

Food & Business Applied Research Fund Second Call International Workshop

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2016 ARF-2 project members met for a learning exchange during the second International workshop of the Food & Business Applied Research Fund (ARF) in Cotonou, Benin. Since the ARF project groups aim to ensure their research is taken up in society, they all have a private organization as project leader of their consortium. The projects also need to embed their research in society from the very beginning of the project. To support these groups in achieving these goals, the first two days of the workshop focused on knowledge exchange and strategies of co-creation and research uptake. In addition a public seminar was organized on the role of nutrition in agricultural value chains. During this third day workshop lessons were brought further with food security professionals from Benin.

The three-day workshop was jointly organized by the Office of the Food & Business Knowledge Platform (F&BKP) and NWO-WOTRO, in collaboration with the University of Abomey-Calavi Cotonou and AgriProFocus Benin. Please find below the summary of the report on this second International workshop.

During the first two days the internal workshop took place. Around 40 representatives of 15 ARF-2 projects from ten different partner countries and from private (project leaders), public and academic background attended. The programme on co-creation and research uptake was organized to stimulate discussions through pitch presentations, speed dating, working groups, plenary discussions and a visit to a training centre for agricultural entrepreneurship.

Co-creation within research groups: Challenges and solutions of partnerships

During Day 1 of the workshop the concept of co-creation, which is guiding for ARF projects' execution, was introduced as "A form of cooperation in research where different parties in the knowledge process are engaged in interaction and joint learning on the problem definition, formulation of possible solutions, design and conducting of the research and the translation of these in new practices and products". During breakout sessions, the ARF projects - all consisting of public, academic and private Dutch and local partners - identified three core challenges to effective co-creation in their research consortia:

- 1) Communication issues, including language barriers, communication between people of different knowledge systems, lack of trust.
- 2) Identification of relevant partners/stakeholders and their continuous engagement, because there is too little time and budget to ensure inclusivity, representation and legitimacy.
- 3) Under-estimation of necessary (time) investment of the co-creation process.

The participants suggested the following solutions to overcome these challenges and to effectively engage with project actors:

- Ensure a flexible and detailed planning with diverse specialised sub-activities for various project members.
- Revisit the original Theory of Change when the project evolves.
- Make enough time available for an appropriate project stakeholder mapping with clear roles and responsibilities assigned to project members.
- Ensure sufficient budget is allocated to co-creation and documentation.
- Work with humility, for example researchers should admit that they can also experience doubts and should be aware of using too complex jargon.

Societal uptake of projects research: Stakeholder engagement, capacity building and communication plans

Workshop Day 2 focused on research uptake, introduced as: "All activities that facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence by policymakers, practitioners and other development actors". Achieving effective research uptake requires stakeholder engagement, capacity building, communication, and monitoring & evaluation, but also a strategic plan and some flexibility. Active involvement of different partners throughout the research implementation process is key for contributing to achieving food security aims. Besides, organizing activities with broader relevant stakeholder groups is important. For the related objective of enhancing research outcomes the [research uptake frame](#) used by NWO-WOTRO and the F&BKP was presented. This frame is based on four components: stakeholder engagement, capacity building, communication, and monitoring & evaluation.

In the following sessions ARF participants worked on the component "stakeholder engagement". They used the "Alignment, Interest, Influence Matrix" (AIIM) to identify various project stakeholders, map them according to their interest in the topic and general alignment with the project, and consequently define the most appropriate communication and capacity building to convince them to become part of the project.

The session also emphasized that it is important to start early with research uptake strategies, based on a detailed flexible planning that can be adapted along the way. The ARF projects were also informed on how the F&BKP can facilitate their uptake practices. The Platform provides a network for dialogue and interaction among researchers and with the wider Food & Business community. It can aggregate and amplify research results. Projects were urged to use the Platform's website to those ends, and also to showcase their innovative results in this unique ARF funding instrument.

Overall International workshop lessons

In addition to the above-mentioned activities various plenary and group sessions took place during the two workshop days. This included a field visit to Songhai, a training center for agricultural entrepreneurship. All in all participants concluded that:

- Joint learning, co-creation and research uptake should start from proposal writing, involving the whole team and all stakeholders, when possible.
- Appropriate fine tuning of proposals after approval is valued by funders.
- Consortia should be flexible towards adaptation because of failure, lessons learned or success.
- Stakeholder mapping is highly recommended, and furthermore, stakeholder analysis is highly encouraged.
- Consortia are stimulated to plan capacity building and meetings, make and discuss communication plans, and connect to other projects that work in a similar domain, country or region. Making use of the F&BKP in this sense is recommended.
- Research uptake approaches should be monitored and evaluated, and the impact pathway should be adapted accordingly.
- Consortia are asked to showcase project activities to NWO-WOTRO and the F&BKP no matter if they are success or failures.
- The approach used for ARF projects can be used in any type of research as different kinds of expertise are required to achieve significant results.

Public seminar: Linking agriculture and nutrition

On the third day, 50 Beninese external relevant food and nutrition security professionals from various background joined the ARF project members for a public seminar organized by the F&BKP and NWO-WOTRO. The theme of the day was knowledge exchange for better informed policies and practices to link nutrition and agriculture. The seminar was opened by the Ambassador of the Netherlands in Benin and the Permanent Secretary of the Beninese Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, who both confirmed the need for integrating agriculture and nutrition. A key note address was given by the Permanent Secretary of the Beninese National Council on Nutrition on actual national political changes in the field of nutrition security. In addition, a panel with representatives from the private sector, a local NGO, and the FAO shed light on the practical difficulties of linking nutrition to agriculture. The afternoon was spent on interactive open space sessions centred around agri-nutrition linkage challenges in the Beninese context and beyond.

Please find below some conclusions of the public seminar:

- Consumers and farmers should be connected to encourage the production of local food products and the generation of substantial revenue to the farmers.
- Research outputs on nutrition should be translated to local languages and disseminated by local radios and NGOs.
- Governmental extension services should contribute to the dissemination of research outputs.
- Policies should be in line with real (nutritional) needs and constraints of actors on the ground.
- Stakeholders should jointly work on problems related to nutrition despite often conflicting unexpressed and underlying interests.
- Nutritional strategies should be developed based on underutilised crops that are dismissed due to perceived low yield.
- Nutrition should be linked to revenue along the food chain.
- Applied research funding should be supported by the Benin government on topics of interest for local stakeholders.
- Simple indicators should be developed to assess the nutritious quality of food.

Concluding remarks

Overall, the multi-stakeholder consortia, together with the Beninese stakeholders, indicated to have gained new insights and contacts to improve their projects and to ensure they are even more embedded in and useful for surrounding societies. By building on the strengths of each actor, it was concluded that within the unique frame of the ARF funding instrument, qualitatively decent research can be developed that is directly linked to the realities and practices of target groups aiming at better food and nutrition security.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Since 2014, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO-WOTRO) manages the Food & Business Applied Research Fund (ARF) to promote research supported innovations that are readily applicable and contribute to the enhancement of sustainable food security for the most vulnerable populations in the fifteen partner countries of Dutch development cooperation. This research fund is based on a novel approach that requires a joined effort from practitioner and research organizations to contribute to achieving sustainable and inclusive access to sufficient and healthy food and an inclusive business climate for the most vulnerable people. After one year of implementation of the awarded projects from the second call, these ARF projects were invited to reflect on co-creation and research uptake in an International workshop in Benin.

This second International ARF workshop was held in Cotonou, from October 25 to 28, 2016. The workshop encompassed an ARF project workshop programme (October 25-27) and a public seminar (October 28). The workshop involved around 40 participants of all the projects from the second call (15 projects) and also the two Benin ARF projects of the first call. The public seminar in addition welcomed key stakeholders of the agricultural and nutrition sectors in Benin to reach an attendance of 120 professionals. Please find here the [participants list](#) and [full programme](#) of the three workshop days.

The workshop days with the projects were designed to favour interactions between participants to further enhance the impact of their research. Opportunities were offered to reflect on two main issues, within the framework of their Theory of Change. On the one hand on the interaction of the inner circle of project stakeholders: the co-creation process. On the other hand, on the outer circle stakeholders strategies of their projects: the research uptake and knowledge sharing process. For these issues challenges were discussed and possible solutions were developed extensively. Interactions took place during activities including pitches, speed dating, open space sessions, group work, plenary sessions and a field visit. The latter took place on the afternoon of October 27 at Songhai Center, a training center for agricultural entrepreneurship in Porto-Novo, Benin. The public seminar, held on October 28, dealt with knowledge exchange for better informed policies and practices to link nutrition and agriculture. During that day, insights were provided in how nutrition, agriculture and food value chains are connected and interlinked in Benin specifically and in how the linkages could be improved to combat nutrition challenges. The example of Benin raised bottlenecks and opportunities for linking agriculture and nutrition through interactive information and knowledge exchange.

This report summarizes the key activities and recommendations yielded from the deliberations during the various days.

2. OUTCOMES OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

During the first two workshop days the ARF project members gathered to enhance learning from each other's knowledge co-creation and research uptake approaches through an ambiance of open exchange, discussion and collaboration. On the third day actors of the agricultural sector joined the ARF projects for a public seminar to exchange knowledge for better informed policies and practices linking nutrition and agriculture.

2.1 Welcome drinks and introduction



Image 01 - Beninese DAPIS-consortium members pitch their pineapple project during welcome drinks.

On Tuesday October 25, 2016 all the projects invited to the second International ARF workshop were introduced to each other during a welcome drinks session in the evening.

Each project was presented by its members in a lively but synoptic manner during a two-minute pitch and via a displayed project poster.

2.2 Day 1 - Strengthening knowledge co-creation: The inner circle

The activities of the day were chaired by Dr Cora Govers from NWO-WOTRO. Please find the background documentation of Day 1 [here](#).

2.2.1 Welcome addresses

Dr Dominique Hounkonnou, the workshop moderator, introduced the programme of the day (see paragraph "Introduction and Background" above) to the audience and allowed the representative of the rector of the University of Abomey – Calavi to open the workshop. On behalf of the rector, the deputy rector in charge of international cooperation, Professor Souaibou Farougou, pointed out the importance of the workshop theme as it concerns food security. He was very grateful to Dutch development cooperation for its high contribution to research and development (education, health, water management, etc.) in Benin. He highly recommended the ARF related activities to be published.

Following the deputy rector's address, the workshop organizers introduced the meeting by explaining about the work of their organizations in the following sequence: Cora Govers (NWO-WOTRO), D. Joseph Hounhouigan (UAC-FSA), Vanessa Nigten (F&BKP) and Marcel Djihoun (AgriProFocus).

The NWO-WOTRO representative called the second International ARF workshop an opportunity for the different consortia to spread their impact and bridge with other projects through reflexions upon knowledge co-creation, research uptake and embedding nutrition at the centre of agricultural activities. She recalled the key missions assigned to the funding scheme of her organization. Please find her full presentation [here](#).

The Dean of the University Abomey-Calavi (UAC-FSA) introduced the Faculty of Agronomic Sciences (FSA) as the first higher education organization specialized in agronomy in Benin. FSA aims at contributing to the improvement of living conditions of rural households and the promotion of food and nutritional security through research and education at BSc, MSc., PhD and Engineer levels. Currently, many FSA staff members are key actors of ARF projects.

The senior knowledge broker of the Food & Business Knowledge Platform (F&BKP) presented her organization, one of the five Knowledge Platforms supported by Dutch development cooperation policy. It is an independent knowledge brokering organization initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to connect knowledge supply to knowledge demand. Business, science, civil society and policymakers can get together within the Platform to further

develop knowledge agendas and spread knowledge in the field of food and nutrition security. F&BKP connects with the NWO-WOTRO research projects within the scope of food and nutrition security, such as ARF, to ensure better knowledge sharing and research uptake. The presenter also introduced the structure and goals of the Platform. Please find her full presentation [here](#).

The AgriProFocus (APF) country coordinator presented the philosophy governing his organization. Installed in 13 countries, APF promotes farmer entrepreneurship, and favours expertise and knowledge sharing among actors of the agricultural sector. He mentioned the network they are establishing and the partnership mode used by the organization. APF was presented as a very dynamic platform active in knowledge exchange and co-creation. Innovation communities are also supported by this platform. Please find the full presentation of APF [here](#).

2.2.2 Progress made by ARF and Introduction to Theory of Change: The inner circle

Hereafter, Cora Govers (NWO-WOTRO) gave a presentation introducing the progress made by NWO-WOTRO in the Food & Business Research (F&BR) programme up to now. She elaborated on the research funding instruments, ARF and GCP, the first two calls of ARF and characteristics of the ARF projects learning process for knowledge sharing and research uptake and project activities so far. Please find her full presentation [here](#).

Thereafter she delivered a presentation on the [Theory of Change](#) that is used as framework for the F&BR projects. She introduced to the participants several concepts related to knowledge and explained the Theory of Change concept through the problem analysis (causes and research design) and the Impact Pathway, via output, outcome, impact, and the links between them and related spheres of control, influence and interest. Achieving impact can take very long and it is important to be aware of that. As an introduction to the group work in the afternoon, emphasis was put on the inner circle of research for better food security, concerning consortium members and their most direct stakeholders.

Following this presentation, several participants pointed out the need of flexibility in the implementation of the Theory of Change and the handling of “outcomes”. In response, the presenter reassured that changes can be made in the Theory of Change throughout the research project process and especially during annual meetings, to allow for more flexibility adapted to changing realities and as a learning process. It would be rather surprising when nothing would change from the beginning of the project till its end. Another point of discussion was that outcome handling can be an issue as it depends upon the stakeholders’ interest. A Kenyan project member made an interesting contribution concerning the unexpected outcomes which may occur during the implementation of a project. He stated that his project was aiming at experimenting with a variety of yams in farms. Yet, before they knew, the various yams were sold on the market because some farmers liked the taste and thought it was a great commercial opportunity.

In any case, projects should kindly keep interacting with NWO-WOTRO during project implementation and beyond.

2.2.3 Speed dating

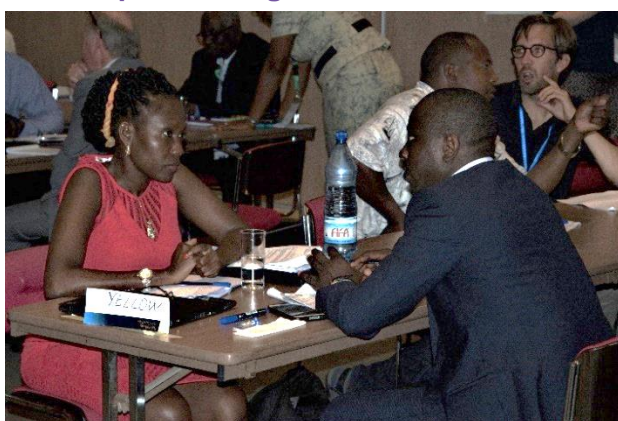


Image 02 - ARF-participants exchange lessons learned during speed dates.

After the presentations, a speed dating exercise was planned. The pitchers of the welcome drinks stayed at a fixed desk and dated the other participants who rotated seats. It appeared to be an entertaining activity, stimulating exchange between the participants of various ARF projects. They discussed their project activities, lessons they can learn from each other and collaboration opportunities.

Although participants felt that time was too short to complete the assignment in a satisfactory way, the speed dating was warmly welcomed because it helped participants to know each other better and learn from each other. For example, an Indonesian entrepreneur learned quite a lot about agriculture in Africa while sharing her own experiences on fishery. Another

project participant was able to share with his dates how his project used ICT to promote research outputs to stakeholders: he in turn learned that he could get his project more gender-oriented by involving women more than currently the case.

Through this activity, all the participants realized that they could easily collaborate with each other beyond current collaboration schemes, and enthusiasm had been further developed for continuing exchanges during the workshop days to come.

At lunch time, participants had the opportunity to learn more about each other's projects through a poster session.

2.2.4 Knowledge co-creation

After lunch a short introduction on knowledge co-creation was given by Cora Govers (NWO-WOTRO), [in which she referred](#) to her presentation on the Theory of Change. After that, two consortium members presented the co-creation approach implemented within their projects, focussing on success factors and challenges.

2.2.5 Presentations from ARF projects

Nicodème Fassinou Hotegni presented the [DAPIS project](#) in Benin. The DAPIS project aims at improving the quality of fresh pineapple and pasteurized pineapple juice by chain optimization to advance the livelihoods of stakeholders. It involves a pineapple processing company (Group Magnificat), two research organizations (FSA/UAC and WUR) and the national pineapple farmer organization (Table filière ananas). The co-creation process started by involving the pineapple value chain actors to voice out the problems of the chain at the proposal preparatory stage. A close involvement of selected chain actors allowed project writing and submission. Project activities are implemented with a strong engagement of stakeholders. Please find the entire DAPIS presentation [here](#).

Rob de Groot presented the [PROFARM project](#) in Indonesia. The PROFARM project plans to close the farming cycle by applying sustainably Lemna and biogas to enhance the livelihoods of small farmers in Indonesia. A hands-on approach is being used by researchers to get their research outputs utilized by community members. PROFARM integrated research institutions (WUR and local research institutes), local communities, local governments, and a local company (YRE). To gain trust and strong actor engagement, the consortium acts as a driving force that has developed an extensive network in multiple sectors, advocated strongly to relevant actors. The project faced difficulties to work in synergy, to select partners, to convey results into accessible data, but experienced the opportunity to network, to use funds efficiently, to lean on other projects, to work inclusively with a strong knowledge base for impact. Please find the entire PROFARM presentation [here](#).

2.2.6 Group work on lessons on projects knowledge co-creation



Image 03 - ARF participant Stephani Mangunsong presents findings break-out session.

Following the presentations on knowledge co-creation, the participants were divided in four groups (blue, yellow, red and green). Each group was composed of different types of stakeholders like research institutions, NGOs' personnel, and companies.

They were assigned to elaborate on challenges encountered and lessons drawn during the process of knowledge co-creation within the framework of their project implementation. In addition, they reflected on possible approaches to improve the knowledge co-creation process.

This group work led to the identification of three core challenges, namely: communication issues; relevant partner/stakeholder identification and their

involvement in the co-creation process; and under-estimation of all the aspects related to the co-creation process.

Firstly, the four groups unanimously emphasized communication issues. They are reflected through language barriers and the different ways in which knowledge systems connect (understanding and acceptance of the existing knowledge systems, unexpressed incentives and expectations that arose in the course of the project implementation), and mutual trust. Secondly, the groups identified that often the project preparation did not involve an appropriate stakeholder identification process which implies the study of different stakeholder perspectives that are important to know. For example, to find out whether the vision and the interest of the project matches stakeholders' needs. Also inclusiveness, representability and legitimacy were raised as important issues in the frame of the platform formation. Thirdly, the participants mentioned investment of actors in the project as a key

challenge. Co-creation costs time and money, whereas consortium stakeholders are very busy. Researchers overcame these challenges and they could run sound, concrete and convincing applied research.

A main conclusion was that proper engagement of project actors can help to overcome the constraints. Within the groups the following solutions were suggested to defeat / deal with the challenges:

- Flexible and detailed planning is needed. Goals are the same for the various project organizations, but consortium members should accommodate with field specificities. Make your plans detailed, but be ready to change what is needed.
- The Theory of Change should be revisited periodically, according to project evolvement (success and bottlenecks effectively encountered).
- Enough time should be made available for appropriate stakeholder mapping with clear roles and responsibilities assigned to each other in the project. One should be aware that the order of introduction of the actors in the process is important as they may have a negative impact when their timing is inappropriate.
- Sufficient budget needs to be allocated to co-creation, documentation and communication.
- Partners need to work with humility. Researchers are not used to say they don't know. But when they would admit this, the paradigm can be reconstructed to learn from each other. Moreover, within these projects, scientists anyhow want to do good science with a scientific language whereas stakeholders deserve to understand in their own language. A reasonable compromise needs to be found taking realism as the main route. Direct and spontaneous communication can be an asset.

2.3 Day 2 - Enhancing knowledge sharing and research uptake: The outer circle

On the second day of the International ARF workshop, activities were chaired by Vanessa Nigten from the Food & Business Knowledge Platform (F&BKP). Please find the background documentation of Day 2 [here](#). This day began with a short reflexion on the activities of Day 1.

2.3.1 Introduction on research uptake and knowledge sharing: the outer circle

Vanessa Nigten (F&BKP) introduced the concept of research uptake and knowledge sharing to the participants of the workshop. She cited the DFID definition of research uptake: "All activities that facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence by policymakers, practitioners and other development actors". Achieving effective research uptake requires stakeholder engagement, capacity building, communication, and monitoring & evaluation, but also a strategic plan and some flexibility. F&BKP and NWO-WOTRO contribute to this by providing online research project pages, supporting research projects with guidance and monitoring, and via organizing activities that focus on the previously mentioned requirements. The whole presentation on research uptake and NWO-WOTRO and F&BKP's roles can be found [here](#).

Subsequently, two ARF consortia presented their research uptake approaches with a focus on their success factors and encountered challenges.

2.3.2 Presentations from ARF projects

Mirjam Ros-Tonen (UvA GID-AISSR, Netherlands) gave inside into the research uptake approaches used by the [TREEFARMS project](#). This project is entitled "Improving smallholders' food and income security by introducing non-timber forest products in reforestation schemes and tree-crop farms: A collaborative learning process in Ghana". A stepwise collaborative leaning approach is used from the project design to its implementation. Local project actors, national and regional communities of practices, and international knowledge brokers are involved in a multilevel learning platform so that knowledge is adapted to practices throughout the project. Please find her whole presentation [here](#).

Geoffroy Ongova (Koppert Biological Systems (K) Ltd.) presented the research uptake approach of the [Salvaging tomato production from pests and diseases project](#). This project is entitled "Development, validation and dissemination of integrated pest management packages for Tomato Leafminer (*Tuta absoluta*) and Fusarium wilt-root knot nematode complex affecting tomato production in Kenya". Knowledge sharing has been ensured through focus group discussion and training, on farm training, farmer field days, development of media briefs, workshops, and conferences. Research uptake is expected from field and greenhouse demonstration, the availability of the products for users, stakeholder involvement in project activities, and capacity building. Nowadays, the high demand of the project alternative and sustainable solutions and consumer concerns about food and environmental safety

represents the project success factors. However, technical difficulties, high financial cost, lack of know-how and poor extension service systems still refrain the project to reach a larger number of people. Please find his whole presentation [here](#).

2.3.3 Introduction of stakeholder engagement using the Alignment, Interest and Influence Matrix: Theory and applications

Cora Govers (NWO-WOTRO) introduced the Alignment, Interest and Influence Matrix (AIIM) to the participants. The All Matrix has two axes scaled from low to high: the x-axis expresses the interest of the stakeholder in the topic, and the y-axis represents the general level of alignment of the stakeholders with the goals of the project and methodologies used in the project. Please find more elaborate explanation on the AIIM exercise [here](#). Developing the AIIM helps to:

- Identify the stakeholders needed for the project to succeed.
- Think through the position of stakeholders according to their interest in the topic and general alignment with the project.
- Define the most appropriate approach for communication and capacity building, for convincing the stakeholders to be involved in the project and working with them.



Image 04 - ARF participants discussing the AIIM results.

Following the explanation, four groups were assigned to develop the AIIM for their projects through [an exercise](#) to identify and position stakeholders and think of possible actions to involve them in the project. These matrixes were presented plenary afterwards. Each group explained the reasoning behind the developed matrix and the role of each stakeholder in the project.

Cora Govers clarified that the AIIM is in particular about the topic of your project, not the project implementation per se. Therefore, the Interest mentioned on the x-axis is not about commitment to the project per se, but concerns more broad interest in the topic you deal with. Commitment could come later from a high alignment to the project topic as being at the intersection between

interest and alignment. In fact, an actor can for example have an interest in the topic you work on, but no commitment with your project if they see you as a competitor. She also added that specific key stakeholders (individual persons or departments within an organization) could be added to the matrix beyond the mapped organizations. She also emphasized that beyond mapping, the AIIM should be followed by defining a clear and specific communication and capacity building strategy to get each needed stakeholder well involved in the project. Strategies should be developed to move important stakeholders from a quadrant to another more to the right and/or upper side of the matrix.

2.3.3 Ideas for knowledge sharing and research uptake activities

During this session, chaired by Vanessa Nigten, participants discussed how they intend to further develop their knowledge sharing and research uptake approaches and what they expect as support from the F&BKP. The F&BKP is willing to help on that matter using their knowledge brokering tools: website (with project pages, research uptake manuals, etc.), newsletter and social media. These tools expose activities of active F&BKP networks and all consortia are welcome to join them by sending their data and experiences to the Platform.

The F&BKP is willing to help broadening the target groups of the ARF projects depending on their expressed needs. The Platform works content wise to connect people and projects from different horizons and thus could also link ARF projects to other actors active within the F&BKP. Extra uptake activities (between projects) can be supported by the Platform through its Knowledge Management Facility for knowledge activities, for example on thematic scopes. It can support the development of short videos, policy briefs, conferences, synthesis articles, mini online courses, etc. for research uptake. The F&BKP is also able to influence policymakers from the Netherlands as they are closely involved in the Platform's management.

Showing achievement and added value of programmes and activities is also very important in convincing Dutch international development policymakers to maintain research for development and related knowledge platforms and organizations. This is another reason for projects to submit as much as possible interesting outcomes of their activities to be published via the F&BKP and NWO-WOTRO. Furthermore, annual reports, case studies, blogs, and reports, with pictures, can be published through these networks, and policy briefs can be developed and distributed. Both organizations reach a broad network of international professionals in the field of food and nutrition security. In addition, the consortia are expected to find ways to reach the massive group of people that are target groups of the research results but cannot access the internet or the scientific jargon.

2.3.4 Field visit and lessons learned from the ARF projects workshop

Workshop participants visited the Songhai Center, an NGO with more than 30 years' experience in promoting entrepreneurship in agriculture. The activities of this NGO cover production, training, research and development in agricultural entrepreneurship and agribusiness based on a sustainable agricultural production model. The NGO has contributed to dynamic economic development through its strategy of applying scientific results and spreading knowledge to young agricultural entrepreneurs. This is a typical knowledge sharing model. Songhai developed and is implementing several projects/workshops such as fish farming, biogas production from wastes, food processing unit, and a machinery workshop.



Image 05 - Re-cap of the field visit and two-day internal workshop at the Songhai Center.

The workshop organized for the ARF-2 participants aimed at improving impact of the ARF research projects and better connecting its participants. At the end of this field visit, the participants led by Cora Govers discussed the key lessons learned that are summed up in the text box below.

Lessons learned from the ARF projects workshop

- Joint learning, co-creation and research uptake should start from proposal writing, involving the whole team and all stakeholders, when possible.
- Appropriate fine tuning of proposals after approval is valued by funders.
- Consortia should be flexible towards adaptation because of failure, lessons learned or success.
- Stakeholder mapping is highly recommended, and furthermore, stakeholder analysis is highly encouraged.
- Consortia are stimulated to plan capacity building and meetings, make and discuss communication plans, and connect to other projects that work in a similar domain, country or region. Making use of the F&BKP in this sense is recommended.
- Research uptake approaches should be monitored and evaluated, and the impact pathway should be adapted accordingly.
- Consortia are asked to showcase project activities to NWO-WOTRO and the F&BKP no matter if they are success or failures.
- The approach used for ARF projects can be used in any type of research as different kinds of expertise are required to achieve significant results.

3. OUTCOMES OF PUBLIC SEMINAR

After the two workshop days with the ARF-2 project members, on Friday October 28 an additional number of some 100 Beninese professionals in the field of food and nutrition security from various sectors were invited to join an additional public seminar. The day was held in French and simultaneously translated in English for the non-Francophone participants.

The theme of the day was knowledge exchange for better informed policies and practices to link nutrition and agriculture. Please find the background documentation on the content of the public day [here](#) (and in French [here](#)).

3.1 Welcome speeches

The seminar opened with the welcome words of the four representatives of the seminar organizers.

- The Dean of the Faculty of Agronomic Sciences (FSA), Professor D. Joseph Hounhouigan, started by summarizing the first two day deliberations. He underscored the ARF approach which consists of using a multidisciplinary approach to solve development problems.
- The AgriProFocus representative, Mr Marcel Djihoun stated that his organization was established in 2005 in the Netherlands and works in the areas of knowledge sharing through business brokerage and debates on topics of interest for specific stakeholders in various developing countries.
- NWO-WOTRO representative, Dr Cora Govers, declared that her institution organizes and supports multidisciplinary research around various themes. Her organization already funded 15 research projects in the first round of the Applied Research Fund (ARF) for such research in the field of food security worldwide, and has another 15 projects running in this second ARF call. She recalled that during the first two workshop days, ARF consortium members had reflected on how to co-create knowledge and work on research uptake. Dr Govers introduced the focus of the day as an opportunity to interact on research uptake approaches for a better connexion between nutrition and agriculture. She also commended the organization and dedication of the Benin team.
- Vanessa Nigten of the Food & Business Knowledge Platform, introduced the Knowledge Platform to the wider audience. She underlined that one of the main Platform activities is to support international research projects that receive funding of the Dutch government in the field of food security in research uptake. This is what the present ARF projects have been working on during the preceding days in Cotonou. The aim of the public seminar is to link all that work to Beninese practices with the external attendees, of whom she was really happy to see them in such a large number.



Image 06 - Welcome address by Ambassador of the Netherlands to Benin, Mr Harry van Dijk.

In his welcome address, the Ambassador of the Netherlands to Benin, Mr Harry van Dijk, explained that the embassy aims at reaching food security in Benin with 2030 as a horizon, for which several challenges have to be overcome. He recognized the window of opportunity for reducing stunting within the first 1000 days of a human's life. He communicated about the main development themes of the embassy (food security, market access, water management and land access to women) and showed the interest of the embassy in this seminar to link agri value chain activities with nutrition outcomes. The embassy is looking forward to see the results of this public day.

Following, the opening [speech](#) of the seminar was delivered by Dr Françoise Assogba Comlan, Chief of Staff, on behalf of the Benin Minister in charge of Agriculture. She confirmed the strong connection between governmental strategies and nutrition issues. She presented the new national strategic plan for the development of the agricultural sector that has been initiated after assessment of the previous Strategic Stimulus Package of the Agricultural Sector (PSRSA). Indeed, the Beninese agricultural sector has to confront new

challenges such as its low resilience to climate change, the resurgence of malnutrition, and the lowering of food quality in the country. In order to address these challenges, she suggested to review the current agricultural policies

and also to make sure that agriculture is sensitive to nutrition, and to establish a knowledge sharing and information platform for key stakeholders (academia, NGOs, policymakers, business people, and parliamentarians). She concluded her speech by underscoring foreseen reforms that are related to food safety. Those reforms include the reduction of the presence of mycotoxins, fair access to quality inputs, and reduction of the seasonality of food availability. Finally, she officially opened the public seminar emphasizing the necessity to fulfil the nutritional needs and requests of rich and poor Beninese people.

Following the opening addresses, a keynote [speech](#) was given by Professor Roch Mongbo, the Permanent secretariat of the Nutrition and Food Council of Benin, on “the current state of nutritional policies: conceptual basis and daily construction of an ambitious reform”. He demonstrated the negative impacts of stunting on children on the economic development of Benin and underlined that Benin had the highest malnutrition rate in West Africa. He showed how policies evolved from the independency until now and how a number of actions were undertaken over time to put nutrition at the centre of governmental policies. Such actions include the establishment of the Nutrition and Food Council in 2009 following the Guédévy consensus which resulted in a malnutrition vision for the country in 2007. From there onwards, a national nutritional policy has been defined and monitored at a state level. In addition, improvements in the nutritional status of Benin is due to the joint actions of four sorts of stakeholders: those who are concerned; those who are called upon to act; those who are challenged; and those who are committed. Besides, stakeholders have resorted to an old but neglected paradigm which is the community management of malnutrition.

All these actions were taken because of breakthroughs in science which show that malnutrition undermines children’s health, intellectual capacity, and future productivity, to mention but a few. Besides, the harmony between science and community beliefs about the first 1000 days of life also played an important role. Though the methods used are not the same, contrasted professional cultures cohabitation between doctors, local authorities and traditional healers enabled to join efforts in solving the problem of malnutrition. He also focused on the development of his institution and its interactions with national and international institutions for a better impact at community level. Upcoming challenges and activities of his institution were also broached. His address was concluded by the United Nations (1974) statement “Every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to fully develop and maintain his physical and mental faculties”.

3.2 Panel discussions



Image 07 - Panel with Dr Tiemoko Yo (FAO) Dr Nadia Fanou (UAC), Mr Gaspard Datondji (Dajo enterprises), and Mr Gbodjinou Aholou Gbewa (NGO Gbewa).

Subsequently, a panel discussed “how to link nutrition and agriculture in practice”. Dr Dominique Hounkonnou facilitated the exchanges between Dr Tiemoko Yo from the FAO as international policymaker, Dr Nadia Fanou – Fogny from the University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC) as researcher, Mr Gaspard Datondji from Dajo enterprises as private sector actor, and Mr Gbodjinou Aholou Gbewa from Gbewa NGO as a civil society member, all active in the field of agriculture and nutrition.

During this debate, all actors demonstrated their ambitions and contributions to render their activity nutrition sensitive and advocate for such practice.

However the following key constraints related to the needed cooperation of the various actors to realize this in practice arose:

- Entrepreneurs blame the inability of the market to value local but quality products and render their activities profitable.
- Despite national research being quite active, farmers and local communities have very little access to research outcomes.
- Policies are not in line with real needs and constraints of the actors.

The most appropriate approach turned out to be gathering stakeholders to jointly work on problems of common interest. This is very difficult as unexpressed and underlying interests are usually conflicting. Yet, the panel discussion delivered the following ideas to increase sensitivity of agriculture to nutrition impact on local communities:

- Translate research outputs to local languages for dissemination by local radios and NGOs.
- Extension services of the Ministry of Agriculture should contribute to the dissemination of research outputs.
- Connect consumers and farmers to encourage the production of local food products and the generation of substantial revenue to the farmers.
- Develop nutrition strategies based on underutilized crops, which usually have low yield.
- Link nutrition to revenue along the food chain.
- Redefine the social function of agriculture and sensitize people on this matter.
- Applied research funding is needed, supported by the Benin government on topics of interest for local stakeholders.

3.3 Open space session: challenges and knowledge questions for nutrition

In the afternoon, participants in groups of around ten persons identified and discussed nutrition challenges they face in their field of activity. Every group presented a key challenge to be discussed during the afternoon by representatives, their so-called ambassadors. Those ambassadors were assigned to a table and participants were free to join a table with a challenge of their choice and to change groups during the open space session. During about two hours every group discussed one of the presented issues and tried to formulate joint solutions.

Table 01 - Challenges and suggested solutions for a better linkage between agriculture and nutrition.

	Challenges	Solutions
1	How can we improve consumer behavior for better nutrition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To create awareness on nutrition and a balanced diet. • To develop policies and incentives to produce more nutritious food.
2	How can access to information on nutrition and food security be improved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To educate the population on better feeding by making information available through radio, television and social media. • To make necessary resources available to institutions in charge of collecting data on nutrition and food security.
3	What types of partnership should be established for an effective link between agriculture and nutrition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop a consensus framework that expresses the same dreams and strategy to achieve dreams. • To sensitize stakeholders and communication.
4	How can the shift from traditional food systems to staple food crops occur?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To render quality products accessible to all. • To have each stakeholder to mainstream the quality factor. • To develop indicators to assess the nutritious quality of food.
5	How can the mentality and negative attitudes in communities towards local food change? Imported food is cheaper than locally grown food.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The promotion of locally grown food through research on the nutritious value of traditional food. • Business people should make locally grown food more attractive.
6	Different stakeholders related to the agri chain are not ready to contribute to nutritional outcomes and they need more capacity. And mapping of food security is a challenge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New sensors and training of farmers. • Sensitization of the stakeholders via online available free software and data; information is power and once mapping is available, more targeted actions can be conducted.
7	How to build an endogenous and resilient food production system, also through value chains?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the bottom-up approaches for the definition of priorities. • Make a permanent committee in charge of strategic orientations and agricultural policies operational.
8	Less opportunities for (nutritional) quality life as populations are growing fast and land tenure systems are affected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus more on human resources and develop land tenure systems for equitable ownership, production, and utilization.



Image 08 - Participants discussing challenges and solutions for a better linkage between agriculture and nutrition during open space.

The above overview shows the diversity of challenges encountered by different stakeholders when working on better linking agricultural value chains and nutrition outcomes. The conclusion was that the only way to reduce divergence and create more convergence is through stakeholder platforms to be used to address the main challenges.

After this open space session and the concluding words of Vanessa Nigten on the possibilities offered by F&KBP to spread knowledge, the Dean of the Faculty of Agronomic Sciences of the University Abomey-Calavi recapped the deliberations of the day, and linked it to the preceding two work shop days. He was very impressed by the interest of the participants in the conference subject and their active participation. Linking agriculture to nutrition

reflects the history of his professional career and the one of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences. Since the 1985 initiative of FAO and Wageningen University to integrate nutritional considerations in the training of Agricultural Engineers, several nutrition oriented courses were inserted in Agricultural Engineers training, no matter their final major. Such practice has inspired the development of nutrition and food science courses and training programs. Despite all that has been done, poor nutrition remains a key hurdle that our communities need to overcome. Mindsets are changing but beyond the fact that people are getting more sensitive to nutrition, action/behavioural changes are now strongly required. Investment in nutrition is highly profitable as the Ambassador and Prof. Roch Mongbo said. Dr Francoise Assogba, representing the Ministry in charge of Agriculture, showed policies and strategies developed to integrate nutritional considerations in Agriculture. Several value chains are now promoted, including pineapple, shea, and horticulture. She named the Agency and the Laboratory of Food Security and Safety as key examples that can contribute to this goal. She emphasized the necessity for research institutions to come in the forefront of food security issues and be active through participatory approaches, a better institutional framework and qualified staffs. The nutrition expert panel pointed out the need to 1) conciliate profit and quality at all the stages of food product value chains, 2) communicate between actors about nutritional issues, 3) spread research outputs to enterprises (example ARF projects). All value chain actors should be sensitized to the impact of their actions on the quality (safety and nutritional) of food products. The key role of women in ensuring food security was also raised, as valuable to invest in for increasing nutrition security in households. The Dean of FSA stated that the open space strategy brought out key challenges and solutions that should be deepened later.



Image 09 - Final words from organizers during closing session.

Together with the other main organizers he closed the public seminar and thanked all the external and ARF participants for their lively contributions. The Dutch partners warmly thanked the Beninese organizers for their effort to make the workshop days a success.

Closing activity of the public seminar was a drinks session where some [15 small agro entrepreneurs](#) of the Beninese AgriProFocus network presented their local food and beverage work and products, which were tasted by the participants of the second International ARF workshop.