

Enhancing research impact for food security

Strengthening knowledge co-creation and research uptake

First Food & Business Applied Research ARF and CRF projects workshop

Thursday 1 October 2015 - Workshop Session 1

Strengthening knowledge co-creation

Enhanced awareness of the importance of science for development has resulted in growing demands on researchers from policy makers and research donors to guarantee and demonstrate the actual or potential use and/or impact of research outcomes. As a consequence, research is increasingly interdisciplinary and inspired by the needs of society or is explicitly problem- and solution-oriented. This often concerns, however, a collaboration that remains within the scientific boundaries. Yet research is increasingly embedded in wider innovation systems that transcend the boundaries of academia and allow stakeholders to participate in the knowledge co-creation process. This is known as trans-disciplinary research.

NWO-WOTRO works with trans-disciplinary research partnerships, which means research involves non-scientific actors (policy makers, enterprises, civil society, consumers and others) who stand to benefit from the outcomes of this research. This implies that knowledge co-creation takes place between researchers, practitioners (private and public), target groups and stakeholders. Knowledge co-creation not only includes different types of knowledge (next to scientific knowledge) and different kinds of partners (next to researchers), but also transcends the boundaries of research to deal with innovation and application. For ARF this means that practical problems of practitioners and those that potentially benefit from scientific research are central to the research process itself. This is exemplified by a consortium of practitioners and researchers (the immediate target group) where the practitioner is the lead collaborator/main applicant with the involvement of ultimate and intermediate target groups as stakeholders. ARF aims at solving real problems by combining different knowledge sources.

From the ARF Call for Proposals: some definitions:

Applied research is a form of systematic inquiry involving the practical application of science. Applied research deals with solving practical problems and generally employs empirical methodologies. (*source: OECD*)

Innovation is the process of developing new value adding ways to meet existing, new or inarticulate needs. Innovation is accomplished through more effective products, processes, services, technologies, policies or ideas that are readily available to governments, markets and society.

Co-creation is a form of cooperation in research where different parties (stakeholders, target groups) in the knowledge (demand and supply) process are engaged in interaction and joint learning on the problem definition, formulation of possible solutions, design of the research, conducting the research, the assessment of the results, and the translation of these in new practices and products. The diversity of perspectives and of the type and level of knowledge is seen as an asset that can be addressed in a constructive way of mutual learning and design.

The **ultimate target group** to reap the benefits of this programme consists of the most vulnerable segments of the population in developing countries, i.e. the poor, food insecure people and people suffering from malnutrition, especially women and children.

The **intermediate target group** consists of those individuals, organisations and networks that will be directly impacted by the outcomes of the programme, that is to say those that will adapt, adjust and apply newly generated knowledge and insights in order to wield new tools and technologies and apply new perspectives for action for pro-poor sustainable development.

Knowledge co-creation is a process that needs to give special attention to emerging dilemmas and challenges, as well as to the potential opportunities. For ARF knowledge co-creation is intended to enable the more effective use of knowledge and to encourage innovation which results in development impact. With partners from various backgrounds and with different knowledge input and expectations, this can be a complicated endeavour.

NWO-WOTRO has identified several dilemmas and challenges that inter- and transdisciplinary project teams encounter in working with various partners on creating new knowledge (in various research programmes):

- Different expectations on goals and results in research, while aiming at societal and policy relevance, from the wide range of partners involved;
- Even when sharing transdisciplinary goals, benefits from the research may be very different for the various partners (let alone the target groups);
- The sometimes conflicting wish for short term success and the aim at long term benefits and impact that exists between various partners and donors;
- Participating in a joint research project yet using different terminologies and concepts, or similar ones that have a different meaning;
- The different outputs that are needed in different environments, most notably the need for scientific publications for researchers, and the need for practical output for practitioners;
- Dealing in international collaboration involves various national requirements, cultural differences and a variety of expectations in working together;
- Working together in a public-private partnership project or programme while experiencing differences in influence and position.

Nevertheless, the rewards are worth the effort. No blueprint can exist on how to deal with knowledge co-creation. It is crucial therefore to share experiences and to have input from experts to enable 'learning by doing'. For this reason the session will start with a keynote and experiences from two projects, followed by discussions and sharing between participants.

Objective and outline of Workshop session 1

The session will explore and share experiences to learn and improve knowledge co-creation and take this back to the project teams, to enable all the partners to contribute and to discover together what the most appropriate collaboration looks like.

Public Seminar

The role of SMEs in enhancing food security

Strengthening the performance of SMEs by strengthening the collaboration, interactions, information and knowledge exchange between researchers, practitioners, NGOs, and policy makers.

First Food & Business Applied Research ARF and CRF projects workshop

Friday 2 October 2015 - Public Seminar

Actual international development policies allocate an important role to business in tapping the agricultural potential for sustainable economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa. Economic growth and food and nutrition security can be achieved by linking agricultural producers to regional, national, and international markets. The growth of cities and the urban middle-class in Africa are increasing the national and regional market opportunities for agricultural produce and their derived food products. Amongst other important roles, like creating jobs, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) will play an important role in linking producers to the regional, national and international markets and consumers. Products can be marketed in their raw or hardly processed form, but can also be processed, and as such, the SMEs add value to the products sold.

It is recognized that producers are of course also entrepreneurs, but this seminar intends to focus on the next step of the value chain, that is on those SMEs involved in the processing and adding value to the products.

Central challenges faced by SMEs are with the providers of the basic agricultural products, i.e. the links with producers or their representatives and towards marketing their products. Many of the factors contributing to these challenges are beyond their direct sphere of influence. Good policies to create an enabling environment in which SMEs are operating are essential for the optimal performance SMEs, and thus contribute to increased food and nutrition security and economic development.

Importance of SMEs

The growth of the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) sector is seen as a strong indication of a flourishing economy. In developed economies, SMEs and microenterprises account for over 95% of firms, 60-70% of employment, 55% of GDP and generate the lion's share of new jobs. In emerging economies, the importance of SMEs to economic growth is even stronger. In Uganda for instance, they account for about 90% of the private sector production and employ over 90% of the labour force. SMEs contribute to the economy through creating employment in both rural and urban areas, and by providing sustainability and innovation. SMEs tend to employ more labour-intensive production processes than large enterprises and as a result create more employment opportunities and income generation, particularly for low-skilled workers, as well as women and young people, who usually make up the greatest proportion of the unemployed in emerging economies. Hence they have an important role to play in ensuring inclusive growth. SMEs are also an important source of innovation as they tend to occupy specialized market "niches" and follow competitive strategies that set them apart from other companies. Their small size and flexibility allow them to adjust to local market fluctuations and to weather local market shocks more comfortably.

SMEs are defined by their size and turnover. The National Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) policy being developed in Ugandan defines MSME as follows:

- Micro Enterprise: An enterprise that employs up to 4 people, with annual sales turnover and/or total assets of maximum Ugandan Shillings 12 million. (Euro 3,000)
- Small Enterprise: An enterprise that employs from 5 to 50 people, with annual sales turnover and/or total assets of up to Ugandan Shillings 360 million (Euro 90,000)

- Medium Enterprise: An enterprise that employs from 51 to 100 persons, with annual sales turnover and/or total assets of over Uganda Shillings 360 million but not more than Uganda Shillings 30 billion (Euro 7,500,000).

Due to their importance to economic growth, SMEs are increasingly becoming a priority for policymakers globally and especially in emerging economies. There is solid evidence that an enabling environment and a level playing field supports employment and economic growth, and that the smaller the enterprise, the greater the effects on employment. Policies to strengthen SMEs range from:

- macro-level interventions, including promotion of public-private partnerships to attract venture capital funds and higher levels of investment, and tax incentives and reduced bureaucracy;
- support to individual enterprises, including capacity building
- to more systemic approaches of developing entire markets.

The Seminar

The seminar brings together various stakeholders active within agro-food chains, e.g. the private sector, farmers organizations, researchers, practitioners, policy makers.

Various aspects will be introduced by speakers on the role of SMEs in food security and commercialization of knowledge, examples of support programs to SMEs, the challenges the SMEs are facing and improving the enabling environment.

The discussions with the multi-stakeholder group present at the seminar will focus on two main issues:

- how to improve information exchange and knowledge management and knowledge co-creation within chain actors networks to enhance the performance of SMEs in their role of improving food security? What are the multi-stakeholder innovation environments to be developed?
- how to improve the enabling environment by better policies to strengthen SMEs and support the multi-stakeholder innovation networks? This will include, in addition to the policies mentioned above, the development of cross-sectoral policies for development, but also for research funding, including incentives for establishing public-private partnerships, to enable the chain networks to apply much more integrated approaches.

Enhancing research impact for food security

Strengthening knowledge sharing and enhancing research uptake

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Saturday 3 October 2015 - Workshop Session 2

Knowledge sharing and enhancing research uptake

The ARF and CRF research projects focus on research for (local) impact on food security and poverty alleviation. For this reason they work on improving the enabling environment by embedding the research in the local context, capacity development, and widely sharing intermediary and final knowledge results. Active involvement of different partners throughout the research implementation process is key as well as organizing activities with broader relevant stakeholder groups. The Theories of Change and Research Impact Pathways as formulated in the proposals are helpful tools and critical elements in this regard. Enhancing research impact for NWO-WOTRO and F&BKP is based on four components of knowledge sharing and research uptake strategies¹: stakeholder engagement, capacity building, communication, and monitoring & evaluation.

Stakeholder engagement

“Stakeholders are the scientific and other collaborators, targeted users, beneficiaries or other stakeholders who are participants in social, economic, legal, environmental or political processes in the local context and who are key persons in enabling the introduction and putting to work of new solutions and insights (NWO-WOTRO 2014).”

In all ARF (WOTRO) and CRF (PAEPARD) project proposals an initial mapping of relevant stakeholders involving multiple stakeholders from the research proposal development stage onwards was crucial. Stakeholder engagement is an ongoing process requiring regular updating and further development of context analysis, stakeholder groups and stakeholder engagement strategies. Two main stakeholder groups can be distinguished. The first group is the stakeholders who are important for the specific research uptake and who are involved from the beginning (including in the development of the proposal, its modification and adaptation if needed, the implementation of the project, training, etc.). The second group consists of those actors critical in up-scaling and out-scaling (i.e. actors who are able to intervene in the wider enabling environment). These two groups of stakeholders can be regarded as the inner circle and outer circle respectively.

CRF in particular bases its works on “User Led Process” (ULP) which implies the engagement of all key stakeholders in the research process. As for ARF, the process is led by a non-research stakeholder to ensure their involvement in the process and also that the research carried out addresses issues and concerns who will ultimately put the research results into use. In addition, a desk review, resulting in a comprehensive study mapping all stakeholders intervening in the sector aimed at a comprehensive involvement of all relevant actors.

Capacity building

“Activities directed at improving the capabilities of individuals, networks, and institutes to learn and innovate, based on sustainable partnerships and the ability to both generate and build on knowledge (NWO-WOTRO 2014).”

From an early stage ARF/CRF consortia are expected to map existing capacities in the context of their research focus. Each research project defines how the project itself and the results could contribute to targeted capacity building of relevant groups, organizations, enterprises and government institutions related to the project. Those groups are mainly part of the above described “inner circle” stakeholders and include mainly parties involved in the research teams themselves. The research groups develop activities accordingly during implementation of the research. This will address specific knowledge needs in order to design and implement plans for achieving impact in terms of capacities to be

¹ Four components adopted from “Research Uptake. A guide for DFID-funded research programmes” of 2013.

developed, strengthened, maintained and adapted. Capacity within the projects will be built by joint conduction of the research, development of knowledge and learning within the research projects. Besides research teams will link the projects to external local (civil, government and business) actors, who can be defined as outer circle project target groups, for and with whom capacity strengthening strategies will be developed. In this regard research could, for example, contribute to evidence-based policies.

Communication

“ARF projects are asked to gain, apply and share enhanced insights of the potential for local, national and regional market integration and integrated chain approaches. They are requested to indicate various target audiences, communication objectives, subjects and means of communication with reference to: Output dissemination (the anticipated results in terms of scientific and non-scientific publications and other output, as well as enhanced capacity and skills) and International collaboration (intended communication with communities, institutions, networks and platforms who would be interested in linking up with the consortium.) (NWO-WOTRO 2014).”

Projects are expected to inform audiences by communicating results and relate these to existing knowledge. Communication can be the base for capacity building trajectories, but is mainly targeted at broader more general audiences. An initial communication plan including specification of target groups, communicating messages and means of communication should be developed by ARF projects. Communication plans target stakeholders from “outer circle” as described above. At a later stage, communication initiatives are to be developed further by the project team into more sustained and elaborated strategies. Knowledge sharing partly takes place via the F&BKP (website).

Similar to this for CRF the communication and visibility plan aims to achieve two strategic objectives: to ensure dialogue through improved internal and external communication; and advocacy to demonstrate opportunities associated with demand-driven multi-stakeholder partnerships in the Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) programme. These include: building the capacity of external actors; creating awareness about the PAEPARD approach among different actors; disseminating outputs and outcomes (visibility) to serve as lessons learnt; attracting investments to build on multi-stakeholder partnerships in ARD.

Monitoring and evaluation

Project teams have formulated a Research Impact Pathway during their proposal writing. The Impact Pathways of ARF are related to the overall Theory of Change of ARF. Project teams are expected to formulate research uptake objectives and adjust them according to emerging results and shifting knowledge needs; this is a cyclical approach that requires continuous effort. Changes are mentioned in the annual reports. The same applies to CRF where result framework of each project is revised/updated each year according to emerging results.

Objective and outline of Workshop session 2

Plans for knowledge sharing and research uptake are an integral part of the ARF and CRF research projects. These should make knowledge work for practitioners and policy makers. Where the prime responsibility for enhancing research impact lies with the consortium partners and stakeholders, the F&BKP Office and WOTRO may facilitate those activities. This second workshop session aims to provide better insight in the various possible components of knowledge sharing and research uptake and to inspire the participants to come up with ideas for knowledge sharing and research uptake they can further develop with the research team and others.

During the workshop session presentations on Knowledge Sharing and Research Uptake will be followed by group work on one of the component of this topic: how to improve stakeholder engagement.

This will be followed by a short introduction by the F&BKP Office on potential activities and expected deliveries. A subsequent brainstorm session will look at possible research uptake activities by the projects and how these could be conducted in collaboration with each other, with external actors and/or the Food & Business Knowledge Platform or NWO-WOTRO.