PAEPARD

The **journey** from an **information** platform to a **knowledge** management system

POLICY BRIEF

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🍃 Lessons learned and recommendations

As the PAEPARD project is complex and multi-faceted, ensuring that appropriate information is made available to users in a timely manner and in a form that can be easily understood and used has been a major challenge.

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Throughout the different phases of PAEPARD, challenges have arisen in the implementation of effective internal and external communication from which the following lessons have been learned:

> Different partners and their audiences: a wide range of project partners with different interests, expectations, capacities, operational procedures and institutional cultures result in variations in the type of information required and the preferred means by which it is communicated among different actors. The multiple target audiences of these partners also have varying expectations, and demands for information often have to be reached in different ways, it is therefore important that communication and/or advocacy messages are tailored appropriately.

> Communication responsibilities: the nature of the PAEPARD partnership structure led to shared communication responsibilities among partner organisations. This arrangement meant that a strong

direction for communication activities was lacking in the early stages of the project. Without leadership and strong management of communication activities, communication can become rather ad hoc and valuable information may not be published or shared with other consortia.

> Information sharing and exchange: during the early stages of the project there was limited sharing of information by PAEPARD consortia members, which meant that opportunities for partnership development and for synergies between consortia were under-exploited. This also limited the scope for consortia to profile what they were doing through the PAEPARD website and other communication channels. Mapping and coordinating information flows between users of the platform is vital, especially when co-learning is encouraged and partners engage in a process of mutual learning. Having invested in communication, PAEPARD now has a variety of tools to help people share

and publish information, but it is critical to the success of a project to find those that work for its users and to provide training in their use.

> External communication: without a structured approach to identify and develop a set of topics for publications PAEPARD reports from workshops and other events, which contained a large amount of useful material that would have been of interest to a wider audience, remained inaccessible to outside organisations. However, the establishment of a publications task force, with a firm lead from PAEPARD managers, resulted in the production of a range of publications within a short period of time.

> Timely communication: ensuring that appropriate information is made available to users in a timely manner and in a form that can be easily understood and used is challenging in a multi-faceted project. To enable the Platform to post events months in advance, PAEPARD monitored around 20 key websites featuring upcoming ARD events related to Africa.

Recommendations for designing an effective and streamlined communication strategy

> Select the right tools. The context and needs of each project are different and require different communication tools;

> Meet users' needs. The communication strategy and tools should be designed for a participatory and responsive approach;

> Keep it simple. Base communication on simple tools that require little or no training;

> Opt for open source. Choose open source options to build sustainable tools that will remain useful after the project;

> Use face-to-face training. Where possible, opt for face-to-face training when launching a new communication tool and use video for support materials;

> Elect strong leadership. To be effective and coordinated communication activities must directed by an identified leader;

> Push for ownership. Integrate advocacy into communication activities to ensure the sustainability of a multi-stakeholder innovation platform like PAEPARD.

🍃 Why is communication so important in a partnership platform?

Advocacy and communication initiative at the European Development Days 2017 held by the European Commission.

The Platform for African-European Partnership in Agricultural Research for Development (PAEPARD) aims to foster strong multi-stakeholder partnerships in agricultural research and development (ARD) to contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs). PAEPARD seeks to achieve this by:

• **Facilitating** partnerships between farmer organizations, civil society groups, research and education institutes, private companies and policy networks;

• **Supporting** partnerships through capacity strengthening and access to information on funding opportunities;

• **Assisting** partners to prepare strong research proposals which will address real needs at the farm or enterprise level;

• **Advocating** for increased support for demand-led, multi-stakeholder partnerships in ARD.

The PAEPARD communication and advocacy strategy aims to support and strengthen African-European multi-stakeholder ARD partnerships by demonstrating the value of a demand-led approach involving a wide range of actors. The strategy has two strategic objectives:

i) To create strong synergy and commitment among PAEPARD partners through timely and effective

communication. This includes formal communication with – and feedback from – the European Commission (EC), as well as communication between partners and between working groups.

ii) To raise awareness of the benefits of African-European multi-stakeholder ARD partnerships and encourage active engagement of ARD stakeholders in such partnerships. In order to achieve this, the Platform:

• **Creates** awareness about PAEPARD activities among different actors;

• **Disseminates** outputs and outcomes of project activities and learns from the experiences of others;

• **Shares** information about funding opportunities and promotes networking;

• **Attracts** investments and manages competitive research funds to build multi-stakeholder partnerships in ARD.

This policy brief, describes how PAEPARD has sought to meet its users' information needs and shares some lessons that may be of interest to those designing similar knowledge management platforms for other multi-stakeholder initiatives and for the sustainability of such platforms.

Evolving communication strategies

The PAEPARD information platform went through several stages before moving towards an effective knowledge management system. In the early phase of the project, communication tools were only used for disseminating information through a Dgroup (an online facility which supports interaction and discussion between members of an interest group or project), the PAEPARD blog, and PAEPARD and consortium member websites.

A common communication and advocacy strategy to support the evolving communication needs of PAEPARD members led to the development of a bespoke tool named OSIRIS (Online System Improving Relationships by Information Sharing), which transformed the information platform into a genuine information system. Finally, by publishing synthesis documents, such as policy briefs, offering the platform partners free websites and Web 2.0 tools for sharing experiences, and starting to use social media (Twitter and Facebook) as new communication channels, the PAEPARD information platform transformed from dealing mainly with references and data, into a knowledge management system handling more subjective and varied resources.

Early stage development

At the start of the PAEPARD implementation phase (2010), a draft communication strategy was developed based on stakeholder discussions held during the inception phase. At the core of the strategy was an information and communication platform that would meet the needs of researchers, farmer organizations, civil society, the private sector, development partners and others. The platform's main functions were to:

● **provide up-to-date information** about ARD funding opportunities and events;

● **support the process of partnership development,** and document and share how this was done;

● **assist organizations** to build joint African-European research proposals;

● **share good ARD practices** and promote the multi-stakeholder partnership approach.

However, the PAEPARD mid-term review in 2012 recognized that internal and external communication needed to be improved and divided into two complementary but distinct activities, and that the tools needed for each purpose were not the same. PAEPARD communication goals remained the same but only the first one – to provide ARD information – had been met. To address the three other goals, new ways and means to meet them had to be found.

A revised approach

The revised PAEPARD communication and advocacy strategy (2015) had two strategic objectives. The first objective was to strengthen synergy and commitment among core partners through timely and effective communication. This included mandatory formal communication with the EC, which is a contractual obligation, and improved communication between partners and working groups to promote more effective networking.

The information to be communicated was differentiated as follows:

MANDATORY	DESIRABLE
Follow-up progress information on activities devoted to management to be delivered on a regular basis to the EC.	**To inform** and update PAEPARD stakeholders stakeholders on its working group activities.
Follow-up with PAEPARD stakeholders to provide basic information in order to meet the goals of: ● supporting the process of partnership development, and document and share how this was done; ● assist organizations to build joint African-European research proposals.	**To facilitate** interactions amongst partners in order to meet the goals of: ● Assisting organizations to build joint African-European research proposals; ● Sharing good ARD practices and promoting the ARD approach.

The second strategic objective built on the aims of the initial communication strategy to raise awareness of the benefits of African-European multi-stakeholder ARD partnerships and encourage active engagement of ARD stakeholders by:

● **building the capacity** of external actors;

● **creating awareness** about PAEPARD activities among different actors;

● **disseminating outputs** and outcomes of project activities and learning from the experiences of others;

● **sharing information** about funding opportunities and promoting networking, as well as attracting investments to build on multi-stakeholder partnerships in ARD.

New information and communication demands

Addressing the challenges and constraints related to improving internal and external communication was achieved through a process of learning and negotiation so that:

a) internal mandatory obligations were strengthened and made more visible in the revised communication and advocacy strategy including follow-up progress (financial reports, work plans) on activities;

b) stronger management action was also taken to encourage compliance with internal obligations (reporting, documenting) including regular management meetings (more than twice a year as previously) using video conferencing to monitor progress of the working groups, including changing the way of working with the working groups and consortia;

c) a publications task force was established to improve external communications;

d) online tools were developed through a parti-

cipatory and iterative process to meet PAEPARD members' needs.

The main changes implemented by this revised strategy resulted in a move from a project team managed information platform to a communication platform that is driven largely by project partners and consortia members.

The PAEPARD platform had to evolve to allow its partners and consortia to become major players in information and communication. The platform now needed to integrate more decentralized tools to produce structured and up-to-date information. This need marked a new phase in the platform's journey towards becoming a knowledge management system.

It soon became apparent that the overall brokerage process of PAEPARD did not give adequate support to research users, especially farmer organizations. To address this issue, a new mechanism was developed: the Users-Led Process (ULP)[1].

In the first stage of the ULP, a regional farmer organization consults with stakeholders to identify a priority theme for which research activities are needed to solve problems or respond to emerging opportunities. The issues are then studied in more detail by specialists, collated and made available to stakeholders in two workshops facilitated by agricultural innovation facilitators (AIFs). By the end of the second workshop, a set of research questions are agreed and a small team of stakeholders mandated to develop a proposal.

As a result of this change in PAEPARD orientation, new information needs arose among PAEPARD-supported organizations. The partners in the existing 19 consortia also continued to need communication support. Consequently, new information and communication tools were tested to take account of these diverse needs.

Towards a bespoke communication tool

PAEPARD decided to fully involve consortia and working group members in the design of a bespoke collaborative tool to support people working together and producing and sharing documents (joint proposals). This was an important step in becoming an information and communication system.

Osiris tool (Online System to Improve Relationships by Information Sharing), home page of consortia workspaces.

The communication strategy and tools must remain flexible and capable of rapidly adapting to changing stakeholder needs.

[1] See previous publications of PAEPARD (2016):
Policy Brief N°2 Facilitating innovation in agricultural research for development: Brokerage as the vital link;
and Policy Brief N°3 Inclusive, balanced, demand-led partnerships for ARD: A consultative process.

The first prototype of an integrated platform was presented to ULP and consortia representatives and to PAEPARD members.

The device is named OSIRIS for *Online System to Improve Relationships by Information Sharing* it is a bilingual (English and French) collaborative working platform customized from an open source Wiki, among other functions, managing a directory, a library, calendar, news, activities , online shared documents and online surveys.

Each ULP, consortia and PAEPARD working group has its own web space under OSIRIS. Whilst the spaces are initially private, each group can share some or all of its information with other groups. During the development of OSIRIS, a revised PAEPARD communication and advocacy strategy

was also defined and developed. As a result, consortia and ULP were able to share contractual information (deliverables, reports) with the OSIRIS project co-ordinator, share certain information with other consortia or work streams (calendar, news, documents), as well as news and certain documents with the PAEPARD website.

The added value of OSIRIS was seen not only in dissemination of the same information via different tools, but also in the improvement in internal and external communications within the consortia. Today, 15 consortiums use OSIRIS mainly as a tool for collaborative work among the consortium members and four of them use it as a promotional tool for their consortium on the web.

There is no effective communication without a strong communication and advocacy strategy, without leadership and tools that are duly addressing to the needs of partners.

Integrating communication and advocacy

A strong communication strategy is essential to identify audiences, as well as tailored messages that need to be conveyed. For PAEPARD, advocacy is an important part of its mandate, so having a combined communication and advocacy strategy with activities under one working group was a key development in the communication process, particularly to strengthen the goals of assisting organizations to build joint African-European research proposals and to share good ARD practices and promote the ARD approach.

The new communication and advocacy strategy for PAEPARD current phase (December 2013 to December 2017) developed at the communication workshop in Brussels, in October 2014, ensures that action plans are now prepared annually in which organizations and events are prioritized, responsibilities assigned and budgets allocated for implementation.

Initially, the project stated the aim of advocacy activities was primarily to influence funding bodies in Europe to provide more support for demand-led multi-stakeholder African-European ARD partnerships. However, there was already a move towards targeting funding bodies in Africa and partners recommended that more attention should be paid to influencing national funding bodies on the continent. This view was reinforced by the mid-term review, which also recommended that in any future

phase of the project, advocacy activities should have a stronger focus on engaging non-research stakeholders and more development-oriented funding sources.

The combined communication and advocacy strategy has enabled PAEPARD communication and information platform to acquire new information resources. Above all, it enabled this platform to penetrate into the world of knowledge management systems thanks to the arrival of PAEPARD publications.

PAEPARD publications

Whilst external communication via Dgroup, the PAEPARD blog and website was appreciated by various

Set of PAEPARD publications.

PAEPARD audiences and generating considerable interest and engagement, the preparation of a new communication strategy highlighted the limited number of publications generated by the project for external stakeholders. PAEPARD activities were extensively documented in workshop reports and other documents but these had been largely written for an internal audience. Until 2014, the external visibility and influence of PAEPARD was very limited.

To address this issue, an editorial committee (publication task force) was established to provide a full range of editing services in several languages to any consortia who wanted to publish a booklet, brochure, summary report, article or policy brief. A new graphic charter and branding design was developed to give PAEPARD publications a strong, common and homogeneous identity. PAEPARD business presentation slides, based on a few templates, were developed for any PAEPARD member promoting and advocating for PAEPARD at international seminars. The same design was further used on the web, on posters and on social media so that PAEPARD became a recognizable brand, and PAEPARD projects could be better identified.

Social media

A social media campaign was launched for the European Development Days (EDD17) and specific

objectives were defined in a PAEPARD social media communication strategy document. The PAEPARD communication team focused on Twitter and tweets were synchronized with the PAEPARD Facebook account.

The social media campaign, with 95 tweets, 37,000 impressions and 1,200 profile visits on the PAEPARD Twitter profile, has helped to increase PAEPARD visibility.

PAEPARD has gained in exposure and institutional status and is now linked to similar social media partners. Visits to the PAEPARD website increased by 25% during the EDD17.

The tweets have helped spread PAEPARD progress to a larger audience and the campaign presented an opportunity to design and set up a new communication approach to highlight any PAEPARD events/activity on social media: PAEPARD should continue to use social media to promote Africa-Europe multi-stakeholder partnerships in ARD, the importance of users' engagement, and the impact on the ground of these partnerships.

With the increased online visibility of PAEPARD publications, such as policy briefs and papers, and the dissemination of thematic and synthesis information via social media, PAEPARD information and communication platform is evolving towards a genuine knowledge management system.

Sustainability as an exit strategy

From the outset, it is critical for any initiative to design a well-defined communication strategy that is developed collaboratively among partners to ensure a common understanding of objectives and approaches, and a sense of ownership and roles and responsibilities. Developing a clear and distinctive 'brand' for an initiative also helps to enhance visibility and strengthen ownership among project partners.

A strong communication strategy should be used to identify key target audiences and convey tailored messages. To achieve this, communication specialists can help provide guidance and facilitation (e.g. through development of information and communication tools, brand development and editing services). It should also be realized that information and communication needs may evolve over time, influenced by changes in project orientation, and

as a result of feedback from information users. This may lead to the emergence of new information and communication systems and, consequently, in the project strategy and tools designed and implemented to meet these needs.

Finally, the sustainability of the information and communication platform after the end of a project depends on two factors. The first is related to the open access of the tools that make up the platform. Choosing open source tools allows them to be used for free and to evolve even after the end of the project. The second factor is related to the hosting and animation of the platform, which will have to migrate, be hosted and led by a national, regional or international institution/organization in order to sustainably continue to provide brokerage and knowledge management services.

PAEPARD

FARA — Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa

The Platform for Africa-Europe Partnership in Agricultural Research for Development (**PAEPARD**) is a 8-year project sponsored by the European Commission (80%) and partners' own contribution (20%).

It is coordinated by the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (**FARA**) since December 2009, and extended until end of 2017.

It aims at building joint African-European multi-stakeholder partnerships in agricultural research for development (**ARD**) contributing to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. On the European side, the partners are **AGRINATURA** (The European Alliance on Agriculture Knowledge for Development, coordinating the European partners), **COLEACP** (representing the private sector), **CSA** (representing the NGOs), **ICRA**, specialized in capacity building in ARD, and the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (**CTA**). On the African side and in addition to FARA, the partners are the Pan-African Farmers Organization (**PAFO**), the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (**RUFORUM**) based in Kampala, and the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (**FANRPAN)** based in Pretoria. PAFO involves its members that are the Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (**EAFF**) based in Nairobi, the Réseaux des Organisations Paysannes et des Producteurs d'Afrique de l'Ouest (**ROPPA**) based in Ouagadougou, and the Plate-forme Régionale des Organisations Paysannes d'Afrique Centrale (**PROPAC**) based in Yaoundé. The Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (**SACAU**) is an associate partner of **PAEPARD**.

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