

Multi-stakeholder partnerships: How can African Universities better engage?

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Abstract

The African European Partnerships on Agricultural Research for Development (PAEPARD) presents a unique opportunity for African Universities to meet the increasing demand to join multi-stakeholder platforms. Based on the theory of innovation process, that defines innovation as “the application of novelty (idea, technology or process) in new ways that generate economic and social benefits to those involved and to wider society” and that “innovation results from a process of networking and interactive learning among a heterogeneous set of actors”, PAEPARD has launched 2 calls to which 14/81 and 7/69 were led by Universities. A total of five have been selected to date for PAEPARD support. Two possible processes were considered; Seeding and grafting but a hybrid involving four broad process of Brokering partnerships, Inception workshop, Writer shop, and Applying for funding was adopted. Between the first and second cohorts, Agricultural Innovation Facilitators (AIFs) were introduced as neutral and more objective external facilitators. Several lessons and issues have emerged that African Universities can help shade more light and propose possible solutions. The purpose of this paper therefore is to solicit the input of African universities on how best to engage them as stakeholders, to and generate discussions about the key lessons and issues emerging.

Key words: *African University involvement, Emerging Lessons and issues, Multi-stakeholder innovation platform, PAEPARD process,*

(211 words)

Résumé en Français:

La plate-forme de Partenariat Africain-Européen sur la Recherche Agricole pour le développement (PAEPARD- en Anglais) offre une opportunité unique aux universités Africaines de satisfaire le besoin croissant en plateformes multi-acteurs. Se basant sur la théorie du processus d'innovation qui définit l'innovation comme l'application de la nouveauté (idée, technologie ou processus) d'une nouvelle façon qui génère les bénéfices économiques et sociaux à ceux qui sont impliqués dans le processus et à toute la société au sens large et sachant que l'innovation résulte du processus de réseautage et du processus d'apprentissage collectif parmi une hétérogénéité d'acteurs, PAEPARD a lancé 2 appels dont 14/81 et 7/69 notes conceptuelles étaient pilotées par les universités. Au total 5 notes conceptuelles ont été sélectionnées pour recevoir l'appui de PAEPARD. Deux procédures ont été considérées ; le processus long et le processus court mais un processus hybride a été suivi en étapes telles que identification des partenaires, l'atelier d'initiation au partenariat, l'atelier d'écriture, et la demande de financement proprement dite. Les consortia ont utilisé les facilitateurs d'innovation externes. Beaucoup de leçons et de questions ont été tirées. Les universités peuvent aider à apporter d'éclairage et proposer les possibles solutions. D'où le but de cet article est de solliciter la contribution des universités sur comment ils peuvent s'impliquer comme parties prenantes et à discuter les principales leçons et les questions qui se posent dans le processus.

Mots clés : *Implication des Universités Africaines, Les leçons et les questions, Plateformes d'innovation, Processus PAEPARD. (245 words)*

0. Introduction

Increasingly African Universities are called upon to partner with other stakeholders as a means of enhancing collective effort to address challenges in Africa. It is believed that partnerships are central to the emergence of new innovations. The African European Partnerships on Agricultural Research for Development (PAEPARD) set up in December 2010, draws on the evolution of the economical theory of innovations to inform its design and delivery of innovative platforms, with universities as one of the major players.

1. The evolution of the theory and understanding of innovation processes

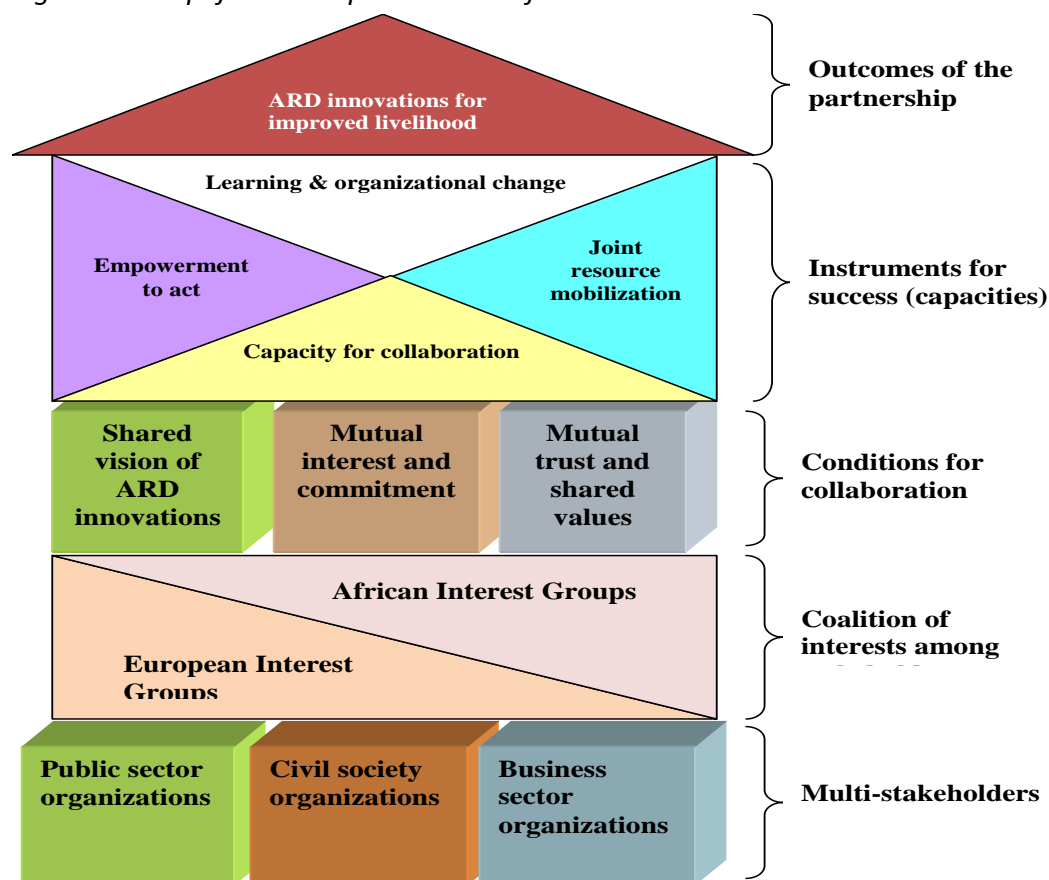
Christopher Freeman (1974) developed the notion of the systems of innovation in which in his view *“new technologies are not isolated inventions. They involve a constellation of interrelated technological and organizational innovations”*. He proposed the concept of “national systems of innovations” comprising of *“firms, universities and other actors, together with traditions, accumulated expertise and policy context - that produce technical change in each national economy”*.

Hanusch and Pyka (2005) in their paper “Principles of Neo-Schumpeterian Economics” note that, *“besides economic actors – basically firms – institutional actors such universities and other public research laboratories as well as the institutional frameworks and governance structures shape the innovation process taking place in national (e.g. Nelson 1993 and Lundvall 1988), sectoral (e.g. Malerba 2002 and 2005), regional (e.g. Cooke 2002) as well as corporate innovation systems (e.g. Cantwell, Dunning and Janne 2004) are important in determining their performance”*.

Kibwika and Clavel (2010) define innovation as *“the application of novelty (idea, technology or process) in new ways that generate economic and social benefits to those involved and to wider society”* and state that *“innovation results from a process of networking and interactive learning among a heterogeneous set of actors”*.

PAEPARD was therefore set up to build innovation partnerships between African and European ARD, involving both research and non research stakeholders from the two continents, as illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Simplified conceptualization of PAEPARD



Source: Kibwika and Clavel (2010)

Involving non-research actors was new, and did not have a lot of literature to draw from; as such PAEPARD was launched on new ground as a pilot (2010 - 2012). It was therefore essential that both the process and results of these partnerships are closely monitored and documented to generate knowledge for future multi-stakeholder partnership building.

The purpose of this paper is to generate discussions on the role of universities as key players in multi-stakeholder platforms, how to deal with the emerging lessons from PAEPARD experience and how to position universities to benefit from PAEPARD.

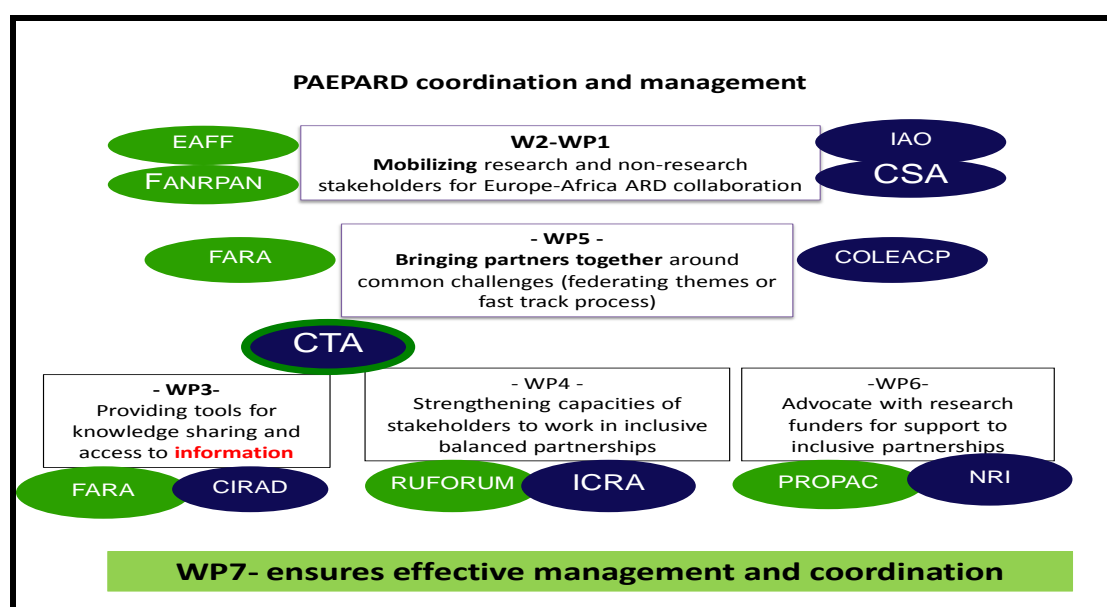
The management support of PAEPARD

PAEPARD is coordinated by FARA. The project is implemented through seven strongly interdependent 'work packages' (WPs), each led by a leader and co-leader and jointly coordinated by an African and a European Co-Manager (See figure 2 below):

- WP1 and WP2 initiated project actions by mobilising European and African stakeholders (respectively) for ARD (agricultural research for development) partnerships.
- WP3 supports the internal communication within all work packages, particularly within WP5, and works to raise the visibility of the Project.

- WP4 supports the development of innovation-oriented multi-stakeholder ARD partnerships, through strengthening capacity of these partnerships in key areas. It is closely integrated with WP5.
- WP5, the heart of the Project, seeks to broker innovative partnerships, involving research and development partners from both Africa and Europe, leading to the formulation of joint action plans, the development of targeted ARD proposals, and ultimately the establishment of successful and funded multi-stakeholder ARD projects.
- WP6 advocates with funders of ARD to create funding opportunities for the new kind of partnership proposals developed within the Project.
- WP7 ensures effective management and coordination of the Project through two co-managers, one based in Africa and the second in Europe.

Figure 2: PAEPARD Coordination and Management



Source: PAEPARD program document

2. The PAEPARD process, lessons and challenges

The purpose of PAEPARD innovation partnerships is to make research more demand driven through increased innovative engagement of the non-research actors. Two tracks for establishment of partnerships in PAEPARD are proposed.

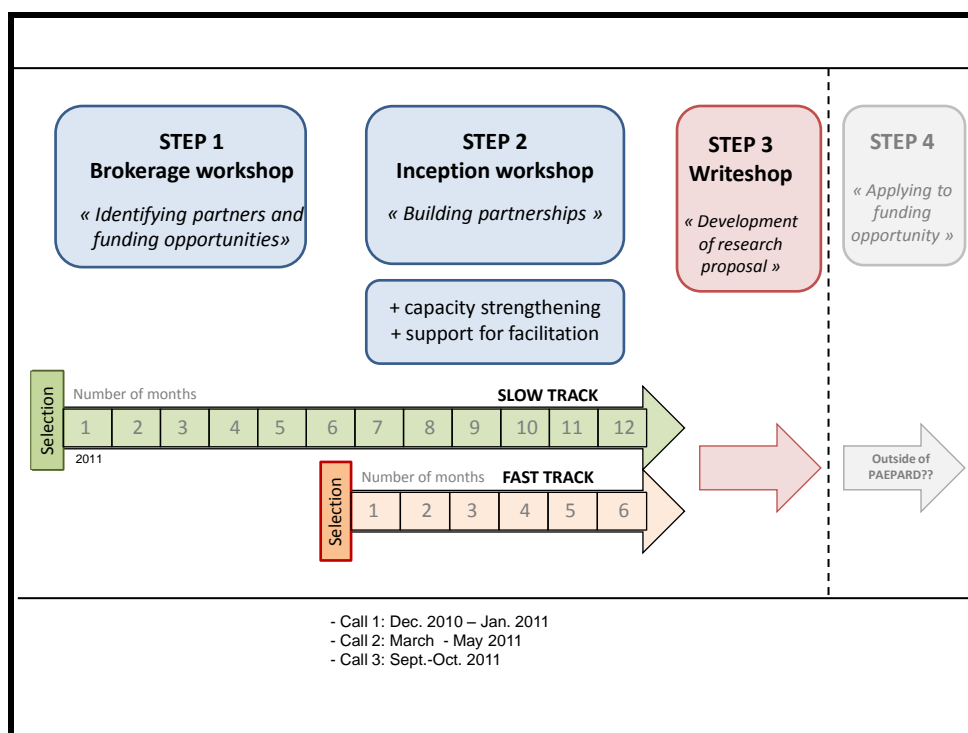
The Seeding approach in which partnership construction is done with the provision of adequate space and time for the non-research actors to organise themselves around mutual interests and engage with the research actors to articulate their demand and address them through partnerships. It is a long term process that takes nine phases grouped in three major steps: Partnership exploration, Partnership building and Partnership maintenance.

The second approach to partnership building was qualified by PAEPARD partners as a **Grafting approach** because it fast-tracks the establishment of innovative partnerships without following all steps of the seeding approach. The principles of innovative partnerships are grafted into the process to make them more functional.

Subsequently PAEPARD partners designed to broker the multi-stakeholder innovation partnership as indicated in the below figure. The process involves 4 interlinked phases:

- Brokering partnerships
- Inception workshop
- Writer shop
- Applying for funding.

Figure 3: PAEPARD model



Source: Mugabe and al (2012: Engaging non-research stakeholders in ARD)

a. Brokering partnerships

This is the courting step in which partners begin to communicate, decide on research themes, and explore funding opportunities. There is an opportunity here for African Universities to propose themes that are relevant to the development needs or that address gaps they have identified in their own work. This phase is assumed to be completed during the process of applying to PAEPARD. However not all consortiums are able to meet before

the inception workshops, as such it has been acceptable if the lead researcher indicate the interest of their other players.

The criteria employed by PAEPARD to assess and select consortiums to be supported included three broad areas: anticipated development impact, partnership suitability and expertise to deliver the proposed program as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Criteria for selecting consortiums to be supported by PAEPARD

Consideration	Specific questions
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which category (ies) of stakeholders is (are) going to be positively impacted by the implementation of the project? • Does the proposed partnership clearly identify intended beneficiaries and development outcomes? • Does the proposed partnership and innovation process add value to existing initiatives? • Are the expected outcomes of the proposed innovation process likely to benefit large numbers of people beyond the partnership?
Suitability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the partners clearly define a joint innovation challenge or opportunity that requires their concerted effort? • Does the application clearly show evidence of demand by end-users/beneficiaries? • How plausible is it that the partnership will evolve in a research partnership? • Is the proposed partnership likely to be sustainable?
Expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the applicant have the required expertise and experience to lead the development of the proposed partnership and innovation process? • Is the proposed partnership composed of a core group of partners (including a research partner) capable of providing the required complementary inputs to address the shared challenge or opportunity? • Does the proposed division of roles and responsibilities enable non-research partners to keep the partnership focused on their needs? • Are the nature and the function of the different partner susceptible to show the potential importance of a partnership through its potential multiplier effect and his sustainability? • Are the nature and the function of the different partner susceptible to show the potential importance of a partnership through its potential multiplier effect and his sustainability?

Over the two PAEPARD calls, a number of lessons and issues have emerged that universities can propose solutions to:

- Different levels of expertise and experience: For instance between farmers representatives and researchers. How best can PAEPARD ensure meaningful participation of all levels of expertise?
- Dealing with value chain: Identifying over the whole value chain, where specific actors should take the lead.
- Promoting a level ground for engagement: The whole issue of providing space and means for all stakeholder to participate fully in the process and decision making.
- Identifying and maintaining interest of European partners: Several were identified but few actually engaged. How best can PAEPARD capture and maintain European partner's interest?
- Mobilizing partners around issues of common interest: Coordinators mentioned several actors whose interest was not clear. When in the process should they be decided to interest all stakeholders?
- Roles and responsibilities of actors: The motivation for partnering, roles and responsibilities were poorly articulated. AIFs were employed in the second cohort and results from the mini-review indicate that this was helpful (Kapiriri, 2012). How can the function of AIFs be better engaged in the process?
- The motivation and function of consortiums: Many wait to collaborate after the funding is secured. Without funding, most are dormant. How best can partners be mobilized for research interest and not just accessing funding?
- Developing winning proposals: Several attempts have been made and few platforms have won proposals. Similar to the above, once the interest is there, how best can PAEPARD support consortiums to access available funding?
- Subsequently the few number of funded proposals show that the current mechanisms are not appropriate for ARD. Can PAEPARD advocate for better funding mechanisms by different donors?

b. Partnership inception workshop- PIW

The proposed partners meet face-to-face during the inception workshop to establish or consolidate their partnership, and to develop an action plan for their innovation process. The action plan is expected to include clearly agreed principles for working in partnership, roles, responsibilities and commitments of the partners. The following outputs are expected:

- A shared analysis of the challenge identified by the non-research partners;
- A consensus on what they want to achieve together;
- An in-depth analysis of the interests of the partners and other actors to be involved in the innovation process, and of their expected roles and responsibilities in the process;
- A log frame and an action plan for the joint innovation process and research proposal development;
- The governance and management mechanisms for the partnership.

Key lessons from PIW

- It takes at least 4 participating partners for the PIW to be effective. However, larger partnerships (with more than 10 partners) also imply long bureaucracies that have delayed the process of innovation partnerships and therefore the delay in the response to the calls.
- The position of the partner representative in their organisational structure matters for decision making purposes. Representatives from hierarchical organizations refrained from making decisions, requesting for consultation with those in management. It is helpful if representatives have decision making powers.
- The cost of bringing consortium members from some countries to the country where the workshop is organized limited the numbers of partners represented. There also associated management modalities for inception when involving people from different countries.
- The availability of the facilitators to organize workshops in the different sub-regions. The second call had AIF recruited to facilitate the process as a pilot and has generated a number of lessons.
- A number of European partners identified in the partnership applications were not represented in the workshops, perhaps due to the relatively short notice of workshop dates, or in some cases – at least – because the European organizations did not see sufficient incentive to allocate staff for five days. The relative lack of interest by European organizations in attending the partnership inception workshops raises questions about the usefulness of these to promote European-African ARD partnerships. PAEPARD needs to give individual targeted support to identify and mobilize European support for partnerships, if a balanced African-European partnership remains a project objective.

c. Writer-shops:

These were designed to move the concept notes to full proposals, targeting available funding windows. PAEPARD provides resources for consortium members to come together, and in the case of the second cohort, even provided a facilitator from EU. However, all

consortiums were expected to look out for calls and submit proposals. Besides the calls announced by PAEPARD, consortiums have not been vigilant in seeking out and applying for funding on their own.

3. How can Universities better engage with the PAEPARD process?

A number of African Universities have responded to the PAEPARD call. Out of 81 concept notes received for the first call, 14 concept notes were led by African universities and the following three were selected.

- I. Enhancing capacity and developing networks between North-South Universities in Research Methods training at PhD level, Makerere University
- II. Improving the incomes of smallholder farmers through increased access to livestock markets and through the engagement of the stakeholders in the livestock production to marketing, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zimbabwe,
- III. Partnership for Enhanced Aquaculture Innovation in Sub Saharan Africa (PEAISSA), University of Malawi

For the second call, out of 69 concept notes only 7 concept notes were led by universities and only 2 of these were selected.

- I. Control of Angular leaf spot disease of Citrus in Ghana, Department of Crop Science, University of Ghana, Legon
- II. Low cost and high quality livestock feed production knowledge delivery to Nigerian poultry industry (NIPOFERD), Dpt of Animal Science and Technology, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria (RE-SUBMISSION)

Many were disqualified on basis of not meeting the following

- Does the applicant and do each of the partners meet the requirements for legal status and stakeholder mandate?
- Does the partnership have at least 3 partners with 1 from Europe?
- Is there at least one African non-research partner and one African research partner?
- Does the partnership target a published or expected call for ARD proposals or other identified funding opportunity? (later on this criteria was not considered)

The PAEPARD innovation platform is new and evolving, to ensure that functional partnership take place between EU and African research and non-research actors. A number of challenges and lessons have been highlighted above, and over the process of implementation several adjustments have been made. This goes to show that PAEPARD is a

learning process and therefore creative thinking around the challenges is essential. There are a number of challenges but a few have been selected for discussion:

- Perhaps the biggest challenge is identifying interested and committed EU partners: How can African Universities use their current EU linkages to develop collaborative partnerships?
- Secondly, the issue of creating leveled platforms where all partners can participate as equals. PAEPARD has experimented with Agricultural Innovation Facilitators - AIFs and while results from a mini internal review point to these being relevant, there were also capacity gaps in terms of facilitation skills, and general knowledge about the subject matter. There were also unresolved contractual issues that affected their full engagements. How can the function of AIFs better serve the process?
- Actively looking out and responding to calls for proposals. All calls for proposals have guidelines and requirements. For instance many require the logical framework, some are moving to the theory of change, etc. How can PAEPARD better equip consortiums to write winning proposals?
- At the moment consortiums seem to limit active involvement to when they access funding, is there a way of engaging partners in the consortium with or without proposals being funded? Is there a way to cultivate a deeper and meaningful multi-stakeholder platform whose primary motive is collaboration and not to get funding?
- Is there something PAEPARD is missing in the design and delivery of its projects?

Background reading

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