HLPD Stakeholder Forum: Knowledge Management & Communication System

In support of the Africa-EU R&I Partnership on Food & Nutrition Security & Sustainable Agriculture

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Building Bi-regional Partnerships for Global Challenges

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Introduction

In support of the EU-Africa Research and Innovation (R&I) Roadmap on Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA) CAAST-Net Plus partners have recently been convening consultative workshops in the pursuit of establishing a Knowledge Management and Communication System (KMCS) for the bi-regional partnership on FNSSA. Consultations have been held with key representatives from science academies, the private sector, policymakers, farmer associations, research community and other actors with the objective of gathering inputs towards the design of the KMCS.

The KMCS initiative emerged as a recommendation from a stakeholder forum with a group of Africa-EU science, technology, and innovation (STI) projects in April 2016, where a need for a platform for structured access to all research outputs and lessons learned from various projects was identified.

CAAST-Net Plus has interviewed around 50 individuals within the FNSSA value chain, with a total of 4 workshops organised in Egypt, South Africa, Namibia and Spain. The Africa-EU KMCS Initiative aims to pool various actors from the food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture value chain. The KMCS will tap into and mobilise existing networks within knowledge management and communication in FNSSA. At the end of this consultative process, a blueprint will be presented to inform the African and European policymakers on the requirements for establishing such a KMCS.

In this context, CAAST-Net Plus organised a stakeholder forum on 19 October 2017, in Brussels, Belgium. The stakeholder forum was organised in conjunction with the 4th Senior Officials Meeting of the EU-Africa High Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) on STI, which took place from 17-18 October 2017.

Background and Objectives of the KMCS

In summary, the KMCS aims to mobilise committed actors within the FNSSA value chain. These actors include, but are not limited to:

- ❖ Funders networks
- ❖ Digital portal and data managers
- ❖ Research institutions and academies
- ❖ Innovation hubs/technology transfer offices/extension services
- ❖ Entrepreneurs and professional organisations
- ❖ Governmental institutions
- ❖ HLPD Bureau (incl. the African RECs and the NASAC into STI related processes)

The aforementioned groups will be invited to Africa-EU dialogue meetings to exchange ideas and formulate new dynamic partnerships to respond to FNSSA-related challenges. The KMCS will support the activities of the Africa-EU FNSSA consortium – LEAP-Agri, which is tasked with the implementation of the FNSSA Roadmap.

The proposed dialogues for actions are towards, closer collaboration with groups, identifying regional focus areas, funding activities for R&I, and finally, an optimised knowledge management and communication methods and technologies.

With CAAST-Net Plus coming to an end in December 2017, the KMCS blueprint is expected to be adopted and implemented by the LEAP-Agri consortium – a project established to support the bi-regional FNSSA R&I partnership.

Panel Discussion

As a final step to concluding the consultative discussions around the KMCS blueprint, a panel discussion took place during the HLPD Stakeholder Event. The panel consisted of:

- ❖ **Moderator: Stefan A. Haffner** – Project Management Agency at the German Aerospace Centre (DLR-PT), Germany
- ❖ **Dorra Fiani** – Founder of the Knowledge Economy Foundation (KEF), Egypt
- ❖ **Jackie Olang-Kado** – Network Coordinator of the National Academy of Science Academies (NASAC), Kenya
- ❖ **Hamidou Tamboura** – Fonds National de la Recherche et l'Innovation pour le Développement (FONRID), Burkina Faso

Recommendations on the Establishment of the KMCS Initiative

To guide the discussion, it was requested that panellists share their experiences and provide recommendations on the KMCS. The following key points were raised:

Experiences from the Knowledge Economy Foundation – Ms Dorra Fiani

1. KMCS must be custom tailored, pick target audiences and decide what information each audience needs, i.e. what information funders need from farmers and vice versa. This is how KEF functions.
2. KMCS should not reinvent the wheel but structure all the relevant available initiatives and made accessible.
3. The initiative should aim to build up awareness of all stakeholders on what exists nationally and internationally, and what are the interests of the countries. For example, there are technologies that have been created, but we do not know where the product originates from – KMCS should address this.
4. The platform should manage the linkages between stakeholders because currently, there is no initiative dedicated to this.
5. There is also an issue of capacity building that the initiative should address, because there hasn't been enough capacity building, especially within the African continent. There needs to be capacity building for smallholder farmers, to gather with other stakeholders and using digital tools for their operations.
6. In summary, the potential role of the KMCS is for it to consider the role of government as this is where policies are made and it can easily influence the priorities of funders. There is a real interest for African countries to collaborate amongst themselves, the KMCS can further encourage intercontinental collaboration. In addition, it would allow the establishment of schemes between smallholder farmers in a country working specifically in one area of a value chain. African countries could definitely benefit from the KMCS as they are already establishing their own knowledge in FNSSA, however a coordinated approach that links all stakeholders together is needed – which is where the KMCS can serve.

Recommendations from Fonds National de la Recherche et l'Innovation pour le Développement (FONRID) – Dr Hamidou Tamboura

1. The KMCS Initiative has potential to identify the right actors in a specific domain, especially one that is aligned to LEAP-Agri's[1] objectives. Once identified, dialogue needs to ensue discussing needs in STI in FNSSA for both regions – what is available, what are the gaps and how to fill these gaps. The findings herewith will be addressed by the projects which will be funded through the LEAP-Agri call. Solutions proposed by project proposals will be assessed on whether or not they speak to the demands of the EU-Africa FNSSA partnership.
2. A strategy should be devised to communicate and involve farmers in the KMCS Initiative, as they are a pivotal partner in this process and the success of the Initiative.

Experiences from the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC) – Ms Jackie Olang-Kado

1. The KMCS recipe should be relevant for the countries that it is being launched in. Before it is launched, an assessment should be conducted on whether there is a need for such an initiative or if there are similar platforms.
2. The benefit for scientists utilizing the KMCS should be that it enables them to conduct research that helps the policymaker make informed decision, in other words, science should be aligned to the needs of the community.
3. Consider smart resourcing – money should not be pumped into a project just because it is seasonal, it should try to find means to ensure that funds are spent in smart way and are monitored.
4. Scientists should be able to effortlessly contribute towards science and technology outputs. Invitations need to be circulated to scientists (via the KMCS) to be part of the policymaking process, so that structures such as the EU-Africa High Level Policy Dialogue could make informed decisions. This is where NASAC can get involved as it is mandated to produce science policy reports that are informed by the needs of the community.
5. One other issue is that scientists and policymakers are working in silos. The KMCS should break that barrier, it should encourage collective activities between the two.
6. Lastly, there is a level of competitiveness when funding is involved. The KMCS will mean that research partners get to stay updated on what their competitors are busy with.

Recommendations from the floor:

1. There is a plethora of information already freely available, including research data in grey literature. Consider the next step in closing this loop – how do you include informally published research in the KMCS?
2. End users will be able to give feedback to researchers on what works and what doesn't. This information informs policymakers, and it should be an ongoing cycle.
3. To get real impact with the KMCS, consideration must be given to other relevant activities in KMCS-related activities, the KMCS should not be a standalone tool. It should exist in conjunction with, and form a link between existing initiatives.

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[1] LEAP-Agri: A network for the long term EU-Africa research and innovation partnership on food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture

❖ Acknowledging that farmers are traditional and do not like abandoning their farming/communication/ICT techniques to new ones, introducing them to new systems and illustrating the benefits of technology for their work is necessary.

❖ It is also favourable if the KMCS could get in touch with funders from different sectors who have the means to get access to farmers.

❖ There is a lot of focus and concern placed on donors than on clients/customers/consumers. There is a mutual complicity – many projects have been started on knowledge management. The sustainability of the projects need to be questioned and analysed. Research outputs stand a risk if projects and their knowledge management and communication activities are not sustainable/viable. A service should be designed which takes care of communicating with specific target groups.

❖ The success or challenges of programmes that have been awarded funding need to be evaluated accordingly. Evaluations should be made public (via the KMCS) so that other programme coordinators can learn from earlier initiatives and be able to plan for their own future projects.

Conclusion

The discussions reiterated that the KMCS should not exist in silos, it should exist as a link and central point for all efforts within the knowledge management and communication activities in the food and nutrition security and agriculture sector.

There are various lessons that can be learned from earlier initiatives such as PAEPARD, and from these lessons the KMCS should aim to advance these activities. Initiatives such as NASAC and KEF also possess experience in this field, and should be considered as potential champions of the KMCS initiative.

Challenges that have been identified, i.e. access to farmer networks and other financing models, should be considered in the development of the KMCS. The initiative should aim to close this gap and subsequently create an enabling environment for multistakeholder engagements in addressing FNSSA-related challenges.