

EDITORIAL

Science and Technology for Development STD-2 (1987- 1991) A new research and development programme for Tropical and Sub- Tropical Agriculture

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In his editorial (Tropicultura 1987 p 45-46) A. Darthenucq outlined the main reasons for the involvement of the European Communities (EC) in tropical agricultural research cooperation. It is now appropriate to review the developments since then, and to explain the main philosophy of the new programme. About one year after the end of the first STD programme, the Council of Ministers took the decision to launch the second programme on 14 December 1987 (OJ L355 17.12.87 p41) with a budget of 80 million Ecu. (Approximately 55 million Ecu for the sub-programme "Tropical and Sub-Tropical Agriculture" and 25 million Ecu for the sub-programme "Medicine, Health and Nutrition in Tropical and Sub-Tropical Zones").

A call for proposals was announced on 16 December 1987 (O.J. C337 16.12.87 p 3) which remains open for two years until 31 December 1989. Thus, proposals may be submitted at any time until that date but for the purposes of evaluation and selection this call has been divided into five tranches. The closing dates for submission of proposals in the remaining tranches are, 30 June 1989 and 31 December 1989. Further information on the programme and application forms can be obtained from the address below.

The new programme is similar in conception to the first but has more scope. In particular the scientific collaboration element, which is considered to be one of the most important in the programme, has been strengthened. Each proposal must involve at least one EC and one developing country partner in meaningful collaboration before it will be considered. However, proposals including more than one EC laboratory and more than one developing country laboratory are now positively encouraged. The provision of resources for increasing links makes more effective use of the research effort put into tropical agriculture research, reduces unnecessary duplication and may promote further associations in other fields. It may also, particularly in multilateral projects, facilitate the development of linkages with laboratories without previous contacts with developing countries, but with valuable expertise and facilities to offer.

In the past EC Member States have acted independently in respect of tropical agriculture research maintaining links with individual third world centres encouraging research often without wide regional application. By involving additional EC partners new contacts in developing countries can be established going beyond the traditional ex-colonial links. An obvious example in this respect is the opportunity this programme provides for bringing together scientists in francophone and anglophone Africa where often similar problems are tackled without significant coordination. In addition, due to the world-wide application of this programme, it is now possible to envisage projects in which laboratories from S. America, Asia, Africa and Europe would work together.

The type of cooperation envisaged is an important feature. Each project submitted should include the substantial involvement of a developing country laboratory at a level which gives the opportunity to increase technical knowledge, skills and resources. It should not merely relate to, for example, the organisation of field trials for which local expertise is already sufficient. In other words, the cooperation should no longer be based entirely on the division of research tasks which encourages basic or sophisticated research to remain in the EC Member States and leaves developing countries simply with applied or more routine research.

This programme differs from other methods of international funding of agricultural research; it offers the forging of closer links between laboratories by means of joint research contracts with all participants receiving financial contributions (up to 50% of the total cost in EC and up to 100% in developing countries). As a new feature for STD-2 the principal proposer and main partners have the opportunity in appropriate cases to jointly sign the contract, thereby increasing the involvement of the partner in the conception and management of the overall project. A further strength of the programme lies in the contracts themselves —these are made between the Commission and individual research institutes. Money is sent directly to the institutes concerned ensuring that the money is received rapidly and without complications. For many research institutes this is a decided advantage. In addition there are no political strings attached to the signing of an STD contract.

The STD-2 programme also recognises the value of promoting another form of cooperation — the creation of networks. Networks may be defined as cooperative associations of scientists, institutes, etc. that have agreed to work in a complementary way on a single research topic. These networks, which may now be considered for funding, could include not only laboratories working on EC contracts but also other bodies researching similar subjects.

Reference has already been made to basic and applied research. This programme will endeavour to cover both extremes for both EC and developing country participants. Developing countries will never attain a satisfactory level of applied research unless they also have the means to carry out basic research. Furthermore, basic research is the sole source of genuine long term progress and should therefore be positively promoted in developing countries. What is needed in a programme such as this is the maintenance of a good balance between fundamental and applied research. To maintain credibility and to complement other development activities the capacity must exist to tackle urgent problems even when the research required is not particularly novel.

Arguments are often advanced that basic research is better left to the richer countries since the limited resources available to tropical agriculture could be more effectively spent on more applied activities of more immediate value. However, this fails to recognise long term economic benefits, and also the extra motivation of scientists and the spin-off in terms of additional international contacts this might bring.

It is true to say that not all laboratories in developing countries are ready to conduct basic research — the relatively young nature of many of these research institutes and national funding policies have precluded this in certain developing countries — however, the up-grading process should be progressively encouraged. The stimulation of collaborative research contracts provides the right climate for this to take place. In this context it is inaccurate to refer to all developing countries in the same breath. It is clear that many third world countries have a strong reputation for scientific excellence in tropical agriculture and are already conducting basic research and/or using advanced technologies. In these cases, too, participation in the programme creates new cooperation and research opportunities. In addition it must be said that there is a danger that speculative advanced technologies and their associated basic studies may be sought for scientific prestige purposes without due consideration of less glamorous but well tried approaches which could perhaps more effectively solve the same problem.

Obtaining and maintaining a necessary minimum standard of equipment is a major problem in developing country laboratories. Costs of purchase and maintenance are high and obsolescence is rapid. The STD-2 programme, by providing the possibility of purchasing equipment and encouraging effective technology transfer goes some way to improving the situation. The programme does not have sufficient resources to solve all the problems but it can contribute. In addition, the EC partner may be able to assist in obtaining information on the various types of equipment available and to facilitate ordering and delivery.

In order to fully capitalise on the opportunities for collaboration offered by the STD-2 programme the Commission wishes to promote the mobility of scientists. This is one of the best ways of strengthening ties between laboratories, raising the standards of developing country research teams, and providing better training for young researchers by involving them directly in the work of properly equipped centres. In addition it gives EC researchers a better insight into the real problems facing developing countries.

In conclusion, by positively promoting scientific cooperation between EC and developing countries, the STD-2 Programme goes some way to tackling the two major objectives of the Vienna Programme (2nd Conference of the United Nations of Science and Technology for Development (CUNSTD)) ie the strengthening of the scientific and technical resources of the developing countries and the reorganisation of the existing procedures governing international relations in the field of science and technology.

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