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DURAS, the Global Forum, and Competitive Grant Schemes to Promote Innovation



Photo: Oliver Oliveros

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The DURAS Project

In June 2008, after four years of implementation, the DURAS Project wrapped up its activities with a project closing seminar at the FAO Headquarters in Rome. But, what exactly was DURAS?

The 'Promotion du développement durable dans les systèmes de recherche agricole du sud' (or DURAS) Project was launched in 2004 with a total budget of 4 million Euros. Promoted by the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and funded by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DURAS is known in English as the 'Promotion of sustainable development in agricultural research systems in the South'. The project took a multi-dimensional approach to agricultural research for development (ARD), highlighting the centrality of multi-stakeholder partnership.

The main objectives of the project were:

- To help strengthen the involvement of southern stakeholders in the ARD process by encouraging and promoting innovation;
- To enhance the scientific capacity of southern partners through partnerships; and
- To ensure their voices are heard at the international level.

The DURAS Project had three major components. The third, to which about fifty

percent of the resources were allocated, focused on the development of a Competitive Grants Scheme (CGS) to promote innovation and to contribute to capacity development among southern partners.

Promoting innovative ARD through competitive grants

Although the overall objectives of the CGS were very ambitious, the scheme succeeded in developing innovative approaches to supporting collaboration between many different stakeholders. And despite the short timeframe and small size of the projects (funds ranged from €90,000 to €150,000 per project), several made impressive progress in areas such as:

- *New scientific knowledge* — including a new indigenous biological control agent for nematodes.
- *Novel methodologies* — for engaging civil society in ARD, for example.



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- *Policy changes* — to proposed legislation protecting traditional knowledge.
- *Leveraging additional resources* — to accelerate local innovation in natural resources management.
- *Developing links with other initiatives* — by launching innovation platforms involving agricultural research institutes and local communities.

Importantly, the CGS maintained good links with other parts of DURAS. In particular, the process for selecting the CGS themes, and the mechanisms for supporting the research, came from stakeholder consultations in another project component.

Monitoring progress of CGS projects

As well as achieving these positive results from the projects themselves, the CGS's management systems were impressive. They developed their own Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework, and project teams developed logical frameworks as part of their project proposal. Project teams had to measure their progress against four Critical Success Factors:

- Meeting stated project objectives;
- Whether project implementation was progressing as scheduled;
- Functional involvement of stakeholders in project implementation;
- Scientific outputs.

And, project leaders submitted different types of reports to the Project Coordinator:

- Quarterly progress reports;
- Mid-term project progress and financial reports;
- Final technical/scientific and financial reports.

Site visits by the Project Coordinator also assessed projects' progress. Plus, members of the DURAS Scientific Partnership Committee were involved in some of these visits, providing them with the opportunity to see at first hand some of the projects that they had reviewed and selected. Because partnerships are an important measure of the quality of the ARD process, monitoring visits aimed to assess the extent to which different partner

organizations were engaged in project activities.

In addition, project documentation and analysis workshops were organized. In these, project participants discussed and defined indicators which could be used to analyze and evaluate the success and partnership quality of their respective projects using different criteria. A publication highlighting the process and partnership dimensions of the 12 projects supported under the DURAS CGS is being prepared.

The project's reviews

The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs commissioned a mid-term external review of the DURAS Project in 2006 and a final review in 2008.

The final review recommended supporting projects that had produced innovations with the potential for widespread uptake for a further three years with multi-donor support. This research should have a clearly defined learning framework, and follow a new set of principles and guidelines representing best practice in conducting multi-stakeholder ARD.

The review team suggested that the Global Forum should facilitate the development and promotion of these guidelines, drawing on the experiences of DURAS and other relevant initiatives. The lessons from the new research projects could also contribute to the further refinement of the guidelines.

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