

Fourth South Africa – European Union Summit

Support Event on Climate Change Research Cooperation (12 September 2011)

Notes, observations and comments from the discussion session

1. South Africa has an excellent track record in participating in the EU and other European country specific bi-lateral collaboration opportunities. The example of the long and successful relationship with Germany was highlighted.
2. The following are some of the key reasons identified for this success:
 - a. Effective trust-based personal networks have been established over the years.
 - b. The DST's role in creating an enabling environment for building and maintaining this network (through for example the various co-funding instruments available to researchers as well as a dedicated and experienced support office network in SA and Brussels).
 - c. SA has an excellent science base to build onto;
 - d. The science infrastructure and interesting case study areas make it attractive for European scientists to collaborate with SA;
 - e. Spending time in SA is an attractive opportunity for students and young researchers from Europe to diversify their personal and career experience base.
 - f. SA is seen as an entry point into the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa.
3. The examples of FP Projects that were presented highlighted the benefits of 'Teaming up for Success'. A key benefit of such multi-institutional and multi-cultural collaborative projects is the fact that all participating researchers gain significantly by experiencing the diversity of approaches and perspectives that the different cultures and case area environments offer.
4. There is strong alignment between the research focus areas and themes of the SA 10-Yr Global Change Research Plan (see attached) and the focus areas of the FP7's Theme 6: Environment (including climate change). This makes it easy for SA research institutions to align their own research strategies to the EU agenda.
5. The level of funding made available by the EU makes it worthwhile for meaningful engagement by senior researchers. Seen as leveraging co-funding to realise the local research agenda it allows for DST to endorse the activities and add additional conditions that promote local capacity building.

6. It was noted that the 2012 and 2013 FP7 Calls emphasised the need for the application and demonstration of the knowledge developed in the FP 7 projects to date. This is also aligned to a key objective of the SA's GCGC to achieve local level impact through the application of science.
7. An observation was made that the projects presented at the seminar could amongst themselves benefit from the learning and outputs achieved. The challenge was to find a way to learn from each other. A suggestion was for South Africa (DST) to define a specific study area and to invite collaborative proposals from the various SA FP participants.
8. The challenge of translating the research output to policy and other 'real-world' actions was highlighted. It was mentioned that, for example, the Water Research Commission has a successful approach of publishing both technical and policy level briefs as output of research that they fund. To achieve this, however, it was pointed out that stakeholders, including technical and political decision-makers, need to then be part of the project design from the start.
9. The challenge of broadening the research network into the rest of especially Sub-Saharan Africa was highlighted as this is an explicit need expressed by European and other international funders. Specific thoughts on how to achieve this were identified as:
 - a. To tap into the many existing research networks in Africa.
 - b. South African researchers should be encouraged to more actively participate and support local and regional conferences and workshops (as opposed to often the more sought-after European based events due to the perception that these are better organised and of a higher standing).
 - c. An ESASTAP-type of collaboration enabling mechanism for Africa (EASTAP?) set up in close collaboration with the AU could overcome the real barrier that non- South African researchers sourcing seed and co-funding experience.
 - d. To acknowledge that activities in Africa take place within a specific cultural and political context and that this should be taken into account at all times.

The discussion concluded with an agreement that it had been a worthwhile exercise of sharing of information and learning points. The speakers were thanked for their work. The DST and the international partners were thanked for their ongoing commitment and support.

(Notes by L Barwell)

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