

D3.6 Guidelines on standardisation of procedures for initiating new activities



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The overall objective of CASA, a Coordination and Support Action (CSA), is a **consolidated common agricultural and wider bioeconomy research agenda** within the European Research Area.

CASA will achieve this by bringing the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR), which has already contributed significantly to this objective in the past, to the next level of performance as a research policy think tank. CASA will efficiently strengthen the strengths and compensate for the insufficiencies of SCAR and thus help it evolve further into “SCAR plus”.

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Abbreviations

CASA = Common Agricultural and wider bioeconomy reSearch Agenda

CSA = Coordination and Support Action

CWG = Collaborative Working Groups

FG = Foresight Group

MS = Member State

OT= Organizing Team

PM = Plenary Meeting

SG = Steering Group

SCAR = Standing Committee of Agricultural Research

SWG = Strategic Working Group

T = Task

TOR = Terms of Reference

WG = CWGs, SWGs and Task Force Groups

WP = Work Package

Introduction

The Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) was established in 1974 through a Regulation of the Council of the EU with the objective of coordinating the agricultural research between Member States (MS) and the European Commission. SCAR was given a new mandate in 2005 by the Council, that assigned it the task of providing advice to the European Commission and the MS.

Since research and innovation landscape is in constant evolution and new issues are constantly emerging, SCAR needs to be promptly responsive to these challenges in order to provide a high quality strategic policy advice. This could be achieved only through enhanced cooperation, coordination and information exchange within the SCAR members and between it and its subgroups. For this reason the **CSA CASA project** was designed in order to strengthen the strengths and compensate for the insufficiencies of SCAR in order to help it to evolve further into “SCAR plus”.

The goal of CASA will be achieved through the accomplishment of several specific objectives and relative Work Packages (WP) aimed at supporting and strengthening the work of SCAR in achieving its targets:

- 1. Increased and broadened participation, interaction and collaboration of MS and Associated Countries.**
- 2. Improved quality of outputs and outcomes of SCAR.**
- 3. Strengthening the production of more strategic policy advice.**
- 4. Improved overall organisation, communication and dissemination of SCAR activities.**

Work Package 3 focuses on strengthening strategic advice based on SCAR outputs of Strategic Working Groups (SWGs) and Collaborative Working Groups (CWGs), targeted to different stakeholders and areas, and on underpinning a common agricultural and wider bioeconomy research agenda. This should lead to a better use of resources, which are always scarce, as well as to provide the overall organisation with jointly agreed tools able to show the most achievable level of objectivity and impartiality. In particular, Task 3.5 (T3.5) aims at improving overall organisation and communication within the SCAR by creating new standardised procedures and tools, which would allow defining priority issues, identifying gaps/overlaps in existing research agenda and entailing the initiation of new activities (CWGs, SWGs and task forces).

Background

At the moment, there is no standardised and formalised procedure which could guide SCAR in the initiation of new activities. So far, each new initiative has been established as consequences of various inputs from different groups sharing common strategies with non-uniform approach in a bottom-up way. Consequently, the current Working Groups (WGs) could be seen as not completely coherent in structure as well as in thematic coverage extent. This may possibly lead to the risk of facing thematic overlaps, duplicating the WGs efforts on same research areas while leaving others uncovered. Moreover, the rationale of CASA project highlights that communication, coordination and information exchange between different WGs leave room for improvement in terms of appropriateness and standardisation. To such an extent, it would be advisable to proceed towards a harmonisation of the procedures of starting up new initiatives, in order to overcome potential shortcomings in full exploitation of SCAR initiatives results

Note: should further scheduled milestones and deliverables issue additional inputs influencing the present subject, consequent updating and/or amending of this document could be taken into consideration.

Guidelines on standardisation procedures for initiating new activities

The present guidelines propose a **centralised top-down approach** with broadened function assignment to different SCAR bodies, whereas **SCAR Steering Group (SG)** holds a key role in implementation of the procedure. Briefly, the process can be displayed through the flow chart as shown in Figure 1.

The SG is delegated to carry out specific tasks agreed within the plenary meetings, to implement the advice coming from the European Commission in relation to coordination mechanisms in Horizon 2020 and prioritisation of ERA-Net Co-fund activities, to establish new working groups focused on specific areas of research and innovation and to support existing initiatives.

In this context, the SG is the ideal body for the implementation and coordination of the here proposed procedures.

The need of creating new initiatives has to be defined through a process of **Gap Analysis** between available research topic coverage provided by existing SCAR initiatives and potential

strategic research areas identified during the **Priority Exercise** as described below. The core of the proposed process consists of the identification of issues that could be considered critical, yet have attracted insufficient attention despite their importance. Critical issues are identified during a Priority Exercise by members from SG and FG. The FG provides the basis for the Priority Exercise since it gives recommendations for the bioeconomy primary production sectors and possible solutions for upcoming challenges. Usually so far, the FG publishes a new foresight study every 2-4 years. Therefore, the same time-frame is supposed to be applied to the implementation of the proposed procedure. During the intermediate period, when an updated Foresight Exercise is not available, it is advisable that within the FG, a delegated group is formed for producing an **annual Trend & Development Report**. This report may represent a considerable contribution to the process of identification of emerging issues during the Priority Exercise.

The Priority Exercise is carried out through individual work by SG and FG delegates and a series of *ad-hoc* workshops where they work hand in hand. As an initial step, they nominate an **Organizing Team (OT)** for the managing of the exercise. The OT should include individuals who have an expertise in priority-setting exercise. If no such individuals are available within the SG or FG, an external study could be advisable.

Ideally, at least 50 delegates participate in the workshop from SG and FG. This delegation should be composed of participants from each SCAR member state. The **SCAR Secretariat** can investigate the possibility to integrate these workshops within the planned SCAR meeting agenda.

The steps of the Priority Exercise are:

1. Generation of a list of issues considered as most relevant by each participant.
2. Break up and classification of the issues into several thematic groups (sectorial and intersectorial).
3. Definition of priority criteria for evaluation of selected issues.
4. Evaluation and winnowing the issues that seem to have lower priority.
5. Generation of prioritised critical issues list.
6. Generation of a final report and its distribution to the SCAR member countries.

Prior to the workshops, as a first step, each delegate is invited to produce an **initial list of issues** considered to be highly important. These issues should reflect the following principles:

1. They should reflect pragmatic problems rather than personal opinions.
2. They should address important gaps in knowledge.
3. They should help making new policies by increase of knowledge.

A non-exhaustive list of different methods that could be applied to generate these issues, reads like the following: reflection by individual participant, eventually consulting with experts outside his/her particular expertise; review of the peer-reviewed and grey literature with particular attention to the outputs of Foresight Exercise and Trend & Development Reports; informal discussions between workshop delegates and colleagues.

The OT collects lists of issues compiled by each delegate and composes a full set of issues, removing overlapping topics. Subsequently, they classify the issues into several **general themes** and then distribute them among each participant.

Afterwards, a series of workshops is organized where delegates are appointed to revise and prioritize the issues in each theme. The presence of experts from different bioeconomy fields in the workshops is strongly recommended. They are given advisory roles and can add considerable value to the prioritisation process.

Initially, **priority criteria** for evaluation of selected issues should be determined. The identification of priority criteria depends, among others, on current needs of MS, potential emergencies, external and internal drivers and trends, social and economic forces. The selection of criteria should also take in account how the issues arisen are able to inspire and support policies addressed to the three pillars of sustainability: economy, environment and society. Once such criteria are identified, the delegates are broken up into several groups and are asked to evaluate, discuss and score the issues in which they have sufficient expertise in order to withdraw all the topics that seem to have a lower level of priority, after having challenged the proposed issues against the criteria. In such a way, a more restricted **list of prioritised critical issues** is generated for each theme. At the end of the workshops, the OT merges all the thematic lists of issues together and produces a final consensus list after joined refining by all the delegates.

The results of the Priority Exercise are finalized in the **Final Priority Exercise Report**, where Priority Exercise process is described. Moreover, different research areas should be proposed to address every critical issue listed.

The SG proceeds to compare the outcomes of the Priority Exercises with the activities performed by the existing Working Groups, ERA-Nets, JPIs and other related initiatives. In order to obtain high quality scientific outputs from the WGs and simplify the knowledge mapping, a **standardised report system** is desired. For such an extent, it can be necessary to produce an annual up-dated report by each WG following the template displayed in **ANNEX 1**. The annual production of the report should be considered as the minimum requirement for recognizing a Working Group as operative. The template described in Annex 1 is tailored to the kind of the work carried out by sectorial WGs. In case of WGs having more intersectorial nature a more flexible structure of their reports is certainly applicable.

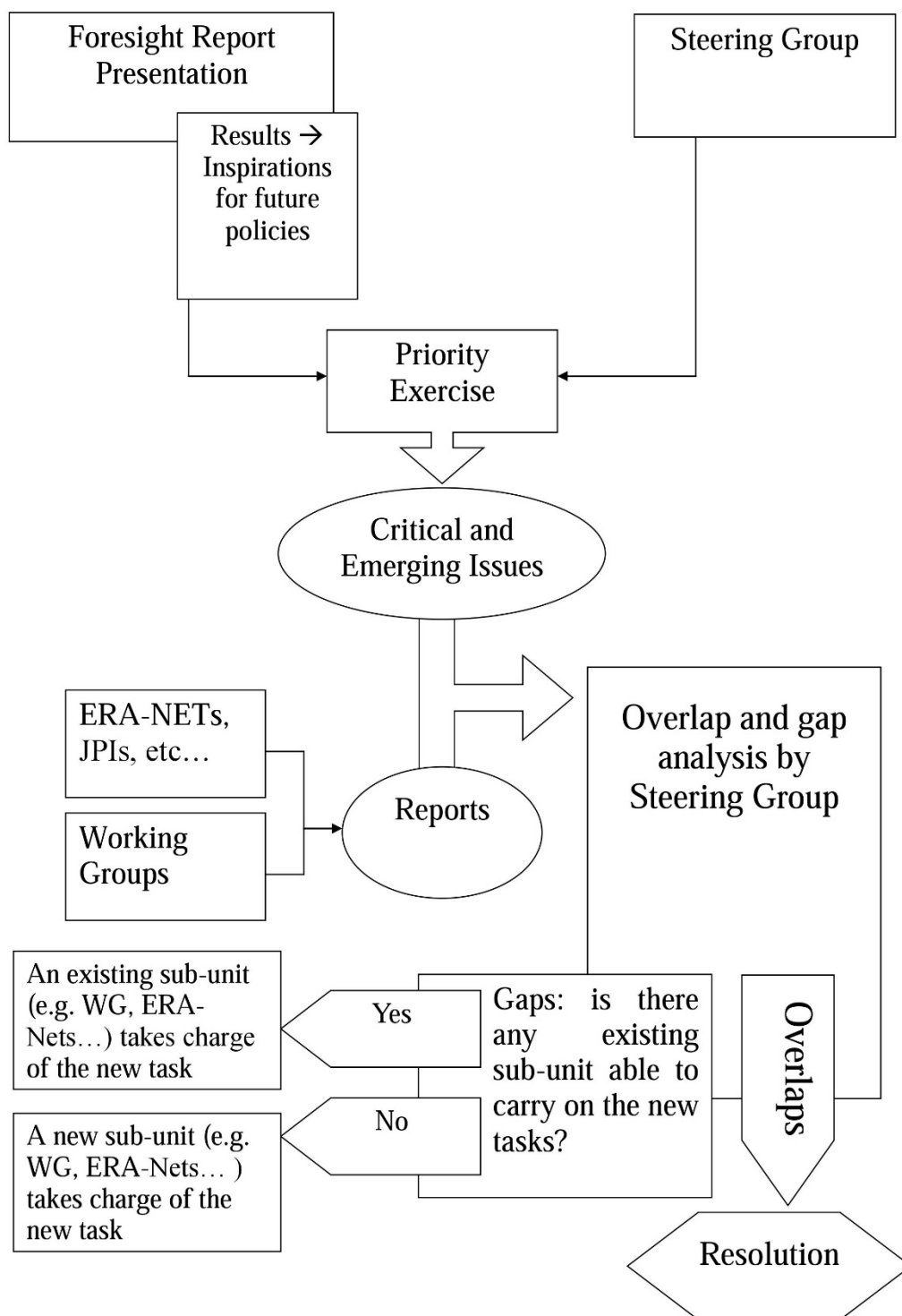
Once the necessary information is obtained, the SG proceeds to **Gap Analysis**. Gap Analysis is used to determine the areas of research which are identified to be of priority interest and that are currently not covered by existing active WGs and other SCAR initiatives. To bridge the detected gaps, the SG investigates the potential capacity and willingness within existing initiatives to take over the new areas of interest. If it is not the case, the SG makes a proposal for the starting up of a new initiative.

Calls for setting up new initiatives should clearly declare the scopes and the targets identified. To facilitate the evaluation of more than one proposal, a standardised application document in the form of **Terms of Reference (TOR)** is required. An example of template is displayed in **ANNEX 2**. The applying new WGs should represent a fair number of Countries, in order to increase representativeness and inclusiveness of MS in the new initiative of SCAR. Moreover, the applying WG has to demonstrate to have a clear view on alignment with existing WGs activities. Once SG detects a suitable candidate, the proposal for a new initiative is presented during the upcoming Plenary Meeting (PM) for approval.

If during the Gap Analysis SG detects eventual overlaps in the activities of two or more WGs, it should invite them to resolve the issue and encourage more synergy and coordination between them.

The top-down approach described above does not exclude the possibility to initiate new activities applying a **bottom-up process**. In this case, a promoter can provide documentation containing TOR aiming at proving potential benefit in providing high quality strategic advice to SCAR. The SG, through the procedure of gap analysis described above, identifies the suitability of the new proposal. The SG takes collaborative position in fostering the nascent initiative formation and collaborates with the candidates to maximise the efficacy of the proposal. Once the SG considers the latter coherent, it is presented for approval in upcoming **Plenary**.

Figure 1: Procedure for initiating new activities.



Reference Documents

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Summary of the impact assessment, accompanying document to the Support Action to Common Agricultural and wider bioeconomy reSearch Agenda. Topic identifier: SFS – 25-2016, 2016.

Sustainable Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in the Bioeconomy – A challenge for Europe. 4th SCAR Foresight Exercise. Foresight Group, 2015.

Sutherland W.J. et al. Methods for collaboratively identifying research priorities and emerging issues in science and policy. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution* 2, pp: 238-247, 2011.

Terms of Reference and Report available from the different CWGs and SWGs, available in <https://ec.europa.eu/research/scar/index.cfm?pg=about> .

ANNEX 1: Template for Annual CWG/SWG Report

The present template intends to standardise the annual report of the Working Groups. Working Groups focused on intersectorial areas might need a different, more *ad-hoc* structure.

Introduction

Note: A short introduction dedicated to the role of the organisation and the challenges faced.

Foresight and Priorities for the WG

The European Science Orientation

The role of WG in supporting the innovation process in agricultural and bioeconomy sector

Current regulations of WG sector

Deliverables and activities executed by WG within the year

Activities carried out by WG.

Note: contribution giving to developing of Horizon 2020 and Common Agricultural Policy and beyond; creation of integrated approach with the whole EU AGRI and stakeholders.

Report on lessons learnt and feedback received from stakeholders.

Deliverables and activities programmed for the next year

Cooperation with other WGs and Organisations

Recommendations to SCAR and Steering Group

ANNEX 2: Template for Terms of Reference for application for call for institution of new initiatives

Structure

- Title of the initiative.
- Participant countries.
- Name of coordinator.
- Composition, identity (specifying affiliation e.g. policy representatives, experts, funders, stakeholders....) and contacts of the participants.
- Presentation of the background of the personnel involved.

Objectives

- Scope and overall objectives.
- Defining research areas coverage and action limits.
- Strategic researches, activities and interventions.
- The list of the priorities in future activities.
- A timeline in which a new initiative desires pursuing its objectives.

Organisational aspects

- Workshops and meetings expected to be organised.
- Alignment between members and channel of internal communication.
- Expected alignment with other CWSs/SWGs.
- Link and form of collaboration with other international projects, networks, organisation, cofunds and society cofunds (ERAnets, JPIs...).
- Channels of communication (e.g. compulsory yearly report).
- Input channels.
- A map of the resources available or expected.
- Duration of the initiative (or re-evaluation periodicity).

