

REPRESENTATION AND INCLUSION IN SCAR – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) coordinates agricultural research in the broader bioeconomy remit between European Member States and associate countries. It acts as a platform for them to exchange on research priorities and demands, and has an advisory function to both European Commission and the member states. One of the main challenges of SCAR, published in its 'Reflection Paper on the Role of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research' is representation and inclusion of SCAR members across its governance bodies and working groups. This study focused on the following questions: 1) How are countries represented in SCAR bodies; 2) What national institutions are usually involved (in terms of research domains, Ministries and funders); and 3) Are all areas in the bioeconomy sufficiently represented?

SCAR operates through a number of Strategic and Collaborative Working Groups (8) and the the Foresight Group. All are overseen by the Steering Group, the 'daily management' body that reports to the Plenary; the official decision-making body. All working groups deal with specific topics of the bioeconomy. Countries participate in SCAR bodies for several reasons, of which the most valued one is the rather informal exchange and learning opportunity between its participants. SCAR allows for expression of national interests and priorities with regard to agricultural research, also to a degree in the Framework Programmes, and enables alignment of national and European policies and research. More general SCAR facilitates countries in a better understanding of how the European Union work, thus enhancing effective cooperation.

Country involvement in SCAR governance bodies and working groups

There is underrepresentation of the newer European Member States (the EU-13 countries) and associate countries in SCAR. This is widely recognised as undesirable, as SCAR functions in bringing together national priorities of the thirty-seven members of SCAR, but also because climatological differences across regions lead to specific priorities for countries in those regions. In addition to underrepresentation of countries, underrepresentation of *regions* is undesirable as well, as it may lead to priorities becoming less visible. Underrepresentation occurs in both working groups as well as in the governance bodies; the Steering Committee and Plenary. Underrepresentation in the latter is regarded as the most pressing challenge. Underrepresentation is both visible in formal participation levels of countries and in actual participation; whether people are present at meetings and have actual contributions. This study identifies three sets of participation challenges: i) resources restraints; ii) familiarity with the EU, national priorities and internal organisation, and iii) familiarity with SCAR and expectation management.

Resources restraints in terms of time, money, and people is a clear challenge for all participating countries, that forces to prioritise participation to those working groups that deal with topics of national priority. Negating such restraints is less clear, as suggested options are not straightforward and could even have adverse effects. Reducing the number of meetings or use telecommunication tools may be more time-efficient, they also decrease informal exchange capacity. Compensating travel costs could attract participants without a strong national incentive, and could have effects on the independent position SCAR has as a member-

state driven initiative instead of an EC body. Organising meetings outside of Brussels has been shown to be effective, but may affect the strong participation of EC delegates.

The **relative unfamiliarity that newcomers may still have with the European Union and its governance mechanisms** is a less clear-cut challenge, especially where it involves prioritising and organisation at the national levels. Return on investment in European cooperation is a long-term process that requires substantial attention for both transnational cooperation and for creating structures that can coordinate at the national level. It requires a national strategic view on what the value of cooperation is for a country in both policy influence as well as cash return on investment from large European funding programmes such as the Framework Programmes. It also needs a European environment that allows countries to catch up with the front-runners in European cooperation at both policy and scientific levels.

SCAR could benefit from more awareness and visibility of its work and the impact of that work at both national and European level. In order to improve this, the timing of products (e.g. policy advices) is essential as is the need to get and keep the right people participating in SCAR. Strengthening the working groups in their activities is important in this respect. New participants in SCAR can benefit from a learning environment or mentoring system that capitalises on the experience of their colleagues, thus supporting more quick and effective participation and reduction of disappointment due to unrealistic expectations.

Organisational representation, participants roles and remit representation

Most policy participants in SCAR are linked to the national Ministry that oversees agriculture. Though not surprising, this raises some concerns as the broadened bioeconomy remit also touches upon policy areas that are handled by different Ministries. Participation of EC staff in the different working groups is limited to mainly DG RTD and DG AGRI, raising similar concerns. National developments such as drafting Bioeconomy strategies can provide opportunities to widen participation to more Ministries. Coordinating this at the national level could happen through 'mirror groups' or inter-Ministerial platforms.

There is general consent that Plenary and Steering Group members should be policy makers or mandated delegates. The various working groups include other roles for participants. On average about a third of the participants are experts and in general this is seen as satisfactory. There is discussion about stakeholder involvement because this (is argued) increases viewpoints and the out-of-the-box thinking capacity of the working groups. Such inclusion of stakeholders could be arranged as observers.

The working groups cover the bioeconomy remit sufficiently, either in their respective mandates or through interlinkages with each other. There is some concern whether cross-cutting issues get the attention they need, and if there is sufficient attention for specialised topics. However, scarce resources limits the capacity to increase the number of working groups. This points towards a more clear demarcation of SCAR responsibilities and other initiatives in the public-to-public landscape that work on closely related topics.