

# Blog “Sustainable Land Management in Sub-Saharan Africa: Improving livelihoods through local research”



## INTRODUCTION



Our blog is intended for project staff as well as interested stakeholders from science, policy and practice, to share experiences and mutually learn. It is an opportunity to showcase the multi-faceted nature in which we improve livelihoods and support sustainable land management through local research.

This current blog summarises key messages from the pre-conference workshop on “Bridging the Gap: Strengthening Science-Policy Interfaces in Agricultural Research” as well as further highlights from the Tropentag Conference 2025 in Bonn, including winners from the Poster Awards and the *Let's Plant e.V.* Photo Competition!

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM TROPENTAG 2025 IN BONN

The Tropentag Conference is a strategic platform for yearly in-person exchanges across the regional projects and provides an opportunity to engage with various stakeholders. This year's pre-conference workshop “Bridging the gap: strengthening science-policy interfaces in agricultural research” was a logical continuation of workshops during the last two Tropentag conferences, which dealt with participatory approaches in agricultural research and with agricultural knowledge management.

## BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY-SCIENCE INTERFACE

Many researchers and research projects aim to influence policy processes through their findings. However, within research organisations, a clear understanding of how policy making functions, which policy domains and levels to target, and how to effectively engage policy makers remains limited. These competencies are rarely part of formal training, and relevant knowledge is often tacit, experiential, and not easily accessible. Navigating science-policy interfaces is as much an art as it is a practice grounded in evidence. This workshop, moderated by Dr Michael Bruentrup from IDOS, explored the dynamics of science-policy interaction and sought to equip

researchers with practical insights to enhance the visibility and influence of their work.

A keynote was delivered by Dr Sieglinde Snapp, Director of the Sustainable Agrifood Systems programme at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), on whether science and policy can be consequential without people,



postulating that participatory approaches to improve science and policy are necessary.

This insightful presentation was followed up by two rounds of World Café style break out groups moderated by INTERFACES researchers on four main themes: (1) the role of funders in designing agricultural research programmes for impact; (2) embedding participation in research-to-policy pathways; (3) adaptive project implementation for local relevance; and (4) strengthening knowledge exchange and Communities of Practice.

## WORLD CAFÉ - THE ROLE OF FUNDERS IN DESIGNING AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH PROGRAMMES FOR IMPACT

Dr Eefje Aarnoudse from the Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg hosted the World Café on “**The Role of Funders in Designing Agricultural Research Programmes for Impact:** Exploring how funding priorities, instruments, and partnerships can be shaped to better support science-policy linkages and long-term developmental impact”.

One main topic from the discussion was that of seed grants—funds for proposal writing. Participants indicated this can lead to stronger consortia as it allows for team building and trust development from an early stage, leading to knowing ones partner better and even finding new partners. Furthermore, the research consortia can

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already familiarise themselves with the farmer communities from the onset. Funders can learn from each other also regarding on how to evaluate the seed grants. A second theme of this World Café was that in research projects funds should be made available for praxis-partners and research-practice facilitators. Here there is a risk of micro-management and a greater administrative effort being required, especially when fixed budget proportions are set. Nevertheless, participants remarked that this can be eased by research and implementation funders cooperating with one another.



Participants also exchanged their thoughts and experiences regarding selection criteria, in particular that reviewers should be from different disciplines, countries and gender, however it is generally hard to find good reviewers. Conversely, that a lot can be learned from feedback from a proposal being rejected. It was argued that feedback is limited due to workload.

Finally, participants discussed project duration. For example to not only focus on the research phase but to start the cycle with project proposals and to extend the project duration to include project implementation and scaling, thus for projects to run for longer than three years. This often clashes with political cycles and consequently a funders mandate changing and increasing competition over resources. With a shorter duration and limited resources, researchers are subject to short-term contracts and resulting changing team composition is questioned.

A potential solution to extend project duration could be the stronger use of seed grants as well as follow up calls for research implementation and scaling.

Related reading to this World Café can be found [here](#).

## WORLD CAFÉ – EMBEDDING PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH-TO-POLICY PATHWAYS

Dr Peter Asare-Nuamah from the Center of Development Studies (ZEF, Uni Bonn), hosted the World Café on “**Embedding Participation in Research-to-Policy Pathways**: Examining inclusive and participatory approaches that enable co-creation with policymakers, practitioners, and communities to enhance relevance and uptake of research findings”.

The first question raised in this World Café was how to attract diverse knowledge sources with participants stating that communication flows should be established between scientists and stakeholders and that the interests of all stakeholders should be known and included from the onset. Specifically regarding farmers, it was felt that strong relationships had to be built, including with NGOs and CSOs representing them, and part of this relationship is to be underpinned by scientists changing their mentality that farmers have prerequisite knowledge to draw from.

Once diverse sources of knowledge have been identified and included, the discussion turned to how co-creation methodologies and approaches can be implemented. Trust building and relationships were stressed as essential elements, with continuous dialogue with stakeholders, incorporating innovative methods such as future visioning by for example paintings. Furthermore, context-specific strategies should be adopted by selecting friendly and flexible environments for stakeholder engagements, whereby barriers have been identified and addressed.

To ensure sustainability of co-creation, participants shared ideas such as providing pre-support for emerging scholars to engage effectively with stakeholders and to build stronger collaboration between social and natural scientist.

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Related reading to this World Café can be found [here](#).

## WORLD CAFÉ – ADAPTATIVE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION FOR LOCAL RELEVANCE

Dr Theodore Asimeng from the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) hosted the World Café on “**Adaptive Project Implementation for Local Relevance**”: Discussing the importance of flexibility in project design and implementation to accommodate context-specific needs, with a focus on researchers’ and farmers’ perspectives”.



Front and centre to this World Café is understanding the needs of local people and their unique situation. This can be done through collaborative processes. Related to collaborative practices is the duration of projects, as longer project cycles allow for proper learning and improved understanding between researchers, farmers and other stakeholders. Understanding of the current policies and finding opportunities to build on those through established institutions was another highlight of this session. The target audiences or stakeholders of the project at hand are to be clearly visible to allow for a long period of continuous feedback for implementation. Two-

way communication was highlighted as being important with a certain amount of flexibility within the project to adapt. Here funders are to be informed early about any change in implementation. This further allows for proper monitoring and timely adjustment.

Related reading to this World Café can be found [here](#).

## WORLD CAFÉ – STRENGTHENING KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Mr. Benjamin Abugri from the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) hosted the World Café on “**Strengthening Knowledge Exchange and Communities of Practice**”: Identifying effective strategies for managing, sharing, and applying knowledge within and across institutions, and cultivating networks that support sustained policy engagement and learning”.

A core theme in this discussion was centred on how African research and policy institutions can embed knowledge management and exchange into their core strategies, rather than treating them as project add-ons? Participants felt that there were many different sharing platforms that stand in isolation from each other and questioned how the various channels for knowledge sharing, targeted to different audiences, can best be used.

Concretely the group asked whom a farmer is and how a professional farmer can be identified and how to make people interested in farming. This follows from how to get information to the farmer in their own language, including indigenous knowledge, use of photos and infographics rather than reliance on too many words.

Involvement of both researchers and policy makers in the initial stages of knowledge exchange are crucial as well as an analysis of stakeholders for targeted knowledge exchange. Furthermore, good practices for adoption and adaptation are to be documented and made available at various levels.

Related reading to this World Café can be found [here](#).



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## PANEL DISCUSSION

With the 45 workshop participants having brainstormed and exchanged thoughts and experiences in the World Cafés, the stage was cleared for a panel discussion. The panel included stakeholders from both policy and science with Ms Theresa Herbold from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Ms Maja Clausen from the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity (BMLEH), representing the policy side of the equation. Dr Sieglinde Snapp and Dr Tina Beuchelt, INTERFACES project leader and senior researcher at ZEF, provided critical feedback from the scientific perspective. The panel was rounded off by Mr Benjamin Abugri, the Knowledge Management Specialist from FARA, who stressed the importance of identifying effective communication strategies and cultivating networks that support sustained policy engagement and learning. A general consensus could be found in that there is a discrepancy in the timelines of funders and researchers whereby project cycles are inherently too short to effectively include implementation of research results and community feedback.



## Key take away messages from the workshop are:

- Funding processes can be optimised by including instruments such as seed grants and integrated budgets for research-practice facilitators
- Early trust building with and participation from stakeholders is crucial for sustainable co-creation of knowledge
- Project cycles should be extended to include innovation implementation and scaling that can be adapted to specific contexts and needs

- Knowledge management is an integral part from initial to final project phase with communities of practice further enabling exchange between relevant stakeholders

## PARTICIPATION AND PRIZES AT TROPENTAG

Beyond the pre-conference workshop, researchers from across the projects presented their work in oral sessions as well as poster sessions. 25 presentations were given by 19 consortia researchers across 14 thematic sessions, and an additional 7 researchers chaired various sessions. **InfoRange** also organised a pre-conference workshop “Let’s talk about co-design! Exchange opportunity for researchers working with participatory approaches”. Furthermore, Michael Bruentrup served as a panelist in the BMZ/GIZ session on why science matters for the transformation of agricultural and food systems and hosted another workshop on making better photos of and in landscapes and agriculture.



Most notably and celebratory, **INTERFACES** PhD candidate [Dorcas Alame Sanginga](#) and **DeclaRe** PhD candidate [Frimence Allogbènou Tossou](#) won in the Poster Awards and **INTERFACES** PhD candidate [Cecile Poitevin](#) came second in the Photo Competition with a Photovoice project carried out in the Northern region of Ghana.

A short video with impressions from Sieglinde Snapp, Benjamin Abugri, Kwamboka Tirimba, and Maja Clausen on the pre-conference workshop and Tropentag in general can be viewed [here](#).

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## PHOTOS

(c) Sabrina Heuwinkel (IDOS)

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Funded by the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR), within the strategy of its platform [Research for Sustainability](#) (Forschung für Nachhaltigkeit, FONA), the **INTERFACES** project works with four regional projects – **COINS**, **DeclaRe**, **InfoRange** and **Minodu** – to strengthen the integration, coherence and reach in the area of sustainable land management.

## MEDIA

Follow us for updates on the research programme on our [website](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and on [D-Groups](#).

## PREVIOUS BLOG CONTRIBUTIONS

[“Bridging Research and Action: Insights from Guiè’s Sahelian Hedgerow Innovation”](#)

[“ISFM: Cradle or Tomb of Ecological Diversity?”](#)

[“Progress in biodiversity monitoring in Northern Ghana”](#)

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## LATEST VIDEOS

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With funding from the:



Federal Ministry  
of Research, Technology  
and Space