



Rencontres
partenariales

Partners' Meetings



Montpellier 27-28/06/2022

Montpellier Declaration

An international agricultural and food systems research alliance to address global issues: learn, act and succeed together

The Partners' Meetings, organized at CIRAD's initiative, were held in Montpellier on 27 and 28 June 2022. For the first time, they brought together representatives of some 40 research and training institutions from every continent, working on agricultural and food systems. Focusing on the evolution of the role of research and its working methods in partnership in a context of multiple crises, these exchanges led to the following declaration.

With the increasing globalization of issues, the prospect of universal economic progress is now dependent on the need to guarantee its sustainability, since both the planet and the available natural resources have their physical limitations. However, the ongoing debates in both North and South, in the hope of understanding and controlling the dynamics of the switch to sustainable development, have run up against a vast increase in the number and severity of crises since the early 21st century: in addition to economic crises, the world now faces climate, migratory, environmental, security, health and food crises.

This “avalanche” of crises has altered our perception of the future, triggering a more pessimistic and less inclusive vision of what that future holds. Indeed, one of the first impacts of this global “multi-crisis” has been to exacerbate the inequalities between countries, with tensions linked both to the gravity of the phenomena under way and to the resources available to each party to allow them to cope. The problem is that solutions to global phenomena such as climate change or pandemics require contributions from each and every stakeholder, since such crises generate complexity and increase interdependence. Stepping up cooperation between all the world's countries is the only means of overcoming this widespread “multi-crisis”. The adoption of major international conventions on climate, biodiversity, land degradation and sustainable



and inclusive development are clear signs of an increasing awareness on the part of the community of nations. Those conventions must now be translated into strong plans of action in every field, since the rate of global change means we are running out of time.

Global science must play its part in this movement and has a vital contribution to make to tackling these societal challenges and the resulting “system”. Our research and training organizations in the fields of the life sciences, agriculture, the environment and food have long shared this concept of engaged science, working to solve issues raised by economic, political and social players while taking account of the planet’s limitations. Together, we can help build solutions with and for them, with a view to sustainable, inclusive development. This type of science, which builds its strategies and research projects with all its partners, is necessarily both participatory and open.

The recent exceptional global health crisis has been a major test for this belief in solidarity, and means we must now think about changing how we work and conduct research. While reinforcing the responsibility and role of science in finding solutions, Covid has highlighted the risks of misinformation and mistrust in science. The pandemic has also confirmed that it is vital to safeguard people’s freedom of movement, strengthen partnerships and steer international cooperation towards greater reciprocity and more equitable rules, to ensure the strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty of each and every country worldwide.

Rethinking the nature of these issues and how they fit into our fields of action and the mandates of our different institutions was the task set for the partners’ meetings, which brought together representatives of 44 research and training institutions from every continent that have been working together for many years. That stock of mutual trust and longstanding partnership links made for both rich discussions and quality recommendations.

Following these two days of discussions, our organizations wish to reaffirm our partnership values and draft proposals that will allow us to work together to tackle these major societal challenges by means of more effective research methods and partnership practices tailored to the multi-crisis situation we will continue to face over the coming decade.

The partners, meeting in Montpellier, therefore:

- **Acknowledge** [Workshop 1] that in the face of multiple and interdependent global crises research must confront complex problems that place higher on the agenda the acceleration of transitions (agroecological, energy, etc.) and the challenges of resilience. To do this, we must mobilize new stakeholders and new financial resources. We will do this through a strengthened, more balanced local, regional and international cooperation network, open to the full range of stakeholders – public and civil society – and that targets more specifically the most vulnerable populations. Our institutions are committed to strengthening the dialogue between science and public policy to enhance mutual understanding and better align the timing of science and that of policy. This will be done in particular by means of crisis observatories and decision-making tools.
- **Recognize** [Workshop 2] the value of digital tools as solution vectors for our institutions as well as for stakeholders in the agricultural sector. The Covid-19 health



crisis has highlighted the particular importance of digital tools to ensure continuity in working relationships within scientific communities, education and training activities, and field research. However, the new opportunities offered by digital tools cannot be fully exploited without careful consideration of the conditions under which responsible, inclusive digitization can be developed, which effectively meets the needs of end users. Access to infrastructure, the quality and reliability of research data, the digital skills of researchers and end users, and a governance framework that guarantees the security of data exchanges are all prerequisites for limiting the risks of increasing inequalities and supporting digital science with impact.

- **Consider** [Workshop 3] that contextualized knowledge of the societies and environments in which we work lies at the heart of our common research practices. This is based on a comparison of disciplinary perspectives on the topics and problems addressed, collective experimentation in real conditions with stakeholders and the hybridization of knowledge that it presupposes, and the co-development and wide sharing of results. Being able to interact directly with stakeholders is an essential condition if we hope to be able to weigh collectively and concretely on the challenges we face. This includes working with the full diversity of stakeholders, including those operating in the policy- and decision-making spheres, and collaborating with them on the scale of territories, on research systems and infrastructures capable of co-producing more relevant and actionable data and knowledge over time. The following desirable developments can help us achieve this objective: (1) involving non-academic partners – private-sector players, producers' organizations, NGOs, decision makers, etc. – with better-defined statutes; (2) strengthening the capacities of decision-makers – both initial and continuous training, their direct participation in work; (3) more flexible, equitable and territory-based governance of these partnerships; (4) a more concerted search for financial resources; (5) greater concern for impact, reflected in the collective and concerted adoption of robust methodologies on theories of change; and (6) a debate on the attitude of researchers.
- **Affirm** [Workshop 4], that nothing can replace physical interactions between people in order to: (1) maintain the creativity of researchers, students, technicians, etc.; (2) strengthen their scientific capacities, their practical understanding of situations and their ability to dialogue with the various stakeholders; (3) optimize opportunities for collaboration and interpersonal and intercultural relations; (4) boost attractiveness and public-private partnership; (5) promote dialogue between science and policy; (6) consolidate institutional frameworks and networks; (7) promote the co-construction of projects. The necessary geographic mobility of scientists can take several forms depending on the objectives, themes and immersion contexts of the partnership: long-term expatriate assignments, missions of varying duration, diverse training programmes (short North-South/South-North/South-South courses, PhDs and post-docs), diverse hosting arrangements. A better balance (equity, reciprocity) of mobility between South and North is essential. That mobility, which is also a factor in attracting the best research talents, requires a prior institutional framework to generate a long-term impact despite the inevitable "turnover". Long-



term commitment requires a combination of physical mobility and virtual exchanges. The prevailing security crisis in certain regions in itself poses new development issues. It also forces us to find appropriate partnership methods to involve the populations concerned (different sharing of activities, adapted training, etc.).

- **Commit** [Workshop 5] to step up exchanges of people and skills between our organizations, within our platforms in partnership and our laboratories. Networks of different players (in terms of skills, status and geographical origin) are a major instrument for comparing viewpoints on a given topic, promoting the emergence of common visions and values, working collectively to seek out new solutions, and building our capacity to cooperate, to foster shared actions. Networks are based on a long-term institutional commitment, shared governance, embodied leadership and human, financial and structural resources. These networks are often built at the local level, where participants can contextualize the issues and implement collective learning aimed at co-constructing solutions leading to impact. They are necessarily agile as contexts and partnerships evolve, and are bound to interconnect regionally and globally. Impactful communication is required to strengthen their visibility.
- **Recognize** [Workshop 6] the need to reconsider the issues down as far as a local scale, by promoting an education-research-training-application continuum. We need to develop the collaborative environment itself by targeting co-construction, co-management and co-assessment capacities allowing for greater participation of stakeholders and the implementation of transdisciplinarity. We are thus asking for massive and sustainable investment to deploy and support the skills capable of meeting these challenges. Future generations will then be trained to take into account the complexity of the problems to be dealt with and put in a position to carry out the transformations expected by our societies

Given the magnitude of the challenges associated with global health, food security and nutrition, the preservation of natural resources (water, biodiversity, soil) and the need to transform agricultural and food systems, and adaptation to and mitigation of climate change, our organizations are committed to working together more closely and strengthening their relationships in order to best plan this collective investment effort in research, innovation and training, to foster the transitions to be invented across the planet. Our organizations are aware of their societal responsibilities and the challenges to be resolved in a limited timeframe, and wish to build on the already strong partnership capital that links us within a mostly bilateral framework, to propose a "change of scale" in terms of cooperation and partnership. For this reason, in view of the usefulness of the meetings held on 27 and 28 June 2022, we propose to repeat this type of exchange, in the same spirit and at regular intervals, keeping it open to new institutions. In this way, we will be able to monitor the implementation of our recommendations and strengthen our shared understanding of the dynamics underway, promote greater agility in our collective actions and in our methods of collaboration, and ensure greater efficiency in terms of our capacity to act in the interests of as many people as possible.



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More than ever, it is time to mobilize research and training and to act for change. It is now up to us to work together to help build the path to get there, a path along which we will learn and act together.

Montpellier, 4th July 2022

List of signatories

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