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INCONET – Mediterranean Partner Countries**

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Summary

The present report includes the outcomes of tasks 7.6 and 7.7 and constitutes the frame for deliverables 7.4 and 7.5, respectively linked to the above tasks.

In particular, the joint deliverables 7.4 and 7.5 aims at presenting the plan of action discussed and agreed by the NCPs (National Contact Points) and Thematic Contact Points from all the Mediterranean Partner Countries members of MedSpring: Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan.

The outcomes of the two tasks for the preparation of the deliverables are essentially based on the open discussion carried out and hosted by the tasks leader HCST (Higher Council for Science and Technology – Jordan) in Amman on 11 December 2013.

All Mediterranean NCPs representatives and Thematic Contact Points participated to the event. HCST and CIHEAM-IAMB were responsible for the organisation and facilitation of the work.

1. Introduction

Deliverables 7.4 “Project Plan for support to Mediterranean NCPa and Thematic Contact Points” and deliverable 7.5 “Project plan for cooperation (of Mediterranean NCPs) with INCONTACT” are highly linked. In fact, the plan of NCP involvement in INCONTACT depends very much on needs, problems and issues discussed with identified by NCPs.

More in detail, the task 7.6 (producing deliverable D 7.4) aims at exploring, together with NCPs, on how MedSpring could help them tackling common problems and needs through specific activities.

The action plan should not only include activities that MedSpring could support in the coming three years but also actions to be carried out by NCPs in order to ensure institutional engagement and sustainability of the thematic contact points MPCs.

On the other side, due to several synergies identified with INCONTACT and to avoid duplication and redundancies, task 7.7 (producing deliverable D 7.5) has been carried together with Task 7.6.

The joint 7.4-7.5 deliverables are the result of an open discussion coordinated by task leader HCST and CIHEAM-IAMB in Amman with NCPs and Thematic Contact Points of all Mediterranean Partner Countries on 11 December 2013. The event was organised back-to-back to the Training for Mediterranean NCPs on H2020 (9-10 December) organised by MedSpring and hosted by HCST.

2. Background

The present session aims at providing an overview of main strategic lines, current tasks and organisation of NCPs in the Mediterranean Partner Countries. This items discussed in this session have been considered during the discussion in Amman by all NCPs.

2.1 Overview

National Contact Points (NCPs) are experts nominated by the competent national authorities, to provide assistance to potential FP7 participants in their countries. In Members States the existing systems of NCPs show a wide variety of architectures and a number of very different actors and special agencies to private consulting companies. This reflects the different national traditions, working methodologies, research landscapes and funding schemes.

Liaison between the NCP systems by trans-national activities (networking, benchmarking, partner search, staff exchange schemes etc.) is an important element in harmonizing quality of service, at the same time contributing to the realization of the European Research Area.

The Commission services considers the NCP systems of Member States and Associated Countries and the similar FP7 contacts in third countries as important partners for the implementation and management of FP7. The strategy for third countries NCPs in H2020 is not yet well clear and developed. This partnership based on shared responsibilities is a major element in assuring transparency and equal access. The Commission services sees in the NCP network the main structure to give practical information and assistance to potential participants and contractors in FP7/ H2020 as the main recommended tasks for the NCPs are: informing, awareness raising/ advising, assisting and training, signposting and provision of feedback.

Transnational exchange of experiences and dissemination of best practices can constitute an important supporting element in monitoring the performance and quality assurance of NCPs duties.

2.2 Traditional NCPs Tasks

Informing, awareness raising:

- Circulate general and specific documentation on the Community RTD programmes, including on conditions for participation, and on possibilities and conditions for submission of proposals;
- Organize promotional activities in liaison with the Commission services (e.g. info days, seminars, conferences, newsletters, Web sites, fairs, etc.);
- Raise awareness for the Community objectives of increasing the participation of women in the Framework Programme and of strengthening the link between science and ethics and between science and civil society;
- Raise awareness for the Community objectives of increasing the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Framework Programme;
- Raise awareness for other European programmes in the field of research and innovation such as CIP, Eureka and COST.

Advising, assisting and training:

- Explain the scope and the modalities of the whole spectrum of funding schemes to be used in FP7;
- Advise on administrative procedures and legal issues (e.g. role and responsibilities of participants in a consortium, costs, rights and obligations of participants, respect of ethical rules and for the principles laid down in the Commission Recommendation C(2005)576 on the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Recruitment);
- Assist in partner search activities notably by disseminating calls for proposals (using Community tools such as CORDIS, co-operation networks, business support network services etc.);
- Assist organizations, in particular new actors and SMEs, with a view to increasing their participation in FP7;
- Organize training sessions on RTD programmes for intermediaries and information multipliers to ensure high quality of advice;
- Organize training seminars for specific target groups (SMEs, universities, professional organizations, women in science etc.) or on specific topics (legal aspects, modalities for participation, research areas covered by several specific programmes, ethical rules etc.);
- Provide information for and advise participants, in particular smaller organizations and SMEs, on the setting up of appropriate management and legal structures in projects with large budgets and/or numerous participants;
- Assist the Commission services in assuring transparency and equal access to calls for new partners in on-going FP7 Projects.

Signposting and Feedback:

- Give feedback to the Commission services on any problems and difficulties in implementing and participating in the Framework Programme;
- Signpost to other Community business support network services those potential participants who require assistance, for example on general EU matters or matters relating to innovation and technology transfer, typically dealt with by these networks;
- Inform the Commission services about planned NCP activities and events requiring participation of Commission staff.

2.3 NCPs Challenges & Requirements

Due to the necessity of tackling the emergence of new environment and social challenges in energy, food, and water sectors, it is necessary to mention the main challenges and requirements of NCPs.

Challenges:

- The status of science, technology and innovation in the third countries compared to EU status, and in the world in general.
- Regional and international political and social directions.
- Accumulated experience related to current and former policies related to science, technology and innovation.
- NCPs Capacity building (different data, needs & training for NCPs; depending on the system structure and maturity).
- Enhancing NCPs Visibility & NCPs Networks.
- Improving NCPs access to international funding.
- Partner search activities and Provide assistance services to different kinds of actors.
- More coordinated vision of Programmes such as BILAT.
- Coordination/ support at governmental level.
- Administrative procedures and legal issues (e.g. role and responsibilities of participants in a consortium, costs, rights...).
- Training seminars for specific target groups (SMEs, professional organizations, etc.) or on specific topics.
- The modalities of the whole spectrum of FP7/ H2020 funding schemes.

Requirement:

- Spreading awareness regarding the importance of NCPs role and activities on all levels (government, research institutions and the private sector).
- Setting up a network in collaboration with local and international professional bodies with the aim of linking NCPs in EU and third countries.
- Adopting new mechanisms for assisting NCPs technically and financially.
- Creating cooperation between research centers and small and medium enterprises.
- Specialized human resources (trained and qualified human resources in various fields).
- Research and development; NCPs should change the way of taking decisions and choosing from alternatives and think out of the box; partial or radical change in ways of thinking, productivity, processes and institution governance.
- Encouraging the establishment of thematic NCP in third countries.

Target groups of NCPs:

- companies - industry and SMEs
- universities
- non-university research organizations
- other organizations (e.g. cities, regional authorities, hospitals, associations)
- new actors, end-users and less-favored regions
- intermediaries and multipliers

2.4 Current situation and EU support to NCPs, with reference to the Mediterranean region

In the last ten years, a number of cooperation networks have been created through programmes that are either bilateral (state-of-state, or EU-single state) or multilateral (framework programme or major regional programmes), yielding significant achievements in building a common Euro-Mediterranean area of research and innovation.

Certain research fields offer real collaboration opportunities based on mutual interest, and a large part of the scientific community in MPCs has forged and maintains strong ties with universities and research centres in the EU.

In this complex framework, promoting the human resources development through the component of capacity building in the framework of scientific and cooperation activities has always been a priority and, among the others, the National Contact Points (NCPs) played an essential role on it.

The NCPs all over the world provide information and assistance to research community of their own Countries, to take part in the Framework Programme (FP) for RT&D, a set of EU programme instruments that follows strategic objectives in selected areas, applies specific rules, supports EU policies for Research and Innovation (EC, 2006), including International cooperation¹. Therefore, to act as a NCP is not an easy task, especially for Mediterranean Partner Countries that, since 2004, are working to represent and foster EU programmes and strategies in their own Countries.

Several specific projects have been co-financed by EC to improve the basis for NCP in MPC and building networks among them, in particular: EURO-MEDANET (funded under the 6th FP and implemented in 2004-2006) and ERAMED (funded under the 6th FP and implemented in 2006-2008), aimed at stimulating the participation of the MPCs in EU-funded R&D projects. The project ERAMED identified, through a mapping exercise, national public large-scale R&D Programmes of MPCs and compared the results derived from the participation of each MPC in the recent Framework Programmes (from 4th FP to 6th FP). The bi-regional INCONET (ie: MedSpring) and BILAT projects funded by FP7 are also actions supporting NCPc through ad-hoc capacity building and training and dialogue.

3. Tasks activities and main outputs : suggestions for the work plan

As mentioned above, an open discussion with Mediterranean NCPs was organised on 11 December under the heading event “NCP Networking and Road Map”. The discussion allowed to identify specific NCP needs to be possibly addressed by MedSpring (or beyond MedSpring) as well as by INCONTACT.

During the open discussion in Amman, Mediterranean NCPs representatives were given the floor to present their problems, ideas and suggest actions. The presentations were discussed in plenary with the task leader, the MedSpring coordinator and a representative of INCONTACT.

All the NCPs presentations are available on line at the following link: <http://agora.medspring.eu/en/content/training-h2020-presentations>

The following common needs and actions were agreed to be at the base of a work plan:

Needs:

- Needs of launching events on H2020, similar to the Launch of H2020 regional event in Cairo planned on 9 February 2014. MedSpring could coordinate with NCPs to support organization of the events by providing experts and speakers.
- Needs of Capacity building and training on specific issues, for building a spectrum of knowledge, capabilities and skills, including H2020 Thematics / Societal Challenges, proposal making, EU policies, EU regulations.
- Needs to improve the communication skills, particularly communicating research and research programming with the aim of improving NCPs institutional visibility and improve dissemination of information. MedSpring could support and contribute through the ongoing Euro-Mediterranean Agora (WEB) and – in synergies with INCONTACT – through the organization of WEBINARS.
- Need to organize NCP info days for researchers and SMEs and also with the aim of facilitating connections among NCPs at national and regional level.

- Need to improve limited financial resources.
- Proposal of establishing a “Monitoring & Evaluation committee of NCPs”. Synergies between MedSpring and INCONTACT will be established for the purpose.
- Need to support researchers to increase visibility and relevance for participation in international / EU projects. MedSpring brokerage on research cooperation will support.
- Need to promote contacts with EU and other MPCs researchers, through Brokerage events (INCONTACT, MedSpring) and on-line Database (INCONTACT, MedSpring Agora).
- More support / synergies with BILAT or other projects, like ERAWIDE, R2I, RDI. The ongoing MedSpring activity will be of high support, particularly the ongoing task of creating an open discussion platform among projects and research WEB communities.
- Need of being effective regarding success in the EU RTD activities. This will require an NCP focus on increasing impact on the overall research system.
- Need to improve the local network capacities and motivate partners / focal points.

The following actions were identified by the Mediterranean NCPs and brought to the attention MedSpring and INCONTACT for possible follow-up and implementation:

- INCONTACT, in cooperation with MedSpring (WP7) could organize in 2014 a regional info/training event on HORIZON 2020. Candidates for hosting this event are Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. MedSpring will work with these candidates in order to agree on the final name of the hosting country.
- Screening of best NCP practices in other regions and their promotion towards the Mediterranean NCPs for possible implementation.
- Stimulating and facilitating permanent dialogue platform MEDITERRANEAN network of NCPs. The Medspring AGORA could play an important role in supporting the dialogue platform.
- The MedSpring Agora will booster activity in order to act as regional base of information and open north-south dialogue among researchers. MedSpring and NCP will work to promote Agora in each country.
- The MedSpring AGORA will work to create an ad-hoc forum for NCPs with the aim of connecting them with the researchers at large.
- INCONTACT could organize meetings or invite Mediterranean NCPs in INCONTACT events in order to increase link with EU NCPs and researchers.
- MedSpring and other regional initiatives should support Training and Capacity building (as already foreseen in Work Package 7 of MedSpring), possibly complemented by WEBINARS.

- MedSpring and INCONTACT could work together to offer regional coaching on a package of services agreed and formulated by NCPs on a win-win base, including specific objectives and targets for coaching.

4. Conclusions: the work plan

In summary, NCPs agreed on the need to activate in the very short term ad-hoc actions.

In particular, the following work plan (fig. 1) could be supported by MedSpring in the remaining three years of project:

- Increasing Internet based visibility and operability through the existing WEB means developed by MedSpring, particularly the Euro-Mediterranean Agora. The Agora will host the following new facilities: i) interactive dialogue platform for NCPs and Thematic Contact Points, ii) a Forum dedicated to NCP and Thematic Contact Points, iii) platform of interactions with NCPs and Contact Points from EU and other regions
- Developing assistance to NCPs through training and capacity building on H2020 opportunities and rules for participation. WP7 of MedSpring will develop, together with NCPs, the content and agendas of capacity building events. Note: part of this work has already been carried out by Task 7.1 of MedSpring with the launch of a survey targeted to the NCPs on needs and objectives for training. Training through WEBINARS will be considered in synergy with INCONTACT.
- MedSpring will stimulate NCPs to identify and formulate a request for regional coaching on common specific win-win objectives. MedSpring could support the mobilization of coaching experts.

With regard to the involvement of NCPs in INCONTACT activities, the following actions need to be developed in 2014 and 2015.

- INCONTACT will invite NCPs participate in regional events planned by the project, particularly offering opportunity of exchange and networking with NCPs from EU and other regions.
- Organization of one regional event on H2020 in the first semester 2014, with the aim of launching-disseminating the EU programme and creating opportunity for networking and exchange among researchers.

Fig. 1: The Work plan for years 2014-2015 summarized in a GANNT

Activity	2014		2015		Project
	1 st semester	2 nd semester	1 st semester	2 nd semester	
Internet visibility and dialogue platform					MEDSPRING support
Capacity buildings	1 st event	2 nd event		3 rd event	
NCP preparation for detailed request of coaching					
Provision of coaching					
Participation of NCP in INCONTACT meetings/events					
Regional event supported by INCONTACT (in cooperation with MEDSPRING) on regional launch H2020	1 st event		2 nd event (possibly)		Synergies with INCONTACT
Organization of H2020 events					