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Participation of the MPCs in the European Research Area

Capacity building activities in MIRA Project

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Abstract. Capacity building, based on ad-hoc training initiatives on EU instruments and policies, is essential to improve international cooperation and enhance quality and quantity of Mediterranean Partner countries' participation in EU-funded projects. The final objective is to further enable scientists and institutions of Mediterranean Partner Countries to be key actors in the Euro-Mediterranean research and innovation partnership, while facing the main challenges of the years to come. Bottlenecks, proposed solutions and performed activities are illustrated and analysed.

Keywords. Capacity building – Instrument – Programme – Cooperation – Impact – Assessment.

Participation des PPM dans l'Espace Européen de la Recherche. Activités de renforcement des capacités dans le cadre du projet MIRA

Résumé. Le renforcement des capacités, basé sur des initiatives de formation ad-hoc portant sur les instruments et les politiques communautaires, est essentiel pour améliorer la coopération internationale, au même titre que la qualité et la quantité de la participation des pays méditerranéens partenaires aux projets financés par l'UE. La perspective ultime est de continuer à permettre à des scientifiques et des institutions des pays partenaires méditerranéens de devenir des acteurs clés dans le partenariat euro-méditerranéen en matière de recherche et d'innovation, tout en faisant face aux principaux défis de l'avenir. Ce document illustre et analyse les obstacles, les solutions proposées et les activités réalisées.

Mots-clés. Renforcement des capacités – Instrument – Programme – Coopération – Impact – Evaluation.

I – Introduction

Over the last years, the Mediterranean region has experienced a peculiar moment in its history due to the repercussions of economic crisis blowing across Europe and the socio-political changes in Arab countries. In the Southern Mediterranean area, the Arab Spring has completely changed the political, economic and social situation. The regional challenges can be summarized as follows: economic crisis, political and socio-economic instability, decreasing availability of research and development funds, reduction in international donors' funds, competition of comparable education/training institutions, discontinuous involvement of institutions.

Innovative and ambitious responses are needed to establish a renewed and closer partnership in research and innovation between the EU and its Mediterranean neighbours, namely capacity-building, cooperation in research and innovation as well as increased mobility opportunities for students, researchers and academics. The Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education and Research (Cairo, 2007) stressed the need to move toward the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Research and Innovation Area, also by promoting and supporting institutional capacity building and enhancing the participation of the Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs) in the FP, while taking into account their particular needs and the mutual interest and benefit. Throughout the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Research and Innovation (Barcelona, 2012),

special emphasis was further placed on addressing urgent societal and economic issues in the Euro-Mediterranean region as effectively as possible, and helping transform the Mediterranean area into a zone for sustainable economic and cultural exchanges that benefit its inhabitants. The development of a Common Knowledge and Innovation Space and the EU's Innovation Agenda are two central aims of the Union's strategy, and its successful implementation and delivery of sustainable results depend also on activities aimed at building a common innovation and research-based culture. Among other aspects, this should unavoidably include the enhancement of national and regional capacity building.

Capacity building means to develop human, scientific and technological capacities and it is an approach toward development, which may be adopted by each Nation to respond to the multi-dimensional process of changing societies. It is not a series of events, training and workshops with default results and options. Therefore, any initiative, as also promoted in the MIRA project, could produce a relevant result if it is part of a larger and wider process aimed at facing the main challenges of international cooperation with the full involvement of national stakeholders. It may likely fill some of the main gaps and needs, while being related to other key projects and processes in the Mediterranean region.

Capacity-building activities for the MPC institutions (National Contact Points, Ministries, national research centres, etc.) could contribute to improved economic, environmental and social outcomes through some main pathways:

- Individual human capital that raises the productivity and hence the earning capacity of the individual, reflected in higher lifetime income.
- The efficiency of the institution, as it captures part of the returns from the individual improvement in productivity and, due to the “echo effect”, it could improve the productivity of other workers, e.g. extension of their learning and adding to the local stock of knowledge. This is reflected in improved levels and/or reduced cost of services or outputs delivered by the institutions to local/national stakeholders.
- Innovation in the institution, as the culture and mindset changes, new and better ways of doing things are introduced and new services are developed. This is reflected in the changes in the services or outputs the institution delivers to local/national stakeholders.
- Effectiveness of the institution that interacts with the policy environment, targeting more to areas of need, attracting more resources and engaging more effectively in policy.

These pathways leading to ‘*changes in practice or behaviour*’ reflect the capableness of the individuals and the institution they work for. The potentiality to utilize such capableness depends both on the quality of training activities (or any other capacity building action) and the degree to which the institution uses the skills, knowledge, networks and other capacities developed by the specific activities implemented.

II – Capacity Building of NCPs in Mediterranean Partner Countries: problems to be faced and first results

In the last ten years, a number of cooperation networks have been created through programmes that are either *bilateral* (state-to-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 the MPCs has forged and now maintains strong ties with

universities and research centres in the EU. In this complex framework, promoting the human resources development through capacity building within scientific and cooperation activities has always been a priority and, among other things, the National Contact Points (NCPs) played an essential role.

The NCPs all over the world have been established by regional or national authorities to ensure the necessary support to actions financed by the European Commission (EC). They provide information and assistance to the research community of their own Countries to take part in the Framework Programme (FP) for RTD, a set of EU programme instruments that pursue strategic objectives in selected areas, apply specific rules, support EU policies for Research and Innovation (EC, 2006), including international cooperation¹. Therefore, to act as an NCP is not an easy task, especially for Mediterranean Partner Countries that, since 2004, have been working to represent and foster EU programmes and strategies in their own Countries.

Several specific projects have been co-financed by the EC to improve the basis for NCPs in the MPCs 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. Through a "mapping exercise", the ERAMED project identified national, public and large-scale R&D Programmes of the MPCs and compared the results coming from the participation of each MPC in the recent Framework Programmes (from the 4th FP to the 6th FP).

When MIRA project started its activities, in 2008, only one year had passed since the launch of FP7 (2007-2014) and although projects like ERAMED helped the Mediterranean NCPs, stakeholders and institutions understand and manage the FP, the changes about the role and the activities of international cooperation were not easy to be endorsed and explained to them. The change in structure and the identification of SICAs in each Work Plan of the thematic sectors under the FP7 Cooperation Programme were two of the main issues the NCPs of Mediterranean Partner Countries needed to face. Moreover, as reported by NCPs, a lot of scattered information and different rules of participation were among the main obstacles for the MPCs to take part in the FP projects. Finally, there were also problems related to the lack of recognition of the important role of the National Contact Points in some MPCs, the lack of networking with the NCPs of EU Countries and scarcity of human and financial resources to organise INFO-days and involve scientific communities. These difficulties clearly emerged from the results of the first survey on the NCPs of Mediterranean Countries carried out in 2008 in the framework of MIRA project activities. The survey was based on a Questionnaire sent to all those in charge of the International Cooperation Partner Countries (ICPC) Information Points of the Mediterranean region. The collected data, referred to the period 2004-08, contributed to better define activities, problems, achievements and prospects of the NCPs and clarified their role towards the EC, other EU NCPs and relevant stakeholders at both national and international level. Data collection and assessment were performed by the National Hellenic Research Foundation (NHRF) and consisted of 3 parts: general comments based on the replies to the Questionnaires, specific comments and condensed raw data (MIRA, 2008).

The participation of MPC institutions in the EU Framework Programme and, consequently, the spur of the Mediterranean scientific community to participate through the NCPs, reflect first of all a common political willingness to cooperate with the EU in ST. In principle, such a decision and commitment existed for all the MPCs in 2008, when MIRA project was still in its infancy, and most of NCPs had been established. Nevertheless, NCPs expressed many specific needs: being duly recognized by national authorities and equipped accordingly, helping MPC researchers to successfully coordinate EU projects; implementing an NCP network in the Mediterranean area to exchange best practices and relevant information.

Funding for their maintenance and activities is a delicate matter for NCPs. In most cases, financial resources were provided by two sources:

- the hosting Country: contributing substantially through allocation of permanent staff, office space, equipment and telecommunications;
- the European Union: through several FP projects, contributing mainly to their capacity building and providing funds to support the organization of their activities such as info-days, brokerage events, etc.

In spite of the recognition of the role of the European Commission in supporting their activities, it is clear that, starting from the forthcoming FP (Horizon 2020, 2014-2020), the NCPs of the Mediterranean Countries need to have the same “stature” and EC co-funding as their colleagues of EU Member States. In recent years, the organizational model of many MPC-NCPs has changed and it is now more similar to those of EU Member States. Some significant outcomes of the organizational structure of the MPCs, as in 2008, are provided in Table 1 and Table 2 that report – respectively - the type of host institution and the organizational model of the NCPs.

Table 1. Type of host institution of the Mediterranean NCPs. Legend: (R) Research Centre; (E) Educational Centre; (A): Administration (O): Other.

	Algeria	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Palestine	Syria	Tunisia
<i>University</i>	-	-	-	x (E)	-	-	x (E, R)	-
<i>Research centre</i>	x (R)	-	-	x (R)	-	-	-	-
<i>Public body</i>	-	x (R)	-	-	x (A)	x (E,R)	-	x (A)
<i>Private Company</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Other (specify)</i>	-	-	Gov. Agency	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Report MIRA project – Evaluation of Contact Point structures of the MPCs, 2008.

Table 2. Organizational model of the NCPs

	AL	EG	JO	LEB	MO	PA	SY	TU
<i>Network of thematic contact points</i>	-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Network of institutional Contact points</i>	-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	-	-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Only National Contact Points</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	-	-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	-

Source: Report MIRA project – Evaluation of Contact Point structures of the MPCs, 2008.

Although a centralised unit may prove to be very efficient, a more “decentralized structure” through the setting up of a network of (local) contact points/multipliers under the responsibility of a focal unit is more promising. Tangible advantages of the latter model are: a better knowledge

of the local research landscape, familiarity with “face to face” discussions with stakeholders, a more efficient organization of local events. MIRA Capacity Building activities (CBA) for the MPCs were adjusted to the specific situations and demands of the recipient Countries, also answering the needs that result when shifting from a specific organizational model to another one or solving specific problems (as in the case of the Palestinian NCP in November 2008 and of the Tunisian NCP, in 2010: in both cases, MIRA actions were useful to strengthen the NCPs and overcome obstacles to their activity).

Generally speaking, MIRA CBA may be divided into:







- training actions (on-the-job training, workshops and seminars);
- technical assistance and advice (e.g. on improving standards and standard operating procedures);
- development and dissemination of tools (manuals, guidelines, training materials, etc.);
- support to networking of NCPs.

Among other things, some significant MIRA activities implemented for promoting capacity building were the following: *Training seminar for officers of MPC-NCPs* (Egypt, 2009) and for NCPs on *Financial and Legal Issues* (Beirut, 17-18/01/2013), organised to handle financial rules and IPR issues while fostering a regional network of the NCPs in the Mediterranean; *Training course on auditing* (Tunis, 2010), *Training seminars for local scientists and administrative officers from the MPCs, to improve the quantity and quality of participation in FP7 projects and raise awareness of FP7 opportunities* (Bari, 2009 and 2011).

As reported in the analyses performed by the NCPs in 2012, great progress has been made in the last years (2008-2012). Achievements are summed up in Table 3 where the main issues to be faced in future, as perceived by the NCPs of the countries concerned, are also reported. The data were extrapolated from the assessment interviews carried out before the MIRA Management Board Meeting held in Casablanca in February 2012. On that occasion, also some suggestions from the MPC NCPs to spur participation in the FP and raise awareness on policies and instruments of EU were provided.

In particular, through the MIRA capacity building activities, the event organised in Egypt in 2009 for Mediterranean NCPs offered the opportunity to start a more intensive dialogue at regional level, to favour networking and give impetus to the debate on the role of NCPs at national level. Also the training seminar on auditors paved the way for discussion on the real/potential role of auditors, a remarkable figure for the Mediterranean Partner Countries. Most of the events urged the NCPs' staff to be more self-confident and also provided material for further training and info-days.

Table 3. Recent achievements and future challenges of the MPC-NCPs.

COUNTRY	RECENT PROGRESS	FUTURE CHALLENGES
 ALGERIA	<p>Since 2008, the NCP has increased both the number of participations in FP7 co-funded projects and the number of contacts of IP with EU NCP.</p>	<p>To involve more personnel in the NCP, to propose twinning actions, to participate in regional projects.</p>
 EGYPT	<p>The IP has a great deal of contacts also with industrial representatives, and Egypt has a considerable number of participations in FP7. The use of mobility schemes co-financed by the EC has increased.</p>	<p>To apply the principle of co-ownership and co-funding in EU projects, in line with MoCo conclusions.</p>
 JORDAN	<p>Success rate in terms of participation in FP7 of Jordanian researchers has increased. The most important recent change is the official nomination of six Jordanian thematic NCPs covering the following sectors: KBBE, Health, Environment, Energy, NMP and ICT. The BILAT EU-JordanNet is supporting the thematic NCPs through developing their action plans and, in collaboration with MIRA, some events to enhance awareness of EU policies and opportunities were envisaged.²</p>	<p>To develop the capacities of the newly established thematic NCPs; to build the capacities of the new project coordinators (7 ERAWIDE projects have been funded so far); to give more visibility of the Jordan RDI community to European countries.</p>
 MOROCCO	<p>The number of participations in FP7 has increased and organization of IP is moving towards a decentralized network. Call for proposals have been launched by the Moroccan Ministry of Research to have thematic NCPs for the following sectors: FAB, ICT, ENERGY, ENV, HEALTH, SMEs. Also dissemination and training activities have increased significantly: 26 info-days and training seminars (from June 2010 to December 2011) were organized.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Researchers' motivation suffering from heavy financial and administrative procedures; – Poor participation in large scale CP; – Urgent need to have more involvement in EU projects with socio-economic impact; – Addressing IPR and ethical issues.
 PALESTINE	<p>The number of Palestinian project proposals submitted to the EC and the involvement of the scientific community has increased. At present, no. 4 ERA-WIDE projects co-funded by EC under FP7 involve Palestinian representatives.</p>	<p>To further improve networking with other IPs.</p>
 TUNISIA	<p>Tunisian NCPs moved towards a set-up based on different contact persons for the main FP7 thematic sectors: KBBE, Health, ICT, Environment, Energy, and NMP. For three of these sectors, a network with EU NCPs was created, thanks also to the coordination between MIRA and other projects co-funded by the EC for NCPs and, above all, to the BILAT coordinated by the Tunisian NCP.</p>	<p>To implement networks also in other sectors, to spur clustering and foster innovation activities.</p>

Source: Elaboration by M. Rossano, MIRA project report on Capacity building in the MPCs, 2012.

When assessing the activities implemented in the last five years by the NCPs, one should also consider that they were planned and designed in 2007, when the social, economic and institutional framework of many Mediterranean countries was different. Uprising in many countries and political changes in the areas concerned have inevitably influenced, and in some cases weakened, the activities of the NCPs.

Some MPCs - and Morocco in particular - stressed that some critical questions still need to be addressed in future:

- “*Act as being one*”: consolidating achievements, notably by elaborating a database of training material, including practical exercises and useful guides for the MPCs; adopting a “Handbook of good practices of MPC NCPs” as reference document;
- *Maximize complementarities*: possible synergies on capacity building events could be achieved in future, also with reference to TEMPUS events.

The same issues were highlighted during the MIRA International Conference on the MPCs and EU opportunities (Amman, 2012). During the conference, the need for “*a Mediterranean set*” of capacity building activities, shaped and conceived to respond to regional specific issues was also emphasized as a must to create an environment conducive to South-South Cooperation, while further integrating the MPCs into ERA.

III – Training activities on FP7: methodological aspects and instruments for training assessment

Training activities are a useful tool to improve the quality of MPC participation in the projects co-funded by the European Commission by increasing skills and understanding of the administrative and technical issues related to the handling of FP projects, while heightening awareness of EU programmes and regional strategies. In this framework, the training activities implemented from 2009 through 2012 involved about 150 trainees from 8 MPCs and were carried out following a highly flexible approach, with the academic contribution by speakers coming from partner research institutions and international organizations. Lessons were integrated with exercises, open discussion and technical documents, under the supervision of tutors.

To assess the implemented activities, a feedback questionnaire was provided for each training activity to improve the future CBAs, as well as to propose priorities/suggestions to be addressed to the European Commission.

In particular, figure 1 shows the national composition of a sample of 76 trainees attending the CBA for “*Local scientists and administrative officers from the MPCs, to improve the quantity and the quality of participation in FP7 projects and raise awareness of FP7 opportunities*” (organized in Bari in 2009 and 2011 and also in Tunis in 2010).

The assessment of the results of the questionnaire emphasized that participants appreciated training activities, both in terms of understanding FP7 and its rules, becoming aware of EU strategies and activities. Many of the participants were very pro-active and asked for further training activities in their Countries. They pointed out difficulties and suggestions to improve cooperation with the MPCs. As a general suggestion, they asked for training modules more linked to thematic workshops and other activities in their countries in order to avoid fragmentation of efforts and gain out of synergies.

For data completeness, the participants who responded to the feedback questionnaire were 15 trainees in 2009 and 13 trainees in 2011. Some of the most significant results are reported in Annex I.

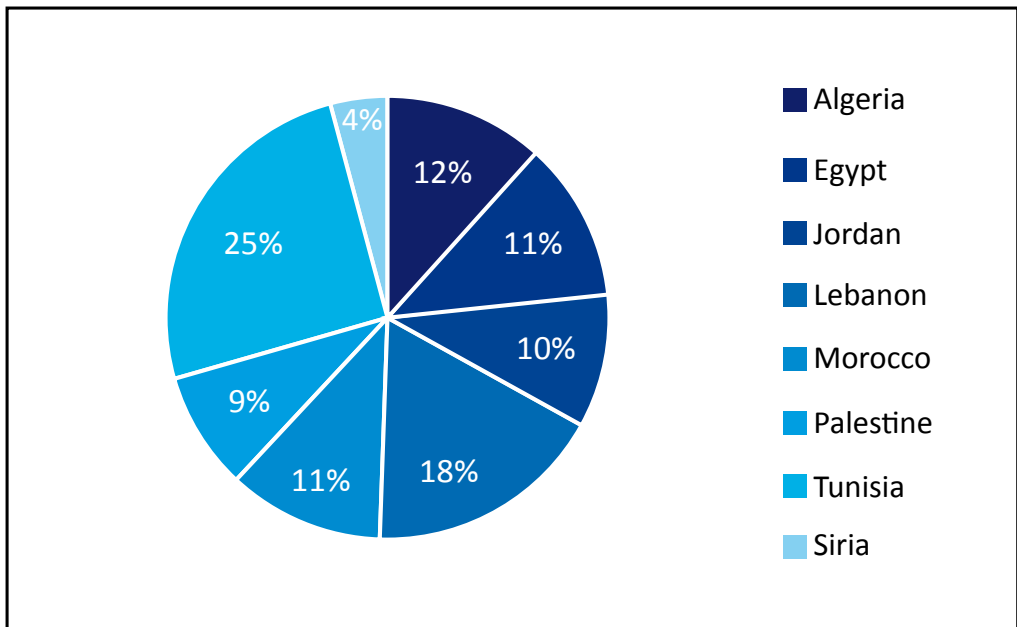


Figure 1. Country of origin of the 76 trainees involved in MIRA training activities.

Source: MIRA Project report WP3, Task 5, Feedback questionnaires, year 2009, 2010 and 2011.

The results of the Questionnaire emphasized that participants appreciated the training activities that allowed them to get a good grasp of FP7 and its rules, and to be aware of EU strategies and activities. Many of the participants were very pro-active and asked for further training activities in their Countries. They also pointed out difficulties and suggestions to improve cooperation with the MPCs. As a general suggestion, they asked for training modules more linked to thematic workshops and other activities in their countries in order to avoid fragmentation of efforts and gain from synergies.

Specifically for the training activity implemented in Bari in 2009, the most significant results concerning the three phases of building a cooperation activity under FP7 (Survey, 2009) were assessed and they are reported in Table 4.

IV – A proposal of analytical framework: from inputs to benefits of capacity building activities

The application of an analytical framework is the first step to assess benefits of training and other capacity building initiatives. The framework described in this paragraph aims to elucidate the linkages between the training provided and the intended or observed benefits, thus facilitating the attribution of benefits to specific capacity building investments. The value of capacity building depends on impacts resulting from the change in practice and behaviour of institutions. For estimating impacts, the transferability of experimental results to practice should be known. Therefore, this analytical framework aims at clearly linking benefits, such as increased institutional performance, with specific investments in capacity building activities, and presents the array of pathways through which capacity building investments can result in benefits. The pathways may be direct or indirect, strong or weak, certain or highly uncertain. As far as MIRA CBAs (Capacity Building Activities) are concerned, the analytical framework is illustrated in Figure 2. In this case

study, the focus is on CBAs related to the participation of the MPCs in FP7 projects, so the benefits accruing to the involved institutions and research communities are the main concern. The benefits for the individuals involved in training (and resulting indirectly from the scientific development in the country) can also be identified and assessed for MIRA CBAs, as shown in Figure 2:

Table 4. Problems and suggestions to write and manage FP7 projects.

	MAIN PROBLEMS	SUGGESTIONS
Partnership building for participating in FP7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is not easy for the MPCs to identify project partners, especially because it is not evident to find common interests in research areas of mutual interest and benefit; - Information on Cordis partner service is not continuously updated; - Lack of confidence when a non-European country tries to build a consortium and act as a coordinator to set up projects on specific themes (e.g. migration); - It is difficult to build a strong partnership without mutual trust, and sometimes partnerships are based only on personal relations; - Lack of awareness on common interest research topics for the Mediterranean region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - List of partners categorized according to their specialities. These partners should be from the EU or associated countries; - To organize meetings with researchers experienced in participation in FP6 and FP7. - Participation in info-days; - More specific actions to foster the participation of the MPCs in the FP.
Writing a project proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overload of administrative tasks; - Often administrative staff are not well informed on how to fill European projects forms; - Lack of experience in writing a project and lack of knowledge of project evaluation process by the EC; - The time granted for drafting the projects is usually short, and it is then difficult to respond in time especially when the partnership has been recently established; - A gap in scientific interest between Northern and Southern countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support from organizations specialized in project management; - To provide some templates of projects already accepted, and also assistance to researchers during the planning phase; - More training courses for improving MPC capacity building - Exchange of experience with persons who have managed and written projects; - Specific courses for project coordinators.
Managing a project under FP7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulties in financial issues and in technical reporting; - Misunderstanding of the EU rules. Lack of experienced administrators for managing this kind of projects; - Lack of competence for financial management; - Complexity in project management and inadequacy in complying with the national regulations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To adopt a more streamlined and clear procedure; - To enhance trustful relations between the coordinator and partners to get guidance in any financial issue; - Organization of training seminars and workshops concerning FP7 project management; - To consider the specific institutional system of each country and identify and agree upon applicable rules, especially for the financial process, since the beginning; - Tutoring support to benefit from experts' or officers' experiences.

Source: Elaboration by C. Morini from results of "MIRA – Assessment Questionnaire of the Training Seminar on writing and management of FP7 projects for local scientists and administrative officers of Mediterranean Partner Countries - Bari, 2009.

1. Capacity building inputs are: expenditure on training by suppliers and participants, including the value of time and in kind support.
2. Changes in practices and behaviour: i) for individual trainees: knowledge gained; skills developed; awareness and understanding enhanced; contacts and networks formed; ii) for the institution they work for: training of other staff (which in turn leads to: application of the capacity to work to improve quality, effectiveness and/or efficiency of service delivery, policy advice utilization of new tools; greater networking, accessing information, improved internal communications, etc.).
3. Impact of changes arising from capacity utilized on the local stakeholders: developing partnership, favouring information access, spurring participation in EC calls for proposals, regulations knowledge, creation of internal planning office;
4. Benefits: besides measurable benefits (government's cost saving, increased participation in EU calls, etc.) there are long-term ones requiring an in-depth analysis that considers external factors such as policy stability, governance hindering factors, and operating framework.

In a nutshell, in order to evaluate the impact of any CBA two steps are generally followed:

Step 1: Utilize the framework to identify the changes occurring as a result of training (map the pathways). In order to demonstrate that a capacity building activity has led to the benefits observed, it is first necessary to identify linkages between a capacity building activity and the benefits attributable to it. These linkages are the existing or potential changes that occur between the different levels as set out in the analytical framework. Therefore, identification of changes is required at each level, by mapping the links on the pathway from inputs to benefits or expected benefits. This approach includes measures and "indicators of change", using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

The framework provided is intended as a general model and may vary according to particular CBAs. However, the reported categories and examples are not exhaustive, the framework should be regarded as a living document and thus updated as new pathways and categories emerge.

Step 2. Determine measures and indicators to verify the identified changes. Once the change occurring as a result of training has been identified at the respective level, measures and/or indicators that enable the validity of this link in the pathway towards the benefits to be verified must be identified. Ideally, measures will be available at each level.

For example, taking into account the above-mentioned MIRA CBA experience:

- Measures for inputs may be: financial cost, in-kind contribution, time associated with the capacity building activity.
- Measures for changes in practices and behaviour: i) at the individual level, assessment of learning achieved, clear perception and application of new skills; ii) at the institutional level: adoption of more innovative approaches, expansion and/or improvement of quality of services provided.
- Measures for impact: number of new procedures adopted, improved quantity of trainees, increased number of national/international collaborations/partnerships.
- Measures for benefits in the medium term could be the "spread" between the "expected benefits" with most favourable external conditions and the "real achieved benefits", once the impact of the external factors has been duly analysed and correlated to the external conditions envisaged when conceiving and planning the CBA.

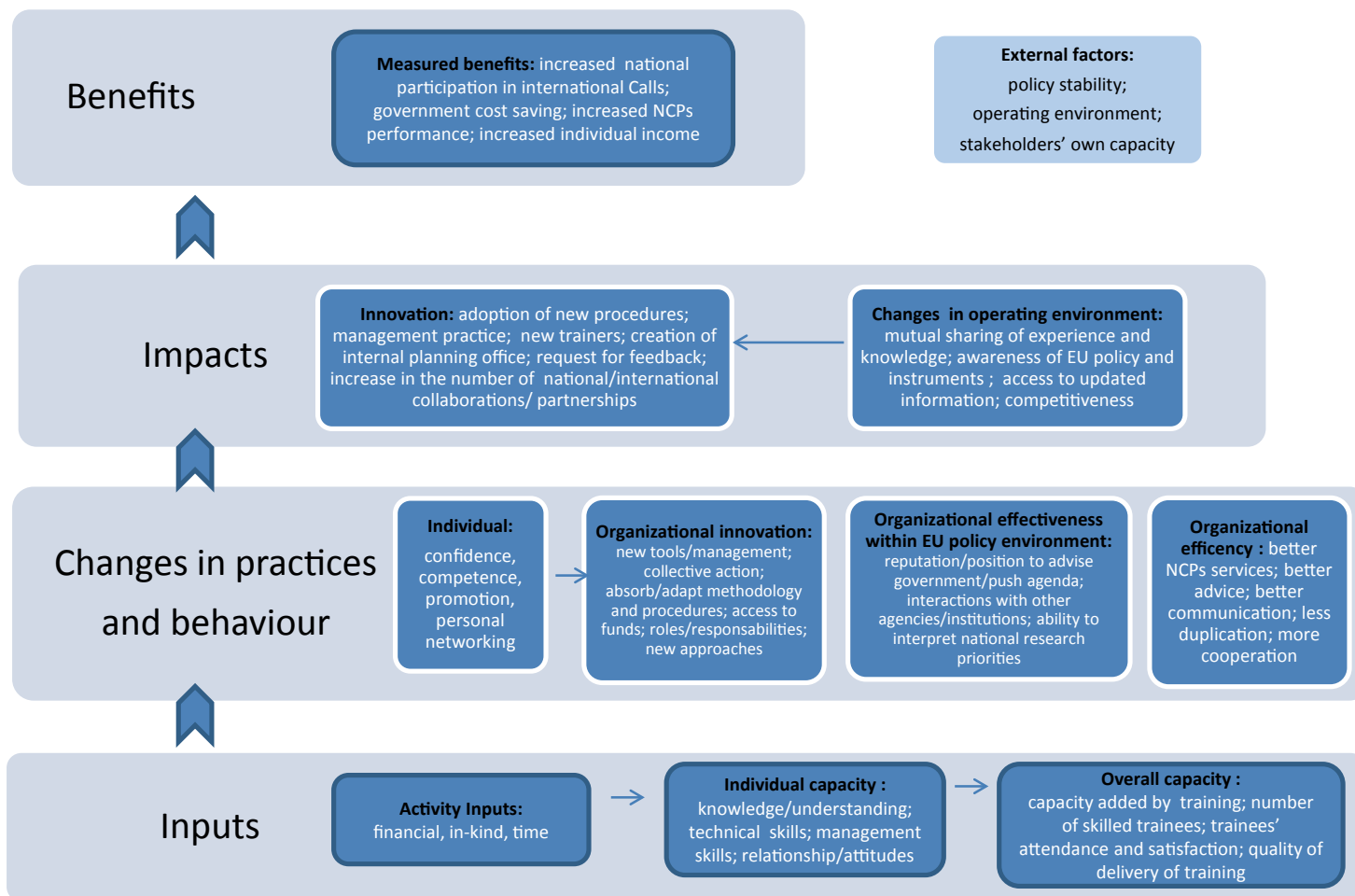


Figure 2. The analytical framework: from input to benefits of capacity building activity, especially training on FP7 for MED countries. (Data processing based on results of post-training surveys by C. Morini and M. Rossano; Graphic design: A. Errico, 2013).

V – Lessons learnt and future challenges dealing with EU projects for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation

As shown by the feedback questionnaire, the addressees reacted positively to their training. They considered it very useful for their job, for enhancing awareness of EU opportunities and possibilities to integrate the MPCs in the European Research Area, and achieving a better understanding of FP projects planning, writing and management. They were also made aware of the importance to measure the impact of projects and build initiatives where the MPCs may act as co-owners. The results pointed out a “thirst for knowledge” about these topics, the efforts made for improving RI in the Mediterranean region, cementing cooperation and partnership through the impressive work done so far, and the future steps. This assessment also highlighted the importance of working as a team during training implementation, sharing documentation and exercises, and exchanging useful suggestions when needed. Sometimes, capacity building activities connected scientists of different background, promoting knowledge exchange and mutual trust, and creating landmarks for promoting high quality cooperation initiatives.

The major trends and changes outlined in this analysis are at the same time opportunities and challenges for institutions in Mediterranean partner countries, which are called upon to play a vital capacity building role in support of cooperation development. As far as training is concerned, the use of “*edutainments*” tools (educational – entertainments) that actively involved the trainees was quite successful. Seminars with on-line exercises, web-based activities, access to digital libraries, promoting familiarity with EC procedures and websites are examples of the new learning enhancing opportunities that increased connectivity can offer to research centres and institutions in the Mediterranean Countries. This allowed us to share experiences, lessons learnt and best practices. Moreover, combining regular training courses with practical activities gives more opportunity for human interaction and development of the social aspects related to learning. For the future, NCPs suggested that to further motivate scientific communities and spur decision makers to support NCPs and their activities, Regional Fora could be organized periodically to show statistics on co-financed projects, case histories, value added for the Mediterranean Countries involved, in the presence of national policy makers and the major representatives from both EU and MP countries. Training participants also recommended performing systematic monitoring and evaluation in order to consolidate the project implementation conditions and measure their related impacts.

Many problems still need to be solved for improving the process of cooperation in its multiple dimensions: scientific, administrative and financial. The heavy and cumbersome administration of the EU projects is one of the barriers to cope with. In the last years, excellent scientists from the MPCs progressively distanced from the Framework Programme due to the difficulties in handling the administrative aspects of participating in a project, as they have very little technical and administrative support from their administrations - though this aspect is slowly being solved - and to the enormous amount of effort and time required for reporting and other tasks that are not strictly related to scientific activity. One main problem the scientific community faces is the administrative constraint of complying with the principle of strict control of expenses related to the project and the consequent financial and personnel burden for reporting, audits and other activities based on this principle. In contrast, the scientific content and results of the activities and its impacts do not rank among the main issues of the projects.

To stimulate or support the necessary EU-MPC cooperation in research and innovation, further capacity building of administrators in the MPCs is needed and the specific characteristics of international cooperation must be considered in the EU Financial Rules. The “Third Parties” concept, i.e. support structures or companies for handling the funding received by MPC partners, must be developed and stimulated in order to leave the managerial tasks of accounting and reporting in professional’s hands and provide services to the MPC participants in the cooperation

projects. At this moment in time, there is a wide perception that the opportunities offered by the European Programmes for ST cooperation to the MPCs are much more “difficult to handle” than the Chinese, American, Brazilian or Russian programmes (Rodriguez and El-Zoheiry, 2012), and there is a net transfer of partnering from the traditional European partners to those coming from other Countries.

VI – Conclusions

Capacity building is at the heart of tomorrow’s regional employment, innovation, stability and prosperity. All the Mediterranean countries will benefit from it, if it becomes easier for individuals, research institutes, universities and companies to cooperate. Any obstacle to the cross-border flow of people, ideas and funding has to be removed. Mutual benefits will emerge from increased cooperation between North and South Mediterranean, between academia and industry, between national and European initiatives, between European programmes and activities such as Structural Funds, Horizon 2020, EU neighbouring policy, and so on. Therefore, there is urgent need to capitalise on what has been done so far. Capacity building also facilitates the construction and use of critical mass of competences and stimulates cross-fertilization among national and international research teams. To facilitate capacity building and empowerment of transformative networks, major recommendations concern also the need for a well-structured approach of both “capacity” and “power” building. Both dimensions – capacity building and empowerment - are key factors. On one hand, it is necessary to strengthen project and institutional management capabilities; on the other hand, it is also necessary to facilitate building up efficient transformative networks and coalitions of change. These networks and coalitions, operating as a bridge between the Southern and the Northern rims, include many different types of people, beyond the scientific communities. Particularly important are: the business sector (that needs to be involved as much as possible in project design and implementation, by matching funds and appropriate public/private partnership mechanisms); the civil society and young researchers. Thus, capacity building should be the interface between Research and Innovation systems that, in general, have only random contacts as they fit different demands and expectations. The creation of mutual acknowledgement and trust between the actors of these systems is a prerequisite to make the most of the efforts in knowledge exploitation in the MPCs.

Thus, the main intervention strategy for capacity building should include a vaster array of actions such as organizational reforms, institutional strengthening, science-policy interfacing, training and networking, as well as participatory approach implementation. Taking into account the new approaches that will prevail in Horizon 2020, notably co-funding and co-ownership, the activities of capacity building may require a combination of various competences from EC and EU/MPC countries. The new schemes of R&D cooperation and new rules of management require that training plan for trainers be prepared. Moreover, training seminars could be followed by twinning activities in order to extend the scope of cooperation while putting capacity building at the core of the new regional strategic Research Agenda. In a time of increased global competition, it is urgent that Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries pool their resources of talent and knowledge for a better and shared future.

Notes

- ¹ Some of the several tasks of an NCP: a) *Informing, awareness raising* (to circulate general and specific information, i.e. calls for proposals, possibilities and rules for participation; organising promotional activities with the European Commission; raising awareness for general EU objectives; giving notices of other EU programmes); b) *advising, assisting and training* (to explain the modalities for participation; advise on administrative and contractual issues, responsibilities of partners, costs, IPR, etc; assisting in partner search, stimulating participation of new partners; advising in project management); c) *Signposting* (to inform the European Commission about planned activities and involve EC staff; to signpost the path for other EU network services; to give feedback to the EC; to signpost the path for national or regional funding and support organizations where appropriate). An efficient NCP should represent a centre of expertise on EU RTD opportunities, be impartial, have knowledge of the local research landscape, understand innovation processes, reach the national research community and other stakeholders, have skills in RTD management and financing, be an active and accepted partner of the international system for partner search, be in contact with all the other NCPs. Moreover, it needs to cooperate with other RTD networks at national and regional level, to ensure transnational exchange of experiences and best practice, to have communication skills, and ability to moderate meetings and to organise promotion actions, to assess the work and provide feedback.
- ² Within the ST Co-operation Agreement, Jordan has identified energy, sustainable development, health, ICT and agriculture as priorities for international co-operation in research, which will help Jordan authorities in formulating and implementing national Research Strategies.
- ³ It is the so-called bottom-up approach, which is useful to see the results of each activity but less useful in evaluating the cumulative effects of different types of interventions spread over time. For example, if an organization receives capacity support from a number of different stakeholders in the same area of its work, the bottom-up method is less suited to dealing with the complexity. Additionally, the bottom-up method makes no attempt to measure the overall capacity of an organization. It is only interested in those areas of capacity that are being supported through capacity building activities.

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- *Evaluation of Contact Points structures of the MPCs (2008)*. www.miraproject.eu
- *Report on Auditing Training Workshop* - www.miraproject.eu/workgroups-area/workgroup.wp2/workgroup-documents-library/training-seminars/audit-training-workshop/Minutes%20MIRA%20Audit%20Training.pdf/view
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- *Report on the Training for officers of the IP of the MPCs regarding specific issues related to the setting and evolution of FP7 projects*. www.miraproject.eu

ANNEX I

PROBLEMS, NEEDS AND SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE MPC PARTICIPATION IN FP7

The main results of problems, needs and suggestions to improve MPC participation in FP7 resulting from MIRA Feedback questionnaires administered in 2009 and 2011 are graphically presented in the following figures. The answers given by interviewees are on ordinate and the number of interviewees is on abscissa.

I – MAIN PROBLEMS/BOTTLENECKS

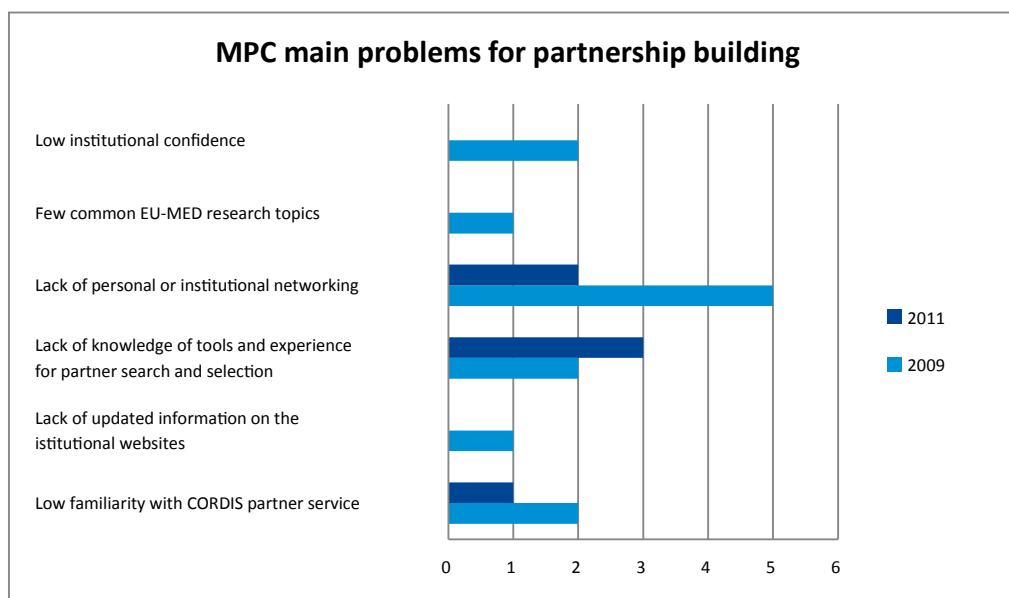


Figure 1. MPC main problems for partnership building.

Source: Compiled by C. Morini based on the results of the feedback questionnaires (2009 and 2011).

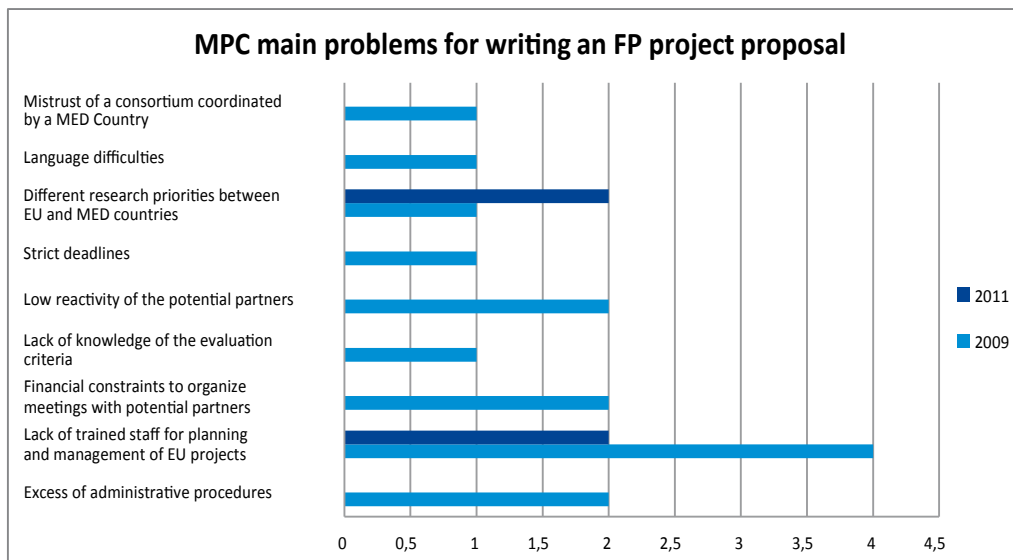


Figure 2. MPC main problems for writing an FP project proposal.

Source: Compiled by C. Morini based on the results of the feedback questionnaires (2009 and 2011).

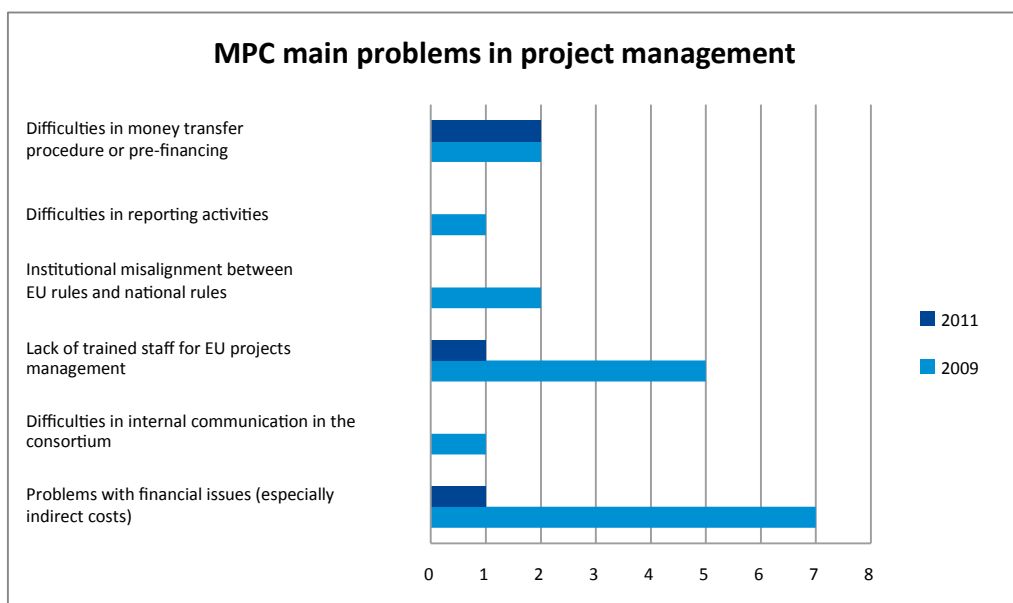


Figure 3. MPC main problems in project management.

Source: Compiled by C. Morini based on the results of the feedback questionnaires (2009 and 2011).

II – MAIN NEEDS

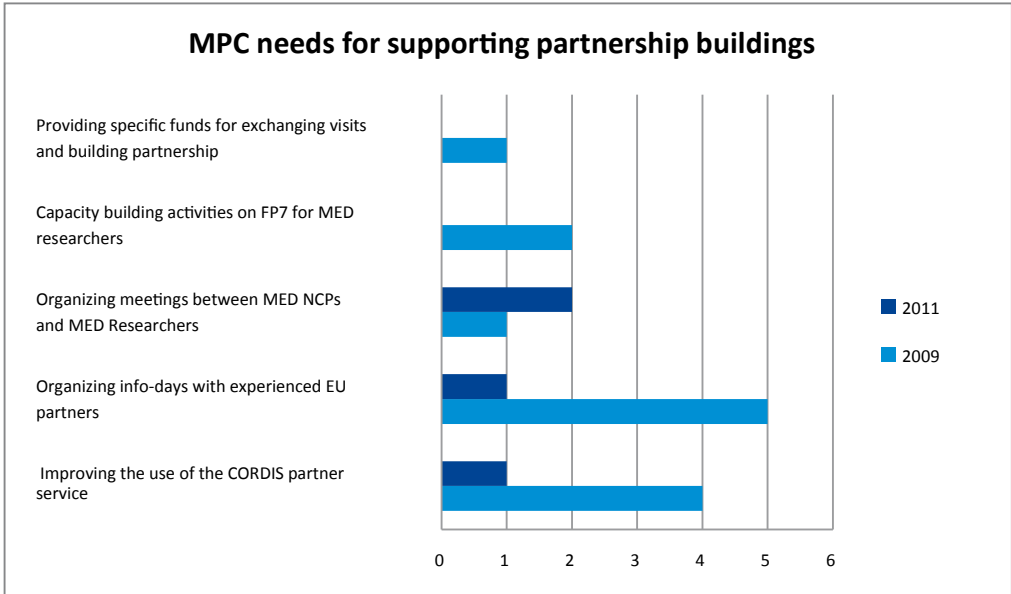


Figure 4. MPC main needs for supporting partnership building.

Source: Compiled by C. Morini based on the results of the feedback questionnaires (2009 and 2011).

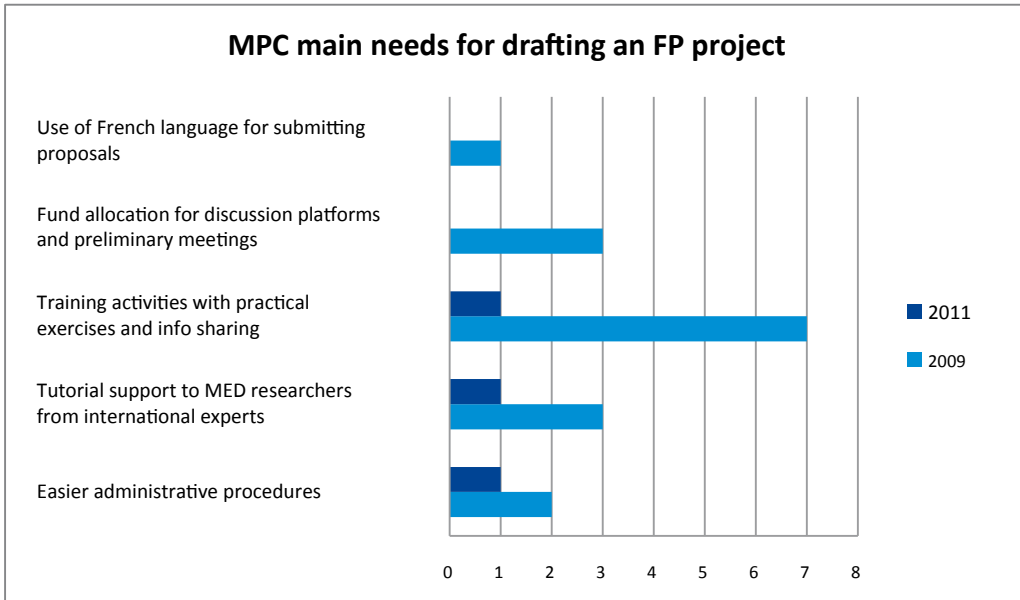


Figure 5. MPC main needs for drafting an FP project proposal.

Source: Compiled by C. Morini based on the results of the feedback questionnaires (2009 and 2011).

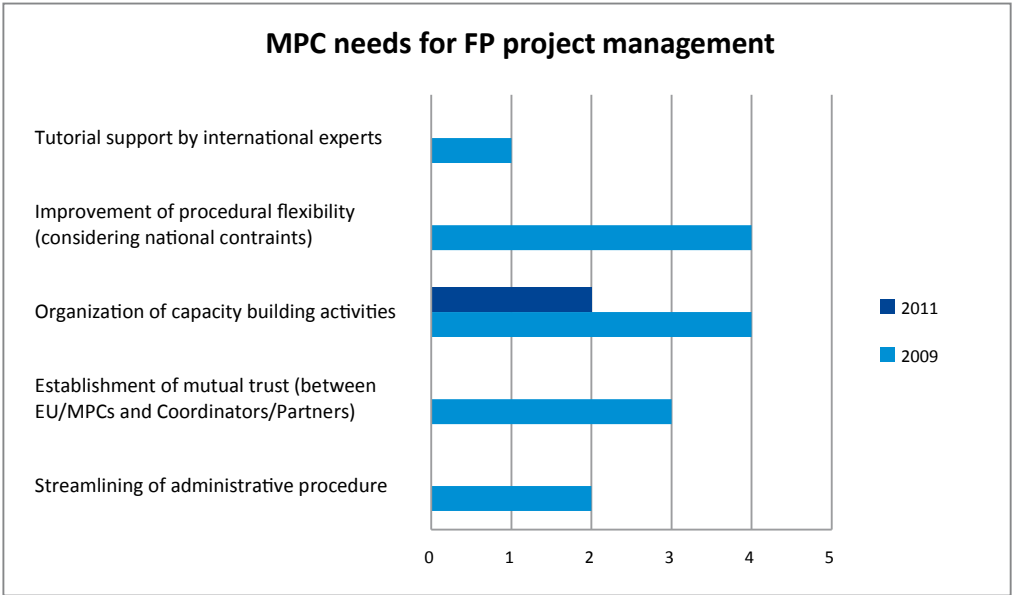


Figure 6. MPC main needs for FP project management.

Source: Compiled by C. Morini based on the results of the feedback questionnaires (2009 and 2011).

III – SUGGESTIONS

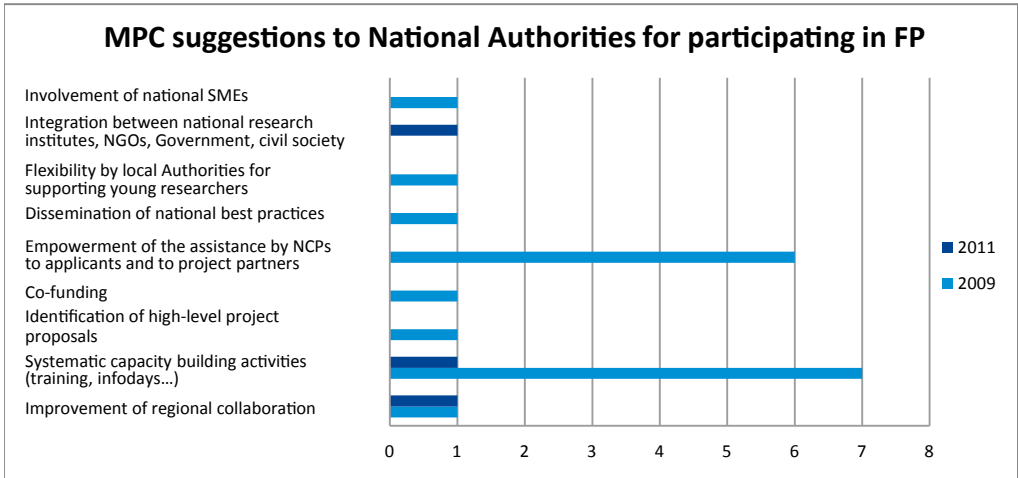


Figure 7. MPC suggestions to National Authorities for participating in FP.

Source: Compiled by C. Morini based on the results of the feedback questionnaires (2009 and 2011).

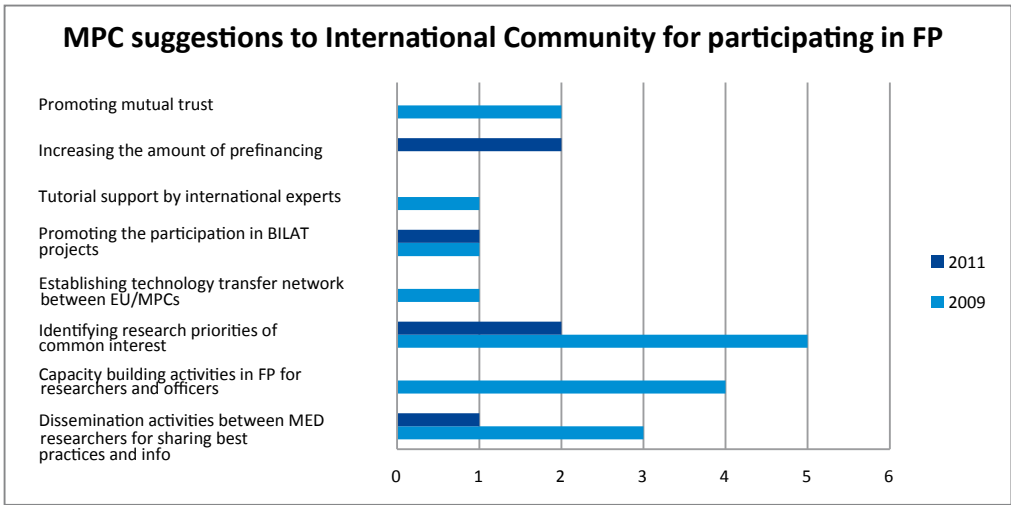


Figure 8. MPC suggestions to International Community for participating in FP.

Source: Compiled by C. Morini based on the results of the feedback questionnaires (2009 and 2011).