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Bridging Research and Development

Partnership Actions for Mitigating Syndromes (PAMS) in the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) North–South: Capitalising on Experience

Peter Messerli, Annika Salmi, Karl Herweg, Franziska Pfister, Thomas Breu

NCCR North–South Dialogue, no. 17

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The present study was carried out at the following partner institution of the NCCR North-South:



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On a vanilla farm, India. (Photos by Frank Haupt, 2005)

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1 Summary

During Phase 1 of the NCCR North-South, Partnership Actions for Mitigating Syndromes (PAMS) were designed as a programme component that would make it possible to implement, test, and validate research outcomes through short-term partnership actions involving researchers and concerned societies. In line with conceptual refinements of the NCCR North-South programme, the PAMS component was specified to focus on syndrome mitigation (finding solutions to problems of non-sustainable development), knowledge dialogue and social learning (exploring and using potentials and social processes that enable sustainable development), and transdisciplinary research (contributing to transdisciplinary knowledge generation) in Phase 2.

In view of this conceptual refinement, it proved necessary to learn as much as possible from the experience of past PAMS projects. To this aim, a capitalisation on experience with PAMS was conducted, covering 75% of all PAMS implemented during Phase 1 and collecting data from project implementers, researchers and beneficiaries through qualitative interviews based on a comprehensive questionnaire.

The results show that direct mitigation through PAMS was (and will remain) difficult to achieve since PAMS are not designed as development projects. Instead, PAMS bridge the gap between research and development, enabling a knowledge dialogue between scientific and local communities, generating new knowledge on development issues and thereby mutually benefiting research and society. By encouraging social learning processes, PAMS offer an opportunity to explore mitigation and development pathways with all stakeholders concerned and thus taking into account the differing needs and conflicting agendas of the various stakeholder groups. Collaboration of civil society and different scientific disciplines within each PAMS should ensure a comprehensive perspective on the issues addressed and a truly transdisciplinary approach. Such experience may provide information on how transdisciplinary research can benefit sustainable development, and will at the same time contribute to further development of transdisciplinarity.

The survey also shows that the role of the researcher in a transdisciplinary project has to be reflected on with great care and openly communicated to the partners. As a result, in the local setting, the researcher will mostly be considered as neutral and could thus perform a mediating function between other stakeholder groups. However, the researcher will also raise expectations, and her/his scientific knowledge might be considered a “final instance”. She/he should therefore pay attention to keeping a balance between contributing knowledge on the one hand, and facilitating dialogue and learning between stakeholder groups on the other.

In order to derive maximum benefit from PAMS experience, outcome monitoring will be given more weight in the future. Short and medium-term outcome shall be monitored, with a view to exploring how PAMS help find promising development pathways and how the PAMS component contributes to the overall aims of the NCCR North-South.

2 Introduction

2.1 The Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) North–South

Since 2001 the NCCR North-South international research partnership programme has been conducting research on “Mitigating Syndromes of Global Change” in nine regions of the world, including Switzerland. The NCCR North-South is one of 20 long-term research programmes implemented by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). It is jointly funded by the SNSF, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the participating research institutions.

Within a network of Swiss and foreign research institutions, the NCCR North-South promotes high-quality disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research with the aim of exploring solutions to the most urgent problems of developing and transition countries. The NCCR North-South specifically focuses on fostering research capacity in its partnership regions in the South and East in order to empower them to tackle development problems independently.

Overall goals of the NCCR North–South

- *Research goal:* To conduct disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research aiming to promote sustainable development and mitigate syndromes of global change.
- *Capacity development goal:* To help strengthen institutions, primarily by building individual competence and capacity for developing socially robust knowledge for mitigation action.
- *Empowerment goal:* To support societies in partner countries and institutions in their efforts to address syndromes in their regions and find means to mitigate them.
- *Structural goal:* To develop a Swiss Network of Excellence in Sustainable Development Research with high international recognition and linkage, and based on individual Centres of Excellence in research partnerships and on formal inter-university training at post-graduate levels in Switzerland.

Research in the NCCR North-South is carried out in five Work Packages. The four thematic Work Packages each cover three research themes, and their activities are carried out in several partnership regions. Usually, two Swiss partner institutions cooperate in a Work Package, which is a major integrating element within the NCCR North-South. The fifth Work Package (Transversal Package) further develops the theoretical, conceptual and methodological foundations of the programme and carries out integrative research in eight projects led by senior and promising post-doc researchers aspiring to an academic career.

In Phase 2 of the NCCR North-South, the Swiss partner institutions are conducting research in the following thematic fields with partner institutions in the South and East:

1. Governance and conflict
2. Livelihood options and globalisation
3. Health and environmental sanitation
4. Natural resources in sustainable development
5. Syndrome mitigation and its scientific foundations

Since development research should be application oriented, the NCCR North-South has developed a strong transfer component: the Partnership Actions for Mitigating Syndromes (PAMS). The PAMS programme component contributes to the fulfilment of the NCCR North-South's overall goals (namely the research, capacity development and empowerment goals, cf. page 5). Consisting of small projects with limited finances and duration, PAMS aim to explore strategies for mitigating negative effects of global change, which are characterised by core problems of non-sustainable development. The PAMS concept is based on the assumptions that merging scientific and non-scientific knowledge produces added value, and that transdisciplinary research can play an important role in finding solutions to problems of non-sustainable development, if it triggers social learning processes which can ultimately lead to societal change.

2.2 Background and rationale

During Phase 1 of the NCCR North-South, PAMS were designed as a programme component that would make it possible to implement, test, and validate research outcomes through short-term partnership actions involving researchers and concerned societies. Correspondingly, projects were selected according to criteria such as 'expected mitigation effect on problems of non-sustainable development', 'driven by the demand of involved stakeholders', 'complementarities to NCCR North-South research', etc. Subsequently, a total of 55 projects were implemented during the first 4-year phase of the programme, leading to a great diversity of projects in terms of topic, partnership settings, geographical location, etc.

Towards the end of Phase 1, the framework of the NCCR North-South underwent a conceptual refinement. Starting from an initial focus on problems of non-sustainable development, the concept was extended to include potentials and societal processes that support sustainable development. Accordingly, the PAMS component was adapted to focus on syndrome mitigation, knowledge dialogue and social learning, and (transdisciplinary) research.

In order to capitalise on experience gained in Phase 1, an evaluation of the past PAMS projects was conducted. The questions posed were:

- a. What contributions have past projects made with regard to syndrome mitigation, knowledge dialogue and social learning, and (transdisciplinary) research?
- b. What lessons can be drawn from this experience, and what recommendations can be made for implementation of PAMS during Phase 2?

The present paper encompasses a brief consideration of the applied approach and methodology of the evaluation, major findings with regard to the three PAMS focus areas, and conclusions and outlook for PAMS during Phase 2 of the NCCR North-South.

2.3 Approach and methodology

With a view to developing an appropriate approach and methodology for collecting and evaluating the necessary information on past PAMS projects, the following challenges were faced:

- Because the relevant issues only became apparent in the course of Phase 1, the interviewees would not always be able to fully respond to the questions posed;
- Due to the aim to compile information and assessments from as wide a range of participants as possible, including researchers, project implementers and beneficiaries, the factors to be analysed were large in number and highly divergent in nature;
- The wide geographic dispersion of the PAMS (including 40 projects in 8 geographic regions, called Joint Areas of Case Studies or JACS), would create a number of logistical problems for the conduct of personal interviews with the project participants.

Against this background, the Management Centre (MC) team concluded that it was not realistic to develop a standardised questionnaire that would allow for quantitative analysis of data. Instead, it was decided to develop a questionnaire for a structured interview that took into account the great diversity of interviewees. The interviews were mainly conducted by the Regional Coordinators in the respective JACS. In some cases, however, additional consultants had to be hired to cover countries in other parts of the JACS. A wealth of information was then collected through the interviews, and produced a considerable backflow of 140 interviews to the Management Centre. This made it possible to cover 75% of all completed PAMS projects from different perspectives. In order to grasp the diversity of information, the interviews were analysed using ATLAS/ti software. This programme is based on a coding system of citations that allows combining a bottom-up (inductive) approach deemed necessary by the wealth of interesting data with a top-down (deductive) approach guided by the questions relevant to Phase 2.

When assessing the applied approach and methodology in retrospect, we recognised the following limitations:

- The “chain of transmission” from the MC to the RC to the interviewees was not optimal. More background information would have been necessary to assure an optimal translation of the questions and their precise meaning. This led to certain distortions in the answers.
- Interview partners occasionally had difficulty accepting the purpose behind the questions and presumed that their responses would be determinant for judging the quality of their work; this sometimes led to overly optimistic responses that masked critical issues.
- The wealth and diversity of data contained a lot of interesting information that was not very easy to aggregate into generalised statements.

Despite these obstacles, the approach and methodology made it possible to achieve the aim of compiling the most important lessons learnt, with a view to refining and improving the PAMS component in Phase 2.

3 Results

According to the newly established principles, data were collected on the PAMS' contributions to 1) syndrome mitigation, 2) knowledge dialogue and social learning, and 3) transdisciplinary research, the analysis of which was conducted by different researchers. This chapter summarises the main findings of the evaluation and draws direct conclusions in each area.

3.1 Contribution to syndrome mitigation

The orientation of PAMS projects towards syndrome mitigation was already an important focus at the onset of the programme. Correspondingly, all projects were attributed in hindsight to so-called core problems of non-sustainable development, which were identified in the course of Phase 1. Interestingly, all projects addressed 2 or more such core problems simultaneously, which confirms the basic assumption of the NCCR North-South that sustainability problems occur in clusters and should be addressed with this in mind when mitigation approaches are being sought. The clusters of core problems most frequently identified by the different PAMS were as follows:

- Clusters of core problems within each scientific realm (e.g. different problems of population and livelihood, biophysical and ecological, etc.);
- Specific core problems that showed frequent combinations with almost all other core problems, namely Number 4 (inadequate legal frameworks...), Number 6 (governance failures...), Number 12 (fragile economic systems...), and Number 15 (poverty and livelihood insecurity...).
- Other clusters manifested frequent combinations of core problems between (i) the 'population and livelihoods' and 'political and institutional' realms, (ii) between problems linked to infrastructure (water supply, health- and socio-economic services) and the 'political and institutional' realm, and (iii) between problems related to land use, resource access and poverty.

It should be recalled that PAMS were never assumed to be development projects aiming at the greatest possible mitigation of a certain problem of non-sustainable development. The labels "pilot activities" and "mitigation experiments" were used in Phase 1 to express the basic idea of searching for innovative solutions. The evaluation has shown that not all PAMS projects by far conformed to this idea. Many project designs were shaped either by demand from (mostly local) partners to respond to a concrete problem, or by an opportunity to put scientific knowledge into practice. These differences proved to be crucial when it came to assessing the impacts of the projects, as well as their expected and non-expected effects. It was shown that all projects had quite a limited potential to directly mitigate problems of non-sustainable development. On the one hand, projects could only intervene at a very limited (and mostly local) scale. In some cases, their apparent success even created other problems outside the predefined system boundaries. On the other hand, modest resources and short project durations did not allow for a durable effect, unless projects were embedded in ongoing development activities or as parts of an overall strategy (e.g. JACS), striving for sustainable development.

Table 1: List of core problems of non-sustainable development identified in 9 regions of the world with a focus on the hypothesised highland-lowland, urban-peri-urban and semi-arid syndrome contexts. Source: Hurni et al., eds., 2004.

Scientific realm	Core Problems of non-sustainable development	
Political and institutional	1	Weak international geopolitical position and negotiation power
	2	Dominating and conflicting world views and ethical values
	3	Contradictory policies and weak formal institutions at different levels
	4	Inadequate legal framework and regulations, lack of enforcement and means
	5	Erosion of traditional and/or indigenous institutions
	6	Governance failures, insufficient empowerment and decentralisation
	7	Unequal distribution of power and resources, corruption
Socio-cultural and economic	8	Social, cultural and ethnic tension and insecurity
	9	Prevalence of crime, violence and violent conflicts
	10	Unused or constrained innovative capacities and knowledge
	11	High socio-economic and gender disparities
	12	Incompatible economic systems with limited market and employment opportunities
	13	Dominance of the global economy over national development
Population and livelihoods	14	Constraints on human rights and individual development potential
	15	Poverty and insecurity of livelihoods
	16	Risks of diseases and vulnerability to health
	17	Population pressure and multi-dimensional migration
	18	Unfavourable dynamics and imbalances in socio-demographic structures
Infrastructure, services and land use	19	Poor water supply and environmental sanitation
	20	Lack of adequate infrastructure and its management such as transport, energy and irrigation
	21	Limited and inadequate socio-economic services such as education, health and markets
	22	Discrimination with regard to information and communication flows and technologies
	23	Inequitable ownership and access to land-, natural- and common property resources
	24	Inadequate and conflicting land use systems and technologies
Bio-physical and ecological	25	Inadequate availability of freshwater
	26	Degradation of land, soil and vegetation cover
	27	Degradation of forest and natural habitats
	28	Pollution and overuse of renewable and non-renewable natural resources
	29	Loss of biological and agro-biological diversity
	30	Risks of natural and human-induced hazards and climate change

However, when appraising other expected and unexpected effects of the PAMS, it could be clearly shown that projects designed to explore innovative problem-solving mechanisms were by far the most promising ones. Interaction between researchers, implementers and beneficiaries resulted in the creation of organisational development and solidarity, the establishment of new networks, dialogue between people with different knowledge backgrounds, and promotion of local initiatives and leadership. These achievements represent the aspect of “mitigation pathways,” part of the NCCR North-South syndrome mitigation concept. Mitigation pathways consist not only of problems but also of potentials and social processes that enable more sustainable development. The involvement of researchers was crucial in these achievements, not only because of the scientific inputs provided, but also because academics have less directly at stake and hence played an important role in gaining the confidence of different actors and establishing new networks.

Based on these findings, the following conclusions can be drawn with respect to the PAMS’ mitigation focus:

- The PAMS’ focus on mitigation impact should be gradually replaced by increased orientation towards the exploration of innovative mitigation potentials and pathways.
- Concrete mitigation of core problems should, however, continue to serve as a guiding principle. Since medium and long-term impact cannot be assured by a PAMS itself, it should be sought through embedding the project in larger ongoing development activities.
- Successful PAMS can best be realised if they are preceded by a thorough trans-disciplinary analysis of the problem context. This aspect points up the importance of embedding the projects in the JACS strategy.
- The exploration of mitigation pathways necessitates the contribution of different scientific disciplines. Increased integration of different research fields within a single PAMS should therefore be promoted. Again, this can be enhanced by an innovative JACS strategy integrating various research and PAMS components.

3.2 Initiating knowledge dialogue and social learning

When developing its original research proposal, the NCCR North-South was requested to develop a concept related to Knowledge and Technology Transfer. As scientific and non-scientific knowledge systems are equally important and necessary to explore innovative solutions to problems of non-sustainable development, it soon became clear that research collaboration to promote sustainable development cannot consist of mere transfer of knowledge and technology. Rather, a “knowledge dialogue” should be established in order to assure that mutual learning and joint knowledge generation are guided by the need of the involved actors.

In order to ensure that such a dialogue is fruitful, it must be embedded in a social learning process, fostering not only knowledge in the sense of cognitive competence, but also social and emotional competence, leading to changes in attitude, intentions and behaviour, and resulting in networks and partnerships of mutual trust, shared values, and norms. If these

changes enter the organisational level they may eventually initiate changes in socio-economic and political systems, allowing for more sustainable development.

The evaluation of Phase 1 projects looked at how knowledge dialogue proceeded within PAMS and sought to answer the following questions: Did scientific and non-scientific knowledge systems converge and form a new cosmos of knowledge relevant to sustainable development? What were the good and what were the bad practices involved in knowledge exchange, and what conditions promoted knowledge dialogue and social learning?

The analysis of the collected data showed that knowledge dialogue was not the result of a convergence of knowledge systems to form a new cosmos of knowledge. Rather, dialogue developed during the meeting of actors representing different knowledge systems, leading to complementary and new knowledge.

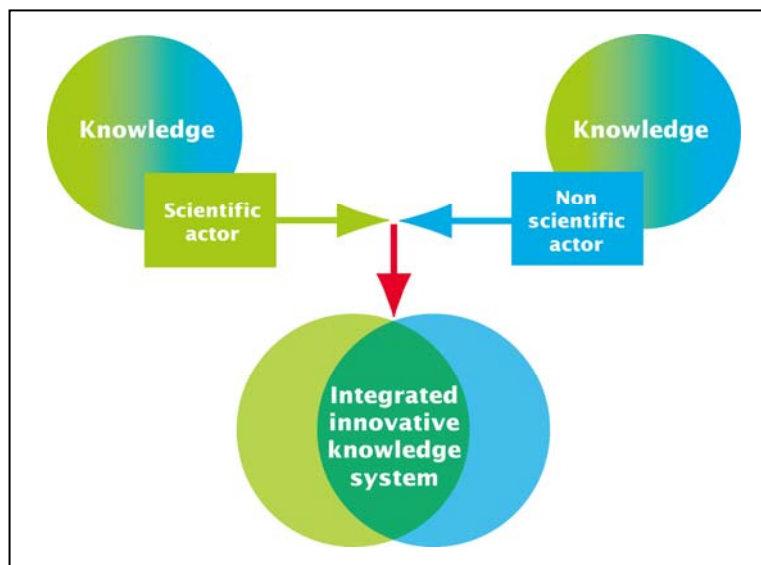


Figure 1: Knowledge dialogue between scientific and non-scientific actors

In the first step of a successful knowledge dialogue, the meeting of different actors led to becoming acquainted with other actors' knowledge. This related not only to information, but also to understanding, reasoning, attitude, and mode of communication. In a second step, the meeting of different actors led to self-reflection about their individual knowledge. This made it possible to position their knowledge in a broader context, and to identify limitations and areas of ignorance. In a third step, individuals' knowledge was enhanced and new knowledge was acquired. The enhancement was thus not restricted to learning from other actors' knowledge. Rather, it was observed that through interaction with others, the involved actors learned considerably from and about themselves.

The quality of the knowledge dialogue described above was decisive for new knowledge to be acquired. Practices which were conducive to knowledge dialogue, and social learning generally, are characterised by specific settings, methods, and means of communication.

In terms of setting, positive experience was garnered with participatory meetings, workshops and discussions, field visits and exchange visits. As to methods, participa-

tory methods such as participatory problem appraisal, action plan development and participatory mapping, learning by doing, group learning and visualisations were found to be most promising. In terms of communication, the important role of local language and metaphors was underlined. Further, the use of theatre and art was found very useful for stimulating learning and initiating dialogue.

In general, direct interaction, face-to-face contacts, and personal encounters in rather informal settings were regarded as successful in fostering mutual learning among different stakeholders, while very formal approaches such as lectures, written information and top-down instructions, as well as large and formal meetings, seemed to have less positive effect.

The attitudes and the competence of the involved actors proved to be the key to the quality of knowledge dialogue, and therefore to the success of social learning. Concerning scientific actors, it was observed that many were not well enough prepared to participate in such a knowledge dialogue. Major deficiencies were identified in interdisciplinary competence, sensitivity to political issues, suspicion, and lack of communication skills and interpersonal skills.

Based on these findings, the following conclusions with respect to knowledge dialogue and social learning processes within PAMS can be drawn:

- PAMS proposals should refer to the project's conduciveness to social learning processes. Special consideration should be given to the setting chosen, the methods to be applied, including communication tools, as well as to the principal partners involved and their respective competence.
- PAMS proposals should make strategic choices with regard to the involvement of different actors. Involving actors and organisations beyond the local context may multiply social learning, thereby enhancing the potential for identifying syndrome mitigation pathways, and helping to minimise organisational and bureaucratic obstacles which often block innovations developed at the local level.
- The NCCR North-South should pursue its efforts to strengthen researchers' competence in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary communication as well as social and emotional competence in general. Face-to-face training courses provided through the Education and Training component could offer an ideal platform for developing such skills.

3.3 Improving transdisciplinary research

Among other things, PAMS were designed to be an opportunity for gaining experience with and improving transdisciplinarity within the NCCR. They are broadly understood as a form of collaboration within scientific fields (namely the natural and social sciences), and as a form of continuous dialogue between the research community and society. It is assumed that such an approach will be an asset in a research-based search for solutions to complex problems of everyday life related to development and the environment (Wiesmann, 2006). Despite the expectation - stipulated in the initial guidelines - that PAMS projects should complement NCCR North-South research, only a minority can be considered transdisciplinary projects. The evaluation of Phase 1 projects revealed that only about half of the PAMS analysed explicitly manifested a mutual exchange between researchers and society, while the others could be described as modest development actions or participatory research projects. Concerning the projects which manifested closer exchanges between the research community and society, further reservations must be stated. Most PAMS involved only one specific field of research and clearly lacked interdisciplinary cooperation, while in others knowledge was transferred mainly unilaterally from the scientific community to society, without society having any effect on science. However, some PAMS generated new research ideas and served as “mind openers” for scientists. There are even a few cases of PAMS strongly influencing ongoing research projects, leading to modifications or refinement in the research approach, theory, hypotheses or research questions.

Even if concrete experience with transdisciplinary approaches was rather scarce, the wealth of interactions described still makes it possible to draw on important lessons for transdisciplinary processes. The most crucial aspect discussed concerns the role of researchers when participating in a project with non-scientific actors such as the implementers (usually Civil Society Organisations) and beneficiaries. Based on the data collected, we observed that the role of researchers within PAMS – be it from their own perception or from the perception of other partners involved – was positioned on a spectrum with the role of a ‘classical expert’ at one end and an actor, who could also be called a ‘participatory observer’, at the other. By acting as teachers, the researchers described as ‘classical experts’ contributed a great deal of scientific knowledge but neglected to engage in dialogue with the other participants and to facilitate mutual learning. By contrast, the researchers described as ‘participatory observers’ were careful not to dominate communication and thereby often neglected their responsibility to contribute their scientific knowledge. It was concluded that researchers will have to find a way to contribute their (scientific) knowledge and at the same time stimulate dialogue and mutual learning between all actors (cf. figure 2). As researchers often have implicit power by virtue of their academic position, their participation in a project will raise expectations with respect to their contributions. In order to deal with such expectations, the position of researchers in a transdisciplinary research process and the role they can and want to play have to be discussed and clarified with partners.

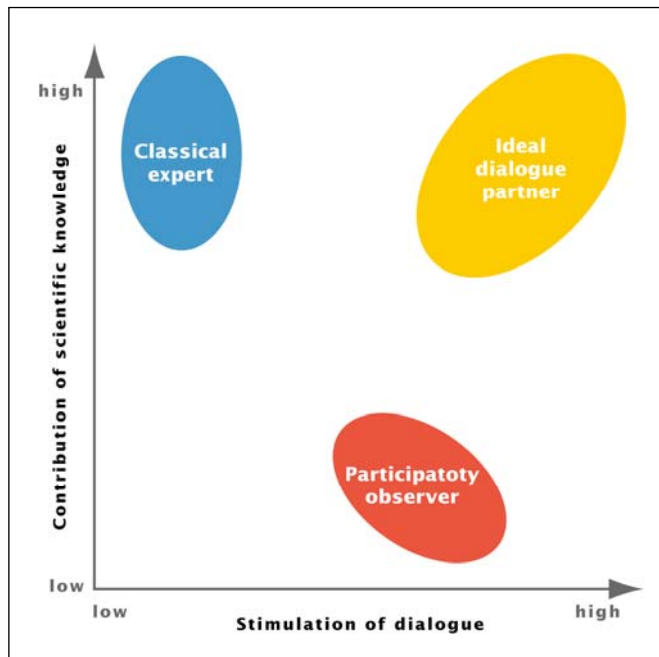


Figure 2: Roles of researchers in a transdisciplinary research process

Based on these findings, the following conclusions with respect to PAMS' contribution to transdisciplinary research within the NCCR North-South can be drawn:

- So far, PAMS have not fully been able to serve as a platform for transdisciplinary research and practice. A closer connection to research should strengthen the transdisciplinary approach of PAMS.
- Most important, improvements should be sought in enhancing scientific collaboration within PAMS beyond single disciplines, while at the same time ensuring equitable collaboration among the beneficiaries during the full process of a PAMS.
- The role of researchers should increasingly be characterised by a meaningful use of power, while at the same time concretely contributing to knowledge dialogue. This may also be seen as a responsibility of researchers towards the other partners involved.
- A transparent normative position of researchers is a precondition for precise definition of their role. The NCCR North-South should address this issue through its Education and Training component and offer corresponding platforms for dialogue and exchange during training events.

4 Conclusions and Outlook

4.1 Conclusions

Experience with PAMS during Phase 1 of the NCCR North-South showed that even though PAMS might well have a mitigation effect in selected areas, it is usually not possible to attain lasting change in the course of a project. It is thus advisable to shift from the PAMS' focus on direct mitigation to a focus on finding pathways of mitigation, consisting of potentials and social processes that enable more sustainable development.

Considering their short duration, PAMS cannot be development projects. Nevertheless, they focus on practical applications for developing societies. In close connection with research, PAMS can test approaches, methods and tools in order to identify promising strategies for syndrome mitigation and sustainable development, and capitalise on results and experience for optimising transdisciplinary research. In order to guarantee this mutual enrichment involving the research community and society, it is imperative to ensure close connection of each PAMS with an ongoing research project and embed it in an overall JACS strategy.

However, in view of the partnership aspect of PAMS, benefits for all stakeholders need to be equally considered. While research in the NCCR North-South benefits directly from validation or evaluation of research results and development of new approaches and methods, the stakeholders in the field do not benefit unless they can make direct use of positive findings in the long run. The PAMS should therefore aim to create opportunities for concrete application wherever possible. In order to ensure at least some continuity of project activities that are found useful by beneficiaries, it seems vital to integrate PAMS into ongoing projects, programmes or initiatives in the field.

Irrespective of the content and aim of a PAMS, social learning proved to play a key role in the process of the project. PAMS which not only applied new knowledge or technology but involved people in a mutual learning process, in which not only knowledge but also perceptions and experiences were exchanged, proved to be by far the most promising ones in terms of effective change towards more sustainable practices. Social learning indeed seems to be a precondition for change, since it goes beyond acquiring information by triggering changes in attitudes, values and rules.

Social learning also seems to be a precondition for fruitful transdisciplinary research, in the process of which different actor groups with different knowledge backgrounds interact to jointly generate new knowledge. This process can only be successful if robust social and emotional competence is available, and the role which each participant can and wants to play is openly communicated and generally accepted.

In terms of duration and resources, a PAMS has only limited possibilities to offer a platform for practising transdisciplinarity. As transdisciplinarity combines problem definition, a search for solutions, and implementation in a recurring cycle, disconnecting the traditional sequence of perception and action, other programme components or research programmes outside the NCCR North-South will have to support such long-term collaboration.

4.2 Outlook

To fully capitalise on the experience of PAMS in Phase 2, the link between the PAMS programme and Knowledge Management in the NCCR North-South has been strengthened. A close connection to Education and Training will further ensure the backflow of results from PAMS into the training of researchers, thereby strengthening the transdisciplinary approach of the NCCR North-South. To this end a PAMS training module is being developed.

For future monitoring and evaluation, a sequenced outcome monitoring is being institutionalised. In a first step, a revised final report form will capture the most important lessons learned and short-term outcomes of a PAMS, specifically assessing social learning processes initiated through the PAMS. At a later stage, one or two years after termination of the project, it is foreseen that the medium-term outcome of a project will be assessed. This will be done through questionnaires, site visits or workshops, focusing on changes in stakeholders' practices and achievements in syndrome mitigation on the one hand, and the PAMS' contribution to (transdisciplinary) research on the other hand. The Regional Coordinators will play a central role in this process. As they fully understand the conceptual intentions of the PAMS programme as well as the concrete project contexts, they will be important bridging actors. On the one hand, they will be important back-stoppers for the design of projects, together with potential partners. On the other hand, they will also serve as crucial resource persons for capitalising on experience garnered in the JACS, to the benefit of the entire NCCR North-South programme.

Considering the potentials of PAMS, linking each PAMS to an ongoing research project has become a precondition for acceptance in Phase 2. This linkage not only contributes to research in the NCCR North-South, but also ensures the personal involvement of researchers in the PAMS, thereby generating transdisciplinary experiences. In order to strengthen the PAMS' function as platforms for transdisciplinary practice, collaboration between different disciplines within a single PAMS is further encouraged.

Based on the above conclusions, the concept of the PAMS programme has been modified, assigning social learning processes a pivotal role within the projects. This is not to rank social learning processes first as an aim, but to allow for the particular role of social learning as a means or way to enhanced (transdisciplinary) research and sustainable development. This change in focus is reflected in a revised PAMS proposal form, which requires planning for mutual learning and dialogue from the onset and a careful selection of appropriate settings, methods and communication tools to be applied.

The PAMS Principles and Procedures will continually be adapted in response to experience with the projects in order to optimise operational and administrative procedures, improve the quality of PAMS projects, and enhance the relevance of the PAMS component in the NCCR North-South.

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After an initial four-year phase, the PAMS projects implemented to date were evaluated in order to learn about their potentials and limits, as well as to decide on the direction of the component for the next phase of the programme. The present publication presents the results of this evaluation.

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