



Exploration activities with Latin America (2013-2016)
Seminar on 2015 Seed Money projects with Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru

“Encouraging Swiss scientific collaboration with Latin America:
How to take Seed Money projects to the next level?”

Thursday, 17 November 2016

Wrap-Up by Dr. Gabriela Tejada, Programme Leader EPFL Leading House

A word of thanks

Let me start by offering my thanks to all the participants - from the enthusiastic presenters to the members of the audience - including those who have travelled from Latin America. I would like to thank our special panellists, Stéphanie Boder-Pasche and Tristan Piguët, and I would also like to say thank you to the moderator from the Association of Colombian Researchers in Switzerland - ACIS, Nicolas Mora. I want to extend special thanks to the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation - SERI, represented here today by Roger Swifcz.

I will not even attempt to make any conclusions or a wrap-up of all that has been discussed today. I would like to share a few observations with you instead.

1. Mutual interest

The response to this event is a good indicator of the interest that exists as far as intensifying cooperation with Latin America is concerned as well the potential that it offers. It is clear that Seed Money is an instrument that responds to a genuine mutual interest on the part of Swiss researchers and their partners in the focus countries. Wherever it has been necessary, partners have managed to mobilize funds to implement their projects (from universities and research institutions mostly, and to a lesser extent, from national funding agencies). Their contributions are testimony to their interest and their commitment. At this stage we need to see how national funding agencies can get involved and help to maintain the momentum of the ongoing collaborations and reinforce the prospects of these: bottom-up interest and engagement needs to be backed by top-down support.

2. Usefulness of the Seed Money grant

The words of Daniel Núñez, one of the Latin American partners in the projects presented here today, could not be clearer: “This kind of collaboration works”. We can see indeed how the Seed Money grants mainly help in four aspects that are crucial for the prospects of the projects:

- It makes it possible to carry out preliminary research through field work in order to gather data and validate the initial hypotheses.
- Granted researchers can test the partnership for one year and get to know each other better.
- Researchers have the chance to become better acquainted with the context and the local structures in which the projects are implemented.
- Partners benefit from an extension of their networks. The Seed Money grant has a scaling-up effect by involving a broader scientific community on both sides, Switzerland and the Latin American partner country (and sometimes even beyond), thereby impacting a wider critical mass in the areas of the funded projects. This increases the chances of ensuring the sustainability of the projects.

3. Impact and prospects

In my opinion, the Joint Research Projects should not be considered as the only proxy we aim at when we speak about “*Taking Seed Money projects to the next level*”. There are other models that can help move towards intensified and long-lasting bilateral collaboration. Examples of such models are mobility or exchange programmes for students and researchers, or the establishment of alliances with the industry for some projects with application/innovation potential.

4. Needs in terms of instruments

At this stage of exploration, future Seed Money grants and other pilot instruments should support various models of cooperation, such as, preliminary research projects, the organization of workshops and gatherings, the mobility of students and researchers in both directions. There is a particular need for instrument-supporting medium-scale projects (those that are beyond the scope of Seed Money but which are not yet ready to secure larger grants such as those from R4D, SNSF or the EU).

Take-aways

I would like to finish up by highlighting my 2 take-away points from this Seminar:

1. From the perspective of the EPFL Leading House mission, I am pleased to see that thus far we have been able to implement some thoughtful actions that have contributed to the advancement of the aims of the programme: this has benefited both the Swiss scientific community and the partners, and ultimately, this also benefits Swiss science and its international cooperation.
2. While there is a need for Seed Money grants and other funding instruments that can support the advancement of this kind of cooperation, we need to secure engagement and commitment from the partner countries, especially at a top-down level, in order to advance the process effectively. For this, the complexity of their socioeconomic realities and the political structures that influence their national science and research systems have to be understood. The particular priorities and conditions of each of the focus countries should be taken into consideration towards a more advanced bilateral cooperation.

Next steps to be taken

- The presentations will be uploaded to our website.
- The main points that have been discussed will be used to feed our recommendations to the SERI and our future action plan.
- We will encourage closer collaboration with the various Latin American scientific diaspora groups in order to evaluate their key role in this process and to increase the benefits for the exploratory mission.
- I would like to encourage you to stay in touch with us and to visit our website. You could also help us by feeding the website with some relevant information that might be useful to all of us as part of this network.