RIBDA-2009. XV Inter-American Meeting for Librarians and Agricultural Information Specialists, "Technological Innovation in Open Access for Agricultural and Environmental Information"

Peru, National Library, Lima - 27, 28, 29, October, 2009 http://www.aibdaperu.org/

NECOBELAC project: a collaboration network between Europe and Latin America for increasing awareness in scientific writing and open access to scholarly output in public health

Paola De Castro, Daniela Marsili, Elisabetta Poltronieri and the NECOBELAC Working Team*

* NECOBELAC Working Team: Istituto Superiore di Sanità (ISS, IT Coordinatore del Progetto) Paola De Castro, Elisabetta Poltronieri, Daniela Marsili; The University of Nottingham (UNOTT, UK) Bill Hubbard, Mary Robinson, Peter Millington; Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC, SP) Remedios Melero; Centro Latino Americano e do Caribe de Informação em Ciencias da Saude (BIREME BR) Abel L. Packer; Instituto de Salud Pública (ISP, CO) Carlos Agudelo Calderón, Rocío Robledo Martínez, Diony Pulido Ortega; Universidade do Minho (UMINHO, PT), Eloy Rodrigues, Ricardo Saraiva, José Carvalho; Key Perspectives Ltd (UK), Alma Swan; Universidad National de Educación a Distancia de Madrid (UNED, SP) Alicia López Medina.

ABSTRACT – The present paper presents and discusses the idea and the implementation plan of the NECOBELAC project to RIBDA (Reunión Interamericana de Bibliotecarios y Documentalistas y Especialistas en Información Agrícola) community in order to promote new collaborations and links to others initiatives. NECOBELAC is the acronym of "NEtwork of COllaboration Between Europe and Latin American Caribbean (LAC) countries", and the project aims at developing a network of collaboration to create awareness on scientific writing and dissemination, access, retrieval and use of health information in the two Continents. NECOBELAC is a three years project funded by the European Commission within the 7th Framework Program in the theme Science in Society. NECOBELAC is focused on two main targets: 1) the promotion of training initiatives intended to improve the scientific writing skills of all professionals working in the health-related areas and 2) the implementation of scholarly communication systems based on the concept of immediate, open and permanent access to research results. The six Partners involved in the Project represent academic and scientific institutions from European and Latin American countries (Italy - project coordinator -, UK, Spain, Portugal, Brazil, and Colombia), which have gained robust experience in providing information services and outcomes through collaboration networks at national and international level such as the Virtual Health Library (www.virtualhealthlibrary.org) and SciELO (www.scielo.br) in Latin America and SHERPA (www.sherpa.ac.uk) and DRIVER (www.driver-repository.eu) in Europe.

Agriculture is associated to public health not only as regards food safety and life styles, but also in connection with environmental issues in general. In this respect, NECOBELAC is presented to RIBDA Community to establish collaborations in order to develop the network and offer a flexible training model to be used at local level. FAO is already supporting the project, sharing experiences in e-learning programs.

INTRODUCTION

The betterment in production and dissemination of scientific information in the field of public health represents a shared commitment for the globalization of knowledge respecting the right to health. The promotion of dissemination initiatives in the area of public health and health-related disciplines based on Open Access (OA) to research results represent a common task (including technical and ethical issues) which involves an increasing number of scientific institutions and universities in Europe and Latin American countries.

To this goal collaboration networks have been created both in Europe and Latin America to promote the dissemination of scientific outputs.

According to an integrated approach to health, that relies on the WHO definition of health, concerning a psychophysical wellbeing associated with the environmental living conditions of individuals and populations, the association between public health and agriculture can be highlighted considering the impact of agricultural activities on occupational and environmental health for workers and communities, as well as the food safety for consumers worldwide. This also is closely related to the promotion of dissemination of health information to society.

NECOBELAC PROJECT: OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

NECOBELAC is a new project funded under the 7th Framework Program of the European Commission (2009-2012), within the theme Science in Society, and it is coordinated by the Italian National Health Institute (ISS - Istituto Superiore di Sanità, www.iss.it). NECOBELAC is the acronym of "Network of Collaboration Between Europe and Latin American-Caribbean Countries" and the Project is aimed to promote training activities in scientific writing and to strengthen the dissemination of information according to the scientific communication model based on Open Access (OA) to research results. The action area is public health.

The essential goal of NECOBELAC is to promote a bidirectional exchange between Europe-Latin America/Caribbean Countries, which will overcome the Eurocentric vision relying on an unidirectional transfer of knowledge towards Latin America. The creation of a network among the involved research institutions and universities in Europe and Latin American and Caribbean countries and its implementation through the establishment of new collaborations are tools to improve the knowledge of local needs and skills in order to better focus and finalize the project objectives.

All NECOBELAC partners play a significant role within the OA community at both national and international level. They are: the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (ISS) Italy, the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) Spain, the University of Nottingham (UNOTT) United Kingdom, BIREME/PAHO, Brasil, the Instituto de Salud Pública (ISP) Colombia, the Universidade do Minho (UMINHO), Portugal.

Key Perspectives Ltd., United Kingdom and the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia de Madrid (UNED), Spain are involved in the Project respectively for the evaluation of project activities and for the planning of training initiatives.

Each partner contributes to the NECOBELAC work program with its expertise and infrastructures.

The ISS (www.iss.it) promoted the core idea of the Project, acting as both producer and publisher of scientific information in public health (the ISS research staff produces about 1,600 published papers per year and its own institutional publications include a quarterly peer-reviewed journal, a monthly newsletter and a series of technical reports). Since 2006, the institutional repository of the ISS has been setting up, complying to OA principles (DSpace ISS http://dspace.iss.it/dspace/). It is operating as a focal point for the scientific papers produced by the Italian research institutions in the biomedical area (currently holds more than 25.000 items).

Project partners are actively involved in the main networks created for scientific dissemination both in Latin America (Virtual Health Library www.virtualhealthlibrary.org, SciELO www.scielo.br/) and in Europe (SHERPA www.sherpa.ac.uk DRIVER www.driver-repository.eu). Moreover, several Project partners have institutional roles in the European Association of Science Editors (EASE www.ease.ac.org). At a global level, NECOBELAC training initiatives are likely to benefit of the sound experience gained by the FAO in the field of e-learning programs.

This background contributed to raise common expectations towards the idea of integrating the existing initiatives in the health information services as those provided by the National Library of Medicine in the framework of the Medline system. Moreover, the existence of collaborative initiatives carried on by the Partners favoured a progressive aggregation of experts and institutions oriented towards a democratization of knowledge, particularly in the field of public health and health-related disciplines.

This working methodology represents one of the key elements of the NECOBELAC project because it is consistent with a cultural change in the production and dissemination of scientific information, not limited to a mere integration of infrastructures. The wealth and variety of the informative resources available in the two Continents enable the cooperation network by guaranteeing mutual benefits to all the involved countries and by promoting new collaborative research activities.

This aspect characterises the key feature of the Project. All Partners contribute to the all planned project activities, proportionally to their commitments in each working packages, in order to guarantee awareness and collaboration among them during the different Project steps.

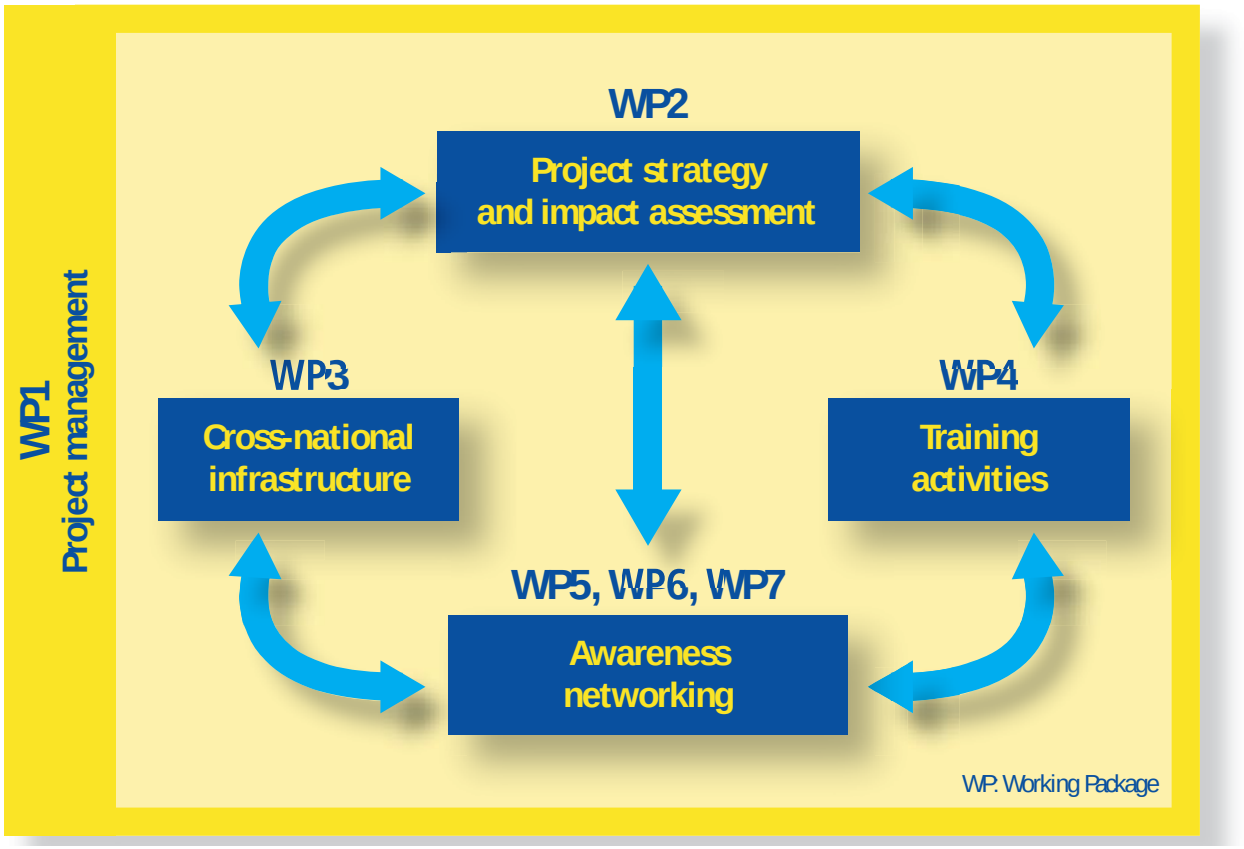

Figure 1. Work flow of project activities emphasizing their connections.

NECOBELAC structure is organised in the following working packages (WP).
WP1 - Project Management (coordinated by Istituto Superiore di Sanità).
WP2 - Project Strategy and Impact Assessment (coordinated by Istituto Superiore di Sanità).
WP3 - Cross-National Advocacy Infrastructure (coordinated by University of Nottingham).
WP4 - Training Activities (coordinated by Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas).
WP5 -Promoting the Project Infrastructure to Guarantee its Usage in EU-LAC Countries (coordinated by Universidade do Minho).
WP6 - Networking LAC-EUROPE Countries (coordinated by BIREME- PAHO).
WP7 -Focus on Health-Related structures in LAC Countries (coordinated by Instiuto de Salud Pública).
A detailed description of the WP activities is available in the project website (www.neconelac.eu).
The shared operative strategy, the constant evaluation of its impact throughout all the Project activities (WP2), together with the web infrastructure (WP3) and the training activities (WP4) have been thought as deeply

integrated with the tasks of WP5, WP6 and WP7. The objectives of these three last WPs are intended for creating awareness about the Project scope as regards the importance of networking institutions to achieve the Project goals. All Project activities are coordinated in order to be performed simultaneously, with slight differences in their starting time.
Moreover, an external evaluation panel of experts on scientific writing and OA communication models has been envisaged, to guarantee the quality of the performed Project activities.

The NECOBELAC work flow (Figure 1) relies on the concept of networking as a core element of the whole Project mission. The joint efforts of all Partners and their background of experiences represent an investment aimed at launching and stimulating new collaborative activities.

The identification of a well-focused operative strategy able to meet the specific information/training needs in this domain is ensured by NECOBELAC focussing on the specific sector of public health. This favours the interconnections with health-related disciplines to promote scientific knowledge as well as to improve health information dissemination on these issues to both the involved sector operators and general public.

The present initial phase of NECOBELAC Project is characterised by the implementation of a training course prototype conceived in terms of adaptability and flexibility to different settings. A survey though a questionnaire has been performed in order to know the different local setting and to obtain an initial scenario of all the institutions that might be potentially involved in Europe, Latin America and Caribbean countries. According to the specific needs revealed by the survey, training coursed are addressed to teaching staff of each institution involved. In the subsequent phases of the project, the trained teacher staff will adopt the prototype courses to train authors of scientific publications at local level.

In order to facilitate the communication and the availability of the NECOBELAC contents, particularly those concerning the training initiatives, the Project website (www.necobelac.eu) has been working as the main project infrastructure.

EXPECTED RESULTS AND IMPACT

NECOBELAC is a three years project and its results will be provided as activity reports, training course prototypes, online residential training courses, production of teaching materials, pilot program for the implementation of digital archives OA compliant, etc.

A grid of indicators will be set in order to collect all the information relevant to the capacity of each involved institution to produce scientific publications in public health and to disseminate them through the net. This will allow us to easily monitor the progress achieved through the project in terms of performed training courses, number and type of scientific publications issued and posted on to institutional repositories, free access to online journals, establishments of new collaborations, etc.

The Project has been promoting the launch of new international collaborations just since the first step, not only through training programs on scientific writing and OA models to reach scientific information, but also through a network of health institutions working on common goals with the intention that this will continue even after the conclusion of the Project. The ultimate expected objective is the long-term use of the materials and services provided by NECOBELAC in the framework of an increasing cooperation between Europe and Latin America for the progress of scientific culture including dissemination of health information.

The Project capacity of attracting collaborations, together with the robustness of its strategy and working methodology, has been favouring the collaboration with FAO with regard to the training programs and their application in areas related to public health, such as agriculture.

Performing training activities represent one of the main tasks trough which NECOBELAC network promotes collaborations with experts and institutions working on this field. To this goal, NECOBELAC Partners, in particular the Brazilian partner BIREME is already working with FAO. Indeed, FAO has participated to the kick-off meeting of NECOBELAC project, that it took place in February 2009. In this framework, exchanges and common experiences focused on e-learning programs can be developed and supported within NECOBELAC network.

Furthermore, the presentation presence of NECOBELAC project at the RIBDA conference represents a new chance to establish contacts and promote future collaborations with experts and institution working in disciplines related to public health as agriculture and environmental issues.

It is well known that public health and agriculture are strictly connected for what concerns communicable and non-communicable diseases. Agricultural activities and rural living as well as the whole food chain, represent fields of interest and intervention within the public health sector in each country, in terms of identification of preventable risks, and prevention, monitoring, elimination of related diseases. In this framework, a common plan of health information spreading could be designed to the benefit of operators and society.

In particular, the effects on human health and environment of an uncontrolled agricultural production are widely recognised. The industrialization of agricultural production affects occupational and environmental health of workers and communities, whereas chemical products are used and uncontrolled working processes affect a sustainable agricultural development.

Furthermore, the environmental pollution of the air, water and soil with pesticides, toxic metals, dioxins etc. produces food contamination affecting health conditions of consumers in the word. Food safety represents a sector of public health that needs an updated scientific knowledge and dissemination of health information to the general public.

In this view, production, dissemination, retrieval and use of scientific information focused on health issues concerning agriculture and environment are of great relevance both for European and Latin American-Caribbean countries, in order to adopt appropriate strategies addressed to the sector's needs.

The impact of NECOBELAC project will be measured by the involved user community. The possibility to open the Project to new fields related to public health represents a further motivation to face this challenge.

FINAL REMARKS

The challenge of NECOBELAC Project is primarily focused on the cooperative and participative approach between European and Latin American Caribbean countries concerning the bidirectional exchanges of skills and experience matured on open access to scientific research results. The socio-cultural diversities characterising the involved countries and institutions represent a valuable enrichment for NECOBELAC network.

The development of new collaborations among institutions of European and Latin American Countries is oriented towards a democratization of knowledge, particularly in the field of public health and health-related disciplines. In this framework, the opportunity to consider agriculture and environmental issues, within the topics discussed at the RIBDA Conference, will offer further points of actions for the NECOBELAC partners.

Within the theme Science in Society, NECOBELAC Project it is committed to serve as a best practice example for other projects and/or geographic areas as well as to provide inputs to the European Commission policy on access to scientific information.

The progress and first impact of the Project activities will be illustrated during the RIBDA Conference in order to raise further discussion and interest on the achieved results.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

De Castro P, Marsili D, Poltronieri E. NECOBELAC, un progetto europeo per favorire la diffusione di informazioni scientifiche nel settore della salute pubblica. *Notiziario dell'Istituto superiore di sanità*. 2009;22(04):3-6.

Pulido D, Robledo R, Agudelo C, et al. Escritura, Comunicación Científica y Acceso Abierto: un Proyecto Internacional y Multidisciplinario-NECOBELAC. *Revista de Salud Pública*, 2009;11(2): 310-314.