Executive summary

Firetail has held discussions with a range of stakeholders to understand perceptions, use and impact of the Panel

Background

Firetail was asked by the Malabo Montpellier Panel ('the Panel' / the MaMo Panel) to conduct an impact evaluation of its work for the period from September 2017 to early 2020. In April and May 2020, Firetail interviewed 22 stakeholders who had used MaMo Panel’s resources and / or attended forums from government, civil society and industry. These stakeholders were chosen in collaboration with members of the Panel’s secretariat.

The aim is to understand:

– **Perceptions** of the MaMo Panel
– **Use and impact** of its reports, forums and other work, as defined by users
– **Views on its peers**
– **Recommendations** for the MaMo Panel
– **Future issues** for consideration

Perceptions of Malabo Montpellier Panel

Stakeholders have consistent and accurate understandings of the objectives and approach of the Panel: as an international panel of experts in agriculture and food security who conduct research and facilitate dialogue between policymakers to strengthen agricultural policy.

They frequently point to the depth and breadth of expertise that the members bring to the Panel.

Stakeholders describe the the MaMo Panel as a credible, African-focused organisation, working with high-profile stakeholders on a broad mix of topics.

In terms of the Panel's outputs, they reflect that:

– The reports are robust, adaptable to different audience, and hit a sweet spot between the level of technical detail and policy recommendations.
– The Forums provide open, robust and engaging debate; there is some uncertainty about ‘what comes after’, and whilst many think that they attract influential attendees, they could and should reach a broader audience.
– Engagement with other platforms used by the Panel (the website, webinars) was much lower.
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Stakeholder see a strong ongoing need for the work of the Panel

Use and impact:
Stakeholders describe the impact of the Panel in terms of building knowledge of the latest developments in agriculture, and the contribution to the shared knowledge of the agricultural development ecosystem.

1. Providing a trusted resource / repository of thinking and expertise for their own / their organisation's work
2. Providing a space for open and robust debate
3. Influencing and shaping policy at a national level
4. Promoting cross-border learning

Of the policymakers who took part in this research, half were able to give specific examples of using the Panel’s work to shape national policies.

The Panel’s approach in facilitating cross-border learning is mostly considered to be a useful and effective approach. A minority of stakeholders had reservations about the applicability of success stories across borders, but most are confident that success stories are valuable.

Most stakeholder recommendations to improve impact concern the Panel’s reach and engagement. To grow the impact of its work, a few stakeholders see room for improvement in the outputs themselves (covering the right breadth of topics, high quality, balancing technical detail with clear recommendations, showcasing success stories effectively). They see more room for improvement in how the Panel communicates its research, how it involves partners, and how it raises its profile.

Landscape and peers
Stakeholders describe a set of peers who are frequently much larger and better resourced than the Panel. It includes international agencies and Africa-based think tanks and policy institutes. They describe the unique attributes of the Panel in terms of:

- Its blend of voices from the North and South, and strong reputation of individual panelists
- Its balance of rigorous research and clear policy recommendations
- Its independence
- Durability, compared to other one-off expert committees
- Breadth of topics

Future areas of work
Conversations about trends in the field of food and agricultural development were dominated by the ongoing pandemic. Many stakeholder believe the Panel could explore the pandemic’s implications for agriculture and the road to recovery.

They suggested a range of potential future topics that they believe the Panel is well placed to address:

- Supply chains
- Agricultural finance
- Climate change, resilience and sustainable production: Youth entrepreneurship
- Understanding economies of scale in Africa
- Smallholder farming and land reform
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The most pressing need is to increase the visibility of the Panel

Recommendations

This has been a period of progress for the Panel – it has established a unique and highly-regarded set of experts who bring a diverse set of experience. There is strong consensus among stakeholders that the Panel’s work is valuable and should be continued. The choice of topics and quality of the outputs of the Panel is strong. It is regarded as innovative and independent. There are several areas where the Panel can improve its impact. The biggest overarching area for improvement is in making more noise and increasing the visibility of the Panel’s work. We would recommend reflection by the Panel on:

— Composition: broadening the diversity of backgrounds of Panel members
— Panel identity: ensuring that the Panel is more cohesive in how it presents itself
— Open agenda: earlier and more open engagement with potential partners
— Partnerships: making the most of other opportunities
— Forums: making the most of the events to influence policy at a national level

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Short term (questions that the Panel should consider)</th>
<th>Long term (possibly requiring additional resources and capacity)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>Panel should discuss the pipeline of potential members, taking into account diversity of experience</td>
<td>Add members to the Panel with other experience, especially from the private sector, policymakers and CSOs</td>
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<td>Panel Identity</td>
<td>The Panel should discuss and agree ‘rules of engagement’ to have a more consistent approach in how and when members speak on behalf of the Panel</td>
<td>More active involvement of the members in communications planning, to encourage them to represent the Panel more frequently and consistently</td>
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<td>Open agenda</td>
<td>The Panel should discuss whether it is willing to seek more open partnerships and agenda-sharing with donors and multilateral agencies</td>
<td>The Panel should seek active and open collaboration/coordination with other organisations to set shared agendas.</td>
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<td>Growing visibility</td>
<td>The Panel should identify opportunities to represent itself in other forums, and consider how it can leverage members’ and funders’ networks to do this.</td>
<td>The Panel should to increase its capacity (staff and resources) to represent its work in other forums.</td>
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<td>Forums</td>
<td>The Panel should consider more follow-on activities as part of the Forums themselves (e.g. ‘What’s next’ sessions as part of the standing agenda) and follow up communications after the events.</td>
<td>The Panel could run follow-up Forum events; consider follow on support and advisory work with willing policymakers to work on implementation of recommendations. Again, this will depend on the capacity and resources of the secretariat, and may require seeking additional funding.</td>
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