

# ICT - BIOCHAIN

## Deliverable 4.3. Report on Development of Multi-actor business opportunities

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## 1. Executive Summary

ICT-BIOCHAIN is a BBI-JU funded project with the main aim of digitalising biomass supply chains through the integration of ICT, IoT and Industry 4.0 technologies for a more efficient bioeconomy. This deliverable (D4.3) describes the ICT-BIOCHAIN project's developments on multi-actor business opportunities. This work was done as part of Task 4.2 of the project. The Key Performance Indicator (KPI) set out for this work was to achieve three cross-sectorial business coalitions per region. These cross-sectorial business coalitions are business ideas that merge stakeholders from the biomass sector and the technology sector. The expertise and work done throughout the project was planned in order to see at least six business ideas of this type develop to an advanced stage. The six business ideas were planned to be split between the two model demonstrator regions of the project: South-East Ireland and Andalusia (Spain). This deliverable therefore outlines the methodologies used to identify, contact, mobilise and develop these business opportunities as well as the final results achieved in this respect.

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## 2. Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>KPI</b>	Key Performance Indicator
<b>WP</b>	Work Package
<b>DIH</b>	Digital Innovation Hub
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication, Technologies
<b>IoT</b>	Internet of Things
<b>Dx.x</b>	Deliverable x.x

### 3. Introduction

The aim of the ICT-BIOCHAIN project is to improve the bioeconomy efficiency through the integration of ICT, IoT and Industry 4.0 solutions within biomass supply chains. To best support this, Work Package (WP) 2 involved the setting up of Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH) in two selected European model demonstration regions for sustainable chemistry: Andalusia (Spain) and South-East Ireland. The DIHs are regional multi-actor one-stop-shops where regional stakeholders (e.g. biomass sector and ICT sector) find support and expertise to become more competitive, through the use of technology solutions. ICT-BIOCHAIN DIHs support regional business development fostering the application of technology solutions to the biomass sector, provided by regional experts in collaboration with wider competence centre, a network of experts developing technology solutions for bio-resources sustainable management, and also by working together both ICT-BIOCHAIN DIHs themselves.

To develop enhance the services offered by the two DIHs, the ICT-BIOCHAIN project team carried on a regional and European-wide technology scoping exercise to understand the current state-of-art within the biomass sector. The result has been and up-to-date, and constantly growing, database containing all the currently available technologies. A second scoping exercise was done to quantify biomass in each region. In each case, a database was created, which mapped out bio-resources around the region regarding the biomass value chains selected in each region in the frame of the project. This includes quantities of each biomass type, location, current fate, chemical composition, price and freight cost calculations. Both databases have now been made available to regional stakeholders through an online platform.

Throughout the project, the expertise of the Irish and Andalusian DIHs, along with the resources developed have been made available to the DIH stakeholders of both regions, through hub event activities, and contact with hub stakeholders through meetings with DIH facilitators. Between M15 and M24, DIHs facilitators were focused on using these engagement activities to support relevant business ideas by bringing biomass and technology sectors together. Working with relevant stakeholders, DIH facilitators, supported stakeholders with information about biomass availability, relevant technology solutions, contacts with potential collaborators or funding advice. This work was part of Task 4.2 of the ICT-BIOCHAIN project and is reported in this deliverable (D4.3).

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Identifying and contacting potential stakeholders

From the Irish side, initial contact was made to the entire ICT-BIOCHAIN network. This mainly consisted of the following two groups of people who attended the ICT-BIOCHAIN knowledge exchange events organised as part of WP4:

1. Attendees of the regional DIH Launch and Knowledge transfer events
2. Attendees of the regional Demonstration Days

An example of the initial communication is included in Annex 1.

In order to improve the effectiveness and the impact of this work, it was thought that a higher email response rate could be achieved through a more personalized email. Specific stakeholders who were identified as having higher potential for successful business coalitions were therefore contacted separately via a more personalised email. This was done for both sectors involved:

1. The biomass sector
2. The technology sector.

From the Andalusian side, a similar approach was adopted. The initial contact was made taking in account the information from the answers in the questionnaire made in two events:

- The DIH Launch event
- The Demo day event

In each of the events of the project, the possibility of providing support to business opportunities and to stakeholders was highlighted in some point of the different presentations. Also, in every communication done from the DIH side, the availability of the Andalusian DIH working group was pointed out.

The contacts between participant in the events and the Andalusian DIH technology advisor or the specific technology provider pointed by them (through the answers in the questionnaire) were made by email. Examples are included in annex 4 and 5.

A very personalized communication approach was chosen to focus in business opportunities already detected in the events. As the companies has been showed interest in the relationship, the emails had a very good feedback. Although these first positives answers, CTA facilitate the consolidation of the business opportunities with further contacts through emails and phone calls. As explained later this follow up come to 37 iterations trying to link the organisations.



#### 4.1.1. The Biomass Sector

At each of the four regional events, the two regional DIH Launch and Knowledge Transfer Events and the two regional Demonstration Days, stakeholders within the biomass sector were asked to fill out questionnaires with their needs from the technology sector. Those who have filled in these questionnaires were identified as targets for potential coalitions and were contacted in order to begin the discussion on what support they might require and what technologies might be useful for them.

Contact was made by email from the event organizing partner of each DIH, usually the person who would be familiar to the stakeholder and to increase the possibility of a positive response. As the support was focused on technology, the technology advisor on the DIH's steering committee was included within the correspondences.

An example of the correspondence to Irish stakeholders can be found in Annex 2

From the Irish side, and following this email, if a positive response was received, calls were arranged between the stakeholder, the DIH representative and the technology advisor. The agenda for all the calls was as follows:

1. DIH representative was provided the following introduction:
  - a. Introduction of people on the call
  - b. Re-introduction to ICT-BIOCHAIN project
  - c. Explanation of the DIH and its goals
  - d. Support offered by the DIH
  - e. Explanation of the scope of the call
2. Stakeholder provided an overview of their biomass supply chain processes.
3. Stakeholder were asked to identify potential areas that might benefit from the integration of ICT / IoT / Industry 4.0.
4. Technology advisor would respond with potential solutions to identified problems.
5. Technology advisor would suggest any other technologies that might also be relevant to the stakeholder's processes (problems that have not already been identified by the stakeholder).
6. Meeting concluded.

Following each call, the DIH representative sent the stakeholder the report of the technology scoping (D1.1 of the ICT-BIOCHAIN project) so that they would have the opportunity identify any other technologies that might interest them. The technology advisor also sent a summary of the technologies discussed over the phone. If there were specific technology companies that had been identified as relevant, the technology advisor sent an email introduction to the stakeholder and the technology company and facilitate a call between the two.

From the Andalusian side, the approach was slightly different referring to the organization of this meetings. The working group has a lot of experience working with companies in the region as facilitator in the creation of value chains and new business opportunities. As the content of the meetings had a high focus of the development of a new business opportunity, CTA decided not participated in them and to limit the follow up to contacts before and after this meetings. The decision was made because past experiences about companies reluctancy to provide information about business ideas. Hence, it was decided not to participate in the calls between the technology advisor and the biomass company as this would help creating a confidentiality environment.

Anyhow, the working group offered their support all the time in individual phone calls and follow-up e-mails.

#### 4.1.2. The Technology Sector

From the Irish side, at each of the four regional events, the two regional DIH Launch events and the two regional Demonstration Days, the stakeholders within the biomass sector were asked to fill out questionnaires with their needs from the technology sector. For each selected opportunity, the technology advisor at the Irish hub identified specific technology companies that offer this service or that might have the expertise to begin to offer this service.

These technology companies were then contacted to begin this discussion. A copy of this correspondence is included in Annex 3. Following this email, calls were arranged between the email sender, technology advisor and the technology company. The agenda for all the calls was as follows:

1. DIH representative gave the following introduction:
  - a. Introduction of people on the call
  - b. Introduction to ICT-BIOCHAIN project
  - c. Explanation of the DIH and its goals
  - d. Support offered by the DIH
  - e. Explanation of the scope of the call
2. Technology advisor gave an explanation of the technology opportunity
3. Technology company asked to discuss whether their technology could provide the solution required
4. Meeting is concluded

Following this call, if there was scope and interest from the technology provider to continue to pursue the idea, the DIH representative would put the technology company in touch with the relevant biomass sector stakeholder(s) and facilitate a call between the two.

From the Andalusian side, the procedures followed require to analyse the satisfaction survey filled by attendees at the Launch and Knowledge Transfer event. There, it was asked which of the technologies presented by the technology providers (6 companies) was interesting for the attendee. This allowed the working group to match biomass companies and technology providers according to the interest that was awakened during the event. A mail was sent in order to put in contact both organisations (see annex 3).

After that, follow-up phone-calls were done and e-mails were sent so as to fully support the development of spotted business opportunities.

### 4.3. Services offered to stakeholders

Once the potential stakeholders for business coalitions were identified, and contact was made, the services offered to the stakeholders were communicated to them. These included the following knowledge and expertise:

1. Biomass availability
2. Value chain expertise
3. Technology solutions
4. Contacts and networks
5. Funding advice

Any successful cross-sectorial business coalitions were again contacted in order to invite them to a regional Investment Day. This day involved an outline of the funding opportunities available to the stakeholders as well as personalised advice on suitable funding calls for each idea, which was passed on through one-on-one meetings with a dedicated DIH representative.

### 4.4. Reporting business cases for cross-sectorial coalitions

As the outcomes of this work are business collaborations between participating parties some of the details are confidential. For this reason, and because this is a public deliverable, the details on the coalitions is high level in order to preserve the confidentiality of the participating partners. A record of the calls and the number of stakeholders was kept, however, specific business ideas or contact identities, and minutes of the calls were kept confidential as they include details of the business which often times is not public information. This decision has also been taken to respect the wishes of the businesses and therefore also complies with GDPR.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Irish cross-sectorial coalitions

When the initial correspondence was sent out to all stakeholders, only a few replies were received. The second, more personalised email that was sent out to stakeholders already known to be interested, received replies from every single organisation. These included a mushroom co-operative organisation, a farm co-operative organisation, a forestry company, a seaweed company, a future hemp processor, a semi-state (varied) biomass-based organisation, a dairy company, a poultry farm, a biomass consultancy, a food technology company and two technology research organisations.

Phone calls were organised with all of the above organisations, and through these phone calls, a general overview of each potential business idea was identified. The stakeholders often needed more time to develop their ideas, however there were some that were able to push their ideas forward immediately. Although support and guidance are ongoing and continued offered to all of the above organisations, the most successful three business cases were selected to be discussed in this report.

#### 5.1.1. Business case #1

The first successful cross-sectorial business coalition was formed between a biomass consultancy and a technology company. As per the above methodology, an initial call was held to understand the stakeholder's problem or idea. During this meeting it was established that the consultancy already had a specific biomass-related problem in mind, as well as a technology solution. They were also already in touch with a technology company that could offer this potential IoT solution. The development barrier in this case was funding. The stakeholder was unable to self-fund the development of this idea and was also unaware of how to go about looking for sources of funding to overcome this.

On learning this, the consultancy was invited to the Irish DIH Investment Day (to hold a one-to-one meeting with the Irish DIH facilitators. During this meeting, the problem and solution were discussed in depth and through this, a suitable funding call was identified; DIVA funding. Project DIVA is an EU project which aims to provide support to the emergence and development of new industrial digitech value chains with applications to the agro-food, forestry and environment sectors. The consultant was provided with the relevant details that they required to apply for this grant. This included an introduction to the local contact point of the funding call who was able to guide the consultant through the details of the application, as well as a link to an information webinar which addressed how to apply for the grant.

Over the course of the subsequent two months, the DIH steering committee kept in close contact with the stakeholder through calls and emails to ensure they were receiving all

the necessary support. By the end of January 2020, the consultancy succeeded in putting forward their application and are now waiting for the outcome.

### 5.1.2. Business case #2

The second successful cross-sectorial business coalition was formed between a mushroom co-operative and a technology research organisation. In this case, the mushroom co-operative was able to identify a common problem experienced by many of their constituent mushroom growers and none of which were able to overcome this issue.

During the initial call between the stakeholder and the DIH representatives and advisers, the mushroom grower's problem was explained to the technology adviser. The technology adviser was then able to recommend a simple and cost-effective IoT solution to the problem, as well as contact to a technology research organisation who were able to put a project together to research and understand the issue so that current methodologies can be improved. The research organisation had in fact already done similar work in the past and thus the project would be both time and cost-effective as it would require minimum effort.

For this reason, the match between the two organisations was suitable and they quickly agreed to consider their funding options. The mushroom co-operative was subsequently invited to the Irish DIH Investment Day to hold meetings with the DIH facilitators. Again, the DIVA funding call was recommended however due to administrative delays, it was not possible to apply for this call. Instead, the two organisations agreed to apply for an Innovation Voucher from Enterprise Ireland; a state-funded grant to aid collaborations between local knowledge providers and SMEs. The application is now in progress.

This new cross-sectorial coalition will thus increase the use of an existing IoT solution for biomass supply chains, in this case for the mushroom industry. The application of this technology for one business within the co-operative could encourage its use among other businesses within the co-operative, allowing the mushroom industry in Ireland to improve its output and lower costs.

### 5.1.3. Business case #3

The third successful cross-sectorial business coalition was formed between a biorefinery company and a technology research organisation. In this instance, the initial call between the DIH representatives and the biorefinery company resulted in the identification of a number of problems that could potentially be solved through ICT, IoT and Industry 4.0 solutions. The technology adviser from the Irish DIH suggested a number of these solutions and also sent D1.1; the deliverable on the technology scoping exercise performed in WP1.

Following this call, the technology adviser put the biorefinery company in touch with a technology research organisation. The two organised a call to discuss the issues and

through this call, it was determined that there was definitely potential for a joint project to be put together since the technology research organisation had the required expertise to tackle the issues that the biorefinery company was facing. The two thus arranged to have an in-person meeting where the technology research organisation travelled to the biorefinery company's premises and were given a tour of the site to further understand the issues. During this meeting, the business ideas were discussed in more detail and the two stakeholders decided on a plan of action to progress a novel idea. Plans are now in place to target national funding to integrate some of these ideas.

## 5.2. Andalusian cross-sectorial coalitions

From the biomass related organisation profile, several entities answered the questionnaires and were therefore involved in the support process. These were a wastewater treatment plant, a forest management large company, a rural development group, a public agency for agro and fish sector management, one university, two rural development consultancy companies, an energy management company of renewable energy, one research organisation, a regional association for biomass, an active compounds and ingredients production organisation, one agro-sector cooperative, one biotech company and one citrus processing company.

After initiating the contact between them and the Andalusian DIH technology advisor or the specific technology provider pointed by them (through the answers in the questionnaire from the DIH Launch event), further contact was done through emails and phone calls as follow-up. 37 contacts following this approach were made linking organisations. However, almost all the activity from the stakeholders side was interrupted by mid-March due to the restrictions related to COVID-19 and the declaration of the “State of Alarm” in Spain on March 14<sup>th</sup> 2020<sup>1</sup>. This caused the majority of organisations to stop working for some time or to adapt to the current situation through remote work (when possible), temporary employment regulation plans, etc. The whole situation derived from the COVI-19 crisis has created a economic crisis in Spain that is affecting all sectors, but specially the private sector. This has forced companies to change priorities and adapt to the situation. From the business cases reported, one of them was particularly affected by this situation as all conversations stopped by mid-March.

Support and guidance are ongoing and being offered to all of the above organisations from CTA side as business advisor from the DIH.

Other cases worth mentioning are also included at the end of the section.

### 5.2.1. Business case #1

A rural development consultancy company was contacted in the frame of the project. They provide agricultural investment, management and operation and conduct RDI projects across four continents, having headquarters in Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, Senegal and Morocco. They were already cooperating with the DIH technology advisor in the development of an IT tool for the agri-food sector, but they wanted to expand it and were looking for funding.

From CTA side, the following options were provided:

- CTA own private funds : CTA manages own private funds that are granted to Andalusian companies that want to conduct innovation projects in Andalusia.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2020/03/14/pdfs/BOE-A-2020-3692.pdf>



- Project ConnectEO: CTA participates in this project together (from COSME-Clusters Go International) with other clusters, with the aim of promoting the use of terrestrial observation in applications in the agricultural sector. The objective of the project is to support European companies with earth observation technologies to internationalize in the Chilean and Australian markets, both in the agricultural and maritime sectors. CTA represents the agricultural sector in the consortium. As part of the project activities, two business missions to Chile, and two to Australia, will be organized whenever possible.
- Parsec-Accelerator call: <https://parsec-accelerator.eu/>
- Call for researches exchange: <https://explorers.ngi.eu/> since one of the target markets could be USA.

### 5.2.2. Business case #2

One of the rural development groups was connected to a technology provider. Cooperation was already established with a large dairy and food company located in the geographical area of the rural development group.

The technology developer was developing a proposal for a European call in H2020 programme related to ICT (call DT-ICT-09) so the geographical area where the rural development group was considered interesting as demo case. Due to the different experience levels in European projects, support was provided from the Andalusian side in order to allow this opportunity to go ahead. The initial deadline was 22<sup>nd</sup> April but due to COVID-19 situation, the EC postponed the deadline to 17<sup>th</sup> June.

### 5.2.3. Business case #3

The third business case arose at the demo day where a technology provider spotted an opportunity after listening to the speaker's presentations where they identified some of their challenges and needs. The identified speaker was a wastewater treatment company.

The technology provider asked CTA to start the contact in order to further develop this cooperation opportunity. Communications were maintained and both organisations started to cooperate together, and some meetings were maintained between the two of them. Solutions involving Artificial Intelligence (AI) were discussed and some adaptations of the technology provider current product portfolio were assessed.

Conversations between the two organisations stopped by mid-March due to COVID-19 situation in Spain. The technology provider is currently trying to resume this opportunity.

#### 5.2.4. Other cases

A technology provider contacted CTA after the demo day in order to learn more about the bioresource model that has been developed in the frame of the project and to share its point of view of potential cooperation opportunities in this area. A meeting between the provider and CTA was maintained and information about the bioresource modelling and development plan was provided.

The technology provider from business case 2 also started some conversations with one vegetable and fruit producer met at the launch event. Conversations were maintained in order to prepare a proposal for a national call for innovative companies groups but this opportunity also stopped due to COVID-19 situation.

## 6. Conclusions

During months 15 to 24, the regional facilitators from the two ICT-BIOCHAIN DIH's worked intensively with stakeholders from both hubs and across sectors to develop new multi-sectorial value chain coalitions. This involved working with interested stakeholder groups from the technology and biomass sectors to identify opportunities and synergies. The hub facilitators engaged directly with stakeholders providing information on biomass, technology and funding opportunities. The hubs also facilitated introductions to potential relevant cross-sectorial partners in order to support the building of value chain coalitions.

In the Irish Hub, calls and in-person meetings were an effective mechanism for engaging with the interested stakeholders in order to identify opportunities, partners and relevant funding calls. Three cross-sectorial coalitions are identified in this report all of which have been or are in the process of seeking funding to implement technology within biomass supply chains. Other identified coalitions are still receiving ongoing support from the Irish hub.

In the Andalusian Hub, coalitions were supported by the DIH working group, through opportunity scoping and signposting of various funding mechanisms. Already one of these value chain coalitions is in the process of submitting a funding application. Although the COVID-19 has forced Spanish organisations to reorganise internally and reschedule priorities, the country is slowly restoring commercial activities as well as other sectors and actions. CTA, as business advisor of the DIH will continue supporting ongoing opportunities and will encourage involved stakeholders to resume the conversations as soon as they are ready to go ahead.

## Annex 1

Good Morning all,

**\*DIH representative\*** here from the [Irish Bioeconomy Foundation](#) (IBF). You attended our [ICT-BIOCHAIN](#) event in June at the National Bioeconomy Campus in Lisheen. The event was centred around launching our Digital Innovation Hub for increasing the efficiency of biomass supply chains through the integration of ICT technologies and was organised by IT Tralee and the Irish Bioeconomy Foundation.

As part of the ICT-BIOCHAIN project, we carried out a study to develop an up-to-date list of technologies that exist for the agri-food, forestry, marine and bioeconomy sectors throughout Europe, and also more specifically within Ireland. We have also set up a group of Irish technology experts who will offer free of charge consultations and support to companies and organisations who might be interested in technologies to improve their biomass supply chains.

If you are interested in any technology or require support for what technologies might be available for your processes, we would require **an email indicating your interest and needs**, and we will be able to guide you from there. An investment meeting will be organised in early 2020 to further support the most promising biomass-technology "matches" with private finance or public funding opportunities.

Best regards,

**\*DIH representative\***  
Irish Bioeconomy Foundation

## Annex 2

Good Morning **\*stakeholder name\***,

How are you?

Just wanted to bring the below email to your attention since back at our ICT-BIOCHAIN event in **\*location\***, you filled out our feedback form indicating your interest in new technologies that can benefit the **\*relevant biomass supply chain\*** sector.

Shall we arrange a call to discuss this further?

Best regards,

**\*Event contact person (DIH representative)\***

## Annex 3

Buenas tardes,

Como ya hemos introducido en los eventos del proyecto ICT-BIOCHAIN a los que habéis asistido, uno de los objetivos es **promover oportunidades de colaboración en la región así como la adopción de TIC, IoT e industria 4.0**. Desde el proyecto animamos siempre a los asistentes a expresar tanto sus necesidades como su oferta tecnológica a fin de promover desarrollos conjuntos, intercambio de conocimiento, etc. entre empresas relacionadas con la biomasa y empresas del sector TIC.

Procedo por tanto a presentaros ya que en el cuestionario que se completó en el evento **\*biomass company name\*** indicó que estaría interesado en conocer más acerca de posibles soluciones TIC, IoT e industria 4.0.

ec2c es una empresa de soluciones tecnológicas que ejerce el rol de asesor tecnológico en el marco del proyecto y por lo tanto podrá orientar a **\*biomass company name\*** en cuanto a posibles estrategias para resolver sus problemas y necesidades.

**Os invitamos a que contactéis entre vosotros para poder desarrollar esta oportunidad**, y nos ponemos a vuestra disposición para apoyaros desde el proyecto ICT-BIOCHAIN así como desde CTA (asesoramiento y/o fondos propios de financiación).

Un saludo,

## Annex 4

Good Morning **\*technology company contact\***,

I am contacting you with regards to the ICT-BIOCHAIN project. ICT-BIOCHAIN is a BBI-JU Horizon2020 funded project where we are looking to identify opportunities for ICT technologies to improve the efficiency of biomass supply chains and therefore strengthen the bioeconomy.

We have performed scoping exercises to understand the technology needs within biomass supply chains and have identified that there is a strong need to **\*explain technology opportunity\***. We are contacting you as we believe that this is a service that you **\*offer / might be able to provide\*** and could therefore be a potential business opportunity for yourselves at **\*technology company\***.

We will be able to offer you support in terms of funding opportunities, and also put you in contact with the companies that would be interested in integrating this technology within their processes.

If this is something that interests you, shall we arrange a call to discuss this further?

Best regards,

DIH representative

## Annex 5

Buenas tardes,

Como ya hemos introducido en los eventos del proyecto, uno de los objetivos es **promover oportunidades de colaboración en la región**. Desde el proyecto animamos siempre a los asistentes a expresar tanto sus necesidades como su oferta tecnológica a fin de promover desarrollos conjuntos, intercambio de conocimiento, etc. entre empresas relacionadas con la biomasa y empresas del sector TIC.

Procedo por tanto a presentaros ya que a raíz del evento de lanzamiento del proyecto parece ser que podría haberse identificado una oportunidad de colaboración para **\*biomass company name\*** e **\*technology provider\***.

**Os invitamos a que contactéis entre vosotros para poder desarrollar esta oportunidad**, y nos ponemos a vuestra disposición para apoyaros desde el proyecto ICT-BIOCHAIN así como desde CTA (asesoramiento y/o fondos propios de financiación).

Un saludo,