

**CGIAR International Centers Week '96 Meeting**

**Washington, DC**

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**Towards a Shared Vision on International Agricultural Research**

*Opening Statement by Fawzi H. Al-Sultan*

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*Chairman, Global Forum on Agricultural Research*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you all to the Global Forum, which is the culmination of an extensive deliberative process that IFAD was instrumental in launching two years ago. I am particularly delighted to note the response to IFAD's invitation and the presence of so many of you who have played an important role in supporting and participating in this consultative process since its beginning.

Our foremost appreciation goes to my friend Ismail Serageldin for his vision and energetic efforts that led to the successful completion of the renewal of the CGIAR System with an emphasis on strengthening partnerships within a global agricultural research context. I must also commend our friends in the NARS community, ISNAR, FAO, the European Union, Swiss Development Cooperation, the World Bank and the CGIAR Secretariat who joined IFAD in supporting and participating in the long and challenging process leading up to this Global Forum.

Since many of us present here today did not have the opportunity of participating directly in the deliberations under the NARS-CGIAR Partnership Initiative that has preceded the Global Forum, I would like to review some of the major events which led to this meeting, and attempt to chart a future course of collective action, which is our main objective here over the next two days.

### **The NARS Perspective on International Agricultural Research**

At the 1994 New Delhi Mid-Term Meeting, a framework was established for the process of renewal of the CGIAR System. It was clear at the beginning of this process that the System could not be revitalized without the full participation of its partners: NARS, advanced research institutions, the NGO community, the private sector, and the farmers themselves. To achieve success, it would be important to work in partnership, drawing on each component's strengths and advantages to improve the effectiveness of research in a global technology development and transfer system. In this regard, IFAD convened the December 1994 Rome Consultation on the NARS Vision of International Agricultural Research.

In order to build on the momentum generated in Rome, I presented the NARS recommendations to the policy makers attending the CGIAR Lucerne Ministerial-Level Meeting. In particular, I reiterated the desire of the NARS community to participate more systematically in setting and implementing the global research agenda. This was adopted as a specific recommendation in the Lucerne Plan of Action.

### **Translating the NARS Vision into Action**

Our common goal of building a strong global agricultural research system, drawing on the strengths of the various partners is now, more than ever, within our reach. As we move towards forging these partnerships, we become better equipped to address together the triple challenge of **alleviating rural poverty; ensuring**

**household food security** by producing enough food at reasonable prices and securing access to food for both rural and urban poor, while **maintaining the sustainability of the natural resource base**.

The first stage in this NARS-driven consultative process, resulted in an Outline Action Plan on Strengthening the NARS-CGIAR Partnership, which was adopted at the 1995 ICW held last October. This served as a framework for further consultations among NARS through the Regional and Sub-Regional Fora. The preparatory meeting for the Global Forum held at the last CGIAR Mid-Term Meeting in Jakarta provided an occasion for consultations among the different Fora, and an opportunity for the NGOs, the private sector, and universities to provide additional input. Leaders of the NARS Regional Fora met again in August, at IFAD Headquarters in Rome, in order to prepare an Action Plan from the NARS Perspective, which is their contribution to this Global Forum.

The NARS Action Plan calls for a farmer-centered research agenda. I am particularly pleased with this approach, which is consistent with lessons learned by IFAD in designing and implementing of our projects. Through its work to increase incomes and improve nutrition among the rural poor, IFAD has worked directly with the rural poor smallholders, both as clients and partners. In this context, IFAD is a strong advocate of direct farmer participation in a global agricultural research system. We believe that such an emphasis on participation ensures that the technologies generated are client-oriented, with high potential for adoption and with minimum risk that such technologies, once generated, will not lie on the shelf.

### **Towards a Plan of Action for Strengthening Agricultural Research**

As we move towards an increasingly interactive and collaborative global agricultural research system, the need for a collectively agreed upon, coherent plan of action is essential. I have great expectations that by tomorrow afternoon, our Forum will have produced the expected results, including a Declaration and the important elements of a Global Action Plan, which fully reflects the spirit and content of this meeting.

Let me now briefly present the Forum's agenda.

In two sessions this morning, we will discuss "Needs and Opportunities for Agricultural Research", addressing the substantive issues relating to the research agenda. In these sessions, I expect that we will consider the overall principles and criteria for setting priorities in this research, in order to ensure an orientation toward poverty alleviation and a more equitable and balanced emphasis on the marginal and fragile environments.

This afternoon we will explore "Avenues for Collaboration" among the various actors in the global agricultural research system. The discussion will revolve around four key research themes which lend themselves to effective collaboration among the

partners. The first concerns the area of **Biotechnology**, where many NARS are using innovative tools to help overcome biotic stresses faced by agriculture in their respective countries and regions. Second we will discuss the dimension of **Genetic Resource Conservation and Utilization**, in recognition of the fact that our partners in farming communities in the developing country can play an important role as the custodians of the vast majority of genetic resources, and can provide the necessary support for in situ conservation. The third area addresses, the field of **Eco-regional Research**, where, again, the role of NARS partners becomes critical in location-specific research on natural resource management issues. Finally, we will talk about the domain of **Public Policy and Institutional Strengthening**, which is fundamental for the creation of an enabling environment for the whole research and development system.

Before we end the day's session we will initiate discussions on the Operational Dimensions of Strengthening Global Partnerships. Here, the discussion should emphasize issues relating not only to the joint programmes under the global research system, but also cover organizational and procedural aspects. This would include strengthening, institutionalizing, and funding regional consultative mechanisms, enabling NARS to become active partners in establishing and implementing the global research agenda.

The draft Plan of Action, from a NARS perspective will be presented by the Chair of the current NARS Global Steering Committee. I expect that this draft will be reviewed and refined on the basis of discussions at this Forum and consolidated with a Declaration, and an Action Plan for Global Partnership in Agricultural Research.

In the final session, we will call upon the CGIAR Chair, Dr. Serageldin, to join us once again to synthesize our collective output and shared vision, as embodied in the forthcoming Declaration and the Global Plan of Action which will focus on the objective of committing ourselves to undertake this process which will enable the international research community to broaden its base, in order to meet the emerging global challenges through stronger and more effective strategic partnerships.

In concluding my opening statement, I would like to announce that, in the same spirit that we initiated the process of building a stronger global agricultural research system that led to this first Global Forum, we in IFAD are prepared to take the lead in giving priority within our grant portfolio to research programmes with a poverty alleviation emphasis, which are designed for implementation in this new partnership mode. I take this opportunity to invite our donor partners to join IFAD in this initiative, thus demonstrating our collective will to move from consultation to action.

Thank you.