

# **GFAR UPDATE TO THE CGIAR AGM 2004**

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### **Introduction**

The founding stakeholders of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) formulated a mission which required GFAR to mobilize all the stakeholders involved in agricultural research for development and support their efforts to alleviate poverty, improve food security and promote the sustainable use of natural resources. In addressing this mission, we pay a particular attention to regional and sub-regional fora, encouraging them to develop fora that are inclusive of various stakeholders in their constituencies, and to develop not only intra-regional but also inter-regional research partnerships, because we strongly believe that the economies of scale resulting from such partnerships will contribute effectively and efficiently to achieving our goal of alleviating poverty and improving food security through the sustainable use of natural resources.

Let me now briefly present to you the most important activities that we carried out and the accompanying outputs since AGM 2003, as we strove to achieve this goal.

### **Major events.**

#### *1. Development of the GFAR Business Plan*

One of the highlights of the GFAR year was the successful formulation of the GFAR 10-year Strategy 2004-2013 and a Business Plan for the period 2004-2006. While for some other organisations the completion of a strategy document and business plan may be a routine event, for GFAR the manner of developing the strategy and plan has been as important as the output. In this sense, we are proud to have been able to undertake a process that sought and obtained the input from all categories of GFAR stakeholders, in such a way as to ensure that what is contained in the plan closely reflects their expectations, views and ideas, and hence secure their commitment to its implementation. The preparation of the business plan involved a succession of consultations and meetings culminating in an externally facilitated retreat of stakeholder representatives. We are confident that the high level of participation and enthusiasm shown by the actors in the process bodes well for the collective ownership, and commitment to the implementation, of the plan.

The GFAR Strategy, and the Business Plan that guides its implementation over the short term, identify four pillars and two cross cutting issues in support of achieving our goal. These pillars are:

- a. Inter-regional collaboration, which is core to the value adding contribution of GFAR to the global research system through the fostering of strong linkages amongst the Regional Fora.
- b. Collaborative research partnerships, where GFAR will continue to facilitate the initiation of multi-stakeholder programmes in those priority areas defined by our stakeholders;
- c. Advocacy, public awareness and strategic thinking. Our stakeholders firmly support an increased role for GFAR in this area, which is fundamental for securing political support for agricultural research worldwide
- d. Management Information Systems (MIS). The Strategy confirms information exchange and knowledge sharing as an enduring and central part of GFAR's responsibility for ensuring effective communication and understanding among its stakeholders, and particularly the Regional Fora.

The two issues that were thought to be sufficiently important as to be reflected across all GFAR activities have to do with:

- e. Full and active involvement of Civil Society Organisations; and
- f. Enhanced private sector engagement.

These two issues are seen as so fundamental to achieving GFAR's objectives that they are and will receive particular attention over the next three years.

## *2. Implementation of the GFAR Business Plan.*

The other main events of the year resulted from the implementation of the Business Plan, and I will now summarise the activities and achievements under the relevant pillars of the business plan

### ***Inter-regional collaboration***

The first of the now institutionalised biannual meetings of the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Fora took place in May this year in Rome, and the second was held here in Mexico a few days ago. These meetings are proving fundamental for sharing information and experiences related to on-going and future activities in the various regions, with the objectives of identifying areas of collaboration and complementarity based on the already identified regional priorities. Collectively, the Executive Secretaries have listed a restricted number of such areas and have identified one in which their respective forum could provide leadership for implementation as follows: commodity development networking by AARINENA; biotechnology and bio-safety issues by APAARI; advocacy and public awareness by FARA; small medium enterprises and agro-industry development by FORAGRO. During the GFAR-NARS sub-committee meeting held here in Mexico on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October, each of these fora presented a vision and a plan on how to move forward with these initiatives on an inter-regional basis, and we will plan to refine and implement these plans over the life span of the current GFAR strategy, in a way that will exploit available strengths and opportunities in the various fora.

The GFAR Charter defines its rules and regulations, and has undergone one review since its formulation in 1998. A second review is currently underway, and one of the recommendations of the review is the recognition of the European Forum on Agricultural Research for Development (EFARD) and the North American Forum for Agricultural Research (NAFAR) as GFAR fora on the same basis as the southern fora. If approved, this recommendation will enable GFAR to expand the concept of inter-regional collaboration to include a north-north axis, and by the same token strengthen south-north collaboration. We hope to report on progress along these lines in the near future.

During the course of the year under review, we supported the efforts of CIRAD to consult with GFAR regional and sub-regional fora as it embarked on a review of its current research programme and the development of a new one. Workshops and discussion sessions were held between CIRAD representatives and those of CORAF, APAARI, and FORAGRO on areas of mutual interests and priorities which CIRAD could take into account as it developed its programme of research, so that collaborative activities between institutions in those regions and CIRAD could be built around such priorities in an effort to strengthen the resulting north-south collaboration.

### ***Collaborative Research Partnerships***

Global Partnership Programmes (GPP) constitute one of the tools we use to pursue our objective of promoting collaborative research partnerships, and we currently have a number of on-going, GPPs. Some others are in the proposal development stage, while others still are in the idea stage.

During the period under review, the Underutilized Crop Species GPP one of our on-going GPPs was evaluated as it concluded a first two-year phase of implementation. This GPP whose main objective is to increase the contribution of potentially valuable and presently underutilised crop species to overcoming poverty and alleviating hunger is managed by a Global Facilitation Unit (GFU) housed at IPGRI and typifies GFAR's approach of drawing on the complementary strengths of its various stakeholders. The web-based information system developed to provide access to most relevant information sources on underutilized species was further refined this year, and an international workshop which focussed exclusively on developing marketing strategies for underutilized plant species was successfully organized.

According to the reviewer of the first two-year phase of implementation, the credibility achieved by the Program now provides it with a sound base for moving forward to a second phase, and it is recommended that the programme should now concentrate on providing policy and other decision-makers with guidelines and options for identifying and better exploiting untapped opportunities for developing underutilised species.

A collaborative initiative between CIAT, IPGRI, and the GFU whose objective is to develop a series of innovation histories that will identify factors that have contributed to successful development of previously underutilized species will in part respond to this recommendation, and the proposal has been submitted to DFID for funding

A pertinent and appropriate example of an activity in the development stage is a proposed GPP on Post-harvest Systems – linking farmers to the markets which, in line with the partnership building concept of GFAR, brings together GFAR regional fora, FAO and the Post Harvest Forum or PhAction, a consortium of research institutions which includes 5 CGIAR centres. The objective of the initiative is promote and facilitate the efficient, equitable and sustainable development of the post-harvest, value adding and marketing components of the production to consumption chain. The initiative builds on a huge amount of groundwork, undertaken through five regional consultations and one global meeting, to identify priorities and gaps, and which has resulted in the development of a strategic framework. The global meeting was held in October 2003, and since then we have synthesized the strategic framework in a brochure that is currently being disseminated amongst our stakeholders and beyond. Next week the initiative will be formally presented to the permanent country representatives to FAO in Rome, and actions are already underway to ‘take the initiative back to the regions’. APAARI will organise the first of these events that will take place in Thailand in December, where a region specific plan of action will be drawn up for implementation.

Underpinning the strategic framework which forms the basis for programme and project implementation in the near future, is the concept that partnerships among the actors of the production to consumption chain, including those that provide R&D services, are vital for effectively addressing the complexity of the opportunities and constraints faced by small farmers in this increasingly globalized world.

With regards to activities we carried out this year to build research partnerships, in July this year and in collaboration with the French consortium of research institutions – AGROPOLIS based in Montpellier, we launched the first of the two calls for Proposals for a competitive grant scheme under the DURAS or Promotion of Sustainable Development in Agricultural Research Systems project funded by the French Ministry of External Affairs. The project will provide funds for the development and implementation of multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder projects that also encourage south-south and north-south collaboration in two thematic areas: agro-biodiversity and genetic resources management for food security, and local knowledge in natural resource management. The first set of pre-proposals were screened by our NARS sub-committee a week ago today. Selected submissions will be developed into full proposal for funding. The second call for proposals which will be made early next year will focus on the themes of Agroecology and other sustainable farming practices; and linking farmers to market: supporting small and medium agro-enterprises (agri SMEs),

### ***Advocacy, public awareness and strategic thinking***

Two objectives drive this pillar. The first is to add the voice and perspective of GFAR to global and regional debates and initiatives on policy, institutional and other critical emerging issues that shape and affect agriculture and agricultural research while the second is to contribute to on-going efforts to sensitize decision and policy makers to the need for a long term commitment to, and support for agricultural research.

During the period under review, we participated in a number of global, regional and national events during which the voice of GFAR, its approach and philosophy were added to the debate,

in order to advocate the partnership concept on which GFAR is built. Some pertinent examples are:

i) Our participation at a research workshop organized by the World bank on development of research systems to support the changing agricultural sector. The objective of the workshop was to evaluate the experience of key reform elements of agricultural research systems currently being promoted in different regions and to identify promising directions for future investments. We presented a paper on the promotion of regional and international alliances and spill-ins from a country perspective as an input into the search for new directions for future investments in agricultural research. ii) Our participation in a symposium organized by the Association of Applied Biologists of the United Kingdom, on increasing the effectiveness of world public sector agricultural research through partnerships- bases for novel paradigms, during which we presented the view that the GFAR model is one of such novel paradigms. iii) We provided some inputs from a GFAR perspective to the debate organized by IFPRI this July on the way forward for the ISNAR programme, specifically on the agricultural science policy theme. During this debate we voiced the concerns of some of our stakeholders with regards to the focus of the new ISNAR programme, indicating that while the focus is on Sub-Saharan Africa, the reach should continue to be global.

### ***Management Information Systems***

Our double endeavour to (a) enable each regional and sub-regional forum to develop and implement an information and communication strategy and (b) to develop a global strategic information system linking the regions has taken important steps forward over the past year with the completion of the first phase of the Global.RAIS project. Five regional consultation meetings laid the basis for an inter-regional workshop held in Rome in June 2004 that set up a global agenda for ICT which has been used to formulate a project proposal that will take the Global.RAIS into a second phase. Our ambition with the second phase is to enable equitable access to global agricultural research and development information in support of the more knowledge intensive agriculture that is emerging globally. The proposal was presented to GFAR Stakeholders at their meeting on Saturday 23 October for endorsement and will be submitted to a consortium of donors including the EU, IDRC, CIDA and NWO.

### ***Cross cutting issue: Civil Society Engagement***

Since my last report at the AGM03 in Nairobi, the GFAR Secretariat carried out a number of activities designed to strengthen the linkages between civil society organizations (CSO) constituencies and other GFAR Stakeholder groups, particularly the regional and sub-regional fora (RF/SRF). A few pertinent examples are:

In June this year researchers from the regional fora participated actively in the biennial World Farmers Congress organized by the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) whose president represents farmers' constituency on the GFAR Steering Committee. A farmer and a researcher pair from each of our regional fora prepared a paper on strengthening the linkages between farmers' organizations and research institutions from the respective regional perspective, and presented the paper in the respective regional sessions.

The event provided both farmers and regional fora representatives an excellent opportunity to interact and discuss issues of mutual concern and to forge new alliances which we intend to nurture.

In addition, and just a few days ago on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> of October the annual GFAR meetings started with a round table discussion on Stakeholder Analysis for Effective Partnership Building. This event brought representatives of GFAR stakeholders together to sensitize and expose them to a powerful tool they need to use at all stages of their collaborative research projects so that the interests and expectations of all partners are well addressed for a long lasting and fruitful partnership. Once sensitised we further challenged the participant to develop a framework for a capacity building initiative designed to enhance the ability and willingness to use this tool. We plan to further refine this framework and implement its contents in the near future.

As indicated earlier, farmers and NGO representatives actively participated in all of the consultation process for the development of the current GFAR business plan. These representatives met again last Monday the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, develop a plan of action that will enable them play their role and contribute effectively to the implementation of the business plan.

### ***Specific collaboration with CGIAR Centres***

Interactions between GFAR and the CGIAR centres occur in many ways and forms. I have already mentioned some examples of how CG centres participate and – in some instances - take lead roles in GFAR promoted and facilitated activities. More concrete and direct collaboration has taken shape over the last year. Let me quickly highlight three examples.

Firstly, GFAR has put together a 17-member stakeholder committee for the GNERATION Challenge Programme(CP) mandated to:

- a) Advise the CP Program Steering Committee so that it could appropriately take into account the views, experience and perspectives of various stakeholders in formulating the overall policies guiding the CP.
- b) Recommend measures to improve multi-stakeholder involvement, especially those from the South and from the civil society organizations (CSOs), in CP implementation and review
- c) Provide feedback to various stakeholders on the CP implementation and outputs

The committee will hold its first meeting early in December 2004.

Secondly, in order to better understand how client (stakeholders) needs and demands can be effectively incorporated into and acted upon in multi-stakeholder initiatives, the GFAR Secretariat and CIAT are jointly supporting a position to address this issue, in the context of the Global Partnership Programs and the CG Challenge and other system-wide initiatives, and with particular interest in looking at the most appropriate mechanisms for greater engagement of the private sector.

Thirdly, in the Agenda item that immediately follows this one on CGIAR and Civil Society; you will appreciate how far we have come in working together to bring the voices of our ultimate beneficiaries to the floor of this important event in the calendar of global agricultural research and development.

## **Conclusion**

By way of concluding, I would like to affirm that bit by bit we are getting closer to an all inclusive dialogue on how best to rid the planet of the scourge of hunger and poverty through well directed agricultural R&D interventions that meet the real needs of the people and communities we endeavour to help. GFAR's intention is to foster and strengthen this dialogue and we see the CGIAR centres as key players, stakeholders and supportive partners in this task.

Finally Mr Chairman, I will be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge the GFAR Donor Support Group which through its moral and financial support to GFAR has made many of these accomplishments and others I have not been able to share with you possible. Many members of the group are present here today, and on behalf of the GFAR family, I say thank you for your steadfast support to a worthy cause.

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