

Global Forum on Agricultural Research

Report of the Global Forum Steering Committee meeting

October 29, 1997

The Second Meeting of the Global Forum Steering Committee was held in Washington on October 29, 1997 in conjunction with International Centers' Week of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Fernando Chaparro Osorio, Chairman of the Global Forum Steering Committee and Director General of Colciencias/Colombia. Participating Steering Committee members included: Moise Houssou (FARA), Fernando Chaparro Osorio (LAC), William Dar (APAARI), Mohammed El Mourid (AARINENA), Dinguri Nick Mwaniki (Private Sector), Miguel Altieri (NGO), Abdelmajid Slama (Convenor of the donors support group), Russell Freed (North America ARIs), Bent Schmidt-Nielsen (European ARIs), and Nobuyoshi Maeno (Asia/Pacific ARIs). Representatives of the IARCs and of Farmer Organizations could not be present.

1. Procedures:

The Committee confirmed that for the present the open-door policy for meetings will continue. This policy is in keeping with the purpose of the GFAR, which is to promote collaboration and sharing of information. In the future, the Committee will meet in camera, when and if, there is a need for closed meetings.

The Chairman tabled six documents for the Committee's discussion and consideration. These included: (1) Global Forum on Agricultural Research Report of Activities: 1996-1997; (2) Global Forum on Agricultural Research: Proposed Programme of Work 1998-2000; (3) Terms of Reference for the Establishment of the Global Forum Steering Committee Secretariat; (4) Operationalization of the NARS-SC Secretariat (for information only); (5) Minutes of the 2nd NARS Steering Committee Meeting (for information only); and (6) Establishment of a "Donor Support Group to the Global Forum for Agricultural Research".

2. Reports from Stakeholder Representatives:

a) The NARSs Regional Fora Report: The four existing Regional Fora of NARSs are in varying stages of development due to differing times of their formation. The Regional Fora for Eastern Europe and Central Asia has not yet organized and did not have representation.

The Regional Fora are currently pursuing four priority activities:

- setting priorities for regional research and for the CGIAR regional agendas and planning collaborative projects at the Sub-Regional level;
- broadening the base of the NARSs to include NGOs, the private sector, and universities as integral components of the NARSs;
- supporting regional research networks, especially for CG Centers, and establishing regional funds for research; and
- seeking support to establish full-time secretariats.

The Regional Fora are also active in documenting success stories from research, publishing newsletters, and establishing electronic communications systems.

b) The North American ARI Report: There has been considerable discussion on the subject of North American representation in the Global Forum, but no formal consultations and there is considerable difficulty in organizing the diverse community interested in agricultural research in North America. Future consultative meetings are to be planned. On a very positive note, there are a number of initiatives underway to raise funding and expand international programs and collaborative research activities. These include, among others: the GREAN Initiative, a competitive grants program by USAID, and a university initiatives with the U. S. Department of Agriculture to obtain funding for international collaborative research.

c) The European ARI Report: A European Colloquium on Agricultural Research for Development was organized by the European Consortium for Agricultural Research in the Tropics (ECART) and the Network of European Agricultural (Tropically and Subtropically Oriented) Universities and Scientific Complexes Related With Agricultural Development (NATURA), and hosted by AGROPOLIS on behalf of the European Initiative for Agricultural Research for Development (EIARD). Approximately 150 participants, including some from the private sector, and NGOs attended the Colloquium, which demonstrated the interest and capacity of the European network of ARIs to participate in global research efforts. The European ARIs indicated a desire to take necessary steps to establish a European Forum for Agricultural Research for Development and to focus on concrete actions. The pilot phase of establishing an electronic information system (INFOSYS) has been agreed.

d) The Asia/Pacific ARI Report: There has been little activity in organizing regional consultations, but Japan is interested in expanding collaboration with regional programs. There is interest in funding research programs, but identifying priorities often takes a long time. The Global Forum and Regional Fora can help to identify research priorities and develop research programs for funding and thus expedite research assistance to NARSs. There is also a comparative advantage in collaborative research making use of advanced facilities in the ARIs. Though some work must be done in the developing countries,

biotechnology and some other advanced research may better take advantage of the investments made in laboratories and other facilities in Japan and other ARIs.

e) The Private Sector Committee Report: The Private Sector Committee has been established for one year and has focused on defining its mandate and interests. The priority area of interest is in dialog on biotechnology policy and defining relationships between the CGIAR Centers and the private sector. There is interest in developing concrete partnerships, but for now consultations on partnerships are on hold. There is interest in capacity building and on completing case studies of partnership arrangements. The private sector is so large and diverse that consultations and representation of the private sector as a whole is difficult.

f) The NGO Representative Report: The NGO Committee has focused attention of developing a concrete proposal for a research program to explore factors of success in collaborative research programs involving NGOs and community-based organizations in Latin America. The objective would be to identify methodologies for successful collaborative relationships and to determine how successes can be replicated and scaled up. The proposal covers work in Latin America, but would be shared with other Regional Fora for comment and consideration for implementing parallel research projects.

3. Dialogue with the Chairman of the CGIAR

The Chairman of the CGIAR, Dr. Ismail Serageldin, met with the GF Steering Committee and pledged his continued support based on the fact that the GFAR is the only mechanism to bring together all parts of the global agricultural research system. He commented that:

- Establishing electronic communications and information systems is very important.
- For the GFAR to have an impact it should address specific problems, such as the integration of NARS. Working on general issues will be difficult to show an impact.
- A critical issue is that of redefining NARS to incorporate the for-profit sector and civil society.
- It is most important for the GFAR to demonstrate some success in the short term to show its potential.
- The CGIAR will continue support to the Global Forum, as the CGIAR is only one part of the global system and must rely on support and collaboration from the other stakeholders within the system.
- The Global Forum Steering Committee should meet with TAC (Technical Advisory Committee of the CGIAR) and the System-wide Review Panel for the CGIAR, as these are perhaps the only two actors that take a global view of agricultural research.

The Global Forum might well also address issues of proprietary science and how they affect the global research system.

The Global Forum Chairman summarized the priorities and strategy of the GFAR as: i) promoting collaborative linkages between institutions (difficult); ii) promoting information initiatives; iii) mobilizing resources within the group; and iv) exploring resource mobilization from outside.

4. Electronic Global Forum for Agricultural Research

The Steering Committee had a brief presentation of the Electronic Global Forum (EGFAR). Mr. Peter Gregory working in ESDAR with a team composed of Reza Firuzabadi, Barbro Danielsen, and Matthew Manfreda from the World Bank's Information Services Division has developed a functional framework of an electronic forum following the model proposed in Cairo by Mr. Selcuk Ozgediz of the CGIAR. The EGFAR will not be simply another website, but a mechanism for communication and interactions for the global agricultural research system. It will be a forum of fora, and includes the following: Kiosks, News, Hot Topics, Auditorium, Forum Library and GFAR Information.

Though the structure for the EGFAR was demonstrated to the Steering Committee, it was not possible with the limited time and the group setting to assess the limitations or additional services that should be included in the EGFAR. The Steering Committee requested that the EGFAR be further developed and put on-line for testing. This was agreed and the EGFAR will go on-line in about one month for testing. The Steering Committee and others will comment by February, 1998 and then final development of the Electronic Global Forum for Agricultural Research can be completed. It has also been recognized that relationship between EGFAR and on-going or planned regional electronic information system should be explored.

5. Global Forum for Agricultural Research Work Program 1998-2000

The Steering Committee had limited time to review the proposed work plan. Some concerns were expressed regarding the activities that the GFAR would undertake. There would potentially be a very large number of organizations that may like to work under the umbrella of the GFAR, but the Forum should be concerned with the quality of activities within its mandate and with the value-added that it can bring to the activities. It was agreed that it is essential to rapidly prepare selection criteria for approving projects under the GFAR umbrella. In the case of the proposed NGO Committee research in Latin America, the Committee questioned why the work should be limited to one region (Latin America) and to partnerships with one type of actor in the global research system (NGOs). It was confirmed that the NARS should be in the center of all these case study analyses and that documenting failures would be as informative as documenting the successes.

In view of the relevant concerns raised and the limited time to resolve these, the Steering Committee agreed that, for the present, work should proceed on two items of the proposed work plan: the Electronic Global Forum for Agricultural Research (EGFAR) and support to Regional Fora and Sub-Regional Fora, the first step being the operationalization of the NARS-SC secretariat as decided by the NARS-SC. Other elements of the proposed Work program will be discussed via e-mail during the coming weeks and actions proposed for funding at the first Support Group meeting to be organize by IFAD for January/February, 1998.

It was decided to give priority to preparation of a leaflet describing the Global Forum and its vision for use in informing the various constituencies for the Forum. The leaflet would highlight the primary purpose of the Forum in facilitating partnerships and collaboration in research for development.

6. Mobilization of Resources: Establishment of a Global Forum Support Group

IFAD reported briefly on an initiative to establish a support group for the GFAR. A report of an information meeting held on Tuesday 28 October, 1997, has been circulated. It demonstrated that there is considerable donor interest with fourteen members already expressing interest in joining a "club" of donors/supporters.

7. Chairman's Comments

Very considerable progress has been made on defining GFAR programs and operations. The agenda is ambitious and the half day meeting is inadequate to the sizable agenda for the Steering Committee. In future meetings, a full day will be needed to adequately address the work plan and issues confronting the Committee.

It is evident that there is considerable turnover in stakeholder representation on the Steering Committee from the various constituencies. This is probably the nature of the constituencies and a factor with which the Steering Committee will have to deal. It implies that more time is required to cover the background of issues during meetings. As the stakeholder constituencies become better informed and as more consultation takes place, representatives should be better informed before meetings. Following further constituency consultations, it was felt that formal nominations to the Steering Committee are necessary.