

Global Forum on Agricultural Research

MINUTES OF THE 3rd NARS STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

Brasilia, May 23, 1998 - 14:00 - 17:00

The meeting was opened by Fernando Chaparro, Chairman of the NARS Steering Committee (NARS-SC), who welcomed all participants to the meeting. The agenda was adopted with a small modification to allow for interaction with the CGIAR System Review at the end of the meeting.

1. Progress report

In his presentation, the Chairman highlighted the major achievements since the last NARS-SC meeting and the key issues which have still to be addressed.

1.1. Highlights

- Establishment of the GFAR-SG under the leadership of IFAD to which the Chairman expressed his appreciation and a significant change in the denomination of this committee which shifted from DSG (donor support group) to SG (support group);
- Significant progress in all organizational aspects of GFAR, especially an approved document on “Operationalization of the NARS Secretariat” and the preparation of a discussion paper on NARS-SC rules and procedures;
- Preparation of a programme of work and budget based on the results and priorities of the regional fora and production of a revised version following comments and suggestions received from the GFAR-SG in early February 1998;
- Official contacts with the main facilitating agencies and preparation of Letters of Agreement (LOAs) between the NARS-SC and FAO and between the NARS-SC and ISNAR.

1.2. Key issues

- How to be sure that the priorities and main concerns of the Regional Fora (R.F.) and Sub-Regional Fora (S-R.F.) are well reflected in the programme of work of the NARS Secretariat;
- The limitation of the number of proposals for action due to the financial constraints and the financial gap in the proposed budget in spite of the good pledges made during the first meeting of the GFAR-SG;
- The urgency to operationalize the NARS Secretariat which implies the finalization of the two LOAs; comments are expected from the NARS-SC members **before May 27** in order

Members expressed their deep appreciation to the Chairman and to the facilitating agencies for the impressive results achieved in such a short period of time and their full confidence in the future of the NARS-SC and of the NARS secretariat.

2. **Presentation by the different Regional Fora**

2.1. Asia/Pacific (APAARI)

In his report, Dr. R.S. Paroda emphasized the “Expert Consultation on management and strengthening of research networks in the Asia/Pacific Region” which took place in October 1997 and the good prospects for initiating new network activities in the region. He expressed his concern to see the regional problems and difficulties taken into better account by the NARS Secretariat. He also mentioned a few partnership agreements signed (with IPGRI) or in preparation (with ISNAR and CABI) and the support APAARI has received from Australia (ACIAR) and is expecting from ISNAR (through an APO) for its secretariat. Dr. Paroda then listed the most recent publications of APAARI (directories for the South Asia and South East Asia sub-regions and the preparation of the Eastern Asia one and the success stories on orchid production in Thailand and wheat production in Iran). Finally, he indicated that the next APAARI General Conference will take place in October 1998 in Korea and will be linked, as usual, with an expert consultation on research management by NARS.

2.2. West Asia and North Africa (AARINENA)

Due to the short period of time between the end of the AARINENA General Conference at which a new Executive Committee was elected and MTM, the new Chairman could not attend. He asked the FAO Regional Representative to the CGIAR for the WANA region to represent him in the meeting but unfortunately the representative did not attend. However, the new AARINENA Chairman sent a letter confirming the strong interest of the region in the activities of the GFAR and of its NARS component and his willingness to play an active role in the near future.

2.3. Sub-Saharan Africa (FARA)

Moïse Houssou, Chairman of CORAF and FARA, indicated that a distinction has to be made between activities undertaken at the sub-regional level and those carried out for the whole region. He confirmed that, in sub-Saharan Africa, the sub-region level is the operational one with the existence of the different research networks, the definition of sub-regional priorities and the preparation of strategic plans (completed for ASARECA, on going for CORAF and under revision for SACCAR). He also mentioned that significant progress has been made in the operationalization of information and communications networks with the publication of newsletters by ASARECA (AGRIFORUM) and CORAF (CORAF-ACTION).

At the regional level, FARA organized its last meeting in February 1998. FARA members agreed to give priority to scientific information, to a better mutual understanding between the three sub-regions and to the establishment of a regional research fund. They also decided to

explore the possibility to be linked more closely to a political organization and have approached OAU in this respect. As a consequence, the next FARA meeting may be organized in July 1998 in Addis ababa, Ethiopia and hosted by CEA. The last FARA meeting was held at the same time as the SPAAR meeting during which the SPAAR external review was extensively discussed. As a result, a vision of the future of both SPAAR and FARA emerged. A seminar on globalization of agricultural research was also organized at the same time and raised many interesting questions.

Whilst recognizing the progress made in bringing all stakeholders together, FARA's main concern remains the financial sustainability of the regional and sub-regional organizations.

2.4. CEE & CAC (Central and Eastern Europe - Central Asia and the Caucasus)

No progress has been made since the last meeting in building the regional and sub-regional fora for these regions.

2.5. Latin America and Carribeans (LAC)

Fernando Chaparro briefly presented the situation for the LAC region and mentioned that the most recent developments are presented in a document which has been distributed to all members. SICTA and PROCICARIBE have now completed their formal establishment and IICA has agreed to serve as the secretariat of the LAC regional forum which has already tremendously increased its operational capacity. Another major achievement was the formal establishment of FONTAGRO, a regional fund for agricultural research, in March 1998 to which 14 countries have agreed to contribute. Main activities carried out or planned for the region were not presented in detail due partly to time constraint and partly because they were listed in the distributed document.

3. Financial support to Regional/Sub-Regional Fora activities and NARS Secretariat Program of Work and Budget

The questions which were covered under this point of the agenda related to the type of activities which should be included in the program of work and budget of the NARS secretariat, how the funds should be channeled to R.F. and S-R.F. and how the NARS secretariat could better serve the needs of the R.F. and S-R.F.

Whilst the difficulty for R.F. and S-R.F. to meet regularly due to financial constraints was emphasized, it was agreed that the NARS secretariat should not be involved in financially supporting the institutional meetings of R.F. and S-R.F.. Its main functions should be to assist in :

- Facilitating inter-regional exchange of information
- Favoring information networking (e.g. assistance to R.F. and S-R.F. in having their "home-page" on Internet)

- Allocating in a transparent manner its resources according to the R.F. and S-R.F. priorities and in making clear what is the “added value” for having these activities undertaken by the NARS secretariat
- Playing an advisory role to the R.F. and S-R.F.
- Mobilizing governments and donors on the R.F. and S-R.F. priorities and in contributing to the rationalization of their activities
- Focusing its activities on non-CG mandate Crops

The Chairman summarized the discussion in emphasizing the need to minimize the size and costs of the NARS secretariat and to maximize investments. He also reaffirmed that the agenda of the secretariat should be the NARS-SC agenda and not one of its own and that there is an urgent need for the countries to demonstrate more clearly their commitment to R.F. and S-R.F.. Finally, it was agreed that, ideally and in a long term perspective, the day-to-day work of R.F. and S-R.F. should be covered by the member countries, the institutional meetings should, as much as possible, be linked to technical consultations in order to facilitate donor support and that projects to be carried out by the R.F. and S-R.F. should be financially supported by the donor community. It was recommended to explore with the GFAR-SG the possibility to move along these lines.

Not much time was allocated to the specific discussion on the Programme of Work and Budget 1998 - 2000. A consensus was reached and all members agreed that the identified Action Lines and activities provide an excellent framework for a more extensive discussion within the GFAR-SC and with the GFAR-SG.

4. Conclusion

The open session of the meeting was closed at 17:00 to allow for interaction with some members of the CGIAR System Review. The Chairman thanked all the participants for their attendance, their active participation and their constructive comments and decided to reconvene the NARS-SC meeting on Tuesday 26 May at 12:30 to cover the agenda of the closed session.

MINUTES OF THE 3rd NARS STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING (Cont'd)

Brasilia, May 26, 1998 - 12:30 - 14:00

The NARS-SC met “in camera” on May 26, 1998. Three points were on the agenda : a discussion paper on the “NARS-SC Rules and Procedures”, the two draft Letters of Agreement with FAO and ISNAR, and the election of the new Chair.

5. “NARS-SC Rules and Procedures”

After a short introduction highlighting the key questions which needed to be addressed, a lively discussion took place and resulted in the following conclusions.

5.1. Composition of the NARS-SC

All members are in favor of an enlargement of the membership with two representatives per regional forum. However, the financial implications should not be neglected. It was therefore decided to explore with FAO the possibility of having at least one regional representative nominated by the regional forum and financially supported by FAO. Meanwhile, the FAO regional representatives will be welcome to attend the open session of the NARS-SC meetings. It was also asked to specify in the text that the Executive Secretary is a member of the committee and serves as its secretary but has no vote. This should also be the case for the “permanent observers” whose the proposed list was approved.

The facilitating agencies raised the question of their presence as “permanent observers”. The NARS-SC members felt that the committee would strongly benefit from their presence and therefore asked them to continue to attend to the meetings.

5.2. Duration of the nomination

The Chairpersons of the R.F. are, ex officio, members of the NARS-SC. As they are nominated for a period of two years, it was agreed that the second member of each regional forum, when the decision of having them becomes effective, should be appointed for three years in order to provide some continuity. The members agreed to consult their respective constituencies regarding this measure and the previous one.

5.3. Chairmanship

The NARS-SC members decided to nominate one Chairperson and one Vice-Chairperson, with immediate effect. The annual turn-over with an automatic shift for the position of Vice-Chair to that of Chair the following year, as proposed in the text, was not considered the optimal one and the members were requested to make alternative suggestions. The decision to review the situation during ICW98 was taken.

Finally, the document was considered very useful for leading the discussion and all members were requested to make comments and suggestions **before the end of July 1998** so that a revised version could be circulated in September, finalized and approved during ICW98. It was also suggested to call this document “Guidelines and Procedures” instead of “Rules and Regulations”.

6. Letters of Agreements with FAO and ISNAR

Fernando Chaparro discussed the draft LOA prepared by FAO, drawing the attention of the participants to the amendments that were to be proposed to FAO. The participants considered the draft LOA as a good and fair proposal and also accepted all amendments

suggested. They also suggested that the secretariat be “housed” and not “attached” to SDD. They requested the Chairperson to clarify this question with FAO, asking to benefit from the same terminology used for the TAC secretariat.

The LOA with ISNAR was just mentioned as only minor changes in the terms of reference of the ISNAR Senior Adviser have to be made to give him more flexibility in the execution of his tasks on behalf of the NARS Secretariat.

Finally, the NARS-SC members were requested to make their comments in writing **before 28 May** so that the LOAs could be finalized and signed during MTM or immediately thereafter.

7. Nominations

The representatives of the facilitating agencies left the meeting room before the election took place. The representative of the WANA region proposed Dr. R.S. Paroda (A/P region) as Chairperson and Dr. M. Houssou (SSA region) as Vice-Chairperson. This proposal was seconded by the representative of the LAC region and unanimously accepted.

All members of the committee congratulated Dr. Paroda for his nomination and for accepting to serve as Chairperson of both the NARS-SC and the GFAR-SC. Dr. Houssou was also warmly congratulated.

A special vote of thanks was proposed to Dr. F. Chaparro for his strong leadership and for all the work achieved by the NARS-SC during his Chairmanship. The meeting was then officially closed.