2nd Triennial GFAR Conference

22 – 24 May 2003

Méridien Président Hotel, Dakar, Sénégal

Linking Research and Rural Innovation to Sustainable Development

Chairman Opening Address
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This is indeed a great pleasure and honor for me as the Chair of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) to welcome all of you distinguished guests and representatives of GFAR constituencies from national, regional, and international agricultural research and development communities around the world to the GFAR-2003 Conference.

Our special appreciation and profound gratitude are extended to the President of the Republic of Senegal, His Excellency Maitre Addoulaye Wade for his kind acceptance of GFAR’s invitation to officially open the conference. Also, I would like to extend our gratitude and sincere thanks to our dear hosts and the Senegalese national organizing committee who welcomed us with open arms and have made excellent arrangement for this important meeting.

After my brief intervention, we will right away proceed with the first Keynote Address. But before that, allow me, ladies and gentlemen, to look back and reminisce on the birth of what we now call GFAR. The collective effort of a number of visionary and like-minded people representing various regional and international institutions led to the creation of GFAR on October 1996.

In May 2000, the first GFAR Conference was held in Dresden, Germany, with the theme of “strengthening partnership in agricultural research for development in the Context of Globalization.” The main highlights of that conference were the adoption of a global shared vision on agricultural research for development and the emergence of Global Partnership Programs (GPP) on strategic issues.

Madame Chairperson, ladies, and gentlemen, since the Dresden Conference, GFAR has facilitated and supported a number of key activities that provided an enabling environment for a stronger multi-stakeholder involvement in agricultural research and development by formulating and implementing a three-year business plan. The GFAR Executive Secretary will later on today present an analysis of how well we have collectively implemented the Business Plan.

I would like to reemphasize the fact that GFAR strongly believes Agricultural Research and Development (ARD) needs to be continuously reviewed considering the threats and opportunities posed by:

- The increasing challenge of poverty and food security faced by the South,
- The globalization process, the results of which are beyond the control of southern stakeholders,
- The ever changing institutional environment, including liberalization in the agriculture sector,
- The increasing important roles being played by the neglected partners in agricultural research such as civil society organization including farmers’ organizations and NGOs.

It is our strong belief that scientific advances, in particular in the fields of natural resources management, information and communication, and biotechnology, must lead to a sustainable development benefiting all ARD stakeholders in an equitable manner.

Madame Chairperson, the GFAR-2003 Conference which is being organized in a developing country and in a region which is now facing the formidable challenges of food security, poverty alleviation, and sustainable use of natural resources. rightly deals with the important theme of “Linking Research and Rural Innovation for Sustainable Development.” This could
not have taken place at a better time than when African countries are embarking on a grand partnership initiative of NEPAD, to achieve sustainable development for the continent.

Agricultural research and rural innovation processes are not isolated activities. They are interlinked with many stakeholders and operate within agricultural knowledge systems. It is within such knowledge systems that both agricultural research and rural innovations emerge as a result of the dynamic participation and interaction among all ARD stakeholders. This diversity of actors leads to diversity of knowledge systems, which may be conflicting but also complementary.

Sustainable agriculture can be economically, environmentally, and socially viable. There are resource-conserving technologies, local institutional structures and enabling external institutions that are all known to work. But until recently, there have been few policies known to be effective. Therefore, another challenge will be reform of policy processes themselves with more focus and emphasis on participation and mediation, if the complexities and uncertainties of sustainability are to be continually and effectively addressed.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you as stakeholders of GFAR, over the next two and half days will elaborate and provide suggestions, recommendations, and directives, which will form the cornerstones of a framework for our next triennial business plan. I would like to draw your kind attention to the GFAR Secretariat’s effort to ensure an active participation of the civil society organizations at this meeting. A pre-conference civil society consultation took place over the last two days to enable CSOs to be actively involved, as a stakeholder group, in GFAR activities. We consider this an effective way of addressing one of GFAR’s objectives, that of facilitating the involvement of the “less vocal” stakeholders in agricultural research and development. As well, I have to underline that during this GFAR conference, there are timeslots allotted for stakeholder consultations, so that each GFAR constituency could meet, exchange, and clarify their expectations.

During the conference we will also review the progress made in recent years with regard to the contribution of agricultural research and rural innovation to sustainable development. We expect new emerging areas of global and regional partnership will be identified in the following parallel sub-plenary sessions.

1. Rural knowledge systems and innovation processes
2. Agro-based small and medium-sized enterprises and markets in developing countries
3. Agriculture/livestock integration
4. Organizational partnerships for Agricultural Research
5. Innovative policy directions and approaches for sustainable agricultural development

The outcomes of the Plenary and Sub-Plenary sessions as well as the Working Group meetings will undoubtedly contribute to redynamization of the various stakeholder groups and emergence of new global and regional partnerships and alliances among ARD stakeholders.

Let me graphically illustrate the exciting times ahead of us from now till Saturday morning. Future directions and next GFAR Business Plan will be mainly derived from: Pre Conference CSO Consultation Workshop, keynote addresses, roundtables brainstorming sessions, side-events, stakeholders consultation meetings, regional forum discussions and thematic working group meetings.

Madame Chairperson, I would like to once again express my deep appreciation and gratitude to the Senegalese National Organizing Committee, GFAR’s Conference Working Group, FARA, and the GFAR Secretariat for their hard work, exciting programs and excellent arrangement of this Conference. Also, I would like to sincerely thank the Facilitating Agencies, FAO and IFAD and the donors of GFAR during the last three years and those who have financially supported GFAR-2003 Conference. In addition, I earnestly request the other donors to come on boards and give full backing to GFAR.
Finally I would like to extend on behalf of all GFAR stakeholders, our profound and sincere gratitude to our host the Government of Senegal, especially the Ministry of Agriculture and livestock for their commitment at the highest level to support our Conference being held for the first time in a developing country. Last but not the least, our sincere appreciation and thanks are extended to you, the stakeholders and participants in GFAR-2003 Conference, for your invaluable presence in this meeting. Without your active support and encouragement, GFAR will not be able to achieve in close partnership with regional and international organizations, its noble goals and mission to collectively meet the challenges of global food security, alleviation of poverty and sustainable utilization of natural resources in the 21st Century, with the emphasis on priorities and needs of small land holders and the rural poor.

Thank you and May God bless you all

Mohammad H. Roozitalab

GFAR Chair