1. OPENING ADDRESS

The meeting was opened by Dr. R.S. Paroda, Chairman of the NARS Steering Committee (NARS-SC). In his introductory speech, after having welcome the 22 participants who attended the meeting, he emphasized the following points:

- Significant progress has been made since Brasilia;
- The most important event was probably the selection and appointment of Fernando Chaparro as the first NARS Executive Secretary;
- A major concern is the low mobilization of the NARS-SC members as well as of the sub-regional associations behind the NARS secretariat;
- Enough time should be devoted to the discussion of the Program of Work and Budget of the NARS Secretariat as this is the first time that the NARS Secretariat is operational and that funds are available;
- Another key question which has to be addressed during this week as it may impact on GFAR and its NARS component, is the report of the CGIAR External Review.

Dr. R.S. Paroda concluded his introductory remarks by wishing a very successful and fruitful meeting to all participants. He then asked Dr. M. Houssou, vice-Chairman of the NARS-SC and Chairman of the NARS Executive Secretary Selection Committee, to also welcome the participants. Dr. Houssou reaffirmed his full confidence in GFAR and his conviction that the NARS will greatly benefit from the establishment of the NARS Secretariat.

The proposed agenda was then adopted without modification.

2. PROGRESS REPORT

Christian Hoste briefly presented the progress made in the operationalization of the NARS Secretariat and on the efforts made for better informing the different stakeholders of the goals and functions of the NARS Secretariat since the 3rd meeting of the NARS-SC in Brasilia. A document was prepared and distributed to all participants. The key points emphasized are:
Staffing: finalization and signature of the two Letters of Agreements which defined the conditions under which the NARS Secretariat will be hosted by FAO and staffed by an ISNAR seconded senior officer; the selection process of the NARS Executive Secretary which led to the appointment of Dr. Fernando Chaparro as of 24 October 1998; the follow-up with the Dutch government on the two APO positions offered and the preparation of the terms of reference; the initial steps to recruit a secretary for the NARS Secretariat.

Physical Infrastructure: FAO was commended for the excellent facilities offered to the NARS Secretariat in spite of the financial restrictions.

Financial resources: All donor commitments were reviewed and a document on the proposed Program of Work and Budget for 1998 and 1999 prepared for discussion under a separate item on the agenda.

Dissemination of information on GFAR and the NARS Secretariat: A summary of all communications which took place between the Chairman and the NARS Secretariat with the NARS-SC members and the other GFAR stakeholders was presented. Formal presentations were also made at different regional/sub-regional fora, the most recent being the APAARI meeting in Korea (13 - 15 October 1998). Comments received from the participants to these presentations were shared with the NARS-SC members. Finally, thanks to the assistance of ISNAR, a GFAR logo and a brochure were drafted for discussion and endorsement by the GF-SC.

In the discussion which followed the presentation, it was emphasized that there is a need to develop the dialogue with the RF/SRF in order to agree on mechanisms which will allow a full participation and contribution of the NARS and their RF/SRF to the setting and implementation of the agenda of the NARS Secretariat. The need to better define the respective roles of the two secretariats and to prepare their operational strategy was also expressed.

3. REPORT ON THE REGIONAL FORA

3.1 Asia – Pacific Region

Dr. R.S. Paroda, Executive Secretary of APAARI, made a short presentation of the association and of its main achievements over the last years. He particularly emphasized the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with IPGRI, the establishment of a research group on fish and aquaculture in collaboration with ICLARM, the publication of 15 success stories and the organization of several expert consultations. He informed the participants that, during the last General Assembly (13 - 15 October 1998), Australia was elected as Chair and Thailand as vice-Chair of the association and that he was unanimously asked to continue to serve as Executive Secretary. He also announced that Australia has agreed to provide some additional financial support to the secretariat which will allow to recruit locally a technical officer and that The Netherlands has also indicated their intention to support an Associate Expert to assist the Executive Secretary in his tasks.
In the last General Assembly, APAARI also decided to work more toward the expansion of its memberships, to prepare for 2000 a high policy-maker meeting during which the association will present its 2020 vision, to consult other associations in the region in order to increase the legitimacy of the participation of the Asia-Pacific Region to GFAR. They also decided to encourage the member countries to move towards the establishment of operational NARS and to not establish formal sub-regional fora. However, the four sub-regions are encouraged to develop joint collaborative research activities based on the sub-regional priorities which they already have identified. Finally, he mentioned that APAARI, thanks to ISNAR’s assistance, has now its home-page on the Web and is currently working on the formulation of an information network project to be submitted jointly by APAARI, ISNAR and CABI to the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

3.2. **Sub-Saharan Africa**

Dr. Moise Houssou, Chairman of CORAF and FARA and vice-Chair of the NARS-SC, made a short presentation of the situation of the three sub-Saharan sub-regional organizations, namely ASARECA, CORAF and SACCAR. ASARECA is now implementing its strategic plan, CORAF is currently preparing its strategic plan and SACCAR is facing a political reform. The protocol which establishes FARA has now been adopted by the three sub-regional organizations and an Executive Committee nominated. A draft program of work for FARA is now available. The three priorities are: exchange of experiences; information and communication systems; and identification of panafrican research activities (e.g. cassava).

Dr. Houssou also informed the participants of the interactions between FARA and SPAAR, indicating that SPAAR has just been through the process of an External Review and that they are currently working on a vision document for agricultural research in Africa. SPAAR and CORAF also organized earlier in 1998 an inter-ministerial meeting to examine the possibility of establishing a regional competitive funding mechanism for agricultural research. A Task Force has been established to follow up on the recommendations. It is worth mentioning that in this endeavor sub-Saharan Africa is benefiting of the LAC experience.

3.3. **Latin America and Caribbean**

Dr. Luis Rodriguez presented the apologies of Dr. Jorge Kondo, acting Chairman of the LAC Regional Forum, who could not attend the meeting. The most recent developments in the LAC Region can be summarized as follows:

- Dr. J. Kondo is the acting Chairman of the LAC RF due to the resignation of Dr. Fernando Chaparro linked to his new appointment as NARS Executive Secretary. An Executive Committee is scheduled for the end of November 1998 and will, inter alia, decide on the new Chairmanship.
- The LAC RF Secretariat is effective. It is hosted by IICA, Costa Rica and the Executive Secretary is Dr. E. Alarcon.
- FONTAGRO, the regional competitive funding mechanism for agricultural research, is now operational.
3.4. West Asia and North Africa

A message of apologies from Dr. M. Roozitalab, Chairman of AARINENA, informing the participants that he will arrive late due to last minute problems of visa was read. Christian Hoste shared informally the most recent developments which took place related to the WANA Regional Forum, indicating that Dr. Roozitalab will complete the picture upon his arrival.

- The AARINENA Secretariat is now operational in Cyprus but needs to be strengthened.
- An AARINENA Executive Committee took place in September 1998 and was mainly focused on the preparation of priority research proposals for the five sub-regions which were established by the last General Assembly.
- The AARINENA Chairman wrote to the Ministers of Agriculture of the WANA Region to sensitize them on the most urgent problems faced by agriculture in the region and seeking for their active support. The possibility to link the next General Assembly with a Ministerial meeting is currently explored.

3.5. Central & Eastern Europe / Central Asia & Caucasus

Christian Hoste briefly reported that no significant progress has been made since Brasilia in setting consultative mechanisms for the countries of these regions to decide on how they can best participate in GFAR. Interesting steps forward were however made by the CGIAR and Dr. H. Elliott from ISNAR was asked to brief the participants. An Expert Consultation on Agricultural Research Systems in Central Asia and the Caucasus was organized by ISNAR in early June 1998. During this meeting, the GFAR and its NARS Component were presented and participants expressed a strong interest in this new initiative. More recently, the CGIAR has launched a System-wide programme for CAC countries. An inter-Center Secretariat has been opened in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and the first Steering Committee took place at the end of September. It has been suggested that the next meeting called by the Steering Committee will present an excellent opportunity to follow up with country representatives on regional collaboration and partnership.

4. NARS SECRETARIAT PROGRAM OF WORK AND BUDGET

The document prepared and presented by the NARS Secretariat was extensively discussed. The Chairman opened the discussion by expressing his concern about the imbalance between the core and the operational budgets which could give the impression that the secretariat is too “administrative”. He also emphasized the need to further clarify the respective roles of the two secretariats and mentioned that, in his views, the first priority for the NARS Secretariat should be the strengthening of the regional and sub-regional fora.
Other comments, ideas and suggestions relate to:

- The support the NARS Secretariat should provide to the Secretariats of the different RF/SRF to complement their effort and the need for close interactions to be sure that the priorities of the NARS Secretariat truly reflect the priorities expressed by the different regions / sub-regions.
- The need to express better in the program of work the facilitating and catalytic roles of the NARS Secretariat, including in resources mobilization.
- The probable necessity of having a new budgetary line for supporting inter- and intra-regional exchanges.
- Priority should also be given to exchanges of information, on success and failure stories in the different regions, on documenting more partnerships between the private sector and the other components of the NARS, in particular on small entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa.
- The interest of preparing logical frameworks for GFAR and the two secretariats in order to clarify who does what.

As time was becoming too short, the Chairman decided to wrap-up and ask the NARS-SC members if it was acceptable to meet in close session later during the week in order to finalize the program of work and budget of the NARS Secretariat and to discuss the last item on the agenda, i.e. “NARS-SC Guidelines and Procedures”. This was agreed and, later on, the closed session was scheduled for Tuesday 27 October from 07:00 to 08:30.

MINUTES OF THE 4TH NARS STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING
CLOSED SESSION

Washington, October 27, 1998

The closed session was opened by Dr. R.S. Paroda, Chairman and the agenda with only two items, namely the program of work and budget and the guidelines and procedures, adopted.

4. NARS SECRETARIAT PROGRAM OF WORK AND BUDGET (Cont’d)

The program of work and budget was revised, based on the comments made during the open session and on inputs by Dr. Fernando Chaparro on how best to present the budget, especially for the GFAR Support Group.

The main conclusions of the discussion are:

- The “in-kind” contributions should be monetarized and acknowledged, not necessary in the budget to be submitted to the GFAR Support Group but, at least, in the GFAR annual report.
- A new budgetary line for “inter- and intra-regional exchanges” should be opened and provisions of US$ 20,000 – 25,000 per year should be made.
- There is not enough justification for the NARS Secretariat to keep Table 2 “Institutional Activities” and Table 3 “Priority Operations” separated. One table is enough.
• The budgets for the three “priority operations” (i.e. Genetic Resources Management, Natural Resources Management and Non-CGIAR mandated commodities) should be merged in one line as no specific activities have yet been identified and only provisions made to assist RF/SRF to formulate programs in these fields.
• It should be clearly stated that the budgets are provisional and that the principles of flexibility and fungibility apply.
• Instead of stating “financial shortfall or gap”, it may be better to mention “unidentified income” as activities will be implemented only if funds are available.
• A warning was given by ISNAR on the potential legal difficulties of establishing database on human resources which provide enough useful information while, at the same time, protecting the privacy of the scientists.

The conclusion was that the program of work and budget should be re-written once more before its submission to the GFAR Support Group scheduled for the evening.

5. NARS-SC GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

Two questions were addressed under this item: the lines of communication between the NARS Secretariat and the RF/SRF on one side and the document prepared by the NARS Secretariat on the other.

5.1. Lines of Communication

As mentioned by the Chairman in his introductory speech, a key problem is the flow of information between the RF/SRF and the NARS Secretariat to be sure that the NARS Secretariat meets their needs and expectations. It was therefore agreed that the NARS Secretariat will prepare different distribution lists but that all communication will, in principle, be addressed or copied to the sub-regional groupings. The participation of the NARS Secretariat to the Executive Committee meetings of the RF/SRF should also be encouraged in order to facilitate interactions and to get first hand information on the RF/SRF priorities.

5.2. Document on Guidelines and Procedures

Not much time was left for discussing the revised document. The participants re-affirmed that:
• The Chairpersons of the RF are, ex officio, member of the NARS-SC.
• Each RF should nominate an alternate for a period of 3 years, based on his/her personal capacity.
• Each RF may consider asking the “alternate” to serve on the GF-SC, in order to guarantee some continuity in the work carried out.
• The NARS Secretariat will cover the expenses of one representative per RF but the other as well as the representatives of the SRF are most welcome to attend the meetings at no cost to the secretariat.
The conclusion was that the document will be re-examined in the light of the points mentioned above and submitted to the next NARS-SC meeting for formal endorsement.

6. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The discussions which took place during these NARS-SC meetings were so rich that it was thought useful to summarize in one place the recommendations and suggestions made. This paragraph has therefore not been discussed but may be useful as “guidelines” for the NARS Secretariat in planning and prioritizing its work.

- The NARS Secretariat should widely circulate the dates and venues of the different RF/SRF to all GFAR constituencies in order for them to plan ahead their eventual participation. In this respect, the RF/SRF should not forget to keep the NARS Secretariat fully informed and to add it on their distribution list.

- For the coming year, the NARS Secretariat should, as much as possible, attend the Executive Committee meetings and General Assemblies of the RF/SRF in order to better explain GFAR and its NARS component and to get first hand information on the regional / sub-regional priorities and adjust accordingly its program of work.

- The NARS Secretariat should encourage inter-regional cooperation by, inter alia, supporting the participation of one or two representatives of other regions to the General Assembly of a Regional Forum. Provisions have to be made in the budget for these activities.

- A better knowledge of existing agricultural research networks is a priority for all regions. It is therefore suggested that the NARS Secretariat requests each RF/SRF to prepare a list of networks active in their regions and to send it to the Secretariat for wider distribution.

- It could be beneficial to both the GF-SC Secretariat and the NARS Secretariat to prepare logical frameworks to make more explicit their respective roles and contributions.

- In order to improve the circulation of information between the RF, it is recommended that each Chairperson prepare for the NARS-SC meetings a short progress report which will be attached to the minutes of the meeting. Similarly, it is recommended that they bring to the meetings copies of the most recent publications produced in their regions which may be relevant for the other regions. These publications should then be displayed or distributed at the NARS-SC meetings.