The Global Post-harvest Initiative-Linking Farmers to Markets (GPhI)

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1. Development /History

1.1 Stage 1: Consultation and exploration of synergies

The GPhI is a global Initiative with the objective to work towards the efficient, equitable and sustainable development of post-harvest components in the supply chain to promote sustainable economic growth, poverty alleviation and food security in developing countries through market-orientated approaches. It was officially launched in April 2003 as a result of the merger of three separate initiatives, on post harvest and market linkages issues:

1. **The Global Initiative on Post-harvest Technology (GIPhT):** between 2001 and 2002, the Agricultural and Food Engineering Technologies Service (AGST) of FAO, in collaboration with the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) undertook five regional consultations with the objective of assessing the global status of the post-harvest sector. These consultations sought to identify issues, opportunities and challenges in the post-harvest sector, and to develop strategies that could feasibly be implemented by developing countries in order to achieve their development objectives. One hundred and ninety-seven individuals, from a variety of different stakeholder groups, representing 67 countries participated in these consultations. These were all organised in collaboration with the Regional Fora and were funded by FAO.

2. **The Linking Farmers to Markets Initiative (PhAction):** between 2000 and 2001, PhAction¹ (The Global Post-harvest Forum) held consultative meetings to develop a programme for ‘Linking Farmers to Markets’, to identify ways in which dynamic interventions in the sector can contribute to improved livelihoods, food security and sustainable development. Such interventions should equitably link smallholder farmers to growth markets, so improving the ability of the agri-produce sector in developing country economies to contribute to development.

3. **The Agro-based Small and Medium Enterprises and Markets in Developing Countries (GFAR).** In response to the Regional priority setting exercise that was undertaken in collaboration with the CGIAR Science Council GFAR launched a facilitation function on Agro-based Small and Medium Enterprises and Markets in Developing Countries with the objective of fostering the development of partnership programmes in this area. To this end the 2003 GFAR conference in Dakar, on ‘Linking Research and Rural Innovation to Sustainable Development’, included a sub-plenary session on agro-based SMEs and markets. The contribution of SMEs to rural development was stressed and some key issues noted, including SME upgrading, competitiveness, market information, partnerships and technology access. The need for agricultural research to be more market-orientated was also identified.

¹ PhAction members are ACIAR, CIRAD, CLAYUCA, FAO, GTZ, JIRCAS, NRI, NZCFR, Michigan State University, UNIDO and the CGIAR centres CIAT, CIP, ICRISAT, IITA and IRRI.
The three initiatives had much in common, it appeared crucial to consider the post harvest sector as a more open ended term. The need for a market driven approach to post-harvest development, which integrates consideration for required elements of technical capacity development in order to foster effective value chain development was recognized. To meet this end, the three partners were thought to be in a privileged position to be able to develop programmes following this new approach. Subsequent to the merger a plan of action was established and a strategic plan was developed.

1.2 Stage 2: The Strategic Framework
October 2003 marked another important step in the development of the Initiative. An International Workshop on Post Harvest Systems was convened at FAO Headquarters in Rome. This Workshop was jointly organised by FAO, the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) and the Post harvest Global Forum (PhAction). More than 100 participants representing different stakeholder groups coming from all regions of the world participated. The main objective of the workshop was to review and endorse the strategic plan that was formulated to launch the GPhI. The objective was achieved and during the first months of 2004 The Strategic Framework for the Global Post harvest Initiative was created. The main objective of the Framework is to provide an innovative market-orientated approach to post-harvest development offering:

- an innovative platform for a supply chain approach to post-harvest development
- a market-orientated approach to addressing post-harvest problems
- participation of stakeholders in the development and implementation of the initiative at the lowest most effective level (i.e. local, regional, global)

The Framework is based on four strategies:
1. Developing appropriate policies
2. Institutional strengthening through collaborative research and capacity building
3. Developing competitive and equitable agri-food systems
4. Fostering networks, communication and further programme development

Within each strategy are concept note ideas (a total of nine) that are intended to serve as a basis for the development of collaborative action-orientated projects.

A second important output of the workshop was the establishment of an Interim Coordinating committee that was given the task to facilitate the implementation of the GPHI Strategic Framework. Membership included:

- FAO
- A representative from each region that would be identified as projects develop
- PhAction
- GFAR
- Representative of funding agencies

Within the Committee FAO offered to serve a facilitating role.

1.3 Stage 3: Towards Project Formulation and “back to the regions”
Further to endorsement of the Strategic framework in October 2003, GPhI has tried to pursue a “back to the regions” strategy. The objective being, to further promote the initiative and to facilitate project development through the involvement and functional interaction of a range
of stakeholder groups creating stronger ownership, and work towards a draft plan of work for the formulation of action oriented projects in each of the regions.

To this end some important activities have been carried out:

- **APPARI Expert Consultation on Post harvest Technology and Session on Implementing the GPhI, Thailand, December 2004.** The main achievement has been sensitization of high level stakeholders, and the identification of specific areas and themes that require priority attention.

- **AARINENA Global Post-harvest Initiative Planning Meeting, Turkey, April 2005.** The principal outcome was the prioritisation of three project ideas, out of a total of 9 that were considered to be of importance to be submitted to donors. Coordinators for the development of such ideas were identified and work is on the way for the formulation of the first draft.

- **FARA General Assembly. Parallel Session: The Sub-Saharan Challenge Programme and Global Post-harvest Initiative - Linking Farmers to Markets, Uganda, June 2005.** The session endorsed the initiative has crucial for the achievement of the development goals in Africa and participants have urged a stronger interaction between the GPhI and the SSA-CP. Important contact with regional actors have been established and recommendations were made for GPhl representatives to participate in the pilot learning sites planning meetings of the SSA-CP.

- **FORAGRO** The FORAGRO Triennial Conference held in Panama during April 2005 was used to initiate the process of establishing a plan of action in Latin America and the Caribbean for 2006. Discussions were held with the Executive Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Rural Agro-industrial Program (PRODAR) and contacts were made with potential stakeholders and the sub-regional Executive Secretaries were informed about the Initiative.

During this stage additional efforts were made to enhance awareness on the GPhI. This strategy was pursued by producing informative material, brochures and posters, and by the organization in November 2004 of a meeting at FAO Headquarters with the FAO country representatives. This was an occasion on which the GPhI again proved to be an important initiative which responds in many aspects to the needs of the developing countries.

2. Experiences and lessons learned

2.1 Stakeholder consultation and participation
Stages 1 and 2 experienced a good participation of stakeholders that culminated in the October 2003 International workshop. During these phases, the initiative built on an important base of information, using a “bottom up” approach. GFAR was achieving its objective of multi-stakeholder involvement, while responding to the RPS (define) indications.

This process has ensured that up to date GPhI continues to be highly responsive to the needs of Stakeholders and this has been expressed strongly by all RFs and stakeholder groups in the various GFAR Steering Committees meetings in Mexico 2004 and Morocco 2005. Donors, consequently, have manifested interest in supporting various aspects of the programme.
This in GFAR’s case is crucial and has guaranteed that GPhI still will feature importantly in its future plans.

This experience has highlighted some important factors:

- the diversity in nature of the different partners championing the development of GPhI which provided different insights and perspectives in development of the Strategic Framework
- the multi stakeholder participation and consultation approach (eg. regional and international workshops) which has ensured full alignment to the stakeholder priorities, still up to date, and attracted donor interest.

2.2 The Transition Phase from a Global Initiative to a GPP

2.2.1 The Leadership and Coordination Roles

The delicate transition period from the development to the implementation phase, towards a full fledged GPP, illustrated the importance of leadership and coordination that sets out clear strategies with well directed roles and responsibilities.

In respect to the interim Coordinating Committee (CC) it has become clear that the role and the expectations of the different actors of the CC should have been more clearly outlined. In particular changes within the management of FAO’s AGS Division at the beginning of 2005, resulted in decreased momentum. At the same time the PhAction group entered a phase of dormancy, while NRI (the Natural Resource Institute based in the UK), which was functioning as an acting Secretariat, reduced its input.

Leadership/Championship is a crucial factor for a successful partnership programme. Partnerships require committed leaders with the sufficient human (and financial) resources to pull together all partners.

In the experience of the Coordinating Committee a clear setting of the roles for each partner would have greatly helped. All partners need to feel ownership of such roles particularly in terms of institutions. To this end GPhI has often been reliant on the activism of individuals, and as often happens in big institutions, the moment these leave, those who take over do not necessarily feel the same level of commitment, and resource inputs decline. In these cases in order to ensure continuity, the initiative needs to be “owned” by the institution itself, for example by being reflected clearly in the work plans for the medium or long term.

This experience has also posed some questions on the role of the GFAR Secretariat in the development of GPPs. While the Initiative was experiencing coordination difficulties in its path towards a full fledged GPP, the GFAR Secretariat found itself without sufficient time and resources to meet the expectations of its stakeholders (principally the RFs). It also raised the question to the extent the GFAR Secretariat should play the champion role in the development of a GPP and how best to identify and motivate other institutions/organization to take on the role, given the need of time and resources required.

In the case of the GPhI development this situation has posed some risks in terms of “loosing” a high priority initiative for the GFAR Stakeholders with in addition strong demonstrated funding potentialities.

2.2.2 The Strategic Framework

The strategic framework for the Initiative, poses some very ambitious objectives. To a lesser extent this also made the transition from an initiative to a GPP slower.
The implementation of the “all embracing” Strategic Framework was undertaken without the development of a strategy by the interim Coordinating Committee. GFAR, continued its activities with the organization of various workshops (the Back to the Regions Stage). It was later realized that targets set by GFAR during these Workshops may have been too ambitious in terms of attempting to identify project ideas that would be taken forward in each region. The first workshop convened in Thailand in (December 2004) was organized collaboratively with FAO, while the other two were organized by GFAR only.

The most recent of the regional activities (together with the information collected during the regional consultations at the early stages) provided some clear guidance on the future direction for the GPhI. A well identified gap in each region has been the relative lack of attention and R&D capacity to benefit the farmers that are at the subsistence or early stages of post-harvest development as shown in Figure 1. This has been identified as a potential focus in planning regional activities (e.g. projects) and would enhance the global, cross regional, nature of the initiative.

*Figure 1: A gradient approach to post harvest development*

The experience has highlighted the critical requirement for a thorough planning exercise in accordance with the expectations and capacities of the partners, during the transition period.

### 2.4 Alignment with stakeholder priorities

The successful planning and implementation of the development stages of the initiative, in accordance with stakeholder priorities has validated the need for the initiative. This Initiative has been attracting donor attention while being continuously relevant to our stakeholders. For
these reasons, and thanks to its development process, there are still high expectations that the GPhI will impact upon post-harvest development in the future.

3. Indications for the GPP guidelines formulation

The GPhI experience has posed also some questions on the role of the GFAR Secretariat and its “facilitated” partnership initiatives:

- To what extent GFAR Secretariat can take up a leadership role? When does the facilitation function stop, and when does GFAR assume the role of a Champion?
- Can the successful development phase (e.g. Stages 1 and 2) constitute a model for GPPs?