1. Background

The Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) was established in October 1996 as a new dynamic initiative aiming to promote a Global System for Agricultural Research based on cost-effective partnerships and strategic alliances among the key players involved in agricultural research. In pursuing this, one of the main goals adopted for the GFAR is that of promoting research partnerships with various stakeholders in agricultural research and development.

One thrust in developing research partnerships for development is to link local and global knowledge in agro-ecology and natural resource management (AE/NRM). In order to achieve this, GFAR supports the development of partnerships that promote innovation processes at the local level through participatory research and extension, and systematising knowledge on innovative practices of natural resource management at the local level, combining this with relevant scientific knowledge in a “knowledge management” process aimed at disseminating and scaling-up these innovative approaches.

During the GFAR 2000 Conference, a large number of concrete proposals for research partnerships in the area of AE/NRM were presented. NGOs and farmers’ associations are playing a very important role in developing these proposals and seeking links with research and development organisations in the South and North and with international research centres. A framework for Prolinnova (PROmoting Local INNOVAtion), which is designed to link local and global knowledge in AE/NRM, was discussed by these various stakeholder groups in Dresden.

As part of this initiative, mechanisms are proposed to: a) document and systematise local innovations and innovation processes; and b) facilitate application of this information to stimulate further innovation at the local level. Numerous projects presented at GFAR-2000 are being developed within this initiative. These include (1) InterDev, a project for an interactive database on NRM, which was presented in the GFAR/FAO/World Bank Consultation Meeting organised in FAO on 27-29 March 1999, subsequently improved and operationalised through a consortium of NGOs and universities, and is now in an initial pilot phase; (2) the network PolicyNet for research into policy issues related to NRM, which is still in a planning stage; (3) the Direct Sowing, Mulch-based Systems and Conservation-Tillage (DMC) Program, which will involve several stakeholder groups worldwide in analysing and comparing experiences from local initiatives in DMC, extracting lessons, managing and...
disseminating information, and networking. This initiative serves as an example of the mechanisms that could be developed under Prolinnova and fed into the InterDev database; and (4) various proposals for scaling-up successful initiatives vertically (in the sense of institutionalisation into mainstream research and development activities), and horizontally (in the sense of geographical spread of promising technologies and processes). The scaling-up concepts and specific proposals were developed primarily by NGOs during the last year at workshops in Washington and Manila in October 1999 and April 2000, respectively.

Other stakeholders are also playing an important role in linking local and global knowledge for agricultural development. For instance, FAO is addressing the development of sustainable farming systems while conserving the environment through such participatory programmes as Integrated Pest Management (IPM). FAO’s Conservation Agriculture Programme aims at improving the sustainability of tillage-based cropping systems through better land husbandry based on principles of reduced or zero-tillage and permanent soil cover. FAO is facilitating and promoting the generation of knowledge and technology transfer through its Research, Extension and Training Division. WAICENT - the World Agricultural Information Centre - provides a platform for accessing FAO's information resources and makes the accumulated knowledge of the Organization in all fields of food security and agricultural development available to everyone. Another information management system in which FAO is involved, Ecoport, facilitates access to information on NRM through a public service that enables participants to own and update information created by their collective effort.

At the same time, the international agricultural research centers have built up a system-wide programme on participatory research and gender analysis (PRGA). One of the sub-networks is PNRM (Participatory Research for Natural Resource Management), a forum of researchers from the CGIAR and partner organisations who are developing and practising approaches and methods for research and development in NRM. It aims to support, integrate and add value to the experiences of researchers and other practitioners in NRM.

Part of the meeting will be devoted to an informal and open information sharing between the NGOs, FAO and CGIAR-PNRM to explore potential linkages between their activities.

2. Objectives

The meeting aims to achieve the following objectives:

(a) To review progress made in the Prolinnova, InterDev and PolicyNet initiatives and to revise plans, as necessary, particularly with a view to strengthening and broadening linkages and acquiring support

(b) To exchange information about the on-going and planned initiatives on NRM and agro-ecology of the GFAR NGO stakeholders (Prolinnova, PolicyNet and InterDev) and on the various related initiatives of FAO and CGIAR-PNRM;
(c) To explore possibilities of linkages between the NGO initiatives and related initiatives of FAO and CGIAR-PNRM.

3. Expected outputs

This meeting will begin with an informal get-together on Saturday evening involving the NGOs in the Prolinnova, InterDev and PolicyNet initiatives. This will be followed by a day-long review of the progress and further plans of these initiatives. Day 2 will be devoted to exchange between the NGOs, various FAO units and the CGIAR PNRM network coordinator. This will involve brief presentations on the various initiatives and on the emerging proposals for action by the respective institution or group to ensure that all participants are acquainted with what each one is doing. It should be noted, however, that the purpose of the meeting is not to go into a detailed substantial discussion of what each one is doing. Rather, the discussion should be geared in terms of meeting the three objectives outlined above. As such, this information and other background materials are circulated to all participants prior to the meeting in Rome.

On the basis of the dialogue and exchange of views that will take place, the expected outputs are the following:

a) An understanding of the various stakeholder-led initiatives on NRM and agro-ecology;

b) An agreement on interest (or not) to develop collaboration between participating NGOs, FAO and CGIAR-PNRM in the area of knowledge management for local innovation in AE/NRM;

c) Common perception on the advantages and disadvantages that such collaboration could bring and a better understanding of the timeline needed for developing collaboration.

4. (Tentative) List of documents

1. Provisional Agenda
2. GFAR Business Plan
3. New Mechanisms for Partnership Research in Natural Resource Management, Policy and Agroecological Research for Development
4. Prolinnova (Promoting Local Innovation) background information
5. InterDev background information
6. PolicyNet background information
7. FAO activities related to knowledge management for local innovation
8. CGIAR-PNRM network background information