



GFAR

GLOBAL FORUM ON AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
FORUM MONDIAL DE LA RECHERCHE AGRICOLE
FORO GLOBAL DE INVESTIGACION AGROPECUARIA

Strengthening the Business and Industry (B&I) Participation in the Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) Agenda of GFAR

Setting a Global Strategic Agenda for ARD at GFAR

The mission of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) is *to mobilise the scientific community and all stakeholders in agricultural research for development in their efforts to alleviate poverty, increase food security and promote the sustainable use of natural resources*. The stakeholders of the Global Forum are: National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS), International Centres of the CGIAR (IARCs), Advanced Research Institutes (ARIs), Farmers' Organisations, NGOs, the private agri-business sector (or Business & Industry), and Donors and Development Agencies. Annex 1 presents an executive summary of what GFAR is.

In the development of a *Global Strategic Agenda for ARD*, GFAR is concentrating its efforts in advocating to place agriculture and agricultural research into the national, regional and global agendas. This process is carried out through the Regional/Sub-regional Fora (RF/SRF) constituted by the NARS and through the relevant stakeholders that play a role in this process. Through the sharing of experiences and of information among them, GFAR seeks to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to respond to the challenges and take advantages of the opportunities generated by the deep changes in the science that underlies agricultural research: the information and communication (ICT) revolution, the increasing importance of proprietary technology (IPRs), the emerging new normative framework related to key aspects of agricultural research (i.e. management of genetic resources, IPRs), and the deep changes in the organisation of research that the previous factors are generating (i.e. re-thinking and integration of NARS to make them more effective and efficient). This range of factors is leading to the need of developing a *Strategic Agenda* related to policy and management issues of agricultural research.

Besides providing a forum for dialogue among stakeholders on these strategic policy issues, the second major function of GFAR is that of *promoting research partnerships* among stakeholders of agricultural research, at both the regional and the global levels. This is being done through the identification of common needs based on *regional priority setting* exercises that the Regional/Sub-regional Fora are carrying out in consultation with all stakeholders, and through the identification of shared needs that may lead to the Global Partnership Programmes (GPPs) that GFAR is facilitating, or to the Challenge Programmes (CPs) that the CGIAR is promoting. The GFAR Secretariat is playing a support role in order to facilitate the participation of all stakeholders in these global initiatives.

Strengthening the Participation of Stakeholders in ARD at GFAR

Besides the active participation of those stakeholders that have traditionally played an important role in ARD (NARS, IARCs and ARIs), the main challenge that is being faced is that of integrating the other non-traditional stakeholders: the farmers' organisations, the NGOs and the private sector. This

challenge has to be addressed, in order to reflect the key role that farmers play in this process, as well as the increasingly important role that NGOs and the private sector are playing. One of the practical problems that have been faced in this regard is that of how to improve the "representation function" in heterogeneous constituencies of stakeholders. Two important products this effort seeks to generate are the development of *multi-stakeholder decision-making systems*, on the one hand, and concerted actions and partnerships in stakeholder-driven processes, on the other. In the last year significant progress has been made in integrating Farmers' Organisations working through IFAP and through *Via Campesina*, and in integrating NGOs in both developing and developed countries, working in close collaboration with the NGO Committee (NGOC) established by the CGIAR. The involvement of the private agribusiness sector in GFAR has been less active until now, although some interesting initiatives are being developed with private sector stakeholders in different regions. The main objectives of these notes are to initiate a dialogue with private agri-business groups on the role they can play in GFAR and in global agricultural research in general, and the reasons that could motivate a more proactive participation in this multi-stakeholder forum. These reflections have been generated by conversations with B&I persons in both developing and developed countries.

Role of the Business and Industry (B&I) Sector in GFAR and Reasons for Involvement

In order for GFAR to achieve its objectives, all stakeholders should clearly perceive an advantage or a benefit from participating in it. Otherwise the motivation will not be there. There are four important reasons for the participation of private agri-business, or Business and Industry (B&I), in GFAR: (a) the relevance of having a neutral space for dialogue with stakeholders of ARD on strategic policy issues related to the changing context of agricultural R&D; (b) the importance of influencing the regional and global research agendas through an inter-stakeholder dialogue; (c) the need to develop closer links between the public and the private sector through innovative partnerships; and (d) the importance of strengthening the participation of the B&I sector in rural and agroindustrial development projects through which the private sector can play an important role in contributing to the overall objectives of the eradication of rural poverty and of achieving sustainable development. In the remainder of this paper comments will be made on each of these reasons, making reference to some of the activities already being developed with the private agri-business sector.

One of the important challenges we are facing as a consequence of the deep changes in science, of the changing nature of agricultural research, and of the increasing challenges being confronted in achieving a sustainable and equitable development, is that of the need to consolidate a *new policy and institutional (normative) framework* that can respond to these challenges and take advantage of these opportunities. This new normative framework is being shaped by international agreements (such as the recently signed agreement on genetic resources at the FAO General Conference), by national legislations that are being put in place and by the increasing role being played by public opinion related to these major issues. In this context the issue of food safety has joined the basic considerations related to food security and sustainable development. Besides the important role being played by international agreements and national legislations, the need to *develop principles and standards that all stakeholders can agree to* in order to develop sustainable agricultural production systems has become an issue of primary concern. This is where a non-governmental neutral forum in which stakeholders can engage in an open and frank dialogue on these policy and institutional issues can play a key role in the emergence and consolidation of this new policy and institutional framework. These stakeholder-based fora do not compete with, but rather complement and support, the inter-governmental fora where decisions and formal agreements are negotiated and finally adopted.

Through the Regional/Sub-regional Fora and other relevant mechanisms, GFAR has been facilitating this dialogue among stakeholders on key policy and institutional issues related to ARD. The B&I sector should have a direct interest in actively participating in this process along with other

stakeholders. One of the interesting initiatives GFAR is supporting in this direction, in which there is a clear participation of the private agri-business sector is that of the *AgroBio project* that is being developed in the Latin American and Caribbean region. The AgroBio project, which has support from several multinational corporations (Monsanto, Dow, Syngenta and others), is aimed at analysing several scenarios of the development of agriculture in a given country with and without the potential uses of biotechnology, as a way of generating awareness of the possibilities the new technologies offer, and of the control measures that can be put in place (bio-security considerations). Thus this project aims at integrating a prospective analysis of agricultural biotechnology in developing countries with the related issues of biosafety and of the policy and legal environment that is emerging (including IPR issues). The AgroBio project is currently under development, but it is taking shape and it will most probably be implemented in the first semester of 2002. Similar projects are being discussed in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia/Pacific. This type of analysis and of dialogue is taking place in an inter-stakeholder environment oriented towards the development of an informed public opinion on these topics. Here we see stakeholders actively engaging in dialogue in the context of GFAR, through which we expect to generate a better understanding of the facts and of the policy options a developing country has, as well as of the role each stakeholder plays. The increasingly important role of public opinion on these matters is quite evident, and thus the need to facilitate the emergence of an informed public opinion on key topics related to ARD.

The second main reason mentioned above is the importance for the B&I sector to actively participate in the priority setting exercise that Regional/Sub-regional Fora (RF/SRF) are currently carrying out in the various regions of the developing world. These priorities are influencing and shaping the regional and global research agendas. Given the increasingly important role that the private sector plays in agricultural research, and given the closer interaction there now is between scientific research and its various technological applications in production, the B&I sector should be an active stakeholder in this process. With RF/SRFs the GFAR Secretariat has been discussing several options for the active involvement of all stakeholders, including the private sector, in these endeavours.

Given the increasing complexities of agricultural research, in many research areas *research partnerships* constitute one of the most effective ways of tackling them, given the magnitude of the effort required, the diversity of the scientific disciplines that intervene and the range of stakeholders that are related to the generation and utilisation of knowledge and to innovation processes. It is well known that technical change and innovation processes are increasingly a result of *learning networks* and of *innovation networks* that bring into close interaction different stakeholders that play different roles in knowledge generation and knowledge utilisation. Here the B&I sector can play a very important role since they can work in partnership with research organisations (i.e. NARIs, IARCs and ARIs) in articulating innovation chains that may contribute to an equitable and sustainable development. There are currently two GFAR initiatives that are aimed at the establishment of *innovative public/private sector partnerships* of this type. The first one is the programme that is being supported by the IPGRI/CIRAD/GFAR Support Unit in Montpellier facilitating the development of Global Partnership Programmes (GPPs) in *commodity chains* of interest to developing countries, where two such programmes are near the take-off phase: the cacao and the coconut GPPs. These two cases that were presented at the GFAR/IFAD Workshop on Global Partnership Programmes (GPPs) in Rome in early October 2001, are interesting cases of public/private sector partnerships in specific commodities. The case of coconut involves basically small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), because of the production structure that predominates in that sector. However, in the case of cacao there is a very active involvement of IOCCC in this initiative, along with its two main regional associations which are CMA in the US (through ACRI/CMA), and CAOBISCO in Europe. The latter involves such companies as Nestle and Unilever. These initiatives have the potential of becoming interesting models for public/private sector cooperation in research and technological development.

The second initiative of this type that has potential for close interaction with the private agribusiness sector is one that is called *Linking Farmers to the Market: Post-Harvest, Rural Innovation and Rural SMEs*. This initiative is being developed under the coordination of the *Istituto Agronomico per l'Oltremare (IAO)* of Italy, in cooperation with research and action-oriented groups that work in the promotion of rural SMEs in developing countries. The objective of this initiative is to disseminate best practice in terms of policies and programmes oriented towards the promotion of SMEs that can play an important role in increasing the value-added in agricultural production and in generating employment and income in the rural sector.

In strengthening the participation of the B&I sector, GFAR is interested in integrating not only large multinational corporations but also the national private agribusiness sector of developing countries that is mainly constituted by small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). This is being done through establishing close links with regional/sub-regional networks of SMEs that have been established by the local enterprises themselves. An example of this is the INTERFACE network that has emerged in Western and Central Africa (CORAF/WECARD), and is now becoming a Pan-African network of SMEs.

In the interaction between research and development the B&I sector has multiple possibilities to participate, in which it can find interesting investment opportunities. Here we refer to the participation of the B&I sector in rural and agroindustrial development projects, through which this sector can make an important contribution to the overall objectives of the eradication of rural poverty, of assuring food security and of achieving a sustainable development. For example, it can fund research aimed at carrying out product quality assessment for potential new products of interest to developing countries. This is the case of one of the emerging new Global Partnership Programmes that GFAR is supporting, which is that of the *Underutilised and Orphan Species and Commodities*, that is seeking to identify plant species that are used only locally, and that have the potential for developing into products with wider markets, due to their nutritional value or to the value they have as sources of energy and of fibre. Or for medicinal applications. Participating in this programme, the B&I sector could identify investment opportunities that may allow it to play an important role in linking the world of research to the market, and thus to increase the development impact of the former. It is interesting to point out that one of the Sub-regional Fora (PROCISUR) is organising its main regional cooperation programme around the development of “*innovation networks*” that can contribute to link local agricultural production with the regional and global markets. In the development of these innovation networks, strategic alliances between local research institutions and private sector companies, both national and multinational, is being actively sought. GFAR is seeking to identify successful strategic alliances of this type, from where lessons can be derived with respect to what works and what doesn't. And how to promote it.

Finally, GFAR is interested in facilitating the flow of information among the stakeholders of ARD. For this purpose, the *Electronic Global Forum on Agricultural Research (EGFAR)* has been established to facilitate interaction through the web. The main website of EGFAR (www.egfar.org), currently being re-designed, is facilitating this through its gateway or portal function, where access is being facilitated to the web sites of the various stakeholders. EGFAR has a component (a Master Web Site) for the private agri-business (B&I) sector, that we are expecting to develop jointly with associations that represent this sector, such as the *International Agri-Food Network (IAFN)*. And through the inter-regional exchange of information that GFAR can offer, the Business and Industry sector can identify new market and investment opportunities that, besides representing business opportunities, can also contribute to the food security and safety of poor people, as well as expanding the opportunities for employment and income generation in developing countries.

ANNEX: The Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR)

The mission of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) is "*To mobilise the scientific community and all stakeholders in agricultural research for development in their efforts to alleviate poverty, increase food security and promote the sustainable use of natural resources*". Thus GFAR is a new stakeholder-led initiative that seeks to promote cost-effective partnerships and strategic alliances among the key players involved in agricultural research, and to provide a forum for the discussion of strategic issues among the stakeholders in this field with the objective of developing common perceptions that can facilitate co-operation and concerted actions. The stakeholders of the Global Forum are the National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS), the International Centres of the CGIAR (IARCs), the Advanced Research Institutes (ARIs), the Farmers' Organisations, the NGOs, the Donors and Development Agencies and the Private sector.

The Global Forum operates at two levels: the first one is constituted by all the activities, programmes and projects that GFAR stakeholders decide to jointly undertake in the context of the Global Forum. This first level is referred to as the *GFAR Business Plan*, which emerged from the GFAR-2000 Conference that took place in Dresden, Germany, May 21-23, 2000. The second level is constituted by the support activities provided by the GFAR Secretariat with the objective of facilitating the implementation of the GFAR Business Plan through dialogue, exchange of information, capacity-building and partnership facilitation. This defines the *GFAR Secretariat's Programme of Work*. The recently finished *GFAR First External Review* endorsed the mission and objectives of the Global Forum, and recommended that the GFAR Secretariat focus its efforts around four main facilitating Lines of Action:

- a) Facilitate the flow of information and knowledge among stakeholders of ARD, by providing a *Gateway to information resources on agricultural research and rural development* and through *learning networks* that can be generated on concrete topics. This is being done through two main instruments: the Electronic Global Forum on Agricultural Research – EGFAR (www.egfar.org) and the Regional Agricultural R&D Information Systems (RAIS).
- b) Development of a *Global Strategic Agenda for agricultural research for development (ARD)* aimed at facilitating the emergence of a new normative framework for agricultural research. This can be achieved by providing a forum for dialogue among stakeholders on topics of common interest that can set the basis for a better understanding of these *global issues*.
- c) Facilitate the development of networking and research partnerships among stakeholders of ARD in topics of common interest, seeking to develop a small portfolio of *Global Partnership Programmes (GPPs)* during the next three years on global issues of strategic importance.
- d) *Strengthen the various constituencies* of the stakeholders of ARD, paying special attention to the strengthening of NARS and of their Regional/Sub-regional Fora, given the key role they play in linking research to development. But a similar effort should also be carried out in strengthening the constituencies of NGOs, of Farmers' Organisations and of the private sector, along with ARIs and with the international centres of the CGIAR.

Since the principal actors are the stakeholders, GFAR is not an implementing agency and thus the organisational structure is being kept very lean. It is basically composed of a small GFAR secretariat, a steering committee to set policy and agree on programmes, a management team to assist with implementation and a donor support group to co-ordinate funding support. Two basic documents provide the framework for the functioning of the Global Forum: the *GFAR Charter* that defines the rules and procedures for its operation and the *GFAR Business Plan & GFAR Secretariat Programme of Work 2001-2003*, which is approved by the GFAR Steering Committee for periods of three years. The GFAR Secretariat is hosted by FAO in Rome, Italy, and the GFAR Donor Support Group is chaired by IFAD.