Some Thoughts on the Follow-up to GFAR-2000
on Research Partnerships

GFAR Secretariat
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This paper complements the report that is being circulated on GFAR-2000, which analyses in more detail the various results of the Dresden Conference and the follow-up that is being made to each one. This paper concentrates on the GFAR function of “facilitating the development of research partnerships for global cooperation in agricultural research for development (ARD)” and on how it can be further operationalized, capitalising on the research partnership proposals that were presented at the Dresden Conference by the interested stakeholders.

1. The GFAR-2000 Outputs: Research Partnerships

In preparing the Dresden Conference, GFAR stakeholders documented 52 successful cases of research partnerships, identifying the factors of success that characterise the most efficient partnerships, as well as the constraints that limit their effectiveness. In GFAR-2000, 17 of these successful cases were presented in the four sub-plenary sessions, providing a very interesting overview of the dynamics of research partnerships in agricultural research for development (ARD) in different research areas and in different regions of the world. The other cases were presented as posters. At the same time, GFAR stakeholders prepared and developed 46 proposals for new and innovative research partnerships in the four priority areas for cooperation in ARD. These partnerships involve old and new actors of ARD, working together in innovative partnership proposals.

The GFAR Secretariat is currently discussing with IFAD an additional financial support to prepare and publish a book on research partnership, presenting a synthesis of the lessons that can be learned from these different cases and highlighting in particular the added value of the partnership and the main factors that led to its success. This publication will assure a very wide dissemination of this information, but it should be pointed out that the reports of these individual cases are already accessible through the EGFAR website (www.fao.org/NARS/GFAR2000/Outputs.htm).

Given the fact that the GFAR is not a donor nor a funding agency, one of the main operational questions that emerged in Dresden is that of how to proceed in the further

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development of these proposals. This question has two dimensions: (a) How to proceed with the dynamic process that led to the partnership proposals in order to respond to the expectations that this process has generated among the partners who participated in it? (b) What are the roles that GFAR and the GFAR Secretariat should play in the operationalization of research partnerships?

2. Different Types of Partnership Proposals

In defining the role GFAR can play in facilitating research partnerships two important distinctions should be made. The first one refers to the type of research partnership in which GFAR should concentrate. In this section a distinction will be made between different levels of partnership-building, identifying where GFAR should concentrate its effort in order to maximise its value-added. The second distinction refers to the scope of GFAR action, in terms of the support the GFAR secretariat can give the interested stakeholders in developing their respective partnerships. This second distinction will be analysed in the next section.

In the process that led to GFAR-2000, and in the conference itself, two types of research partnerships were clearly identified:

a) The first one refers to R&D Framework Programmes, either at the regional or global levels. These can be conceived as multi-stakeholder programmes that seek to develop concerted research and development efforts among interested potential partners, around a crop, or around a major problem or topic of agricultural production, of natural resource management, or of rural development. We are here confronting a new organisational form of global science that is emerging not only in agricultural research but also in other areas of research as well (such as health). Through the concerted action of the various partners involved (NARS, IARCs, NGOs, Farmers, ARIs) and the networking arrangements this may lead to, the effectiveness of their efforts in achieving their shared development objectives can be greatly increased. Within these programmes, specific projects and activities can be developed. Examples of framework programmes that were presented in GFAR-2000 are the Global Programme for Roots and Tuber Research, the Global Programme of Research on Sustainable Land Management (SLM), the Global Cassava Strategy, the Global Programme on Trait Discovery in Rice, the Global Initiative on Trypanosomiasis, the Global Research Programme for Coconut (PROCOCOs), the Global Programme on Research and Policy Management Capacity-Building in the Management of Genetic Resources, and the Global Programme on Promoting Local Innovations (PROLINNOVA). Similar framework programmes have emerged at the regional level, such as the Coffee Research Network of Eastern Africa (ASARECA-CORNET), the AARINENA Regional Network on Research and Technological Development on Date Palm, and the Regional Programme on Organisation and Management of Technological Integration in Agriculture in the Southern Cone (FORAGRO-PROCISUR).

b) The second level is that of the single research and technological development projects carried out under a partnership mode, which are not formally part of a Global or a Regional Framework Programme. This is the most operational level, where projects are presented to donors, and where competition for funds should probably be the main mechanism for implementation.
The Global R&D Framework Programmes are one of the new forms for the organisation of scientific research that is emerging in the context of the globalised science that characterises this turn of century. These global programmes can play five important functions:

- facilitate the development of a critical mass of researchers and of a research capacity in key areas of strategic importance, bringing together researchers in IARCs, NARS, universities, ARIs, NGOs or the private sector;
- facilitate the development of region-specific or site-specific research that responds to regional and local needs in the context of a strategic global framework;
- promote the development of action-oriented R&D networks (following a “filière” approach) that bring together researchers, practitioners (development agents) and end-users, generating learning processes through the interaction among these key actors of rural development (they are not networks of only researchers);
- promote the development of concerted efforts among different stakeholders, where each one has an important comparative advantage or a specific role that it can bring to the overall programme (not only in the research phase, but also in post-harvest and in marketing);
- develop synergisms and economies of scale through the complementary and concerted efforts that are carried out by the various partners.

These five functions constitute the value-added that they bring to a given research area. It should be pointed out that this organisational form does not replace the basic research infrastructure that is organised in terms of research centres, research institutes, universities and other organisational forms. On the contrary, the Global Framework Programmes build on the existing research capacities, seeking to provide a “framework for concerted action” among the potential partners in the topic/commodity/issue that is being addressed. They thus constitute important building blocks for the construction of a Global Agricultural Research System.

In the communication society of today networks of very different types are emerging everywhere. But the networks that are of particular interest to the Global/Regional R&D Framework Programmes are those that we are referring to as “action-oriented R&D networks”. Given the characteristics of such networks mentioned above, and especially the fact that they facilitate the interaction between researchers, development agents and end-users (farmers, policy-makers and other users of knowledge), this type of networks can play an important role in making a link between research and rural development. This is not an indiscriminate interest on any type of network. In some of the success cases presented in GFAR-2000 the dynamics that helps to develop such learning networks or innovation networks among key actors of rural development was clearly analysed.

The development and consolidation of these new and innovative programmes is one of the challenges that global ARD presently confronts. The main challenge that is confronted is how to articulate individual (decentralised) projects and activities carried out or proposed by the various stakeholders into a coherent global framework programme, and how to assure the appropriate networking and synergisms among the participating partners. Some concrete proposals have been presented by the European Forum (EFARD) and by other stakeholders for the establishment of operational mechanisms to facilitate this process. The proposed mechanisms basically consist in organisational focal points, or coordination mechanisms, that identify and receive the decentralised project proposals that many research groups generate, and seeks to facilitate their articulation into a concerted effort. That is, they facilitate the emergence of a global framework programme from the individual project proposals. The organisational form these coordination mechanisms can take varies immensely from one research area to another, or
from one region to another. They could take the form of an advisory group or a steering
committee for a global framework programme, they could be constituted by an inter-institutional
task force or a consortium in a strategic research area, or they could be based on the strategic use
that certain donors could give to the Project-Calls they organise to identify and select projects to
support. There is no single formula or model. But what is important is to use existing
mechanisms, whenever possible, avoid bureaucratic procedures and unnecessary layers, while at
the same time seeking to integrate the key stakeholders that should participate in this process. If
global framework programmes are to be effective, they need to integrate the relevant stakeholders
with a clear sense of ownership by the latter.

The CGIAR has a very important role to play in the process of developing and
strengthening Global R&D Framework Programmes, but this requires an effort of opening up in
order to work in close collaboration with the other stakeholders of ARD. In close interaction with
IARCs, with the CGIAR Secretariat and with other stakeholders, the GFAR Secretariat should
explore ways of promoting and facilitating this process. Since one of the operational proposals
that has been suggested is that the various centres of the CGIAR could collectively consider to
post a person to the GFAR Secretariat for joint CGIAR-GFAR undertakings, the development of
such Global R&D Framework Programmes could be the main area of joint endeavours.

It should be pointed out that the GFAR/NARS Secretariat has concentrated more on
promoting the development of framework programmes, at both the global and regional levels,
because of the important role they play in the development of a global agricultural research
system. On the basis of the above considerations, it is suggested that the GFAR Secretariat
should give higher priority to facilitating the follow-up to the Global and Regional Framework
Programmes, as defined above, more than to individual partnership projects. The latter are
basically the responsibility of the interested partners. The adoption of this criterion would help to
concentrate on a smaller number of proposed partnerships that comply with these characteristics,
among the various proposals presented at GFAR-2000.

3. Possible Scenarios for the GFAR Secretariat to Promote Research
Partnerships

Regarding research partnerships, the Dresden Conference was designed as a
“marketplace” where stakeholders could identify opportunities for collaboration and where they
could develop partnership proposals that respond to such opportunities. GFAR-2000 was not
conceived as a place where projects would be “approved or rejected”. This approach was clearly
explained to all conference participants in the communications that were sent prior to the Dresden
Conference and confirmed in the deliberations that took place in GFAR-2000.

Having said this, it is important to address the two questions raised at the end of section
1 in order to identify the main steps to carry out in the process of facilitating the research
partnerships presented in GFAR-2000. In order to define more clearly the respective roles of the
different actors involved, a clear distinction is made throughout the text between “GFAR action”
in general, that refers to stakeholder-led initiatives that are carried out by the interested partners,
and the facilitating role the GFAR secretariat should play in this process.

The scope of the action to be carried out by the GFAR Secretariat clearly varies along the
four scenarios that are described below. In order to define clearly the role of the secretariat it is
very important to reach a common understanding on the scenario or combination of scenarios that
will be adopted. The four scenarios that are described below are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they can be combined and they can complement each other. Each scenario builds on the previous one, but goes one step further.

1) The first scenario is that stakeholders agree to use the “project marketplace” facility that GFAR provides in developing strategic alliances and research partnerships among themselves. In this first scenario, the GFAR Secretariat is not expected to do any additional effort in helping to look for funds, nor in operationalizing the respective partnerships. Donors and stakeholders simply interact in GFAR.

2) The second scenario requires a more proactive role on the part of the GFAR secretariat, working in close collaboration with the interested stakeholders. This second scenario requires the development of a clear understanding among stakeholders that it “pays to collaborate”. That is, there is a clear added value to research partnerships, and that therefore stakeholders should look at the development of partnerships as something that is not totally dependent on donor funds becoming available. It should depend on their own interest to collaborate. As a consequence, an important part of any partnership should be assured through “cost-sharing” among stakeholders. This implies a different way of looking at collaborative programmes. They are not something you do “on top of the existing national or corporate programmes”, that thus have to be funded by donors (because they are seen as extra-budgetary activities). On the contrary, the partnerships should include and thus integrate what each stakeholder is already doing through its national/corporate programmes in a given field, but that now the partners agree to do so in the broader framework of a partnership arrangement, in order to take advantage of the economies of scale, of the synergisms, and of the possibility of division of labour among stakeholders and of exchange of results between them, that is feasible in a partnership arrangement. The objective that is being pursued here is not only a financial one; the main purpose is to assure a close integration of the regional programmes with the national ones. Although this seems to be a simple statement, it implies a major change in the traditional perception of cooperation and partnership. In the last year the NARS/GFAR Secretariat has been working in very close collaboration with Regional/Sub-regional Fora (RF/SRF) in developing this attitude among NARS and among interested stakeholders. Some very interesting experiences have recently developed with this approach, especially at the sub-regional level. Two concrete examples can be seen in both PROCIANDINO and PROCISUR in the Latin America and Caribbean region, where the sub-regional programmes are increasingly being developed on the basis of “joint programming” among the participating national programmes of the countries of each sub-region, seeking to assure complementary efforts and economies of scale among them. Here the GFAR Secretariat can facilitate the exchange of experiences and of “best practice” among the RF/SRF, in terms of how to develop regional programmes based on joint programming. This second scenario implies that the GFAR Secretariat has at its disposal and uses some “seed money” to support global as well as regional or sub-regional meetings aimed at the formulation of such research partnerships. An interesting by-product of this process is that of strengthening “networking” among researchers and among stakeholders in a given region.

3) A third scenario is one in which the two previous functions are complemented by a third step: the participating stakeholders in a given partnership contact a donor or a group of donors for possible support to the partnership. This is always under the understanding that at least part of the partnership is already being made viable through the budgets of the participating partners (see previous point), but that “additional funds are being
sought” for those components of the partnership that cannot be totally absorbed by the regular budgets of the partners. This fund-raising effort, and the role that the GFAR secretariat can or should play in this process will be further elaborated in section 4, as it is a question that many stakeholders have raised.

4) A fourth scenario is one in which donors agree to create a funding mechanism to explicitly support research partnerships among stakeholders of ARD through a “competitive grants” approach, on the basis of the criteria that they agree to, and on the topics or priorities that may be chosen. This scenario is rapidly becoming a reality at the regional/sub-regional level with the recent establishment of FONTAGRO in the LAC region, and with the regional funds for the support of collaborative research projects through a competitive grants scheme that are being established in ASARECA and in CORAF. At the global level only a few donors (i.e. Inco-Dev of the EC) are already using this mechanism. There are some good examples of how to manage inter-institutional funding mechanisms of a competitive nature, and the GFAR Secretariat can facilitate the exchange of experiences among them. The idea of establishing a similar mechanism for the support of collaborative projects, through the joint effort of various donors, has been discussed in the past, as part of the measures aimed at strengthening RF/SRF. There has been a very rich experience with the management and operation of “competitive funding mechanisms”, at both the national and the international levels. EMBRAPA recently carried out a workshop on this specific topic. Under this scenario, a clear effort can also be made by the GFAR secretariat to mobilise fresh funds from non-conventional sources for the objectives of food security, poverty eradication and sustainable development, tapping sources different from the ones that contribute to the CGIAR. It is interesting to point out that the various cases that are presently emerging are based on efforts of mobilising fresh funds that do not compete with conventional sources of CGIAR funding. Thus these emerging cases clearly show that the mobilisation of fresh funds is a viable option, reflecting the GFAR approach that is based on the commitment and active participation of the various stakeholders involved.

4. From Facilitating Partnerships to Facilitating their Implementation

Until now GFAR has operated in the first two scenarios mentioned above. GFAR has provided a very active “project marketplace” function that has generated very interesting partnership proposals that were presented at GFAR-2000. This process has involved the various GFAR stakeholders (NARS, IARCs, ARIs, NGOs, etc.), with the GFAR/NARS Secretariat playing a facilitating role. This effort is also facilitating a strong dynamics at the regional and sub-regional levels, in which specific proposals for the strengthening of regional/sub-regional networks and programmes are being developed. The results of this effort became evident in the presentations of the Regional-Sub-regional Fora in GFAR-2000, as well as in the posters that were displayed at the Dresden Conference. In doing so, the GFAR/NARS Secretariat is seeking to develop among stakeholders of ARD the attitude referred to in the second scenario described above. To the extent possible, the regional and global partnership proposals have sought to build upon what stakeholders can collaboratively carry out among themselves, through cost-sharing and through the budgets of the participating institutions.

The gradual evolution from the first to the second scenario is one of the most interesting and innovative processes that is taking place in GFAR, although it should be pointed out that this is still very much an ongoing process, and only in some cases has the second scenario started to
emerge. In most cases this requires a change in the approach to the development of research partnerships. The most common attitude that still prevails is that of formulating proposals for regional research programmes that are totally dependent on donor funding, and where the countries in a given region have not yet developed a capacity to do things through collaborative research efforts based on their own budgets. In those cases where the second scenario has started to emerge, regional and global programs can become viable through the joint effort of the stakeholders involved. If this approach is developed, it then becomes easier to find donor funding for specific components of a regional and/or global programme that complements the funds of the stakeholders.

In the post-GFAR-2000 phase the main challenge is that of how to strengthen and deepen the second scenario mentioned in the previous section, and how to develop a capacity to operate in the third and fourth scenarios that are related to the process of facilitating the interaction between stakeholders and donors in order to mobilise funds for the research partnerships that are emerging. Several ways of interacting with potential donors can be envisaged, both in terms of the steps to be undertaken by the interested stakeholders, and in terms of the role the GFAR secretariat can play in this process.

The first step is for interested stakeholders to go ahead and to contact donors, sending them the information that presently exists on the proposals, which in most cases is at the “project profile level” (not yet full fledged project proposals). It will be important to see in which cases a good opportunity can be identified that warrants the additional effort of preparing the final version of the respective project proposal. As in the pre-Conference phase, the GFAR secretariat can play a facilitating role and eventually use some of its seed money to assist in the formulation of full fledged project proposals, if requested by the participating stakeholders.

Secondly, in some of the thematic areas covered by GFAR-2000 the Working Groups prepared a set of criteria to identify the most important or relevant projects. These criteria can be presented to donors as well, in order to facilitate the final selection of projects. The GFAR Secretariat could then follow up with the different Working Groups to develop the final set of criteria.

A third possibility was discussed with some donors at GFAR-2000. Since research priorities are emerging from the GFAR process in the different thematic areas (in terms of either global or regional priorities), some donors were open to the idea of adopting these topics/priorities for future Project Calls they will be carrying out in the near future. This would show a “donor response” to the GFAR effort and to the priorities that have been identified as part of this process. This would also be a very important step in the process of facilitating research partnerships among the stakeholders of GFAR. It should be pointed out that after a very active exchange of views throughout the month of June, it was decided that it was better for GFAR not to “endorse” specific projects, at the individual project level.

5. Conclusions: Focusing the Partnership-Building Function

Although stakeholders are totally free to develop the partnerships they deem of importance to them within the framework of the Global Forum, the GFAR Secretariat will concentrate its efforts only in a few strategic cases that are considered of high priority and of high potential impact. As pointed out in section 2 above, a first step in that direction is that the GFAR Secretariat should concentrate most of its efforts in facilitating the development of a few “Global and Regional R&D Framework Programmes”, not on single collaborative projects, which are the
responsibility of the interested stakeholders. But even here the potential options are numerous.² In order to focus its efforts in only a few cases, the following criteria are suggested for the selection of those cases where it should seek to play a facilitating role (they reflect the GFAR criteria for identifying priorities that were adopted by the GFAR-SC):

- The relevance of the concrete partnership or programme from the point of view of the objectives of GFAR, which are those of food security, poverty eradication and environmental sustainability.
- The existence of a lead stakeholder that can play an articulating role, working in close collaboration with other stakeholders of ARD (a core group of participating and committed institutions).
- The possibility of integrating into the programme both old and new actors of agricultural research, in a multi-stakeholder initiative (i.e. NARS, IARCs, NGOs, ARIs, Farmers and the private sector).
- The identification of value-added through the interaction and the synergisms among the participating stakeholders.
- The possibility of an integrated approach covering not only research activities, but also post-harvest and marketing development efforts, or the policy framework that conditions its effective impact.
- The opportunity of developing a coordination mechanism that facilitates concertation among stakeholders and donors in the development of the Global Framework Programme.

On the basis of these criteria it should be possible to identify a small portfolio of strategic Global and Regional R&D Framework Programmes in which the GFAR Secretariat could play a facilitating role in the next three years. This will also facilitate the evaluation of its performance and its contribution to the emergence of a Global Agricultural Research System. One important clarification should be made. This document has concentrated in identifying the role the GFAR Secretariat can play in this process, analysing how it complements the action of the various stakeholders of the global ARD System. If we look at the total GFAR activities, there are many useful partnerships and networks that presently exist, that clearly form part of the Global Agricultural Research System and that should continue to be supported. Emphasis should not only be placed on “new and innovative” research partnerships, but also on strengthening those research partnerships and regional or global networks that have shown their capacity to perform and deliver. We have to construct on what already exists.

The GFAR Secretariat is discussing the ideas summarised in this document with stakeholders, as part of the process of following-up on the conclusions and recommendations of GFAR-2000, and especially of following-up on the partnership proposals that were presented and discussed in Dresden. The GFAR Secretariat is very actively engaged in working with the different partners in this process and, from June through September, several activities are already scheduled in further advancing this process in various initiatives that play a particularly strategic role in the development of each of the priority thematic areas. The conclusions of the External Review Panel that is presently preparing its report will play an important role in this process. In fact, given the simultaneity of the process, many of the ideas expressed in this paper have been discussed with this panel.

² For information on the various cases that are presently being discussed, see “GFAR-2000 Conference: Highlights and Follow-up Action”; Rome, GFAR Secretariat, July 2000.
Meanwhile, it should also be pointed out that, at GFAR-2000, several cases of potential funding were advanced, as part of the interaction between stakeholders and donors in the GFAR project marketplace. Three examples can be mentioned. The first one is the case of the project proposal for the development of a research and policy management capacity on genetic resources in developing countries, an initiative that in Dresden caught the attention of a group of five donors who expressed interest in supporting it, and that is presently being further developed and implemented. Secondly, in the area of under-utilised crops (commodity chains) Germany announced its intention to support the Bambara groundnut network, which is one of the interesting new research partnerships that had been identified in this area. The third example that can be mentioned is the process that was advanced in Dresden of negotiation between AARINENA and EFARD/EC, to see the possibility of EC support for the main regional networks that are emerging in the WANA region, through collaborative research endeavours between European research groups and AARINENA research groups. A process and a timetable were agreed to for this purpose. These and other cases will thus continue to develop in the very near future, as opportunities for action and the operational way of proceeding become clearer.

A Global Forum is something that is constructed through the collective efforts of all stakeholders. It is not a top-down approach. It thus has to be gradually and collectively constructed, through the emerging practices that all stakeholders are contributing to shape. There are no pre-existing models that can be easily adopted or rejected. The challenge is one of contributing to the design and gradual emergence of a new and innovative collective undertaking that forms part of the globalized world of science and of sustainable development in the new century, and that strongly builds on networking and on stakeholder-led initiatives.