FACILITATING THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

AFRICA AGRICULTURE SCIENCE WEEK
AND
4TH FARA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA
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A SYNTHESIS REPORT

Summary

The Africa Agriculture Science Week (AASW) and the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) General Assembly (GA) provides a platform where agricultural research and development stakeholders and organizations discuss and determine the regional agricultural research and development agenda and priorities in Africa. The AASW and FARA GA 2007 held in Johannesburg, South Africa in June 2007, offered civil society organizations (CSOs) in African agriculture namely; sub-regional farmers’ organizations, the private sector agri-business, and NGOs to develop strategies and mechanisms for the promotion of their inclusiveness in African agricultural research and development systems. The event witnessed the emergence of an Africa Alliance of sub-regional farmer organizations (AAFO) that brings together four sub-regional farmer organizations in East Africa (EAF); ROPPA in West Africa; PROPAC in Central; and SACAU in Southern Africa. It is envisaged that a North African sub-regional farmer organization will become an AAFO member in due course. The proposed Pan-African Agri-business initiative aims to stimulate financing of agri-businesses enterprises; minimize risks in agriculture through expansion of the business portfolio; and develop and expand the domestic regional markets. The Sub-Saharan Africa NGO Consortium (SSA NGOC) on the other hand resolved to focus on advocacy and creating awareness in African ARD issues, promoting end user access to knowledge and technologies, and improving the institutional arrangements and capacity of the consortium.

Introduction

During the 3rd FARA General Assembly (GA) held in Entebbe, Uganda in June 2005, civil society organizations (CSOs) in agriculture ie Farmers’ organizations (FOs), Private sector agri-business, and NGOs met and discussed the setting-up and strengthening of their respective regional platforms under the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) umbrella. The NGOs in particular were represented by 35 NGO representatives from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and at that meeting, they launched a regional NGO Consortium called
the Sub-Saharan Africa NGO Consortium (SSA NGOC). The Consortium aims to mobilize NGOs involved in African agriculture so that together, they can actively engage the conventional agricultural research and development (ARD) system by influencing the integration of their collective view and perspectives in the regional and sub-regional ARD agenda. In the same vein, representatives of sub-regional farmer organizations and private sector agric-business met and discussed ways and means of effective involvement with the conventional African ARD stakeholders. Since then, a number of civil society organizations (CSOs) events were held with the support of the FARA in partnership with the Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR).

Sub-Saharan Africa NGO Consortium (SSA NGOC)
Since its establishment, the SSA NGOC has made significant progress, albeit limited financial resources. The Consortium, since 2005;

- initiated a mobilization process to increase active membership of the SSA NGOC and enhance linkages among NGOs in African ARD
- convened two regional meetings and launched profiling exercise to; (i) mobilize active membership of the consortium, and (ii) develop a database of NGOs involved in ARD in the continent in order to facilitate NGO/research linkages and partnerships
- participated in global ARD events ie GFAR Triennial Conference in November 2006 in India and CGIAR AGM in Washington D.C
- individual members started dialogue with NEPAD on possible role/participation in the NEPAD peer-review
- developed and concluded five evidence base case studies in all sub-Saharan Africa sub-regions with the aim of documenting and widely sharing (scaling up and out) past experiences and lessons learnt in technology dissemination and improving linkages between CSOs and researchers
- set-up institutional arrangements by agreeing to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among members
- buy-in to a code of conduct for consortium members and leaders
- establishment of an interim management committee that oversees the operations of the consortium, and
- articulation of a communications strategy.

(SSA NGOC) side event at FARA GA 2007
At the SSA NGOC side event meeting during the Africa Agriculture Science Week (AASW) and FARA General Assembly (GA) 2007, consortium members determined the triennial work program to coincide with the newly adopted Triennial FARA GA. The first two activities focus on programmatic issues while the third targets institutional capacity strengthening of the consortium

Advocacy and Public Awareness
Because of financial limitations to conduct hands-on activities, the consortium agreed that advocacy should be the main thrust of its work. Some of the issues that the consortium needs to address during the next triennial includes: climate change, underutilised species, the role of women in agriculture; trade policies, to mention a few. Currently, the membership is addressing these issues but in an uncoordinated manner. The consortium therefore recognises the need for synergy and collaboration in carrying out advocacy work. The group therefore agreed to use the findings of their peers of the recently concluded four case studies for its advocacy work.
The consortium also agreed to enhance its efforts in mobilizing NGOs in the region to effectively engage with ARD organizations, particularly FARA, the three sub-regional organizations, and the national agricultural research system (NARS). The consortium agreed to develop a detailed advocacy work program that members will address in the next triennial. Ms. Khamarunga Banda and Mr. Joseph Ssuuna were identified as lead members to spearhead this activity.

**Access to Knowledge and Technology**

There was a consensus among the consortium members that the consortium can significantly contribute to FARA’s efforts in facilitating ARD knowledge sharing and technology dissemination in the region. Many of the members are currently working with community based organizations (CBOs) including farmers’ organizations through the promotion of local innovations and scaling up and out proven technologies. Hence, by mobilising NGOs and providing a platform for effective information exchange and knowledge sharing among the NGOs and CSOs in general, and with researchers, the consortium will add value to the work of FARA and SROs in devising mechanisms for information exchange, decision making tools for transformation of information into knowledge for innovation, as well as mechanisms for exchange of technology-based innovations between and among sub-regions. To achieve this, the consortium will closely work with FARA and SROs by participating in both regional and sub-regional ARD decision making processes. Focal points were identified in each sub-region, as well as at the regional level to liaise with FARA and the SROs.

The consortium also discussed their role and contribution to Research Into Use (RIU) initiative. The RIU is a DfID funded five-year initiative that aims to scale up research results and knowledge i.e. putting emphasis on technology dissemination rather than technology generation. The consortium identified areas of collaboration with RIU and these include participation of consortium members in the RIU Innovation Challenge Fund and Monitoring, Impact and Learning program. It was also agreed that the consortium will be one platform and network that will enable RIU to reach out to consortium members and their clients and partners at the grassroots.

**Institutional capacity of the Consortium**

After deliberations, members resolved that there is a need to establish and run a Consortium Secretariat that will coordinate activities and programs of the consortium; facilitate information and knowledge sharing and help keep institutional memory. South Africa (SA) was chosen to be the location of the Secretariat. The consortium agreed to approach the SA delegates present at the Assembly for support. Ms. Khamarunga Banda who is based in South Africa was identified as a lead member to follow up and liaise with Government of South Africa, with the support of Mr. Ukaoha Ken, the Communications Secretary of the Consortium.

**Africa Alliance of sub-regional farmer organizations (AAFO) side event at FARA GA 2007**

Although functional sub-regional farmers’ organizations exists ie EAFF in East Africa, ROPPA in West Africa, PROPAC in Central Africa, and SACAU in Southern Africa, these have no common regional (Africa-wide) platform to synergize their actions and activities on issues affecting farmers in African Agriculture. The recent membership of North African
countries in FARA, opens new opportunities for cross learning in the agriculture value chain between SSA farmer organizations and that of Northern Africa.

Farmers’ institutions remain generally weak however and farmers continue to be poorly represented in agricultural research for development. Although some degree of farmer participation in research programs mainly through participatory approaches exists, their full participation in the governance, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of research programs and activities is still very poor. Farmer groups themselves, have a problem of representation and in general, have weak capacity to efficiently manage internal and external resources and events. The organizational management of farmer groups and retention of interest of its membership remains a fundamental challenge. African farmers and farmer groups do not have the requisite capacity to effectively engage and participate in international trade negotiations and defend their interests in a global competitive market.

Worse still, sub-regional farmers’ organizations do not have a common regional platform to effectively engage with FARA, SROs, NARS and the global community. Thus, representatives of the four active sub-regional farmer organizations (EAFF, ROPPA, PROPAC, SACAU) met at the ‘Africa Agriculture Science Week and FARA General Assembly 2007’ in Jo’Burg, South Africa and formed the ‘Africa Alliance of sub-regional Farmer Organizations (AAFO)’ and this was endorsed by FARA GA 2007. The AAFO comprise existing sub-regional farmers’ organizations ie EAFF, ROPPA, PROPAC, SACAU, and at a later stage, the one for Northern Africa. It was recommended that;

- ‘Africa Alliance of sub-regional Farmer Organizations (AAFO) should adapt the laws and bye laws of the existing sub-regional farmers’ organizations ie EAFF, ROPPA, PROPAC, SACAU, North Africa
- FARA/GFAR/IFAP/IFAD should work together and support the realization of the AAFO
- FARA/GFAR/IFAP/IFAD should support the 1st proposed meeting of the Alliance of 30 representatives from farmers’ organizations in sub-Saharan Africa and Northern Africa to meet and determine the institutional arrangements of the AAFO
- the venue of the proposed consultation of the AAFO should be the FARA Secretariat in Accra, Ghana
- farmers recognize their weak institutional capacity and need strengthening
- farmers should be at the heart of agricultural programs and initiatives as set out in the Framework for African Agricultural Productivity (FAAP)
- farmers recognize poor access to information and learning and need strengthening
- farmers poor engagement with the public agricultural research need to be reversed
- farmers need increased strengthening to be more productively involved in extension/advisory service
- farmers poor representation at agricultural fora and events need redress
- farmers and agri-business should collaborate more and establish trust and confidence

Private sector agri-business side event at FARA GA 2007

The private sector agri-business in Africa has been active individually but weak as a sub-regional and regional grouping. Their failure to come up with common and coordinated mechanisms and programs has hitherto kept away potential partners and collaborators. Because of the efforts of FARA, research organizations, financiers, among others, the public sector now recognizes and appreciates the private sector as a viable partner in agricultural research and development in Africa.
The private sector as an integral end user of research innovations and findings seeks to partner with ARD institutions, sub-regional, regional and the global community, as well as innovation platforms in ARD. The sector seeks to contribute to issues of regional trade and tariffs, biotechnology, standards and certification, micro-finance and credit, capacity strengthening, land tenure, etc.

The private sector side event held at the FARA GA 2007 was hence an opportunity to bring together various stakeholders to discuss and come up with strategies and approaches in engaging with conventional ARD systems and stakeholders. The meeting which brought together agri-business entrepreneurs, policy makers, scientist, academics, development agents and farmers, identified challenges and opportunities as follows:

- private sector agri-business is already involved in African agriculture in a number of ways that generate wealth for smallholder farmers, and that are capable of taking into account development goals such as gender equity and environmental sustainability;
- the private sector is capable of playing a role in both conducting science-based research and technology development, and transferring products and services to end users – with the added advantage that profitability and market linkages are built into the private sector’s role in both sets of activities;
- at the same time, the profit motive implies that if risks are too high or economic benefits are unlikely, then the private companies may not play a very active role (the “what’s in it for me” attitude will prevail).
- there is also a tendency for private companies to compete among themselves, and be secretive with regard to proprietary knowledge or technology. This makes industry-wide and continental initiatives somewhat challenging, and highlights the importance of identifying tangible benefits that could emerge from any new venture. There is little patience for initiatives that are “just about talking.”
- supply chain management weakness, e.g., inadequate investment in agribusiness infrastructure such as irrigation, warehouse, cold storage etc.
- lack of competitiveness of product offerings
- weak links between private companies and public sector research organizations
- poor targeting by NARIs of research activities and hence poor uptake by private sector of NARI technologies
- lack of higher education, training and study scholarship opportunities for private sector staff
- depressed business portfolio hence increased risks
- erratic financing facilities
- poor marketing strategies
- policy and market environments are not conducive to successful private sector participation
- need for programs that support incubation of new business ventures.

The side event singled out three major challenges which it agreed should define the agenda of the FARA GA endorsed **Pan-African Agri-business Initiative** as follows:
• stimulating financing of agri-businesses enterprises.
• minimizing risks in agriculture through expanding on the business portfolio.
• development and expansion of the domestic and regional markets.

Participants concurred that the opportunity for the private sector exists in working closely with FARA. Specific recommendations about next steps for strengthening the role of the private sector include;

• creation of Pan-African Private Agri-business body that will seek to meet the above challenges
• create/consolidate partnerships with SROs, research organizations, donors, RECs, etc.
• develop and strengthen structures for collaboration with Pan-African and global innovation platforms (e.g., RIU, NAP, RUFORUM, etc) in enterprise development, information and technology dissemination
• expand the sector membership to meet the expectations and interests of all stakeholders (e.g., bee keepers, fishermen, livestock keepers)
• address the question of strengthening markets to develop and expand domestic and regional commerce.

**Interim Steering Committee**

An Interim Steering Committee (iSC) was formed with eight members (two from each sub-region) with mandate to chart out the vision, scope and mission of the body and organize for the official launch of the Pan-African Private sector Agri-business initiative in 18 months. The committee will from time to time invite experts on specific field of agriculture to complement its activities. The new initiative should aim to learn from past experiences and build on existing initiatives rather than starting from scratch. The first meeting of the iSC is scheduled to take place at the FARA Secretariat either last quarter of 2007 or 1st quarter of 2008. The meeting will roll out the institutional arrangements and program of work for the platform. Draft documents generated by the iSC will be circulated in the next FARA GA for feedback.

**Private sector follow-up meetings with potential partners and collaborators**

Several high profile courtesy and familiarization meetings were held with potential partners and collaborators to share the concept of a Pan-African Private sector agri-business initiative and receive feedback. The idea was endorsement by all potential partners and collaborators and generally, possibilities on further consultation and support is encouraging. The following potential partners and collaborators were engaged;

**Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa (PCHPA) – Contact: Dr. Daniel Karanja**

A very fruitful meeting was held with Dr. Karanja, senior fellow with PCHPA. He explained the PCHPA’s private sector programs and potential areas of partnership and collaboration.

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1 The members of the iSC are Lucy Muchoki, chair (Kenya); Moussa Seck (Senegal); Gisèle D’Almeida (Senegal); Josephine Okot (Uganda); …………….
**Corporate Council on Africa (CCA) – Contact: Dr. Joyce, Director**

The CCA’s agri-business programs and areas of business development and partnerships were explored. The Pan-African private sector agri-business initiative was invited to participate in the CCA meetings, one of which is scheduled for South Africa in November 2007.

**Commonwealth of Learning (COL) – Contact: Dr. Krishan Alluri**

Dr Alluri explained CoL’s programs involving the private sector in Africa under the L3 (Life Long Learning) concept in East Africa. The need to out scale L3 through the private sector platform in the rest of Africa was also explored.

**Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR) – Contact: Dr. Adel El-Beltagy, Chair Person, GFAR**

Dr El-Beltagy explained GFAR’s private sector programs. He emphasized the need for partnership and involvement with the GFAR-led private sector initiative and programs.

**Conclusion**

The FARA GA 2007 endorsed the emergence of the *Africa Alliance of sub-regional farmer organizations (AAFO)* and the proposed *Pan-African Private sector Agri-business Initiative*. The *Sub-Saharan Africa NGO Consortium (SSA NGOC)* resolved to focus on advocacy and creating awareness in support of African ARD, promote end user access to knowledge and technologies, and improving the institutional arrangements and capacity of the consortium.