



GFAR

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

**Advocacy by Regional Forums for
Improving Information Sharing
and Exchange in Agricultural
Research for Development**

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Introduction

The need to participate in globally competitive markets, practice environmentally friendly farming and cope with rising farm input costs is making new knowledge a critical resource for agriculture. The recognition of knowledge as a critical resource for practising efficient farming and developing agriculture makes sharing and exchange of knowledge globally vital for agricultural development. Since agricultural research is a major source of new agricultural knowledge, this is a key strategic area of focus and intervention by GFAR whose mandate is to promote and facilitate agricultural research for development (ARD).

Improving knowledge sharing and exchange for ARD within the framework of the Global Forum for Agricultural Research is translated into strengthening and improving information sharing and exchange at different levels: community, Institute, national agricultural research and innovation systems, regional organizations and forums and global. The focus is on information sharing as it is information that, through integration with experience and learning, is converted into knowledge.

From the GFAR perspective, the interventions in this area are primarily through improving the global flow of agricultural research information, ensuring its equitable access and appropriation by all agricultural actors and enabling learning systems to make effective use of it for agricultural innovation.

Advocacy by GFAR and the Regional Forums

GFAR aims to improve the global flow of agricultural research information and information and communications management for agricultural research for development through four inter-related actions:

- Awareness, sensitization and advocacy to National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) leaders and policy makers for increased and improved investment, both financial and human capacities, in information and communications management
- Capacity development in NARS information managers
- Greater coherence and integration of agricultural information systems
- Improved governance of information flows to ensure equitable access to information related to agriculture globally

The key GFAR actors in improving information and communications management for ARD are the officers and members of the Regional Forums. They have to advocate improved ICM at two levels, national and regional/global levels.

What do the Regional Forums advocate?

- **Increased and improved investment in ICM at the research Institute, research organization and research system level.**

At the national level, this investment should be aimed at:

- improving the quantity and quality of: hardware such as equipment, software such as content (text, graphics, audio, video) and tools and application to integrate and manage content, skills of information managers and Internet broadband connectivity
- developing information and learning systems with associated policies and structures for systems management and for assessing the outputs, outcomes and impact of the information and learning systems and their products.
- The information systems that have to be developed or strengthened on priority are:
 - Scientific and Technical Information Systems that enable easy online access to full text scientific and technical documents
 - Research Management Information Systems that enable access to information on Research Institutions, their expertise, their research projects and activities and the outputs and outcomes of these activities
 - Research databases that are useful for land and natural resources use planning through use of geographical information systems, crop and farming systems modelling and simulation and use in knowledge based systems
 - Information and Communications Systems which are useful for efficient farming and value addition in agricultural market chains.
 - It has been observed that many agricultural research managers find it difficult to propose and justify investments in ICM for their Institutes and Research Systems. Regional Forums should organize awareness building and advocacy events for ICM for research managers and provide learning opportunities such as through training workshops for developing proposals and justifying investments in ICM for the information indicated above.

Many a times, communication between agricultural research managers and information managers and IT professionals in Institutes and NARS is difficult. Efforts to install joint working groups in research institutes, organizations and systems contribute significantly to improved investment in ICM. Regional Forums should advocate and facilitate the formation of such working groups.

Regional Forums, at the regional and global level, have to advocate for increased national government and bilateral and multilateral donor support for strengthening agricultural information sharing and exchange at national, regional and global levels. These investments are needed to develop and strengthen national, regional and global agricultural information systems, validate and integrate content, support protection of intellectual property and security of agricultural information systems.

- **Capacity development, especially skills in generating digital content, managing and disseminating it at the Institute and Research System level.**

The use of ICTs is changing the way information is generated, shared, exchanged and

used. Today every researcher, Institute and research system is a potential publisher of scientific data and information on the Internet. In order to better manage and share information and knowledge researchers and Institutes must be made aware of new publishing patterns (Open Archives, Open Licensing) for their scientific papers, be able to contribute to and use standardized research databases that can be leveraged for modelling, simulation, geographical information systems and knowledge based/expert systems, participate in electronic discussions, communities of practice, blog and question and answer services. The Regional Forums and NARS leaders have to advocate these new approaches and see that Research Institutes encourage and provide platforms for researchers to carry out and participate in these knowledge sharing practices.

Regional Forums should also be conduits for information on how these new trends, tools and applications of ICT are influencing agricultural research.

- **Greater coherence and integration of agricultural information systems.**

Regional forums have an advocacy role at national and global levels in bringing about greater coherence and integration of agricultural information systems. For the national level, they should advocate the adherence to global standards, norms, rules and regulations for exchange of agricultural information and for contributing to regional and global information systems. At the global level, they should represent the national systems when the standards, norms, rules and regulations are developed and set. Within their own information systems, Regional Forums must be a model in implementing these standards and norms and adhering to rules and regulations. Regional Forums should also be a conduit for information on standards, norms, rules and regulations for exchange of agricultural information.

GFAR and the Regional Forums are founding members of the Coherence in Information for Agricultural Research for Development (CIARD) initiative, a partnership of all major actors in agricultural information management that aims at improving accessibility of agricultural research information. The Regional Forums are represented in CIARD through their representatives being members in the CIARD Task Forces. Thus a direct link between national institutes, research systems, Regional Forums and global actors including GFAR is now in place for improving accessibility to agricultural research information.

- **Improved governance of information flows to ensure equitable access to agricultural related information globally**

Ultimately, the flow and access to information will decide who will benefit most from it. The flow of information depends on its source, media and the channels through which it flows. For equitable global sharing of agricultural information the governance of information flows through national, regional and global information systems is vital. Regional Forums have a critical role in assuring equitable global access to agricultural research information through supporting development of appropriate information systems and Institutions at National, Regional and Global levels that set standards, norms, rules and regulations and develop tools and applications for agricultural information. They also have a critical role in guiding the processes through which agricultural information for development is generated and accessed so that this information is relevant and useful and socially appropriated by all the diverse members of agricultural communities.

How do the Regional Forums Advocate?

The Regional Forums will need to advocate at 3 levels. The first is at the Senior NARS decision and policy makers and managers; the second is at higher technical level to Institute and national systems information managers and the third is at the information systems development level.

The Regional Forums will need three categories of actors:

- Senior Regional Forum officers will have to sensitize, build awareness and advocate policy and strategy to Senior NARS decision and policy makers and managers.
- Higher technical level advocacy such as in research Institute level policy and strategy, best practices and choice of applications and tools for information managers will be best done by the Regional Forums information coordinators.
- Regional Forums information managers will need to advocate and support national systems in applying standards and using tools and applications for information managers.

The Role of the GFAR-Secretariat

The GFAR Secretariat will facilitate Regional Forums advocacy for improved ICM technically by drawing upon the expertise of GFAR partners and its own expertise in ICM. The Regional Forums may ask the Secretariat for technical support for advocacy on specific issues related to ICM for ARD.