



Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA)

Progress Report¹

(2003-2004)

Introduction

The Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA) was established in 1985 as an instrument of change for strengthening national and regional agricultural research capacities in order to reverse the downward trends in agricultural productivity and the deterioration of the natural resources. AARINENA's Mission is to contribute to the enhancement of agricultural and rural development in member countries through fostering agricultural research and technology development and by strengthening collaboration among them and with the outside world. AARINENA endeavors to assist member countries in creating effective national agricultural research systems that serve the goals of sustainable agricultural development, as well as strengthening regional and sub-regional scientific collaboration.

AARINENA Mission

To contribute to the enhancement of agricultural and rural development in the region through fostering agricultural research and technology development and by strengthening collaboration in this regard within and outside the region to achieve greater degree of self-reliance in food and agriculture, and to improve the nutritional well being and overall welfare of the people of the region, while at the same time sustaining and further improving the productive capacity of the natural resource base.

¹ *For presentation by Ibrahim Hamdan, AARINENA Executive Secretary, at GFAR Statutory Meetings- NARS Sub-Committee, México City, Mexico 22-25 October, 2004*

The Ninth General Conference of AARINENA

AARINENA 9th General Conference was held at the Sultanate of Oman between 11 and 13 April, 2004. It was inaugurated by H.E. the Special Advisor to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Sayed. The conference was cosponsored and supported by AARINENA, ICARDA, GFAR and FAO and attended by representatives from 20 member institutions and 12 regional and international organizations. The 9th General Conference elected the following officers representing the five sub regions to serve in the executive committee for the next 2 years: Dr. Abdel Nabi Fardous (Mashreq sub region) President; Dr. Ahmed AlBakry (Arabian Peninsula sub-region) Vice President; Dr. Hamid Narjisse (Maghreb sub-region) Member; Dr. Ismail Muharram (Nile Valley and Red Sea Sub-region) Member and Dr. Mohammed Roozitalab (West and Central Asian sub-region-Asia) Member. The Program of work 2004-2005 that was adopted by the conference includes:

A) Regional Agricultural Information System (RAIS)

- Enhancing AARINENA Web Site
- Publication of AARINENA Newsletter
- Implementation of RAIS Priority Projects:
- Project on Design of National Agricultural Information Database
- Project on Electronic Forum for Discussion and Question & Answer Service

B) Networks

- Establishing Medicinal & Herbal Plants Network
- Establishing Biotechnology Network
- Preparing Plan of work for the Olive Network
- Support priority activity for the Date-Palm Global Network
- Support the annual meeting for the Cotton Network

C) Proposed Meetings

- International Conference On Medicinal Plants September,2004 Cairo, Egypt
- Regional Technical Workshop on Biosafety Matters & GM seed detection (FAO/AGPS & ISTA) January, 2005.
- Olive Network Coordinating Board Meeting, December 2004
- RAIS Steering Committee Meeting, September 2004
- Executive Committee Meeting , Morocco, December 2004
- 10th General Conference, Yemen, April 2006

D) Publication of five Successful Case Studies.

The Conference empowered the new elected executive committee to implement the above work plan and adopted the following recommendations:

- Upon the request of FAO/RNE to handover the Trust Fund to AARINENA Secretariat, the Conference approved the transfer of AARINENA account from the FAO/RNE to AARINENA Secretariat account in Jordan, with the option of transferring the account to ICARDA.
- The Conference recommended requesting bids from AARINENA member countries to host the permanent secretariat of AARINENA. The committee will review these bids and choose the best offer to host the permanent secretariat of AARINENA. The

committee will present its recommendation to the 10th General Conference for adoption and approval .

- Prepare project proposals to be presented with detailed budgets to the Islamic Development Bank and Arab Fund. These proposals will include the medicinal plant network, olive network, cotton network, and RAIS two priority projects.
- Increase membership fees of the association in 2005 to US \$ 3000 for full members, US\$ 2000- for Associated Members and US\$ 5000- for Regional and International Organizations.
- The conference responded positively to the invitation of Dr. Ismail Muharram to host AARINENA 10th General Conference at Sana'a in Yemen in April 2006.

Highlights of the Progress:

1. AARINENA Regional Agricultural Information System (RAIS)

1.1 AARINENA ICT Steering Committee

The AARINENA ICT Steering Committee was formed in February 2003. It includes representatives' from the five sub regions in the Near East and North Africa Region, and representatives from FAO, ICARDA, GFAR, and AOAD. The first meeting of the committee was held in ICARDA, Aleppo, Syria. In order to plan for the RAIS implementation, three main recommendations were made by the committee namely: conduct a survey of the National Agricultural Information Systems available at the National level, conduct another Survey on the human resources working in the ICT/M at the National level, and prepare a project proposal to be submitted to a donor to fund the first phase of the RAIS as defined in the minutes of the meeting. These recommendations have been achieved.

The Second meeting of the AARINENA ICT Steering Committee was held in Tehran, Iran, on 8th and 9th of September 2004 and reported the following:

The Committee reviewed briefly the first meeting's approved strategy which consists of the following items:

- Framework of Action to develop the WANA/RAIS on the National and Regional Levels
- Implementation Plan
- Collaborative Programs
- Implementation Priorities

Regarding the framework of action, the chairman pointed out that there are two frameworks. The first framework is at the National level and the second one is at the Regional levels. The one at the National level is the development of these four modules using an integrated relational data base:

- Institutional Information Management
- Projects Information Management
- Experts Information Management
- Research Outputs Information Management

Some efforts have been implemented at the national level, but they are not using relational database and no country has the four modules. The Regional framework consists of the following items:

- Enhancing the Web site of AARINENA
- Launching of electronic forum of discussion enabling and fostering dialogues within and amongst all the stakeholders involved in agricultural research for development in the region,
- Launching of a question and answer service at the regional level,
- Establishment of a gateway function at the regional level facilitating accesses to information managed by NARS

The implementation plan as was agreed upon calls for:

- Continuous enhancement of AARINENA web site (www.aarinena.org)
- Defining an articulated set of small-scale collaborative programs consistent with these national and regional frameworks.

The six different collaborative programs that are suggested to be done in the region are:

- Design of National Agriculture Information System Database
- Design and Implementation of Experts Information System
- Design and Implementation of Institutes Information System (IIS)
- Design and Implementation of Projects Information System (PIS)
- Design and implementation of Research Outputs Information System (RIS)
- Electronic Forum for discussion and Question-and-Answer service
- Gateway function that has multi-host database search engine

The priorities were set as follows:

- RAIS phase 1 should include Projects 1 and 6:
 - Design of National Agriculture Information System Database
 - Electronic Forum for discussion and Question-and-Answer service
- Remaining set of projects 2-5 and 7 will be implemented as second phase.

Finally the chairman summarized the current status of RAIS implementation in these points:

- AARINENA Web site has been enhanced
- Data for the status of NAIS and human resources have been collected and analyzed
- A project Proposal has been prepared

1.2 New AARINENA Web Site

The new version of AARINENA website includes the following:

- a. Two new items namely search and spotlight section is added to AARINENA web site. The search system allows finding useful information regarding to the NARIs, universities, NGOs and etc... in the regional countries.
- b. In the new version of AARINENA all the components of the old web site are divided to three separate sections:
 - The first section is related to the AARINENA association: it contains the general information about AARINENA, its vision and mission, the governance group (which includes the Executive Committee, AARINENA Secretary and Secretariat and etc.), Sub-regional Organizations.
 - The second section is related to the AARINENA-RAIS: it contains general information about the RAIS (Steering Committee, RAIS Secretariat), databases, regional networks, E-discussion, events, publications, etc...
 - The third section contains Tools like spotlights, search engine, site map and a link to the EGFAR web ring connecting AARINENA information system to all the other RAIS through the site of GFAR that will act as a gateway of regional gateways.
- c. An Arabic version of the web site could be so useful, because it is the native language of about 90% of the region. She asked the SC members to decide in this meeting about this important issue and nominate one of the Arabic countries to follow this activity in close collaboration with the RAIS Secretariat in Iran. All the up-to –dates news and activities should be publish in the same time on the Arabic version too.
- d. The main problems regarding to development of Web site were as follows:
 - Getting accurate and timely information;
 - Cooperation and collaboration in data and information collection and distribution.
 - Training and skills development: we need training programs for the regional representatives and RAIS managers.
 - Technical support

1.3 Planning RAIS Activities for Year 2005

- The expected activities to finalize the RAIS proposal to be submitted for funding are as follows Finalizing the Proposal RAIS for WANA phase-1,
- Approve the proposal by the committee members by mid of October, 2004
- Get the approval of at least three countries from the region through AARINENA executive committee, by the end of November, 2004
- Submit the proposal to the IDB to get their financial support.
- AARINENA thanked FAO/RNE for proposing an Arabic version that interfaces with AARINENA website.

Cooperation of focal points is highly recommended. In this regard the SC members asked Dr. Roozitalab to raise this issue in the executive committee meeting to ask the countries to nominate focal points.

- Three training courses will be held during January, April and December 2005. In each course two persons from 6 countries are to participate. For the first course (January 2005) trainees from Iran, Egypt, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia.
- Activate the national AGRIS resource centers

The Committee will hold its third meeting in September, 2005 in Morocco.

2. Networks:

Technical cooperation networks have become an increasingly important means of action and are initiated and supported By AARINENA in collaboration with GFAR. These networks have become a generic model for the establishment of functional mechanisms for collaboration and enhancement of communication and exchange of experiences among different countries in one region and/or different regions of the world.

Networks are found to reduce duplicative efforts among national institutions in several countries and may provide a cost-effective instrument for information exchange and institution building (including training). When the resources are limited, networks become a more effective means for the optimal utilization of indigenous expertise and available resources among the countries themselves.

Given the current status of some important commodity crops growing countries, and in the absence of a coordinating body for the promotion of cooperation among these countries for the optimal utilization of the limited resources available for the development of the commodity crops agro-industry, the establishment of a Technical Cooperation Network on these crops is a matter of urgency.

AARINENA workplan included the establishment of Networks for four commodity crops of particular importance to this region: Date Palm, Cotton, Olive and Medicinal & Herbal plants.

2.1 Date Palm Global Network (DPGN):

An expert consultation, to study the feasibility of establishing a Date Palm Network for technical cooperation on date palm and to draft the objectives and guidelines of the network, was first held in Tehran, Iran, during the period 13 – 14 October 1999, with the participation of scientists from the following countries: Egypt, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Namibia, Tunisia, U.A.E., Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Pakistan. The consultation was hosted by the Iranian Government and supported technically and financially by FAO and AARINENA.

In the meeting, common problems and interests were defined and a document was prepared summarizing the outcome of the consultation and was presented in the Date Palm International Symposium that was held in Namibia, February 22 – 25, 2000. The program included a special session to discuss the Network under the auspices of the FAO.

It was an important component of the Date Palm International Symposium, which was held in Namibia, 22 to 25 February 2000, and was organized by the Date Production Support Program in Namibia with the technical and financial support of AGPC/FAO.

The meeting was attended by 130 participants from Algeria, Australia, Egypt, England, Eritrea, France, India, Iraq, Kenya, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Libya, Mali,

Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Palestine, Peru, Republic of South Africa, Senegal, Swaziland, Tunisia, U.A.E., U.S.A. and Zambia, and representatives from the following international organizations: AOAD, DMP, FAO, ICRISAT and Proclima International.

The Network's establishment meeting, held during 07 – 09 April 2002 in Al Ain / UAE, did finalize the terms of reference of each of the Co-coordinating Board, the General Co-coordinator, the working groups and regional co-coordinators. During the same meeting the structure of the Network was also adopted.

DPGN Activities

A. The constitution document as well as the project document of the DPGN were discussed and adopted during the first technical meeting of the Coordinating Board, which was held in Cairo, Egypt during 10– 11 June 2003.

B. The First Date Palm Exhibition will be held in Al Ain City / UAE during 21 – 23 November 2004. The exhibition is under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak AL Nahayan, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Chancellor of The UAE University.

The Friends Society of Date-Palm cosponsored the organization of this exhibition in collaboration with the producers and processors of dates from all centres inside and outside UAE to achieve the following goals of the exhibition:

1. Knowledge of the current status for growing palm, and to view the best date varieties that include rare varieties;
2. Identify the problems facing the production and processing of dates and investigate the best solutions encourage the date's production and processing sector
3. Showing the output of applying palm growing techniques.

Experience exchange and strengthen the relations between farmers, producers, and processors of the dates.

The Exhibition will display and show various date varieties, nutritional value and health benefits of dates, secondary products, tissue culture seedling, traditional show, date production equipment, books and scientific articles about date.

The participants in this exhibition will be from farmers and specialists in processing and exporting of dates, and representatives from Agriculture ministries in the dates producing countries and from research centres, organizations and international institutions. The Exhibition will include scientific workshops that will focus on dates cultivation in UAE and the World with special emphasis on propagation techniques and date diseases and the constraints that faces date processing and marketing.

2.2 Inter-Regional Cotton Network in Asia and North Africa (INCANA)

Establishment of INCANA

Recognizing the importance of cotton production in a number of developing countries in Asia and North Africa, and considering the prime role and importance of cotton in the agricultural economy of these countries, producing more than half of the world's cotton production, Dr. M.H. Roozitalab, Deputy Head of Agricultural Research and Education Organization (AREEO) of Iran and Executive Secretary of Asia Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI); Dr. A. Satybaldin, Chairman of Central Asia and Caucasus Forum (CAC); and Dr. H. Ketata Head of Tehran Office, International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), during early 2002, and called for

strengthening research collaboration among NARS. Following these discussions, an Inter-regional Workshop on Cotton Research was held at AREEO, Tehran, Iran in October, 2002.

On the basis of the recommendations of the Workshop, an Inter-regional Network for Research Collaboration on Sustainable Cotton Production in Asia and North Africa (INCANA) was established. Through common consent, Cotton Research Institute of Iran, Varamin branch, was selected and given the responsibility for establishing INCANA Secretariat in Iran.

Objectives:

- Increasing cotton yield in member countries through research collaboration and exchange of scientific knowledge, success stories and new technologies.
- Providing a data base on cotton research and other related issues concerning cotton production in the region to be used by the member countries.
- Increasing the knowledge of cotton experts and scientists through implementation of collaborative research activities and holding training workshops on cotton related issues.
- Establishing close cooperation with other research networks on cotton in the world (such as Mediterranean Cotton Research Network).

Activities & Achievements:

- Establishment of the Secretariat Office in Varamin (Iran) and equipping it with electronic and telecommunication facilities;
- Initiating connections with some international Institutes and ARIs working on cotton, such as CIRAD;
- Inviting cotton producing countries in Asia and Africa for joining the Network; until now, the following countries have agreed to join the Network: Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Syria, and Turkey.
- Making arrangements for 2nd Annual Meeting in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in September 2004.
- Receiving 189 cotton accessions from Tajikistan. These varieties have been cultivated in Khaveh Quarantine Research Station for testing their performance.
- Development of the INCANA Website (www.irnc.net) including information and data on cotton research institutes and cotton scientists of the member countries.
- Compilation of INCANA Directory on cotton research institutes and cotton scientists of the member countries.
- Preparing INCANA newsletter and a reference booklet on cotton production and related issues in the member countries.

The Second Meeting of Inter-regional Cotton Network for Central Asia and North Africa (INCANA) was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan from 6-8 September 2004. The meeting was organized by PFU and ICARDA-CAC Regional Office under the umbrella of Central Asian and Caucasian Association of Agricultural Research Institutes (CACAARI). The meeting was co-sponsored by the Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR), Association of Agricultural Research Institutes for Near East and North Africa (AARINENA), Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutes (APAARI) and CACAARI. In all, about 35 scientists participated in the meeting, including representatives from Iran, India, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Greece, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. The meeting was inaugurated by H.E. Mr. Ikramkhon Najmitdinov, Minister of Agriculture and Water Management of Uzbekistan.

The meeting included three technical sessions on country presentations, new developments in cotton research and strengthening research collaboration as well as round table discussions. During the technical sessions, representatives from Egypt, Iran, India, Greece, Syria, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan presented their country reports, highlighting the problems and promising results in cotton research and development.

Final recommendations and future plan were spelt out as follows

- **Information and Germplasm Exchange:**
On this topic the participants agreed that INCANA should play a facilitator's roles. As first step, through gathering and disseminating information on available germplasm, and putting the legislatives procedures of various countries on web.
- **INCANA Regional Varietal Trials:**
Considering specific regional needs and available resources, Mr. F. Talat from AREO (Iran) was proposed to coordinate this work. (ftcri99@yahoo.com)
- **Hybrid and Bt cotton Research:**
ICAR, MAHYCO, India agreed to take up the lead and providing needed logistic support in organizing traveling workshop on hybrid and Bt cotton. (Dr. K.C.Jain, ICAR, kcjain@icar.delhi.nic.in ; Mr. Raju B. Barwale, MAHYCO, raju.barwale@MAHYCO.com)
- **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)**
Dr. Naif Al-Salti from Syria was proposed to coordinate training workshops for INCANA members. (iyad10@scs-net.org)
- **Cotton-Wheat Rotation**
Considering the successful existing experiences on this topic in North India and Pakistan, Dr. Mayee will suggest a suitable author to describe the Success Story of cotton-wheat rotation. (cdmayee@krishi.delhi.nic.in)
- Development of INCANA Website as soon as possible
- Preparing of a good Project proposal for donor support
- Printing of Success Stories on Bt Cotton in India and IPM in Syria.
- For needed resources, GFAR, AARINENA, APAARI and ICARDA be again requested to provide similar support in future to INCANA. Also FAO be approved to support for this inter-regional initiative.
- The venue and time were debated. Syria and Egypt have come forward to hold the 3rd INCANA meeting in 2006. It was agreed that based on written request from the respective countries, INCANA Secretariat could take a final view for hosting at either of these countries.

2.3 Olive Oil Network:

AARINENA has organized an expert consultation meeting at the Olive tree Institute at Sfax-Tunisia during the period of 16-18 of February, 2004. The meeting was supported by GFAR, FAO and ICARDA. Olive Experts from research institutions and private sector of AARINENA olive producing countries: Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan and from the European side: Spain, France, Turkey, Italy, Portugal and Cyprus, attended the meeting which aimed to:

- a) Review the current status of olive research in the participating countries;
- b) Elect a new coordinator for the olive network at ESCORENA; and
- c) Establish AARINENA olive Network for the Near East and the North Africa countries.

The meeting approved the establishment of regional cooperative Network for Olive to be hosted by the Olive Tree Institute at Sfax and recommended strengthen Interregional cooperation by establishing linkages to The European System of Cooperative Research Networks in Agriculture (ESCORENA) .

The meeting formed three olive technical working groups as follows:

- 1.Olive production and Protection group to be hosted by Egypt.
- 2.Post-harvest processing technologies to be hosted by Jordan.
- 3.Socio-economic and commercialization group to be hosted by Morocco.

The working groups have completed their mission statements & working plan documents and prepared project proposals.

The focal points were selected from NGOs, Private sector, research institutions and universities that will constitute the coordinating board of the network. The first meeting of the board will be held in Marrakech, Morocco December 20-23 to elect the chairman of the board and to approve the work plan for the network and review the working group's project proposals.

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2.4 Medicinal & Herbal Plants Network:

AARINENA organized an expert consultation meeting on Medicinal and Herbal plants in conjunction with “the 11th International Conference on Marketing Strategies for Medicinal Herbs , Essential Oils and Functional Food Ingredients” This meeting was held in Cairo, Egypt on September 30, 2004 under the patronage of HE Eng. Ahmad El-Leithy Minister of Agriculture & land Reclamation and was supported by GFAR .

The meeting was attended by experts from Egypt, Malta, Morocco, Jordan, Oman, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. It was also attended by representatives from AARINENA, ESMAP, ICARDA, IPGRI, Private sector and NGO and Universities.

The participants presented the status of the medicinal and herbal plants in their own countries, constraints on research and production and recommendations to support the establishment of a Regional Medicinal & Herbal Plants Network.

A regional proposal for regional Network on Medicinal plants and herbal plants was presented by AARINENA Executive secretary. The Participants adopted the proposed regional Network and Selected Egypt to host the secretariat seat of the Network and selected the following technical working groups:

- 1- Conversation and Sustainable Use Group to be hosted by Morocco,
- 2-Agricultural Practices Group to be hosted by Sudan,
- 3- Post Harvest Technology Group to be hosted by Jordan
- 4- Commercialization & Scio-economic Group to be hosted by Egypt.

3. Workshops/Training Courses:

AARINENA co sponsored and participated in the following meetings:

- 1) Regional Training course on Post-Harvest technology in Amman-Jordan Jan, 2003
- 2) Bio-safety Workshop in Syria in August 2003.
- 3) AARINENA Executive Committee and Cosponsors Meeting, Amman-Jordan 4-5 January 2004
- 4) Advanced post-Harvest Training course, NCARTT, Jordan 6-8 April `2004
- 5) Regional workshop on Transfer of Technology, Muscat Oman 14-15 April, 2004
- 6) 2nd Regional Fora Executive Secretaries Meeting, 17-18 May 2004, Rome, Italy
- 7) 36th World Farmers' Congress 29 May – 4 June 2004 Washington D.C., USA
- 8) The ISNAR-IFPRI Program Advisory Committee Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, July 7-9, 2004
- 9) ICT Steering Committee Meeting, AREO, Tehran-Iran, 6-7 September, 2004
- 10) Second annual Meeting of Inter-regional Network on Cotton (INCANA), 6-8 September, 2004 Tashkent, Uzbekistan

4. Publications:

4.1 Newsletter:

Three issues of AARINENA Newsletter (May-2003, February-2004 and September-2004) were published and distributed to all members, research institutions, and faculties of Agriculture at universities in the region. The Newsletters are posted on AARINENA website.

4.2 Proceedings of meetings:

- Proceedings of meetings, workshops and training courses were distributed and posted on AARINENA Home page.
- Revised amended Constitution of AARINENA has been published and circulated to all members.
- Rules of procedure, adopted by the General Conference were also published and circulated.

5. Membership Enhancement:

5.1 New Members/Associate Members

The efforts of the secretariat resulted in the addition of 8 new members:

Algeria, Tunisia, and University of Jordan, Jordan University for Science & Technology (JUST) and the International Center for Bio-saline Agricultural Research (ICBA), King Abdulaziz City For Science and Technology (KACST) in Saudi Arabia, Mauritania and Somalia .

The new members will make the total membership of AARINENA to 32 that include 25 full members and 7 Associate members.

5.2 New Cosponsors:

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) have welcomed AARINENA invitation to become cosponsors along with FAO and ICARDA

Conclusion

Over the years, AARINENA has supported national agricultural research systems (NARS) in the region in capacity building through training programs, organizing technical and scientific workshops and conferences, and establishing regional information and communication system through active support and active participation of GFAR, ICARDA and FAO. In this regard, a web site (www.aarinena.org) to disseminate information to member countries was operating since July 2002. AARINENA has also contributed in establishing networks for essential crops in the region such as date palm, cotton, olive and medicinal & herbal plants. It acted as a facilitator in bringing the views, aspirations and research priorities of the WANA region to the attention of the relevant international organizations with the aim of promotion of sustainable agricultural development through attraction of global agricultural and developmental communities as well as donors to support the regional and sub-regional research projects and related activities.