



## **FARA progress report**

**October 2004**

### **Background:**

In September 2003, FARA was entering its second year and was well aware that its credibility depended on making tangible progress in its three main functions, i.e., advocacy, promoting partnerships and improving access to and exchange of information.

The demands in those three areas were growing rapidly but FARA's budget did not allow for immediate recruitment of additional staff. At the same time, FARA had to respond to the interim Science Council's demand for the Sub Saharan Africa Challenge Programme proposal to have more information on the Pilot Learning Sites and the problems that were going to be addressed. This would require engaging in the participatory processes that are at the core of the Integrated Agricultural Research for Development which had not been possible with the resources that had been available to FARA. In those circumstances FARA was especially grateful for the support and encouragement provided by its European partners that gave us the confidence to stick with and move on with the agreed programme for 2004.

### **Progress with advocacy:**

In the past 12 months, FARA has achieved greater recognition and a closer working relationship with the African Union which is essential for its advocacy functions. The Commission of African Union action plan has identified the SROs and FARA as key players in implementing accelerated development in research, technology and marketing of strategic agricultural commodities. Evidence of this is found in the signing of an agreement with NEPAD, the involvement of FARA in the preparatory meetings and participating in the Extra-Ordinary Session on Agriculture and Water of Heads of State held in Sirte, Libya. Since then FARA has continued to be engaged in the identification of centres of excellence as advocated by NEPAD and the IAC. With the qualification that FARA would prefer to consider them 'centres of specialisation' because FARA is

committed in the BASIC programme (see below) to restoring excellence to African tertiary agricultural education as a whole. For example, the NEPAD 'Bioscience East and Central Africa' (BECA) facility set up at ILRI in Nairobi is justified by the need to provide specialised and expensive equipment and facilities. However, for it to succeed ILRI and institutions such as the University of Nairobi and KARI must be centres of excellence capable of promoting researchers requiring such facilities.

FARA has continued to advocate consistency and focus in agricultural research for Africa's development by adhering to CAADP as a guiding framework. CAADP will continue to evolve and be improved but it has already established a means of ensuring cohesion and value adding. For example CAADP provides a framework for synchronising the realisation of the recommendations of the IAC report on 'Realising the promise and potential of African agriculture' with the goals and objectives of the SSA CP without the need to create any new structures.

FARA and CTA have found increasing common ground through their complementary mandates. Participation in each others programmes has been helpful to both organisations. For example CTA supported the participation of key African university professors in the FARA-convened BASIC workshop and FARA presented the outcomes of that workshop to CTA-NEPAD-ATPS meeting in Nairobi on 'Enhancing the Science and Technology Dialogue – Innovation for Development' and received important feedback and endorsement.

Following visits of high-level FARA delegations to Morocco and Oman a subset of ARRINENA countries, excluding the Near East membership will be represented as observers at future meetings of FARA's Executive Committee pending confirmation at the next FARA General Assembly that will be held in Entebbe, Uganda from 6 - 12 June 2005. This is essential for FARA's completeness as an African continental institution.

### **Progress with partnerships:**

FARA recognises that there are four essential necessities for achieving levels of impact that will stem and reverse Africa's worsening livelihoods, food security and loss of natural resources. These necessities are;

1. a new innovation systems approach to agricultural research for development
2. immediate applications that can make a difference and restore credibility in agricultural development,
3. the human capacity to implement, internalise and upscale that approach to all stakeholders including researchers, change agents, processors, marketers, and not least policy makers, and,
4. the financial resources that African agricultural research systems require to carry out the required reforms and investments.

FARA has sought to make concurrent progress on these four fronts so that impact of one will not be limited by lack of progress in the other.

## 1. Introducing and internalising a new approach to agricultural research for development

FARA is indebted to the Government of Norway for grants it provided through IITA and ILRI for advancing the SSA CP. With those funds, a multi-institutional Ad hoc Spatial Analysis Group was established to provide critical information on the application of SSA CP criteria of poverty and natural resource degradation and the SROs established Task Forces that were able to refine the information with primary data and consultations with stakeholders to identify priority Pilot Learning Sites. Meeting together under the auspices of FARA one site in each sub-region was selected that best met sub-regional and regional criteria. Following the provision of that information in a revised proposal FARA is pleased to report that the CGIAR Science Council and the CGIAR Executive Committee have approved the first phase (18 months) of the Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme. Assuming the final approval by the CGIAR Group at the forthcoming AGM in Mexico (October 2004), FARA will move quickly to sustain the buy-in and momentum achieved by the participatory proposal development and site selection processes.

## 2. Immediate applications that can make a difference and restore credibility in agricultural development

FARA believes that progress can and must be made with the uptake of existing research-based technologies because they are urgently needed to improve livelihoods and to raise confidence in the potential of agricultural research to make a difference. FARA also believes that there will be common opportunities and problems in the dissemination of the different technologies and that lessons learnt should be rapidly disseminated between the countries and agencies involved.

To this end FARA and NEPAD have formulated a programme for the ‘Dissemination of New Agricultural Technologies in Africa’ (DONATA). DONATA is comprised of a growing portfolio of technologies that are ready for dissemination and out-scaling. These include NERICA rice, Tissue Culture Banana, IR-maize for *striga* control and improved cassava. Each of these has important contributions to make to improve African livelihoods and economies but through a common implementing structure there will be more rapid uptake by avoiding common pitfalls in dissemination and outscaling.

## 3. Strengthening the capacity to build the human capacity to implement, internalise new approaches to agricultural research for development and to implement development

The linear research-extension-adoption approach to developing and disseminating agricultural research has not been sufficiently successful in Africa. There is a growing consensus that a broader more inclusive participatory approach is required. The development of the Sub Saharan Africa Challenge Programme has stimulated increasing interest in Integrated Agricultural Research for Development (IAR4D). A growing awareness is developing of the new demands on agricultural professionals in all branches of agriculture for the skills required to function effectively in participatory, multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional, multi-stakeholder innovation systems modes. This

creates an urgent need to introduce institutional change and soft skills into university curricular.

There are a number of programmes aimed at strengthening MSc and PhD level training but these and all branches of agriculture including processing, marketing and policy making require well-qualified graduates. But BSc level training has suffered as a consequence of under funding and staff attrition and must be brought back to strength as a matter of the greatest urgency. The IFS amongst others has warned of the dire consequences of the ‘missing generation of African scientists’.

Through a careful series of actions, FARA’s stakeholders have identified the need for a new approach to ‘Building African Scientific and Institutional Capacity’ (BASIC) with the following key characteristics:

1. African universities will determine the demand
2. African universities will as far as possible assist each other to strengthen their capacity to build capacity
3. Northern universities working through ICRA and NATURA will respond to the requests for strengthening pedagogy
4. The CGIAR and associated NARIs will provide opportunities for the development of locally relevant research-based teaching materials
5. the African universities engaged in collaborative activities with northern universities and the CGIAR will disseminate the outcomes and products to other African universities to maximise the benefits.
6. Consistent with its continental mandate and its agreement with NEPAD, which has made capacity strengthening a cross cutting theme of CAADP, FARA will facilitate and coordinate the development and implementation of BASIC.

The Commission of the African Union hosted a workshop on BASIC that was convened by FARA. The wide African and European ownership, low transaction costs, rapid implementation, and impact potential are critical to enabling BASIC to up-scale IAR4D and the research products of the Sub Saharan Africa Challenge Programme to continental scales.

4. Securing the resources that African agricultural research systems require to carry out the required reforms and investments

The IAC report is only the latest of many to highlight the need for increased investment in agricultural research for Africa’s development. FARA is working with NEPAD to advance the ‘Multicountry Agricultural Productivity Programme’ (MAPP) by raising awareness, seeking feedback and buy-in in the subregions for a submission to the World Bank and other donors for funding for regional activities such as the promotion of the DONATA projects to complement and add value to activities that will be supported by the individual country agricultural productivity programmes such as has recently been initiated by Kenya.

FARA is also following the development of major projects such as the sustainable land management project ‘TerrAfrica’ and the African livestock project ‘ALive’ which have the potential to support significant investment in agricultural research.

**Progress with promoting access and exchange of information:**

FARA is concerned that the huge growth in available information and the improvement in information infrastructure (albeit far from satisfactory) are not being used as effectively as they should be by African end-users. This is a concern shared by NARIs, NARS, SROs, GFAR, FAO, CABi, CTA, Infosys, TEAL and many others. FARA sees an important role in helping to catalyse the gelling of the providers and transmitters of information into a system that responds to the needs of African end-users.

To that end FARA has participated in several workshops and hosted a regional meeting in April 2004 together with GFAR. The workshop recommended that FARA take the lead in developing the Regional Agricultural Information System (RAIS) in Africa that will be a critical link in the global agricultural information chain leading ultimately to the rural communities and primary producers.

FARA is currently renewing its website to implement the recommendations of its stakeholders. It is working closely with GFAR, EARD Infosys+ and the SROs to develop a comprehensive FARA\_RAIS portal.

**Hosting projects with common goals and objectives:**

FARA is pleased to have been in the position to assist the *Système d’Information Scientifique et Technique* (SIST) project funded by the Government of France and the ‘Programe for Biosafety Systems’ (PBS) funded by USAID and carried out by IFPRI/ISNAR and Agricultural Biotechnology Support Project II with intellectual and logistical support including office accommodation. The presence of the senior staff of these projects adds to work of their FARA colleagues.

**FARA secretariat:**

The FARA Secretariat has continued to engage the FARA stakeholders in its different activities and will continue to be a small lean unit. However, the demands on the three professional staff; Executive Secretary, Senior Resource Person and Special Assistant to the Executive Secretary are such that the decision was made to recruit two more international professional staff. We are pleased that Dr. Zinesh Sileshi who is well know by any one engaged in agricultural research in Ethiopia has accepted to join FARA in December as Senior Resource Person. Her wide experience and NARS perspective will enable her to add new dimensions to FARA’s work. We are also pleased that Mr. Victor Keraro (Kenyan) from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) as Head of Administration and Finance. These are critical appointments as FARA expands its activities.

**Conclusion:**

As FARA looks forward to a year of consolidation and action it is conscious that the foundation it has been able to establish is the product of the confidence and contributions of all its stakeholders. The intellectual and financial support of its donors has been and FARA requests will continue to be vital factor in FARA' ability to add value to the work of the SROs leading to more effective agricultural research at the farm and community level.