



GFAR

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

Round Table of the NARS Committee of GFAR on *Regional Priority Setting*

October 22, 2000

In the NARS Committee meeting of October 22 a Round Table was held on Regional Priority Setting for ARD, with the participation of NARS leaders from the five regions of the developing world, the RF/SRF, ISNAR and the GFAR Secretariat. The following conclusions were reached:

- a) Regional priority setting in agricultural research is of paramount importance to all Regional/Sub-regional Fora. It is an important part of their mandate and a very significant amount of work has already been done, not only in formulating a *Regional Vision* for agricultural research but also in defining concrete *regional research priorities*.
- b) *Regional priorities* have been formulated in terms of both *development needs* (i.e. food security, poverty alleviation, improvement of well being of the rural population, competitiveness of agricultural production, etc.), and in terms of *research priorities*. In the case of the latter, research priorities have been formulated in terms of “technological constraints” to production, in terms of crops and/or commodity chains, in terms of NRM constraints or issues (i.e. water, soil erosion), in terms of agro-ecosystems, and in terms of strategic areas of research that cut across many development needs.
- c) Given the importance they attach to this topic, the RF/SRF welcome the evolution taking place in the CGIAR in giving an important role to regional priorities. They understand that this does not mean evolving towards regional programs, given the global mandates of centres, but this new orientation recognizes the importance of regional priorities in orienting the research efforts of the CGIAR.
- d) In order to achieve the objective of ownership and of effective participation, the process of needs-assessment and identification of regional priorities should be led by the Regional/Sub-regional organizations. In this way, it will be easier to assure greater coordination and synergisms between CGIAR research efforts and what other stakeholders do in each region (NARS, regional research centres, NGOs, the private sector, etc.). This also allows to build upon the work these organizations have already done, instead of duplicating efforts or failing to recognize the work already done by each region.
- e) Although in some cases the priority-setting exercises have mainly involved NARIs, the RF/SRF are starting to develop a capacity for inter-stakeholder dialogue and consultation. This presently is their main weakness, but there are several methodologies and techniques that presently exist that allows for a quick “*validation*” of priorities with various stakeholders, that can enrich the process and complement the priorities so far identified.
- f) Although this regional priority-setting process can make an important contribution to priority setting in the CGIAR, it is of great importance that these efforts take a wider view in *looking at*

the broader research agenda that responds to the development needs of the countries of the region. Given the fact that the CGIAR has a specific mandate it will only be able to cover a limited part of the research needs of each region. Other stakeholders (NARS, regional research centres, NGOs, the private sector) will cover other aspects and research issues identified in the regional priority setting exercise. In doing this in an integrated way, complementarities and synergisms among the research efforts of the various stakeholders may be achieved as part of this process. Regional cooperative programs can be derived from this process for other stakeholders to carry out.

- g) In order to be able to tackle the above tasks, the planning capacity of RF/SRF will have to be strengthened. This is an area where the GFAR Secretariat can play an important role, in cooperation with ISNAR, with FAO and with regional organizations that work in this field. It was considered that this is one of the most important comparative advantages of GFAR, through *enabling NARS to learn from each other*. The following possibilities were identified:
- In order to strengthen the capacity of RF/SRF and to facilitate comparability among the regional priority-setting exercises across regions, the GFAR Secretariat can develop Guidelines for information requirements and for key strategic planning questions to be addressed by the regional/sub-regional fora, in cooperation with the TAC Secretariat.
 - The GFAR Secretariat can facilitate exchange of experiences and of planning approaches and methodologies among NARS and among regions. This is part of the process of enabling NARS to learn from each other.
 - ISNAR offered to make available the planning methodologies it has developed through its work with NARS in CD-ROM format, that could be distributed to all RF/SRF and to interested NARS.
 - IICA also offered to make available the methodologies that have been developed by this organization with IDB. An effort of comparing these different approaches could be made. While the ISNAR experience has concentrated more at the national (NARS) level, the IICA experience has directly addressed the issue of priority setting at the regional and sub-regional level.
 - Sharing of information among NARS and among RF/SRF was considered an important tool for capacity building. EGFAR can be used as a dissemination platform for this purpose, through the NARS Forum that is under development.
- h) An important practical question that emerged is that of the timing. It was pointed out that for the inputs into the CGIAR strategic planning exercise the time horizon has not yet been defined, but that very likely a first significant input would be expected for MTM-2001. This being the case, this poses a great challenge of being able to prepare a quick response. Although a serious needs-assessment exercise requires a bottom-up approach of defining national priorities (based on inter-stakeholder consultation), from which we can derive sub-regional and regional priorities, in reality this time may simply not be available. In order to make an input into the process in the short term the most practical approach may be to: (1) take as a point of departure the most recent set of regional (or sub-regional) priorities available; (2) seek to update these priorities on the basis of recent studies or reports on development needs of the region or through other means; (3) “*validate*” those regional priorities by putting them to the consideration of *different constituencies of stakeholders* in order to integrate the inter-stakeholder perspective. The fact that the initial effort of priority-setting was based on the active participation of one or two stakeholders can be easily corrected through various “validation” techniques that allows to quickly pull into the picture other sub-sectors (i.e. forestry, fisheries), as well as the opinion of other stakeholders. This process can be facilitated by the coordination mechanisms GFAR has already established with NGOs and with Farmers’ Organizations. This also has the great advantage of generating a “learning process” in the respective RF/SRF.

- i) It was again pointed out that, although the CGIAR exercise may require a quick input in order to make an impact on CGIAR priorities, this cannot be the only motivation nor objective of the priority-setting efforts of RF/SRFs. As pointed out in point (f) above, the regional priority-setting efforts should take a wider view in looking at the broader research agenda that responds to the development needs of the region, including those research efforts and topics that will be covered by other (mainly regional) stakeholders.
- j) A pilot project or exercise is already under preparation for the Central American countries in the LAC region, and the approach and methodology that will be used here could provide valuable inputs for the process that will be carried out by the other RF/SRF. Again, this is a good example of *enabling NARS to learn from each other and of facilitating inter-stakeholder consultation*, which are two very important comparative advantages that GFAR has.
- k) In the near future both the GFAR-SC and the NARS Committee will address another aspect that is of interest to all NARS, which is that of the identification of the main issues that should be reflected in the *Global Strategic Agenda on ARD*, in close interaction with the NGO, the Farmers and the private sector Working Groups of GFAR. Through this mechanism inter-stakeholder consultation can be assured, which is one of the purposes for having established GFAR in the first place. The GFAR Secretariat will interact with the various RF/SRF, with NGOs, with Farmers' Organizations and with the private sector in the next five months, in order to prepare a similar Round Table that will be held in MTM-2001 on this specific topic.