



# GFAR

## The Global Forum on Agricultural Research

### Ten Years of Impact



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In the mid 1990s, scientists and policy makers recognized that the agricultural research sector needed to change. It was time for a new research agenda, with smallholder farming communities taking centre-stage. To help shape this agenda, the sector needed a neutral, global platform in which everyone from scientists to smallholder farmers could participate, exchange perspectives and share knowledge. As a result, the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) was founded in 1998.

Since then, the Global Forum has helped farmers, scientists, policy makers, NGOs and donor groups come together to discuss and work to alleviate poverty, increase food security and promote the sustainable use of natural resources. It has done this by facilitating and promoting cost-effective partnerships and strategic alliances, championing key issues, and by improving the ways in which knowledge is shared and communicated.

The role of GFAR is thus to link science and society to address critical issues determining our future ability to feed humanity. Within this, it has a prime aim of creating effective research and innovation systems that meet the complex economic, social and environmental needs of sustainable agricultural development.

One major thrust of the Global Forum's work has been to work with National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) to ensure that they represent not only public-sector research institutes, but all stakeholders in agricultural research for development (ARD). Examples of

such would include universities, the private sector, NGOs and farmer representatives.

#### Facilitating discussions for change

In order to promote open, results-driven dialogue among diverse partners, the Global Forum has held a series of events, including its **Triennial Conferences** (2000: Dresden; 2003: Dakar; and 2006: New Delhi). At these conferences, hundreds of participants from around the world, from across the spectrum of those concerned with agricultural research for development, met to discuss current and emerging global issues and plan concerted action. These meetings have catalyzed new thinking on collective actions between people with widely differing roles and views, to stimulate and deliver rural innovation.

Via conferences and network meetings, the Global Forum has identified research needs in ARD that are common to communities around the world. This information has guided the Forum in facilitating discussions on the **International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources**, for example.

#### *The Global Forum focuses on the following four main areas:*

- Conducting advocacy for research to address and understand key issues that will shape tomorrow's agriculture
- Reorienting agricultural research and innovation systems to meet development goals
- Fostering innovative and strategic partnerships around the world
- Enabling access to agricultural knowledge for all.

#### Strengthening the role of farmers, civil society and young people

The Global Forum has been a strong advocate for involving civil society organizations (including NGOs, farmer organizations and young people) in ARD decision-making at national, regional and global levels. As a result, farmers' associations and young agriculturists are now directly involved in

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the governance of regional agricultural research forums and many research institutions.

The Global Forum has also strived to make existing global programmes more effective in meeting society's needs. For example, by bringing stakeholder perspectives into the Challenge Programmes of the CGIAR. The Global Forum has also created the NGO Consortium for agricultural research for development in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region.

The Global Forum has also been instrumental in the birth of the **Young Professionals' Platform for Agricultural Research for Development** (<http://www.ypard.org>). This global platform enables young professionals to exchange information and knowledge, express their ideas and contribute to policy debates.

#### Building partnerships

The Global Forum has established radically new working partnerships to address global agricultural issues. Global Partnership Programmes (GPPs) are jointly developed, carried out and owned by diverse stakeholders. Each programme involves partners from diverse stakeholder groups and from two or more regions.

One example of a Global Partnership Programme is ProInnova (PROmotion of Local INNOVation), an NGO-led GPP, which promotes local innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resources management. The programme focuses on recognizing the dynamics of indigenous knowledge and enhancing the capacities of farmers and fisherfolk in adjusting to change. More information is available at <http://www.prolinnova.net>

A second example is the DURAS Project (Promotion of Sustainable Development in ARD in the South). This has overcome wide initial differences in perspectives to successfully create partnerships for agricultural research and innovation between research and civil society actors from Europe, Africa and Asia. More information is available at <http://www.duras-project.net>

The Global Forum not only initiates and fosters Global Partnership Programmes, but also helps build the capacities of its members and the regional forums – so helping them to participate more effectively in discussions and research activities. Over the past ten years, the Global Forum has helped regional forums

to define their research priorities, develop agricultural information systems, create 'South-South' and 'North-South' partnerships, and establish thematic networks within and between regions (covering, for example, conservation agriculture, under-utilized crops, cotton and agricultural biotechnology).

#### Sharing research knowledge

A key aim of the Global Forum has been to overcome barriers to accessing knowledge. Through the Information and Communication Management for ARD (ICM4ARD) initiative, the Forum has helped to create, improve and integrate agricultural information systems and services – especially in the case of regional forums.

Working through its regional forums, the Global Forum has also helped agricultural research institutions to access, manage and share information and to organize complex information systems. And, at the global level, the Forum is collaborating with the managers of key information sources to establish standardized mechanisms to make it easy for everyone to access valuable information.

The Global Forum's own web-site (<http://www.egfar.org>) promotes and supports the discussion of important global issues in ARD. To this end it provides, for example, interactive discussion boards and blogs in order to better represent agricultural institutions and communities and help them to share their perspectives and knowledge.

#### Next steps

A recent external review of the Global Forum reaffirmed its unique and valuable role. The recommendations from this external review form the basis of a new business plan, which will help keep the Global Forum on track to address key future issues, such as the challenges involved in coping with climate change and in linking poor farmers to markets. The Global Forum is now playing a key role in helping to shape international agricultural research and we invite you to become involved in these open and inclusive processes for change.

[www.egfar.org](http://www.egfar.org)

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