

**Report of the
Meeting of the AARINENA *ad hoc* Committee for the development of a
Global Partnership Programme
on the theme of
Linking Smallholder Farmers to Markets**

22-23 February 2006

Al-Ain, United Arab Emirates

Background

The “*Strategic Framework for a Global Post-harvest Initiative - Linking Farmers to Markets*” was developed following an International Workshop on Post Harvest Systems held in FAO Headquarters in Rome in 2003, jointly organised by FAO/AGS, the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) and the Post-harvest Global Forum (*PhAction*). More than 100 participants, representing different stakeholder groups, participated in the workshop and contributed to the development of an innovative initiative designed to address the complexity of the post-harvest sector and to meet the trade and market access challenges that face farmers and other rural actors in a rapidly changing world.

The Strategic Framework is composed of four interlinked pillars that address policy, institutional R&D capacity, supply chain integration and infrastructure, and inter- and intra- regional learning and information sharing issues.

At the meeting of the GFAR Steering Committee held in Mexico in October 2004, the Regional Forums and other stakeholders identified with the Strategic Framework and recommended that the GFAR Secretariat explore the development of a Global Partnership Programme within the framework of the Global Post-harvest Initiative. In December 2004 and throughout 2005, the GFAR Secretariat undertook actions to identify areas of convergence and common needs and demands across regions, and also to assess donor interest in supporting a global programme.

Across regions, agricultural R&D and investment is addressing predominantly the needs of those farmers, whether they are large, medium or small, that are capable of articulating their demands and have the resources to access appropriate services. In all developing continents, appropriate technological and organisational options and support services for those poorer farmers that practice subsistence or family agriculture are less well attended to. Two potential common regional cross-cutting areas of interest suggest themselves:

- Support to the transition of smallholder farmers from subsistence to a greater level of commercially oriented production, building their capacity to engage in supply chains linked to growth markets. This meets the needs manifested especially in APAARI,

FARA and FORAGRO. It is also a priority for another of GFAR's stakeholders, the International Federation of Agricultural Producers.

- Commodity differentiation and diversification; differentiation (e.g. organic products) can be an opportunity for farmers to generate higher incomes, while there is a growing demand for higher value agricultural products. This meets the needs of AARINENA in particular, but is also important in the other regions.

With respect to funding opportunities, IFAD, Italy and the Rockefeller Foundation have in the past contributed to activities associated with the Global Post-harvest Initiative. IFAD and the Rockefeller Foundation have manifested the possibility of further support, IFAD related to the organisation of partnerships – among supply chain actors and R&D support services, and the Rockefeller Foundation particularly to activities in Africa. CIDA has indicated interest in supporting activities that engage the private sector. A 'linking farmers to markets' programme could provide such an opportunity to engage both private service providers and the private food processing and retail sector. There is therefore potential for obtaining support from the above donors for an inter-regional proposal or proposals that address their interests.

Activities in the Near East and North Africa

In the West Asia and North Africa region, AARINENA played the major convening role for the consultation that was held in Cairo in February 2002 prior to the International Workshop held in Rome and mentioned above. Subsequently AARINENA confirmed the importance of post-harvest, marketing and enterprise related activities and expressed the desire to use the Post-harvest Initiative to strengthen and build on the commodity networks that have been established for cotton, date palm, olive and medicinal & aromatic plants. In March 2005, a planning meeting was held with the Commodity Network Coordinators, the Post-harvest Working Group Leaders and selected experts from the region with the aim of: a) identifying cross-cutting needs of four commodity networks (olive, date palm, cotton and medicinal plants) in the AARINENA region, in the area of post-harvest handling, processing, and marketing and enterprise development; b) prioritizing three project ideas that would address the identified needs; and c) establish a plan of work for the subsequent development of the ideas into full proposals. The principal output of the meeting was the prioritization of the following three project ideas:

- Market-orientation for the AARINENA networks and their members
- Innovative and effective market-oriented and demand-driven extension services
- Organic production and markets for of olive, cotton, dates and medicinal and aromatic plants

For each of the selected idea a draft project profile was developed and these have been subsequently transformed into concept notes that can be used as the basis for further project proposal preparation.

The Al-Ain meeting of the *ad hoc* working group

The meeting held in Abu-Dhabi on 22-23 February was designed to move the above process forward by convening an *ad hoc* working group composed of the promoters of the three project ideas mentioned above and selected resource persons from the region. The objectives of the meeting were the following:

- (a) To review the three project concept notes and determine the possibility for financing and execution them as stand alone projects within the AARINENA region;
- (b) To identify commonalities among the three projects that could form the basis of an inter-regional proposal that will add value to and increase the effectiveness of on-going research and development interventions in the region and in other regions;
- (c) To identify candidate on-going R&D interventions that could become an integral part of an inter-regional programme;
- (d) To make a preliminary determination of the experience and expertise available in the region, and the demands and needs that might be met by expertise from other regions;
- (e) To develop the plan of activities required for preparing the region to participate in a inter-regional project planning meeting to be held in the second semester of 2006.

Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome to the meeting by Prof. Abdelouahhab Zaid.
2. AARINENA statement by Dr. Ibrahim Hamdan.
3. Review of actions taken since the Antalya Meeting at the global level by Dr. Rupert Best.
4. Review of the actions taken and presentations of the three concept notes.
 - Market-orientation for the Networks and their members by Prof. Abdelouahhab Zaid.
 - Innovative and effective market-oriented and demand-driven extension services by Mohamed El-kholy.
 - Organic production and markets for olive, cotton, dates and medicinal & aromatic plants by Nabeel Abu-Shriha.
 - Remarks on the three project ideas by Prof. Dr. M. S. A. Safwat
5. Discussion on advances and perspectives for regional projects and priorities for an inter-regional programme (Global Partnership Programme).
6. Definition of common cross-project issues that could form the basis of an inter-regional programme.

7. Identification of candidate on-going R & D interventions (countries, locations, and institutions), with an inventory of experience and expertise.
8. Courtesy visit to the Hon. Vice Chancellor of UAE University, Dr. Hadeef Al Dhahiri.
9. Development of a plan of activities in preparation for an inter-regional project planning meeting to be held in the second half of 2006.

Participants in the *ad hoc* working group

The following persons participated in the *ad hoc* working group meeting:

Abdelouahhab Zaid	Market orientation for commodity networks project convener and Date Palm Global Network Coordinator
Samir AlShaker	Emirates Dates Factory, Alsaed
Mohamed El-Kholy	Extension project convener
Nabeel Abu-Shriha	Organic production and marketing project convener
Salah Hegazi	Agro-Food Company, Egypt
Mohamed Safwat	Board Chair, Medicinal & Aromatic Plants Network
Fawzi Taher	Regional Crop Production Officer, FAO
Ibrahim Hamdan	Executive Secretary, AARINENA
Rupert Best	GFAR Secretariat, Rome

The contact information for each of these persons is provided in Annex 1. Apologies for absence were received from Magdi Madkour of ICARDA who, in a personal communication with Ibrahim Hamdan, expressed ICARDA's full support for this initiative. Saleh Shdiefat, Olive Research Programme Director NCARTT & Board Chair of the Olive Network was due to attend but unable to travel for visa problems.

Principal outcomes of the meeting by each meeting objective

1. Review of the three project concept notes and determine the possibility for financing and execution them as stand alone projects within the AARINENA region

The three concept notes presented by Abdelouahhab Zaid, Mohamed El-Kholy and Nabeel Abu-Shriha respectively, and the summary remarks presented by Mohamed Safwat can be viewed at www.egfar.org/action/partnership/masterpage.shtml . Following the presentations, a general discussion highlighted the following:

- There is growing interest in the region for support in organic farming, based on the perceived expansion of the market for organic produce.
- Meeting organic standards is just one of now several 'standards' being demanded by retailers. Examples are EUROGAP and Natural Choice. Experience has shown that producing to organic standards goes a long way to meeting other private

standards currently being imposed on growers, local wholesalers/packers and exporters.

- In terms of market share and relative importance for some commodities (e.g. dates, olives and cotton), organic production may be less important than the establishment of good agricultural practices (GAP). For the WANA region, it will be better to maintain a wider window than just that limited to the organic market niche. For example, GAP principles will/may be more relevant for dates, olives and cotton, while organic production practices may be more relevant for medicinal and aromatic plants and fruits and vegetables.
 - The emphasis of both the intra- and inter- regional initiatives in linking farmers to markets should be on development of methods and tools for supporting farmers to link themselves more firmly with other market actors (traders, processors, etc.), not in the development *per se* of any particular sub-sector. However, to initiate in a focused and practical manner it will be necessary to prioritise commodities, countries and regions within countries.
 - The very different nature of the farming systems – and the livelihood strategies of those involved with these systems– of those that are tree based (olive and dates, fruit trees) and those that are based on annual crops (most vegetables, medicinal and aromatic plants) was noted. It was felt that any WANA initiative on linking farmers to markets should take this diversity into account.
 - There was unanimity among the *ad hoc* working group members that a clear definition of the market, or markets, with the specific purchase requirements of each one, should be the starting point of the linking farmers to markets programme.
2. Identify commonalities among the three projects that could form the basis of an inter-regional proposal that will add value to and increase the effectiveness of on-going research and development interventions in the region and in other regions
- The concept notes share many similar elements that can provide the basis for a unified set of proposals for an inter-regional proposal.
 - Each concept note places emphasis on a different actor: the market orientation for commodity networks proposal focuses on the researcher, the extension proposal on the extensionist and development agent, and the organic proposal principally on the farmer, while acknowledging the integrated support required moving from current production practices to production to meet organic market standards.
 - A common thread across the proposals is the need to develop skills and capacity, and change attitudes and behaviours across all the three types of actors. Based on this analysis, and to achieve a WANA ‘position of interest’ to take to the inter-regional workshop, a union of the most important ideas from the three proposals could be achieved using the matrix presented in Table 1. Across the top of the matrix are the three principal outcomes that are desired to achieve successful farmer-market links. These outcomes are generic and could be applied to any of the prioritised AARINENA commodities or others. The focus of the WANA linking farmers to markets proposal would then be provided by a prioritisation of

countries, target markets for each commodity and the most appropriate regions within countries for meeting the identified target market.

3. Identify candidate on-going R&D interventions that could become an integral part of an inter-regional programme

- It was considered that to identify candidate R&D interventions that could become an integral part of an inter-regional programme, and provide the building blocks for learning, filling gaps and sharing experiences, both within and across regions, it will be necessary to consult further with those involved in the respective commodity networks and with other resource persons.
- The *ad hoc* working group members therefore limited themselves to establishing the criteria on which to prioritise and then subsequently select, for each commodity, countries and, within countries, regions where there are on-going interventions that could make up the initial ‘pilot’ projects on which to build the programme. The criteria for prioritising among countries were:
 - a) The product/commodity is important for the livelihoods/welfare of a significant number of smallholder farmers in the country
 - b) There exists – or there is potentially – a growing and well defined domestic or export market for the product/commodity in question
 - c) There are on-going R&D and other investments (by the private sector, for example) on which to build and fill gaps, while promoting learning and sharing experiences across WANA countries among regions
 - d) The actors in the market chains (farmers, traders, processors, wholesalers, retailers, etc.), and related service providers (public and private sector) exhibit a willingness to participate
 - e) The respective government is interested and supportive of the linking farmers to markets initiative.

These criteria are subject to review and reflection by the working group. For example, a further criterion might try and capture the extent to which the experience gained in a particular country or region will be applicable to other countries and regions. Table 2 shows a matrix that could be used to compare and contrast amongst the countries that make up the each of AARINENA’s commodity networks, and help make decisions on where initially to focus the programme. Each commodity network will prioritise two countries with contrasting market and production conditions on which to focus the programme initially.

- Similar criteria to those mentioned above could be used to identify and define the institutions and organisations within the prioritised countries with which the WANA linking farmers to markets programme would initiate actions.
- From the outset it will be necessary to define the means by which the results obtained in the initial pilot projects—or focal points - are scaled out to other

countries within WANA. This will require the incorporation of appropriate mechanisms for achieving learning and change within those institutions interested in participating.

4. Make a preliminary determination of the experience and expertise available in the region, and the demands and needs that might be met by expertise from other regions.
 - The *ad hoc* meeting was not in a position to make this determination which will depend to a large extent on consultation among network members, regional resource persons and the situation prevailing in the areas prioritised for inclusion in the programme. This objective will be met through activities envisioned in the plan outlined below.
5. Develop the plan of activities required for preparing the region to participate in an inter-regional project planning meeting to be held in the second half of 2006.

The following actions will be carried out in the period March-September, leading up to the inter-regional project planning workshop:

- Preparation of a report on the *ad hoc* working group meeting. Responsible: Rupert Best.
- Preparation of a draft WANA 'position' paper that will provide the basis for presenting the WANA interests in an inter-regional programme on linking farmers to markets. The position paper will build on the background, objectives and outputs developed in the three concept notes that came out of the Antalya workshop. A tentative outline for the position paper is presented in Annex 2. Responsible: Abdelouahhab Zaid (lead), Mohamed El-Kholy and Nabeel Abu-Shriha
- Circulation of the draft concept paper among AARINENA's network members with a request to undertake a process for defining pilot countries, target markets, regions and participating institutions for the initiation of the inter-regional programme. Responsible: Ibrahim Hamdan and respective Network Coordinators and Board Chairs.
- Preparation of a request from AARINENA to FAO for a follow-up meeting of the *ad hoc* working group following the AARINENA General Assembly to finalise the WANA region position and proposal. Responsible: Ibrahim Hamdan.
- Preparation of a presentation to the AARINENA General Assembly on the linking farmers to markets programme, which will require electronic interaction through e-mail of key persons prior to the AARINENA General Assembly in June to finalise the presentation. Responsible: Rupert Best, Abdelouahhab Zaid, Mohamed El-Kholy, Nabeel Abu-Shriha and Ibrahim Hamdan.
- Presentation of Inter-regional initiative to prepare a Global Partnership Programme on linking farmers to markets and WANA region's position to the AARINENA General Assembly. Responsible: Rupert Best
- Finalization of the concept paper for the inter-regional workshop based on feedback and additional information supplied by network members; with a second

meeting of the *ad hoc* working group should resources be available. Responsible:
Abdelouahhab Zaid (lead), Mohamed El-Kholy and Nabeel Abu-Shriha.

Table 1. Matrix of desired outputs and potential initial participant institutions/organisations belonging to the AARINENA commodity networks

Commodity system	Initial focus areas	Desired outcomes		
		Skills and capacity enhanced, and attitudes and behaviour changed of the following actors:		
		Smallholder farmers with increased ability to meet the demands of the market, through application of good agricultural practices, organic methods and/or other practices required by purchasers	Extensionists, and other small enterprise service providers, ability to supply demand oriented, cost effective and sustainable services to smallholder farmers	Researchers ability to generate information, knowledge, tools and technologies that respond to the expressed needs and demands of smallholder farmers and their service providers
Olive-based farming systems	Country: Region: Target market:	Beneficiary farmers: Participating farmers groups:	Potential participating service providers:	Potential participating research institutions:
	Country: Region: Target market:			
Date-palm based farming systems	Country: Region: Target market:			
	Country: Region: Target market:			
Medicinal plants, aromatics-based systems	Country: Region: Target market:			
	Country: Region: Target market:			
Cotton-based systems	Country: Region: Target market:			
	Country: Region: Target market:			

Table 2. Matrix to help select countries for initial focus of a global partnership programme on ‘linking smallholder farmers to markets’

Commodity:						
Country	Criteria					
	Product/commodity is important for the livelihood/welfare of a significant number of smallholder farmers	There exists – or there is potentially – a growing and well defined domestic or export market for the product	There are on- going R&D and other investments on which to build, filling gaps, learning and sharing experiences – within and beyond the WANA region	The actors in the supply chain (farmers, traders, wholesalers, retailers etc) and service providers (public and private R&D institutions or enterprises) are willing to participate	The government is interested and supportive of the linking farmers to markets initiative	Other.....

Note: A similar matrix might be used to determine which geographical area within each selected countries the project will initially focus

Annex 1. Contact information of the members of the *ad hoc* working group

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Annex 2. Tentative outline for AARINENA position paper on Linking Farmers to Markets (for discussion and improvement)

Title: Improving rural livelihoods through linking farmers to growth markets in WANA region

1. Background

- Overall socio-economic situation of the region
- Agricultural situation and perspectives in the WANA region: opportunities and constraints (differentiation by sub-region)
- Situation of the rural population and small holders and their links with markets
- Institutional setting: strengths and weaknesses. Both at regional and national level. Examples of successful experiences or good practice on which to build

2. Goal of linking farmers to markets programme and WANA's participation in an inter-regional programme

- Desired future situation achieved by WANA's participation in an inter-regional programme: outcomes or changes that will be brought about, and the tangible outputs that need to be produced

3. Existing initiatives/projects and institutional infrastructure on which the programme can build

- Priority countries, target markets and a short description of potential projects/programmes on which the programme will build, with institutions and responsible persons.

4. Major actions (groups of activities) envisaged to achieve the desired outcomes and outputs

- Activities required in and across the initial focal or pilot projects
- Activities required to achieve scaling out and learning and sharing of information across countries and across regions

5. A preliminary estimate of the resources required to undertake the activities identified