

2nd draft

**Proceedings of the 1st Meeting of the EGFAR Task Force held at FAO Headquarters
Rome in the Forenoon of 26th September 2007**

1. The list of members of the Task Force who participated and observers present at the meeting is attached as Annexure 1.
2. The agenda of the meeting is attached as Annexure 2.
3. Ajit Maru, member-secretary representing the GFAR Secretariat initiated the meeting with a brief welcome. In his welcome, he explained the setting up of the Task Force as planned under the ICM4ARD GPP Project Plan as per the agreed terms of reference (Appendix 3) discussed at the 3rd ICM4ARD Inter-regional consultation held at Bangkok in July 2006. He explained that EGFAR was a very important communication channel for GFAR and its development and function, in fulfilling the spirit of GFAR values, has to be guided by a representative task force of its stakeholders. EGFAR was not only a website but also an electronic space and communication channel that partly fulfilled GFAR's communication, information sharing and exchange needs. It included all electronic channels that GFAR used in its communications such as e-lists used in e-mail communications, discussion forums, the GFAR Newsletter etc.
4. Ajit Maru temporarily chaired the Task Force. He tabled the draft agenda for the Task Force Meeting and requested amendments, if any.
5. The selection of the Chair for the EGFAR Task Force was the next agenda item. Viviana Palmieri was selected unanimously as Chair of the EGFAR Task Force for 3 years (September 2007-August, 2009) by the EGFAR Task Force. It was also decided that in the absence of any representative from the CAC region, Arman Manukyan, who had earlier represented the CAC region and was present as an observer, should be the representative member from the CAC region for this task force meeting.
6. Upon assuming, the Chair of the EGFAR Task Force Viviana Palmieri again welcomed the members and observers to the EGFAR Task Force Meeting. She observed that all regions, sub-regions, and major stakeholders except NGO and Farmer Organization were present at the Task Force Meeting.
7. Vivian Palmieri initiated the technical session of the EGFAR Task Force by inviting the GFAR Secretariat to present progress on EGFAR and the re-engineered EGFAR WebSpace. Introducing the EGFAR webspace, Ajit Maru stated that the EGFAR WebSpace was a platform that mimicked electronically GFAR physical space for face-to-face dialogue. The URL <http://www.egfar.org>, in addition to being a platform, was also a gateway, a node and a model for sharing and exchanging ARD related information that was being discussed, acted upon or being assessed by GFAR and its stakeholders. Valeria Pesce then presented the re-engineered EGFAR webspace, focusing on how EGFAR is implementing its roles as a gateway to ARD information systems and as a communication platform. Her presentation is included as Annexure 4.

8. Following the EGFAR presentation, Sahdev Singh presented details of the APAARI Website. He indicated that APAARI has a database of more than 1100 ARD Institutions of the Asia Pacific Region and. APAARI had developed the Regional Agricultural Expert Locator that should be used for the Global ARD Web ring. He also indicated that APAARI Website had documented and placed for general access a large number of agricultural technologies success stories. The APAARI Website presentation is included as Annexure 5.
9. After the APAARI Website presentation, the AARINENA website was presented by Taraneh Ebrahimi. The AARINENA Website also enabled access to regional information and had a large database on Institutions, Experts and Projects. During her presentation a special emphasis was brought on some databases, such as NARIMS and NERAKIMS, which could be used for the Global ARD Web ring. The AARINENA Website presentation is included as Annexure 6.
10. The details of the FARA Website were presented by Myra Wopereis-Pura and Joost Lieshout. They indicated using Django as Framework and Content management System and MySyndicaat for aggregation. The FARA Website presentation is included as Annexure 7.
11. Viviana Palmieri presented the Infotec/FORAGRO website and illustrated several unique features of the website, highlighting its service-oriented and demand-driven approach. The website could provide customised information as its registered users required. The Infotec presentation is included as Annexure 8.
12. Nadia Manning then presented the activities of the CGIAR ICT-KM initiative in enabling access to the CGIAR Medium Term Plan information initially to all CGIAR Institutes and the Science Council. She indicated that this information would be made available to all ARD stakeholders in future. The CGIAR ICT-KM presentation is available as Annexure 9.
13. Joel Sor presented the SIST platform's capacities. There were significant synergies that could be gathered through use of the tools offered by the SIST platform for the RAIS and NAIS, specially for the settlement of the Web ring function within EGFAR, taking into account the multi-hosts information and databases search engine available within the SIST toolkit. The SIST presentation is available as Annexure 10.

Discussions

14. In the discussion that followed the various presentations it was noted that spectacular progress in managing ARD information through regional websites has been achieved during the last two years.
15. The members were of the opinion that experimentation to improve sharing and exchange of information as being done on the EGFAR platform was important contribution to managing information related to ARD. GFAR's focus on Institutions, Experts, Projects and Project outputs was well placed in view of the overall GFAR mandate to improve collaboration and bring partnerships in ARD.

16. The next challenge for the EGFAR Task Force is the issue of defining and further developing the EGFAR webring. The development of the web ring has been planned as one of the main activities of the ICM4ARD GPP and as a major role for GFAR. The webring is defined as a network of ARD related webspaces which may be “gateways” (websites that enable value added access such as through search engines, indexes, catalogues, digests etc. to networks of ARD related digital/electronic information) and nodes (which store ARD related information). GFAR is expected to contribute to the creation and further development of the webring by strengthening EGFAR and the Regional Agricultural Information Systems (RAIS) webspaces to act as both gateways and nodes, improving integration of information systems and contributing to coherence of information and strengthening the governance of ARD related information flows. The Regional Agricultural Information Systems (RAIS) enable improved and value added access to information held digitally such as on their websites by the NARS and Institutes within the NARS.

The EGFAR Task Force thus also has to contribute to the development of the RAIS and NAIS especially in capacity development, integration through introduction and use of standards, guidelines, norms etc and appropriate governance structure that ensure equitable and fair access to ARD information globally. The role of the EGFAR Taskforce is not seen as a normalising role in a top-down approach, but rather as a facilitating role in harmonising policies and strategies through the exchange and promotion of best practices in information management and sharing among GFAR stakeholders and the ARD community at large. The EGFAR Task Force has close links to the ICM4ARD GPP that, with the support of GFAR’s stakeholders, executes activities in awareness building, sensitization and advocacy for improved ICM for ARD, capacity development, coherence and integration and governance structure for information flows related to ARD.

The EGFAR webspace as a model platform contributes to supporting GFAR stakeholders, especially the regional forums, in developing their own webspaces and enables all ARD stakeholders to learn from each other. The members felt that EGFAR should also be a “marketplace” for experience sharing, ICM related documentation, tools (and toolboxes) and applications for managing ARD information. Coordination with the IISAST initiative in this was also considered, as demand for a similar service also arose from the 2nd Expert Consultation of the IISAST held just before this Taskforce meeting. The EGFAR Task Force strongly recommended, consistently with the statement made during the 2nd Expert Consultation, that EGFAR webspace be used as a platform for this marketplace as it was “neutral” and “legitimate” in representing equitably the interests of all ARD stakeholders.

EGFAR should be a space for sharing information, experience (through experts) and knowledge in ICM, especially for the regional forums and ARD stakeholders. The need for a newsletter in ICM was also discussed and accepted as an activity of the EGFAR Task Force.

The unique value of EGFAR not only as a neutral, global electronic forum to dialogue, act and assess critical issues in ARD, but also in its concept as a globally accessible space for learning in ARD related ICM, was acknowledged.

The members dwelt at some length on issues related to bringing stakeholder organizations and Institutions onboard the ARD webbing through ICM4ARD activities and the role the EGFAR Task Force could play.

The terms of the EGFAR Task Force were also reconsidered and it was recommended that the EGFAR Task Force focus also on the bi-annual Status of ICM for ARD reports. It was felt that this exercise required more partners, specially from the CSOs.

The type of information the members wanted from EGFAR was also discussed at length. The information expected from EGFAR was value addition to information related to critical issues in ARD being discussed by GFAR stakeholders. EGFAR was also expected to contribute to integration of the databases available at regional and NARS levels. There are many “crossbreeding” opportunities and achievable synergisms with databases (of FAO or CGIAR) and information systems such as Infosys, SIST, Wisard. The exploration of this crossbreeding needs to be expedited as soon as possible by the GFAR Secretariat.

It was also decided that the collaborative activities of GFAR with FAO, CGIAR, Wageningen University and other ARD Institutions such as CIRAD, EIARD/Infosys, SIST in defining institutional metadata sets should be furthered and the standards, tools and applications etc be shared as soon as possible.

It is suggested that the GFAR Secretariat provide the needed support for the role EGFAR is expected to play.

Action Points:

The EGFAR Task Force should focus on

- a. The further enabling and strengthening of the EGFAR Web ring through various synergisms facilitating an improved access to the RAIS resources.
- b. Advocacy, capacity development and enabling integration and coherence of ARD information systems in collaboration with other major stakeholders involved in similar activities.
- c. The publication of the Bi-annual Global Status of ICM for ARD
- d. Developing EGFAR as a “marketplace” for sharing and exchanging tools, applications related to managing ARD related information.
- e. Work closely with all ARD stakeholders in developing new means to integrate and bring greater coherence to ARD information