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Strategic Partnership in Agricultural Research for Development: the Global Forum on Agricultural Research Model



Dr. Olanrewaju B. Smith
Executive Secretary

Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) Secretariat
c/o Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), SDR
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy
Tel: +39.06.570.53413 Fax: +39.06.570.53898
E-mail: ghar-secretariate@fao.org

ABSTRACT

The concept of technology transfer is gradually giving way to that of technology development especially in the area of agricultural research for development (ARD). This change of approach or paradigm shift has become necessary because of a well documented low rate of technology utilization and also because of the increasing complexity of the problems facing the agricultural sector, which now not only has to provide food in sufficient quantity and quality for an ever increasing global population, but also has to do this in an environmentally responsible manner, while at the same time contributing to alleviating poverty through employment and income generating opportunities. Hence the obvious need for researchers to not only form strategic partnerships and work as pluri-disciplinary research teams, but also to form cost effective partnerships with other stakeholders including producers, community groups, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

The Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) a stakeholder led-initiative was founded in 1996, and its vision is: to see the scientific community and other stakeholders involved in ARD collaborate and work together as equal partners in an effort to find policy, technical and socio-economic solutions to the triple scourge of poverty, food insecurity and the degradation of natural resources. In order to realize this vision, GFAR provides the space, forum and opportunity for all stakeholders involved in ARD to meet, and work together on common problems of local, regional or global importance.

One of the favoured instruments that GFAR uses to foster research partnerships around problems of critical importance to its goal of contributing to the development of a productive and sustainable agriculture is the Global Partnership Programmes (GPPs). These are collaborative programmes, projects or activities initiated, developed and implemented by recognized GFAR stakeholder groups, and which remain open to participation by other stakeholders as and when they find a suitable niche. They exploit the comparative advantages of participating stakeholders, and are implemented at the most effective level - local, regional or global.

Four GPPs are presented as case studies to illustrate how the concept works, the research focus areas and some process and product outputs. These are: Knowledge Systems and Innovation Processes. Post Harvest Systems, Promoting Local Innovation and Underutilized crop species.

1 INTRODUCTION

Recent information shows that the agricultural sector is contributing substantially to economic growth, livelihood systems and human well being in general, through the economic, environmental, cultural, food security and social roles it plays. For example, according to the FAO, the number of chronically hungry people was reduced by over 80 million people during a 10-year period (1991-2001) in a number of countries from developing regions including sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

These positive outputs notwithstanding, the sector is currently struggling to reach its potential and optimally contribute not only to food security and natural resources conservation but also to economic and social well being. According to the same source, the World Food Summit recommendation of reducing the number of undernourished people by half by the year 2015 will only be reached if recently recorded negative trends in the performance of the sector are substantially reversed. In sub-Saharan Africa, overall agricultural production decreased by 0.3% in 2000, while crop and cereal production in particular fell by 1 and 3.2% respectively, with an overall food production decrease of 0.3%. A similar trend was observed for Asia and the Pacific, with an overall decline in agricultural output growth of 1.7% in 2000, with crop and cereal production falling by 0.3% and 3.6% respectively. This struggle to reach its potential is symptomatic of several factors including the various paradigm shifts and adjustments that were made over the last several decades.

First was the concept of food self-sufficiency, which although desirable, rapidly proved to be unattainable, and rapidly gave way to another paradigm, that of food security. This initially put the onus of providing access at all times to adequate and quality food to a rapidly growing population, in order to ensure a productive life. As if this task was not difficult enough, we have more recently added two new dimensions, firstly, that the provision of the access must be done while maintaining or even improving environmental integrity, and secondly that it is expected to contribute to alleviating poverty, through on and/or off-farm income generating and employment opportunities.

A second shift concerns a progressive movement from the concept of technology transfer where technologies developed in developed countries are transferred to be used by developing country farmers who had no input into its development, and who more often than not operate under such different conditions as a lack of access to inputs, land and loans, to make the technology un-utilizable. Another variant of the technology transfer conundrum takes place within developing countries themselves, when scientists develop technologies which are then passed to be utilized by farmers and other end users including extension services who had little or no input into their conception, development and initial testing.

The sector therefore still has a long way to go to meet the expectations placed on it in terms of adequately feeding a growing global population and contributing to poverty alleviation while keeping an eye on sustainable resource utilization. Appropriate responses to this task have to be rooted in research, technological and rural innovation processes that make use of both traditional and the newer knowledge systems Demand

driven agricultural research and innovation would have to provide solutions to. Hence the central role research has to play. Research would be needed to provide solutions and responses to policy and institutional issues that could prove to be formidable bottlenecks, as well to technical (production and productivity increases, resource management and utilization) and social and economic problems (such as access to land, water, and other required inputs).

Recognizing that these are complex issues that can not be tackled in a piece-meal manner because they demand complex approaches and solutions as well, the global community embarked in recent times on a collective attempt to reform the agricultural research system in developing countries with support from a number of regional and/or global initiatives in order to transform these systems into client oriented, impact driven systems with a proper balance of good versus right research. Several reviews and analyses have been carried out on the on-going reform of agricultural research systems in developing countries (ISNAR) and the accompanying global initiatives. The focus of this paper will be on one of such global initiatives, the Global Forum on Agricultural Research.

2 THE GLOBAL FORUM ON AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH (GFAR)

2.1 Brief history and raison d'être

We have briefly described above some of the issues and considerations that led to the founding of GFAR and which to reiterate were as follows; Firstly, that in order to respond effectively and efficiently to the triple demand of adequate quality food, good environmental stewardship and poverty alleviation, placed on the agriculture-food sector, the sector would have to be integrated, knowledge driven and innovative. Secondly, that no single research group, institution or individuals working alone and in isolation can generate, utilize or promote the effective utilization of the required knowledge based and integrated approaches. Thirdly, and as a corollary, that the activities, enquiries, innovation and research outputs required to drive this knowledge based integrated agriculture can only be efficiently and effectively produced by stakeholders working together in strategic alliances and cost effective partnerships, in order to benefit from the economies of scale that comes from pooling of knowledge, expertise and resources both human and financial. Researchers would need to work in not only in pluri-disciplinary teams, but also across stakeholder groups inclusive of civil society organizations such as the producers/farmers' groups, community based organizations, relevant NGOs, private sector groups such as processors, commodity and input traders etc.

In 1996, a number of like-minded groups or stakeholders involved in ARD, got together and formally founded the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) which they **described as a stakeholder led initiative, whose goal is to facilitate exchange of information, access to knowledge, cooperation and research partnerships amongst a broad spectrum of stakeholders involved in agricultural research for development.**

The stakeholders who collectively formulated a **vision** of the path agriculture should take in the near future, as well as a guiding **mission**, a set of **objectives** and **priority thematic areas of research** that will contribute to realizing the vision comprise:

- Farmers` Organizations (FOs);
- Non-Government Organizations (NGOs);
- three types of research institutions - National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) of developing countries through their Regional and Sub-Regional Fora, Advanced Research Institutions (ARIs) of the north, and International Agricultural Research Centres (IARCs);
- the agri-business private sector; and
- a group of donors committed to the concept of collaborative partnerships amongst these other stakeholders.

The Vision: GFAR stakeholders envision a progressive development of a multi-purpose agriculture that:

- contributes in a cost-effective and competitive manner to feeding the global population through environmentally sensitive resource utilization technologies, and to poverty alleviation;
- is diversified, innovative and based on modern and traditional knowledge;
- thrives on research outputs developed in a participatory manner by stakeholders working together in cost-effective partnerships built around the farmer-producer;
- that stimulates long term policy and political support to the research systems that produces such beneficial research outputs.

Convinced that developing such a multi-purpose competitive agriculture would require sustained collaborative efforts amongst the several stakeholders involved in agriculture and agricultural research for development, GFAR stakeholders see in the near future, the scientific community and other stakeholders involved in Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) collaborating and working together as equal partners to find policy, technical and socio-economic solutions to the triple scourge of poverty, food insecurity and the degradation of natural resources.

The Mission: The mission of GFAR flows directly from this visionary statements as it should be, and it is to mobilize the scientific community and all other stakeholders involved in agricultural research for development, and support their efforts to alleviate poverty, increase food security and promote sustainable utilization of natural resources.

Objectives: GFAR stakeholders crafted the following objectives, which they strongly believe will enable them address their mission and achieve the goals envisioned if properly addressed:

- Facilitate the participation of all stakeholders in formulating a truly global framework for development-oriented agricultural research;
- Foster cost-effective collaborative partnerships amongst such stakeholders involved in agricultural researcher for development;
- Promote the emergence of true National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS), and enhance their capacity to respond to users` needs;
- Facilitate and promote information exchange and knowledge sharing amongst its stakeholders;
- Advocate for and sensitize to the need for a long term commitment to, and support for agricultural research

Priority thematic areas of research: The thematic areas of research the group decided to initially confine itself are: Genetic resources management and biotechnology, natural resources management and agro-ecology, commodity chains/underutilized species and policy management and institutional development.

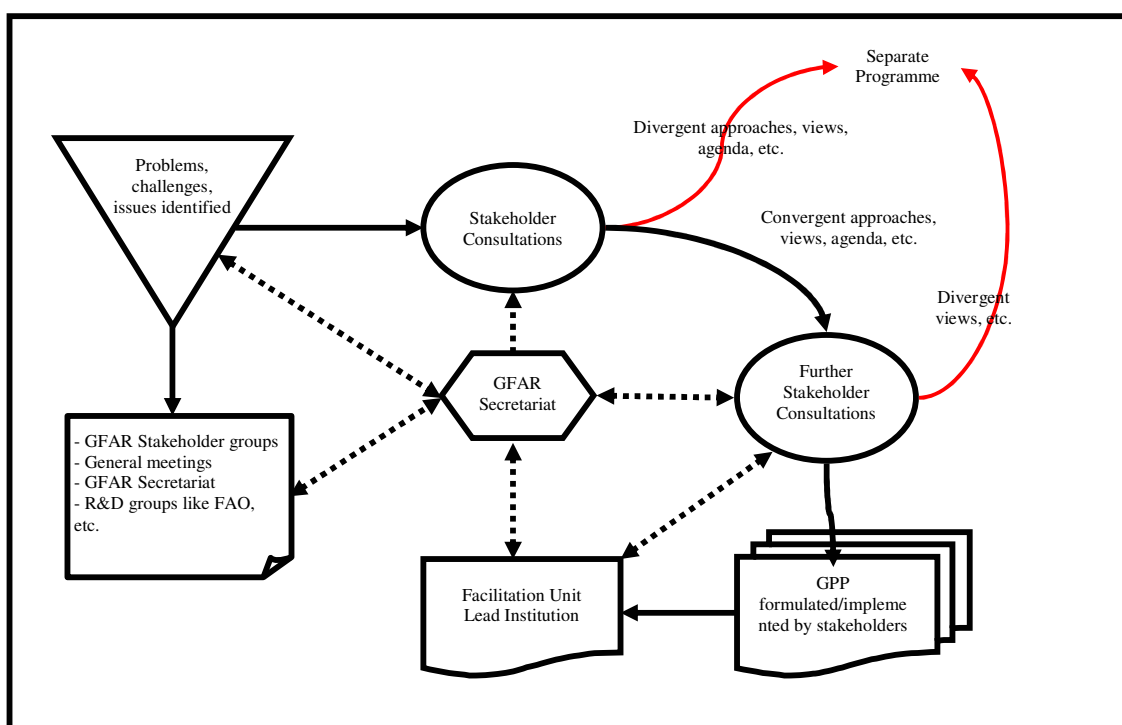
Modus operandi: GFAR stakeholders use a number of tools and approaches to foster the goal of building strategic alliances and cost-effective partnerships. One of these is the

Global Partnership Programme (GPP) approach. A GPP is a collaborative programme, project or activity initiated, developed and implemented by recognized GFAR stakeholder groups, and which remains open to participation by other stakeholders as and when they find a suitable niche. It exploits the comparative advantages of participating stakeholders, and is implemented at the most effective level - local, regional or global.

3 GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (GPP)

In figure 1 we present the process flow usually adopted for the development and implementation of a GPP. The rest of this paper will now be devoted to a brief description of four on-going GPPs in terms of their rationale/objectives, activities and some outputs.

Figure 1: Flow chart for the development and implementation of GPPs



3.1 Knowledge Systems and Innovation Processes

Innovation occurs through the use of local and external knowledge and capacity to innovate is an essential step that needs to be repeatedly taken by poor and marginalized communities in the march towards poverty alleviation and improved livelihood. Blockages in knowledge flows in any direction or its poor utilization may slow down or completely inhibit such capacities among the poor who may therefore become incapable to help themselves. Blockages may result from the way information is packaged, presented or made accessible for use by the poor. Knowledge deemed important for the poor by others is sometimes not useful or relevant them, while useful and relevant knowledge because of its source, is not shared or made available. Also because knowledge is power, useful and relevant knowledge is sometimes monopolized by already powerful actors to the detriment of others.

Participatory learning and technology development processes that enrich local knowledge with external knowledge systems often result in the production of a common wealth of knowledge that is relevant to, and owned by communities. Innovation processes can then be built on such a pool of knowledge leading to appropriate and long-lasting solutions to local problems and improved livelihood.

Hence this particular initiative on putting knowledge to work whose purpose is to explore and examine the linkages and barriers to interactions between local and external innovation and knowledge systems.

The objective of this Global Partnership Programme currently being developed and which has brought together a variety of partners is: to learn from the interaction between local and external innovation systems in order to resolve rural development constraints across a diverse range of contexts.

Participating institutions that have been involved in all of the consultative processes carried out to date and facilitated by the GFAR secretariat, and which have culminated in the formulation of a series of activities to be carried out as well as the expected outputs are: CABI-Bioscience, Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT), ETC-Ecoculture, International Service for national Agricultural Research (ISNAR) ENDA Tier-Monde, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Some of the envisaged activities and expected outputs were recently summarized in a concept note prepared by CABI-Bioscience with inputs from the other members of the group.

The planned activities will be carried out in three sites and linked to on-going IFAD development projects addressing aspects of natural resource management and rural livelihood issues, and fall into the following categories:

- Reconcile indigenous and external knowledge systems by compiling, combining and transforming relevant knowledge from these sources into information media and messages accessible to communities to address priority constraints.
- Develop knowledge systems and analyse pathways with communities and associated stakeholders with regards to constraints to (a) Agricultural resource management by the community and (b) Improving marketability of produce.
- Evaluate and improve upon options, drawing on local and external innovation through cycles of action research in which the value and relevance of different knowledge is established in specific local contexts.
- Measure impacts of processes against development markers in poverty, system sustainability, empowerment of the poor and changes in knowledge relationships and external processes.
- Develop capacities and policies among local stakeholders and institutions to sustain knowledge partnerships and processes.
- Share insights and outcomes gained externally, adding to external knowledge base and local development-support processes and informing external research policies and priorities.

Some of the expected outputs would include:

- Vulnerability reduced as a result of knowledge development and sharing via robust novel systems for knowledge access and its validation and use in the field. (Knowledge Product).
- Capacities (knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour) developed among rural development actors and their norms and relationships transformed to enable the effective generation, access and use of knowledge (Capacity Product).
- Direct impact/relationship demonstrated between improved knowledge systems and their effects on poverty alleviation, confidence in local innovation, community resilience and system sustainability (Direct Impact).
- Principles and practices for sustainable knowledge partnerships and systems developed and mechanisms established for institutional learning and international sharing of outcomes (Sustainability Product).

In order to achieve these outputs the group will keep a focus on sharing the value of knowledge held by different stakeholders for the mutual benefit of those engaged in the process, and adopt the following complementary strategies:

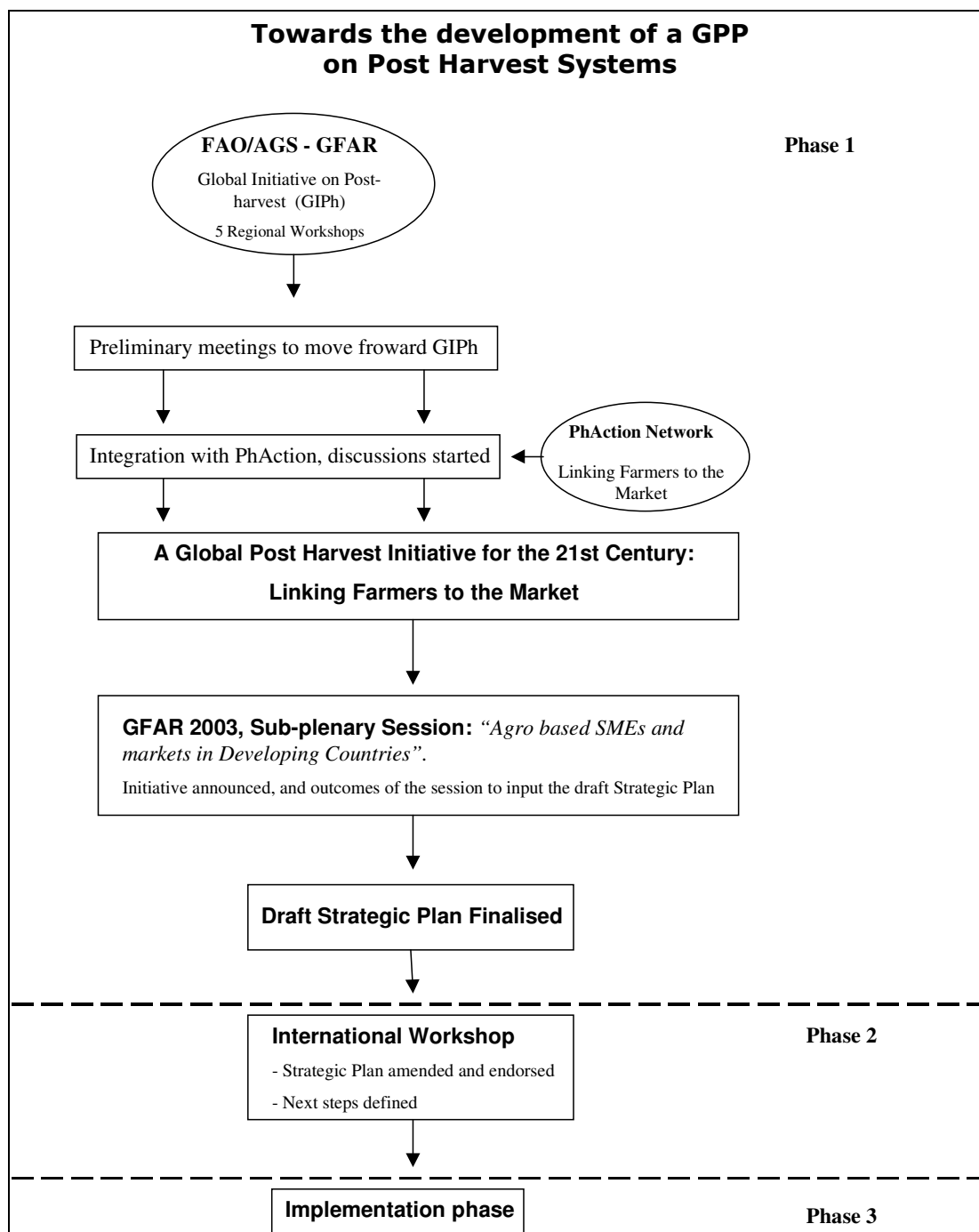
- use action-learning cycles in which the value and relevance of different knowledge is established in specific local contexts, and communities and associated stakeholders determine knowledge needs to support innovation in the community;
- bring development practitioners, beneficiary group members, information specialists and researchers together in frequent learning workshops to reflect on development practice, carry out training and interpret research findings

3.2. Post Harvest Systems

The post harvest sub-sector of the agricultural sector which spans the continuum often referred to as the field to plate covers an area of activity that goes beyond the traditional on farm activities occurring immediately after harvest such as crop grading, primary processing and storage, to include a long chain of other activities including secondary processing, packaging, transportation distribution into urban areas and local or international marketing. This offers a tremendous economic opportunity to farmers and other entrepreneurs including small and medium scale commercial concerns active in the sector. These opportunities have been further enhanced in recent time, thanks to a number emerging global trends such as urbanisation, changing consumer demands, developments in information technologies, globalization, food safety and quality concerns of consumers. The same trends, however, also present challenges to these small and medium scale entrepreneurs in developing countries who are often unable to competitively meet emerging consumer needs even within their own local context because of their inability to meet quality, safety, volume and timeliness requirements of a demanding market. Many reasons account for this poor competitiveness including: a persistently high and unacceptable level of post harvest losses; limited or minimal value-adding activities; poor market organization and access; poor rural-urban infrastructure linkages; inadequate research and development support from both private and public sources; minimal access to timely and critical market information; inadequate policy support for an enabling environment.

In an effort to address these diverse post harvest issues and concerns, GFAR in collaboration with the Agricultural and Food Engineering Technologies Service (AGST) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) embarked on the development of a Global Initiative on Post-Harvest Systems (GIPh) using a three-phase approach. (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Three-phased approach towards the development of GPPs on Post-Harvest Systems



Phase 1: Regional consultations for the development of a global perspective of the sector

Regional consultations were carried out in the five GFAR Regional Fora (Table 1.)

Objective: The objective of these consultations carried out through regional workshops was to assess the status of the Post-Harvest System in the various regions, identify the main issues, concerns and priorities to be tackled. In other words to develop a global perspective of the sector through regional consultations.

As shown in Table 1, these consultations were carried out over a period of 6-7 months between 2001-2002. The main output of this phase was the identification of region specific post harvest issues of concern and of relevance to the Post harvest sector, and a synthesis of recommendations of actions required to address them.

Table 1: Schedule for FAO/GFAR regional consultations

Region and Regional Forum	Organizing Institutions	Workshops	
		Venue	Dates
Africa: Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)	Association for Agricultural Research in East and Central Africa (ASARECA)	Entebbe, Uganda	17-19 September 2001
Asia-Pacific: Asia Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI)	APAARI/SEAMEO/SEARCA	Los Banos, Philippines	5-7 December 2001
West Asia and North Africa: Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near east and North Africa (AARINENA)	AARINENA	Cairo, Egypt	4-6 February 2002
Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia and the Caucasus: CEE-CAC Regional Forum	National Centre for Agricultural Research (NARCAR)	Almaty, Kazakhstan	20-22 February 2002
Latin America and the Caribbean: Foro Regional de Investigación y Desarrollo Tecnológico Agropecuario (FORAGRO)	FORAGRO	Quito, Ecuador	19-22 March 2002

Some follow up activities carried out at the end of phase and leading up to phase 2 included:

- development of a website INPhO for information sharing. www.fao.org/inpho;
- development of a database of institutions and organizations working in the post-harvest area of ARD (www.egfar.org);
- preparation of a draft strategic plan of action; and
- create an awareness of the initiative to attract other partners.

For example the initiative was presented during a sub-plenary session on agro-based SMEs and markets in developing countries during the GFAR 2003 General Meeting. (www.egfar.org/gfar2003) Some of the outputs of this session were later considered and incorporated into the draft strategic plan. It was also during this period between phase 1 and 2 that a strong linkage and collaboration was established with the PhAction Network whose approach of linking farmers to Markets fitted perfectly with the GIPh initiative.

During separate consultations carried out by the *PhAction* in 2001, the group identified four major areas within the post-harvest field where it thought collaborative research and development activities would deliver positive results that would benefit smallholders and small rural agri-enterprises in developing countries. These areas were: improve identification and assessment of market opportunities, improve market access, foster technology innovations to produce products demanded by the market and enhance product quality to meet consumer demands and regulatory standards. The *PhAction* group therefore became an invaluable partner and contributed actively to the development of the draft strategic plan and the implementation of the second phase of the initiative.

Phase 2: International consultation to harmonize regional findings, develop and endorse a strategic action plan

A draft strategic plan inspired by the outputs of the phase 1 regional consultations, and other consultations carried out since then by GFAR and *PhAction* as indicated earlier was presented during an international workshop held at the FAO in October (7-9) 2004. The workshop brought together a multi-disciplinary group of post harvest stakeholder from around the globe in order to pursue the implementation of the initiative. Invited 400 participants and came from all regions of the globe, representing eight (8) multi-lateral development, five (5) bilateral development, six (6) international research, twenty-one (21) national research institutions and nine (9) private sector concerns.

The objectives of the workshop were:

- To review and refine elements of the draft strategic plan entitled: A global post-harvest systems initiative for the 21st Century: Linking Farmers to Markets;
- To review prepared concept notes on likely projects/programmes for collaborative implementation;
- To obtain consensus on an institutional framework for the operation and functioning of the initiative; and
- To obtain consensus on the way forward.

The main outputs of the workshop were:

- The endorsement after discussion and some modifications of the Strategic framework made up of:
 - ✓ four strategies. Policy development, institutional strengthening/organizational arrangements, local development, and programme development (networking and partnerships around priority R and D themes);
 - ✓ eight concept notes representing discrete topics or issues around which concrete activities could be built for implementation. Examples are: trade policy, development of tool kits for market oriented decision making, post harvest technology development, food quality and safety issues, and infrastructure investment.

- Agreement on next steps towards implementation:
 - ✓ a co-coordinating unit comprising representatives of Regional Fora, PhAction, GFAR, FAO/AGS, and funding agencies was set up and mandated to foster collaboration in project formulation and implementation, facilitate mobilization of funds for collaborative projects and oversee the implementation of workshop recommendations.

Immediate to short-term actions to be taken agreed upon included: dissemination of workshop outputs, preparation of promotional material, identification of regional focal points, development of an action plan and resource mobilization strategy, revision and further development of concept notes and projects derived from them - with possible provision of seed funds to assist this - leading to discrete projects/programmes implementation and eventual impact assessment.

The Phase 3: Implementation of the action plan

The initiative on post-harvest systems is has now entered its implementation phase, which will be characterized by the development and implementation of a number of Global Partnership Programmes.

3.3 Promoting Rural Innovation (PROLINNOVA)

Promoting Local Innovation or PROLINNOVA, is a GPP that illustrates another aspect of GFAR partnership building process that provides opportunity for any of GFAR's stakeholders to initiate an activity, be it a farmer organization, an NGO or a research institution. PROLINNOVA was initiated and being driven by NGOs who strongly believe in, and would like to see more research and development activities directed towards ecologically oriented agriculture. They argue that this is the approach which many small-scale farmers, livestock keepers and fisher-folk in developing countries use to earn a living and manage their natural resources endowment, and that the global research system should pay more attention to this form of production system. They would want to see efforts being made first to understand the system, after which capacities of the small scale producers should then be developed so that they can easily adjust to changing conditions including globalization and new biotechnologies, and adapt such new knowledge to further develop their own site-appropriate systems, as well as institutional arrangements that would encourage, enhance and promote such environmentally sound systems of natural resources utilization.

The initiative started in 1999 when NGOs from the south and the north, with support from GFAR, the NGO committee of the CGIAR and the French Government (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères) met in Rambouillet France, to consider how to take advantage of on-going experiences in participatory innovative agro-ecology approaches and scale these up through a GFAR type GPP. The Rambouillet group as it came to be known, made appropriate recommendations, including the identification of a facilitation unit, the ETC Eco-culture, a Netherlands based NGO mandated to drive the initiative. The ideas were endorsed during the GFAR 2000 meeting in Dresden, and in 2002, a pilot phase of PROLINNOVA started in three countries- Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda, with funds from

the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The GPP got additional funds from the Netherlands Government recently, to further promote the institutionalization of the PROLINNOVA approach. This support will contribute to the implementation of the pilot or design phase currently going on in Ethiopia, Ghana and Tanzania and also enable the participation of other partners in Cambodia, Nepal, South Africa, Sudan and Tanzania, moving closer to the goal of institutionalizing the approach.

Objectives

The stated goal of the PROLINNOVA GPP is to promote processes of innovation by local people for sustainable agriculture and natural resources management, and to institutionalize such processes, and in order to achieve this goal, the GPP is addressing the following objectives.

- to establish effective PROLINNOVA partnership programmes in several countries;
- to establish lasting mechanisms for linkages amongst the various programmes for mutual learning and support;
- to synthesize lessons learnt from the various programmes and widely share the knowledge; and
- to encourage a wider application and institutionalization of the PROLINNOVA approach within formal research, development and education systems.

Activities

Coordinating NGOs from the three founding countries have started the process of developing a national PROLINNOVA programme with partners from farmers' organizations, other local NGOs, research and development organizations, and institutions of higher learning. The lead NGOs are: Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE), Ecumenical Association for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (ECASARD), and Environmental Alert in Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda respectively, and they benefit from some backstopping support from ETC Eco-culture. They have carried out inventories of on-going local innovation experiences and of organizations involved in such activities with farmers, followed by consultations and workshops to synthesize these experiences and draft national action plans.

These action plans will be presented and shared with potential partners from other countries during an International workshop in early March 2004, which will bring together representatives from:

- PROLINNOVA partner countries (Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Niger, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda);
- The International support team (International Institute for Rural Reconstruction, ETC Ecoculture, Centre for Development Cooperation of the Free University of Amsterdam, and the Swiss Centre for Agricultural Extension);
- Regional and Sub-Regional Fora of GFAR in sub-Saharan Africa; and
- Supporting donors.

These partners will share experiences and exchange information on draft national action plans, with the objective of identifying and deciding on feasible activities and strategies for linkages and mutual support. In addition they will prepare an operational plan for networking amongst themselves and for promoting the International PROLINNOVA programme. The GPP on PROLINNOVA will be effectively launched after the workshop, and pursue its institutionalization objectives for the benefit of the small -scale producers.

3.4 Under utilized crop species

One of the issues of global concern identified during the very first GFAR general meeting in 2000, was the observed trend of concentrating only a handful of edible plant and animal species to meet our the food requirements. In the not too distant past, over 7000 different plant species served as food for humankind. In recent times, however, over 50% of our requirements for protein and energy are now met by just three crops - maize, wheat and rice, while 95% of the global food energy needs are provided by just 30 plant species, a trend largely due to a concentration of research efforts on such species. The resulting narrow base for global food security not only limits livelihood options for the poor, but also threatens to erode diversity. The latter is of concern to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, both of which would want to see many semi-domesticated and under utilized species contribute more effectively to food security and livelihood options, especially in marginal areas where they are naturally adapted. GFAR therefore decided to focus on this problem of global dimension.

A small group of GFAR stakeholders which comprised: the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI), the International Centre for Underutilized Crops (ICUC), IFAD and the German Ministry of economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) further examined the issue, and recommended the establishment of a Global Facilitating Unit to pursue the goal of drawing attention to the potential contribution hitherto underutilized species could make to food security and livelihood of marginalized and poor communities so that an increasing number of research institutions, extension services, policy makers and donors include the development of underutilized species in their programmes and plans.

The unit was established in 2002 and is currently housed in IPGRI. It has since then set about carrying its mandate of calling attention to the need to work on many of these species, and transform them from neglect to prominence. Some of the activities carried out to date and the corresponding out puts are indicated below.

- **A global survey:** In order to facilitate improved networking and to develop synergies amongst stakeholders involved in the development of underutilized species for food and other uses, a survey was carried out to document who those stakeholders are, and what strategies and approaches they are using. The information retrieved has been compiled in a **database** soon be posted on the GFU website. The database features information on an expert list which will promote future interactions within the underutilized species community.

- **Website construction:** As indicated above information collected on active stakeholders will soon be posted on a website which is now functional. The site serves as a gateway to information on underutilized species for a large and diverse clientele including researchers, development workers, policymakers, donor organizations, farmers, consumers, etc. It complements existing efforts and provides information on specific underutilized crops species, links to stakeholders and relevant publications and serves as a platform for discussion and knowledge sharing on topical issues of interest and can be found in www.underutilized-species.org.
- **Specialized workshops:** A number of specialized and focused workshops have been organized by the GFU, two of which were:
 - ✓ An international workshop on underutilized plant species held in May 2003 in Leipzig, Germany. The objective of the workshop was to identify strategic elements for the promotion and sustainable utilization of underutilized plant species, and the output included the identification of a number of priority areas of action to be developed in the future. In addition, workshop participants made some other recommendations with regards to raising awareness of the issue, and GFU was mandated to: support the participation of organizations at local and regional events where an awareness of the importance of these species in poor people's lives could be raised, and that it should facilitate and support campaigns on local and international radios and other means of mass communication. With regards to stimulating appropriate policies and political support, it was suggested that the GFU should plan to organize a meeting that will bring together political decision makers, donors and development agencies.
 - ✓ International Expert Workshop on Marketing Strategies and Human Capacity Strengthening to Realize the Economic Potential of Underutilized Species. This workshop was focused on sharing information on a number of successful cases of efforts to develop the marketing channels for underutilized species in an attempt to stimulate their development and utilization, so that factors responsible for such successes could be identified and used with appropriate adaptation and modification for other crops, within a common strategic framework that will highlight needed capacity development efforts. Interesting cases from different parts of the world covering different species were presented, and the information is currently being compiled.
- **Specialized focused activities:** In collaboration with specialized agencies the GFU recently initiated an analysis of the implications of the EU Novel Food Regulation (NFR) on imports into the EU of food products derived from underutilized species. The NFR could limit the importation into Europe of products that have not been marketed as food items to a significant degree before 15 May 1997, and could have some impact on small producers and entrepreneurs in developing countries for whom the export of these products could provide income-generating opportunities. The results of the analyses and recommendations on how to reconcile the interests of such entrepreneurs and consumer safety were shared through the BMZ with competent national authorities responsible for the implementation of the Regulation with the request to bring the recommendations to the attention of the EU-working group on Novel Food currently reviewing the regulations.

These are some of the on-going activities under this particular GPP, and give a flavour of potential impact it might have on promoting the conservation and utilization of hitherto underutilized plant species by poor communities and on preserving diversity.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As indicated earlier, the vision of GFAR is to see the various stakeholders involved in agricultural research for development, build strategic alliances and cost-effective partnerships around issues of common concern in order to find long lasting and effective solutions. GFAR is the first to recognize that building such partnerships is not an easy task, and could carry with it substantial transaction costs. GFAR has therefore invested some time and effort into identifying factors that would promote and facilitate the building of such partnerships and alliances.

The long-term commitment of the potential partners is an important factor, and this can only be secured if efforts are made initially to develop a common and shared vision of the problems to be tackled, and the approaches to be utilized. Once this is achieved, the role of each partner needs to be clearly spelt out, as are the expected benefits for each partner. Partnerships need to be built around complementary skills and expertise of participants, and a mutual respect for such contributions is important. Complex partnership arrangements like the ones described must have some resources for effective coordination, without which the partnerships may flounder. Nevertheless, coordination, no matter how effective will not keep partnerships dynamic and long lasting, because resources for carrying out concrete agreed upon activities in a timely manner would be equally important. Such resources need to be managed and shared in a transparent and equitable manner to maintain commitment to the cause. Complex partnerships need to set up effective and interactive communication systems in order to share relevant information, and must have in-built flexibility to allow for changes and necessary modifications. Contributions of all partners must appropriately acknowledged, and appropriate exit strategies must be built into the partnerships. Finally important decisions concerning the implementation of activities that brought the partners together should as much as possible be taken with full consultation. Moreover, since these partnerships often involve groups, institutions and researchers working at different levels, local, regional or global, care must be taken to ensure that activities are implemented at the most appropriate and effective level. These two last points reflect two important principles of GFAR, those of participatory decision-making and subsidiarity.

As indicated above this way of doing business carries with it a substantial transaction cost that needs to be carefully monitored and controlled. On the other hand, we are convinced that it comes with a lot of benefits as well. The issue is to balance the costs against the benefits. GFAR plans to do a comprehensive benefit- cost analysis of its GPPS in 2006, when we would have had a sufficient number of ongoing and/or completed GPPS to make the exercise worthwhile. Both process and product outputs will be factored into the analyses, which means some methodology would have to be developed to input qualitative outputs into the analyses.