

CGIAR & GFAR – past, present and future

1. Past: CGIAR was instrumental in establishing and supporting GFAR

The attempt to reform the CGIAR in the mid-90s was instrumental in the birth of GFAR - with the original idea of bringing stakeholders from the Global South and especially from the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) to complement the planning and implementing the research agenda of the CGIAR.

In December 1994, an International Consultation entitled "Towards a NARS Vision of International Agricultural Research" was convened by IFAD in Rome, within the framework of the process of renewal of the CGIAR System. Some 80 NARS leaders came together and produced a Declaration with concrete actions to strengthen NARS-CGIAR-partnership.

A common understanding was reached on an agenda for a Global NARS meeting to be held during the CGIAR International Centers' Week96. At the end of this meeting the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) was born.

GFAR was supported initially by World Bank, IFAD, FAO, International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) and Swiss Development Corporation, triggered by a major shift in thinking about development during that period which entailed, through working principles of complementarity and subsidiarity, a new recognition of the need to include all development stakeholders in development processes and to accept ownership by the intended beneficiary countries and communities.

Recognizing this shift, in addition to the above-mentioned organizations, the CGIAR partnership of 15 international agricultural research centres (IARCs), the NARS of countries from South and North through their already existing regional bodies and representatives of civil society, the private sector and farmer organizations, joined GFAR.

Hence CGIAR is a Partner in GFAR, and the GFAR Secretariat has long mobilized its networks to help inform the decisions of CGIAR from the perspectives of a wide range of partners, including by capturing and consolidating NARS' inputs, towards transforming global agriculture and food systems. The importance of GFAR's role has been recognized by System Council Chairs, who considered that the perspectives of the intended beneficiaries of CGIAR's work were essential elements for success. GFAR has continued to contribute to the governance and reform of the CGIAR which started in 2001 and is now an "active observer" in the new System Council. GFAR helps bring mutual accountability vis à vis stakeholders, by mobilizing partners from outside the CGIAR system.

The first gatherings for the stakeholders were the GFAR Triennial Conferences:

- The first was held in Dresden, Germany, in May 2000, on "Strengthening research partnerships in the globalized world of the turn of century".
- The second was held in Dakar, Senegal, in 2003 with the theme "Linking Research and Rural Innovation to Sustainable Development".
- The third was held in New Delhi, India, in 2006 with the theme "Reorienting Agricultural Research to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)".

Subsequently, the meetings were replaced by Global Conferences on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD) along with the Annual General Meetings of CGIAR.

GCARD

In the 2007/8 CGIAR reforms, GFAR became central to the planning of the international agricultural research agenda. The instrument was the GCARD conferences, which led GFAR to be involved in the reform of the CGIAR resulting, among other outputs, in the establishment of the CGIAR Research Programs and Platforms (CRPs) and Research Initiatives.

[GCARD](#) is an inclusive, participatory process and an opportunity to shape the future. It encourages conversations for change in setting a new agenda for agricultural research for development and new pathways for uptake.

GCARD1 (2010, Montpellier) addressed the following questions: What are the development needs where agricultural research can play its best role? How best do we deliver research for development impacts at scale? How can we develop more effective pathways to create impact for the poor? What investments, institutions, policies and capacities are necessary?

Chaired by the World Food Prize Laureate, Dr. Monty Jones, the GCARD Task Force was established to oversee the organization of the Conference and the consultations preceding it and to work with the GFAR Secretariat on the day-to-day delivery of the GCARD consultations and Conference.

GCARD 1 delivered "[The GCARD Road Map: Transforming Agricultural Research for Development Systems for Global Impact](#)", which guided GFAR for years to come.

GCARD2 (2012, Montevideo), organized by GFAR in partnership with the CGIAR and the Government of Uruguay, set out to move the process forward from WHAT transformation of agricultural research for development (AR4D) is required, to HOW to implement the GCARD Road Map in practice and the difference it makes.

GCARD3 (2015-2016, South Africa) organized by the Global Forum and CGIAR, was part of a continuing, iterative reform process, and builds on what has gone before in, and around, the previous two GCARDs in addition to national consultations that were held prior to the meeting.

The GCARD conferences provided indications for the directions GFAR should follow. See for example the report U. Lele, J. Pretty, E. Terry and E. Trigo: "Transforming Agricultural Research for Development" (2010).

2. Present: CGIAR's support to GFAR vanished (and vice versa)

CGIAR's support to and relationship with GFAR died out after 2010, as part of an attempt to improve efficiency (cutting corners and costs by doing away with engagement with key NARS stakeholders), although some involvement in the CRPs (CGIAR Research Programs and Platforms) strategy remained.

GFAR's capacities and interest also vanished: After GCARD3, with an increased diversification of GFAR activities followed by Secretariat staff constraints and financial difficulties, the relationship with the CGIAR became weaker, and hence GFAR's contribution to the CGIAR was perceived as less and less relevant.

Nevertheless, GFAR Secretariat and the wide-ranging network of approximately 800 members and partners in GFAR remain ready to help connect CGIAR to research and innovation actors, particularly

those belonging to farmers' organizations and civil society. GFAR can help leverage the dynamic networks created through its collective actions (CAs), to provide a stronger social grounding and hence legitimacy to CGIAR research design and implementation.

Towards GFAR's re-engagement with the CGIAR

Since 2021 GFAR is re-engaging as "active observer" in the CGIAR System Council Meeting (SCM 14 and 15) and offering its active support and cooperation to CGIAR / One CGIAR to "reconnect the world" / connect with NARS in the Global South.

It is essential that re-engagement happens from both sides. Initial signs of re-engagement on the CGIAR side are the participation in the Collective Action on Forgotten Foods and the incorporation of elements of the GFAR-endorsed Partnership Principles in their One CGIAR Partnership respectively Engagement Strategy.

3. Future: In the future, GFAR aims to re-connect and contribute in four ways:

1. Ensuring that **small scale producers are placed at the center of innovation processes** leading to co-research and co-innovation at all stages of the research-to-development continuum
2. GFAR would like to make sure that **NARS are involved in CGIAR research initiatives**. Especially in areas where GFAR is doing **Collective Actions**: CA on Forgotten Foods, CA on Inclusive Digital Agriculture, CA on Family Farming, CA on Transformational Learning
3. GFAR would like to see **Partnership Principles established as a global standard**: One of the contributions GFAR can provide to the international research community is the development of a set of collectively agreed criteria to measure the quality of research partnerships, in particular their capacity to establish - in the context of collaborative research endeavors - the right conditions for the inclusion, mobilization and valorization of different knowledge systems and innovation actors, particularly small scale producers.
4. GFAR would like to do **joint meetings** together with CGIAR (like GCARD in the past).

This collaboration would aim at:

- CGIAR research to be better grounded in NARS / local actors dynamics,
- NARS (and other members and partners in GFAR) to complement the planning and implementing the research agenda of the CGIAR,
- joining forces in ongoing Collective Actions and identifying new areas of investment / new Collective Actions going in the direction of more inclusive research and innovation systems,
- agreeing on Partnership Principles for the improvement of co-research and co-innovation approaches,
- providing One CG with greater legitimacy and GFAR members and partners with greater opportunities to contribute to the agrifood research and innovation agenda (and ultimately the transformation of the agrifood system).