

## ***The Global NARS Consortium's revolutionary approach to food security***

### ***Interview with Dr. Ravi Khetarpal***

To date, agricultural research has largely focused on the priorities of high-income countries. But to truly address global food security, National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) in developing countries need more influence and investment. A new global consortium aims to help make that happen. Dr. Ravi Khetarpal, Executive Secretary of Asia Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI) and initiator of the Global NARS Consortium, explains the need for this paradigm shift.

#### **Q: What is the Global NARS Consortium (GNC)?**

At APAARI, we believe agricultural research must focus on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ***Too much research remains disconnected from practical application – research for its own sake. That needs to change.***

GNC is our method of tackling this challenge. It's a collaborative initiative under the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAIR), designed to link NARS across regions and create truly global partnerships. The focus is on applied, action-oriented research that supports SDG 1 (End Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). ***It's about breaking academic silos and working with – and for – the people of the Global South.***

#### **Q: What will the GNC do?**

The GNC aims to safeguard food security more effectively by strengthening global partnerships. It will serve as a bridge between national systems and international research institutions, donors, and UN agencies. ***We're not building a new structure – we're leveraging existing ones to close gaps in collaboration and innovation.***

It's about generating research that delivers socio-economic value – innovative thinking, processes, and products that matter to real people. That means empowering researchers to listen to local communities, coordinate better, and support evidence-based policymaking.

For everyday people, this means their country's agricultural research will become more collaborative, globally supported, and likely to deliver real benefits on the ground. Ultimately, the GNC is about improving food security through applied research that serves those most in need.

#### **Q: Why are NARS so crucial?**

Global agricultural research is still not truly global. Institutions like CGIAR have done important work, but historically their focus has leaned toward the needs of the Global North.

Yet today, food insecurity is most acute in the Global South – and that's where research should be directed. Research labs focused on crops and systems relevant to high-income countries can't solve food crises in low-income ones. We need more research on crops grown and consumed locally, tailored to local conditions.

And we must recognise that the SDGs are achieved country by country. ***National systems must be strengthened – better funded, better connected, and more effective. They are the front lines of food security.***

#### **Q: What challenges do national research systems face?**

NARS vary greatly. In countries like Brazil, India, Malaysia and Morocco, systems are relatively advanced and already engage with global partners like CGIAR, the Food and Agricultural Organization

of the United Nations, or International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). But in less-developed or transitional economies, challenges persist, including, limited funding and resources, poor access to global knowledge and networks, weak communication and outreach capacity, and a sense of being left out of global research agendas

Many lack the ability to clearly articulate their needs or connect with international platform – meaning they often miss out on funding, partnerships, and influence.

**Q: What needs to happen to change that?**

A major step forward would be improving South-South cooperation. NARS in more advanced developing countries could offer technical support and mentoring to those in less-developed areas.

The EU's triangular cooperation model – pairing a donor, a knowledge provider from the Global South, and a recipient – has had some success, but it's not widespread yet. What's needed is tailored approaches, based on regional needs and capacities.

**Q: How will the GNC operate?**

Rather than piloting in select regions, we're taking a global approach. While regional NARS networks already exist, their success has varied. The GNC will work to complement these efforts by building a global framework – what we call “every NARS according to its needs and support.”

Our approach includes ongoing dialogue, webinars, and workshops. ***We're finalizing a governance structure that reflects this flexible, inclusive design. The goal is to create a responsive system that supports NARS where they are, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all model.***

**Q: What's next for the GNC?**

The GNC was officially declared on 17 March 2023, at a meeting of leaders from the six major regional fora: the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA), APAARI, Central Asia and the Caucasus Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (CACAARI), the European Forum on Agricultural Research for Development (EFARD), the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and the Forum of the Americas on Agricultural Research and Technology Development (FORAGRO).

This effort is supported by global players including the European Commission, IFAD, and CGIAR, who all recognize the need for a unified, global NARS platform.

The full launch is happening at CGIAR's Science Week in Nairobi on 10 April, 2025. But ***this is not just another initiative – it's a revolutionary shift in how we approach agricultural research and development. It's about ensuring those who are most affected by food insecurity also have a leading voice in shaping the solutions.***