

The Making of the GNC: Roadmap to a Global NARS Consortium

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Introduction

Aiming to address global agricultural challenges and strengthen international collaboration, the **Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAIR)** has been entrusted with the important task of developing the Global National Agricultural Research System (NARS) Consortium (GNC) by the Regional Fora on Agricultural Research via the Declaration signed in Bangkok in March 2023¹. These Regional Fora (RF) include the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI), the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), the Forum for the Americas on Agricultural Research and Technology Development (FORAGRO), the European Forum for Agricultural Research for Development (EFARD), the Central Asia and the Caucasus Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (CACAARI), and the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA). This initiative follows the recommendations of the CGIAR High-Level Panel on Action (HLAP) report² on better partnering with the Global South.

The GNC aims to empower and amplify the global voice of National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS), encompassing all public and semi-public agricultural and food systems stakeholders involved in research and development in a country, including National Agricultural Research Institutes, universities, and government laboratories, among others³.

In the absence of such Consortium (GNC) the capability of integrating the issues and efforts of National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS), especially in the Global South, in the field of agricultural research and development, coordination and collaboration remain fragmented and less effective. While NARS play vital roles in driving innovation and sustainable agricultural practices at the national and sub-regional levels, they do not have a collective global representation and voice. Their roles and perspectives therefore largely remain fragmented and dispersed. The lack of a unified NARS platform at the global level hinders their ability to share knowledge, address global challenges, and advocate for their needs on the international stage.

Recognizing the urgent need for a cohesive and empowered NARS community, the

¹ See the [Declaration of GFAIR Regional Fora on the Establishment of a Global NARS Consortium](#)

² See the report by the independent High-level Advisory Panel (HLAP), “[On Improving One CGIAR’s Strategic Engagement with Partners](#)”

³ Some stakeholders have expressed differing views on the scope of this definition, and ongoing discussions aim to further clarify and refine the concept to ensure inclusivity and alignment with regional needs.

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establishment of the GNC was seen as critical by the Regional Fora. The Bangkok Declaration agreed to entrust the GNC to GFAiR, whose task and mandate was and is to represent the NARS of the Global South and to improve their co-operation with international agricultural research (CGIAR and others).

By establishing the GNC, GFAiR Regional Fora and NARS stakeholders have initiated the creation of a body that promises to be able to leverage collective strengths, to enhance the influence of NARS on policies, programmes and financing, to pool expertise and resources, and to promote (South-North and South-South) collaboration to effectively address the rapidly changing global context and ensure the sustainable development of agricultural research worldwide. Through the establishment and operationalization of the GNC, GFAiR and its partners aim to strengthen NARS, ensuring their global representation and influence in the ever-evolving field of agricultural research and development.



Figure 1 - The Executive Directors / Secretaries of EFARD, FARA, APAARI, GFAiR, AARINENA and CACAARI after signing the Bangkok Declaration.

Overall, the establishment of the GNC is expected to result in a strengthened, unified, and empowered NARS community at the international level, leading to enhanced global cooperation, more relevant, targeted, and impactful research outcomes.

Progress to date

The roadmap to establishing the GNC is being implemented following the GNC Declaration of Bangkok made on 17 March 2023 and the discussions held during the GFAIR Steering Committee meeting in Durban in June 2023. Since then, the GFAIR Secretariat has undertaken several activities to initiate this process, including:

- Conducting a **consultation survey** with the Regional Fora to gather their concerns and suggestions,
- Establishing a **GNC Advisory Group**, with its inaugural meeting held in mid-January 2024,
- Developing a **NARS database** in collaboration with the Regional Fora,
- Developing a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** with the Regional Fora to strengthen cooperation.
- Developing a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** with the Brazilian NARS, EMBRAPA.
- Regional fora engage with various NARS within their respective regions and increase awareness locally. Holding of **regional and subregional webinars** in collaboration with the Regional Fora and the Sub-Regional Fora,
- Hosting a **GNC workshop** on July 2nd, 2024, to gather perspectives from various NARS and other stakeholders involved in the initiative, followed by the preparation and dissemination of a detailed workshop report. We are now planning to host a second workshop in October 2024, in Uzbekistan.
- Forming a subgroup of NARS institutions and other stakeholders to work on drafting a **GNC working guidelines / basic document**
- Engaging with **CGIAR's MP 10 (CapSha)** through meetings to explore synergies and collaboration opportunities.
- Developing a **comprehensive workplan** for the years following the GNC launch.

- Conducting **outreach to potential funders**, such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), IFAD, USAID or ACIAR to secure financial support for the GNC's initiatives.
- Planning the **official launch** at the CGIAR Science Week in April 2025

The previous points will be further elaborated in the following sections.

1. Conducting a Consultation survey

To initiate the process of establishing the GNC, the GFAiR Secretariat conducted a consultation survey with the Regional Fora. The aim of the survey was to gather their concerns, suggestions, and expectations regarding the CNG initiative. This information was highly relevant in shaping the direction of the consortium, ensuring that regional needs and challenges are addressed.

2. Establishing a GNC Advisory Group

A GNC Advisory Group was established to guide the strategic direction of the GNC.

Participants include representatives from various agricultural research and development organizations, including the six Regional Fora, CGIAR, FAO, GIZ-FIA, and EC DG INTPA.

The inaugural meeting of the **GNC Advisory Group** was held in January 2024. This event aimed to gather the members of the GNC Advisory Group for a focused discussion on refining the strategy for the establishment and implementation of the GNC. This collaborative session was essential to engage the GNC Advisory Group members effectively as active participants in constructing the Consortium. It also provided an opportunity to obtain insights from participants, fostering a group spirit that will help set a clear path for a successful global launch of the GNC in 2025. The meeting started with a clarification of the definition of NARS, which was broadened to also cover NARES (National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems) and NARIs (National Agricultural Innovation Systems). This was crucial to ensure that all stakeholders have the same understanding of the scope and inclusiveness nature of the consortium.

One of the central discussions concerned the main objectives of the GNC. The group agreed that the GNC should aim to increase the influence of NARS in shaping agri-food systems at national, Sub -regional, regional, and global levels. This involves fostering collaboration between different stakeholders, including governments, research institutions and the private sector. Another key objective identified is the optimal use of resources, promoting synergies and avoiding

duplication between the different entities involved in agricultural research and development, strengthening the innovation capacity of NARS was highlighted as an important objective.

The GNC will provide a platform for NARS to develop and express a unified voice on critical issues such as priorities, capacities, policies, and resource mobilization. In this sense, the role of GFAiR was also discussed in depth. GFAiR is expected to play an advisory and facilitating role, helping NARS to mobilize resources and consolidate their efforts. This support aims to improve the operational effectiveness and impact of the GNC.

The meeting concluded with recognition of the significant demands facing the NARS and the need for the GNC to clearly demonstrate its value in addressing these challenges. In summary, the first GNC Advisory Group meeting laid a solid foundation for the consortium's development. It set clear objectives and identified crucial next steps.

3. Development of a NARS database

As part of its ongoing commitment, the GFAiR Secretariat conducted a collaborative **identification exercise** with the Regional Fora to identify the NARS in each region that has an interest in joining and contributing to the Consortium. The database is the major foundation of the Consortium.

To achieve these objectives, GFAiR worked with five expert consultants of the Regional Fora bringing a strong background in agricultural research and regional knowledge, which made them well-suited to the intricate task of identifying NARS in their region. This process combined technical expertise and rigor with regional knowledge and sensitivity.

4. Memorandum of Understanding with the Regional Fora

Through the GNC, GFAiR aims to enhance regional collaboration, enabling closer cooperation among the Regional Fora and strengthening their contribution on a global scale. In this regard, Memorandum of Understanding were discussed and drafted with the Executive Secretaries of all Regional Fora (inter alia during the inter-regional meeting held on 29th May) to bind GFAiR and the Regional Fora (as regional arms of GFAiR) closer together and to provide a framework for cooperation. The MoUs will be signed during the GNC workshop in October 2024 in Uzbekistan.

5. Memorandum of Understanding with EMBRAPA

An MoU with Brazil's National Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) was developed to reinforce Brazil's participation in the GNC. As the first formal agreement with a national NARS entity, this MoU sets a precedent for future collaborations with other NARS. The objective is to expand these agreements with more NARS across different regions, recognizing the importance of EMBRAPA's leadership in fostering international cooperation and resource mobilization.

6. Engagement with SROs Fora and NARS

In some regions Sub-Regional Research Organizations (SROs) play a key role in agricultural research. Following the subsidiarity principle, it is essential to find effective ways to involve them in the GNC. Collaborative mechanisms should be explored and mainstreamed to harness synergies between SROs and the GNC, for the mutual benefit of stakeholders involved in agricultural research.

In order to ensure that there is no duplication of roles but rather support and complementarity GFAiR reached out to and finally managed to meet with some SROs in Sub-Saharan Africa to strengthen cooperation.

7. First GNC Workshop (Nairobi, Kenya)

On 2nd of July 2024, GFAiR organized a workshop with over 50 participants, including NARS representatives from all regions, to discuss their expectations for the GNC. Originally planned as part of the CGIAR Science Week⁴, which was postponed, the workshop offered an important platform to engage participants, gather their feedback, and delve into potential strategies for establishing the GNC. The workshop was structured in two main sessions:

- **Objectives and Stakeholder Perspectives**

The first session aimed at identifying the specific needs and challenges that the GNC should address. Participants highlighted the importance of funding and resource mobilization,

⁴ Due to the days of violent protests in the country during the month of June, the workshop was held online.

collaboration and partnership opportunities and capacity development, among other options. They discussed how the GNC could facilitate international collaborations specially between global south, offer training and capacity development programs, share best practices, and advocate for supportive policies.

Participants expressed their expectations from the GNC, emphasizing South-South exchange and cooperation, information about international agricultural research, and the potential to partner with international agricultural research initiatives. Discussions also covered the potential role of organizations within the GNC, emphasizing their contributions to knowledge sharing, participation in international agricultural research initiatives, and support for fundraising and resource mobilization efforts.

- **Structure and Governance of the GNC**

The second session focused on the roles and responsibilities of NARS within the GNC, ensuring balanced representation from different regions, and the overall structure of the GNC. Key roles identified included collaborative research, knowledge sharing, capacity development, resource mobilization, and fostering innovation.

Participants emphasized the need for effective communication, participation, and regional representation to ensure balanced inclusion. As for the GNC structure, a General Assembly comprising all NARS supported by a Secretariat within GFAiR was the preferred option.

According to a satisfaction survey, the overall satisfaction with the workshop was high and the positive feedback underscored the relevance and effectiveness of such collaborative discussions. Participants provided additional comments and suggestions to improve future workshops highlighting the need for smaller task teams, in-person meetings, an action plan, and more frequent webinars.

8. Working Guidelines / Basic Document Subgroup

In line with the recommendations gathered during the GNC workshop on 2nd of July 2024, GFAiR formed a dedicated working group that started working on the development of a comprehensive GNC Working Guidelines / a GNC Basic Document. This group will take the

lead, based on all the feedback received in the various stages, to identify and define the principles, the structure and governance of the GNC.

Additionally, this document is expected to define the roles and responsibilities of NARS, setting the framework for collaboration and resource mobilization.

9. Comprehensive workplan

The GFAiR Secretariat is actively developing a comprehensive workplan in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. This workplan will be shared during the GNC launch in April 2025 and will include a detailed timeline, key deliverables, resource mobilization strategies, and guidelines for cooperation among members.

Ongoing efforts and Next Steps

- 1. Second GNC Workshop (Uzbekistan, October 2024):** Building on the success of the first workshop, a second GNC workshop will be held in October 2024. This workshop will focus on finalizing key aspects of the GNC's governance and operational structure, with a dedicated meeting involving the Regional Fora to ensure alignment among all stakeholders. Additionally, the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with the Regional Fora and EMBRAPA will take place during this event. The workshop will also serve to inform GFAiR's governing bodies about the progress made and prepare for the official launch of the GNC in April 2025.
- 2. Finishing the Working Guidelines:** The dedicated subgroup will work on refining and finalizing the Working Guidelines for the GNC. These guidelines will outline key principles, roles, and responsibilities, and will require approval from GFAiR's Steering Committee.
- 3. Outreach and Partnerships:** The GFAiR Secretariat has initiated discussions with CGIAR's MP 10 (CapSha) and potential funders, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). These outreach efforts aim to secure support and funding for the GNC's activities and long-term sustainability.
- 4. Launch of the GNC (1st Quarter 2025):** The GNC is scheduled to be officially launched in the first quarter of 2025. The launch event is expected to bring together key

stakeholders from NARS, subregional and Regional Fora, CGIAR and other international organizations and other GFAiR partners.

- 5. Incorporate first NARS Champions:** As part of an ongoing effort, the GNC will actively identify and incorporate the first NARS Champions into its framework.

Key findings

Overall, the key findings of the process made so far could be summarized:

- 1. Definition of NARS:** the lack of a universally accepted definition of National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) has emerged as a significant barrier. Ambiguity in the definition of NARS poses a potential obstacle to the creation of a cohesive Consortium, underscoring the need for a clear and shared understanding of NARS among all key stakeholders.
- 2. Structural complexity in the formation of the GNC.** the task of forming the GNC is intrinsically complex due to the range and different structure and nature of organizations recognized as potential NARS. Moreover, the challenge is more complicated in countries where the NARS structure implies different bodies involved in agricultural research within a single country. Addressing this complexity requires careful assessment and decision making on how to incorporate multiple organizations from the same country into the framework of the GNC.
- 3. Diversity and categorization of NARS:** NARS vary significantly in Structure, size, nature, and capacity, making it difficult to create a "one-size-fits-all" approach for consortium engagement. For instance, large NARS like India, Brazil and China can engage in extensive research but may face coordination issues. At the same time, smaller NARS like Laos, Nepal, Cambodia may have limited capacity and lack resources. Recognizing these differences is crucial for creating an inclusive GNC that accommodates all strengths and challenges of all its members.
- 4. Learning from Successful Models:** best practices from countries like the Philippines and Ethiopia demonstrate the value of collaborative efforts in agricultural research. South-South cooperation, co-creation, and co-research models have proven effective in fostering innovation and addressing sustainability challenges.

5. **The Need for Continuous Stakeholder Engagement:** active and continuous stakeholder engagement is crucial for the successful establishment and operationalization of the GNC.
6. **Regional Specificities and Subsidiarity:** regional and sub-regional differences present unique challenges that need to be recognized and respected. The role of GFAiR should be supportive, complementing the work of regional and sub-regional entities without duplicating efforts.
7. **Importance of Partnership Principles:** the success of the GNC will depend on maintaining strong collaboration among its members. The GFAiR Principles of Partnership, which emphasize trust, mutual respect and shared goals, are fundamental to building effective partnerships within the Consortium.
8. **Financial Sustainability** Securing consistent and sustainable funding for GNC activities is vital for ensuring long-term success. Without adequate resources, the Consortium risks losing momentum and effectiveness.

Key recommendations

Based on the progress to date and the future steps outlined, we offer the following recommendations for improving the effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of the Global Consortium of the National Agricultural Research System (GNC):

1. **Adopt a definition of NARS for the GNC:** A proposed working definition is *all public and semi-public AFS stakeholders involved in research and development in a country, including National Agricultural Research Institutes, universities, and government laboratories, among others*. It is suggested this definition to be adopted in order to ensure consistency and clarity across the Consortium.
2. **Address Structural Complexity:** The GNC needs to ensure inclusivity beyond the traditional crop-based organizations often seen in other platforms. Our aim is to broaden participation to encompass diverse sectors integral to agriculture, including livestock, fisheries, forestry, and higher education. Ideally, each country should be represented by multiple stakeholders, with representation from each relevant sector, rather than a single organization per country. A way forward could be:

- a. Develop **clear guidelines** on how to incorporate multiple organizations from the same country into the GNC to avoid redundancy and ensure cohesive representation.
 - b. Conduct a **detailed assessment** to determine which organization(s) or bodies should legitimately represent a country within the Consortium, ensuring that representation is both legitimate and effective.
3. **Conduct a categorization of NARS:** implement a categorization framework to better understand the diverse roles and capabilities of NARS across different regions and contexts. This will facilitate targeted support and resource allocation.
4. **Leverage successful models and best practices:** from existing collaborative efforts in agricultural research, such as the example from Philippines and Ethiopia⁵, particularly in South-South cooperation.
5. **Enhance Stakeholder Engagement:** establish working groups or committees to address specific challenges, facilitating continuous dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders. Implement robust communication channels, including digital platforms, to keep all stakeholders informed and engaged throughout the process.
6. **Emphasize the Subsidiarity Principle:** reinforce that GFAiR's role is to support, not to supplant, the functions of Regional and Sub-Regional Fora. GFAiR serves as the sole entity focused on global-level agricultural research and innovation, complementing the efforts of regional and sub-regional organizations that concentrate on their respective contexts and priorities.
7. **GFAiR Partnership Principles:** ensure that GFAiR Partnership Principles are upheld as the core framework for collaboration within the GNC, guiding interactions between its members.
8. **Secure Sustainable Funding:** prioritize resource mobilization efforts to secure sustainable funding streams, ensuring the GNC's activities have the financial support needed for long-term success.

⁵ TBD

Funding opportunities

Securing stable and long-term funding is crucial for the success and sustainability of the Consortium. Below are the key elements of the proposed funding strategy:

- 1- **Member Contributions:** Annual membership fees or voluntary contributions should reflect the varying capacities and financial situations of each member organization. This will ensure that all members, regardless of their size or budget, can contribute to the GNC meaningfully. Additionally, members may offer in-kind support by hosting meetings or providing expertise, with specific opportunities outlined in the GNC working guidelines.
- 2- **Partnerships with funders:** engage with key international funders such as European Commission, the World Bank, IFAD, FAO, and other philanthropic entities, as well as private sector partnerships. This engagement aims to secure long-term funding and encourage these organizations to adopt the GNC as a priority.
- 3- **Grants and project funding:** Encouraging members to collaborate on joint proposals for research grants will help secure substantial funding.

For more information about funding opportunities, please do not hesitate to get in contact with GFAiR Secretariat through gfair.secretariat@gfair.network.