Association of Agricultural Research Institution

In the Near East and North Africa

(AARINENA)

Activity Report[*]

(2002-2004)

Introduction

The Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA) was established in 1985 as an instrument of change for strengthening national and regional agricultural research capacities in order to reverse the downward trends in agricultural productivity and the deterioration of the natural resources. AARINENA's Mission is to contribute to the enhancement of agricultural and rural development in member countries through fostering agricultural research and technology development and by strengthening collaboration among them and with the outside world. AARINENA endeavors to assist member countries in creating effective national agricultural research systems that serve the goals of sustainable agricultural development, as well as strengthening regional and sub-regional scientific collaboration.

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1. **The Eighth General Conference of AARINENA and Regional Workshop on Institutional Needs:**

The Eighth General Conference of AARINENA and the Regional Workshop on Institutional Needs Assessment for Agricultural Research, Technology Development and Extension were held in Amman Jordan from 26-31 of May 2002. The conference was cosponsored by FAO, ICARDA and ISNAR and hosted by National Center for Agricultural Research & Technology Transfer (NCARTT), representatives from institutions in sixteen countries attended the conference along with several regional and international organizations. The conference adopted a tentative work plan and rules of procedure and elected new executive committee for the next two years.

The Regional Workshop on Institutional Needs Assessment for Agricultural Research, Technology Development and Extension was held on 29-31 of May after the general conference and adopted framework for action that was based on four studies commissioned by FAO Regional office in the Near East.

2. **Executive Committee Meeting, Oman, December 2002:**

- The committee translated the guidelines of the Eighth General Conference into a specific work plan that include:

   2.1. Establishing Regional Agricultural Information System.

   2.2. Merging the Regional Date Palm Network to DPGN

   2.3. Establishing Cotton Inter-Regional Network.

   2.4. Establishing Olive Oil network.

   2.5. Establishing Medicinal & Herbal Plant Network.

   2.6. Convening Regional Training Course in Post Harvest.

   2.7. Formulating WANA Delegation to GFAR 2003 Conference.

   2.8. Increasing AARINENA membership and follow up on member's contributions.
   2.9. Strengthening AARINENA secretariat

3. **AARINENA Regional Agricultural Information System (RAIS)**

   3.1. **AARINENA Homepage**

   AARINENA homepage has been operating since July 2002 from the Agricultural Research & Education Organization (AREO) in Iran in collaboration with GFAR. AARINENA web site (http://www.aarinena.org) acts as a gateway, where one can find useful information, related to the National Agricultural Research Institutions (NARIs), Universities, Ministries, NGOs, Private Sector

and Farmers' Organizations in the region. It collects information through National Information Nodal Points (NINPs) from each sub-region Also direct links to Regional and International Organizations, publications, news and events, Regional Networks and Databases are available on this website. A new scroll text spotlight has been added to the web site, where users can find information more easily.

A search system has been added on the web site which helps finding all the information related to each Sub-Region. We'll try to develop more search systems and Regional Networks on this web site in the near future. A project about the new design and structure of AARINENA web site has been done in collaboration with GFAR and will be available soon. The mock–up of this new project is available on the EGFAR at the following URL: http://www.egfar.org/aarinena/default.html

3.2. AARINENA ICT Steering Committee:

AARINENA ICT Steering Committee was established upon the recommendation of the participants of AARINENA ICT Expert Consultation held in February 2003 at Cairo, Egypt that was supported by GFAR & FAO with the aim to strengthen Regional Agricultural Information System in the region. The steering committee members composed of representatives of the five sub regions and representatives of AOAD, FAO, GFAR, and ICARDA. The Committee held its first meeting at ICARDA on 28th of July 2003 and reported the following activities:

- Preparation of the TOR of the committee and its approval by AARINENA executive Committee.
- Drafting a frame work of the collaborative program that included six projects;
- Collecting and classifying the comments received by the steering committee members on the collaborative program; and
- Preparing a questionnaire on NAIS for NARS's in WANA region.
- The committee identified the following areas of weakness in the Region:

    1) Lack of well-qualified human resources;

    2) Lack of national policy on information management;

    3) Language barriers (need multilingual system);

    4) Poor communication at sub-regional level; and

    5) Poor communications infrastructure in some counties (bandwidth)

The framework of the collaborative program of RAIS has been reviewed by all members. The proposed program includes the following six projects:

1   Design of MIS Database.

2   Design and implementation of expert's information system.

3   Design and implementation of institute's information system (IIS).

4   Design and implementation of projects information system (PIS).

5   Design and implementation outputs of research information system (RIS).

6   Electronic forum for discussion.

Preliminary Analysis of the Questionnaire on Status of NAIS in WANA Region:

Eight countries have filled the questionnaires on National Agricultural Information System (NAIS) for NARS's, prepared by the Chair of the ICT steering committee and approved by its members. Preliminary analysis revealed that most of the national research organizations in the eight countries have a body responsible of information, and a local area network. The connectivity rate to the Internet is not mentioned in some of the responses.

This indicates that some of the countries have still problems in the connectivity. The number of workstations ranges from 3 to over 300 in national research organizations as a whole. Most of the software identified indicates that the computers are mainly used for office automation or using ready-made information packages such as CDS-ISIS. Few countries have Data Base Management System (DBMS) such as SQL and Oracle.

No country has a complete NAIS as specified in the ICT steering committee minutes of the meeting held in ICARDA last July. Most of the countries that have one or two modules have built these modules using tools provided by International organizations. 50% of the countries are not satisfied with the system they have right now, and the other 50% although satisfied, they do not have a complete system or indicate that they want to modify it. Only two countries have expressed giving priority to the Institutions Information System. Four countries indicated that they do not have the human capacity to develop the NAIS. Some countries did not respond to this question because they are satisfied with what they have but this does not indicate that they have human capacity to build new modules. The Committee will hold its second meeting in September, 2004.

4.   **Executive Committee Meeting, Dakar-Senegal, May 2003.**

The Committee met during GFAR 2003 and reviewed the progress since its last meeting in Oman:

(a)   It approved the terms of reference for the ICT steering committee;

(b)   Recommended to establish Regional Olive Network and to collaborate with the European System of Cooperative Research Networks in Agriculture (ESCORNEA).

(c)   Recommended to make contacts with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) requesting a grant to strengthen AARINENA activities; and

(d)   Appointed Dr. Ibrahim Hamdan (Ex-FAO Senior Officer) to serve as interim Executive Secretary of AARINENA.

Members of the Executive committee and members of the WANA delegation, which was composed from representatives of NARS, Universities, and Private Sector and NGOs, participated in the various activities of GFAR-2003 Conference.

5   Networks:

5.1. Date Palm Global Network (DPGN):

AARINENA Regional Date-palm Network was established on the basis of the project document which was adopted by AARINENA 7th General Conference in Beirut–Lebanon. This regional network then merged to the Date Palm Global network that was established under aegis of FAO and operates from the United Arab Emirates University at Al-Ain assisted by technical secretariat from FAO.

AARINENA serves on the coordinating board of the Network which include the coordinators of the technical groups, regional coordinators and representatives of the different regional and inter-regional date palm networks. The Network held its first board meeting in Cairo in June 2003 and   approved the constitution and work plan of the Network.

5.2. Inter Regional Cotton Network:

The inter-regional network for research collaboration on sustainable cotton production in Asia and North Africa was established in October 2002 at AREO in Iran to strengthen cooperation among regional and international cotton research institutes, to support cotton research, exchange of information experiences and research results.

Since cotton is a way of life in developing countries therefore it was necessary to make cotton base technologies network in mentioned regions. The mission of INCANA is to established regional collaboration for improving cotton production technology in Asia and North Africa through research, workshops and training programs. The network partners include: APAARI, AARINENA, ICARDA, CAC, GFAR and AREO.

Since its establishment the network has: a) contacted NARSs and ARIs for the exchange of germplasm and information among them b) established data base on AARINENA Website, c) planned data bases for research institutes, research programs for NARSs in the APAARI/ AARINENA /CAC regions, and d) planned for an electronic and regular newsletter on cotton.

5.3. Olive Oil Network:

AARINENA has organized an expert consultation meeting at the Olive tree Institute at Sfax-Tunisia during the period of 16-18 of February, 2004. The meeting was supported by GFAR, FAO and ICARDA. The meeting approved the establishment of regional cooperative Network for Olive to be hosted by the Olive Tree Institute at Sfax and recommended strengthen Interregional cooperation by establishing linkages to The European System of Cooperative Research Networks in Agriculture (ESCORNEA)

The meeting formed three olive technical working groups as follows:

(1) Olive production and Protection group to be hosted by Egypt.
(2) Post-harvest processing technologies to be hosted by Jordan.
(3) Socio-economic and commercialization group to be hosted by Morocco.

The focal points will be selected from NGOs, Private sector, research institutions and universities that will constitute the coordinating board of the network will meet to elect the chairman of the board to approve the work plan for the network.

5.4. Medicinal & Herbal Plants Network:

Contacts were made with the president of the Egyptian Society for medicinal and herbal plants and with the project coordinator of Medicinal and Herbal Plant project conducted by NCARTT. It was agreed to hold a meeting to explore the possibility of establishing of medicinal and Herbal Plant Network in the region during the convening of the International Conference on Medicinal and herbal plants to be held 28-30, 2004 at Cairo, Egypt.

6. Training Courses:

AARINENA has co- sponsored with FAO Regional Office in the near East,

(1) Regional Training course on Post–Harvest technology in Amman–Jordan Jan, 2003

(2) Bio-safety Workshop in Syria in August 2003.

(3) Advanced post-Harvest Training course in Amman- Jordan, 6-8 April 2004

(4) Transfer of technology workshop, Muscat, Oman, 14 – 15, 2004.

7. Publications :

7.1. Newsletter:

Volume 11 and Volume 12 were published in May 2003 and February 2004 and were distributed to all members, research institutions, faculties of Agricultures of universities in the region. The Newsletters are posted on AARINENA website.

7.2. Proceedings of meetings:

- Proceedings of meetings, workshops and training courses were distributed and posted on AARINENA Home page.

- Revised amended Constitution of AARINENA has been published and circulated to all members.

- Rules of procedure, adopted by the Eighth General Conference were also printed and published.

8. Memberships:

The efforts of the secretariat resulted in the addition of seven new members: Algeria, Tunisia, Somalia and University of Jordan, Jordan University for Science & Technology (JUST) and the International Center for Bio-saline Agricultural Research (ICBA), and King Abdelaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST).

9. Promoting AARINENA Activities

The president, visited the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) to discuss a grant proposal to promote AARINENA activities such as the Regional Agricultural Information System (RAIS) and the olive, medicinal plants and cotton Networks. The response was positive and the bank requested detailed proposals for these activities.

10. President Activities:

10.1. CGIAR – AGM02 – Philippine, October, 2002

10.2. Ex-Co Meeting of CGIAR – W. DC., September, 2002

10.3. ICT Workshop to strengthen RAIS – Egypt, February, 2002

10.4. First ICT – Steering Committee Meeting – ICARDA, July, 2003

10.5. Ex-Co Meeting of CGIAR – W. DC., 2003

10.6. GFAR Meetings – Nairobi, October, 2003

10.7. FAO 27th NERC Doha-Qatar, 13 – 17 March, 2004.

11.   Executive Committee and Cosponsors Meeting, Amman-Jordan 4-5 January 2004.

The Executive Committee and Cosponsors of the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA) held its meeting under the patronage of the Minister of Agriculture in Jordan at the National Center for Agricultural Research & Technology Transfer (NCARTT) in Amman - Jordan during Jan. 4-5, 2004.

The Committee has adopted the agenda for the 9th General Conference of AARINENA that will be held in Muscat, Oman during April 11-13, 2004 at the kind invitation of the Sultanate of Oman. The Committee has also adopted an outline for the plan of work for the association for the coming two years. The Plan include implementation of priority projects of the Regional Agricultural Information System, support to network activities, cosponsor   a number of workshops and training courses as well as publishing successful case studies from the region. The activity report, which s presented during the meeting highlighted the progress that has been made during the last two years.

12.   <u>Conclusion</u>

Over the years, AARINENA has supported national agricultural research systems (NARS) in the region in capacity building through training programs, organizing technical and Scientific workshops and conferences, and establishing regional information and communication system through active support and active participation of GFAR ,ICARDA and FAO/RNE. In this regard, a web site (www.aarinena.org) to disseminate information to member countries was operating since July 2002. AARINENA has also contributed in establishing networks for essential crops in the region such as date palm, cotton, and Olive and it is in the process of establishing a network for medicinal plants. It acted as a facilitator in bringing the views, aspirations and research priorities of the WANA region to the attention of the relevant international organizations with the aim of promotion of sustainable agricultural development through attraction of global agricultural and developmental communities as well as donors to support the regional and sub-regional research projects and related activities.