

Report on AARINENA-ICT Expert Consultation Meeting to Strengthen RAIS in the WANA Region

25-27 February 2003

Cairo, Egypt

(Draft)

Introduction

1. The meeting was sponsored and managed by GFAR, AARINENA, ARC, and FAO/RNE.
2. The agenda, attached as appendix A, was modified as follows :
 - a. The program of Wednesday 26 February 2003 was changed to be Reports from countries in the WANA region in the morning session, and working group discussions in the afternoon session
 - b. The program of Thursday 27 February 2003 was changed to be: Recommendations, and Discussion on Proposed Collaborative programs, in the first morning session, and steering committee election in the second morning session.
3. Appendix B includes the modified list of participants. Mrs. Taraneh Ebrahimi – AARINENA-RAIS Webmaster, and Mr. Dady Demby – CORAF/WECARD’s representative could not attend the meeting. Mr. Hattar represented the AOAD. Mrs. May Hani from FAO, and Mr. Mohamed F.Nawar IPGRI/RIISFC also attended the meeting.

Opening Session

4. Dr. Fardous gave the AARINENA statement in which he emphasized the vital role the RAIS can play in the WANA region and the commitment of AARINENA in developing this system. He reviewed AARINENA past activities since the 8th General Conference in Beirut and thanked GFAR, ARC and FAO for organizing this meeting.
5. Dr. Giovannetti presented GFAR statement and mentioned that GFAR supports Global RAIS. He also mentioned that this is the first consultation in a series of similar consultations that will be held in the different regions. He underlined that APAARIS and INFOSYS managers, coming from Asia/Pacific and Europe were attending this regional workshop. He thanked Mr. Dirk Pottier from EC/DG Research to have funded this regional workshop through INCODEV Accompanying Measures.
6. Dr Khalifa conveyed to the attendees regards from H.E. Dr. Yousef Waly, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture. In his statement Dr Khalifa stressed the importance of ICT in agricultural research and the commitment of ARC to this fast growing technology. He presented some examples of using ICT in ARC such as remote sensing and GIS, expert systems, and the ARC integrated information system that is currently being developed.

Status of Implementation of RAIS

7. Dr. Ahmed Rafea reviewed the RAIS strategy in the WANA region, the report of Cairo workshop that was held in October 2000, and the project proposal prepared for RAIS as a result of this workshop.
8. Mrs. Mahvash Behroozin, instead of Mrs T. Ebrahimi who was unable to attend the workshop, made the second presentation. In this presentation she reported on the current status of the AARINENA-RAIS Web site, and on the related expectations for its development.
9. After the presentations, the following comments were made:

- Dr Giovannetti (GFAR) stated that there is a need to move away from centralized databases management systems. Instead, he suggested, that each information producer could manage their own information, in which case the AARINENA-RAIS Web site could serve as a portal for those various decentralized web information resources. He also suggested, that through a regional framework, there could be combined leadership of this effort.
 - Commenting on the report made on AARINENA-RAIS Web site, in which it was stated that one of the most difficult problems faced by its developer was the fact that a lot of data was missing, Mr. Tamzini suggested that contact should be established between the developers of the web site, and various organizations and institutes in order to bring them awareness of the existence of the site.
 - Dr. Fawzy Naim suggested that various countries should be encouraged to build up their own databases and websites and standardize those in order to facilitate communication amongst all regions.
 - AOAD announced the existence of a statistical database for use by any interested party at: <http://www.aoad.org>
 - Lebanon's representative requested that better ways for establishing communication with both regional and focal points, be looked into.
10. Dr. Ahmed Rafea highlighted and summarized the main issues raised as follows:
- Strengthening the NAIS in all countries of the region
 - Strengthening communication between members on ongoing ICT activities or initiatives
 - Standardization of tools to be used in development of systems
 - Coordinating the training activities that take place in the region

Experiences of Regional & International Organizations

11. Mr. Portegies Zwart presented FAO's strategy for strengthening RAIS. He highlighted FAO's role in developing standards and methodologies for the exchange of agricultural information, with particular reference to AGRIS/CARIS (publications and on-going research activities), VERCON (strengthening links between research and extension) and TECA (proven technologies). . He suggested that anyone interested participate in the discussion forum on the new strategy for AGRIS.
12. Ms Bonaiuti gave a presentation, which first focused on GFAR's Web site. Some of the important issues raised, included:
- The need to decentralize database implementation be allowing each country to build their own, and to provide a gateway for the access of these databases
 - The development of Management information tools for monitoring ARD activities.
 - The facilitation of access to scientific publication generated by agricultural research centers in the region.
- Then she highlighted the expected plan of work and budget of the Global-RAIS project funded by the EC, DG/Research.
13. Dr. Maliha presented ICARDA's ICT strategy and its various activities to promote information exchange within the region. In his presentation, Dr. Maliha stressed the importance of encouraging countries to use AGRIS as a means for agricultural document management.
14. Dr. Maru presented ISNAR's experience in the development of a management information system, through a focus on the INFORM project and its relevance to regional organizations. In his presentation, he stressed that information systems should be allowed to evolve over time, and that systems should adopt accordingly.
15. Mr. Singh presented APAARI's experience in the development of RAIS in Asia/Pacific, underlining the main achievements of the phase 1 and the specific objectives of the phase 2.

16. Mr. Bernard presented ZADI/EIARD-Infosys's experience in the development of three systems: Alert, Groupware and Node XML.
17. In the discussion that followed Dr. Giovannetti highlighted some of the important issues that were raised throughout the day:
 - The importance of developing specific databases related to research centers and institutes
 - Information System development should be backed by political commitment
 - Big problems can be divided into smaller ones each of which can be handled by a specific institutes with specific funding and thus a more well defined basis for collaboration can be established.
 - The importance of addressing human resources training and communication
18. Based on the issues raised throughout the day, a number of points were identified for discussion by working groups. These were:
 - Identifying, prioritizing, and launching a set of databases to be implemented for various countries.
 - Defining what a gateway function is, and going further in discussing what is needed for its development.
 - Addressing training and communication issues.
 - Discussing the concept of rural nodes and VERCON as a means for improving communication
 - Defining terms of reference for AARINENA RAIS.

The discussion sheet in appendix C was prepared accordingly.

Country Reports on Present Status of ICT and Future Coordination with AARINENA-RAIS

19. Representatives of the national agricultural research organizations of Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Sudan, and Yemen made presentations. Each of the representatives explained the current status of information management in their countries, and highlighted resources such as existing information, human resources, and training materials, that can benefit from further development and integration within the broader scope of RAIS. Collectively, they presented a wide range of capabilities in ICT management and system development.

Working Group Discussions

20. Attendees of the workshop were split into two groups and given the discussion sheet in appendix C for review. When splitting the groups, an attempt was made to place an equal number of representatives from national organizations (NARS), in both groups. Each group contained members of similar regions.
21. Group 1, came up with the following recommendations:
 - a. With respect to the first point, the group suggested the development of relational databases to include:
 - Institutional information
 - Expert/expertise information
 - Research project information
 - Scientific publication/bibliographic information

An effort should be made to review and use or adapt the various systems that already exist for each of these types of information.

- b. The group also suggested that the Networks issue be addressed as an independent topic. They therefore added a point 6 - Network and Forum - with the following sub-items:
 - Explore existing forums
 - Current Research Networks
 - Build a discussion forum
 - c. With respect to the second point, the group suggested the development of a project to avail Expert System tools on the Web.
 - d. Regarding the third point, which addressed a gateway function, the group stressed that information systems at the national level should be developed and strengthened so as to provide resources on top of which a gateway function would be useful. A gateway then, would be a search engine that would be capable of searching these distributed resources.
 - e. Regarding the fifth point, the group stated that for the RAIS steering committee as well as for each NINP, the terms of reference should be: 1) follow up on the recommendations of the workshop, 2) prepare a relevant action plan, 3) ensure timely delivery of the planned activities, and 4) report to the AARINENA Executive Committee, which meets every 6 months.
22. Group 2, came up with the following recommendations:
- a. With respect to the first four points, the group suggested the development of the following articulation for a comprehensive set of collaborative programs as top priority:
 - An institutional information database
 - An expert and research project information database
 - A virtual library
 - A question/answer component
 - Electronic forums at a regional level
 - b. Regarding the fifth point, they suggested that the terms of reference of a RAIS steering committee are: 1) have: a 2-year period, 2) its duties would focus on planning, and monitoring the implementation of the collaborative programs, and 3) ensuring regional balance in its formation.

Discussion on Future Collaboration Programs with NARS and Recommendations

23. The workshop participants:
- a) Endorsed the “*Proposal for regional agricultural information system for WANA Region*”, prepared by AARINENA, in April 2001, as a relevant regional framework for actions;
 - b) Recommended defining an articulated set of collaborative programs consistent with this regional framework. These collaborative programs can be seen as different modules, their later integration would constitute the future RAIS;
 - c) Recommended that these collaborative programs (i) would be led by the NARS, each acting as a leader for a specific collaborative program and (ii) would involve NARS, regional organizations, international centers or Agencies as a common platform making use of the available expertise;
 - d) Recommended that these collaborative programs would be define through a specific plan of work and budget, systematically including (i) a content generation component and, (ii) a training component;
 - e) Recommended that these collaborative programs would adopt methodologies and tool kits already available for agricultural information management, or when necessary, would customize or develop such tools and methodologies;

- f) Recommended that the information contents would be made available in local language, or whenever possible, local language and English or French according to the various sub-regions of AARINENA;
 - g) Recommended that AARINENA Executive Secretariat would seek for catalytic funds in order to achieve the definition and the launching of these collaborative programs. For this purpose, Regional and international Organizations could play a significant role;
 - h) Recommended the launching of a AARINENA-RAIS Steering committee, which would deal with the following issues: (i) facilitate the management of an articulated and consistent set of collaborative programs leading to a three-years plan of work, (ii) monitor and evaluate the activities undertaken within this plan of work, (iii) ensure that there is a timely delivery of the expected outcomes of the collaborative programs, (iv) facilitate the communication between all the stakeholders involved in these activities, and (v) report to the AARINENA executive Committee, (vi) this AARINENA-RAIS Steering committee, consisting of information technology and information management specialists would be nominated for a three-year period, consistently with a sub-regional balance and personal and institutional commitment of its members, (vii) Associate Members of this AARINENA-RAIS Steering Committee would involve sponsors and partners;
 - i) Recommended that AARINENA Executive Secretariat, in consultation with FAO and GFAR explore possibilities to assign a scientific assistant in charge of the Information and Communication Management (ICM) activities within the Secretariat;
 - j) Recommended the following frame for the collaborative programs:
 - ❑ Enhancing management information systems at national level. That would include the following modules (a) management of institutional information, (b) management of research activities and research project information, (c) management of information on experts, and (d) management of information on research outputs,
 - ❑ Launching of electronic forum of discussion enabling and fostering dialogues within and amongst all the stakeholders involved in agricultural research for development in the region,
 - ❑ Launching of a question and answer service at the regional level,
 - ❑ Establishment of a gateway function at the regional level facilitating accesses to information managed by NARS.
24. The AARINENA-RAIS Steering Committee is expected to draft and circulate a concept note related to these various collaborative programs.

Selection of a Steering Committee

21. Nominations for a steering committee were made by present representatives of each of the five sub-regions with the following results:
- From the Arab Peninsula, Kuwait was elected
 - From the Mashreq, Jordan was elected
 - From the Maghreb, Morocco was elected
 - From the Nile Valley and the Red Sea, Egypt was elected
 - From Wes/Central Asia, Iran was elected.
22. Elected representatives were asked to nominate and select a chair from amongst themselves and Egypt was elected.
23. FAO, ICARDA, GFAR, and AOAD were proposed to join the steering committee as associate members.

Appendix A



AARINENA-ICT Expert Consultation Meeting to Strengthen RAIS in the WANA Region

25-27 February 2003

Cairo, Egypt

Agenda

Tuesday 25 February 2003

9:00 – 10:00 Registration

Opening Session

10:00 – 10:30 Statement by the President of AARINENA

Statement by the Representative of GFAR

Statement by the Representative of ARC

Status of Implementation of RAIS

Chairman: M. Khalifa

10:30 – 11:00 Review of RAIS Strategy in WANA Region A. Rafea

11:00 – 11:30 AARINENA-RAIS Web Site: Present Status T. Ebrahimi
and Future Perspective.

11:30 – 12:00 Coffee Break (Reception)

Experiences of Regional & International Organizations

Chariman: M. El-Tamzini

Draft (March 5,2003)

12:00 – 12:30	FAO/WAICENT: Strategy on strengthening agricultural research information systems	R. Portegies Zwart
12:30 – 13:00	GFAR Initiative on ICT and expectations from RAIS and NAIS	JF. Giovannetti F. Bonaiuti
13:00 – 13:30	ICARDA-MIS and future partnership with AARINENA-RAIS	N. Maliha
13:30 – 15:00	Lunch	
	<i>Chairman: N. Maliha</i>	
15:00-15:30	ISNAR experiences in development of MIS with relevance to regional organizations	A. Maru
15:30 - 16:00	APAARI experiences in development of RAIS	S. Singh
16:00 – 16:30	ZADI/EIARD-InfoSys+ Experiences in development of Databases and Node XML.	M. Bernard H. Knipschild
16:30 – 17:30	Open discussion	

Wednesday 26 February 2003

WORKING GROUPS

Status of Implementation of RAIS

Chairman: JF. Giovannetti

9:00-10:30	Plenary meeting of ICT Experts from the 5 Sub Regions of AARINENA, and Election of a Reporter. Discussion on: - Subregional Strengthens and Weakneses - Subregional Needs and Answers - Expected Requirements for Their RAIS.
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Draft (March 5,2003)

10:30-11:00 Coffee Break

Chairman: A. Rafea

11:00-13:00 Working group report from each sub region with regard to Present Status
of ICT and Future

Coordination with AARINENA-RAIS **

13:00-14:30 Lunch

14:30-16:30 Working Groups (*cont.*)

16:30-17:30 Discussion (Plenary Session)

Thursday 27 February 2003

Review of the RAIS Requirements, Strategy & Implementation Plan

Chairman: A. Fardous

9:00 – 9:30 National Information Nodal Points: Terms of Reference, Selection of
NINPs

(NARS/Sub-Region)

9:30-10:00 Selection of AARINENA-RAIS Steering Committee

10:00-10:30 Discussion on Future Partnership with International and Regional
Organizations / Centers

10:30-11:00 Coffee Break

11:00-12:00 Discussion of AARINENA-RAIS and Approval of Workplan 2003-2004
(Financial Needs, Future Programmes, Collaboration and Contribution
from Partners and Donors)

12:00-13:00 AARINENA-RAIS Steering Committee Meeting

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch

Draft (March 5,2003)

14:00 - Local Tour

** 20 minutes allocated for each status report.

Appendix B

ICT Expert Consultation Meeting To Strengthen AARINENA – RAIS Cairo, Egypt 25-27 February, 2003

No.	Name	Tel., Fax. and Email
1	Mr. Abdel Naby Fardous, President, AARINENA Amman, Jordan	Tel: 00962-6-4725017 Fax: 00962-6-4726009 e.mail: fardous@ncartt.gov.jo
2	Mr. Ibrahim Y. Hamdan Interim Executive Secretary, AARINENA 31 Road 206, # 602, Digla-Maadi, Cairo, Egypt	Tel : 202-5166605 Fax : 202-7495981 e.mail: Ihamdan@link.net
3	Mr. Raed F. Hattar Chief of Agricultural Information Division AOAD, Khartoum , Sudan	Tel: 00249 472176 83 e-mail: read.hattar@aoad.org
4	Mr. Sahdev Singh, PhD Assistant Executive Secretary Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI), Maliwan Mansion, 39 Phra Atit Road, Bangkok 10200, THAILAND	Tel: (+662) 697-4372, 4371 Fax: (+662) 697-4408 e-mail: ssingh@apaari.org
5	Mr. Dirk Pottier DG Research-European Commission , INCO programmer EUROPEAN COMMISSION	Tel.:0032 2 2967209 Fax.:0032 2 2966252 e-mial: Dirk.Pottier@cec.eu.int
6	Mr. Marc Bernard EIARD-Infosys+ Coordinator ZADI, Bonn, Germany	Tel.: +49 228 9548203 Fax.:+49 228 9548111 Bernard@zadi.de or .mail:bernard@isicad.org
7	Mr. Henning Knipschild EIARD-Infosys+ Technical Coordinator ZADI, Bonn, Germany	Tel.:0228 9548130 Fax.:0228 9548111 e.mail: hk@zadi.de

8	<p>Mr. Mohamed El Tamzini</p> <p>Agro-Industries & Technology Officer</p> <p>FAO Regional Office for the Near East, RNE, Cairo – Egypt</p>	<p>Tel: 202-3316000/3351026</p> <p>Fax.:7495981</p> <p>e.mail: Eltamzini.Mohamed@fao.org</p>
9	<p>Mr. Robert Portegies Zwart</p> <p>Information Systems Officer</p> <p>World Agricultural Information Centre (WAICENT), (FAO)</p> <p>Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy</p>	<p>Tel: +39-06-570-54347</p> <p>Fax: +39-06-570-54049</p> <p>e.mail:Robert.PortegiesZwart@fao.org</p> <p>website: www.fao.org</p>
10	<p>Mr. Magdi Latif</p> <p>Regional Information Management Officer</p> <p>FAO Regional Office for the Near East, RNE, Cairo, Egypt</p>	<p>Tel.: 00202 3316148, 010 1772187</p> <p>Fax.: 00202 7485981</p> <p>e-mail: Magdi.Latif@fao.org</p> <p>website.:www.fao.org</p>
11	<p>Mr. Jean-François Giovannetti</p> <p>GFAR Secretariat</p> <p>Visiting senior Expert</p>	<p>Tel: +39.06.57.05.56.98</p> <p>Fax: +39.06.57.05.38.98</p> <p>e.mail 1: jeanfrancois.giovannetti@fao.org</p> <p>e.mail 2: j.giovannetti@cgiar.org</p> <p>Website: www.egfar.org</p>
12	<p>Ms. Fulvia Bonaiuti</p> <p>APO Information and Communication System for ARD, GFAR Secretariat</p> <p>FAO, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, Rome, Italy 00100</p>	<p>Tel. (39) 06- 5705-3584</p> <p>Fax. (39) 06-5705-3898</p> <p>e.mail: Fulvia.Bonaiuti@fao.org</p> <p>Website: www.egfar.org</p>
13	<p>Mr. Nihad Maliha, PhD,</p> <p>Manager, LIS,</p> <p>ICARDA, Aleppo, Syria</p>	<p>Tel.:+963 21 2213433</p> <p>Fax.:+ 963 21 2213490</p> <p>e.mail: n.maliha@cgiar.org</p>
14	<p>Dr. Ajit Maru</p> <p>Research Officer (Information)</p> <p>International Service for National Agri. Research, Laan Van Nieuw Oost Indie 133, Post: P.O. Box 93375, 2509 AJ</p> <p>The Hague, The Netherlands</p>	<p>Tel: 31 70 349 6154</p> <p>Fax: 31 70 381 9677</p> <p>Res.: 31 71 5622 413</p> <p>e.mail: a.maru@cgiar.org; a.maru@planet.nl</p>

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15	Mr. George Adamides Agricultural Information Systems Agricultural Research Institute of Cyprus.	Tel.: 357 22 403133 Fax.: 357 22 316770 e-mail: adamides@arinet.ari.gov.cy
16	Mr. Ahmad Rafea Director , CLAES, ARC, Giza ,Egypt	Tel.: 202 3317601, 3317602,6704727 Fax.:202 7617628 e.mail: rafe@esic.claes.sci.eg
17	Mr. Mahmoud Rafea Senior Researcher CLAES, ARC, Giza, Egypt	Tel.: 202 3317601, 3317602,6704727 Fax.:202 7617628 e.mail: mahmoud@claes.sci.eg
18	Mr. Soliman Edrees Senior Researcher CLAES, ARC, Giza, Egypt	Tel.: 202 3317601, 3317602,6704727 Fax.:202 7617628 e.mail: soliman@claes.sci.eg
19	Mrs. Samhaa El-Beltagy Researcher CLAES, ARC, Giza, Egypt	Tel.: 202 3317601, 3317602,6704727 Fax.:202 7617628 e.mail: samhaa@claes.sci.eg
20	Mrs. Mahvash Behroozin Plant Pathology Department, Agricultural Research, Education & Extension Organization (AREEO), P.O. Box 19835-111 Teheran, Iran	Tel: 9821-2402987 Fax: 9821-2413925 e.mail: taraneh25@yahoo.com
21	Mr. Abdel Aziz AL-Louzi Director of Information and Computer C/O NCARTT, C/O UNDP Jordan	Tel.: 9962 6 4725071 Fax.: 962 6 4726099 e.mail: louzi@ncartt.gov.jo
22	Mrs. Tahani Hussain KISR, Kuwiat	e.mail: thussain@kisir.edu.kw
23	Mr. Robert Kalaily Network Administrator and IT manager of LARI Lebanese Agricultural Research Institute, LARI , TalAmara/Bekaa/Lebanon	Tel.:009613802585Mobile. 00961 8 900037 (work) Fax.: 00961 8 900077 e.mail: rkalaily@lari.gov.lb

24	<p>Mr. Otman Sebbata</p> <p>Website Designer, INRA,</p> <p>B.P. 6512 R.I. Rabat-Instituts, Morocco</p>	<p>Tel: +212 037 775530</p> <p>Fax : 212.37.77.40.03</p> <p>e.mail: sebbata@awamia.inra.org.ma</p>
25	<p>Mr. Hamed Sulaiman Ali AL-Dhuhli</p> <p>MAF, Plant Production Research Center</p> <p>P.O.box : 50 , P.c.: 121 Seeb, Oman</p>	<p>Tel: +968-9204060</p> <p>Fax: +968-893097</p> <p>e.mail:hamed444@yahoo.com</p> <p>e.mail:research@omantel.net.om</p>
26	<p>Mr. Babo Fadlalla</p> <p>Director, Information & Documentation</p> <p>Agricultural Research Corporation (ARC),</p> <p>P.O.Box 30, Khartoum, North Sudan,</p>	<p>Tel.:249 13 313912</p> <p>Fax.: 249 13 310813</p> <p>e.mail: babo_f@yahoo.com</p>
27	<p>Mr. Aiman Alsayed Hassan, Agronomist,</p> <p>Head of Informatics Section in General Committee For Agriculture Scientific Research</p> <p>GCSAR Information Section, Syria,</p>	<p>Tel. 00963 11 5740064</p> <p>Fax 00963 11 40064</p> <p>e.mail a-hasan@scs-net.org</p>
28	<p>Mr. Mohamed Noaman Sallam</p> <p>Director of Extension Programmes and Projects</p> <p>Agricultural Research & Extension Authority, (AREA), Ministry of Agriculture,</p> <p>P.O.Box: 87418 , Dhamar, Yemen</p>	<p>Tel: 00967 6-509413</p> <p>Fax: 00967 6 500766</p> <p>e.mail:area@yemen.net.ye Sallam1958@yahoo.com</p>
29	<p>Mrs. May Hani</p> <p>Extension, Education & Communication Officer</p> <p>FAO Regional Office for the Near East, Cairo, Egypt</p>	<p>Tel.: 202 3316000</p> <p>Fax.: 202 7495981</p> <p>Email: may.hani@fao.org</p>
30	<p>Mr. Mohamed F.Nawar</p> <p>Information Systems Consultant</p> <p>IPGRI/RIISFC</p>	<p>Tel.: +20105340130</p> <p>e-mail: m.nawar@lgiar.org</p>

Appendix C

Issues to be addressed by working groups

1. Databases included in the Management Information System: (database on national institutions, on research networks, full text scientific publications)

- Starting from stakeholders requirements prioritize the development of (a) bibliographic, (b) Institutional Information, (c) Research Projects information (d) Networks and (e) Experts
- Define specific objectives
- Propose an implementation process and identify possible leadership by national institutions or regional organizations
- Define collaborative programmes involving stakeholders from all the regions and define a specific related funding strategy
- Define the specific training
- Define the specific action plan to strengthen communication among stakeholders

2. Expert system included in the Regional Reference System

- Starting from stakeholders requirements prioritize the development of (a) Expert System and (b) GIS.
- Define specific objectives,
- Propose an implementation process and identify possible leadership by national institutions or regional organizations
- Define collaborative programmes involving stakeholders from all the regions and define a specific related funding strategy
- Define the specific training
- Define the specific action plant to strengthen communication among stakeholders

3. Gateway function (allowing access to material and resources through a single access point such a website) to be developed on the AARINENA RAIS website

- Define specific objectives to this gateway function
- Define the collaborative programmes enabling implementation and involvement of NINPs
- Define specific training and related policy communication

4. Rural nodes to improve communication and dialogue between researchers, extentionists and farmers

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- Assessment of the VERCON Programme in Egypt
- Interest and commitment from other countries
- Collaborative programme with F AO for a sub-regional platform for the VERCON programme

5. Clarify Vision, Mission and Goals of AARINENA RAIS and Strengthening its constituencies

- TORs for AARINENA RAIS Steering Committee
- Formalization of the role of the NINPs
- Monitoring and reporting activities towards AARINENA Executive Committee