Special Program for African Agricultural Research (SPAAR):

Frameworks for Action - An Initial Review

Background

SPAAR was established in 1985 to foster collaboration in agricultural research and development in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) between donor organizations and African agricultural research systems. It also sought to enable Africa to benefit from the accumulated knowledge of global agricultural research and technology generation and transfer. The SPAAR Membership consists of twenty-three donor organizations, comprising of bilateral and multilateral donors, international, autonomous and regional agencies. Its Secretariat is housed in the World Bank. In 1994, SPAAR donors decided to open SPAAR membership to all the national agricultural research systems (NARSs) in SSA.

The Frameworks for Action (FFAs)

Over the period 1990-1994, SPAAR, in collaboration with African national and regional organizations, developed 4 subregional FFAs in agricultural research. These were for the Sahel, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), Western and Central Africa, and Eastern and Central Africa. The FFAs stress 6 guiding principles/concepts:

- Institutionalizing a participatory and responsive strategic planning process.
• Developing sustainable funding plans and mechanisms.
• Improving institutional, human resource and management capacity.
• Building country coalitions and support groups of stakeholders.
• Strengthening linkages between research, extension, universities, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), farmers and market agents in order to refocus the research agenda on constraints, both on- and off-farm.
• Promoting regional and international collaboration, to ensure cost effectiveness.

These principles were implemented in two pilot countries: Mali for the Sahel and Tanzania for Southern Africa.

**Review of FFA Initiatives**

In 1994, the SPAAR membership asked for an independent review of the implementation of the FFAs. This was carried out in the two pilot countries, Mali and Tanzania, and in 4 countries where the process was well under way - Ghana, Kenya, Senegal and Uganda. The Review focused on 3 major areas: masterplanning, institutional reforms and linkages.

**Masterplanning**

_The development of a masterplan had been emphasized by the FFAs as the cornerstone of any realistic effort to improve research output, resource allocation and research management._ The Review found that:

• The masterplanning process has had a significant effect in institutionalizing priority-setting mechanisms in NARSs and in aligning agricultural research with national development objectives.
• The active involvement of IARCs which provided the technical know-how and backstopping facilitates the production of an actionable strategy document.
• All the plans recognized the necessity to consolidate and down-size the large national systems to make them sustainable.
• The planning process highlighted the necessity to improve incentives, and conditions of service and accountability by strengthening research management, financial administration and support services.
• The countries recognized the need to move from supply-driven activities to a much more client and demand-driven set of parameters.

**Institutional Reforms**
The FFAs advocated reorganization of the national agricultural research systems (NARSs) in order to improve their institutional and management capacity. Some of the significant results found included the following.

- **Legal Status.** In Mali, the Institut d’Economie Rural (IER) which is the central national agricultural research institute (NARI) of the country, was converted from a government department to a semi-autonomous self-accounting EPA (Etablissement Public à Caractère Administratif) research organization in 1993.

- **Decentralization.** Decentralized decision-making in the NARSs and more demand-driven research programs have been welcomed by all the research actors. This resulted in 7 zonal Directorships being established in Tanzania; 5 Research Center Directorships in Mali; 7 regional research organizations in Uganda, and a number of independent institutes and research organizations in Ghana.

- **Rationalization and Staff Conditions:** There has been a significant down-sizing within NARSs. In Mali, the number of staff in IER was reduced from 240 senior staff to 110 scientists. In Uganda, roughly 25 percent of the scientific staff was redeployed to the Ministry of Agriculture. However, the Review emphasized the need for better conditions of service if the full effects of decentralization were to be realized.

- **Consolidated Funding Mechanisms (CFMs):** Under the CFM, funding of agreed research programs is part of capital investment. Research activities are costed separately. Funding is then sought for an activity from the government and/or donors. Independent scientific and financial audits through a national agricultural research council (NARC) oversee the operations. The Review found that the CFM idea is gradually catching on.

(i) The Agricultural Research Fund (ARF) established by Tanzania is intended to fund contract research, as well as collaborative research between the DRT and other researchers. All necessary conditions for the operation of the fund have been fulfilled and it is fully operational.

(ii) An ARF was started at the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1992. Overseas Development Administration (ODA) of the UK has contributed a token amount and the World Bank is working on setting up a 'Secondary Special Account' that would allow it to contribute funds to an ARF.

- **Sustainable Funding:** The Review found that it is possible to get commitments from *national governments* to fund agricultural research in partnership with donors through the FFAs and the masterplanning process. For example:

  - In Uganda, the government's contribution to the recurrent budget of the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) has increased by 30 percent.
  - In Mali, the government has signed a contract with the IER for increased contributions over a 5-year period and since then, the government contribution has been paid on time each quarter.
In Ghana, the government has committed itself to progressively increasing the proportion of total program funding from domestic sources from 32 percent to 77 percent over a 5-year period.

Progress in getting donor support for agreed priority programs in the masterplans has been much faster where the NARSs have divided their programs into projects which bilateral donors can fund using their traditional financing mode. A good example is Kenya where the masterplan served as a guide for the multi-donor National Agricultural Research Project (NARP). KARI management has used it as a basis for parcelling out its research program to the World Bank, USAID, the European Union, ODA, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Australian Center for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), and the governments of Canada, Japan and the Netherlands.

Success in getting support from the private sector depends on the creation of the necessary legal frameworks and the offering of profit incentives.

In Tanzania, a revenue retention scheme was approved by the government in July 1994. A number of institutions have made commitments, e.g. the Sugar Development Corporation has agreed to allocate 2 Tanzanian Shillings per bag of sugar sold to research, the Tanzania Cotton Board has agreed to pay 2 shillings per kg of seed cotton sold, and the Tobacco Industry 50 cents per kg of leaf tobacco sold.

In Ghana, the research system has signed an undertaking to generate up to 30 percent of its recurrent budget from commercial activities (seed production, sale of agricultural produce, etc.).

In Mali, cotton research is completely funded by the Compagnie malienne de développement des textiles (CMDT) through contracts signed with IER.

**Effective Linkage Mechanisms**

- **NARSs**: Improvements in research programming, priority-setting and functioning of the NARSs have allowed them to become more effective partners with the IARCs and industrial country institutions.

- **Participation**: The emphasis on zonal priority setting has emphasized the importance of greater participation by extension agents and farmers in the research agendas and priority-setting process. Attempts to institutionalize this process at the national level have gone furthest in Mali where a hierarchical system of user consultation has been set up within the IER programming, priority-setting and reporting process.

- **NGOs**: The involvement of NGOs in research committees has improved the research planning process by bringing in the view from the field. In some countries, NGOs have signed formal contracts for research with the NARSs that directly addresses their needs. For example, CARE Mali has signed such formal contracts for research on flood-recession sorghum and rice cultivation with the IER sub-station at Diré, and for research on sorghum, groundnuts and cowpea with the IER station at Cinzana. In Senegal, two farmer organizations, the Comité d'appui au développement des fonts (CADEF) and the Comité national de concertation des ruraux (CNCR) have had a long history of collaboration with ISRA.
Private Sector: Closer involvement of the private sector in research has been beneficial in terms of improving the responsiveness of the NARSs to the needs of their clients, and in opening up a potential avenue for increased funding of agricultural research.

Sustaining Momentum

The processes of organization, formulation of strategies, and priority-setting are in place in most of the countries reviewed. The need now is to fully operationalize the system and address problems as they arise. One such area is with regard to the modalities of obtaining farmers' inputs into the identification of research priorities and their involvement in the execution and information feedback into the research, planning and implementation processes. Another critical issue is the actual realization of funds to carry out the priority programs identified in the masterplans. In this regard, one of the major SPAAR initiatives for 1996 in collaboration with USAID has been the launching of a Sustainable Funding Initiative (SFI) which focuses on identifying new funding sources for agricultural and natural resource management.

SPAAR strategies aim to provide the support needed to reach an agricultural production rate of 4% per annum through science-based agricultural intensification. Such a growth rate should generate substantial employment in the rural areas and income in urban areas as well as stimulate sustained economic development in the SSA countries.

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