In 2008, as Africa prepared for the first Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD1), Africa’s population was slightly over 976 million. By 2012, the population is estimated to be over 1 billion, and because Africa is overwhelmingly rural, agriculture remains the main source of livelihood for most people.

Agriculture in Africa has been under-performing. In 2000, Africa spent USD 18.7 billion on importing staple food such as wheat, rice and maize. Between 1990 and 1992, there were 173 million chronically undernourished people in the continent. However, by 1997-1999, this figure had increased to 250 million, making Africa the only region in the world where the absolute number and percentage of hungry and malnourished people was still increasing.

The Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme

The desire to eliminate pervasive hunger and malnutrition as well as to reduce the large cost of importing staple food became the driving motives for all governments to adopt the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) in 2003. According to CAADP, agriculture-led development is fundamental to cutting hunger, reducing poverty, generating economic growth and reducing the burden of imports. The key is to make agriculture a “profitable business”. The implementation of CAADP was entrusted to regional economic communities such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) for East and Southern Africa and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for West and Central Africa.

CAADP Implementation:

The first part of the process of implementing CAADP involved identifying Africa’s agricultural research priorities. Recognizing that priority setting was best carried out at the national level, sub-regional research fora established “agricultural development domains” within each sub-region. These development domains enabled these sub-regional fora to develop guidelines for priority options that cut across national boundaries. The fora, in carrying out this exercise, followed the priorities that had been established by the sub-regional economic communities such as ECOWAS (see Box 1).

At the national levels, these efforts aided in the development of national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), which proved to be very helpful in implementing CAADP. Thus, for example, the second-generation version of Ghana’s PRSP prioritized the “modernization of agriculture and strengthening of infrastructure”. This was in recognition of the fact that allocating resources to basic pro-poor services, such as primary education, water supply and public health, would not by themselves reduce poverty because most of the working poor in Ghana are farmers who depend on agriculture for their livelihood.


Representing the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)
Developing Africa’s Agricultural Research for Development agenda

CAADP and the agricultural research priorities of the sub-regional fora guided the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) in developing a regional set of priorities for work. These are:

- Establish appropriate institutional and organizational arrangements for regional agricultural research.
- Develop access to knowledge and technology needed for innovation for broad-based stakeholders.
- Develop strategic decision-making options, institutions and markets.
- Develop human and institutional capacity for innovation.
- Support a platform for agricultural innovation.

Box 1. Priorities in the ECOWAS region

In the ECOWAS region, the template was based on a policy document developed to highlight the agricultural research priorities of the sub-region. These priorities should lead to:

- Reduced dependence on imports of food and achieve food sovereignty.
- Producers involved in setting up markets.
- Jobs created, with guaranteed incomes.
- Production systems intensified, in a sustainable manner.
- Reduced vulnerability of West African countries by limiting factors of instability and regional insecurity.
- Appropriate funding mechanisms for sustainable management of natural resources such as water, wildlife, fisheries and forestry.
- Sound environmental management policies.

On the basis of these priorities, FARA engaged in a process of consultation to determine the research agenda that would be ideal for the Global Forum for Agricultural Research and Development 1 (GCARD1). The process was managed by the FARA Secretariat with the involvement of all its stakeholders including farmers, policy makers, national extension systems, private-sector operatives, universities and public national research institutions. Figure 1 below illustrates the different consultations that took place before GCARD1 and activities that it led to.

To make sure the ideas of different stakeholders were taken into account, consultations took place, involving FARA’s entire membership. The first consultation was electronic (dubbed “e-consultation”) and the second was a face-to-face meeting held at FARA headquarters in Accra. The goals of the consultations were to examine the priorities in the review document and either approve them or add others to the list. The consultations also identified research gaps and areas of greatest importance for capacity building.

Following the consultations, there was an agreement to concentrate on staples, such as maize, sorghum, millet and cassava but focusing on issues such as conservation, use and enhancement of genetic resources, integrated natural resource management, markets, institutions, information and up-scaling challenges and improving livelihoods in high stress/unstable environments. It was noted that the work on staples must be guided by these facts:

- Africa is characterized by countries with low average population density which leads to increases in transaction costs in agriculture
- Nearly 40 percent of Africa’s population live in land-locked countries
- There is an eroding human capital base in agricultural science, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.
  Apart from high attrition due to HIV/AIDS, 40 percent of all active scientists in sub-Saharan Africa are found in only five countries, while 25 countries share 20 percent of the active scientific work force.
African participants at the stakeholder consultations also noted that every major review of agricultural research and development in Africa has highlighted the importance of increasing the capacity of African agricultural scientists. For example, the World Bank-led work by Staatz and Dembele\(^3\) noted that of 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa for which data were available, half had fewer than 100 scientists (full time equivalents), while 40 percent of the scientists were working in just five countries. A study commissioned by FARA (FARA, 2007\(^4\)) found that a major cause of Africa’s slow progress in agricultural growth is poor capacity for innovation. However, African governments have continued to give little support to capacity building for agricultural research development. This weakness in the capacity of the National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) reduces the ability of national scientists to form meaningful and productive partnerships with scientists from advanced research institutions. What is missing is a strategy by national governments, their development partners and the CGIAR system to direct investments into building and retaining a new generation of agricultural scientists.

Another area in the system that requires urgent attention is the lack of coordination between research (i.e. the production of technology) and extension (i.e. the transmission of knowledge and information to the farmers). In many African countries, the research institutes and the extension organizations do not belong to the same ministries. More often than not, staffs of the research institutes receive higher compensation than those of the extension services. This situation leads to minimum interaction between the two important components of NARS.

The efforts to reduce food insecurity should not simply be efforts to increase crop production. It was mentioned during these consultations, for example, that NARS did not emphasize research on reducing undernourishment as part of the national research programmes. Research that links food security to human health has often been downplayed by agricultural research scientists.

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\(^4\)Africa’s capacity to build human and institutional capacity for the agricultural industry. FARA, 2007.
In the same line, researchers tend to neglect value-chain approaches. The success of the Presidential Initiative on Cassava in Nigeria, in which the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture played a leadership role, was cited as an example to be followed. There are two areas that seem to suffer from a deafening silence. Although due emphasis has been placed on research to promote access to markets, in sub-Saharan Africa, research on processing of farm produce is missing in all the national programs. Related to this is the absence of research to find ways to attract increased participation of the private sector in African agricultural research. These twin problems have been tackled by FARA’s sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Program. African stakeholders noted that at the national level, the “problems of tomorrow” (e.g. water scarcity, the effects of population pressure on the availability of arable land and climate change) are either completely off the radar or are not looked at in terms of their effects on the growth of agricultural production. Issues related to climate change are often assigned to the Ministry of the Environment rather than the Ministry of Agriculture.

To be fully functional as part of the national agricultural research system, the universities must change the ways that students are trained. The current training is not providing the knowledge and skills graduates need to secure fulfilling careers in agriculture and related industries. The FARA Secretariat is currently running a project (UniBRAIN) that is addressing this issue. The project aims to promote agricultural innovation and improve tertiary agribusiness education in Africa. In addition, special efforts must be made to encourage more women to get trained as agricultural scientists.

At GCARD 2010, held in Montpellier, the results of these consultations were amply discussed. The African situation was presented by the Chair of the Executive Board of FARA. In addition to stating the priorities for agricultural research in Africa, the following areas were highlighted as areas where capacity strengthening in the region is sorely needed: risk and vulnerability; institutional and policy dialogue, information, knowledge and innovation, land and water management, monitoring and impact assessment.

**Developing Africa’s Agricultural Research for Development agenda**

This GCARD process has energized the FARA Secretariat which today is actively helping African national governments to develop their CAADP Compacts and Investment plans. FARA also has decided to ensure that policy makers are more involved in the work they do. FARA is undertaking annual meetings with African policy makers and has held two ministerial dialogues with relevant ministers since 2010.

Research prioritization has led to better involvement of all partners in agricultural research for development and has fed into the new research priorities of the Consortium Centers within the CGIAR.

At the national level, more African governments are paying needed attention to agriculture. More than half of the countries have developed and signed their CAADP Country Compacts. The implementation of the investment plans showed that Africa still requires much capacity in many important areas. FARA is working as part of the national teams to help design strategies for implementing the national investment plans under CAADP.

Africa has turned the page. Agriculture is back on the development agenda and every country has recognized that following the principles contained in CAADP would help solve most of their development problems. In 2012, African participants are looking forward to GCARD2.

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*A notable exception is the work program of the Agricultural Research Center (ARC) of Egypt. In addition to having a viable program of work on water quality and use efficiency, the Center has a staff of 8,000 full-time research scientists of which 6,600 have a Ph.D. degree.*

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