

# Regional Research Networks in Africa

*Research networks, programmes and projects have been created on the basis of the fact that most African national agricultural research systems (NARS) are small and agricultural research is increasingly characterized by substantial economies of scale. Regionally coordinated initiatives therefore provide a means of aggregating effort across a number of small national domains into a research domain that can be addressed at an appropriate scale.*

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Agricultural research in Africa is coordinated by three sub-regional organizations (SROs), namely: ASARECA – the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa; CORAF/WECARD – Conseil Ouest Africain Pour la Recherche et le Développement Agricole / West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development; and SADC-FANR – Southern African Development Community/Food Agriculture and Natural Resource Department.

The three SROs founded the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) which is the apex body for Africa's agricultural research. Prior to the formation of FARA, research had been coordinated by the Special Program for African Agricultural Research (SPAAR) under the auspices of the World Bank. SPAAR was established to coordinate donors and their projects, avoid duplication and invest more in

building local capacity. It was also to promote reforms that would strengthen local institutions and ensure local ownership. SPAAR was disbanded after the creation of FARA. The aim of FARA and SROs is to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of agricultural research in the region, and thus to promote economic growth, food security and export competitiveness through productive and sustainable agriculture.

## The Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa – FARA

FARA is an umbrella organization that brings together major stakeholders in agricultural research and development in Africa. FARA complements the activities of national, international and sub-regional research institutions. It plays advocacy and coordination roles for agricultural research for development, while the NARS, Advanced Research Institutes (ARIs) and International Agricultural Research Centers (IARCs) develop improved technologies along the research-to-development continuum in their respective countries

Research on water harvesting at the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia in the Namib desert.



Photo: Willeke



To coordinate agricultural research in Africa FARA was founded. Its task is among others to bring scientists and other stakeholders together.

Photo: GlobalAware

## Southern African Development Community/Food Agriculture and Natural Resource Department – SADC-FANR

SADC-FANR membership constitutes the following countries: Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Its responsibility is to coordinate all aspects of regional research in food, agriculture and natural resources that is carried out through regional research networks. SADC-FANR was formerly known as the Southern African Centre for Cooperation in Agricultural Research and Training (SACCAR) established in 1984. Contact: <http://www.sadc.int>

In general, regional research networks, programs and projects in Africa are initiatives that are being implemented by national agricultural research institutions (NARIs) and cooperating partner institutes, mainly the international agricultural research centers (IARCs) of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). The status of these initiatives are at different stages of development in the three sub-regions. The major stakeholders that are working with FARA and the SROs are:

NARIs, ARIs, IARCs, universities, NGOs, private sector, farmers organizations, political bodies (e.g. African Union, NEPAD), government institutions, development partners and donors.

The creation of SROs is an act of will reflecting many forces:

- A recognition of the value of sub-regional and regional action;
- A desire to empower NARIs in their relations with ARIs and IARCs;
- The opportunity to add value to the work of the NARIs.

The added value of networking to the NARIs would be

- Identification of shared goals and promotion of economies of scale and scope through collaboration, specialization and sharing of results;
- Identification of regional public goods that would be under-produced in the absence of shared goals and regional mechanisms;
- Sharing of knowledge and experience with institutional innovations for more effective agricultural research for development (AR4D).

<sup>1</sup> RAIN is a network of ASARECA

and coverage areas. Contact: <http://www.fara-africa.org>.

## The Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa – ASARECA

ASARECA is a regional organization of the National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs) of ten member countries who established it as an incorporated association: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. It was established in September 1994.

ASARECA carries out its activities through 17 regional research networks, programmes and projects (NPPs). Most of these NPPs focus on specific commodities (e.g. beans, bananas), while others deal with cross-commodity agricultural topics (e.g. post-harvest technology, biotechnology). Others focus on natural resources

(e.g. land management, soil/water, plant genetic resources and trees), and two cut across all the above (i.e. policy, information). Contact: <http://www.asareca.org>

## The «Conseil Ouest Africain Pour la Recherche et le Développement Agricole» – CORAF / WECARD

CORAF membership includes NARS from twenty one member countries of West and Central Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Chad and Togo. It was established in 1987.

CORAF operates through networks, regional poles, research projects and base centres. These regional units carry out research on given topics. Contact: <http://www.coraf.org>