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SOME AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
INITIATIVES IN
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND
THE ROLE OF THE OAU

- By -

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SEMI-ARID FOOD GRAIN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

- S A F G R A D -

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

With the increasing deterioration of the food situation in Africa, several organizations - governmental, non-governmental, philanthropic, etc - have continued in their individual or collective endeavours to find solutions to this problem. Many believe that the solution lies more in the sectors of extension and production and, therefore, concentrate their resources in those sectors. While some believe that more resources should be devoted to research, others give consideration to all the sectors, but placing emphasis where they consider more deserving.

During the last few years, two major initiatives have emerged in agricultural research in sub-Saharan Africa. The first is by the World Bank through its Special Programme for African Agricultural Research (SPAAR). The other initiative is by the French Government through its Conference for Representatives for African Agricultural Research (CORAF).

S P A A R

The Special Programme for African Agricultural Research (SPAAR) was created since 1985 by the World Bank as an attempt to coordinate the funding of agricultural research in sub-Saharan Africa, through an informal group of donors. After more than five years, it was realized that the expectations that SPAAR would improve the effectiveness of coordination of donor funding of agricultural research had not been fully achieved. Most donors continued with their old habits of funding research activities in Africa only on the basis of their geopolitical preferences.

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In order to resolve certain types of problems regarding funding of agricultural research, SPAAR set up working groups to study the problems. Each working group was headed by the principal donor interested in the particular kind of problem. There were working groups on forestry research, education and training, networking, etc. The group on networking was headed by USAID. SAFGRAD's cooperation with SPAAR was linked up more closely with the special working group on networking.

African commodity networks were classified and prioritized according to certain SPAAR criteria before funding by SPAAR member donors could be recommended or implemented. The four crop commodity networks of SAFGRAD fully satisfied SPAAR requirements. However, some concern was expressed about the existence of two separate maize networks in West and Central Africa: the SAFGRAD maize network and the CORAF maize network. The need to have them harmonized had been expressed by the Council of NARS Directors and the Oversight Committee of SAFGRAD.

SPAAR Regional Frameworks for Action in Agricultural Research

After several meetings, SPAAR soon realized that even though its principal role was to strengthen national agricultural research capabilities through concerted efforts by the donor community, the direct involvement of the recipient countries was indispensable. Thus during its May 1990 meeting in Brussels, SPAAR agreed to set up regional agricultural research frameworks in sub-Saharan Africa. By this approach, it was hoped that action programmes could be developed which would receive the support of national governments, the international and regional research communities as well as donors.

The initiative was to involve sub-Saharan Africa starting first with Southern Africa (SADCC countries) and then the Sahel

(CILSS countries). This would then be followed by Coastal West Africa, Central Africa and Eastern Africa. As indicated by SPAAR, the choice of Southern Africa and the Sahel for initial action was based on the fact that they have functioned as cohesive regional organizations for long. Besides, they both have specialized services for coordinating agricultural research, namely the Southern African Centre for Cooperation in Agricultural Research (SACCAR) for Southern Africa and the Institute of Sahel (INSAH) for the Sahel.

The frameworks consist of drawing up regional research programmes aimed at strengthening the NARS, development of human resources, stabilizing research funding for NARS institutions and ensuring that the interphase between the NARS and the IARCs is improved. Since long-term development plans had been developed for both INSAH and SACCAR, the task of formulating the two regional frameworks was considerably facilitated.

The SPAAR Initiatives for the Sahel and Southern Africa

The meeting for the Sahel framework took place in January 1991 in Bamako, Mali. It was attended by national agricultural research directors and some university staff from the CILSS member countries as well as by representatives of the IARCs, regional organizations (including SAFGRAD), the private sector and donors.

Each national director made a presentation on the agricultural research programme of his country, covering its structure, research programme priorities, sources of funding, infrastructure, types of collaboration, etc. Similar presentations were made by the few university representatives who were present.

At the end of the discussions, specific areas which require strengthening in national agricultural research in the Sahel were outlined, while the various actions to be taken and the actors were

indicated. Before the close of the meeting, an outline of the action plan for strengthening agricultural research in the Sahel was formulated and an indicative time table proposed. The final plan is expected to be completed in October 1991.

A similar exercise had taken place with representatives of SACCAR for Southern Africa. The framework for action, prepared by a joint SACCAR/SPAAR task force was presented to SACCAR Board at its mid-year meeting on 11-14 April, 1991.

In its work programme presented during the Brussels meeting in May 1990, SPAAR indicated a series of meetings which it planned to organize to sensitize African policy makers about their role in supporting agricultural research. This included two meetings; one for African Ministers in-charge of Science and Technology and the other for Heads of State of African countries. A revised list of actions already taken by SPAAR and the next steps to be taken on supporting agricultural research in sub-Saharan Africa is annexed to this paper (Appendix I).

Evidence from SAFGRAD and similar organizations indicates that high-yielding, disease resistant varieties of several food crops which are well adapted to the various ecological zones, have been developed and are now readily available. Not only are the technologies for increasing food production in Africa available but the willing and hard-working African farmers as well. One of the greatest bottlenecks is therefore at the level of policy makers. If SPAAR, with financial power, is attempting to sensitize African policy makers on strengthening agricultural research, the OAU should provide its political umbrella and guidance to such an initiative. What is needed now is a change in policy by African Heads of State through the joint effort of OAU and the World Bank.

C O R A F

A Franco-African conference for agricultural research officials (CORAF) was organized four years ago in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire to discuss ways of strengthening cooperation in agricultural research among its members. Membership of CORAF has been limited to 15 French-speaking African countries and France. The African member countries include: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo. However, in response to appeals emanating from several sources (including SAFGRAD), the name was modified to "Conference for Representatives of African Agricultural Research" and its membership has recently been extended to non-francophone African countries which request for such membership. Since then, CORAF has established a number of research networks on maize, cassava, rice, cotton, drought, etc, with plans in progress to consider the addition of new networks on livestock and forestry.

Except for a few technical differences, the CORAF maize network involves the same scientists and countries as the maize network of OAU/SAFGRAD. The rice network of CORAF, so far, functions in exclusion of the West Africa Rice Development Association (WARDA); its network on cotton does not involve a major cotton-producing country like Nigeria. Consequently, this has led to some resentment of CORAF by several non-French-speaking African countries. Crop commodity networks, particularly in West and Central Africa, should be established with due consideration given to ecological zones which cut across political and linguistic boundaries.

Nonetheless, CORAF should be commended for filling certain gaps where vital leadership and coordination were needed but which were never provided by STRC or any other regional organization .

As a result of the limited SAFGRAD mandate to specific cereals within the semi-arid ecology, CORAF took the initiative to create networks on the other crops: cassava, cotton, rice and, soon, forestry and livestock.

The Need for a Coordinating Mechanism

When the SPAAR regional frameworks for action in agricultural research have been completed, there will be need for coordinating such initiatives in the five subregions. The experience accumulated by SAFGRAD during a period of more than ten years could be extremely useful.

In the three subregions of the Sahel, Coastal West Africa and Central Africa, the major agro-ecological zones run from West to East (Appendix II). Sorghum, for example, is grown by all the Sahelian countries and by most of those of Coastal West Africa. Maize is grown in all the countries of the three subregions. There are practically no crops that are grown exclusively in a single subregion. Accordingly, a single body is capable of coordinating agricultural research on the major food and industrial crops in the three subregions.

It must be emphasized that the above proposal is not advocating the creation of a new institution, but a reorganization of existing services. The implementation of such a proposal would minimize unnecessary duplication and maximize the use of scarce financial and human resources. It would also demonstrate the seriousness of the OAU in shifting its focus towards economic development and attainment of food self-sufficiency for Africa.

As far as Southern Africa is concerned, coordination of agricultural research is being effectively undertaken by the Southern African Centre for Cooperation in Agricultural Research (SACCAR) for the SADCC countries. For Eastern Africa, the

existence of the sorghum/millet research network (EARSAM) and the proposal by SAFGRAD of a liaison Officer to be based in Nairobi, could serve as the nucleus for strengthening agricultural research coordination in that subregion.

SAFGRAD COORDINATION OFFICE

OUAGADOUGOU

August, 1991

APPENDIX I.

SPAAR Initiative to Support Regional Agricultural Research
in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Chronology of Developments*

Actions Since Inception

July 1990	Preparation and Circulation of an Issues Paper on African Agricultural Research.
September 1990	"Brainstorming" Session in Washington, D.C. of Representatives from the SAHEL (CILSS) and Southern Africa (SADCC) Regions.
October 1990	Informal Meetings with Director-Generals of IARCs, and with SPAAR Members in Washington, D.C.
November 1990	Regional Workshop for the Southern Africa (SADCC) Region, Gaborone, Botswana.
January 1991	Regional Workshop for the Sahel (CILSS) Region in Bamako, Mali.
March 1991	Meetings (March 5 and 27) of the Informal SPAAR Steering Committee to Review the Frameworks for Action (FFAs) for the Sahel and SADCC Regions.

Next Steps

April 1991	Meeting of the SACCAR Board: Technical Validation by SACCAR of the FFA for the SADCC Region in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.
May 1991	Technical and Financial Validation of the FFAs by the Eleventh SPAAR Plenary Session in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.
June 1991	Meetings of NARS Directors and Policymakers from the Sahel (CILSS) Region (tentative): Technical Validation of the FFA for the Sahel.
July 1991	Political Validation by the Advisory Committee of the Global Coalition for Africa, Kampala, Uganda (tentative).
August 1991	Political Validation of the FFA for the SADCC Region by the SADCC Council of Ministers.

* Presented by SPAAR during its Eleventh Plenary Session, 13-14 May, 1991 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

August/September/ October 1991	In-Country Validation of the FFAs in the Sahel and SADDC Regions (tentative).
October 1991	Twelfth SPAAR Plenary Session in Washington, D.C. (tentatively scheduled for October 24- 25).
January 1992	Political Validation of the FFA for the Sahel by the CILSS Council of Ministers.

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