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**STRATEGY FOR TRANSFERRING NETWORK
COORDINATION AND LEADERSHIP TO NARS**

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STRATEGY FOR TRANSFERRING NETWORK COORDINATION AND LEADERSHIP TO NARS

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I. BACKGROUND

The achievements recorded under SAFGRAD-II, especially in terms of strengthening national research systems and facilitating the emergence of scientific and management leadership, must be considered for the decision to transfer the coordination of the four crop commodity networks to NARS. Arguments that warrant caution not to rush the transfer are based on the reality that most NARS lack qualified and experienced researchers even to sustain an active programme of their own. Moreover, lead NARS centres, in order to serve as technological base for network coordination, also require substantial improvement in managerial capability and institutional flexibility. On the other hand, building upon positive trends of NARS leadership development manifested during SAFGRAD II, the network entities are in general agreement that national systems should gradually assume full management of networks. This issue was amply discussed and documented in the Strategic Plan and in the report of the internal evaluation of SAFGRAD networks undertaken by the Oversight Committee.

Furthermore, at its sixth meeting (12-14 February, 1991), the Oversight Committee again considered its preferred two scenarios. These are:

- The transfer of current network coordinators from IARCS to OAU/SAFGRAD. Such staff would then be directly responsible to SCO and the networks.
- Selection of NARS scientists to serve as network coordinators but who will be posted to a NARS Lead Centre (or IARC) in a country other than their own.

The second scenario is considered more plausible for the transfer of network leadership and management to NARS. To attain this goal, the Oversight Committee examined:

- 1) The network activities already assumed by NARS during SAFGRAD II.

In general, the situation of NARS leadership in networking is summarized as follows:

Network Activities

Extent of Leadership Assumed by NARS.

- | | | |
|----|--|--------------------|
| a) | Policy guidance and management (NARS, OC, SCO) | Very good progress |
| b) | Priority setting of research programmes, determination of annual network activities, sites of implementation, etc. (SC of Networks). | Very good progress |
| c) | Budget control, decision for financial disbursement and management. | Less than average |
| d) | Generation of technology and technical backstopping for networking. | Less than average |
| e) | Coordination and supervision in the implementation of network programmes. | Average progress |
| f) | Resource support for network activities (in kind). | Average progress |

2) Probable Implications:

- a) Donor support may not be sustained since this requires building credibility and trust for proper management of funds and project execution. Special training during the transition phase is proposed to improve NARS management capabilities.
- b) NARS governments are expected to cover costs for major aspects of network activities (a long-term prospect).
- c) Technical support to networks from IARCs would be minimized since they may no longer receive financial support from donors for the networks.
- d) NARS will be expected to support the coordinators (covering basic salaries while being compensated by networks for assuming regional responsibilities). This is expected to happen by the end of the decade.
- e) NARS serving as technological base for networking are expected to contribute resources and to facilitate the movement of germplasm and mobility of scientists.

A transition phase of two to three years is therefore proposed during which the network partners (IARCs, SCO, NARS,)

could coordinate their efforts in discharging their respective responsibilities to enhance the transfer. The specific roles of the partners are outlined in the Strategic Plan document (pages 47-49).

II. Transition Phase Activities

In addition to the implementation of the regular programme of networks, the following activities, to further strengthen the NARS, may need to be carried out:

First Year

- 1.0. To undertake a detailed appraisal of the institutional suitability of certain Lead NARS to serve as network coordinating centres. The assessment would take into account research strength, comparative advantage, ecological representation (as one of the test sites to undertake research in order to develop technologies that could alleviate common constraints), managerial capacity (finance and project implementation), organizational and administrative flexibility; access to communication and ease of mobility of scientists and movement of germplasm.
- 2.0. To upgrade research managerial capabilities through training and analysis of case studies. The three priority areas are:
 - i) Provision of management training to staff of national institutions in order to establish sound financial and research project management systems. Initially, training (2-6 months) could be provided to national staff of prospective network coordinating centres which have been identified.
 - ii) Review of on-going collaborative research to propose medium and long-term programmes that could build a reliable technological base for network coordination (or research cooperation).
 - iii) With regard to network development, tasks of the IARCs may need to be realigned in order to sustain technical training and related research support.

The starting point for defining these research needs are the steering committee or sub-working groups of the respective networks.

- 3.0. To assess the previous mode of cooperation and linkages of network partners (SCO, IARCS, NARS) and redefine their respective roles based on current NARS institutional requirements.
- 4.0. Concurrently, to pursue the implementation of technical programmes of the respective networks.

Second Year

- 1.0. NARS - the Conference of Directors of Agricultural Research will be expected to provide policy guidance and to agree on the mode of collaboration, coordination and management of regional research through the networks.
- 2.0. Provision of financial and project management training for NARS participants (two sessions, each lasting 2-6 months).
- 3.0. Assessment of networks with regard to technical research strengths and weaknesses and to reorient programmes in order to benefit weak and relatively small NARS, etc.
- 4.0. Consideration of an OAU agricultural research co-ordination and management structure to be submitted by SCO.

Third Year

- 1.0. OAU/STRC to enter into negotiation with governments of network coordinating NARS to facilitate network operations, such as travel, movement of germplasm, and mobility of scientists (within the General Convention, Privileges and Immunities of the Organization of African Unity).
- 2.0. SCO, in collaboration with the respective Network Steering Committees and the IARCS, will search for potential candidates among NARS that could serve as Coordinators. Recruitment of such Coordinators would be based on international standards.
- 3.0. Appraisal of Networks based on established criteria.
- 4.0. Recruitment of NARS Coordinators to interphase (4-6 months) with outgoing Coordinators, to ensure a smooth transition.

III. NARS Technological Base for Network Coordination (Tentative Consideration).

As beneficiaries in networking activities, NARS are expected to gradually assume complete management of networks provided that during the next two decades donors and governments of respective countries sustain adequate financial support both for short and long-term training, improvement of NARS research infrastructure, etc. A commitment to support regional research by national governments and respective NARS institutions is crucial. They need to pool manpower and related research resources in order to alleviate common constraints to food production in the sub-region. On the other hand, to support agricultural development, NARS' decision to participate in network activities is also based on the assumption that a "critical research mass" effect can be attained, initially, at regional level which eventually can lead to the improvement of research capabilities of participating countries.

The functional linkages implicit in the SAFGRAD Network model (i.e. involving the national agricultural research systems, the IARCS, and the regional coordination agency of OAU) would ensure the evolution of networks towards sustainable regional research cooperation. During the next decade, priority should be given both by participating countries and donors to support graduate level training as a prerequisite to improve the pool of qualified researchers in the region in order to attain a "critical research mass" both at regional and national levels.

The network scheme depicted in Fig. 1, maintains linkages of the current network partners with possible redefined roles as the network coordination and management activities are transferred to national systems. For example, the relatively few stronger national programmes could be able to provide coordinators on a rotational basis (paying salaries and providing other emoluments) in the long-run.

The scheme also proposes the establishment of a "Research Officer's Post" by both IITA and ICRISAT in order to sustain technical backstopping for the maize, cowpea, sorghum and millet networks in West, Central and Eastern Africa.

With the assumption that adequate financial support could be made available for the implementation of the research programmes proposed in the Strategic Plan, and building upon the experience gained during SAFGRAD-II, a NARS coordinating base for networking could evolve as follows:

- a) The West and Central Africa Sorghum Network could be based in Mali, affiliated with the national research programme and the ICRISAT regional sorghum improvement programme.
- b) The West and Central Africa Cowpea Network could continue to be based in Burkina Faso using existing facilities in cooperation with INERA and with good affiliated activities with the cowpea improvement programme of IITA.
- c) The West and Central Africa Maize Network could continue to be based in Burkina Faso using existing facilities in cooperation with INERA and the IITA maize improvement programme.
- d) The Eastern Africa Sorghum and Millet Network could be based in one of the Lead NARS in the region, for example, Sudan, Ethiopia or Kenya, using the OAU umbrella and collaborating with an ICRISAT sorghum and millet improvement programme in that sub-region.
- e) The West and Central Africa Millet Network will need to be strengthened within SAFGRAD. It could be based in Niger in cooperation with INRAN and affiliated with ICRISAT Sahelian Centre.

The relationship and linkages of network partners within the framework of a NARS-driven network operation are depicted in Fig.1.

It should be noted that the above is only one of the alternatives. It may be modified or changed, based on current conditions of the networks and national research development needs.

In the particular case of the Eastern Africa Sorghum and Millet Network, the Coordinator must be appropriately housed in a convenient national agricultural research institution or in close vicinity to an ICRISAT regional sorghum improvement programme. In such a circumstance, there must be a properly negotiated mutual understanding whereby the Coordinator is enabled to carry out his regional assignment and has access to the station's service and support facilities, even if at nominal costs. In return, the research centre benefits from the research facilities provided by the Coordinator in support of Network activities.

f) Other Networks.

- . West African Farming Systems Research and SALWA Networks will continue to be based in Burkina Faso under the OAU/STRC-SAFGRAD umbrella.

IARCs' continued technical backstopping in research and training to networks is crucial (linkage projected in Fig. 1). IITA, for example, should continue to assist NARS in the technical management and development of maize and cowpea networks in West and Central Africa. It is expected that IITA would establish one Network Research Officer's Post to support NARS network coordinators for maize and cowpea based in different national research programmes.

Similarly, ICRISAT should continue to assist NARS in the technical management and development of sorghum and millet networks, both in Eastern Africa and in West and Central Africa. It is expected that ICRISAT would establish one Network Research Officer's Post to support NARS sorghum and millet network coordinators based also in different national research programmes.

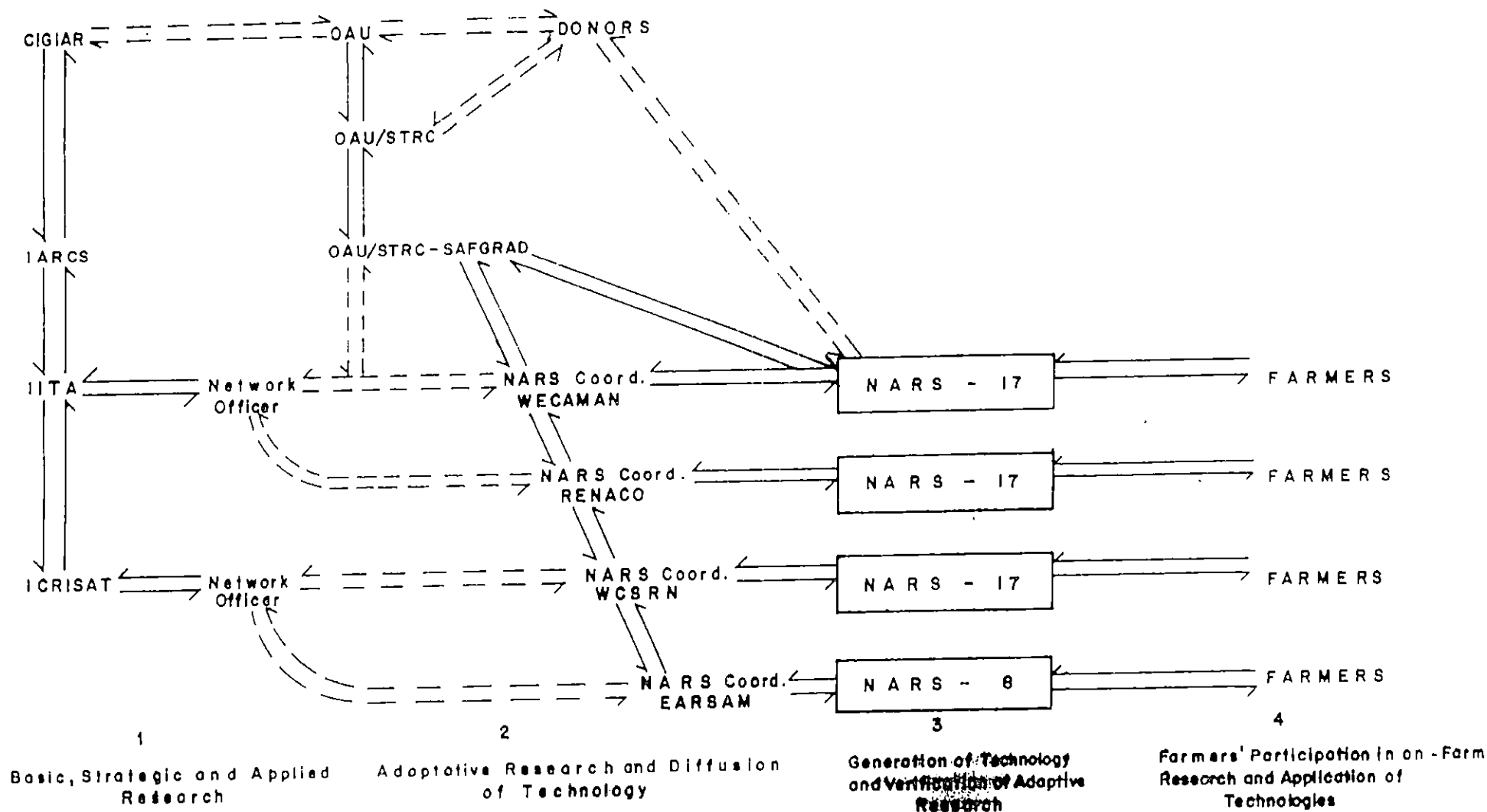
Proposed roles of IARC Network Research Officers.

- Assist NARS Network Coordinators in facilitating the flow of germplasm, development of collaborative projects, evaluation of regional trials, etc.
- Attend meetings of respective network Steering Committees to plan and review programme activities.
- Liaise training, seminar and workshop activities of the IARCs with those of Networks to minimize unnecessary duplications.
- Arrange joint scientific tours in consultation with NARS coordinators.

In conclusion, the extent of donor and government support to participating NARS during the next decade will determine future network sustainability in the region. To attain this important goal, however, the following stages of Network development are anticipated:

- i) During the transition phase, network entities should work very closely to implement aspects of the Strategic Plan defined as their specific responsibilities.
- ii) NARS coordinators recruited as SCO staff could be based at Lead NARS Centres or seconded to IARCs.
- iii) As the stage of network development improves, certain Lead NARS should be able to provide coordinators (paying salaries and other emoluments) in the long-run.
- iv) As many of the weak national research programmes become strengthened, collaborative research networks could evol-

ve into information exchange networks. Then costs for sustaining activities of networks can be reduced since the network secretariat, from its strong NARS data base, can facilitate the exchange of network information.



1 Network Scheme Depicting the Transfer of Network Coordination and Management to NARS. The Technical and Administrative Linkages of Network Partners are Indicated.

Case Note :

- Solid lines indicate direct administrative and management connections
- Broken lines indicate technical and collaborative connections.
- Donors - broken line connections indicate support through bilateral or regional arrangements
- NARS Coordinators are based at National Centres in different countries other than their own.
- For the purpose of emphasis, the scheme considers only food grain networks.
- Network Officers could be based at the headquarters or at regional programmes of IARCs. They could provide sustained essential technical linkages with IARCs for effective coordination of network activities.

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