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STRENGTHENING THE MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY OF THE

SAFGRAD COORDINATION OFFICE*

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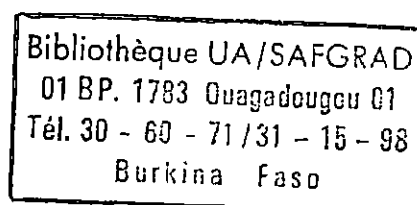
Introduction

The activities of the SAFGRAD Coordination Office have evolved during the last decade in relation to the development of national agricultural research systems (NARS) and the relevant international agricultural research centres (IARCs) in the geographic mandate zone of SAFGRAD. When SAFGRAD was established in 1977, the research capacity of most NARS, especially in sorghum, millet, maize and cowpea in the semi-arid regions was generally poorly developed. Besides, activities of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) were limited to the humid ecologies, while the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) had not yet established meaningful research activities in Africa. In addition, the number of funding and implementing agencies operating at national and regional levels through bilateral and multilateral agreements had so increased that despite their positive effects on agricultural development, fragmentation of national research efforts and duplication were soon evident. Thus SAFGRAD was established to play the vital role of:

- a) regional coordination of agricultural research and
- b) strengthening of national agricultural research programmes and transfer of appropriate crop production technologies to farmers.

Since the 1980s, however, IITA has strengthened its role and activities with the NARS, particularly in West and Central Africa. ICRISAT has since built two regional centres in Africa - one in Sadore (Niger) for West Africa and the other at Matupos (Zimbabwe) for Southern Africa. The research capabilities of most NARS have increased considerably. Consequently, direct SAFGRAD involvement with ICRISAT and IITA in research was phased out at Kamboinse

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Agricultural Research Station in Burkina Faso where two teams of researchers, funded through SAFGRAD, were working on various problems of maize, cowpea, sorghum and millet

The Roles of the SAFGRAD Coordination Office

Even though SAFGRAD's major role has now been focused on the management of collaborative research networks since September 1986, this evolutionary process did not result in a corresponding reduction in the responsibilities of the SAFGRAD Coordination Office (SCO). On the contrary, the work load of the SCO has even increased as reflected in the following roles which it is expected to play, namely to:

1. Provide political and administrative support to research networks by facilitating the mobility of germplasm, scientists and organization of workshops and steering committee activities;
2. organize appropriate workshops and conferences and meetings of the Council of NARS Directors and Management Committee of SAFGRAD;
3. sensitize appropriate ministries of member states and institutions to allocate more resources to agricultural research;
4. solicit funds from donors to help increase financial support to research networks and to related research activities of NARS;
5. facilitate greater cooperation among NARS, between NARS and IARCs and other relevant institutions in Africa and abroad;
6. provide technical translation and documentation services and prepare SAFGRAD periodic reports, newsletter and other publications for dissemination to NARS and other relevant services;

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7. implement recommendations of the Council of NARS Directors and the Management Committee;
8. enhance NARS leadership in the management of research networks;
9. plan and prepare SCO and network budgets and carry out accounting functions for the SCO;
10. strengthen existing research networks and facilitate the organization of new ones under the OAU umbrella;
11. coordinate short-term training programmes of the different networks;
12. fill research gaps by supporting NARS in research activities of their respective needs;
13. strengthen liaison with the host government and member states of SAFGRAD;

Permanent Status for SAFGRAD

The SCO serves as a secretariat to the Council of National Agricultural Research Directors, the Management Committee as well as Steering Committees of the different networks. It provides a forum to NARS to address common research and other issues of common interest and formulate regional cooperative research programmes.

If SAFGRAD is to fulfill the roles outlined above, for the benefit of its member countries, then a permanent institutional status is highly desirable. This wish has been expressed on several occasions by the former consultative and Technical Advisory Committees of SAFGRAD as well as by the Council of NARS Directors. Even after NARS capabilities have been strengthened, there would always be need for networking, training, workshops and conferences, etc which would need the services of such a permanent coordination agency - as had been proposed for SAFGRAD.

Present Organizational Structure of the SCO

The organizational effort of the SCO should be considered against the background of the functions it is expected to perform (as already indicated above) and the goals to be achieved in the context of the special African and international environment within which SAFGRAD operates.

Whereas overall SAFGRAD management is achieved through the Organization of African Unity, the Council of NARS Directors and the Management Committee, the implementation of recommendations from these bodies is accomplished by the SCO, based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso and headed by an International Coordinator. Within this office, the only other senior management personnel are a Director of Research, a Financial Controller and an Accountant. They are assisted by a Senior Project Advisor (USAID), a Personnel/General Services Officer, a Documentalist/Information Officer, a Translator - all three of them locally recruited - and a small core of local support staff.

Out of the five Coordinators of the research networks managed by SAFGRAD, only three (West and Central African Maize and Cowpea Networks and West African Farming Systems Research Network) are based in Ouagadougou. The Coordinator of the East African Sorghum/Millet Network (EARSAM) is based at the OAU/IBAR Office in Nairobi, Kenya, while the one for the West and Central African Sorghum Research Network was transferred by ICRISAT from Burkina Faso to Mali to work with one of the two ICRISAT West Africa sorghum teams. [The other sorghum team is located near Kano in Northern Nigeria]. It would be recalled that the Council of NARS Directors, during its first conference, had recommended that Network Coordinators should be based as close as possible to the SCO for effective management of the networks.

SAFGRAD Operating Environment

The present mandate area of SAFGRAD extends across the semi-arid zones of 26 sub-Saharan African countries. Communication systems are rather inefficient while air travel is unreliable. Compounded

to these difficulties are the distinct differences in administrative procedures and political ideologies in the various SAFGRAD member states. Not only should these differences be known but one must keep abreast of the evolving situations which inevitably affect efficient coordination. All these problems are very real barriers to easy coordination of SAFGRAD operations, which should not be underestimated.

Space at the SCO has become so limited that the only alternative was to look for additional office space away from the SCO for the West African FSR Network. An appeal has since been made to the Government of Burkina Faso to provide adequate space for the SCO and the various networks currently (or anticipated) under its management.

The scope of work and the difficulties of the operating environment make it imperative for the SCO to be adequately strengthened and staffed with well qualified, internationally respected and competent senior staff who should be provided with sufficient material resources to carry the SAFGRAD work load.

Recommended Organizational Structure

Several changes in the organizational structure of SAFGRAD in general and the SCO in particular have been proposed during several policy meetings and consultant studies, all in an effort to strengthen the SCO to implement its Africa-wide programme more effectively.

The structure recommended below is based on the following key issues:

- i) The need to transform SAFGRAD into a permanent Agricultural Research and Development Agency of the OAU.
- ii) The need to strengthen the SCO, headquarters of this Agency, with key staff to enable it cope with the workload assigned to it.
- iii) Ease of effective coordination of activities throughout its vast geographic mandate.

In the proposed organizational structure (Fig. 2), a few additional management posts have been added to cope with the SAFGRAD workload. It is assumed, budget permitting, that each of them would be assisted by appropriate support staff. The additional staff, as recommended by the Management (Oversight) Committee during its August 1988 meeting, include the following:

- a) Planning and Project Formulation Officer
- b) Administrator
- c) Liaison officer for East and Southern Africa
- d) Training and Information Officer
- e) Translator (French to English)

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The success of SAFGRAD is judged mainly from the effective and timely services rendered to NARS either directly or through the networks. To carry out its main tasks of liaison with NARS donors, IARCs, OAU and other roles expected of SAFGRAD, there must be a competent Administrator to relieve the International Coordinator of daily routine chores so that the latter can play his full role. The Administrator will take charge of personnel matters, employment and research contracts, travel arrangements for SAFGRAD staff, consultants and visitors and deputize for the International Coordinator on administrative matters during the latter's absence.

The Planning and Project Formulation Officer will be expected to assist in the processing and finalizing research proposals to be submitted to potential donors - He will assist in the planning and monitoring of the implementation of the overall SAFGRAD programme.

Strengthening SAFGRAD Services to East and Southern Africa

The vastness of the SAFGRAD mandate area together with present problems of communication, present major difficulties in effectively coordinating SAFGRAD activities from its headquarters in Ouagadougou. Although it would have been ideal to propose two

regional offices - one for West and Central Africa and the other for East and Southern Africa - such a proposal would not be feasible due to financial constraints. Since most of the present SAFGRAD activities (including four out of five networks managed by SAFGRAD) are concentrated in West and Central Africa, the SAFGRAD office in Nairobi should be strengthened and the number of networks and related services increased for the benefit of NARS in East and Southern Africa. Thus SAFGRAD presence would be better felt not only in providing direct assistance to NARS but by encouraging more collaboration and mutual assistance among the NARS themselves.

Pigeon pea is becoming an important crop in East and Southern Africa, thanks to the increased involvement of ICRISAT. In discussions with some NARS and ICRISAT personnel, a pigeon pea collaborative research network was proposed. Fully aware of current financial constraints and the fact that this crop is commonly grown in the same ecologic zone as sorghum, the EARSAM Coordinator can also serve as Coordinator of the proposed network, pending its full development and availability of funds.

A regional or Liaison Officer for East and Southern Africa, based in Nairobi, will be responsible for coordinating SAFGRAD activities in that region and thus allowing the Network Coordinator to concentrate his energy on sorghum millet and pigeon pea - in collaboration with ICRISAT's technical backstopping. This post is also justified by recent prospects of a SAFGRAD/CIMMYT maize network and a SAFGRAD/SACCAR farming systems research network in the same region.

The Regional Officer will therefore provide back-up support to the networks, by initiation and/or assisting to organize workshops seminars, short-term training (in collaboration with the Training and Information Officer at the SCO), etc. He will facilitate mobility of germplasm, other related research materials and personnel in the region. In general, he will assist network coordinators in promoting SAFGRAD activities.

Special Support to Networks

For SAFGRAD to continue to function as a coordinating body to networks, it must be able to produce the kinds of services required

for the smooth running of the networks. SAFGRAD also serves as a secretariat to the Council of Agricultural Research Directors, the Oversight Committee as well as the Steering Committees of networks. It provides a forum to NARS to address common research issues and formulate regional cooperative research programmes. If, as it is expected, network responsibilities would shift more and more towards NARS, then an indigenous coordinating body like SAFGRAD should be fully developed and strengthened so that it can:

1. Provide networks and network coordinators with the kind of information needed for conducting their regular activities;
2. provide some services which might be too costly to obtain at the level of each network;
3. conduct workshops, seminars and conferences and provide other back-up services to the coordinators;
4. facilitate the exchange of information among networks through timely publication of network deliberations and proceedings, etc.;
5. Solicit financial support on behalf of networks;
6. Assist NARS in discharging roles assigned to them by the networks, such as serving as lead centres for generating appropriate technology.
7. provide a service to follow-up on the progress of the networks.

A. Creation of Data base on NARS

"One of the major constraints for agricultural researchers in developing countries", notes the 1987 CTA annual report, "is the lack of access to scientific and technical information which is indispensable for the identification, implementation and evaluation of research programmes".

Voluminous but scattered information is available on national research resources and capabilities and on results of research activities carried out by NARS, IARCs, bilateral and regional agencies. Most of the available data is not tuned to the needs of research institutes and scientists engaged in semi-arid agriculture. The type of research information that would be collected to serve NARS would be based on research and development requirements of the semi-arid region. If it expected that experts in this field will initially assist in determining the kind of information to be collected, processed, documented and disseminated. Globally, the information data base could be initiated by: serving, sorting out and synthesized available data pertaining to semi-arid agriculture by linking to established data sources of ILCA, ICRISAT, ICRAF, CIRAD, CILSS, FAO, CIMMYT, NARS and other relevant organizations.

On a regular basis, data would be compiled and processed on existing research institutions and technology transfer systems. The initial inventory would include, manpower, publications of various categories, data on diverse projects, list of on-going research programmes, extension agencies, etc. The work of university-affiliated institutions and non-gouvernmental agencies related to the semi-arid ecology would be assembled, processed for publication and distribution. A data processing system would be acquired, or preferably, the WAFSRN facilities would be complemented. The focus of the project would be to ensure a continuous flow of technical information to NARS institutions, universities and, on demand, to various development agencies and scientists. A senior documentalist would be require to realize this project during its first two years. Provision for this post has already been made by the West African Farming Systems Research Network (WAFSRN).

B. Publication Services to Facilitate Exchange of Information

The exchange of information between institutions and researchers is very limited. Newsletters, Research Briefs, and

Highlights etc., are regularly produced largely by IARC agencies. Similar publications covering NARS activities are virtually lacking. Several conferences, workshops and symposia are held on a wide range of topics all over the African Continent but the proceedings are often published very late.

Furthermore, their distribution also tends to be confined mainly to specialists. Research information published at the appropriate time and readily available to the researchers remains an essential tool for the design and implementation of research. It is also useful for professional training, reduces wasteful duplication and raises the standard and quality of agricultural research. Availability and widespread dissemination of research information to researchers increases their awareness of the range of research activities taking place within and outside their region and reduces scientific isolation.

There is very obvious absence of sustained publications of agricultural journals where researchers and technicians in semi-arid sub-Saharan Africa could regularly publish their research findings. The regular publication and effective distribution of agricultural journals, bulletins and proceedings of specialised scientific meetings would provide African scientists with a "home base" opportunity to publish and disseminate their research findings to a truly relevant audience.

SAFGRAD's objectives are regional coordination of research and strengthening of national and regional programmes through training, workshops, conferences, seminars, etc. Publication and effective dissemination of research information are recognized as powerful tools for facilitating SAFGRAD's efforts in achieving these objectives. These strengthening of a publication and information service within SAFGRAD would contribute significantly to reducing scientific isolation of researchers in semi-arid Africa.

SAFGRAD would, therefore improve its capacity to publish various documents both in English and French. As a centre for the coordination and management of networks, research results, deliberations of each network steering committee and workshop proceedings need to be timely published and distributed. This includes the publication of the SAFGRAD Newsletter. Proceedings of continent-wide symposia are occasional items that could be published as books. In order for SAFGRAD to improve its services of publication, it needs to recruit an Editor and another Translator (French to English).

C. Training, organization of Seminars, Workshops and Conferences

The critical bottleneck in the rapid development of many NARS, based on contacts with NARS officials and discussions during the last Management Committee meeting, is the acute reduction in the number of academic training possibilities for national scientists. In order to revive training at higher degree level (M.Sc Ph.D or their equivalent) training as one of the ways of strengthening NARS capabilities, the SCO intends to focus more attention on this problem in collaboration with the IARCs and universities in Africa and abroad.

If the number of networks to be managed by SAFGRAD would increase, which is most likely to be the case, this would inevitably lead to an increase in the number of seminars, workshops and conferences to be organized by the SCO, for which a Training and Information Officer would be suitable.

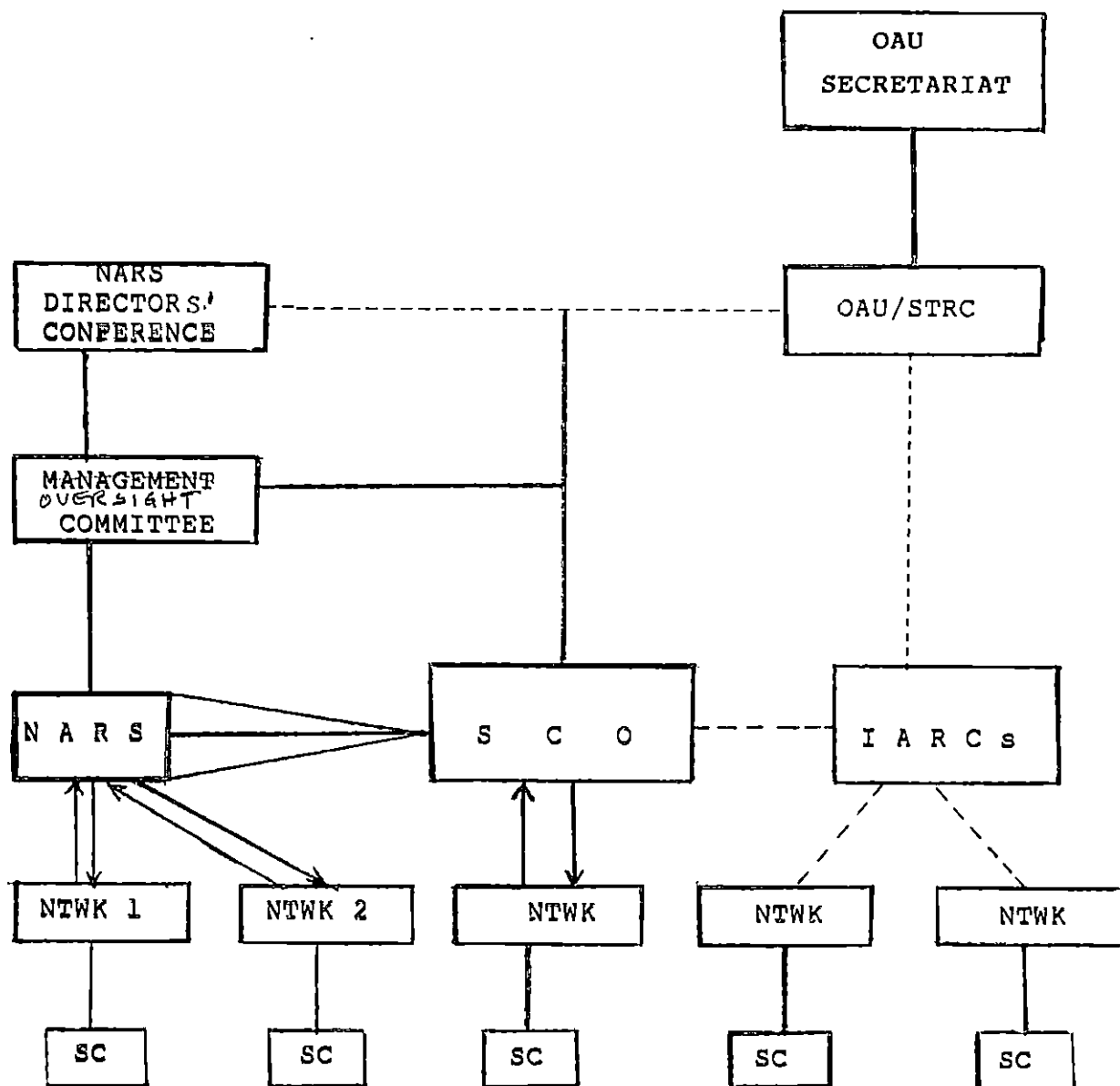
Such a person would be responsible for logistic arrangements for the meetings, follow-up of air tickets, arrangements for hotel and conference hall reservations, etc. The person would also maintain a list of such meetings to be organized by SAFGRAD as well as those by other cooperating organizations. This would ensure better coordination and avoid two or more important meetings being arranged around the same period.

To reduce the excessive cost of interpretation, the translators can also be used as interpreters especially for meetings of short duration with limited number of participants. SAFGRAD has succeeded in bringing African scientists of different linguistic origins together. This aspect should be maintained and reinforced.

D. Follow-up of Network Activities

The creation of networks should be accompanied by effective assessment methods of their effectiveness. Periodic meetings of network coordinator would be organized, for example annually, by SAFGRAD to enable coordinators to share their experiences in network coordination. From discussions during such meetings, major constraints relating to the implementation of network programmes would be identified and possible solutions worked out. Follow-up methods could also be designed to enable coordinators and other interested parties to assess the output of networks during specific periods. This will avoid network activities from becoming just routine performances while ensuring that they become innovative, productive and effective.

Fig. 1: SAFGRAD ORGANIZATIONAL (MANAGEMENT) CHART



- OAU - Organization of African Unity
- STRC - Scientific, Technical and Research Commission
- NARS - National Agricultural Research Systems
- SCO - SAFGRAD Coordination Office
- IARCS - International Agricultural Research Centres
- NTWK - Network
- SC - Steering Committee

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