

Background

The GFAR Constituent Assembly brought together over 100 representative stakeholders from all sectors and all regions, to consider and renew the role, purpose and governance of GFAR. This landmark Assembly formed a key step in a process of governance review, reform and renewal of the Global Forum, responding to the fact that much has changed in the world of agricultural research and innovation since the Forum was first established in 1996.

Participants in the Assembly were selected from each region by Regional Fora and networks, and globally, as involving a legitimate and representative cross-section of organizations and networks, as identified by the multi-stakeholder Strategic Governance Working Group. They included farmers' organizations, consumer associations, NGOs/CSOs, the private sector in various forms, national public research and rural advisory services, higher education, Regional Fora for agricultural research and innovation, FAO and other multilateral organizations, international agricultural research centres, women's groups, youth groups, development banks and foundations, and financing and technical partners. Participants included those long familiar with the Global Forum and those new to the forum and its partners. The GFAR Constituent Assembly was made possible through financial support from the European Commission and the support of FAO as host of the GFAR Secretariat.

The Assembly was structured around four Discussion Papers:

Renewing GFAR's Role and Purpose

Redefining Collective Action

Reframing Governance

Resourcing the Global Forum

The Discussion papers were prepared by a multi-stakeholder Strategic Governance Working Group, drawn from the GFAR Steering Committee. The Discussion Papers were made publicly available and discussed in webinars in advance of the Assembly and provided the background and context for the issues to be discussed and decisions requested of the participants.

The Assembly Process

Together, these participants explored and considered the strategic role and direction, mechanisms, and future governance and resources, required of the Global Forum, so that all

stakeholders can work more effectively together to address the needs set out in the GCARD Road Map. The Global Forum uses mechanisms of collective advocacy, partnership, capacity building and knowledge sharing, to ensure that agricultural research and innovation processes serve the desired futures of local communities and are responsive to the development needs of producers and consumers, in particular among the resource-poor.

Short dynamic talks, by speakers covering the spectrum of participants, introduced and framed each of the working sessions, based around the four Discussion Papers. These were followed by very active and participatory round table sessions, exploring and brainstorming each segment, with participants rotating around to inspire new ideas. These sessions delivered really useful outputs in relation to GFAR's role and purpose, collective action, governance and resourcing, that then formed the re-shaping of GFAR.

A meeting of the existing GFAR Steering Committee and others, held during the Assembly, was also very helpful in formulating and refining the renewed vision and mission for GFAR and shaping development of the new governance arrangements, in line with the decision of the Assembly.

Using an anonymous electronic voting system, participants were able to vote on whether they agreed with the changes proposed by the Assembly. In the final votes, over 90% of votes cast by participants, from very diverse sectors, agreed with the changes and with GFAR's renewed role, a very strong endorsement of the changes proposed and a great recognition of the value and 'ownership' of GFAR among all those involved in agricultural research and innovation. For full transparency, any opinions that did not concur with a particular decision were expressed in plenary. One issue discussed was whether to change the Global Forum's name to better reflect the revised Vision and Mission. It was decided not to change the Global Forum's name at present, but rather to retain the acronym and find a supporting 'tagline' that would more accurately reflect the reformed Forum.

Conclusions

This landmark Assembly has provided a resounding endorsement of the reform and renewal of GFAR:

1. The Assembly redefined the role and purpose of the Global Forum through strong agreement (94% agreement¹) on a new **Vision:**

“The Global Forum makes agri-food research and innovation systems more effective, responsive and equitable, towards achieving Sustainable Development outcomes”

And **Mission:**

¹ Of those who voted

“Partners in the Global Forum, at national, regional and international levels, advocate for, and catalyse Collective Actions that strengthen and transform agri-food research and innovation systems”

2. A formal basis was agreed (91% agreement) for the definition and basis of **GFAR Collective Actions**², a key operational mechanism for the Global Forum. Specifically, it was agreed that:

“A GFAR collective action is a multi-stakeholder programme of work at national, regional or international level, initiated by three or more partners and prioritized by the Global Forum, always including producers and with a particular focus on women and youth.

Partners agree to commit and generate resources together, in actions or advocacy that strengthen and transform agri-food research and innovation systems towards shared demand-driven development aims and which add value through their joint actions.

The Global Forum’s collective actions and their outcomes must be publicly recognized as contributing to the objectives of the Global Forum and the GCARD Road Map. Progress must be reported and shared with other partners through the Forum.”

3. Composition of the Global Forum: The issue of membership of the Forum, including the possibility of paying fees was discussed, but a fee payment basis was ultimately considered inappropriate, given the need to retain the open and inclusive nature of the Forum and the transaction cost of operating such a scheme.

Instead, institutions will be encouraged to become Partners in GFAR. Stakeholders from national, regional and global organizations will identify themselves as national, regional and global partners of the Global Forum by expressing formally their alignment with GFAR’s Mission and Vision.

4. A new Governance structure is now agreed (96% agreement) that includes:

The GFAR Partner Assembly, meeting every three years as part of the Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD). Constituencies of Partners coming from the regions will nominate participants to the Partner Assembly. The Partner Assembly is composed of Global Partners, Regional Fora

²These are a group's steps or actions taken while working toward a common goal. When individuals engage in collective action, the strength of the group's resources, knowledge and efforts combines all parties to more readily achieve the shared goal.

Partners and Partners nominated by regional constituencies. All Partners are accountable to their constituencies.

A multi-stakeholder Steering Committee will meet every year between meetings of the Partner Assembly. The Steering Committee is composed of global partners, Regional Fora and Partners from other constituencies, selected by the Partner Assembly.

The Steering Committee will organize itself as a body and through standing committees. The reformed Steering Committee will decide what sub-committees it may, or may not, require to ensure effective operation and accountability in all respects.

Until the new governance comes into place, the existing Steering Committee will maintain its role and responsibilities.

5. GFAR's role in regard to resourcing the transformation and strengthening of national research and innovation capacities was discussed and agreed upon (92% agreement). ***Participants in the Assembly recognized the need for additional and new forms of investment in national agri-food research and innovation systems and consider this a priority for advocacy through and by the Global Forum.*** Possible mechanisms for this will now be explored with a range of funding partners.

The Assembly has strongly established the legitimacy, governance, role and purpose of the Global Forum. As expressed by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) following the meeting: ***“(The Assembly) was able to deliver some really useful outputs in relationship to role and purpose, collective action, governance and resourcing. There also seemed strong endorsement and willingness for all partners to be engaged in the ongoing process to deliver what we all want to achieve – a world with less poverty and hungry where agriculture plays a central, impactful role. So, an excellent step forward on the path to reform – a path ACIAR will remain interested in staying involved.”***

Follow-up

The mandate of GFAR is now strongly approved, with broader representation and a clear, strong basis for GFAR Collective Actions. A series of follow-up actions will now be put in place to implement these reforms. These include:

- All participants are encouraged to sign up as GFAR Partners and encourage others to do so. A web-based system for signing up as a GFAR Partner will be implemented.
- Systematic follow-up with invitees to the Constituent Assembly, and with other Partners in GFAR, will mobilise constituencies at global and regional levels for the Partners' Assembly.

- The functional linkage between FAO and GFAR, reinforced through the Assembly, will be further elaborated through discussion and action at high level in FAO and with Member Nations.
- GFAR's agreed role in advocating and promoting greater and better investment in national research and innovation systems will be pursued as a collective action in demand-driven national contexts, with a range of funding and implementing partners.
- The existing Steering Committee will meet prior to the GCARD3 (probably in Rome, in early December), to agree plans for the Partner Assembly
- The Partner Assembly will be planned as an intrinsic part of the GCARD3 event in early 2016.
- The GFAR Charter will now be revised and presented for consideration by the Partner Assembly.
- A full report of the meeting will be produced.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the efforts of the Strategic Governance Working Group and Secretariat in organizing the meeting and preparing the Discussion Papers, APAARI for managing the logistics on the ground, and our sponsors, particularly the EC and FAO, for their support. Thanks go to each and every participant, particularly our speakers during the event, for really engaging and contributing such valuable points to the discussion. This was a truly international, multi-stakeholder meeting, where everyone could participate equally, exemplifying the spirit and value of being part of GFAR.