



# Reform & Renewal

Constituent Assembly 24-26 August 2015

## *Renewing GFAR's Role and Purpose*

*Discussion Paper #1*

GFAR Strategic Governance Working Group  
July 2015

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**Summary:** *In August 2015, stakeholders of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) will come together as a Constituent Assembly to consider the strategic direction and future governance of the Forum. To help guide and inform discussion, background papers have been prepared on each of the four topics to be addressed at the meeting.*

*This paper explains **renewing the role and purpose of GFAR**, our evolution as a multi-stakeholder Forum focussed on agricultural innovation encompassing the environment, economy and society in every part of the value web. This leads to consideration of how we can all work more effectively together to deliver development outcomes for the rural poor.*

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## Introduction

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The Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) has a critical role to play in the future of agriculture, as a collective movement for change, articulating the needs of the poor, promoting basic human rights to food and nutrition security, enabling viable rural livelihoods and generating resilient and sustainable productive systems.

The Global Forum is not a stand-alone institution, but a convening and catalytic mechanism for change, a Virtual Organization<sup>1</sup> composed and driven by networks, fora and institutions from all stakeholder sectors involved in agricultural research, extension, education and enterprise, from farmers and consumers to researchers and multilateral organizations and from NGOs to the private sector. As a worldwide network encompassing stakeholders from many different sectors with many different viewpoints and perspectives, achieving these goals requires effective and efficient ways of working.

In 2013 the GFAR Steering Committee commissioned the MANNET Consultancy to look at the issues and challenges facing GFAR governance and to make recommendations to strengthen it in the immediate and medium-term. The resulting report led to the current review of new structures and institutional roles required of a renewed GFAR. The aim is to better align GFAR's governance with the realities of complex systems involving many and diverse actors, and of catalyzing the multi-stakeholder initiatives required of effective agricultural innovation in addressing the future of agriculture, agri-food systems and hence of rural communities themselves.

The GFAR Steering Committee (SC) has begun a change process, setting up the Strategic Governance Working Group (SGWG) to lead a process of strategic reflection and renewal, looking at the issues raised by the review as they impact on governance. The SGWG has prepared four discussion papers for the consideration of those attending the Constituent Assembly, on four inter-related themes.

1. **Renewing GFAR's Role and Purpose**
2. Redefining Collective Action
3. Reframing Governance
4. Resourcing the Global Forum

**Much has changed in the nearly two decades since GFAR was first established, including GFAR's Role and Purpose in transforming national systems of agricultural innovation and in giving voice to society in determining the future needs of agriculture and rural development. The purpose of this paper is to explain how GFAR's role is evolving as a multi-stakeholder forum, working with all actors in agricultural and agri-food innovation systems, to improve development outcomes for rural communities. Understanding GFAR's changing role and focus leads logically to further consideration (Discussion Paper 2,3 and 4) of how we can to meet our responsibilities more effectively, while ensuring the active participation of all relevant sectors.**

As part of this process of reform and renewal, it is timely to re-examine our ways of working. GFAR provides its constituencies the mechanism to engage in collective actions where they can bring their capabilities together for development success. But what constitutes a collective action? How can we ensure that our actions are truly inclusive and equitable and that every relevant stakeholder has a seat at the innovation table? How will these actions be resourced, collectively?

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<sup>1</sup>A dynamic set of individuals or institutions defined around a set of resource-sharing rules and conditions. Structurally, a virtual organization is composed of partnership webs of disseminated organizational entities or self-governing institutions. Composite partners share some common concerns and requirements, but may vary in size, scope, duration, sociology, and structure.

These latter topics are covered in Discussion Paper 2, while Discussion Paper 3 deals with the subject of governance and proposes two options for consideration. Discussion paper 4 returns to the question of how to resource collective action.

## **The Challenge for Agricultural Research and Innovation**

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The world faces unprecedented and complex challenges. One billion people go hungry every day and 1.4 billion live in extreme poverty. At the same time, over 1 billion people are overweight or obese, and suffering from diet-related disorders, complications and related disabilities. The challenges of food insecurity, malnutrition, changing climates, trade flows, protracted crises and poor governance all impact on agricultural development, livelihoods and economic growth.

Processes of innovation and research have delivered significant benefits in agricultural and rural development, but huge challenges remain, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, which together account for the majority of the world's 870 million hungry people. Urgent action is needed if we are to feed a potential nine billion people by 2050 with safe, healthy, sustainable food.

Smallholder producers and rural communities have a vital role to play in setting the agenda and as innovators in their own right. Three quarters of farms in developing countries are less than one hectare in size. They need access to adequate nutrition – particularly for mothers and infants – and the skills, tools, capacities and enabling environment to grow out of poverty, increase their incomes and improve their families' quality of life.

The Sustainable Development Goals recognize these chronic needs and set ambitious targets for delivering tangible outcomes in these areas. Meeting them will require multiple partners working together at many levels, towards mutually-owned outcomes that benefit the poor, in particular the 500 million resource-poor smallholder farming families of the world.

There is an urgent need to better harness agricultural knowledge and innovation, whether from formal or informal systems, to help eradicate hunger and malnutrition, alleviate poverty and ensure sustainable productive environments. However, national agricultural innovation systems are not yet realizing their full potential.

As the Global Forum, we have to examine the reasons why apparently effective products of agricultural innovation - technologies, tools, processes, systems, policies, etc. - have not yielded the results expected. The Global Forum must explore how smallholder farmers and smaller scale agro-entrepreneurs can more directly engage in and benefit from processes and institutions of agricultural and agri-food innovation and create national capabilities for self-determination and sustainable rural development. The enabling institutional and economic environment for farmers to take up and share innovation must also be addressed, risk factors and constraints confronted, and new capacities, mutual trust and understanding created at all levels within agricultural systems.

## The Evolution of GFAR

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GFAR was established in 1996 to:

***“To mobilize all the stakeholders involved in agricultural research for development and support their efforts to alleviate poverty, increase food security, and promote a more sustainable use of natural resources”.***<sup>2</sup>

The Global Forum arose from a need to strengthen national public agricultural research and extension systems, so that they could play a more effective role in national and international agricultural development. Initially, GFAR brought public research together with key stakeholder groups to address issues of global importance and create links and common agendas around the world. The Forum later merged with the National Agricultural Research Systems Secretariat, which was addressing inter-regional actions among leaders of national public research organizations.

GFAR’s initial governance brought together (and in some cases helped establish) Regional Fora of national agricultural research-for-development institutions, with representatives from other sectors including the UN agencies, CGIAR, farmers, NGOs and the private sector. However, the fast-changing global environment of food and agriculture has challenged previous assumptions of a linear flow of expert knowledge and resultant technologies from research to farmers. Instead, GFAR partners now consider an approach based on multi-directional systems of innovation, working to priorities set out in the GCARD Roadmap and particularly focused on the contribution of agricultural knowledge and innovation in development.

Over the last decade, following the 2006 Triennial Conference and the subsequent GCARD processes, GFAR has progressively evolved. Stakeholder consultations formulating the GCARD Road Map recognized that agricultural research was essential, but not itself sufficient, for development impact. The Road Map clearly identified the need for GFAR to encompass all actors involved in the generation, access, transformation and use of agricultural knowledge, science and technologies, as a unique permanent forum for their interaction. To ensure all can be effectively mobilized and represented, GFAR has since directly helped co-create new networks on agricultural advisory services, education reform and the inclusion of youth, private sector actors and women’s groups. All are recognized to be innovators in different ways and each forms part of the complex multi-dimensional research and innovation continuum which GFAR now encompasses and is represented in the Constituent Assembly.

The Global Forum hence now encompasses all actors involved in systems of agricultural innovation. These include those concerned with agricultural research, extension, education and enterprise and recognize producers to be innovators in their own right. While there are many definitions in use, here we aim for an inclusive concept of agricultural innovation systems that enables all actors to be involved:

### ***Working Definitions***

***Agricultural innovation*** is the process whereby individuals or organizations generate new, or bring existing agricultural and agri-food knowledge, products, tools, technologies, processes and forms of organization into new social and economic use, towards eliminating hunger and malnutrition, eradicating poverty and enhancing wellbeing and fostering environmental sustainability and resilience to shocks.

An ***agricultural innovation system*** is a network of actors or organisations, and individuals, together with supporting institutions and policies in the agricultural and related sectors working to achieve the above. Policies and institutions (formal and informal) shape the way that these actors interact, generate, share and use knowledge as well as jointly learn.

(Adapted from a definition developed for the Tropical Agriculture Platform)

<sup>2</sup>The Mission, as set out in the 1996 GFAR Charter

Agricultural innovation takes place within a dynamic network of actors – individuals and organizations – fostering interaction and learning through adaptation and responsiveness to emerging challenges and opportunities. An ‘agricultural innovation system’ (AIS) encompasses all of the various actors (farmers, and farmers’ organisations, businesses, processors, marketers, transporters, input suppliers, policy-makers, regulatory agencies, researchers, service providers, extension services, civil society organisations and others) involved directly or indirectly in agricultural production, processing, marketing, distribution and trade. Innovation is thus an interactive, dynamic and flexible process involving learning and the application of knowledge among all these actors.

## **Integrated Approach**

Today, GFAR engages partners from all sectors concerned with the complex interactions that give rise to effective agricultural innovation. GFAR partners now work together across diverse areas from consumer markets, to production, to upstream research, addressing the complex web of processes involved in the generation, access and use of knowledge at all levels. GFAR works in an integrated approach to create effective and dynamic partnerships between public, private, producer and civil society sectors.

GFAR is a transformative movement, highlighting the interdependence of actions and recognizing that, while governments have to be at the center of policies, there is an essential and inevitable role for civil society, farmers, business and other groups in the shaping and implementation of the policies and actions required for our agricultural futures.

GFAR’s engagement of multiple stakeholders recognizes the need for **collective action**<sup>3</sup>. This is the kind of interconnected world we will increasingly see in the future – collective movements for change, towards clear and agreed goals.

GFAR is the catalyst for change, mobilizing the power of agricultural knowledge and innovation towards achieving desired agricultural and rural development outcomes.

## **GFAR’s Constituents**

GFAR welcomes all constituencies active in agricultural innovation systems and in particular their role in development. These cover the complex, interconnected and interacting range of actors in food and agriculture, including the diverse services, occupations and activities related to rural communities and their landscapes<sup>4</sup>, the value webs between producers and consumers, and the multiple relations between rural and urban areas.

Just as GFAR’s contribution to the reform of integrated agricultural and agri-food systems is evolving, so too is our composition and constituencies, enabling GFAR to bring the voices and perspectives of many new partners together into different processes. Given their interdependence and inter-relations, actors in rural and urban areas converge within integrated networks of agri-food systems. Partners in GFAR naturally encompass a great diversity of groups with varying levels of formal or informal organization, legal status, membership, degree of incorporation, scope and diversity of specific constituencies. This includes networks, fora, alliances, member-based organizations, and groups of individual and institutional members or associates, at national, regional and international levels. The broader strategic interests and priorities of individual, national, country-based or local institutions or associations are represented through regional and international stakeholder mechanisms.

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<sup>3</sup>A more detailed discussion of what constitutes collective action and its importance to GFAR is covered in Discussion Paper 2.

<sup>4</sup>Landscapes include biodiversity, forests, fisheries and aquatic ecosystems, soils and water, covering their multiple economic, social and cultural services.

At the core of the Global Forum are the constituencies and their organizations that have most direct and immediate impact on the agriculture and food sectors through improving the capacities, knowledge and abilities of smallholder and family farmers.

GFAR constituencies, which may be organized at national, regional or international level, are *inter alia*: farmer organizations, including cooperatives and other forms of association such as trade unions; international agricultural research institutions, both CGIAR and non-CGIAR; regional fora of national institutions involved in agricultural research for development; inter-governmental organizations devoted to innovation for sustainability and development of rural communities; food and agriculture networks across complex value webs and multiple services; finance and investment institutions including donors, development banks and foundations; civil society and non-governmental organizations; private sector: small- and medium-size enterprises (SMEs), agri-food markets, agri-input industries; extension and rural advisory services; higher education and training; organizations representing specific social groups, notably women and youth; and consumer associations.

## How We Work

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The Forum work through the 'soft power' of common purpose, persuasion, mutual accountability and self-assessment, to ensure that agricultural innovation processes serve the desired futures of local communities and are responsive to the needs of producers and consumers. GFAR is particularly centred on the needs of resource-poor producers, primarily in developing countries and puts their priorities at the very core of agricultural research and innovation systems.

The guiding principles of GFAR's operation (established in the 2006 GFAR Charter) are:

- **Subsidiarity:** Programs and projects are planned and managed at the closest level at which they can be effectively executed.
- **Complementarity:** GFAR strives to develop effective and efficient agricultural innovation systems worldwide, by drawing on the complementary strengths of all stakeholders involved.
- **Additionality:** GFAR fosters programs and projects that aim specifically to add value to what each stakeholder is able to do on their own.
- **Partnership:** GFAR aims to create effective and mutually beneficial partnerships through multi-stakeholder innovation platforms and collective actions among all those involved in agricultural research and innovation in developed and developing countries. The Global Forum fosters and connects these actions internationally to catalyze change.

### The GCARD Road Map

1. Farmers and national stakeholders empowered and informed to better negotiate their own agricultural futures.
2. Equitable and effective demand-driven partnerships that transform agricultural research and innovation into impacts at scale.
3. Transformative investments stimulated to provide tangible opportunities for the world's rural poor.
4. Collective initiatives fostered to improve capacity in agricultural research for development.
5. Agricultural research and knowledge is embedded into rural development agendas.
6. Accountability, transformational change and development impacts in AR4D systems increased through greater and more transparent stakeholder involvement.

- **Involvement of all stakeholders:**GFAR operates through all its stakeholders and mobilizes them in the planning and execution of its programs and activities.

## GCARD Road Map for Reform

GFAR collectively shapes the future of agricultural research and innovation through the Global Conferences on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD). The GCARD is a unique dialogue process, delivered in partnership with the CGIAR, aimed at fostering system changes in agricultural research and innovation. Working to the GCARD Road Map<sup>5</sup>, itself derived from an extensive multi-stakeholder process, partners come together to discuss and agree the reforms required of agricultural innovation and research systems worldwide.

Together GFAR partners are putting the GCARD Road Map into practice, through the GFAR Medium Term Plan, which sets out practical actions, outputs and outcomes, needed to transform the agricultural research and innovation system.

Work formulated through consultative processes of the Forum is fostered and sometimes co-financed through the GFAR Secretariat, but is **delivered by the constituent partners in GFAR** across four main areas:

1. **Advocacy**, to ensure stakeholders' needs for research and innovation needs are identified and prioritized. Examples include the Global Conference on Women in Agriculture in 2012 and at the Climate Summit in 2014 and work expressing stakeholder perspectives into the reform and focus of the CGIAR;
2. **Partnership**, to take collective action to address the complex issues that stand in the way of getting innovation from, for and to farmers. Examples include the Global Foresight Hub, the Gender in Agriculture Partnership (GAP).
3. **Capacity-building**, to enable national agricultural systems, institutions and people to deliver development outcomes. Examples include the work of the regional fora of national research and extension agencies, , Promoting Local Innovation in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural resource management (Prolinnova), the Global Confederation of Higher Education and Research in Agriculture (GCHERA), the Tropical Agriculture Platform facilitating capacity development in agricultural innovation (TAP), the Global Foresight Hub and its Grassroots Foresight Initiative, Young Professionals in Agricultural Research for Development (YPARD) and work on promoting Farmers' Rights in the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources.
4. **Knowledge-sharing**, to empower stakeholders with the information, skills and technologies they need. Examples include the work of the Coherence in Information for Agricultural Research & Development (CIARD), and the Global Open Data Access Network (GODAN) and the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS).

The GCARD Roadmap constructively challenges institutions of all forms to reflect on their own roles and change. These are not easy processes as institutional behaviors have many internal drivers, but GFAR collective actions are helping institutions to become transparent in their actions and take on 360 degree accountability (for instance, to farmers, not just taxpayers), to connect with other sectors and avoid becoming boxed in by existing institutional frameworks and mentalities.

## Conclusion

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<sup>5</sup> The GCARD Roadmap was developed through a consultative process arising from GCARD1.

When GFAR was established in 1996, its initial focus was very much on agricultural research for development, particularly in ensuring national public research was aligned with needs and aspirations of a range of stakeholders – civil society, private sector, policymakers and donors. Today, it has evolved into an open, equitable and inclusive Forum on agricultural innovation among stakeholders from all sectors in agri-food systems, from consumer markets, to production, to upstream research, together addressing the complex web of processes involved in the generation, access, transformation and use of knowledge at all levels for food and agriculture systems and landscapes.

Given the complex realities of agricultural innovation, representation of non-research stakeholders in the Forum has increased. Rather than linear chains from research to farmer, we now consider that innovation, involving multiple actors, has many different points of interaction between different sectors and institutions. Those directly engaged in GFAR now include farmers' organizations, researchers, extension workers, educators, NGOs, private sector enterprises (for inputs and into markets) consumers' associations and international organizations, working together to help deliver development outcomes worldwide.

The Forum works through the 'soft power' of personal/institutional commitment, mutual persuasion and self-reflection, to ensure that agricultural research and innovation serve the desired futures of local communities and are responsive to the needs of resource-poor farmers and poor consumers, primarily in developing countries. GFAR puts their priorities at the very core of agricultural research and innovation systems. Such power delivers outcomes in changing livelihoods, and sustainability and viability of agricultures, rural communities and their connections to cities and consumers.

New governance arrangements are now needed, to establish structures, processes and ways of working that can best fit this evolving function. The Forum's role and actions must be owned, delivered and reported on by the constituencies concerned, who are directly accountable for delivery, to agreed GFAR goals.

## **Discussion Points for GFAR Role and Purpose**

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### **1. Does the evolved role and purpose of the Global Forum, as described in this document, fulfil the desired role and meet future needs as seen by the Assembly? How could it be further improved?**

There is a strong need to move towards integrated, multi-stakeholder, multi-sector and multi-actor agricultural innovation systems, to enable agreed development outcomes to be achieved at scale. The Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) is addressing these challenges, engaging partners well beyond conventional public sector research and extension in an integrated approach that creates effective partnerships between public, private, producer and civil sectors. This concerns the entire value chain from farmer to consumer, in city and country, in countries "South" and "North". It encompasses the environmental, economic, social and cultural context. This means directly empowering farmers, consumers and communities in dialogue and in generating the innovations, technologies and the delivery systems required to address their needs and objectives, rather than starting from a particular technology alone. The obstacles and constraints preventing farmers and agro-entrepreneurs from taking up innovation must be addressed and new capacities created at all levels within agricultural systems.

### **2. Should the GFAR name be changed to better reflect its evolution and direction?**

The Forum is not about research or productive technologies alone. GFAR is fundamentally a unique global platform for agricultural innovation, encompassing all sectors. Its name needs to reflect this role. It should be simple, evocative, easily understood and 'owned' by all involved and should clearly express the renewed purpose of the Forum and its role in the transformation of agricultural innovation and research systems. It

should serve as a major communication tool to position the work of the Global Forum in mobilizing collective actions to address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **Decision Point**

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**Agreement on a renewal of the role and purpose of the Global Forum**

and

**Should the renewal be reflected in a change of name?**