

Agricultural Research for Sustainable Development

AARINENA VISION 2025*

Once the cradle of agriculture, the Near East and North Africa Region is now food deficit and for many years it has been the largest net food importer among developing countries. More than 60% of the population of the region live in the rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

The natural resources base for agriculture in the region is very fragile with especially acute shortage of water and arable land. Aridity is a prevailing feature in the Region, making it the poorest in the world in terms of water resources, both globally and on a per inhabitant basis.

Despite affluence in some parts, poverty and food insecurity persists in the region and some of its poorest countries are also the poorest in the world. Poverty is pervasive in the dry areas where over 80 percent of the population live in countries with an average per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$1.10 per day.

The Challenge to Agricultural Research

Opportunities for expanding cultivated lands in the Region are minimal. It is estimated that only 7% of the achievable increase in food production can come from expanding the areas currently under cultivation, another 21% from more intensive cropping patterns, leaving 72% to be realised by increasing factor productivity through improved technologies. The challenge for agricultural research is to produce improved technologies to increase productivity that favours natural resources and the poor.

Progress through Partnership

AARINENA was established in 1985 as an instrument of change for strengthening national and regional agricultural research capacities in order to reverse the downward trends in agricultural productivity and the natural resources base. AARINENA's Mission is to contribute to the enhancement of agricultural and rural development in the Region through fostering agricultural research and technology development and by strengthening collaboration within and outside the Region. This is in order to achieve greater degree of self-reliance in food and agriculture, and to improve the nutritional well being and overall welfare of the people of the Region, while at the same time sustaining and further improving the productive capacity of the natural resources base. The Mission Statement is as valid today as when it was first adopted.

* Approved at the Seventh General Conference held in Beirut, Lebanon (22-23 March 2000).

A Vision for the Future

For agricultural research to play such a vital role in halting the accelerating decline in the fortunes of the Region's agriculture, AARINENA members believe that the way forward is by bringing together the scientific strength and talents available in the Region to collectively tackle the formidable challenges and tasks ahead. AARINENA envisions:

- Effective national agricultural research systems that serve the goals of sustainable agricultural development in Region through:
 - Mobilizing all partners in technology generation and transfer, both in the public and private sectors, working hand in hand with farmers and farmers' organizations.
 - Setting priorities well attuned to the needs of farmers and particularly the resource-poor among them.
 - Using all opportunities offered by scientific and technological advances such as biotechnology and information and communication technologies.
- Regional and sub-regional collaboration building on experiences in and outside the countries of the region.

For the above to be achieved, AARINENA members resolve to transform the Association into a dynamic, self-reliant and highly credible Organization. This could only be achieved if:

- Countries and relevant organizations, which have not done so, join hands in building a strong base for regional and sub-regional collaboration and commit themselves to the Mission and the Goals of the Association.
- Governments accord agricultural research a high priority in national development strategies and in their negotiation with the international community, and accordingly allocate to the sector sufficient human and financial resources.
- International organizations and donor agencies support national governments long-term efforts to build viable national agricultural research systems and foster regional and sub-regional collaboration.

AARINENA is looking ahead into the future with renewed optimism and with a firm commitment to food security, to the fight against poverty, and to the protection of the vital natural resources base of agriculture in the Region.