

## MESSAGE



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The Near East and North Africa (NENA) region faces daunting challenges. They include poverty, especially in the marginal dry areas, rapid population growth, water scarcity, harsh and variable climate, conflicts in some countries, food insecurity, desertification, and loss of precious biodiversity. AARINENA provides a platform for collaborative interventions by the various stakeholders to address these challenges. Since AARINENA and ICARDA (International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas) share the common mission of improving livelihoods and protecting the natural resources in the NENA region, ICARDA has been a co-sponsor of AARINENA since its establishment. Since 2006, ICARDA's West Asia Regional Program has been hosting the AARINENA Secretariat in its office in Amman, Jordan.

ICARDA and AARINENA (in collaboration with other partners) have undertaken landmark initiatives for strengthening agricultural research in the region during the past decade. The first initiative was a study of the national agricultural research systems (NARS) in West Asia and North Africa (WANA). The study developed profiles of various NARS in the region, which revealed a wide diversity in their human and financial capacities. This information continues to serve the information needs of donors, policy makers, and others. The other important ICARDA/AARINENA initiative was the regional priority setting exercise in Central and West Asia and North Africa, conducted in 2001-2002. Through a series of consultations, consensus was reached that strong research-extension-development linkages constitute the backbone of agricultural development. ICARDA and AARINENA are also working together on the Regional Agricultural Information System (RAIS) aimed at increasing access to agricultural research information to scientists in the region.

ICARDA's research programs are implemented in partnership with the national programs. They address the constraints to agricultural production and help to alleviate poverty while protecting the natural resource base. The major focus is on the management of scarce water, drought mitigation, integrated gene management, improved land management to combat desertification, diversification and sustainable improvement of rural livelihoods, poverty and livelihood analysis, and knowledge dissemination. Special attention is given to countries in or emerging out of conflicts. The success of ICARDA's work hinges on partnerships. The center is committed to continue working with AARINENA and other national, regional and international partners to improve livelihoods and protect the natural resource base in the NENA region and the world's dry areas.

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