

MESSAGE

GFAR Chair's Message to AARINENA

Countries in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region are the major losers in trade balances as the price of food increases globally. With increased food prices, the economic growth of these countries is dampened by inflation. With increasing poverty, the political and social fabric of the region is under stress. The need for agricultural development in the region was never as urgent as it is now.

This region is the cradle of agriculture and the origin of domestication of several crop and livestock species. This region was at one time the granary and source of wealth for many empires including the Phoenician, Persian, Carthage and Roman. Today it is food deficient. In future, because of the effects of unsustainable use of natural resources, especially soil and water, environmental degradation and climate change, the situation is expected to worsen. Climate change is among the severest threats for this region affecting the most fertile of the lands which are expected to become drier and barren through influx of salinity. There will be significant shift in agriculture and livestock production in the region, uprooting large human populations and bring about mass migration with accompanying pain and tragedy.

Agriculture in NENA has to develop fast to provide a large part of high quality, nutritious and affordable food needed in the region and avert serious crises. The challenge for all of us as agricultural scientists is to increase food production, farm productivity with sustainability and enable fair agricultural trade across the entire production and commodity market chain.

The region has to increase its investment, financial and human, in agricultural research and innovation. It has to further strengthen some of its existing world class agricultural research and education institutions and develop many more in each country. It has to produce more, high quality agricultural manpower for the research, education and extension challenges in the region. The roots of agricultural development in the region are in education and learning that spreads new agricultural knowledge to agricultural communities to produce more with efficiency in the use of farm resources in the region.

The future of agriculture research globally lies in how biotechnology and nanotechnology, information and communications technology and materials science will harness for agricultural production. Biotechnology and nanotechnology will provide us the means to produce crops and livestock that can cope with the changes that agriculture will undergo due to climate change and environmental degradation. We not only have to increase production but also prevent losses from pest and diseases. This is where these new genetic technologies will contribute. Information and communications technologies will contribute to improving our farm productivity, bring greater sustainability in the use of natural resources and energy, enable innovation and help producers integrate with markets in a more efficient way. Materials science will help us leverage the efficiency in how we use soil, water, energy and labor in agriculture. New forms of agriculture and use of natural resources, for example in the use of saline and waste water, will emerge from the application of advances in Material sciences.

It is imperative that the region collaborates within itself in agricultural research and innovation. The most critical issue is to leverage the knowledge, skills and new technologies needed in the region by enabling its wider access to agricultural communities. Agricultural research institutes and national agricultural research and innovation systems will have to share its information and expertise so that agricultural development is accelerated in the region with the utmost efficiency.

AARINENA is the most important platform for agricultural research and innovation in the region. Its primary role is to dialogue and create awareness and sensitize member countries on critical issues related to agricultural research for development. It has to promote increased investment in agricultural research and innovation in the region. AARINENA also has to further collaboration in agricultural research and innovation in the region through networks and targeted programs that increase capacity, both human and in Institutions, for agricultural research and innovation. The region urgently requires a framework for agricultural development and commitment to follow it up by member countries.

As the Chair of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), I envision that the region through AARINENA will further contribute to sharing and exchanging of knowledge, skills and technology globally through the GFAR platform. GFAR has several mechanisms such as the Global Partnership Programs, Regional and Inter-Regional Networks and EGFAR, its platform for sharing information, that AARINENA is already an active member of for global collaboration in agricultural research and innovation. For all of us, the emerging challenges to agricultural development are huge and the only way we can meet them is through collaboration and collective action regionally, through GFAR and with other global actors.



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