

Summary: Strategic direction towards CSO coordination mechanisms (December 2011)

Including Smallholders in Agriculture Research for Development (INSARD) is an EC-funded partnership project involving six African and European-based NGOs. INSARD is working towards making it easier for civil-society organisations (CSOs) – both non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and farmer organisations (FOs) – to be actively involved in influencing agricultural research systems in Africa. In the start-up study, an inventory was made of African and European CSOs involved in agricultural research for development (ARD) in sub-Saharan Africa. The study identified the formal and informal linkages between CSOs and other stakeholders involved in ARD, as well as potentials and blockages in the ARD system to realising a greater participation of CSOs in prioritising, formulating and carrying out ARD. The study also looked into resource allocation for ARD in sub-Saharan Africa, and how and where and by whom the decisions for such allocation are made.

This study was planned to contribute to:

- Designing and implementing a consultative mechanism that allows various CSO representatives to participate meaningfully in African, European and international deliberations on ARD;
- Triggering the necessary change in direction of the ARD system toward a more demand-led, grounded and smallholder-focused research and innovation system; and
- Stimulating greater resource flows to research involving small-scale farmers.

An international consultation meeting was held on 19 November 2011 in Nairobi to discuss the findings of the study. The meeting was attended by about 30 people from research institutions, NGOs and FOs. This short summary provides an outline of the overall strategic direction towards CSO coordination and consultation mechanisms for ARD in sub-Saharan Africa that was agreed on during this meeting. Over the next months, this strategy will be further elaborated and widely shared.

The path towards CSO coordination and consultation mechanisms for ARD should follow a bottom-up approach, starting with national-level platforms in Africa with representatives from FOs and NGOs taking up issues on ARD, then proceeding to the subregional level, i.e. the subregional organisations (SROs) such as CORAF/WECARD, ASARECA and CCARDESA¹, and from there to the regional African level (Forum for Agricultural Research for Africa / FARA).

Such national platforms would give opportunities for CSO representation, transparency, accountability and feedback, with a clear agenda from civil society, to make the representation process meaningful. However, current capacity of FOs and NGOs in Africa is often rather weak. There are very few NGOs that specialise in agriculture and natural resource management, and still fewer are concerned with ARD. Also FOs give little attention to ARD. Therefore, a specific focus is needed for information exchange and capacity building of FOs and NGOs to recognise the importance of and engage with ARD. For FOs, especially those made up of smallholders/family farmers, engaging in ARD could be one way of promoting ecologically, socially and economically sustainable agricultural development. The national platforms should eventually build linkages to provincial and district levels within the respective countries.

¹ CORAF/WECARD = Conseil West et Centre Africain pour la Recherche et le Développement Agricoles /West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development; ASARECA = Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa; CCARDESA = Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development in Southern Africa



At the regional level, ASARECA and CORAF do have space for CSO participation, but there is no coordination mechanism between the subregional and national levels. Further, it is important to explore how SROs can better integrate farmers' issues, as the current farmer "representatives" in the governing bodies are not generally involved in "research" and do not always represent the interests and needs of smallholder farmers. Therefore, two separate seats are needed in such bodies to reflect better the diversity of African agriculture in terms of types of farmers represented (larger-scale commercial farmers and smaller-scale family farmers) and types of agriculture promoted (e.g. high-external input / export-oriented and lower-external input / agro-ecological farming more oriented to domestic markets).

In the case of NGOs, the current "representatives" in the SROs, FARA and in the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) do not have any mandate from a clear constituency and do not have transparent consultation mechanisms. Therefore, national and subregional networks of NGOs concerned with ARD in Africa need to be created or strengthened. As an important starting point, existing networks of national and regional NGOs in Africa should be encouraged to develop their own ARD policy and strategy. Northern NGOs should support this and develop their own strategy linked to this. It will also be important for northern NGOs to make European donors and global ARD organisations more aware of the capacities and objectives of the networks of CSOs in the South related to ARD, and to create opportunities for strengthening the capacities of FOs and NGOs in South and North to organise themselves around ARD issues.

The participants in the Nairobi workshop felt that important lessons can be learned from the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) for the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). INSARD aims to develop links to the CSM process, through members in the different regions and through the International Planning Committee (IPC). In addition, a review of governance mechanisms for the GFAR is currently underway, and INSARD hopes to be able to identify possible entry points to improve CSO representation.

Next steps:

- INSARD will finalise the "CSO-in-ARD" mapping study report and make it widely available.
- INSARD will develop a short strategy paper on possible CSO consultation and coordination mechanisms.
- INSARD will develop a policy paper to provide a basis for engaging with the GCARD (Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development) roadmap, including issues of governance reforms and alternative approaches to ARD.
- INSARD will contribute to the regional consultations for GCARD in Africa and Europe in early 2012 by informing NGOs and FOs in these regions about the international ARD process, so that they understand how they can engage in ARD decision-making, in a similar way as was done during the time of the NGO Committee (NGOC) of the CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research).

