

4. The Perception of NARS Partners of ICARDA's Activities

The replies to the questionnaire sent to ICARDA partners are summarized in Annex III. A total of 111 responses have been received. The overall rate of return was generally over 60%, and this may be interpreted as a positive reflection of the respect shown by NARS partners for ICARDA.

Twenty-seven countries have sent in comments; a relatively high number of replies have been received from Egypt, Iran, Morocco, Uzbekistan and Yemen; Pakistan, Sudan, Tunisia and Turkey should also be mentioned. A large majority of the questionnaires was filled out by Institute Directors, Programme Leaders and Department Heads. This shows the commitment of the research leaders from the various countries to the collaborative work undertaken with ICARDA.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the replies received and from the countries visited. Cereal and food legume improvement, and human resource development and institutional strengthening are clearly the major areas of collaboration between ICARDA and the countries. One might call these the traditional areas of collaboration. Not surprisingly some of the newer areas of international agricultural research, such as cropping systems management, soil and water management, integrated resource management and integrated pest management are mentioned less frequently. The relatively low frequency of forage improvement and livestock production management is probably due to the fact that most of the respondents were working in institutes which did not carry out research on livestock matters.

As shown by the replies received to the question related to which areas should be strengthened, cereal and food legume improvement were highlighted, as well as natural resource management related matters. There is also interest for further assistance in human resource development and institutional strengthening.

The above outcome is in line with the development of ICARDA's research agenda where increased emphasis has been placed during the last decennium on research projects related to natural resources management. A variety of other collaborative activities are mentioned by the respondents (Annex III), most seem to be areas of specific interest to the respondent concerned.

None of the respondents rated the benefits of the collaboration with ICARDA as poor; 90% gave a rating of excellent or good. This shows a very high appreciation of the various partners in CWANA for the efficiency and effectiveness of working with ICARDA. In this respect food production is mentioned most frequently, followed by human resource development and natural resource management. The high number of impact studies and, in particular, joint publications is unique and impressive. For example, one respondent from Pakistan mentioned that as a result of the long-standing collaboration there were over 200 joint publications from researchers in his country and ICARDA.

These results are an excellent example of true partnership, which is often mentioned in the CGIAR system, but there is probably nowhere else such a resounding proof of it. The joint publications cover all areas of research undertaken by ICARDA as shown

by the comments received from NARS partners. An analysis of ICARDA publications for the period 1998-2002 indicates that of a total of 504 papers 204 were jointly published/presented with NARS colleagues from the national systems; this included 19 workshop proceedings, 77 journal articles, and 108 conference papers.

Of the various collaborative mechanisms that seem to best suit the needs of countries, workshops/training and joint projects are given the highest score, very closely followed by research networks and coordination/planning meetings. However, ICARDA staff posted in-country and appointment of national staff as ICARDA affiliates is considered less favourably. As mentioned already above, countries would like to see that, notwithstanding the already highly productive partnerships, collaboration be further strengthened in all areas of research. The high rating for research on soil and water management and integrated resource management is especially noticeable in this regard. During the country visits the strong interest for more joint NRM research was also mentioned regularly.

Some 80 % of the respondents replied that their national programme would be willing to share the costs of collaborative research with ICARDA. In the large majority of cases this would be in the form of in-kind contributions, however, close to 20% felt that direct financing might be possible. This again is a strong indication of the high interest for collaborative work with ICARDA by its wide range of partners.

During the visits to countries in North Africa the positive impact of the regional projects implemented by ICARDA was often emphasized. The focus on interdisciplinary research approaches involving various institutions and networking with national partners has resulted in the development of new methodologies in relation to participatory community development and effective technology development and transfer activities. Successful examples, often cited by different authorities, are the Marsa-Matrouh project in Egypt and the Mashreq-Maghreb project in WANA. These projects, and the resulting new methodologies, appear to have become an inspiration for a new approach to the planning and implementation of field research in the West Asia and North African Region.

The visit to CAC confirmed the sub-region's unique position because of its high number of well-trained scientists, but the research facilities and equipments are mostly obsolete, outdated and non-functional. In the early 1990s after independence, and the gradual abandonment of collective, state controlled farming, tremendous challenges had to be faced by the agricultural research community in the countries in the CAC sub-region. This was further exacerbated by the worsening economic situation, and as a result average agricultural yields have dropped by over 50%. Research and extension activities came almost to a standstill, in particular because of the lack of operational funds.

The countries in CAC show a strong interest in collaboration with the CG Centres. Limited inputs and support from IARCs have already had a very significant impact on improving research facilities and activities, and in creating new agricultural development opportunities. It is essential that these achievements are well documented and evaluated, preferably also to determine to what extent they can be further used as international public goods. Development and release of drought and

salinity tolerant wheat varieties, as well as the testing of cotton-wheat double cropping systems in Uzbekistan, could be good examples in this regard.

The collaboration between NARSs and ICARDA and other Centres in the CAC region provides excellent examples of cost-effective and productive partnerships between CGIAR Centres and National Agricultural Research Systems. Undoubtedly these joint efforts will lead to significant benefits for agricultural development in the sub-region. However, these activities should be sustained and preferably expanded for at least another five years to fully achieve the expected goals, as well as to consolidate the progress made so far.