

# 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

## 1.2 CONTENT OF THE PUBLICATION

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The purpose of this study was to review the current situation of the public national agricultural research systems (NARSS) in the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region. This introductory chapter briefly summarizes the scope, objectives, and content of the study.

## 1.1 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

One may wonder about the interest in the WANA region and its public NARSS; what countries are geographically located in this region, why this region, why only the public NARSS and not the national private sector and international agricultural research (AR) institutions in the region, and why a new publication on these NARSS?

**What is the WANA region?** As the territorial borders of the region vary according to definitions by different international and regional organizations, it was decided to consider the narrow definition of FAO: “the region covers all the countries from Morocco to Iran including the ‘traditional’ Arab countries of North Africa (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia) and the Near East (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Arabian Peninsula countries), as well as the countries of West Asia (Afghanistan, Cyprus, Iran, and Turkey).” Depending on the studies, other countries are sometimes included in the region, such as Mauritania, the countries of the Nile Valley and Red Sea region (Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia), and Pakistan. As most of these other countries are generally considered within the sub-Saharan region, it was agreed to consider only the countries included in the narrow FAO definition and adding the countries of the Nile Valley and Red Sea region, leaving out Mauritania<sup>1</sup>, Somalia and Afghanistan (where political circumstances do not allow conducting AR activities), as well as Pakistan, generally attached to Southwest Asia<sup>2</sup>. This made a total of 22 countries to be considered.

**Why the WANA region?** It is a well-known fact that the agriculture and food sectors of the WANA region are globally facing difficult prospects in the long term, perhaps the most acute in the world, because of the very limited availability of natural resources (land and water) and the constant degradation of these resources, as well as the fast population growth. Overcoming these difficult challenges will be possible only through large-scale adoption of more productive and sustainable farming systems by farmers and herders without delay. To accomplish this, all public, professional, and private bodies involved in agricultural and rural development of the region (research, extension, training, credit, inputs, marketing, infrastructures, etc.) must be jointly mobilized. In this process, the AR national and international organizations concerned should play a major role through the generation and proposal of (i) technical innovations adapted to the related physical and socioeconomic conditions and to the potential improvement of farmers’ circumstances and of communication and infrastructure in rural areas, and (ii) reliable technical and socioeconomic information (soil maps, inventories of biological resources, surveys of farms and of agro-food marketing systems, etc.) necessary for supporting the definition and implementation of efficient national agricultural policies.

**Why only the public NARSS?** Public NARSS were chosen because they mobilize the bulk of the national AR effort; private AR is marginal or even absent in most of the countries. Public NARSS absorb much of the external assistance to this sector and are the favored partners of the international agricultural research centers (IARCs) and regional agricultural and AR institutions in the region, mainly ICARDA, based at Aleppo, Syria, and acting in most of the countries of the WANA region, and other IARCs (CIMMYT, CIP, ICRISAT, IWMI, IPGRI, ISNAR, etc.) based in some of these countries, as well as FAO, AOAD, etc. More could have been gained by also considering these international and regional institutions, but sufficient work on them has already been published, particularly by these institutions themselves and by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Nevertheless, brief information is given in the NARS monographs on private and international AR in each country.

**Why a new publication on these NARSS?** During the last 35 years, six<sup>3</sup> reviews related to the public NARSS in the WANA region have been published, and only three of them were concerned with all or a large part of the countries of the region: the studies published in 1990 by ISNAR (Hariri G.) related to the Arab countries, and FAO in 1990 (Abercrombie K.C., El Moursi A.W.) and AARENINA/FAO, both related to the Near East and North Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> Included in the 1993–1995 FAO study on the NARSS of West and Central Africa.

<sup>2</sup> The Pakistani NARS is oriented mainly towards irrigated regions and their commodities, with a limited scope of the western arid and semiarid zones where the AR Center of Qattah, with which ICARDA has developed strong collaboration in the past years, is located.

<sup>3</sup> See references at the end of Chapter 9. The three other publications are: FAO, 1964 (Watson J.M.), related to the Near East region (Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates); CIHEAM, 1988 (ed.: Casas J.), related to the countries of the Mediterranean region (North and South); and AOAD/ ISNAR/UNDP, 1994 (Hariri G.), related to selected Arab countries (Algeria, Iraq, Sudan, Yemen).

However, at present, they are well out-of-date, and although still of historical interest, they faced serious limitations as they were prepared without the direct participation of national leaders and presented very few precise data on the human and financial resources of the NARSs.

Given the previous considerations, the study aimed to take into account the public NARSs of the 22 WANA countries, which was an enormous challenge; however, 18 countries accepted to participate in the study; all countries except Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which did not show interest for diverse reasons.

## 1.2 CONTENT OF THE PUBLICATION

For the sake of readers who are not familiar with the WANA region, it seemed useful to briefly record (Chapter 2) some basic data on the economies and agricultural sectors of the WANA countries, which may assist in understanding the important potential role of the NARSs with respect to the hard challenges that most of these countries are currently facing, and possibly more so in the long term.

Chapter 3 is an introductory chapter, which gives an overview of the contents of the monographs and touches upon the methodology (concepts/definitions, conventions, tables) used in preparing them. Despite its abstract character, it is intended to help readers to better understand the monographs and to comprehend the main characteristics of each NARS.

The monographs are presented in Chapters 4 to 8, corresponding to the five sub-regions defined by ICARDA for its regional programs according to diverse criteria related to the countries, such as their geographical location and proximity, history, and similar agroecology. The sub-regions are:

- North Africa: Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia;
- Nile Valley and Red Sea: Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan;
- West Asia: Cyprus, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria;
- Highlands: Iran and Turkey; and
- the Arabian Peninsula: Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

The monographs provided the background for the cross-country analysis, presented in Chapter 9, which is a tentative comparative regional analysis of the structure, human and financial resources, and other characteristics of the 18 NARSs.

It is worth mentioning that the content of the publication in its final form differs considerably from what was planned at the beginning of the study. In fact, the preliminary plan was to present the NARSs by sub-region, with an introductory chapter on the economies and agricultural sectors of the countries concerned, followed by the monographs and a brief cross-country analysis by sub-region. This seemed appropriate as it was expected that the NARSs of each sub-region would have some common features. But the global cross-country analysis (presented in Chapter 9) demonstrated the large diversity of the NARSs within every sub-region, indicating that little value would be gained from a cross-country analysis by sub-region. On the other hand, there appeared to be some similarities among NARSs belonging to different sub-regions.

The study refers essentially to the situation of the NARSs observed in 1997/98, with more recent data for some countries. However, it is more than a mere description and a static review of the NARSs in the reference years. All the monographs include a brief introductory chapter on the historical background of the NARSs, and for some countries for which previous national reviews were available, comparisons of their structure and resources were made between the current situation and the situation prevailing five or ten years ago<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Even for these countries, comparisons were difficult because of the differences in methodologies and concepts and the frequent lack of attention in the previous national reviews given to the NARS institutions other than the specialized AR institutes.