

CHAPTER 2

CORAF NETWORKS¹

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What Is CORAF?

The Conférence des responsables de recherche agronomique en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre (CORAF) is a tool for cooperation in agronomic research. It provides a framework for collective action and for the exchange of information and experience. CORAF aims to:

- (1) Promote cooperation, collective action, and information exchange among member institutions;
- (2) Define common research objectives;
- (3) Prepare common research projects;
- (4) Create, operate, and develop associate networks and regional research workers' teams; and
- (5) Collaborate with international agronomic research centers, regional or international organizations, and funding agencies.

The institutional and operative organs of CORAF are the plenary conference, follow-up committee, executive secretariat, and associate networks.

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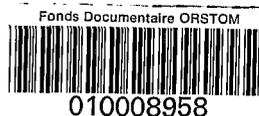
1. No abstract was provided by the author.

CORAF is run by a 10-man follow-up committee, six who represent African national programs and four who are associate members from European countries. This committee elects, from among its members, a president and a vice president to represent CORAF. They are assisted by the executive secretariat.

Associate Networks

An associate research network is a group of researchers who work together on a research theme recognized as priority by CORAF. The network aims to:

- (1) Strengthen existing agronomic research systems and give them regional and international dimension;
- (2) Promote the acquisition of scientific knowledge and optimal use of results;
- (3) Encourage joint action with International Agricultural Research Centers (IARCs) and with other international and regional organizations;
- (4) Prepare projects and submit them to external funding agencies;
- (5) Encourage evaluation of research in various agroecological and socioeconomic conditions; and
- (6) Facilitate the setting up of interdisciplinary teams, and the training of researchers.



At present, six associate networks belong to CORAF, doing research on groundnuts, cotton, maize, cassava, rice, and resistance to drought. The CORAF networks take into account the bilateral and multilateral relationships of member institutions.

Organization and operation of associate networks

An associate network has a general assembly, and a steering committee. The general assembly is composed of the coordinator, national correspondents, and one to several associate correspondents. The steering committee comprises the coordinator, correspondents, three members nominated by the general assembly, two scientific authorities outside the network and nominated by the general assembly, and donor representatives. The steering committee assists the coordinator in managing the network and in following up its scientific activities.

The general assembly's mission is to establish scientific priorities and research orientations. It liaises with scientific partners and with other networks, and convenes once every 3 years.

Research projects

The scientific activities of a given network are divided into major themes that emerge according to national program needs. These themes are implemented as projects, which take into account:

- (1) The scientific priorities within each theme, identified by the network's general assembly;
- (2) The potential of each of the network's partners; and
- (3) Acquired experience and existing work.

The network appoints an authority to lead each project and specifies the scientific objectives, duration, partners, and resources to be acquired. The network's steering committee determines the timing and methodology for the internal scientific evaluation of the work.

Base Centers

A base center is an agronomic research center that belongs to a national network and is open to regional and international cooperation within the framework of a network. It brings together sufficient human, financial, and material resources to attain scientific objectives and achieve results that are applicable or adaptable to other countries having the same development preoccupations.

Operation

A base center is placed under the aegis of an international network and of the national network that shelters it. It:

- (1) Provides the networks with supplementary means for reinforcing a national program (scientific personnel, equipment, operations);
- (2) Contributes to regional cooperation by improving the working relationships among research workers of the same region (visits, workshops, seminars);
- (3) Participates in the training and retraining of scientific and technical personnel of countries of the region;
- (4) Provides expertise to third parties in the form of support or consultation; and
- (5) Promotes the diffusion of information and publication of scientific and technical documents.

Activities

Base center programs are planned with the following factors taken into account: national agricultural policies; development needs of each country; national research programs; priorities defined by the respective network; scientific capabilities of members of the respective network; and other regional and international arrangements in member countries or outside. These programs aim to:

- (1) Improve crops and livestock according to socioeconomic, agronomic, biological, and edaphoclimatic conditions;
- (2) Develop living collections to make possible the sharing of available genetic resources among member institutions; and
- (3) Establish databases and encourage joint studies of common interest.

The Cassava Network: An Example of an Associate Network

Members

Network members number 156 researchers from agricultural research institutes of CORAF member (or associate member) countries, that is, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Gabon, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

Associate network members are researchers from agricultural research institutes of countries who do not belong to CORAF: Belgium, Colombia, Italy, Rwanda, Spain, United Kingdom, USA, Germany, and Zaire.

Other organizations connected with the Network are the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), based in Ibadan, Nigeria; the

International Board for Soil Research and Management (IBSRAM), based in Bangkok, Thailand; and the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI), based in Rome, Italy.

Major research priorities

The Network has three main areas of priorities:

- (1) Make an inventory of, characterize, and evaluate germplasm for selection;
- (2) Develop technologies for promoting longer shelf life, postharvest handling, and improving nutritional quality; and
- (3) Study the management of cassava-based systems to improve system productivity and conditions for propagation.

Major collaborative projects

CORAF has begun establishing thematic base centers in the Congo and Togo. Four projects are under way:

- (1) "Setting up and monitoring a multisite agronomic evaluation of cassava in Africa." Located in Togo, it has researchers from the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, France, and Togo.
- (2) "Improving African cassava cultivars." Located in the Congo, the researchers come from the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Italy, and Spain.
- (3) "Improving detoxification methods." Also located in the Congo, the researchers are from the Congo, France, and Togo.
- (4) "Improving foodstuffs processed from fermented cassava." Again located in the Congo, the researchers are from Belgium, Colombia, the Congo, France, Mexico, and Togo.²

2. For more information about the Cassava Network, contact the Coordinator, Dr. Joseph Mabanza, DGRST-ORSTOM, BP 181, Brazzaville, Congo; tel.: (242) 81 26 80 or 81 26 81; telex: 5404 (Attn. ORSTOM); fax: (242) 83 22 05.

Summary of projects and activities carried out by the Cassava Network

Project	Activity	Country
(1) Improvement of production, processing, and nutritional transformation and quality of cassava in Central and West Africa	(a) Create a base center to improve cassava varieties and cropping systems	Cameroon, the Congo, Gabon, Zaire
	(b) Search and evaluate local cultivars; set up a multisite trial network to assess the genotype-by-environment interaction	Central Africa, Cameroon, the Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Benin
	(c) Improve cassava processing and conservation practices; improve nutritional quality of products and byproducts	Network member countries: France, Germany, Spain
(2) Cassava agronomy in West Africa	(a) Create a thematic base center on the improvement of cassava agronomy	Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Germany, Ghana, Guinea, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo
	(b) Improve management of soil fertility in cassava-based farming systems	Same countries as above
	(c) Implement biological control of cassava pests	Countries of the networks

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