

Another Milestone in AIARD's 40th Year History
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Presented at 40th AIARD Annual Meeting
June 6 - 8, 2004
Washington, DC

To be relevant and effective, organizations must periodically re-examine their mission, goals and objectives to adjust to the ever changing conditions and environment in which they operate. AIARD was faced with this challenge in the Post Cold War Era of the early 1990s. You will recall that during this period, we witnessed significant changes in US development policy and programs, including continuing deep cuts in the foreign aid budget, and declines in commitment and support for international agriculture and rural development. As such, AIARD membership expressed a desire for the organization to become more proactive in its approach, to effectively respond to international agriculture and rural development policy, program, and budget challenges we were faced with at that time. AIARD's 30th Annual Meeting, held in this location June 13-14, 1994, provided the impetus for responding to these challenges, and the membership's expressed desire. As President Elect, I served as Chair of the Program Committee for the 30th Annual Meeting. Other Committee members included Dave Bathrick, Chemonics International; James Henson, Washington State University; Delane Welsch, University of Minnesota; Richard Robbins, North Carolina A&T University; Monika Escher, Winrock International; Don Ferguson, USDA/FAS/ICD; and Gail McClure, W.D. Kellogg Foundation.

As some of you may recall, the theme of the 30th Annual Meeting was "Understanding International Development/Cooperating in the Post Cold War Era: Implications for Agriculture and Rural Development." The Program featured representatives from USAID, World Bank, CIGAR, CRSPs, USDA, universities, private firms, PVOs, and representatives from host country governments who addressed the theme from their perspectives. Additionally, an AIARD Action Plan Committee was established (co-chaired by Jim Henson and David Bathrick) to develop and bring to the membership for discussion at a Group Discussion - Wrap-Up Section at the 30th Annual Meeting, recommendations for a potential Action Agenda for AIARD concerning policy and support for agriculture and rural development.

Two recommendations were presented and discussed:

1. That AIARD become actively involved in influencing policies, budgets, programs and priorities related to international agriculture and rural development, and

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2. That if recommendation #1 was supported, the Committee recommended that AIARD develop a strategic and implementation plan to achieve recommendation #1.

Extension discussions at the 30th Annual Meeting took place regarding the two recommendations and AIARD's future professional role and activities in response to the increased decline in commitment to and interest in international agriculture and rural development in the donor community. At the end of this discussion a recommendation was made that AIARD develop a plan for review and approval by membership, to become more active at all levels in the policy arena. To implement this recommendation, as President, I appointed an Action Plan Committee to develop the appropriate operational approach. The Action Plan Committee, co-chaired by Jim Henson and David Bathrick, included David Acker, Monika Escher, Don Ferguson, Thurman Grove, Edna McBreen, Tom McCowen, Onuma Okezie and Norman Uphoff.

The purpose of the plan was to generate information about and support for policies, programs and resource commitments related to international agriculture and rural development by the U.S. Government and other potential supporters. The theme for the plan was "Food and Natural Resources for the Future" and was based upon the facts that:

1. The global human population was outstripping the food production capacity and poverty was increasing.
2. The natural resource base necessary for food production was and continues to be lost or rendered unusable due to human endeavors, job creation and sustainability of natural resources and population pressures.
3. Investments must be made to enhance the performance and the capacity for food production and the sustainability of natural resources in both the developing and developed countries.
4. Success in influencing decisions, policies, investments and the policy makers themselves will depend upon the provision of information, the establishment of strategic coalitions and partnerships of like-minded organizations, and a focused operational approach that recognizes the central role played by food and natural resources now and in the future if mankind is to survive.

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The Committee completed its work and a draft AIARD Action Plan was mailed to members on May 1, 1995 for review, comments and feedback prior to the 31st Annual Meeting scheduled for June 5-6, 1995 in Washington, D.C. The Plan was the focus of the 31st Annual Meeting whose theme was "Introducing New Approaches for Mobilizing U.S. Responses to Address Pressing Global Needs: Implications for Agriculture and Rural Development." The draft plan, entitled "AIARDs and the 21st Century: An Action Plan to Meet Future Challenges" was also presented and discussed in small group sessions organized around reaction/topics of the Plan that included:

1. Forging Strategic Alliances;
2. Rallying and Focusing AIARD Membership;
3. Information Development and Sharing;
4. Organizational and Financial Plan; and
5. Formalization of a New Organizational and Operational Structure

At the conclusion of the 31st Annual Meeting, then President Dave Bathrick announced he would establish four standing committees (new linkages and associations, membership, finances and communications) to act on the recommendation of the various groups.

While all of the recommendations/action items of the Action Plan were not implemented, many of them were. Much of how AIARD operates today is based on actions contained in the Plan. This Action Plan is almost 10 years old and the conditions and environment in which AIARD operates today are different with the past in many ways. I would recommend for future actions the existing AIARD leadership re-visit the Plan with an eye toward revising it to make it more relevant to fit the international development and the US development policy agenda we find ourselves confronted with today.