

Minutes of the ACIAR CIM/2004/024 Iraq Project Inception Meeting

Thursday June 2, 2005

Present: Dr William Erskine, DDG-Research ICARDA, Chairperson
 Dr Colin Piggin, Project Manager and Director, Megaproject 4, ICARDA
 Dr Kamel Shideed, Director, Megaproject 5, ICARDA
 Dr Elizabeth Bailey, Project Officer, Intl Cooperation, ICARDA
 Dr Ali M Abd El-Moneim, MP2
 Dr Amor Yahyaoui, MP4
 Dr Mustafa Pala, MP4
 Dr Ashutosh Sarker, MP2
 Dr Bayaa Bassam, MP4
 Dr Stefania Grando, MP2
 Dr Moustafa El-Bouhssini, MP4
 Dr Koffi Amegbeto, MP6
 Dr Zewdie Bishaw, MP6
 Dr Mathew Abang, MP4 (Rapporteur)

Apologies: Dr Rajender Malhotra

Agenda of the meeting

1) Brief introduction to the project

2) Immediate preparatory activities

- a) Baseline survey of research and village demonstration sites/villages and on-going monitoring
- b) Information on “best-bet” germplasm and crop, pest and disease management technologies
- c) Seed requirements of wheat, barley, chickpea, lentil, and forages for 2005/06 research, demonstration and extension in Iraq
- d) “Best-bet” crop management and IPDM technologies for 2005/06 R & D
- e) Visit to ICARDA by Iraqi scientists in June?
- f) Purchase of capital items for research station rehabilitation and research/demonstration in Iraq
- g) Training of Iraqi scientists
- h) Any other business

3) Planning meeting with Iraqi, ICARDA and Australian scientists in September 2005.

Opening remarks

The Chairperson, Dr William Erskine, opened the meeting at **10:05 a.m.** by welcoming everybody to this important meeting. He described the chronology of events that led to the ACIAR CIM Project and then designated Dr Colin Piggin as the Project Manager. Highlights of this chronology were as follows:

- Dr Colin Piggin, then at ACIAR, was the first to propose the establishment of a crop improvement and crop management project in Iraq, to be supported by the government of Australia.
- He prepared a draft grant proposal in which crop improvement and crop management were merged
- The full proposal was discussed and developed in detail at a workshop held at ICARDA in November 2004 and attended by representatives of all project participants (including Iraqi scientists and ACIAR): it was decided that crop improvement and crop management should be addressed as separate project objectives.

The Chairperson stressed the importance of ICARDA project participants to use this project inception meeting to “put their house in order” prior to the visit by Iraqi participants later in June 2005. He then called on Dr Colin Piggin to make his presentation on the ACIAR CIM Project.

Agenda item 1. Brief introduction to the project by Dr Colin Piggin

Dr Piggin began with a brief introduction in which he emphasized the need for agreement to be reached among ICARDA participants on who will be doing what at this inception phase of the project. He said there is scope for more ACIAR money to be made available for the rehabilitation of agriculture in Iraq and that other modules could be funded in future. It was originally intended that the project will be geographically focused on the two northern Governorates/provinces of Nineveh and Erbil which account for one-third of the total cereal production nationwide. Later on, due to fund limitations, it was decided that the project should focus exclusively on Nineveh, which has three research stations that cover three agroecological zones of Iraq. The project is committed to getting at least one research station up and running with needed equipment to support the implementation of crop improvement and cropping system management activities under objectives 2 and 3, respectively.

Dr Piggin noted that perhaps not all ICARDA participants present at the meeting were in possession of the final grant proposal and thus proceeded to highlight the four objectives of the project (as stated in the proposal), the expected outputs, the main activities under each objective, the time-line for each activity and the key milestones to be achieved. He also described the project personnel, including Australian, ICARDA and Iraqi staff, the training/capacity building component of the project, as well as the budget. On the Iraqi side, he explained that there will be 3 team leaders, 3 research teams, and 3 teams of extension staff with 2 supervisors. The details of the project can be found in the proposal and are not mentioned in these minutes; however, a number of issues related to the meeting agenda arose in the course of Dr Piggin's presentation. These were discussed and the resolutions are summarized below. In addition, Dr Piggin made a number of important clarifications, which are outlined below.

- For a variety of reasons, Australia wants to portray this project as an Australian project, which explains the strong involvement of Australian institutions.
- The project starts in May 2005 because ACIAR needs to spend the money before the end of the Australian financial year. However, the project has already been approved and the memorandum of agreement has already been signed between ICARDA and ACIAR. Project funds are expected to be transferred to ICARDA soon and nothing stops ICARDA from proceeding with project implementation.

Agenda item 2a. Baseline survey of research and village demonstration sites/villages and on-going monitoring

Activities 1.1 to 1.3 of objective 1 relate to a baseline survey and analyses of production constraints and potential available "best-bet" technologies for addressing the constraints. These activities have to be completed in June-July 2005. To achieve this it was resolved as follows:

- Dr Bailey suggested that the findings of the Mashreq and Maghreb Project should be reviewed and that knowledge gained in that project should be taken into consideration in order to avoid duplication of efforts during the current survey. Dr Shideed acknowledged the relevance of the M&M project findings but pointed out that new constraints have emerged, notably the availability of seeds, thus warranting a new survey and re-assessment of the situation on the ground.
- Dr Kamel Shideed was designated as the person responsible for the planning, coordination and implementation of the baseline survey, in collaboration with Iraqi and ICARDA colleagues.

- The visit to ICARDA by Iraqi scientists to discuss and agree on the methodology of the baseline survey has been scheduled to hold from June 26 – 30, 2005. The survey will be carried out in each agroclimatic zone by Iraqi research and extension teams using the tools developed with ICARDA during the June meeting.
- The selection/composition of the Iraqi research and extension teams to visit ICARDA and participate in the baseline survey was discussed and resolved as follows:
 - a) Efforts will be made to get project participants from within the project area as suggested by Dr Ashutosh Sarker.
 - b) As stated in the proposal, Iraqi research and extension teams will consist of barley, wheat, and legume scientists, an agronomist, a plant protection specialist and a socio-economist. All the specialists in a team will be involved in the planning, coordination and implementation of project activities, as suggested by Drs Bouhssini and Yahyaoui.
 - c) Dr Piggin recommended that 2 individuals be selected in each discipline – one with a research focus and another with a more extension focus.
 - d) After the June meeting, Iraqi participants will return to Iraq and hold round table discussions with farmers towards successful implementation of the baseline survey.

Agenda item 2b. Information on “best-bet” germplasm and crop, pest and disease management technologies

Dr Piggin stressed the need to focus on a few “best-bet” germplasm of barley, wheat, lentil, chickpea etc. and management technologies at this stage in order to see what can be achieved before increasing the suite of options to be evaluated and disseminated. He called on ICARDA scientists to identify “best-bet” options and have these ready for consideration during the June 26-30 meeting. He further expressed the wish that Iraqi participants at the June meeting will have extensive interaction with ICARDA scientists in their different areas of expertise.

Agenda item 2c) Seed requirements of wheat, barley, chickpea, lentil, and forages for 2005/06 research, demonstration and extension in Iraq (objectives 1 and 2)

This item was discussed in great detail and some meeting participants expressed concerns regarding the use of released vs. non-released varieties, the size of the seed shipment to be procured and delivered to Iraq, restrictions imposed by phytosanitary regulations, and the need to “block”/buy seed from Syrian farmers who, in the case of barley, are harvesting now and need cash.

-Regarding the scale of the seed shipments, Dr Piggin explained that large-scale buying and delivery of seed was never part of the project. He, however, pointed out that sufficient seed will have to be made available for on-farm demonstration and research. Dr Bailey added that one of the early goals of the project would be to develop capacity at Rabia Research Station for quality seed production to be used in on-farm demonstration and research.

-Dr Piggin explained that breeding programs exist in Australia for all the target crops in the project and that seed will also be made available from Australia for evaluation, demonstration, and research. Dr Grando noted that restrictions imposed by phytosanitary regulations mean that seed from Australian partner institutions will have to be shipped directly to Iraq rather than to ICARDA for onward delivery to Iraq. However, it was agreed that one set of any such shipment be sent to ICARDA for independent evaluation and as a back-up.

-Dr Piggin will get in touch with Australian partners to see what germplasm is available and ensure that their “best-bet” options are ready for consideration during the September meeting.

-On the issue of using released or non-released varieties, Dr Piggin recommended that a range of promising materials (including non-released varieties) should be included among the germplasm to be evaluated and selected under objective 2 of the project.

-Dr Grando was designated to coordinate amongst the breeders at ICARDA to develop lists of “best-bet” varieties for demonstration/extension (objective 1) and lines for testing in the research programs (objective 2).

Agenda item 2d) “Best-bet” crop management and IPDM technologies for 2005/06 R & D

-Dr Piggin stressed the need to specify the “best-bet” and researchable crop management and IPDM technologies ahead of the June 26 meeting.

-Dr Mustafa Pala was designated as the person responsible at ICARDA for coordinating the identification of “best-bet” crop management technologies (objective 1) and of more speculative technologies for evaluation in objective 3.

- Dr Mustafa El-Bouhssini agreed to coordinate the identification of the “best-bet” and researchable pest and disease management technologies before the late June meeting with Iraqi collaborators.

Agenda item 2e. Visit to ICARDA by Iraqi scientists in June?

This item is covered under agenda item 2a above. We will try to organize the visit in late June (26-30th June was suggested). This will be coordinated by Dr Kamel Shideed. It will be especially

to discuss the baseline surveys and possible “best-bet” and researchable technologies for evaluation in the research and extension activities.

Agenda item 2f. Purchase of capital items for research station rehabilitation and research/demonstration in Iraq

-The budget is rather tight and so only one research station will be rehabilitated.

-Details of the capital items to be purchased for the project can be found in the grant proposal. The proposal states, however, that the Ministry of Agriculture of Iraq and ICARDA will agree on final items/works to be funded. ICARDA will assist with purchasing but as far as possible capital equipment will be purchased locally.

- Some meeting participants were concerned that the amounts allocated for certain capital items (e.g. the plot harvester) were under budget at current market prices. It was explained that the nearest place to procure many of the capital items is Europe and that the current strength of the Euro makes these items more expensive than budgeted.

-Dr Piggin explained that the project will have to stay within the budget regarding the purchase of capital items as there were no extra funds available for the procurement of capital items.

-Dr Bailey enquired if it would be possible to reallocate funds, say to get extra hands (Iraqis) for IPM or breeding work in the project, in case the Iraqis have already acquired some listed capital items and/or have already undertaken some rehabilitation work. Dr Piggin explained that such a possibility probably exists but that this would have to be discussed with ACIAR.

Agenda item 2g) Training of Iraqi scientist

-Dr Piggin explained that up to 20 Iraqi staff will receive training each year in germplasm evaluation, cropping systems management, seed production & seed quality control, integrated pest/disease/weed management, and extension methods.

-Dr Bailey noted that there might be scope to integrate the capacity building activities of the project with on going capacity building activities supported by other donors (e.g. JIRCAS) for increased time and cost efficiency.

- Dr Ali El-Moneim was, however, of the opinion that the individual training needed to cover the specific needs of Iraqi project participants e.g. in germplasm evaluation etc. may be very difficult to combine with other training courses of a more general nature.

- Dr Piggin explained that 1 senior Iraqi scientist rather than two will visit an Australian research institute for 6-8 weeks each year as stated in the proposal (see activity 4.4, page 25).

Agenda item 3. Planning meeting with Iraqi, ICARDA and Australian scientists in September 2005.

A number of important issues were raised and discussed regarding how to proceed beyond the June meeting. These discussions mostly revolved around planning for the September 2005 Meeting, considering that September is only 3 months away.

- It was proposed that the September meeting be made to coincide with Annual Iraq/ICARDA Coordination Meeting, as this would give the project much-needed publicity. However, Dr Bailey explained that it is difficult to say when exactly in September the Coordination meeting would be held and so, for logistical reasons, the date of the September 2005 meeting should be fixed while hoping that it eventually coincides with the Iraq/ICARDA Coordination Meeting.

-The First Annual Project Planning meeting of all project partners is scheduled to take place from 4-8 September, 2005 at ICARDA, Aleppo, Syria. This planning meeting will be an annual event to review progress made in the previous year and fine-tune plans for the next year.

-During the September 2005 meeting, the outcome of the baseline survey will be highlighted and agreement will be reached on the R&D options to implement. A detailed plan of project implementation in the three agroecological zones will be agreed upon and would be expected to answer all questions related to what option(s) to implement, where, by whom etc?

Dr Colin Piggin thanked all the scientists present, on behalf of the Chairperson, who in the meantime was unavoidably absent, before closing the meeting at **11:45 am**.