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IDRC-Funded Workshop at ICARDA-HQ May 24-June 1, 2007

Prepared by:

Sayed Nooruddin Hariq, Deputy Director of Research, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation & Livestock, Kabul, and

Sakhidad Saleem, Associate Professor, Dept of Plant Protection, Faculty of Agriculture, Kabul University

On behalf of:

*The 25 Participants of the IDRC-funded Capacity Building Workshop
Kabul, July 2007*

Since training workshops offer opportunities for researchers to become familiar with the recent advances in agricultural sciences, new approaches and new methodologies, therefore we the participants of above workshop very much appreciate the unique opportunity that enabled us to have a scientific tour of ICARDA-HQ in Aleppo, Syria, and participate in a workshop under the name of “*Capacity Building of Afghan Researchers and Policy Makers in Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis, Poverty & Gender Analysis, Participatory and Interdisciplinary Research*”. It was really interesting and informative and the skills/methodologies learned will enable us in monitoring and evaluation and impact assessment of current and future research projects in agricultural and alternative livelihoods projects in Afghanistan.

This workshop which is tied to the RALF (Research in Alternative Livelihoods Fund) Program of ICARDA through IDRC-funding and responds to the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock’s (MAIL) Master Plan was attended by 25 agricultural professionals of which 8 were ladies. The participants are engaged in governmental and non-governmental agencies in Kabul and different provinces in the field of agriculture. The participants included technical and professional staff of MAIL, professors from agriculture faculties of various Afghan universities (Kabul, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Herat and Balkh) and non-governmental organizations like AKDN, AVRDC/Relief International, Mercy Corps and DACAAR.

Prior to our departure from Kabul, we attended an Orientation Meeting at MAIL on May 24th which was organized by Dr. Najibullah Malik, ICARDA's RALF Program Manager. The meeting was attended by the MAIL Members of the RALF Steering Committee, Kabul University, the 25 participants as well as the family's (Muharram's) of the 8 female participants. Drs. Malik, Bahram, Rizvi and Prof. Sherzai provided an overview of ICARDA's capacity building activities under the RALF and other programs in Afghanistan, followed by the objectives of the IDRC-funded Capacity Building Workshop. Prof. M. Yasin Mohsini, Dean of Kabul University's Agriculture Faculty and Mr. Nasratullah Akbarzad, Director of Planning and Policy at MAIL, applauded the role of ICARDA's RALF Program in capacity building of Afghan institutions. Dr. Malik responded to the questions of the 25 participants regarding their journey to Aleppo and the difficulties experienced in visa applications for UAE and Turkey for the 11 participants who did not carry Service Passports. Dr. Malik also reassured the families of the 8 female participants and offered that his family will personally look after the safety/well-being of the female participants from the moment of arrival at Damascus Airport to the moment of departure from Ankara Airport.

The secondary objective of the Workshop: Whereas the primary objective of the IDRC-funded workshop was to build the capacity of the Afghan researchers and policy makers in sustainable livelihoods, participatory research and poverty and gender analysis, in preliminary discussions/negotiations with Dr. Malik when changing the venue of the workshop from Kabul to Aleppo, it had been emphasized by MAIL and Afghan universities that *any visit to ICARDA-HQ must include a visit to ICARDA's lab and field research programs and provide opportunities for interaction with the ICARDA scientists.*

We left Kabul for Sharjah on May 24th. We spent the night at Sharjah Airport and then left for Damascus the following morning. After a cultural tour of the historical sites in Damascus, Homs and Hama, we arrived in Aleppo. The following morning (May 26th), we had an agricultural tour of the Afrin, Izaz and the northwestern regions close to the Turkish border (Zone-1, rainfall above 450 mm). Lead by ICARDA research scientists, Mr. Nabil Trabulsi and Mr. Atef Haddad, we met with a pioneer farmer (Mr. Hassan Kassem Agha) and discussed participatory research, crop production practices at his farm and the role of the extension service. We then moved to another farm in Maghara and were received by another farmer (Mohammad Kurd) who is involved in participatory research with ICARDA. We were impressed to see how simple and low-cost measures could improve water retention and prevent soil erosion. Dr. Francis Turkleboom of ICARDA responded to our questions on NRM and other research programs in the area. In general, the tour provided us with the opportunity to see crop production practices (cereal crops, cotton, sugar beets, vegetables, olives, fruit orchards, intercropping of grapes and olives) and exchange views with the progressive Syrian farmers in that region.

In general, our visit to ICARDA-HQ had two key components, as follows:

- A. Main class-room activity and lectures that were delivered by facilitators, like Mr. Ziad Moussa, Mrs. Archana Patkar and ICARDA social scientists like Drs. Malika Abdul Ali Martini, Aden Aw-Hassan, Farooq Shomo and Ahmed Mazid. . The topics of the lectures were as follows:
1. Capacity building of Afghan researchers in participatory research.
 2. Capacity building of Afghan researchers in gender and social analysis, the dimension of gender on livelihoods characterization.
 3. Introduction to sustainable livelihoods analysis, when and how the project should fight poverty in a sustainable manner.
 4. How should we conduct socio-economic surveys
 5. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research
- B. Tour of ICARDA's research programs and interaction with ICARDA scientists
1. Tour of the Seed Unit (seed production, establishment of village-based seed enterprise in Afghanistan).
 2. Tour of the Sheep Unit (small ruminant nutrition, forage production, rangeland system and Dr. Larbi's lecture on Forage/Dairy Project in Baghlan Province)
 3. Tour of biotechnology laboratories and wheat improvement program
 4. Tour of Genetic Resources Unit
 5. Tour of IPM Sunn Pest Labs
 6. Tour of farm operations (machinery, irrigation, etc.)
 7. The role of ICARDA's CBSU in building "Networking"

After leaving ICARDA-HQ, along our route from Aleppo to Ankara Airport, we visited the Bahri Dagdas International Agricultural Research Institute, in Qonya. The Bahri Dagdas covers 1800 hectares of land. It mainly deals with cereal crops and animal husbandry, especially sheep and cattle rearing research activities. The Director of the Institute and key scientists were at hand to respond to our questions. The possibility of future collaboration between Afghan researchers and Bahri Dagdas Institute in the area of sheep breeding was discussed.

The highlights of this workshop can be summarized as follows:

-The workshop provided us with the tools and theoretical knowledge in sustainable livelihoods analysis, social and gender analysis and participatory research. The knowledge gained will help us in the evaluation and impact assessment of current projects and the design of new research projects. Both theoretical and practical issues were taken into consideration in the workshop, therefore it was considered to be interesting and quite useful. The facilitators used "on the job" training approach and the "case studies" used were saffron cultivation, flax production as a new oilseed crop and introduction of new improved wheat varieties.

-We sincerely thank IDRC (Canada) for funding this (and future) workshops and ICARDA-HQ for hosting this Workshop. We were honored to see Dr. Lamia El-Fattal of IDRC during the last two days of the Workshop and benefit from advice.

-The decision to convene the Workshop at ICARDA-HQ literally multiplied the value of this event by two fold as we had the opportunity to visit ICARDA's research programs and interact with the scientists.

-Some of the unique features of the group which can be credited to Dr. Malik's planning efforts in the months ahead of the workshop include:

-Participation of eight female professionals, including two from Helmand Province where women can not venture outside the confines of the house, let alone travel abroad for training. The participation of women signifies the gender aspect of the Workshop and this has certainly required a lot of reassurances and commitment to the families of the female participants, on the part of Dr. and Mrs. Malik.

-Participation of professors from Kabul and the provincial universities (a good balance)

-Participation of male and female MAIL employees from Kabul and the provinces

-Participation of male and female RALF Partners from NGO's

-A good mix of seasoned policy makers and young researchers.

-It is noteworthy that, with support from the RALF Program, several participants of this Workshop have already disseminated, within their organizations, the knowledge gained at ICARDA-HQ and that linkages have been built among the participating MAIL researchers, Afghan universities and NGO partners.

All 25 participants of the workshop have evaluated the training event as successful and useful. We thank the facilitators and ICARDA scientists for their time and patience during the one-week intensive course. The Dari text of the Evaluation Forms is available and the translation of the English version will soon be available. We are pleased with the logistical arrangements at ICARDA-Kabul Office, ICARDA-HQ and for our trip to the Research Institute in Qonya, Turkey, which came as a bonus. A lot was accomplished in the course of just 7-8 days. **Time/duration of the course was the key constraint. We recommend that 10 days be devoted to the 2nd Workshop.**

Finally, IDRC is kindly requested to pave the way for long-term courses of 3-6 month duration at ICARDA-HQ for faculty members, graduate students and MAIL professionals. Researchers need to spend an entire growing season at Tel-Hadya and engage in practical work along with ICARDA technical staff. Such opportunities would really play a vital role in human capacity development of Afghan researchers.

IDRC-Funded Project on Capacity Building of Afghan Researchers (MAIL, Afghan Universities and RALF Implementing Partners) in Sustainable Livelihoods Analysis, Participatory Research, Poverty & Gender Analysis

**Summary of the 25 Participants's Evaluation of the First Workshop
ICARDA, Aleppo, Syria
May 24-June 1, 2007**

Prepared by:

- Mrs. Aziza Kaker, Research Officer, DACAAR, Kabul, Afghanistan
- Sayed Nooruddin Hariq, Research Dept, Ministry of Agric., Irrigation & Livestock
- Sakhidad Saleem, Plant Protection Dept, Faculty of Agriculture, Kabul University
- M. Hashim Aslami, RALF Proj. 02-02 Coordinator, DACAAR, Herat, Afghanistan

General Comments:

-The Workshop Participants considered livelihoods analysis, participatory research, poverty and gender analysis as quite relevant to their “on the job training” and the knowledge/methodologies learned will enable them in better assessment of the impact of current projects and design of new projects. The training received can be considered a small but important step in the capacity building of agricultural researchers which is one of the pillars of the government's Master Plan.

-Afghan researchers urgently needed training in the subject areas covered because it is the Afghan government's policy as well as the Donors' expectations that more and more of the research for development projects be prepared and implemented by the Afghan staff. Thus the knowledge gained will enable them to have more input in the project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation activities, provided there is more specialized follow-up training.

An additional outcome (unplanned at the outset) of the workshop was the exposure of Afghan researchers and policymakers to ICARDA research programs, crop and livestock production practices in Syria and interaction with ICARDA scientists. Only 2 of the 25 Participants had been to ICARDA before. This opportunity was certainly appreciated by all Participants.

The Workshop Participants sincerely thank IDRC (Canada), for providing the funding for this project which will complement the capacity building efforts of the RALF Program, and ICARDA for hosting this workshop under the auspices of the RALF Program. We appreciate all the efforts of the Facilitators and ICARDA scientists for a very productive and intensive 7- day program, however, it should be pointed out that the duration of the course was very short which did not allow much time for discussions and the subject of Log frames which is so important to our work was not adequately covered. The second group may be as interactive as the first, therefore, it is recommended that the duration of the workshop be extended.

There is the expectation that some of the Participants (from WS-1 and WS-2) will be invited to a third workshop for more specialized training (Logframes, impact assessment and research proposal writing and evaluation) and trainings of longer duration as TOT.

With support from ICARDA's RALF Program, some of the Workshop Participants have already disseminated the knowledge gained at ICARDA, within their organizations, and more activities are planned.

The Workshop Participants appreciate the persistent efforts of Dr. Malik (and the role of Mrs. Fahima Malik in working behind the scenes) to ensure women participation from Afghanistan for the first time. It was unprecedented for ICARDA to host a group of women agricultural professionals from provinces such as Kandahar and Helmand where women can not easily venture outside the confines of the house in the current socio-political circumstances of Afghanistan.

1- What will you remember most from the workshop? (words, phrases, pictures, ideas, topics, people, etc)?

The "team work" spirit of the Facilitators (Mr. Ziad Moussa, Mrs. Archana Patkar) and ICARDA social scientists (in particular, Dr. Martini) was what most participants remember.

Some of the unique responses are copied verbatim below:

- Topic about the elephant by Ziad Moussa was very interesting and applicable
- Lamia's love/affection for helping the people of Afghanistan was so touching that we all felt as if we have just found a long lost friend, even though Mr. Hariq was her only former colleague!
- The informal facilitation role of Mr. Aslami of DACAAR was appreciated by all. With his strong sense of humor, he contributed to the lively discussions and helped his fellow brothers and sisters understand the course material. He was also a lot of fun during the long bus trips and kept us happy and amused.

2-Was the workshop what you expected? Were there any surprises (negative or positive)?

-In general there were no major surprises for the Workshop Participants because MAIL participants had been briefed by Dr. Fazl and then there were several rounds of informal meetings between the participants and Dr. Malik at ICARDA-Kabul Office during the weeks preceding the Workshop.

Some of the unique responses are copied verbatim below:

- Before starting the workshop we thought that the workshop will be a formality workshop like a show and that the main purpose was providing a travel opportunity to outside of Afghanistan for Afghans, but when it started, we found that that the workshop contents and facilitation were very interesting, useful and applicable for the participants who are working in NGO's or government.

-The facilitators/organizers coped well with a large group. We learned methodologies, analysis that will be useful tools later on in our work. Gender awareness was a key item.

-A surprising thing (important discovery) for me was to see how ICARDA keeps germ plasm at minus 15-20 C for 100 years.

3- Are there any ideas or topics that need further explanation? What would help you with clarification?

Lack of sufficient time for discussion at the end of each module did not allow time to seek clarifications. The Workshop Participants were disappointed that Logframes was not addressed adequately.

Some of the unique responses are copied verbatim below:

-There were very good explanations but the explanations were given very fast, because of the time crunch. In future, this should be taken into consideration. We were a very interactive group. Maybe the facilitators and organizers were not expecting this and had assumed that the course material would be covered in time-fixed modules without any interruption.

-Most of the participants wanted at least a half-day session on Logframes. Coverage of the Logframes would have been the most outstanding module of this Workshop, had it been addressed by the Facilitators properly and adequately.

4- What are your positive impressions? What worked well in the workshop?

The Participants' positive impression is the "team work spirit" that prevailed among the Facilitators, the Afghan Co-Facilitators and ICARDA scientists, even as they tried/struggled to modify certain aspects of the delivery of the program or schedule visits to ICARDA research programs at short notice. Time was of the essence, from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM and there was this eagerness not to miss even a 15-minute slot of time as the Participants wanted to see (ie., one more lab !) and do so many things in the limited time available.

The Participants appreciated the fact that there were women participants (even though only 8 out of a group of 25) at the Workshop. Previous attempts at sending women to ICARDA had failed often because of the mentality of the organizers and the men who are in position of power. Dr. Fazl's (Extension Dept, MAIL) support for participation of women employees from MAIL was also very crucial.

Some of the unique responses are copied verbatim below:

-Working in a team, informal but very professional looking (the Facilitators and ICARDA's social scientists like Dr. Malika)!

- Participatory, cooperation of teachers and ICARDA-HQ scientists and support staff, *especially Miss Maysa* who strived to help us in view of the limitations of the resources available at ICARDA that week.

5- What are the negative impressions from this workshop? What would you change about the workshop?

The single most important critique of the Participants is that of not allowing sufficient time for discussions, interaction and the Participants' other pursuits (not planned for initially) of visiting ICARDA's research programs and cultural tours. The duration of the workshop as envisaged by the Organizers and Facilitators was criticized as being too short.

Some of the unique responses are copied verbatim below:

- Some of the trainers wanted to express their own ideas and did not care about the participants views.
- Just one thing has to be changed in the future: Please try that the examples be provided from Afghanistan in future.
- Separation between male and female participants in classroom would be a negative point.

6- What will you do differently as a result of this experience?

The Participants indicated that they are now more conscious of the themes "livelihoods analysis, participatory research, and gender analysis" and that the new knowledge/analytical skills learned will enable them to better assess the impact of current research programs underway as well as in the design (or approval, as in the case of MAIL) of new research projects aimed at sustainable alternative livelihoods.

Some of the unique responses are copied verbatim below:

- Ask for the participants' experience please. In particular, the colleagues working with NGO's should bring more actual/practical examples of the RALF Projects to the classroom, or even better, provide the examples of Case Studies to the Facilitators ahead of time so that they can incorporate such examples/case studies in their teaching modules.
- Knowledge gained/methodologies learned will help me in better report preparation/analysis of the results of the RALF Project.
- The gained knowledge will be used in my research and teaching program in the Faculty
- The obtained knowledge is applicable in our country.
- The knowledge gained will assist me in better preparation of research proposals for the 2nd Phase of RALF Projects.

7- Please provide additional comments/recommendations on organization, facilitation, logistics, etc.

Although a few logistical problems annoying to the Facilitators (such as not having the auditorium for the entire workshop, insufficient tools for facilitation, not having timely delivery of water, tea/coffee) were noticed, the Participants were mostly gracious in not highlighting these as an issue as they have evaluated the program in totality-the processes involved in the delivery of the whole program starting with the candidate selection, months in advance of the workshop, to the time of safe arrival of the participants back in their respective provinces.

-Two or 3 people should be selected from among the workshop participants who could serve as the Co-facilitator for the 2nd workshop.

Some of the unique responses are copied verbatim below:

- Every thing ran well realizing that this was not the only function at ICARDA that week and that we were competing for ICARDA's resources (ie., the exclusive access to the auditorium for a week, breakaway rooms).

- Organization/logistical arrangements for a workshop involving 25 people from different parts of Afghanistan has required a lot of effort, starting with the process for the selection of the candidates, two rounds of trips from the Provinces to Kabul for Passport Application, the final trip from the Provinces to Kabul and Kabul to Aleppo, then the return trip from Aleppo to Turkey , back to Kabul and the Provinces. We appreciate all the efforts of Dr. Najib and the RALF support staff in Kabul and Aleppo. We had seen/heard that Dr. Najib had to personally get involved/intervene in Kabul to expedite the visas and get discounts for group airfare, discounts for group accommodation in Aleppo, etc. It was also a major undertaking/responsibility to select and take female participants from Kabul and the provinces to Aleppo and bring them back to their home provinces safely. This was a first for ICARDA-Afghanistan!

- This kind of workshop must continue with advance follow-up information later on and the people who are trained must be involved in the field, otherwise building a house with 3 floors without a basement is not logical.

8- Please rate this workshop on a scale of 1-10 (10= most satisfied, 1= least satisfied)

Scores ranged from a low of **3** (by one Participant) to a high of **10** (by 5 Participants).
The mathematical mean of the 25 scores is **8.44**.

Kabul, July 20, 2007