



Establish innovation platform for integrated land conservation and watersheds managements leading to improved access to water, enhanced agricultural practices and pasture ecosystem services and management

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Background

Agro-pastoralists of the Aral Sea region deal with environmental and market risks. To handle those risks, they try to optimize the allocation of their natural, physical, financial, social, and human resources among diverse livelihood options. One major challenge they face is that they often make production and consumption decisions with incomplete information about current and possible future states of market and environmental factors. The adoption and adaptation capacities of the resource-poor women and men and their potential will help to improve their livelihoods and trade-offs in exploitation of natural and production resources, the enabling policy environment, access to services, infrastructure and markets.

Understanding and characterizing the multi-dimensional livelihoods of rural communities makes it possible to identify what options may be best suited to what livelihood system, and helps to guide research, and out-scaling strategies. The baseline survey was conducted at research site (Karauzyak community, Aral Sea Action site) covering 100 households and as result gender-disaggregated database established for agropastoral system in selected research site. Data collected in Karauzyak community, Aral Sea Action site and other baseline surveys conducted in irrigation system (Fergana Valley) helped to capture the spatial variation in livelihoods within the research and action sites, and will serve for comparative analyses will be done across agro-ecosystems in Central Asia.

Concept

Innovation Platform (IP) for multi-stakeholder process to foster reducing vulnerability of the agro-pastoral system and sustainable intensification was mainstreamed to ICARDA Russian Government funded CGIAR Program to engage a range of stakeholders into collective actions to identify and alleviate the constraints affecting productivity growth, and create the conditions that enable sustainable intensification and diversification. IP works with end-users and beneficiaries to test and scale out innovations, technologies, and research methods.

Linking Agricultural Research and Rural Advisory Services

A common approach to the planning of joint activities aimed at the development of Rural Advisory services (RAS) was achieved, a key success given current and emerging challenges caused by the impact of climate change on agro-ecosystems. The establishment and improvement of institutional mechanisms for the exchange of experience and knowledge was also taken forward with the development of a set of

recommendations to enhance extension systems and link science with male and female farmers. Innovation Platform approach was considered as a key innovative model for strengthening RAS systems in Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC).

Outcomes

Within the Innovation Platform activity, in 2015 a baseline survey was conducted in Kyrgyzstan, the Fergana Valley, covering 120 households. Baseline data was collected on the following issues: demographic characteristics of households; financial, physical, natural and social capital; agricultural production; access, quality, quantity, and management of water resources; livestock production and management; agricultural policy; food security and nutrition; borrowing and access to credit; system vulnerability and local coping mechanisms used by households (http://cac-program.org/crpds/survey/baseline_data).

The data-set on socio-economic, gender, youth, capacity building, extension, market and finance aspects covering 100 households in Karauzyak rural community, Aral Sea is available since January, 2016 at <http://cac-program.org/download/file/220>. The dataset is periodically updated.

To understand and characterize the multi-dimensional livelihoods of rural communities in order to identify what options may be best suited to what livelihood system, and helps to guide research, and out-scaling strategies the baseline survey was conducted in Sugd region of the Fergana Valley covering 100 households. As a result of baseline survey two sets data (one for the research site in Tajikistan and another for research in Kyrgyzstan) have been elaborated and available since January, 2016 at http://cac-program.org/files/Kyrgyzstan_dataset.xlsx.

In total by December 2015, three datasets were elaborated in Central Asia.

Mainstreaming gender in Agricultural Research and Innovations

A gender workshop held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on 8 December 2014 - "Gender mainstreaming to higher and sustainable income and well-being in the Fergana Valley " - helped to deepen and integrate understanding of gender, specifically how to use gender as a tool for improving the well-being and increasing the income of rural families in the Fergana Valley. A training course was conducted in Central Asia. All training participants were from Kyrgyzstan. There were 17 training participants, nine of them women, and eight men. All participants had higher or technical education background, and all of them were involved in agriculture, since they work as consultants, or in farmer organizations. For 98 per cent of the training participants this training was their first experience of gender education.

Online discussions

The online discussions on the role of Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS) in Central Asia and Caucasus countries towards more sustainable food security and nutrition (FSN) (<http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/eca/en/AIS-CAC-China>) were conducted from the 6th of May until the 9th of June 2015. The purpose of this cross-regional online discussion was to offer stakeholders an opportunity to share their experience, knowledge and good practices on strengthening Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS) in CAC countries. The objectives of these discussions were: a) identifying challenges, opportunities and collective actions towards strengthening Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS) in countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC); b) identifying roles of various stakeholders; c) gathering insights and views on consistent actions needed to enhance the capacities of existing regional

platforms to promote communication and collaboration on agricultural innovations; (d) promoting regional cooperation for improved policies to enhance market liberalization, environmental sustainability, and regional development.

The online discussions have collected 83 comprehensive contributions from 48 experts. The geographical scope of participants was wide, drawing from 18 countries of different regions as well as from developed and developing economies. People from 73 countries visited the discussion's webpage and above 10,000 people received information on the consultation.

Ministries of agriculture, scientific and research institutions, high education and post-graduate institutions, and farmer's organizations among many other actors from the agricultural sector have contributed with their views to what has turned out to be a truly inter-regional multi-stakeholder dialogue.

Roughly, 35% of the participants who have taken part in the discussion were women and 10% young professionals. Additionally, some participants have kindly shared several analytical documents for further analysis.

Ultimately, the different contributions to the online consultations fed into a side event at the 6th Annual Meeting of the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services in September 2015, and supported an establishment of a window for future collaborations between countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC). The outcomes of the discussion are fruitful for strengthening and enhancing participatory agricultural research network in the CAC region.