

Agricultural research leaders from Central Asia and the Caucasus met in Tashkent

Summary of the Steering Committee Meeting of the CGIAR Regional Program for Sustainable Agricultural Development in Central Asia and the Caucasus, 20-22 September 2011



Heads of the National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan met with representatives of nine International Agricultural Research Centres at the 14th meeting of the CGIAR-CAC Steering Committee. The event took place in Tashkent, on 20-22 September 2011. In addition, partners of the Program from a number of national and international research and development agencies, as well as representatives of diplomatic corps in Tashkent joined meeting sessions.

In his opening speech, Dr. Mahmoud Solh, Chair of the Program, Director General of ICARDA, underlined that *“For the last decade the CGIAR-CAC Program attracted a significant funding to implement its research on crop improvement, genetic resources, natural resources management and socio-economic research for agriculture in the CAC Region”*. He also mentioned that capacity development has been a key priority for the Program. *“I would like to thank the Government of Uzbekistan for hosting this event and for giving the support from the very beginning”* said Dr. Solh speaking about the importance of collaboration with NARS partners in the Region.

“The meeting is an important milestone in agricultural research for development in the CAC Region, including Uzbekistan. Today we are summarizing the results of cooperation with International Centres and we will discuss joint research activities for the next year. What is done by countries over a period of several years, can be done in shorter period of time in cooperation with International Centres, based on their global experience” said Dr. Sherali Nurmatov, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, Head of NARS of Uzbekistan in his welcome address to the participants of the Meeting. He emphasized the need to strengthen and develop collaboration with International Centres in the area of agricultural research and expressed the hope that the meeting *“...will serve as an engine for future research projects in the Region”*.

The annual report of the Program was presented by Dr. Jozef Turok, Head of the CGIAR Program Facilitation Unit (PFU) and ICARDA Regional Coordinator. Dr. Turok underlined environmental stress associated with climate change as a major challenge for sustainable agricultural development in the CAC Region. He also provided a summary of main areas of involvement, activities, achievements and perspectives for future work of the CGIAR and other International Centres.

The following session focused on *“Agricultural Innovations in Central Asia and the Caucasus: promoting adaptation to climate change and supporting integrated water resources*

management". During this session, staff of the International Centres jointly with NARS partners presented highlights of the collaborative research conducted in the Region. All presentations can be downloaded from the Program's website www.icarda.cgiar.org/cac.

They demonstrated the wealth of research knowledge and a number of practical innovations generated by the Program during the past years. Many participants commended the scientific potential of a young generation of researchers, who made the presentations during this session.

Leaders of NARS then presented their expectations and views on future collaborative research for increasing productivity of agricultural systems, natural resources management, conservation of genetic resources, socio-economic and public policy research, the four key areas of involvement of the Program. The need for continued capacity building was emphasized by all speakers. Representatives from Georgia, Kazakhstan and other countries also informed the meeting about current reforms of agricultural research at the national level.

The second day started with a poster session, which was followed by a round-table discussion on Regional priorities for agricultural research for development. Acad. Jamin Akimaliev, Chair of the Central Asia and the Caucasus Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (CACAARI) introduced priorities for research based on national consultative processes in the countries as follows:

- Preservation of plant gene pools, breeding and seed production, introduction of alternative crops;
- Modernization and introduction of resource saving technologies;
- Application of biotechnology in breeding of agricultural plants and animals;
- Development of new, effective and ecologically safe methods of control of harmful organisms;
- Modernization and introduction of technologies for effective utilization of soil and water resources;
- Preservation of gene pools of animal breeds in agriculture, breeding and new technologies;
- Preventive maintenance, diagnostics and treatment of infectious diseases of animals in agriculture, ensuring safety of foodstuffs, testing and using of new vaccines and medicines;
- Mechanization of technological processes in agricultural processes, technical service;
- Food and nutrition security, development and introduction of progressive ways of management in the conditions of small farms and large cooperatives.

CACAARI is actively working on development of a Regional strategy for the transformation of agricultural research systems and innovation. The participants stressed the importance of ensuring good linkages between the Program and CACAARI. Coordination of activities in the Region and representation at global level (Global Conferences on Agricultural Research for Development) were highlighted. It was proposed that a joint review of work could further identify specific areas for intervention in capacity building and strengthening existing thematic networks. Collaboration between CACAARI and the European Forum on Agricultural Research for Development in preparation of a forthcoming CACAARI event was mentioned.

As of January 2012, The CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs) will be the main mechanism by which the CGIAR will achieve the greater alignment with the strategic goals. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, future research will mainly focus on "Integrated Agricultural Production Systems in Dry Areas", the CRP led by ICARDA. As emphasized by Dr Solh during the round-table discussion, it will focus on integrated dryland farming systems, with multi-disciplinary research teams working at several action sites throughout the Region, and being part of a global effort. He announced that the Russian Federation would invest a part of its CGIAR contribution towards the implementation of the CRP in the CAC Region as of 2012. The inception workshop, which will involve partners from all eight countries, relevant partner institutions and the International Centres, will be convened by ICARDA in the coming months.

Representatives of the lead Centres then provided brief updates on the status of those additional CRPs that are relevant for the Region: Policies, Institutions and Markets (IFPRI),

Roots, Tubers and Bananas (CIP), Wheat (CIMMYT), Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereals (ICRISAT), Water (IWMI), Forests and Trees (Bioversity) and Climate Change (ICARDA). The discussion emphasized the need for involving non-CGIAR International Centres in the planning and implementation of the CRPs, wherever appropriate. Recognizing the significance of livestock and rice research in the Region, the participants recommended a closer cooperation with ILRI and IRRI, respectively.

The representatives of the International Centres with staff based in the Region retreated in a closed session, during which they adopted a new remuneration structure for the staff in Tashkent. The Centres also endorsed in principle the proposal for the maintenance of the PFU with a one-year provisional budget financially supported by the Centres.

The Steering Committee members were briefed on the outcomes of the closed session and discussed governance of the Program in general, based on a paper prepared by the PFU. The mode of operation of the Program, including terms of reference of the various bodies (Steering Committee, National Coordinators and the PFU) was briefly discussed and adopted. Recognizing the implications of the new CGIAR strategic framework and the opportunities for collaborative research provided by the CRPs to be implemented in the Region, the Steering Committee recommended that efforts be continued for a closer coordination among the International Centres in the CAC Region. The Steering Committee requested the PFU to strengthen its resource mobilization efforts and activities.

In the comments by NARS partners, achieving food and nutrition security in the Region was emphasized as a key objective. The need to consider land degradation processes associated with soil erosion and soil salinity and the specific soil and climatic conditions was also raised. The NARS participants expressed their full support for the implementation of the CRPs in the Region. They offered their willingness to conduct relevant research in each country under the new umbrella. Several members of the Steering Committee stressed the continued importance of capacity building and education at all levels. The role of the PFU as a bridge between the NARS, International Centres and the wider international research community was acknowledged.

The Heads of NARS from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan informed the participants about ongoing discussions in their countries concerning the intentions to become members of the CGIAR. The efforts to support the Program financially from sources within the Region were acknowledged and encouraged by the Steering Committee. Finally, FAO in its capacity as an observer organization in the Steering Committee provided comments on a range of issues. The weakness of extension services in the Region was mentioned as a major constraint for agricultural development. The representative of GIZ (Germany) emphasized dissemination and effective transfer of the technologies generated by international public research as key for achieving impact.

At the closing session, Dr. Mahmoud Solh, with the agreement from the other members of the Program Steering Committee, handed over the one-year Chair of the CGIAR-CAC Program to the Dr. Dyno Keatinge, Director General, AVRDC - The World Vegetable Centre. Dr. Sherali Nurmatov, Head of NARS of Uzbekistan was elected as Co-Chair of the Program. The members of the Program Steering Committee agreed to hold the next annual meeting in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan, in September 2012.

On the third day, the participants visited experimental fields of Tashkent State Agrarian University, where they met with students and lecturers. Evaluation trials for vegetables and groundnut were demonstrated in the field, and results of collaboration activities for others crops were shown in posters. The participants then visited 'Shreder' Research Institute of Horticulture, Viticulture and Winemaking, and the National University of Uzbekistan, both located at the outskirts of Tashkent. These state academic and research institutions are involved in collaborative research projects jointly implemented with International Centres. The visitors were briefed on the history and major activities of these institutions and the results of ongoing joint research were showcased during the field visit.