

CGIAR Regional Program for Sustainable Agricultural Development in Central Asia and the Caucasus

1. Introduction

The present document was adopted at the 14th Program Steering Committee meeting, held 20-22 September 2011, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. It describes the background of the Program, its mode of operation including terms of reference of the various bodies and the broader linkages. It is based on the practices and decisions made by the Program Steering Committee and accumulated over the thirteen years of operation.

2. Background

The CGIAR Regional Collaborative Research Program for Sustainable Agricultural Development in Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC) was formed in 1998, based on the partnership agreement establishing the Program, signed by 8 CGIAR Centers in October 1997 (Annex 1). The Program goals are to reduce poverty and hunger, improve human health and nutrition, and enhance ecosystem resilience through high-quality international agricultural research, partnership and leadership in the CAC Region. To put the goals into practice, the Program has focused on providing technical support to the CAC countries in achieving sustainable increases in the productivity of crop and livestock systems.

This was accomplished through development of varieties, agricultural production and water management technologies, transfer and adoption of technologies from the international Centers, natural resource management and conservation strategies, methodologies and practices, and capacity building. Examples of key results are listed in Box 1.

Box 1. Examples of key research outcomes of the Program:

- More than 20,000 improved germplasm accessions distributed to national scientists in the Region for evaluation;
- Sixty-three varieties of agricultural crops (cereals, legumes, potato and vegetables) released in the CAC countries;
- Seeds of improved cereal and legumes varieties multiplied in collaboration with national partners;
- Use of alternative irrigation methods and crop rotation systems in increasing on-farm water productivity and crop yields introduced;
- More efficient irrigation water management practices investigated and implemented at basin level;
- Institutional arrangements created and strengthened, and new operational procedures introduced to ensure reliable and equitable distribution of irrigation water in Fergana Valley;
- GIS-based irrigation maps, delineating the location of irrigation and drainage infrastructure, and the boundaries of current irrigated areas of several irrigation projects prepared;
- National crop genebanks established and strengthened in all countries;
- Farmer-based seed system for multiplication of True Potato Seed set up;
- Safe crop diseases management methods helping to implement the biological control of insects, nematodes and weeds developed;
- New salt-tolerant forage crops and integrated salinity management approaches in different agro-ecological zones, especially in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan introduced;
- Minimum-tillage and other conservation agriculture practices tested and promoted in farmers' fields;
- Market-oriented livestock production strategies revitalizing the sector and increasing incomes of livestock farmers, especially in the mountain areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan developed;
- A new agricultural extension system - Innovation Cycle in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan developed and implemented with national partners;

- The Program has made a significant impact on building human and institutional capacities: 430 researchers received short and long-term training; more than 7,000 national partners benefited from participation in regional and international conferences, symposia, workshops, travelling seminars and study tours; and finally, more than 11,000 farmers participated in various farmers' field days, farmers' fairs, traveling workshops, farmers' schools and demonstration activities;
- 700 publications produced (handbooks, brochures, technical guidelines, newsletters) and over 70 articles published in international scientific journals.

The Program has played a pivotal role in fostering cooperation among the countries in the Region. It succeeded in re-activating the linkages among the national agricultural research systems that were ruptured after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union. It has also paved the way for them to integrate with the broader international agricultural research community. For this continued effort, the Program was awarded the prestigious CGIAR King Baudouin Award for Outstanding Partnership, in 2008. Most importantly, the Program has created a sense of ownership and trust, which are the basis for success in the long-term.

Currently, five CGIAR Centers – Bioversity, CIMMYT, CIP, ICARDA and IWMI – have staff and operations based in the Region. In addition, AVRDC, ICBA and Michigan State University are the non-CGIAR members of the Program with staff and operations in the Region. ICRISAT, IFPRI, ILRI, IRRI and University of Bonn have taken part in various activities of the Program, but do not have staff present in the Region¹.

The Program received 'seed money' funding from the World Bank during its first 10 years of operation. This was done through an annual allocation to the "System-Wide Eco-Regional Program" for CAC, which mainly covered the cost of facilitation and coordination. It is broadly agreed that the availability of the Program Facilitation Unit and the largely successful resource mobilization efforts of the Centers have been the two key internal drivers behind the realization of this ambitious Program.

During the decade 1998-2008, the 'seed money' funding to the PFU amounted to 3.2 million USD, while the overall project portfolio of the Program consisted of 70 projects, together worth 23.5 million USD.

3. Challenges and opportunities

In the current socio-economic transition of the countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, improving agricultural productivity is an urgent task. Agriculture employs between 20-50% of the population and farming is the primary source of income in rural areas. Growing and predominantly rural populations expect secure income options, stable and healthy food supply under changing environmental and socio-economic conditions. Agriculture, in particular irrigated agriculture, sustained livelihoods for people in this Region for millennia. About two-thirds of the land surface are drylands with low rainfall, extreme rainfall variability, severe heat and cold stress. Land degradation processes occur widely in Central Asia and are characterized by soil erosion, low soil fertility, salinization of soils and shallow groundwater. There is evidence that climate change effects above global average will exacerbate these natural constraints.

¹ These Centers were participating when the Program received the King Baudouin Award in 2008.

The reforms associated with overall socio-economic transition have left agricultural research, higher education and extension systems weak. Research structures are often overblown in size, but underfunded and lacking equipment and access to scientific information. Agricultural research in the CAC Region, previously staffed by highly qualified and trained scientists, has seen a significant exodus of staff due to shortage of research funds and lack of a vision. Language barriers are only one of the challenges in promoting collaboration between agricultural research in the CAC countries with the broader international community.

The challenges warrant the continued effort of the international community to invest in agricultural research for development in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The external review of the Program, conducted in 2008, concluded that "... the CAC Program is productive and highly important for the Region. It is a Program that definitely needs to be continued and efforts must be undertaken at various levels of the CGIAR system to ensure its future sustainability...". Today, the Program offers a unique example of multilateral arrangement in agricultural research for development, which adds value to the efforts undertaken by its individual members.

The reformed CGIAR with at least two global Research Programs being launched in the CAC Region has a strong momentum to make impact where it is most needed.

4. Mode of operation

The eight Member Countries are represented in the Program Steering Committee (PSC) by **National Coordinators** – Heads of the National Agricultural Research Systems. They represent their respective countries in the Program on behalf of the respective Ministries for agriculture and/or water resources. They oversee and coordinate all Program-related activities within the Member Countries, between the respective country and the Program Facilitation Unit (PFU), as well as any bilateral cooperation between Member Countries.

The National Coordinators are responsible for nominating members to represent their country's interests in the various events such as seminars, training workshops, training courses, technical and scientific meetings, and projects carried out within the framework of the Program. They are expected to maintain close contact with their country's representatives to monitor progress and identify potential problems with ongoing work.

It is the responsibility of the National Coordinators to obtain necessary governmental commitment to the Program. In particular, they take steps to obtain the support required by the national institutes to allow them to contribute to the implementation of the Program through active participation and through contributions in kind (such as provision of experimental field areas and research facilities, establishment and evaluation of trials, maintenance of databases, maintenance of collections, etc.). These activities are widely considered to be one of the key factors behind the success of the Program. In addition, the National Coordinators will seek to obtain financial contributions to the Program from the respective government budgets.

The National Coordinators may delegate part of their tasks to subsidiary bodies which provide communication or technical support, as appropriate.

The **Program Steering Committee (PSC)** consists of the International Agricultural Research Centers participating in the Program, both CGIAR and non-CGIAR, and the National Agricultural Research Systems represented by the National Coordinators. The Centers are represented by the Directors General or their nominated delegates.

The PSC provides guidance and governance of the Program and holds the overall responsibility for the Program. In particular, the Committee:

- Provides overall strategic, technical and policy guidance to the operations;
- Reviews the progress made in the Program on the basis of annual reports prepared by the PFU;
- Provides broad guidelines and takes decisions regarding the general scope of activities;
- Develops a coherent framework plan of activities and budget for three years, in particular aimed at implementation of the relevant CGIAR Research Programs in the CAC Region, monitors and evaluates progress;
- Debates and identifies emerging research issues and priorities relevant for the Program and how to address them;
- Provides policy or technical inputs to key Regional or global processes, such as the implementation framework of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification;
- Approves a three-year budget for the PFU;
- Mandates, oversees and evaluates the Program Facilitation Unit.

The PSC meets annually in a location jointly agreed on the basis of offers received from the participating countries. Between meetings, the PSC makes use of a dedicated list-server to communicate and take management decisions, whenever necessary. All decisions are taken consensually.

The PSC is chaired by the Director-General of one of the participating Centers and co-chaired by one of the National Coordinators. Chair and Co-Chair are appointed by the PSC for a period of one year on a rotating basis.

The **Program Facilitation Unit (PFU)** provides technical and administrative support for the implementation of the Program. Since 1998, it has been based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, operating under the legal agreement between the Government of Uzbekistan and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) on behalf of the Program. Only ICARDA has legal recognition as a not-for-profit, strictly non-political, international organization in Uzbekistan with full exemptions and indemnities.

The PFU is lead and managed by the PFU Head, an internationally recruited position with terms of reference outlined in Box 2.

Box 2. The PFU Head reports to the Program Steering Committee and is responsible for:

- (1) Providing the required support to the PSC and the Center Directors Committee Task Force in their functions. He/she acts as the Secretary to the PSC;
- (2) Preparing the annual work program and budget of PFU for approval by the PSC, in collaboration with the participating Centers;

- (3) Providing the necessary support to all Centers for effective implementation of the Program and efficient utilization of resources, including organization of meetings and workshops, language translation and interpretation, travel arrangements, communications, etc.
- (4) Ensuring that the PFU functions as a central documentation and information exchange center and as a repository for Program documents and publications, and developing mechanisms for information exchange through the use of appropriate information technology, including brief reports and a newsletter on agricultural research in CAC;
- (5) Assisting Consortium members in preparing collaborative projects with the NARS and arranging for their technical appraisal through the Center-designated focal point scientists before they are presented to the PSC;
- (6) Facilitating communication of Consortium members with relevant ARIs to ensure that the most appropriate science and technology is employed to develop interventions;
- (7) Maintaining contact with institutions outside the Program that have research activities in the Region;
- (8) Coordination of ICARDA's activities in the region, as Coordinator of the Center's Regional Program for CAC, devoting [currently] 30% of his/her time. Responsible to the DG of ICARDA through the ADG for this responsibility;
- (9) Ensuring the development and implementation of the regional research agenda for the CAC region, addressing shared research priorities of the region. This includes contributions to resource mobilization and proposal writing;
- (10) Ensuring the implementation of the research for development continuum in the CAC region by building needed partnerships along impact pathways to enhance the uptake of research outputs.

5. Broader collaboration and linkages

The Program endeavors to engage in collaboration and partnerships with a broad range of organizations conducting research in the Region and for the Region. Multilateral and bilateral development agencies are considered to be particularly significant given shared objectives in dissemination and adoption of the outcomes generated by international public research along impact pathways. Representatives of key partners are invited to the PSC meetings as observers.

A successful interaction with governments, policy makers, farmers' associations and farmers, and local research institutes is the key to effective cooperation in agricultural research for development. The Program is also open to establishing linkages with the emerging civil society and private sector in the CAC Region. Universities are regarded as a particularly significant partner given their traditionally strong involvement in research and the potential to out-scale capacity building efforts.

The Central Asia and Caucasus Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (CACAARI) interacts with the Program in various ways. The Program represents the interests of the Centers towards CACAARI. The Executive Secretariat of CACAARI is hosted at the PFU's offices in Tashkent, which offers day-to-day opportunities for collaboration and mutual support.

Finally, the Program welcomes participation of new International Agricultural Research Centers and Advanced Research Institutes. A decision to admit a new participating Center is taken unanimously by the members of the PSC.