

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

Fifteenth Steering Committee Meeting

The 15th Steering Committee Meeting took place on 4-6 September 2012 at Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyz Republic. Senior officials responsible for national agricultural research from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as Directors General or their representatives from the international agricultural research centers attended in their capacity as members of the Steering Committee. Turkmenistan was not able to attend. Observers from two partner organizations (ECFS Russian Federation, and GIZ Germany), participants from various institutions in Kyrgyz Republic and Program staff also attended. The list of participants is in Annex I.

The meeting aimed at providing overall strategic, technical and policy guidance for the Program, reviewed the progress made during the past year and made a number of recommendations and decisions concerning the Program in general and its Program Facilitation Unit (PFU) in particular.

Introductory Session (chaired by Acad. Dzhamin Akimaliev)

Acad. Dzhamin Akimaliev welcomed the participants and expressed his pleasure to host this important meeting. He reminded the participants that a Ministerial-level meeting was organized in the same venue in 2001, which adopted the "Issyk Kul Declaration" a road map for collaborative activities of this Program. He highlighted that international collaboration on wheat improvement had resulted in the release of five varieties of winter wheat: 'Almira', 'Djamien', 'Azibrosh', 'Zagadka' and 'Zubkov'. These five varieties are grown on approximately 150,000 ha of the total 373,000 ha currently under wheat cultivation in Kyrgyz Republic. He also mentioned important achievements of "Soil and Water Management Project", livestock, potato and vegetable improvement activities.

In his letter Mr. Djontoro Satybaldiev, Head of Office of the President of Kyrgyz Republic welcomed the participants on behalf of H.E. Mr. Almazbek Atambaev, President of Kyrgyz Republic. The letter emphasized the commitment of the Kyrgyz Government to agricultural development.

The meeting was inaugurated by Mr. Nurlan Duysheev, State Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration of Kyrgyz Republic. He expressed his great appreciation for the contribution of the CGIAR and other centers to agricultural research and development in Kyrgyz Republic and CAC countries. He briefed the meeting about achievements and challenges of agriculture in Kyrgyzstan. Mr. Duysheev expressed his wish that this extremely beneficial cooperation serve for further strengthening the relations between Kyrgyz Republic and international agricultural research centers.

Dr Kamel Shideed, representing ICARDA as the convening center of the Program, welcomed all participants. He assured the participants of the continued full support of ICARDA to the Program. Dr. Shideed also provided a brief update on the relocation of Headquarter staff from Aleppo, Syria. He referred to the Issyk Kul Declaration, which provided an important basis for enhancing the new partnership eleven years ago. In conclusion, Dr Shideed proposed that the Steering Committee

considers initiating and supporting a Ministerial-level conference on agricultural research for development in the CAC Region.

Dr Dyno Keatinge (AVRDC), current co-Chair of the Steering Committee, shared with the participants some thoughts on the Program contents and stressed the importance of the meeting. He showed figures confirming a steady increase of mean annual temperatures associated with a dramatic decrease of rainfall in some parts of the Region. He emphasized that food and nutritional security continued to be main goal of the Program. Increasing the resilience of dryland agro-ecosystems and sustainable water management practices were key approaches to be followed.

The annual report of the Program was introduced by Dr Jozef Turok (PFU Head and ICARDA Regional Coordinator). He presented recent developments and key economic and policy drivers in the CAC Region and described the approaches taken by the Program. He also provided a summary of main areas of involvement, activities and achievements, including the outcomes of the recent inception phase for CGIAR Research Program CRP1.1 “Dryland Systems”. The openness of the Program to partnerships with a wider range of research and development organizations was emphasized at the end of his presentation. The full annual report 2011-2012 is in Annex II.

Agricultural Innovations in Central Asia and the Caucasus – highlights (co-chaired by Acad. Shota Chalaganidze and Dr Kamel Shideed)

The following session included a number of short presentations made by the scientists of the international centres jointly with national research partners. They presented highlights of the collaborative research carried out in different areas of work such as development and out-scaling of new varieties, multiplication, conservation of genetic resources, biosaline agriculture, integrated pest management, improving water productivity and climate change adaptation research. All presentations made during the meeting can be downloaded from the website www.icarda.cgiar.org/cac.

Discussion and recommendations

The presentations were followed by a brief discussion. Bio-fortification was mentioned as a research topic shared by several centers, with experience being obtained on different crops in different parts of the world. It was suggested that a proposal could be prepared jointly for donor funding in future. Dr Carlo Carli (CIP) said that better synergies and complementarities could be obtained between his center’s ongoing work and the development of integrated pest management packages on potato, which is pursued by MSU. The two members were **encouraged** to discuss a synergistic approach.

There was some discussion on long-term climate change projections, and the conceptual shortcomings inherent to different modelling approaches, for instance how technological change is incorporated. The importance of analyzing past effects of changing climate on agriculture should not be under-estimated, as noted by several participants. Dr Kamel Shideed (ICARDA) mentioned a pipeline project that will allow climate change adaptation research to continue within the framework of Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management (CACILM), with expected financial support by IFAD.

The presentations demonstrated the progress made in terms of new research knowledge and technologies generated during the past year. Several participants commended the quality of the presentations made by young researchers from the Region, and acknowledged their attendance to the meeting.

Priorities and capacities in agricultural research for development (co-chaired by Acad. Hukmatullo Ahmadov and Dr Dyno Keatinge)

Representatives of national agricultural research systems presented their expectations and views on 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 the Program. They also referred to ongoing work in their countries. The need for continued capacity building was emphasized by all speakers.

Acad. Dzhamin Akimaliev (Kyrgyz Republic), in his capacity as Chair of the Central Asia and the Caucasus Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (CACAARI) presented a Regional synthesis. He reviewed the key socio-economic developments and made reference to the Regional strategy for development of agricultural research systems. The strategy was developed by CACAARI last year and adopted in March 2012. Acad. Akimaliev listed key identified problems faced by agricultural research at national level: inadequate attention and lack of political commitment, poor linkages between research and development agendas, and lack of involvement of all relevant stakeholders. At CAC Regional level, he said that (i) difficulties encountered in integrating actions and (ii) absence of a larger international policy commitment were key challenges.

Discussion and recommendations

It was noted that currently the CAC countries invest a very small proportion of their agricultural gross domestic product into research. This is estimated to be less than 0.1% on average, according to the Regional strategy of CACAARI (2011). The figure is widely considered to be too low, with the target level of 1% agreed by all national agricultural research systems to be reached by 2025. After the collapse of the former Soviet Union, state budgets available for agricultural research decreased significantly. However, the rapidly growing transition economies allowed for increasing investment. For instance, Kazakhstan reformed and increased investment in its agricultural research as much as tenfold since independence. The discussion then focused on possible approaches and steps for facilitating higher investment into agricultural research in the CAC Region.

The available funding from state budgets is often supplemented by small projects supported by local or regional authorities. Participation in international projects remains a critical opportunity for conducting research in the Region. The availability of public-private partnerships for supporting innovations in some (horticulture) but not all areas of agricultural research for development was noted. The lack of research coordination at national level was repeatedly mentioned as a constraint in several countries.

Dr Kamiljon Akramov (IFPRI) mentioned Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI) to be a useful tool for convincing policy makers. It essentially profiles agricultural research for development in countries worldwide. Unfortunately, collecting and analyzing ASTI data has been difficult in the CAC countries owing to lack of responsiveness of national focal points.

It was generally agreed that needs assessment, gap analysis and research prioritization were necessary elements of a Regional approach. The meeting acknowledged the central role played in this approach by CACAARI. Dr Alisher Tashmatov (CACAARI Executive Secretary) mentioned the critical importance of capacity building at all levels. Some participants mentioned positive examples of supporting and engaging young talent in agricultural research through state grants schemes, e.g., in Uzbekistan. A proposal was made to engage Universities more closely and pro-actively in agricultural research for development. Research connected with higher education in agriculture has a long tradition in the Region.

Ms. Alona Reichmuth (GIZ) observed that whereas technologies for better natural resource management are often available, their effective dissemination and application is key bottleneck. This view was seconded by several participants.

Recognizing the need for more effective communication with high-level policy makers with a view to increasing the commitment and mobilizing investment of the CAC countries for agricultural research, it was **recommended** to encourage organizing a Ministerial-level conference in 2014. The modalities and partnerships for organizing such event were briefly discussed. It would be appropriate to explore a joint effort with FAO. The PFU Head will assess options and make a proposal to the Steering Committee **by 31 December 2012**.

Status of CGIAR Research Programs in the CAC Region (co-chaired by Prof. Murat Karabayev and Acad. Asad Musayev)

Dr Kamiljon Akramov (IFPRI) made a presentation on food policy research in Central Asia. The presentation reviewed the current state of food security and the impact of recent food and financial crises on food security in the Region. He proposed main policy implications such as the need for regional cooperation and agricultural trade.

Dr Kamel Shideed (ICARDA) explained the global context and described next steps in the process of re-submitting CGIAR Research Program (CRP) “Integrated and Sustainable Agricultural Production Systems for Improved Food Security and Livelihoods”, also known as “Dryland Systems”.

Representatives of 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), Water (IWMI), Forests and Trees (Bioversity) and Climate Change (ICARDA).

Discussion and recommendations

The members noted the regional inception phase for the CRP “Dryland Systems” as a positive experience in building the strategic and multi-disciplinary nature of the Program. The CRP combines multi-disciplinary approaches with site-specific implementation, and establishes an important baseline. Its implementation in the CAC Region will require enhanced communication and coordination among the centers involved. The Steering Committee **recommended** that efforts to coordinate activities and accomplish synergies among the centers be continued.

Recognizing the value of opportunities for collaborative research provided by the CRPs in the Region, the Steering Committee **agreed** that the research portfolio of the Program was not to be limited by the CRPs, and **re-affirmed** the role played by

the Steering Committee in setting strategic priorities. It was confirmed that non-CGIAR Centers can fully participate in the CRPs.

Recognizing the need for the Program to focus its agenda on a few key development challenges in the CAC Region, in which it has the highest added-value potential, the Steering Committee **recommended** that a workshop could be organized as a joint event by several centers and countries during next year. Salinity and waterlogging, and sustainable wheat production were mentioned as two examples of relevant and significant areas. The purpose of the workshop would be to review current state of knowledge, disseminate outcomes of previous research and agree on future common approaches. It was noted that proper resources would need to be allocated for the organization of additional events by the Program.

Program Facilitation Unit: mode of operation, services and sustainability (co-chaired by Dr Colin Chartres and Dr Bayan Alimgazina)

J. Turok (PFU) introduced the session by reviewing main functions of the PFU (government liaison, representation and partnerships; communications, administration and logistics; human resources; and finance). He highlighted key achievements and constraints/challenges in each of these areas and listed several issues for discussion. He also presented the consolidated financial outcome of 2011, budget for 2012 and level of expenditure to 31 July 2012. He noted the negative balance of about 30,000 USD between the budget and the income expected from membership contributions and services in 2012. The financial report is in Annex III.

Discussion and recommendations

The Steering Committee members started the discussion by focusing on publications. Whereas results of the collaborative applied research are best published in local journals or disseminated through dedicated technical publications, every opportunity should be taken to publish in international refereed journals. The Steering Committee **encouraged** the staff and partners to publish their joint results in international journals. It was also **agreed** that a training course on science writing skills would be organized by the Program, possibly in conjunction with the next Steering Committee meeting.

Funding of the PFU (annual budget 311,000 USD) was discussed at length. Recognizing and acknowledging the very valuable contributions in-kind provided by the national partners towards the Program, several Steering Committee members asked whether the countries would be willing to also contribute in the form of membership fees. Acad. Dzhamin Akimaliev (Kyrgyz Republic) responded that there was no practical possibility to contribute financially in the short term. This position was supported by several other national representatives. However, Dr Bayan Alimgazina (Kazakhstan) said that her country would be willing to consider supporting the cost of the PFU in the framework of Kazakhstan's intended membership in the CGIAR.

The Steering Committee **approved** the budget of the PFU for 2013 to be at the same level as in 2012. Acknowledging that the transition process of the CGIAR has not been fully completed, and recognizing that the PFU provides services typically included in overheads, the Steering Committee **recommended** a funding scheme that combines fixed membership contributions with a small levy on projects implemented through the Program. Such scheme was considered more equitable

than fixed membership contributions only. The PFU Head will submit a detailed proposal for PFU income in 2013 to the Steering Committee **by 30 November 2012**.

Acad. Hukmatullo Ahmadov (Tajikistan) suggested that, in addition to the various inputs in kind already provided, a mechanism could be developed whereby each country would allocate a junior person time for liaison and coordination of the Program at national level. This was considered as a way to strengthen responsiveness and improve overall communication. The Steering Committee **welcomed** the proposal and **requested** the PFU Head to approach the countries with a suggested mechanism.

Prof. Sergey Kiselev (ECFS) briefly described the membership of Russian Federation in the CGIAR, which entails three components. The largest component is intended to support research cooperation with CAC countries through an agreement with ICARDA. The cooperation will, in one way or another, be implemented through the PFU, he said.

The challenge of adequate coordination of research and development activities was raised again. For instance, thirty-seven projects worth 250 million USD are implemented in the agricultural sector in Kyrgyz Republic, but donor coordination and impact evaluation at national level is lacking.

The coordination role played by the PFU at regional level in Central Asia and the Caucasus was acknowledged by several participants. It was noted that the annual Steering Committee meeting provided the proper mechanism for coordination between the national agricultural research systems and the international centers. Following a short discussion about the frequency of the meetings, it was **agreed** to maintain annual meetings, provided that additional sources of funding are available to support participation. It was **recommended** that the next annual Steering Committee meeting be organized on a cost-sharing basis with another event, such as CACAARI or CRPs.

The Steering Committee **recommended** that the first-day agenda be focused on a few technical and scientific areas where major progress will have been achieved during the year. The second day would be dedicated to governance and administrative items. Dr Bahtiyor Kamilov (Uzbekistan) suggested that the Steering Committee pay more attention to the development of policies based on technological progress.

The proposal made by the PFU Head to formally establish a liaison office for the Caucasus in Tbilisi, Georgia, based on the existing agreement between ICARDA and Government of Georgia, was **approved**. This would initially be a part-time appointment with the following tasks:

- Act as liaison for the Program with Governments;
- Assist with arranging seminars, meetings, training events;
- Facilitate visits of Centers' staff;
- Liaise with donor agencies based in Georgia and contribute to resource mobilization (project proposals);
- Support project activities of all Centers in the Caucasus.

Dr Julian Parr (CIP) enquired about the possibility of establishing a project office in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. ICARDA has a host country agreement with Government of Tajikistan, which would provide the framework for requesting an accreditation as international mission. The Steering Committee **requested** the PFU Head to liaise

with the authorities in Tajikistan, and with ICARDA's and CIP's management, in order to explore the possibility.

Resource mobilization (co-chaired by Dr Julian Parr and Dr Bahtiyor Kamilov)

Four introductory presentations were made, summarizing the developments or initiatives taken during the past year:

- Dr Dyno Keatinge (AVRDC) reported on the outcomes of a trip that he as co-Chair and accompanied by the PFU Head carried out to visit the European Commission in Brussels and donor agencies in several European countries.
- Prof. Sergey Kiselev (ECFS) explained the history of the "Russian Initiative" for international agricultural development. Dr Pavel Krasilnikov (ECFS) complemented his presentation by summarizing key research areas of work for ECFS in the CAC Region.
- The progress in obtaining Kazakhstan's intended membership in the CGIAR was reviewed by Dr Bayan Alimgazina (Kazakhstan).
- Dr Zakir Khalikulov (PFU) provided an overview of new projects acquired by the Centers during the past year.

Discussion and recommendations

The efforts and initiatives to support the Program activities from sources within and outside the Region were acknowledged and their continuation **encouraged** by the Steering Committee.

The role of the PFU in gathering intelligence and managing donor knowledge was highlighted. It was suggested that the PFU could serve as both gateway and facilitator of information on funding opportunities in the Region and for the Region.

Conclusions and closure

Recognizing the common research interests in the CAC Region and acknowledging the high potential for mutually beneficial collaboration, the Steering Committee **recommended** that the Eurasian Center for Food Security (ECFS, Russian Federation) and the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) be invited to become members of the Program Steering Committee. Those CGIAR Centers with long-term vision for the CAC Region, and unable to join the meeting, were **encouraged** to actively engage in the Program.

The Steering Committee also **encouraged** the country representatives to support and facilitate the ratification of the international agreement establishing the CGIAR Consortium.

Following a short discussion, Dr Hukmatullo Ahmadov (Tajikistan) was elected as co-Chair of the Program Steering Committee. Dr Kamiljon Akramov (IFPRI) agreed to convey the unanimous nomination by the Centers for Dr Shenggen Fan, Director-General of IFPRI, to become the co-Chair of the Committee.

The next Steering Committee meeting will be held in Tajikistan.

In his closing remarks, Acad. Dzhamin Akimaliev (Kyrgyz Republic) thanked all national representatives, directors and scientists of international centers for their

active participation in the meeting. He mentioned that such meetings were very important and presented an occasion for the heads of national agricultural research systems to meet every year. He thanked the young scientists for their participation and encouraged them to continue their research endeavours. He also highlighted the important role of the Program in building bridges between the CAC countries and the international research community.

Dr. Kamel Shideed congratulated all heads of the national agricultural research systems and other participants from the CAC countries for their excellent achievements and hoped that the partnership will further be strengthened. He thanked Dr Colin Chartres, the out-going director general of IWMI, for his dedicated support to the Region. He stressed the importance of a greater ownership of the Program by the countries themselves. He appreciated the hospitality of the host country, the Government of Kyrgyz Republic, and thanked Acad. Akimaliev for the arrangements made. Dr. Shideed appreciated the excellent work done by the PFU in preparing for this meeting and making it successful.