

Background note

Agriculture continues to play a vital role in supporting local communities meet their livelihood requirements in Central Asia. However, increasing land degradation and climate variability are posing significant challenges to achieving food security. In recognition of these challenges, the Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management (CACILM) – a multi-donor investment program was launched in 2006 aimed at restoring, maintaining and enhancing the productive functions of land in Central Asia.

The CACILM Inception Phase (2006–2009) implemented a set of regional and national projects totalling US\$155 million. Based on the final evaluation, the thrust of the second phase was sharpened to focus on the interactions between food security, poverty alleviation, land degradation, biodiversity conservation and climate change.

In February 2013, the International Fund for Agricultural Development endorsed a three-year regional grant to the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, which seeks to support the second phase of CACILM by building a knowledge platform to consolidate knowledge created during the Inception Phase and for scaling-up sustainable land management (SLM) interventions.

Knowledge management (KM) is essential to understanding and disseminating successful and innovative SLM approaches and technologies that have a high potential for implementation in the different agro-ecosystems of Central Asia. The evaluation of the performance of these technologies under real-life conditions (in farmers' fields) and identification of similar potential areas for dissemination is necessary to tailor interventions. The choice of interventions needs to be accompanied by proper, integrated enabling policies and institutional arrangements for each agro-ecosystem. Four main agro-ecosystems are targeted in this project: (i) rainfed cropland; (ii) irrigated agriculture; (iii) mountain ecosystems; and (iv) rangelands.

The overall goal is to make rural livelihoods more lucrative and resilient in the face of land degradation, and climate variability and change. The project's objectives are to: (i) enhance the CACILM knowledge management component for facilitating widespread dissemination of SLM, (ii) improve agricultural systems for enhanced productivity and sustainability, and promote climate change adaptation approaches and technologies.

It is expected that knowledge of SLM in Central Asian countries will be synthesized, packaged and disseminated in forms that facilitate widespread uptake by a diverse group of stakeholders. Knowledge on adapting to climate change in the agriculture and rural development sector will be increased. In addition, a knowledge platform with updated information on SLM will be made operational and a monitoring system based on outcome mapping will be instituted to assess the rate of adoption of SLM. A Knowledge Management system that contributes to evidence-based policy formulation and reduced duplication of efforts will be operationalized.

The target groups include (i) key decision and policy making units responsible for SLM in each participating country; (ii) non-governmental organizations and rural development agencies working in each country and at regional level; (iii) extension agencies, farmers and farmers' organizations; (iv) and international donor community active in Central Asia.

The following are the core activities to be undertaken:

- Knowledge synthesis (existing knowledge and knowledge gaps identification)
- Knowledge generation about SLM approaches and technologies (filling knowledge gaps)
- Typology of stakeholders and knowledge dissemination pathways
- Knowledge exchange on technical packages
- Capacity building and sustainable access to knowledge
- Enhancing evidence-based knowledge
- Policy dialogue to facilitate adoption of SLM

Designated national coordinators will be responsible for implementation of the project in each country. ICARDA will work closely with the Strategic Partnership Agreement, a multi-donor partnership, which includes IFAD, German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ), ICARDA and other organizations. Strategic guidance for project implementation will be provided by the CACILM Steering Committee, which is composed of representatives nominated by the countries and SPA members.

The project inception workshop is co-organized by ICARDA and GIZ in Bishkek. The purpose of the inception workshop is to (i) launch the project by presenting its objectives, expected outcomes and core activities to a relevant range of stakeholders, (ii) establish implementation arrangements and agree on project work plan.