

ICARDA Virtual CLCA Meeting – Summary Notes

“How can we reach farmers in difficult confinement times? Which digital/ICT strategy for research projects?”

09th of April 2020

On 09th April 2020 The CLCA coordination team convened and moderated a restricted virtual meeting. Sixteen (16) participants (see full list of participants in annex) from, Algeria, Tunisia, ICARDA scientists, and Monitoring and Evaluation specialists discussed the impact of the current COVID-19 situation on the ongoing and future CLCA project activities in both countries and brainstorm for about 90-min on how can the CLCA Project overcome some restrictions (as a result of the confinement measures taken in both countries) to continue delivering in the field (potential use of ICT tools, etc.) to effectively reach farmers and maintain the momentum of the on-going activities and possibly those that may be affected if the confinement measures are prolonged.

This note presents a summary of the main discussion points. A video recording of the event is available here: <https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/7eabbb7f-6d78-44e1-9056-e79ccc6c5563>.

The online white board exercise can be accessed through the following link: https://jamboard.google.com/d/1mIncq2gETduyv8ZDD1HZOrk9m_yzNKm6hnSbgThZlwk/viewer?f=0.

The meeting was divided into three (3) main parts:

I. The first part focused on the short-term impact of the COVID-19 on the ongoing activities in North African countries. Dr. [REDACTED] – Agronomist, National CLCA Project Coordinator in Tunisia - claimed that about 20% of the work plan activities for Year-II (ending 31st of March 2020) and Year-III (starting 1st of April 2020) will be negatively affected during this crisis such as:

- Some of the data collection and sampling activities;
- Monitoring of the on-farm demonstrations on forage crops (mowing: end of April) and collecting samples for analysis. These activities will face barriers due to the lockdown (which is expected to continue until 20th April, or even more). The CLCA team will delegate partially or totally the collection of samples and measurement of simple parameters/data to leader farmers in the different project intervention areas.
- The CLCA activity on monitoring soil erosion will be especially vulnerable, since protocols are already implemented on the field, and it is difficult to collect soil and water samples and related erosion measures during the period. This is especially important if we know that good rainfall events already happened during the confinement period. Instructing and charging some of the leader farmers to follow-up the field experiments and record data could be a temporary solution for maintaining the measurement exercise; alternatively and if specific authorizations are given by the authorities, the team observing all needed precautions and prevention measures can plan field works for the recovery of samples to be stored in the labs until work resumes.
- Some socioeconomic activities in Tunisia (related to data collection from farmers for the modeling activity) will also be negatively affected in terms of data collection, which is currently pending due to the local travel restrictions. other activities (surveys with stakeholders) can be implemented remotely using skype or other communication means (Emailing). However, the surveys with farmers or group of farmers in which the face-to-face interaction is important will be postponed.

Mr. [REDACTED], Agronomist from the National Institute of Field Crops (INGC), also mentioned that the current situation of the COVID-19 is affecting negatively the capacity to deliver on different tasks related to the Knowledge management and sharing information. He announced that it is impossible to engage in organizing collective CapDev events during this conjuncture. However, the team was fortunate running an intensive series of CapDev events before the eruption of the crisis.

Similar to Tunisia, Mr. [REDACTED] _ Agronomist from the Technical Institute of Field Crops – ITGC (National Project Institute in Algeria) briefed the participants regarding the situation in Algeria. It was mentioned by Mr. [REDACTED] that the main activities affected are those related to CapDev and focus group meetings involving farmers. He mentioned that the major constraint is about grouping farmers and interacting with them.

Regarding the agronomic parts, Mr. [REDACTED] stated that, at the moment, the data collection will not be affected. After the 15th of April, ITGC team located in proximity to the project target areas will need to move ahead to the field and collect such data. ITGC General Directorate is envisaging to involve its regional offices and other extensionists located in different CLCA target areas to help with the field data collection during this difficult period. We have to see this as an opportunity to embark more local partners.

Concerning the livestock component, Dr. [REDACTED], ICARDA Livestock Scientist and Regional CLCA Project Coordinator, mentioned that most of the activities (particularly those related to stubble use and summer feeding trials) will start in July in both countries. From now until there, if things improve and the confinement restrictions are partially lifted, both teams can resume the activities normally. Otherwise, we will need to discuss again this component in June.

It has been also advised by Dr. [REDACTED] to involve more partners, who are closer than the CLCA team to the field and to farmers such as local extension offices, local NGO's with an interest in agriculture or natural resources who can help collecting the right information and contact the farmers. This is a strategy which the project needs to develop independently from the COVID-19 situation and is already included in the project scaling methodology.

II. The Second part of the meeting consisted of presenting the long-term impact of the coronavirus on the CLCA project activities and deliverables. There was agreement that the impacts of COVID-19 on organizing KM & Sharing events are likely to be significant. The psychological effect of this pandemic and the way it will change the perception of people about group gatherings in the future may particularly constrain some CapDev events. This also means that there is a need to have more sanitary precautions when organizing farmers' groups meetings. Some of the scientific activities/deliverables building on historical data recording (during the lifetime of the project) may also be affected. Participants to the meeting estimated that, though important, this aspect needs to be revisited depending on the persistency of the pandemic and the measures taken by the authorities. As a final comment, Dr. [REDACTED] – Natural Resources Economist (ICARDA), suggested a reference template that could be developed to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on Project activities in the medium and long terms through National partners. Dr. [REDACTED] – Agricultural Economist (Economic Modeling) at ICARDA, further suggested that data collected from such template can be used to analyse the medium and long terms impact of COVID-19, as an illustrative choc, on the resilience of CLCA farming systems in both countries.

III. The last part of the meeting focused on identifying potential ICT tools that can help the project dealing with similar situations in the future and enhancing the effectiveness of reaching more target beneficiaries (farmers, extension agents, partners, students, etc.) with less resources/time. Participants proposed several important suggestions:

- Dr. [REDACTED] – Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Specialist (ICARDA), mentioned that some of ICT tools are in use by the CLCA team, such as WhatsApp, and other social media: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. (With clear advantage of the Algerian team in the use of these tools (Figure-I). The question is rather about the refinement, clearing, analysis and reporting of the feedback information and metrics received from these tools. This is already planned by the CLCA knowledge management team, and actions will be taken in the near future;

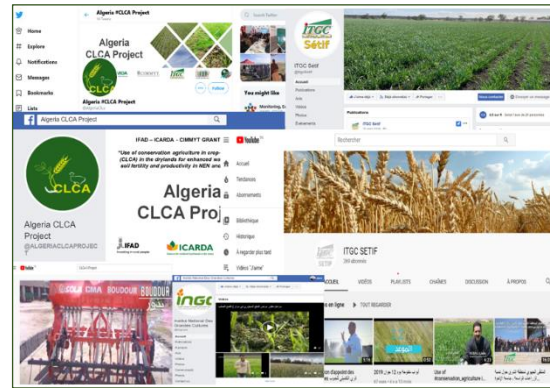


Figure-I. Social media used by CLCA team to reach more target beneficiaries.

- In terms of engagement with stakeholders, which relates to the use of ICT tools for enhancing the enabling environment for scaling rather than scaling with farmers, we can use more virtual tools like software for online meetings in addition to developing online seminars/webinars, where we can break down in different communication directions [parallel session, white boards, and other relevant (simple to more complicated) tools that can be mobilized];
- Dr. [REDACTED] – Knowledge Management Scientist (ICARDA, MEL unit), suggested that the change we can engage in terms of ICT use for different project activities, will depend on the partners we are dealing with. If we are talking to educated stakeholders and farmers (leader farmers) then we can use advanced tools. If not, this will be difficult and other specific tools need to be discussed. For this last situation, some of the tools we can talk about are:
 - i. *SMS based services, SMS can be used to respond to simple questionnaires, through simple responses. Example of SMS Based Data Collection and Information exchange company with a broad portfolio can be found in the following link <https://viamo.io/>;*
 - ii. *Open data kit: open data collection where surveys are designed offline and are used by partners and farmers to collect data. Once they access to internet, all of this data can be sent to a centralized server from which the data can be accessed. Example of Offline Data Collection System can be found here: <https://opendatakit.org/> / www.ona.io (more user - friendly platform for open data kit);*
 - iii. *In addition to the tools, we have to change the practices (case of crowdsourcing). The crowdsourcing approach is based on scaling designs which are using crowdsourcing tools. In the future, we will need to start thinking more about the practices and methods for conducting surveys and this concept of crowdsourcing can definitely help. More information about Practices and Methods for User Based Data Management (Citizen Science /Crowdsourcing) can be found here https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizen_science?wprov=sfla1;*
 - iv. *Another important element is that there are, nowadays, plenty of data about everything. A lot of smart ways for capturing such existing data also exist. We have to pay attention to the method, and we have to see ways to explore existing secondary data to better guide our decision making;*
 - v. *Dr. [REDACTED] also shared an interest blog with the CLCA team about “mobile based agronomy solution” (Akilimo), which can be accessed in the following [link](#).*

- Mr. ██████████, Impact Assessment Specialist (ICARDA, MEL unit), mentioned that there are two (2) ways to consider the use of ICT in scaling: the downstream and the upstream parts:

- ✓ Downstream way of scaling (with the example of [CRP-GLDC twitter](#)): When we twitted about a technology innovation, some farmers get back to us and start asking about this innovation (Figure-II), which created more interaction between the researchers/development agents and the target beneficiaries (Figure-II);

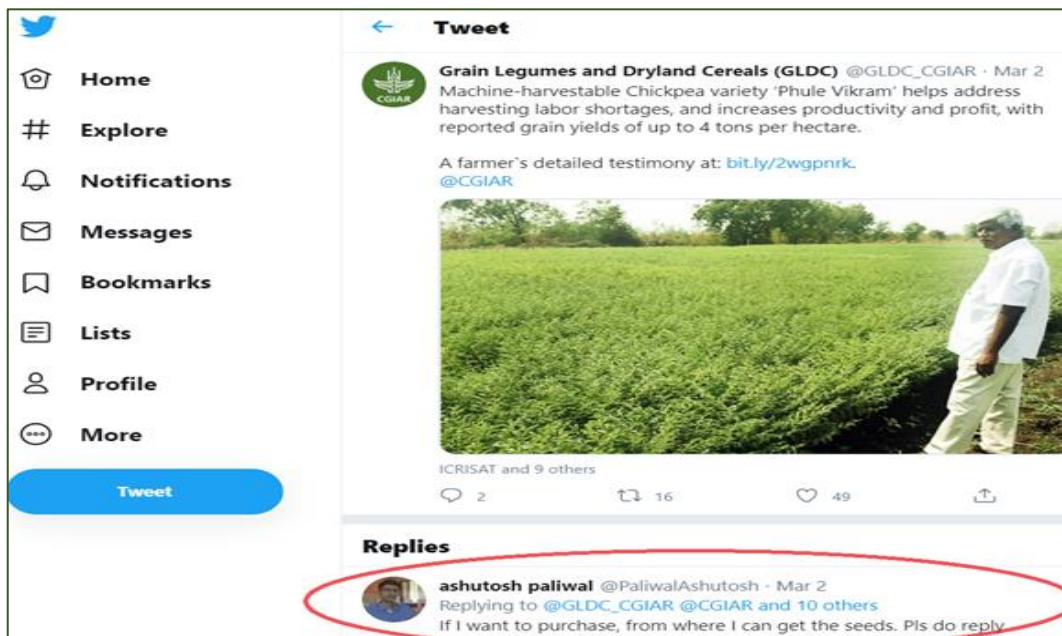


Figure-II. The Example of the Machine-harvestable Chickpea variety 'Phule Vikram' in India.

- ✓ Upstream side: such as SMS based services – Promote open cell phone lines where farmers can ask whatever they want. The main challenge is that farmers have an advanced age (so maybe it is also important to tap on the youth so that they can help the community to access to these ICT tools and further make the agricultural activity more palatable to youth).
- Mr. ██████████, Agricultural Innovation Specialist from ICARDA, briefed about the ICARDA experiences in using SMS tool in the framework of some projects (Mind the Gap, ICT2scale). Also, in the ongoing CLCA-II Project, SMS have already been developed and sent to farmers in Tunisia and Algeria. In Tunisia thirty-two (32) technical SMS messages related to CA (9), livestock (14) and forages (9) are elaborated and reaching out to 700 farmers in the target areas of CLCA project. About 70% of the messages are sent up to now. In Algeria, the project team has used Data SIM Application to send awareness SMS to 530 farmers. One of the challenges of sending SMS is the high number of old and illiterate farmers (in particular high level of illiterate female farmers). Therefore, the development and use of “Interactive Voice Response (IVR)” could be a solution. Interactive voice response (IVR) is a technology that allows a computer to interact with humans through the use of voice. IVR systems can respond with pre-recorded or dynamically generated audio to further direct users on how to proceed. The project can pre-formulate messages to CLCA related topics. These tools could now be extensively used by the project teams in Tunisia and Algeria to keep momentum with the farmers during the lockdown periods. Mr. ██████████ also highlighted the importance of developing e-learning modules on CLCA technologies that can be useful for extension agents, students and lead farmers;

- Mr. [REDACTED] discussed the ICT tools used by INGC. He mentioned that the best ICT methods will be by phone calls (Green Number) and SMS-s. INGC has a large database of farmers and continue to send SMS to farmers even under the current confinement situation. More than 88,200 SMS about technical practices and other related advices were sent to field crop farmers in Tunisia since the beginning of the confinement. Many recipients of INGC SMS are also members of CLCA Project;
- Dr. [REDACTED] shed light on the importance of the Radio broadcast to reach farmers and share information. In rural areas, radio stays and remains a very important media. The Project can be in touch with local media and try to define how we can reach farmers and record information (number) and feedback through this communication channel;
- Since there are several options, it was advised by [REDACTED] (Agronomist - ICARDA) that it will be better to assess the existing level of access to mobile services and app. In this way, there is a need to make an inventory of the use of ICT tools by farmers to tailor relevant solutions;
- Concerning the Gender activities, there was a suggestion by Dr. [REDACTED] (Gender specialist - ICARDA) to target women through radio programs as they might not have access to the phone. It is necessary to conduct a survey in order to extract the best way of information dissemination in relation to age and gender. She also suggested that if Radio is to be used, then we need to target time slots close to existing programs that have a large women audience.

Participants were also suggested to include their ideas directly on an online white board, through stickers. Two (2) white boards were devoted for this collective task: i) short terms impact of COVID-19 on CLCA project, in addition to possible solutions; and ii) possible ICT tools that can be used by the CLCA project team. The results of this interactive exercise can be found in the below annexes.

Notes by Aymen Frija, Zied Idoudi and Mourad Rekik

Annexes

Annex-I. Results of the interactive board exercise



Annex-II. Participant List

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