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Science for Better Livelihoods in Dry Areas

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Reversing the degradation of Jordan's 'Badia'

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Ambassador Alice Wells (seated far right) hears how ICARDA is attempting to reverse degradation across the Jordanian Badia.

The 'badia' – a vast arid area that stretches across most of Jordan - is a threatened ecosystem that has become severely degraded over the last few decades as a result of mono-cropping and overgrazing. ICARDA's work with national and community partners is creating solutions to benefit the region's ecology and the livelihoods of local Bedouin.

Among the interventions being implemented are micro-catchment water harvesting techniques using the Vallarani plow, which slow soil erosion and enhance the collection of scarce water resources; and the introduction of native shrub species which have the ability to thrive in harsh environments. Disseminated as part of a participatory sustainable grazing strategy, developed in cooperation with land owners and other community members, the promotion of native shrubs is a response to continuous land degradation.

In acknowledgement of progress made, successes were recently demonstrated to the US Ambassador to Jordan, Alice Wells, on a visit hosted by ICARDA's [Water and Livelihoods Initiative \(WLI\)](http://www.icarda.org/wli/), Jordan's [National Center for Agricultural Research and Extension \(NCARE\)](#)

[\(http://www.ncare.gov.jo/\)](http://www.ncare.gov.jo/), and the community of Majidyya, located close to the area of implementation. Recent successes include an increase in barley production – up from 50 kg per dunum to 200 kg per dunum – and a near total reduction of sediment loss due to the construction of micro water harvesting structures.

Also present at the visit, Her Highness Sharifa Zein Al Sharaf Bint Nasser, chairperson of the [Hashemite Fund for Development of the Jordanian Badia](http://www.badiafund.gov.jo/) (<http://www.badiafund.gov.jo/>), welcomed the Ambassador and illustrated the importance of the health of the Jordanian Badia to the culture and economic wellbeing of the Kingdom. As chairperson of the Fund, she explained that her responsibility was to coordinate national efforts targeting the 'badia' - not only for the benefits of the scientific community, but also to benefit the people who depend on the region for their livelihoods, with a particular focus on women and youth.

Mr. Kris Dodge, Manager of the WLI Program and Dr. Mounir Louhaichi, a Senior Rangeland Ecology Scientist at ICARDA, explained how the utilization of participatory research practices could generate dual benefits: for strengthening the capacity of local communities and creating optimal conditions for real-life demonstrations and trial sites for conducting experiments.

They also explained that over the past few decades although the increasing sedentary lifestyle of Bedouin communities had created several social benefits, this had come at the expense of rangeland biodiversity. Increased fodder production had placed unsustainable pressures on regional ecosystems, they explained, and the best chance of increasing productive capacity was through the expansion of water harvesting and the introduction of perennial shrubs to reduce soil losses through erosion.

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