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Munir Ahmad Sidiqee, ICARDA NARS partner from Afghanistan, shares thoughts on the visit to Jordan and Egypt.

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The visit of Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) delegation and its stakeholders with the support ICARDA to Jordan and Egypt (from 29 April to 7 May) was an informative initiative in order to gain contemporary knowledge and skills on overall management of the forages (particularly agronomic practices, water harvesting techniques and rehabilitation of rangelands), varietal registration and release system, seed multiplication and maintenance, as well as seed technology (including seed testing) and rainfed agriculture. Comprehensive discussions on Afghanistan's forage trials and next steps to be taken were also facilitated during this visit through project working committee meetings.

The gained knowledge and skills will help in improving the forage intervention being implemented by ICARDA in Afghanistan with partnership of ARIA-MAIL (Agriculture Research Institute of Afghanistan). Moreover, consultations, discussions and reflection of the project working committee meeting should result in an appropriate and effective transition of the forage project from ICARDA to MAIL.

Some key points that could be applied in Afghanistan's context for the improvement of forage, seed and dry land agriculture related interventions are:

- Research and extension on relevant water harvesting techniques through watersheds, particularly circle and semi-circle watersheds. The information obtained could also be compared with the ongoing watershed initiative by ICARDA in Mazar-e-Sharif province.
- Research and extension on measuring the rate of soil erosion through applying gained knowledge and skills.
- Further research, accession and extension of the cactus plantation provided by ICARDA that are under pilot phase in Nangarhar province. Furthermore, combination of atriplex and cactus would be an ideal feeding option for the livestock. Expansion of cactus plantation to the other provinces of Afghanistan with similar agro-climatic condition would be taken into consideration.
- Establishment of the field gene bank mainly for cactus plantations.
- Improvement in integrated alley cropping and conservation agriculture especially for the perennial species (both shrubs and trees) and crops such as barley and lentils in Afghanistan.
- Boosting the efficiency and effectiveness of the Afghan seed enterprises.
- Improving variety registration and release system (including regulation, procedures and policy), protection of new varieties and organizational management (particularly, seed certification committee).
- Improvement in technical and managerial aspects of testing seeds quality and certification.
- Improvement in seed production system, including field multiplication, processing, storage and marketing.



The MoU between ICARDA, Aga Khan Foundation and MAIL (ARIA and Extension General Directorate) will ensure the sustainability of the forage intervention being implemented by ICARDA. To be particular, this initiative will further strengthen the coordination among the mentioned organizations, which will result in smooth transition of the forage initiative to MAIL. After the completion of the forage trials by ARIA, ICARDA and Aga Khan Foundation the varieties will be released and the Extension General Directorate with the help of its key stakeholders will take the responsibility of dissemination of forage varieties to relevant farmers community.

MAIL and its stakeholders are grateful to ICARDA offices in Afghanistan, Jordan and Egypt for enormous support of arranging the event, which has provided an opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills to be applied for better management of dry land farming in Afghanistan.