

AG 3794. Afghanistan: Research in Alternative Livelihoods Fund (RALF)

QUARTERLY REPORT 19 January 2005– 10 April 2005

Narrative Summary

Project Title: Research in Alternative Livelihoods Fund (RALF)
DFID Number: AG 3794
Project Manager: RALF Programme Manager (Acting): Elizabeth Bailey
Organisation: ICARDA (International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas)
Dates: 19 January 2004 – 18 January 2007
Total Budget: £ 3,000,210

Project Goal

Supergoal: Sustainable reduction and elimination of illicit poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

Goal: Sustainable livelihoods in place for rural Afghans in poppy growing areas.

Background

Afghanistan has been the world's major supplier of illicit opium for a decade. The production and processing of narcotic drugs grossly distorts the economy and jeopardises the security and stability of the region as well as the development of Afghanistan. The Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan adopted a National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) with objectives of reducing poppy cultivation by 70% in five years and complete elimination in ten years.

However the livelihoods of a significant number of rural Afghans currently depend on growing opium poppy. If both the development and counter-narcotics objectives of the Government are to be achieved, sustainable alternative livelihoods must be identified for those who are currently engaged in illicit drug production.

The United Kingdom coordinates international counter-narcotics in Afghanistan. A 'UK Plan to Support Implementation of the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy', with objectives and implementation plans that parallel the NDCS, has been formally adopted. DFID's Transitional Country Assistance Plan (TCAP) contributes to this overall objective by focusing, *inter alia*, on supporting the development of sustainable livelihoods for poor Afghans. Without such support, there would be a substantial increase in poverty resulting from the elimination of the opium economy. A sustainable reduction in poverty depends on building the enabling environment and institutional base from which licit livelihoods can develop.

More than 20 years of conflict and neglect has left Afghanistan's system for research and extension devastated. The capacity and facilities currently available in Afghanistan are inadequate to respond to the challenge of finding viable alternatives to an entrenched economy based on an illicit crop. RALF circumvents this lack of capacity by involving research institutions outside Afghanistan, NGOs, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food (MAAHF). The programme aims to contribute to MAAHF capacity building by involvement in project selection, in programme review, and in activities at the field level.

Project Objectives

The purpose of RALF is to develop and promote innovative alternative livelihood options for rural Afghans currently economically dependent on opium poppy.

Expected outputs of the project are:

- A competitive mechanism for funding innovative applied research projects tailored to the programme purpose.
- Recommended technologies and support services, tested and available for implementation.
- Improved capacity for applied research and extension in government and NGO partners.

The outcome of RALF will be licit alternatives to opium production that are practicable in the socio-economic environment of Afghanistan, and that are accessible to rural people. The beneficiaries will be the, predominantly poor, farming population and casual workers who currently depend on the illicit activity of growing poppy for their livelihood.

RALF operates through the mechanism of a competitive research fund (CRF) managed by ICARDA to mobilise innovative ideas for the development and promotion of alternative livelihoods opportunities in Afghanistan. Projects are proposed and implemented by 'mini-consortia' comprising a partnership that includes an international or non-Afghan research institution and an Afghan-based partner with experience in the area that fieldwork is to be carried out. This combination is intended to maximise synergy between international research practice and knowledge of the local Afghan context.

Projects are also intended to include an element of capacity building for Afghan Government and NGO collaborators. Apart from generating practical results of research that can be applied by rural people, RALF will also test the CRF mechanism, which may provide lessons for Afghanistan's emerging broader agricultural research strategy.

Progress Achieved During this Quarter

Since the ANNUAL REPORT for the Period 19 January, 2004-18 January, 2005 was submitted on 17 March, 2005, much of the progress achieved in the early part of 2005 has already been covered. Thus, there is no need to report Achievements against the Logical Framework again.

The following is a narrative report of what has been achieved:

Output 1: A competitive mechanism for funding innovative applied research projects tailored to the programme purpose.

- ***Competitive Research Facility:***

The competitive mechanism is in place. A further request for proposals will not be made unless further funding comes available.

Three RALF02 proposals (02-02, 02-05, 02-07) were modified in consultation with PRP members and approved for funding. Project Agreements with these projects and with the fourth approved project, 02-11, have been concluded and the first tranche funding disbursed.

- ***Appointment of Programme Manager:***

A full-time Programme Manager, Dr. Najib Malik, was appointed 19 February 2005. Dr. Malik is based at ICARDA-HQ in Aleppo but will be making frequent trips to Afghanistan for monitoring purposes. Dr. Malik will hire a local agronomist to assist him in monitoring activities throughout Afghanistan.

- ***RALF Website:***
The RALF website launched on 19 January 2004 at <http://www.icarda.cgiar.org/RALFweb/RALF.htm> is intended to serve both as a centre for information and publicity for the RALF programme and as a means for projects to exchange and share information. The website will be updated and expanded to include project reports, proceedings of annual meetings, etc., and provide a forum for exchange of information, reports, etc., between RALF Projects (restricted to project participants). The website has been updated to reflect the status of the RALF-02 Proposals. The four proposals that have been accepted for funding will be posted on the website.
- ***Project Review Panel:***
The PRP is expected to play a continuing advisory role in the programme, beyond the review of proposals. All PRP members have been invited to attend the First RALF Project Workshop.
Creation of RALF Electronic Database:
 - Plans are in progress for creation of an electronic database where electronic records of all Project Proposals, Project Agreements, 6-Monthly Project Reports to ICARDA, Quarterly, 6-Monthly as well as Annual ICARDA Reports to DFID and Financial Reports to DFID will be stored. This database will initially reside on the ICARDA Intranet but could eventually be placed outside the Intranet where it could be accessible to DFID.
- ***Monitoring and Evaluation of projects:***
ICARDA has contracted the two Panel members to prepare the discussion paper for discussion at First RALF Projects Workshop.
Based on an agreed monitoring framework, the Programme Manager will undertake active M&E of RALF projects, which will include periodic field visits and interaction with local staff of the implementing agencies, as well as monitoring progress against logframe indicators and workplan milestones. .

Output 2: Recommended technologies and support services, tested and available for implementation.

The progress of projects towards achieving this output and in identifying the support services needed to support improved technologies will be assessed in the first RALF Project Workshop scheduled for 19-20 April 2005, and through the M&E framework to be discussed there.

Output 3: Recommended technologies and support services, tested and available for implementation.

RALF Projects Meeting:

An initial meeting of the RALF Programme Manager with all Project Leaders was held 22 February 2005, immediately prior to the FHCRAA* Steering Committee Meeting in Kabul. All RALF Projects also participated in the FHCRAA Steering Committee Meeting and shared experiences with other projects operating under the FHCRAA umbrella.

* Future Harvest Consortium to Rebuild Agriculture in Afghanistan

First RALF Projects Workshop:

The first “lesson sharing workshop” (RALF Projects Workshop) is scheduled for April 19-20, 2005 in Kabul. The DFID annual review of RALF will take place at the same time.

The Workshop will be an important milestone in the progress of RALF, and will:

- Assess progress within each project towards the ultimate objectives of RALF;
- Discuss a monitoring and evaluation framework, based on a review of logframe indicators in each project;
- Share lessons learned and discuss common issues between projects;
- Assess the extent of capacity building conducted by projects.

The Programme Manager circulated a draft agenda and solicited comments and input from participants on issues that they wish to discuss. A copy of the Agenda will be forwarded when finalized.

The Principal Investigator and/or 1-2 key Collaborators of each Project are expected to attend the Workshop and make a presentation. As part of the capacity building of RALF Programme, senior Afghan officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food, Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development have been invited to the Workshop.

A post-Workshop Field Tour of Nangarhar Province is also planned. Projects 01-04 and 02-11 have recently established some research sites there. DFID, MAAHF and members of the PRP are expected to accompany the Programme Manager on this Tour.