Every year, FAO in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation & Livestock (MAIL) observe the World Food Day (WFD) on 16 October 2015. This year also, FAO and MAIL jointly celebrated the 35th WFD on 27 October 2015 at Pamir Conference Hall of MAIL in Kabul Afghanistan. H.E. Ali Ahmad Osmani, Minister of Energy and Water (MEW), H.E. Mir Amanuddin Haidari, Deputy Minister for MAIL, H.E. Basir Sarwar Deputy Minister for Public Health (MoPH), Mr. Gordon Craig, WFP Deputy Country Director, Tomio Shichiri, FAO Representative in Afghanistan and over 200 guests from different governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, donor communities, and local stakeholders attended this event.

This year, the theme of WFD was “SOCIAL PROTECTION AND AGRICULTURE: Breaking the Cycle of Rural Poverty”. The speakers stressed on the theme of the WFD in their speeches. Following, a short video clip on FAO Afghanistan’s activities promoting “Women in Agriculture” was displayed. The event attracted significant media attention and received good coverage on local press, radios and television channels that broadcasted the news through their networks on the same day.

An exhibition stalled by FAO projects as well as MAIL’s other projects funded by WB, USAID, IFAD and etc. that added extra colour to the event.

On 29 September 2015, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) launched a “National Strategy on Women in Agriculture Development”.

The Strategy was signed by H. E. Assadullah Zamir, Minister of MAIL and Tomio Shichiri, FAO Representative in Afghanistan. It was developed as part of the project, “Strengthening the Role of Women in Agriculture Development,” funded by the Government of Germany, and forms an integral part of the Minister’s first 100 days’ work plan. The strategy will be jointly implemented by MAIL’s Home Economy Department and FAO, which place women as central to all of their agricultural interventions.

The Strategy is designed to bridge the productivity differentials between male and female farmers and help women farmers overcome the production constraints they face, leading to significantly increased agricultural growth and output.

The Strategy will recommend priority interventions that would provide an enabling environment for the empowerment of women in the sector, while strengthening the institutional and individual capacity of MAIL to deliver efficient and effective services.

IRDP’s development objective is to increase agriculture production and productivity. The project started from July 2011 funded by the World Bank and being implemented by the Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW) with the technical assistance of FAO. It includes four major components.

**Component A:** Rehabilitation of Irrigation Systems, this component supports the irrigation system rehabilitation in comprehensive manner and under this, 106 schemes completed covering a command area of 106,668ha.

**Component B:** Small Dams, this component supports the design and construction of a limited number of multi-purpose small dams and appurtenant structures, and associated irrigation conveyance and distribution systems.

**In This Issue**

- National Strategy on Women in Agriculture...
- Afghanistan Launches National Food Based Dietary Guidelines...
- Establishment of the Dairy Federation...
- Irrigation Restoration Development Project (IRDP)...

*Continued on Page 4....*
Afghanistan Launches National Food Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) for Improved Nutrition

On 29 November 2015, the Government of Afghanistan and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) launched Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs).

The commitment of “National Food Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) for Afghans” was jointly signed by the Ministers of Cabinet of Afghanistan Government: H.E. Ferozuddin Feroz, Minister of MoPH, H.E. Assadullah Hanif Balkhi, Minister of MoE. H.E. Mir Amanuddin Haidari, Deputy Minister of MAIL and Mr. Tomio Shichiri, FAO Representative in Afghanistan. Over 100 officials from different Ministries, representatives from Embassies, International Organizations and legislators attended the launching ceremony.

The FBDGs were developed under the project “Strengthening National Capacity to Address Food and Nutrition Problems in Afghanistan” supported by FAO and it was a joint and comprehensive process that required a number of steps and skills by interdisciplinary teams including a number of government ministries and organizations and involved the participation of a wide cross section of population through consultations and focus group discussions.

Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) are simple and positive messages on healthy eating patterns and lifestyle aimed at preventing all forms of malnutrition, including non-communicable diet-related diseases and guide people to become well-nourished and healthy. The guidelines are included ten dietary massages with seven food groups, made based on nutrient content and their typical use in a mixed meal that will lead to a diet that is adequate and meets nutrient need. In addition, the FBDGs are tools to aid educators on nutrition and dietary behaviour change. They are the key source of information aimed specifically at health providers, teachers, journalists, extension agents and others working directly with the public. The knowledge and skills that are obtained through implementation and dissemination of the FBDGs will strengthen efforts to improve nutrition and health among the people of Afghanistan in the future.

Level of Awareness for Avian Influenza to be Maintained

Following official reports published on the website of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) on the occurrence of avian influenza A(H5N1) virus detected in the Islamic Republic of Iran in June 2015, FAO-Afghanistan (through the OSRO/AFG/402/JPN project) has taken the initiative to organize a refresher training on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza for field veterinarians and para-vets from both government (including Ministry of Public Health) and private sector, meat inspectors, quarantine officials, relevant NGOs and national traders in poultry sector. The training was conducted in Herat from 12 to 14 September 2015.

The training was attended by 32 veterinarians and para-professionals that received updated information about avian influenza viruses and disease. In addition, nine local poultry producers attended a special dedicated session regarding bio-security and bio-safety measures for them to adopt in their respective poultry farms.

FAO together with its partners is also following up on the evolution of avian influenza H7N9. In this regard, FAO has raised a warning for a forth wave of this novel A H7N9 virus that (differently from A H5N1) spread silently in poultry and can infect people through direct contacts with infected birds or their secretions.

UN70th Anniversary in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, the UN family marked 70th anniversary of the United Nations under the header of “Strong UN – Strong Afghanistan” with events and activities beginning after UN Day (24 October) through to the end of 2015. The 70th anniversary was celebrated with a photographic exhibition in Kabul and other cities of Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar.

The exhibition profiles and highlights the extraordinary works and achievements of a talented group of Afghan professionals who have made a positive difference in their fields, for the betterment of Afghanistan.

Ghulam Nabi, Seed Production Company Director and FAO beneficiary in Jalalabad is one of the role models of those professional Afghans, whose work has made a positive difference to the country, contributing to the development of a strong Afghanistan.

Ghulam Nabi established his company with the technical contributions of Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and his agricultural enterprise improves the quality of seeds and aims to contribute to food security in Afghanistan.

Like Ghulam Nabi’s enterprise, FAO has also supported other companies like his through provision of seed-improving equipment and large warehouses to support the development of a viable seed industry in Afghanistan. He also works closely with local farmers to track the performance of seeds and to ensure the best are identified, reproduced and used in the food chain. He makes his best effort to take the country towards self-sufficiency and help the poor to be nourished.”

Mr. Gh. Nabi Received an appreciation letter issued by the Special Representative of the Secretary General Mr. Necholas Haysom.
Field Demonstration for Enhancing Irrigation Water Use Efficiency

In order to enhance the capacity of the staff of the Irrigation Directorate of MAIL in irrigation water use efficiency, the Capacity Development of Irrigation Directorate (CDIS) project conducted Field Demonstration of potato cultivation in the Badam Bagh Agriculture Research Farm during the Spring Season 2015. The crop season began in April and it was harvested in October 2015. Six different treatments were applied in the demonstration. The specific objectives of the Field Demonstration were to:

- Demonstrate different irrigation methods and their comparative merits and demerits for potato crop
- Observe practically the water use efficiency during the different irrigation and water conservation methods
- Demonstrate some water conservation methods and their comparative merits and demerits
- Demonstrated the growth stages of potato crop and the suitable agronomic practices for it
- Observe practically the productivity of potato under the different practices

The ID Staff were directly involved from growing up to harvesting, four ID staffs and two CDIS interns have been trained regularly while around 60 participants has been trained in different stages.

Field Demonstration for Enhancing Irrigation Water Use Efficiency

Establishment of Dairy Federation

The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) hosted a 3-day workshop to discuss further strengthening of the fledging Afghan dairy sector. The workshop was attended by the government officials including H.E. Assadullah Zamir, Minister of MAIL, Mr. Tomio Shichiri, FAO Representative in Afghanistan, five dairy unions and key stakeholders in the Afghan Dairy Private Sector to think of ways which can collaborate to build dairying as an instrument for rural producers that leads them to better life.

The theme of the workshop was “National Dairy Development Board and Dairy Federation Establishment” with the discussion on further strengthening the Dairy Industry Development in Afghanistan and it was organized by Dairy Industry Development Project at FAO Darulaman compound training hall from September 28 up to September 30, 2015. Dairy development has been recognized as a driving force in improving the socio-economic welfare in the rural areas. The value of dairying as a cash generator and as a base for developing an agro-industry and rural infrastructure cannot be overemphasized.

The aim of the workshop was to bring together a group of people, professionally involved in the endeavour to utilize the domestic potential of milk production, processing and marketing in satisfying the growing demand for milk. The exchange of experiences and ideas helped identify substantive constraints and advantages in the establishment of dairy federation. It also produced strategies and interventions and identified institutional capacities needed in formulating plan of action. These activities would contribute to the long-term objectives of the dairy group in FAO to enhance food production and food security in a market driven development of the dairy sector in a way that will promote rural economic growth for poverty alleviation in a context of sustainable rural and agricultural development.

“...” as well as break social barriers prevailing in rural areas,” said H.E. Assadullah Zamir.

Field Demonstration for Enhancing Irrigation Water Use Efficiency

The Food Security and Nutrition Policy Development and Coordination Project of FAO funded by German Government has been supporting the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) to enhance its capacity on food security and nutrition policies and strategies. The project in collaboration with the Institute of Human Nutrition and Food (IHNF) in Philippine and FAO Philippine organized 10 days training course cum study tour on “Food Security and Nutrition Leadership Development” in Manila. A team of nine technical staff members from the MAIL and one project staff of FAO Afghanistan attended the programme. IHNF under the Collage of Human Ecology (CHE), University of the Philippines Banos (UPLB) facilitated the training cum study tour programme, which was held from 2-12 November 2015. The aim of the training was to develop the capacity of MAIL staff in providing effective leadership to food security and nutrition interventions through strengthening its linkages with agriculture.

During the training, the participants received the information, knowledge and better understanding of food security and nutrition leadership - its concepts and principles, ways for leading and managing change, techniques for leading and managing a team, analyzing stakeholders and creating messages to change the attitudes. In addition, they have been provided with information on developing knowledge management system and using different data sources, analyzing, and making policy brief for decision makers.

The participants visited Ministry of Agriculture of the Philippine, Statistics Authority, and Nutrition Office in Tagaytay City, National Nutrition Council, International Institute for Rural Reconstruction and Agriculture Farms. During the visits, the participants exchanged their ideas and views with relevant authorities on food security, nutrition and agriculture issues. Philippines is one of the South East Asian countries which advanced in many aspects and yet there are many similarities with Afghanistan in terms of food security and nutrition. The country was an optimal location for participants of study tour, to learn from a country that has some community and consider properly on applying the knowledge gained in Afghanistan context.

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FAO and MAIL Engaged in Tackling Trans-Boundary Animal Diseases in Afghanistan

Saffron Progress and Opportunities in Afghanistan

Saffron, a very high-value spice crop with particular potential for profitable production in Afghanistan. Advantages of saffron, requiring very little water, easy to produce, processing and harvesting can be undertaken by family members including women and creating rural employment during the off-peak season. Several historical testimonies dated from around 2000 years ago mention that saffron was available in Afghanistan. Most recently, there are records that around 2000 years ago some farmers re-started growing this crop in Herat Province. In 1973, the Afghan Government implemented a saffron trial planting in Ordokhan Farm of Heart. In 1989, a number of saffron fields in Iran brought back the saffron corns, also referred to as bulbs or onions, and on their return planted saffron in Ghorian District of Herat Province. Since 1998, some NGOs officially started working with farmers in Herat area with saffron. Since then, significant success has been achieved and saffron has increasingly been grown in Afghanistan. Today, saffron is cultivated in several provinces with total cover areas of around 850 hectares, involving approximately more than 5000 farmers. Based on some successful researches and studies conducted in the past fourteen years by the Afghan, USA, Netherlands, French and Iranians agricultural researchers, results have shown that Afghanistan climate, the soil fertility and sufficient water resources available in Herat and some other part of Afghanistan including Balkh, Sar-e-Pul and Faryab provinces are very appropriate for saffron farming and production. The studies also presented that a maximum product of saffron in the aforementioned provinces can be around 24 Kg/ from each hectare and an average production will be at the range of 7- 10 Kg/hectare which is considerable. Based on high demand of farmers and increment of coverage area and the average price/Kg in Karokh and Zindajans districts of Herat province, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) with technical assistance of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) project in planting season 2015 has provided 120.5 Mt of Saffron Corns and 17 complementary items of necessary equipment and material to 1,205 farming families on cost recovery base that by the end of 3rd year the beneficiary households will provide 120 kg saffron corns to his neighbour farmer, each beneficiary received 100 kg saffron corn for 250 m2 land, total of 20,125 ha land come under the saffron cultivation. The beneficiaries have been trained on Saffron planting, harvesting and processing.

Beneficiary Perceptions on Project Outcome

•M&E conducted on various project activities
•5 USGS trainings under process.
•Capacity Building plan approved and being implemented
•13 overseas trainings planned, 7 delivered.
•5 USGS trainings under process.
•31 in country trainings planned, 17 delivered.
•M&E conducted on various project activities

Component C: Establishment of Hydro-Meteorological Facilities and Services

This component supports the establishment of an efficient and effective hydro-meteorological service, under this, 127 Hydrological stations, 56 Meteorological stations and 30 snow survey stations have been installed and six Silt Labs have been established in six regions.

Beneficiary Perception on Project Outcome

When beneficiary farmers were asked on IRDP’s outcomes that have improved their livelihood they mentioned as the most important ones: increase in water availability and reliable supply of water as a result of rehabilitation works that lead to higher production; and the reduction in time and resources deployed in operation and maintenance of the irrigation system. But positive effects also emphasized included: the reduction of damages caused by floods, and the greater harmony in the community due to a much lower number of water-related disputes.

Trans-Boundary Animal Diseases (TADs) have been considered as permanent threat to livestock keepers with significant economic implications for the entire livestock sector. FAO and the General Directorate of Animal Health and Livestock (thanks the Government of Japan for their generous support through the OSRO/AFG/402/IPPN Project) have started their efforts to prevent and control both Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) and Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR) through implementation of preventive vaccination programmes.

The FMD vaccination program started around mid-September 2015 and a total of 9,927 cattle (belonging to 3,064 families) have been injected with a trivalent vaccine protecting against the common serotypes of FMD virus circulating in Afghanistan, namely types A, O and Asia1. The preventive vaccination is targeting dairy cattle in Kabul, Parwan and Logar provinces. For the PPR component the vaccination campaign has been arranged through a Letter of Agreement with the Dutch Committee for Afghanistan (DCA). DCA is an international NGO which is operating in the animal health and livestock sector in Afghanistan for more than 25 years. The vaccination program has targeted Kuchi pastoralists in the areas where animals migrate for their summer pastures in the provinces of Kabul, Logar and Parwan. Furthermore, most of the vaccination has been carried out before the Kuchi pastoralists started to migrate again (in September) to their winter locations. On 1 November 2015, the number of sheep and goats injected with PPR vaccine was 174,197 and 25,507 respectively, belonging to 1,080 Kuchi families. FAO and MAIL joint monitoring and interviews with Kuchi communities indicated that they are suffering from various livestock diseases and natural disasters which result in losses of their livestock. In order to prevent such issues, a specific work establishing extension groups within the Kuchi communities has been initiated. The vaccination programme was well accepted by the beneficiaries and their response to the implementation of those vaccination programmes and extension services has been very positive and recommended to be further expanded. Also, the public/private partnership established for implementing such preventive and outreach activities that should be the framework or way forward to deliver improved services for the benefit of the farmers of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Irrigation Restoration Development Project (IRDP)

Component C: Technical Assistance, Institutional Strengthening and Project Management

Under this component the achievements are as follows:

•Technical Assistance (TA) to MEW through FAO is operational
•Capacity Building plan approved and being implemented
•13 overseas trainings planned, 7 delivered.
•5 USGS trainings under process.
•31 in country trainings planned, 17 delivered.
•M&E conducted on various project activities

Community Development

When beneficiary farmers were asked on IRDP’s outcomes that have improved their livelihood they mentioned as the most important ones: increase in water availability and reliable supply of water as a result of rehabilitation works that lead to higher production; and the reduction in time and resources deployed in operation and maintenance of the irrigation system. But positive effects also emphasized included: the reduction of damages caused by floods, and the greater harmony in the community due to a much lower number of water-related disputes. The beneficiaries have been trained on Saffron planting, harvesting and processing.

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