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MoU for National Coordination Structures for the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSANA)

On 18 April 2017 a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed establishing National Coordination Structures for Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSANA). Signed by Chief Executive Officer, H.E. Abdullah Abdullah, and three UN organizations, UNICEF, WFP and FAO, the three UN organizations have agreed to support the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan through the Office of Chief Executive Officer to provide technical and operational support to establish a National Technical Secretariat on Food Security and Nutrition in the country. The National Technical Secretariat will be housed at the Office of Chief Executive Officer, which is responsible for providing support to the high level steering committee.

Afghanistan is a food and nutrition insecure country where large segments of the population suffer from hunger and malnutrition. Food security and nutrition is a multi-dimensional issue requiring a variety of institutions and ministries to be involved in addressing these challenges.

In recognizing that food and nutrition insecurity result in hunger and malnutrition, which negatively impacts on the population and national development in general, to address the issue, AFSANA was developed. The goal of AFSANA is to ensure that no Afghan suffers from hunger and every single person is well nourished at all times. The strategic objectives are to assure the availability of sufficient food for all Afghans; improve economic and physical access to food, especially by vulnerable and food insecure population groups; ensure a stable food supply over time and in disaster situations; and promote better diets and adequate food utilization particularly by women and children.

EU support to agricultural development in Afghanistan a success over ten years

European Union (EU) support to agricultural sector development in Afghanistan dates back over ten years. The main focus of EU assistance has been in developing certified seeds, animal health, horticulture, agriculture statistics and market information and integrated food security phase classification. EU support has involved assisting the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) in service delivery, particularly in its transformation to a modern institution aimed at providing an enabling environment for agricultural growth, with delivery itself being undertaken with the help of the private sector through public-private partnerships.

Recently, FAO reviewed key achievements of EU support that were shared at an Inception workshop on 29 March 2017 for a new EU funded project implemented by FAO. Based on the review of project documents and ongoing discussions with key stakeholders and beneficiaries, including farmers, private service providers, NGOs, government officials, involved in the implementation and management of these projects, the findings showed that overall EU assistance was very much in line with the overarching policy and the strategic guidelines of the government of Afghanistan.

The support has made a tremendous improvement in service delivery and capacity of the government in the following key areas.
Technical assistance contract to FAO Afghanistan extended for Irrigation Restoration Development Project

On 26 April 2017, the Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW) and FAO signed a contract extension for technical assistance of Irrigation Restoration Development—Additional Financing (IRDP-AF).

The extension of FAO’s technical assistance is for a period of three years with an additional amount of US$4.7 million funded by the World Bank. Main activities will include support in the areas of the rehabilitation of irrigations schemes, river bank erosion protection, hydro meteorological services, dam safety and water resources management throughout the country. The contract document to this effect was signed by H.E. Minister, Mr. Ali Ahmad Osmani on behalf of MEW and FAO Representative Tomio Shichiri.

The contract extension will support the ministry in scaling-up ongoing activities including some additional activities such as capacity development of relevant departments under MEW in Dam Safety including dam operation and maintenance, groundwater management and river basin planning and study.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in Afghanistan

FAO Afghanistan in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock are focusing on policy coherence and close coordination between all relevant departments to jointly achieve the SDG agenda. FAO has made efforts with MAIL to adopt an inclusive approach towards addressing multiple SDGs and targets related to the agriculture sector in an integrated manner. Continuous technical backstopping of FAO - Policy Officer (FIRST) and the focal point for the SDGs, will work with MAIL to review the SDGs as a system in which goals and targets are interlinked. With strong determination to ensure coordination, policy coherence and synergies to achieve the SDG agenda effectively, FAO has held series of meetings with MAIL and the Ministry of Economy. MAIL has grouped four SDGs and 11 targets around food, agriculture, livelihoods and the management of natural resources. FAO Afghanistan has identified around six goals (2, 5, 6, 12, 13 and 15) and 20 indicators that are in line with goals and targets being followed by MAIL.

Given the need to ensure national ownership, integration and rights, and increasingly recognizing the importance of local government leadership as an essential element in achieving the SDGs; FAO is leading technical support to MAIL at central and sub-national/provincial level. Aimed at capacity development of MAIL staff and wider stakeholders; prioritizing SDGs and their targets and monitoring of SDG targets and indicators; along with the need to ensure coherence of Provincial and subsector development plans with SDGs targets, FAO is preparing a comprehensive roadmap for achieving the SDG targets at the provincial level which will in turn feed into the Annual Development Plan/Public Sector Development Program and next five-year plan.

Regarding SDG - 2 (Zero Hunger), FAO in collaboration with WFP and other relevant stakeholders under the leadership of the Office of the President, has carried out an “Afghanistan Zero Hunger Strategic Review”. This included technical support in the strategic review, as well as in organizing consultative workshops at the provincial level. FAO is one of the key members of the Technical Advisory Committee on SDG-2. FAO is providing support to the Government in preparing a high-level technical meeting on SDG 2, being held in New York in June 2017. For the high-level political forum on the SDGs, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, (July 10 to 19) on the theme of “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world”, FAO is among the three main stakeholders – MEW, MAIL and UNDP supporting both the Ministries in leading and preparing an outline and key messages for the Voluntary National Review Report. The report was submitted to MEW to present to the High-level Political Forum.
For the second time the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), FAO in close coordination with the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), Ministry of Education and the recently established Afghanistan National Dairy Association (ANDPA) celebrated World Milk Day on 24 May 2017.

Internationally, FAO has promoted 1 June as World Milk Day to recognize the importance of milk as a global food. This was initiated in June 2001 and has since become an annual event in many countries. In 2016, more than 40 countries around the world celebrated the World Milk Day and the number of participating countries is growing every year.

In Afghanistan, this year’s celebrations were extended to two additional Provinces of Kunduz and Kandahar in addition to Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, and Balkh Provinces. In Kabul city, the event was held at Rabia -e- Balkhi Girls High school. Milk, yoghurt and dairy promotional materials were distributed to students during the event in Kabul, including a short video explaining dairy activities. H.E. Samim Shinwari, Deputy Minister of Education, H.E. Hamdullah Hamdard, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation & Livestock and Mr. Tomio Shichiri, FAO Representative also attended the event.

**National workshop on strengthening Codex Alimentarius activities**

A two-day workshop on strengthening codex activities in Afghanistan took place on 24-25 April 2017 with FAO technical support. More than 20 delegates from key ministries and agencies involved in food safety. The workshop was inaugurated jointly by the deputy ministers of Public Health and of MAIL. The workshop focused on introducing participants to the structure and processes of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, including an eight-step process for food standards formulation, followed by presentations on requirements at the national level, the codex contact point, national codex committee and technical committees and national guidelines.

One of the key outputs of the workshop was that the two ministries (MoPH and MAIL) agreed and signed an MoU. The MoU is to formalize the appointment of the codex contact point and co-focal point, establish the National Codex Committee, identify the responsibilities of both parties and establish a coordination mechanism among relevant ministries and agencies. This paved the way for both ministries to work together in setting up the Codex structure in the country. FAO was requested to provide support.

**Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR) vaccination campaign targets over seven million sheep and goats**

On 17 May 2017, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock and FAO launched a renewed PPR vaccination in Kabul to target seven million sheep and goats in Afghanistan.

The campaign is critical to increase awareness given that PPR is endemic in the country and considered one of the most fatal animal diseases because of its impact on animal production, economy and livelihoods. The vaccination campaign will cover 27 provinces, and is taking place from May to July, through village-based clinics involved in distributing seven million doses of PPR vaccines.

“The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock is working closely with all national and international partners to increase the awareness of the Kuchis community to vaccinate their animals and provide any facilities that may be needed and to strengthen capacity building, Hamdullah Hamdard, deputy Minister of MAIL,” said.

“FAO will continue the technical support in every sector especially in animal health. This project is a good example of our commitment, said FAO Representative, Tomio Shichiri.
“Artificial Insemination of cows with improved bull semen – An efficient tool for increasing dairy farmers’ livestock asset values”

Livestock is an important asset for dairy farmers and critical in supporting their livelihoods. Turab, a resident of a village in Dehsabz District of Kabul Province has benefited immensely from the artificial insemination services provided through the FAO/MAIL and Dairy Industry Development project in Kabul, Logar and Parwan Provinces project. He joined Etifaq Cooperative in Dehsabz District in 2014. In addition to training in animal health and husbandry, cattle stable improvement, silage making and fodder production, Turab was taught the basics of animal breeding and heat recognition by project staff.

In 2014, he had one local breed cow. Now he has three cows after his cow gave birth to two crossbreed calves. The first calf has since matured and is currently pregnant together with the mother. Both are eight months pregnant. In the coming weeks, Turab will be the proud owner of five cows.

Turab said that he can easily sell his pregnant crossbreed cow for AfS 90 000. “A non–pregnant crossbreed calf has a market value of AfS 60 000 compared to a local breed calf that is valued at AfS 30 000”, he said. He is also conscious of the fact that crossbreed cows produce more milk. “The improved breed yields more milk than the local breed – that is why it needs special care and attention,” says Turab. He is one of several happy farmers in Logar, Parwan and Kabul Provinces. The project works with artificial insemination technicians in all the target districts. Technicians are able to achieve an average conception rate in livestock of around 66 percent thanks to the training provided to farmers and the timely response when farmers call the artificial insemination technicians to provide the service.

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Silage making increases incomes of dairy farmers in Logar Province

A major limitation to raising dairy cattle in Afghanistan is insufficient feed, especially during the winter season. Farmers use crop residues (especially wheat straw) and assorted feed stuffs from local markets to feed their animals during winter. The low protein content of crop residues is not adequate to ensure productive cattle during the dry season. As a result, farmers’ interest in adopting forage conservation methods including silage-making is growing. FAO technical staff collaborated with the dairy cooperatives to train farmers in fodder preservation and establishment of silage-making demonstration plots in the villages. About 23 dairy farmers participated in the demonstration of silage pit silos in Jilga village, Pul-i-Alam district in Logar Province. Corn silage was used for the demonstrations.

Follow-up visits were conducted to check for problems and discuss with farmers their experiences with silage making. Farmers also trained their colleagues. Sayed Mokamel Agha, a farmer from Jilga village was trained in silage making by his neighbor. He has two milking cows. “I discovered that silage is very important for feeding my livestock in winter. My neighbor trained me in making silage”, he said. Agha constructed a silage pit with a capacity of 700 kg next to his cattle.

He spent AfS 3 000 making silage and saved AfS 10 500 that he would have spent buying hay and wheat straw, and concentrate feed for his livestock. Sayed Mati, the village milk collector, said milk production by Sayed Mokamel Agha’s cows was significantly higher this winter than in the past and this was due to feeding silage to the livestock. Farmers are increasingly adopting silage making after being trained by project staff and, like Agha are also learning from each other.