

## IPM CRSP Trip Report

Country(s) Visited: Tajikistan

Dates of Travel: July 24-August 2, 2010

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Zahra Jamal, Michigan State University

Country: Tajikistan

Sites visited: Dushanbe  
Turdi Village, Hissor  
Tanyal Village & Gulzor Village, Kulyob

### Description of Activities/Observations:

Our team visited Tajikistan from 26 July to 2 August, 2010. Although our time in-country was very short, we managed to meet with more than 20 individual experts and development groups and to engage in three focus groups in three villages in two different districts. (A list of those contacts follows at the end of this report.) The discussion that follows is based primarily on these conversations but also on our own bibliographic research in advance of the trip. Our comments fall into three categories: (1) overarching socioeconomic issues; (2) agricultural development and food security issues; and (3) next steps for gender inclusion in the Central Asia IPM CRSP. A couple of caveats are in order: unfortunately, we could not get a sense of the wheat production process, except for what Dr. Anvar and other specialists explained to us, because wheat had already been harvested by the end of July. And also unfortunately, none of the farms we visited in Kulyob were wheat-growing.

### Socioeconomic Issues:

In our work, four overarching issues emerged that have an impact on any agricultural development project, including MSU's Central Asia IPM CRSP. First is the general state of the Tajik economy which, as a result of years of war and a rough transition from communism, suffers from weak growth and high levels of poverty. Although the poverty level has decreased in the past three years, more than half the population still lives in poverty. The regime's goal is to reduce that level to 40% by 2015. The numbers of poor in the society have increased due to poor quality of education, lack of jobs opportunities, and unfavorable economic reforms that increase taxes on micro-entrepreneurs, a group that is typically comprised of women. Some are turning to black market trade, especially of fruits and vegetables, as well as human trafficking, out-migration, and other means to increase income in order to maintain subsistence living. As the population continues to grow the food insecurity situation will only worsen.

Second, the education system in the country has deteriorated dramatically since the Soviet era. The deterioration is particularly acute in rural areas. Investment on school buildings and facilities

has significantly declined. There is a shortage of teachers, and those that do exist are grossly underpaid and many are under-qualified. Drop out rates have been increasing across the board and are particularly high for girls in both rural and urban areas because families see no reason to pay for their daughters' education when there are no employment opportunities available. To the extent that this trend continues and affects literacy rates among women, it will be a serious concern for economic development, including rural development projects that involve outreach and workshops.

Third, the health care system is collapsing. There are growing tuberculosis and polio crises, and increases in maternal mortality, infant mortality, and suicide rates, especially among women. Making matters worse, despite an abundance of water in the country, clean drinking water is a major issue.

Finally, some of our interviewees expressed concern over conservative forms of Islam from Iran and Saudi Arabia in the country impacting the political climate and women's rights. They cited a growing number of youth and elderly women, as well as female members of government officials' families, who have begun veiling. The concern is that some of these women are being forced to do so either by social pressure or patriarchal and religious forces in their families. Additionally, the largest mosque in Central Asia is currently being erected by Saudi Arabia in downtown Dushanbe, next to Tajik State University. In some villages, conservative interpretations of Islam impact the roles and responsibilities of women in agricultural and other sectors.

#### Agricultural development and food security issues

Specific to the agricultural sector and food security, our informants identified a number of key issues. First is the process of land reform in which landholdings have been transferred from the state to private individuals. Officially, the process is nearly completed, giving landholders the ability to make independent decisions on which crops to grow. In fact, land certificates (to use but not own the land) have not always been issued, and those that have been issued go almost exclusively to men. One informant explained that 14% of land certificates have gone to women, but it is unclear whether these women really hold titles to the land or whether males in their household do. Furthermore, while farmers may have the right to grow what they wish, in practice farmers are often told what to grow (e.g., cotton and wheat) or simply continue to grow what they have grown in the past (e.g., cotton and wheat).

Poor access to inputs is major constraint to agricultural production especially for rural and marginal farmers. Most farmers in Tajikistan simply do not have the financial resources to develop their land and purchase inputs. It was evident from our discussions that currently there is no reliable input supply mechanism to obtain the required quantities of quality inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, etc. Furthermore, the existing regulatory system does not limit or monitor the importation of substandard inputs into the country. For example, the government does not ban pesticides; there are no laws to regulate their sales or use. Some farmers are using un-tested pesticides brought to the country by Chinese businessmen.

We were also informed that most of the existing farm machinery was acquired during Soviet times and is mostly dysfunctional. Even machinery in decent condition is often under-utilized

due to high fuel prices that have risen 20% in the last year and are presumed to continue rising due to an oligopoly controlling the industry. Irrigation of agricultural land is another key issue. While the Soviet regime developed extensive irrigation systems, those systems are deteriorating. Many canals are not properly lined or maintained, so much irrigation water is lost. Local politics over water management and usage, as well as a severe shortage of electricity in the country, which is needed to irrigate 50% of agricultural lands by machine, exacerbate the situation. Furthermore, food storage is a critical issue as evidenced by a 40% post-harvest spoilage rate due to lack of adequate storage facilities and poor transportation infrastructure.

Yet another shortcoming is that in most rural areas there are hardly any extension services. Therefore, many agricultural producers, especially the women, lack knowledge of new farming methods and agricultural inputs. However, non-governmental organizations are supporting a small but growing network of extension services who work with both male and female farmers. Extension workers from both locations we visited (Hissor and Kulyob) said that women participate in their services, but it was impossible for us to ascertain the extent to which this occurred, how often it occurred, and whether women were simply present but did not speak in the workshops for cultural reasons, as indicated by several other informants. We can confirm that villagers, including women, were very interested in talking about cash crops (especially tomatoes and garlic), technical information, and needs for inputs and knowledge. They would like more information on how to grow cash crops in order to increase their profit margins. Attention to extension work could yield major results if done properly.

Another key issue is the out-migration of men, aged 18-45, from rural areas. On the one hand, families and the government rely heavily on remittances from these migrant workers. On the other hand, their absence leaves women (and children) to work the farms, including heavy-duty jobs normally done by men such as irrigation, harvesting, and other tasks, at the same time that they remain responsible for overseeing reproductive and domestic labor in the household. The women farmers we spoke with in Hissor and Kulyob made clear that they are over-worked: they are working in the fields and caring for the household from dawn to very late at night. Their situation is further complicated by the fact that most decision-making over inputs and over what to grow is typically the purview of men, even if they are elderly and not contributing to farm work or absent entirely. We should say, however, that interviewees in Kulyob and Hissor indicated that when men are not present, elder women, widowers, and divorced women run their households and make decisions related to agricultural production.

As a result of these problems, Tajikistan's food security situation is precarious. Although wheat is being produced in the country the total cereal demand is not fully met. The situation is similar for vegetables, fruits and livestock products. The country relies heavily on home gardens. These gardens, which are tended to nearly exclusively by women, constitute 50% of the country's production and are instrumental in fulfilling the household food needs, especially in rural areas. However, dietary diversification still remains an issue due to lack of income. As identified by some key informants the biggest contributor to food insecurity in Tajikistan is poor access to food resulting from poverty and increasing food prices.

Training Activities Conducted

| Program type<br>(workshop, seminar,<br>field day, short<br>course, etc.) | Date                                         | Audience                                                 | Number of<br>Participants |       | Training Provider<br>(US university, host country<br>institution, etc.)                   | Training Objective                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                          |                                              |                                                          | Men                       | Women |                                                                                           |                                                                                                                   |
| Field days                                                               | July<br>29,<br>2010 &<br>July<br>30,<br>2010 | Linda<br>Racioppi,<br>Zahra Jamal,<br>Hashini<br>Galhena | 7                         | 25    | Host country institution-<br>ICARDA/ATAC and Tajik<br>Academy of Agricultural<br>Sciences | Understand gender roles<br>with respect to<br>agricultural processes<br>and food security issues<br>in Tajikistan |

Suggestions, Recommendations, and/or Follow-up Items:

Based on our findings, we recommend the following:

1. Discuss practical constraints with Managing Entity and shape workplans and budgets for the Gender Global Theme in year two accordingly;
2. Meet with Impact Assessment Team to discuss inclusion of gender-related questions in surveys;
3. Hire Gender Coordinator to build local teams for training, networking, and research (including rapid gender assessment and additional qualitative research); and
4. Solicit MSU students and Tajik students to engage in relevant language-training, research, and field experiences.

List of Contacts Made:

1. Jalil Piriev, Director Tajik Academy of Agricultural Sciences
2. William Bell , Chief of Party, Water Users Association, Winrock International
3. Nargis Azizova, UNIFEM
4. Petra Geraedts, EU TACIS/SENAS
5. Cedric Charpentier, WFP
6. Kevin Dean & S. Turunsov, USAID
7. Kishwar Abdulalishoev, MSDSP
8. Sofia Kasimova- gender scholar, Sociologist, Gender Education Center, Dushanbe
9. Shohira Pahlavonova- gender activist
10. Margarita Higai – gender scholar, Economist, Slavonic University
11. Zulekha Usmanova- gender scholar and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Economics Dept

12. Salim Mohammad, Oxfam Kulyob
13. Turdish village, Durbat Jamoat, Hissor District, Site of Anwar's institute's work
14. Gulzor Village, Kulyob District
15. Tanyal Village, Kulyob District
16. William Bullock, USAID Productive Agriculture Project
17. Ibrahim, ATAC
18. Nurali Saidov, ICARDA
19. Izzatullo Sattori Saidov, Tajik Agrarian University
20. Shahlo Safarzoda, Tajik Academy of Agricultural Sciences
21. Jalilov Anvar, Tajik Academy of Agricultural Sciences