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Afghan Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED)



November Monthly Report

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Roots of Peace

Implementing Partner for:

Afghan Agricultural Research & Extension Development (AGRED) Program

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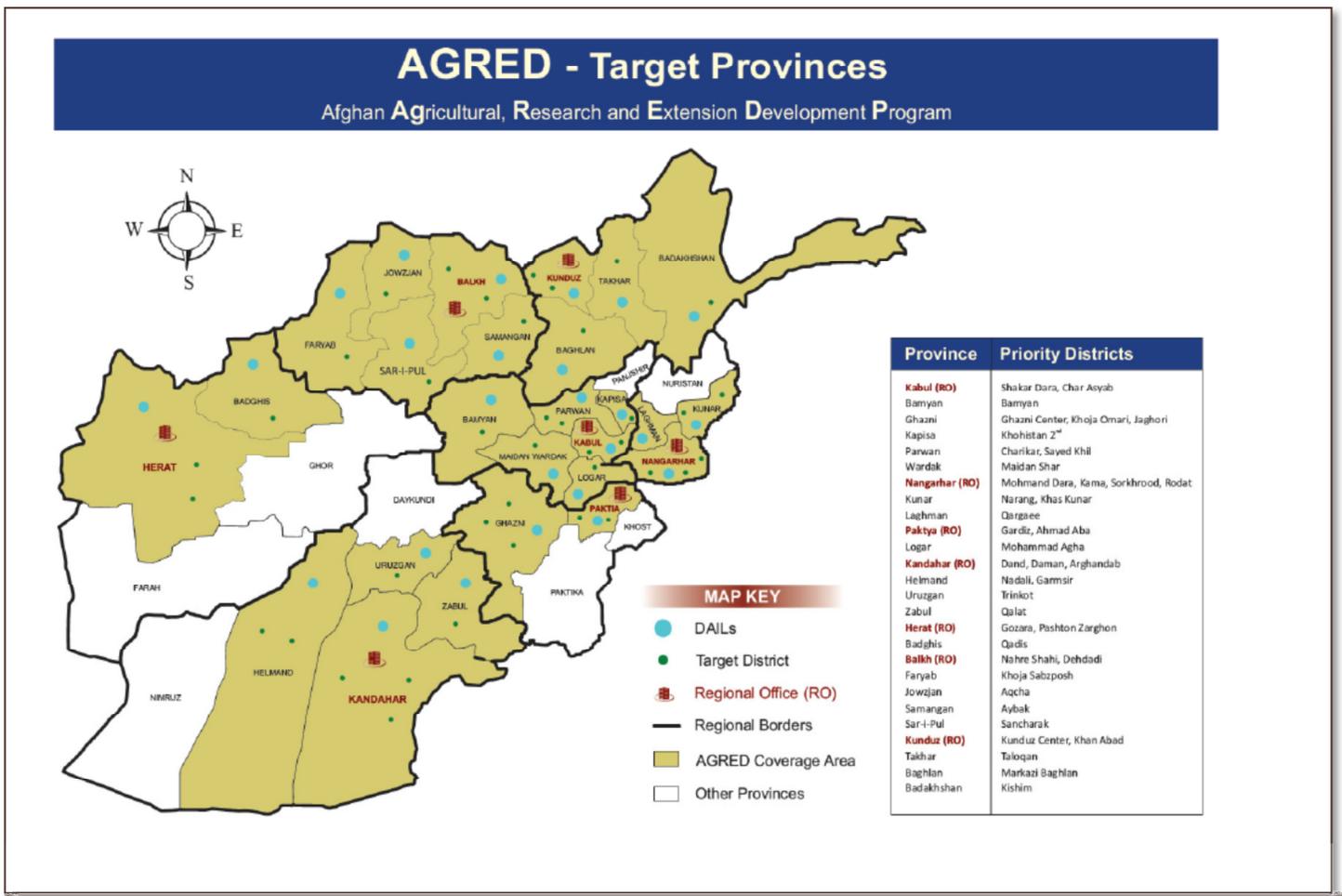
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Program Overview

Roots of Peace is the lead implementing partner for USAID’s Afghan Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED) program. AGRED is a five-year program in partnership with the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). Currently in its second year, AGRED will build enduring and effective research and extension systems to attain the overarching goal of increasing agricultural productivity and income through the application of science and technology.

To attain this goal, AGRED will focus on nine strategic goals to improve internal structures and systems within MAIL that affect research and extension. As capacity is built, AGRED will additionally focus on provincial-level work through Directorates of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (DAILs) to build on the established policies and systems to improve research and extension services to farmers.



On- and Off- Budget: a brief primer

The AGRED program is divided into two components: On- and Off- Budget. The On-Budget portion refers to resources provided directly to MAIL and DAILs to be implemented in seven regional research stations, covering 26 provinces and 50 districts. The On-Budget scope of work focuses on strengthening MAIL and DAILs internal systems, policies, and strategies towards delivering better services as a government entity to farmers and other agriculture-based partners across Afghanistan. On-Budget implementation is measured against the nine above-mentioned Strategic Goals and Benchmarks.

The Off-Budget component refers to support provided by AGRED technical and cross-cutting teams to MAIL and DAILs so that they in turn may better deliver services per the On-Budget scope. Three AGRED departments deliver the Off-Budget technical support: Research, Extension, and Training, while Gender and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) departments provide cross-cutting support. AGRED support generally consists of direct technical assistance, consultation, trainings, strategic decision making, and general oversight.

What this means for the November Monthly report

Even though AGRED's On-Budget has not been formally adopted (IL #1 is in the process of being signed; the following section offers more details), AGRED's technical and cross-cutting teams have been active in carrying out Off-Budget activities in anticipation of On-Budget implementation. The November Monthly report highlights progress made in Off-Budget support delivered by the AGRED technical and cross cutting teams.

It's also important to understand that since Implementation Letter #1 has not been signed, the above-cited Strategic Goals and Benchmarks are subject to minor modifications. These will be finalized as part of the formal IL #1 adoption. Per the AGRED agreement, MAIL and DAILs will be directly responsible for On-Budget reporting once the IL #1 is signed.

Highlight of November Achievements

For all highlights, more detailed explanations can be found in subsequent sections of the report.

AGRED explores how digital technology can support field-level information sharing

In November AGRED continued ongoing negotiations to pilot an initiative through an India-based company, Digital Green, which facilitates community-led design and production of field-level video vignettes. The videos are intended to educate viewers on community-identified farming techniques and approaches that fit the local context. Inclusive in the services is a facilitated viewing and discussion event held in the community (using battery operated projectors) in an effort to present relevant information in an educational and entertaining fashion. AGRED is available to address any questions on this pilot initiative. (see pages 4 - 5)

Additionally, AGRED has held a number of internal brainstorming and concept development meetings which have focused on how digital tools (i.e. e-libraries, tablets, online databases) could potentially be integrated into AGRED's technical support in order to promote improved field-level information sharing. These pilot ideas are currently in the brainstorming stage, but will continue to be developed as implementation activities progress.

Progress towards signing Implementation Letter #1 (IL#1).

The AGRED leadership team worked closely with MAIL to submit a revised version of IL #1 for USAID approval. This document is important because it formally marks the beginning of On-Budget implementation. At the time of reporting, IL #1 is with USAID; AGRED is available to respond to any feedback. (see page 4)

Mini-project design, implementation, and monitoring.

AGRED's technical and cross-cutting teams provided technical support to DAILs through a number of active mini-projects directly benefiting farmers. From assistance in developing stronger project concepts and writing more viable mini-projects; to distributing critical inputs and tools directly to farmers; to monitoring visits of ongoing saffron cultivation, AGRED's technical teams were active in November as the program continues to strive for greater field-level impact. (see pages 5 - 9)

Training- improving yields in saffron production and pre- and post- apple harvesting.

AGRED's Training team conducted two separate workshops through the DAILs in Kabul and Samangan provinces. Both workshops were conducted at the request of the respective DAILs and reflected the specific needs of local farmers. The workshops complemented mini-project implementation by providing hands-on learning opportunities. (see page 8)

Integrating gender into MAIL and DAIL implementation—building the platforms.

As AGRED works towards stronger gender integration into MAIL and DAILs implementation, its Gender team made progress in November by establishing a

Kunar province-based Women in Agriculture Working Group (WAWG). The group will meet monthly in order to address various issues working towards stronger inclusion of gender-related research and extension issues into MAIL and DAILs implementation. (see pages 9 - 10)

Maintaining environmental compliance capacities. Ensuring that AGRED, MAIL, and DAIL efforts continue to be in compliance with the latest USAID regulations, the AGRED M&E team successfully transitioned from old Environmental Review Forms and Reports, to updated lists and templates provided by USAID's Environmental Officer. Additionally, AGRED developed a scope of work to recruit a new short-term environmental specialist to coordinate and ensure that all AGRED, MAIL, and DAIL activities remain compliant with USAID regulations. (see page 10)

Off-Budget Administrative Support [of On-Budget Implementation]

This section offers an update of AGRED's administrative Off-Budget support—largely at the COP and DCOPs levels—provided to MAIL and DAIL in preparation for official On-Budget implementation of program activities.

Implementation Letter # 1

AGRED is awaiting feedback on details submitted to USAID (November 9) concerning the approval of IL# 1. On multiple occasions in November, the AGRED COP and DCOP met with MAIL's Director General of Planning, Policy and Programs and MAIL's Strategic Planning Director. During early meetings in November, AGRED and MAIL reviewed and discussed feedback from USAID on previous drafts of IL #1; they subsequently prepared an action plan to provide additional details. Per the action plan, the AGRED team provided ongoing consultation throughout November to MAIL in preparing and submitting the requested details. The additional information provided to USAID was related to the following supporting documents:

- Life of Project Budget
- Detailed budget for IL #1
- Actions and means of verification for IL #1
- Timeframe for accomplishment of the actions

AGRED COP and DCOPs collaboration meetings

Additional collaboration meetings were held by the AGRED COP and Program DCOP with potential partners who could in principle provide unique collaboration opportunities. Provided below is a highlight of the most notable of these meetings:

- **November 13 and 21:** The AGRED COP met twice with the Afghan Agricultural Extension Project (AAEP) COP to share best practices and lessons learned, as well as to discuss possibilities of AGRED continuing some of AAEP activities and integrating selected staff into AGRED.
- **November 14:** The AGRED COP met with the Capacity Building Change Management Program (CBCMP) DCOP to discuss the work of CBCMP at MAIL and possibilities for collaboration, including the prospect of incorporating CBCMP staff into AGRED.
- **November 17:** The AGRED COP and DCOP attended a meeting with the Regional Agricultural Development Project- South (RADP-South) COP and DCOP. Both parties provided information on their respective programs and discussed possible areas of collaboration.
- **November 28:** The AGRED COP and DCOP attended the launching of the Capacity Building for Results Facility (CBR) to learn more about how CBR will be incorporated into MAIL as well as to network with other projects focused on MAIL capacity building.

Digital Green: utilizing technology for field-level information sharing and relationship building

Following up on initial meetings conducted in October, in early November the AGRED senior management team developed a concept paper for piloting an innovative approach to sharing field-level farming techniques through partnering with an Indian-based company, Digital Green. The concept paper was submitted to USAID (November 5) for review and feedback. The AGRED team remains available to discuss with USAID any comments arising out of the concept paper.

On November 30, the AGRED COP and DCOP held a follow up meeting with a Digital Green representative to continue working out the details of piloting the concept in two provinces to ensure that it fits the

Afghanistan context. The meeting resulted in a preliminary action plan that AGRED will continue developing and executing as next steps towards approval and pilot launching.

About Digital Green

Digital Green utilizes community-led storyboarding, shooting, and editing of field-level video vignettes which educate and entertain local community members on grassroots-driven farming techniques and approaches. These videos are then shared with other farmers in the area as just one part of a successful extension program. According to their website:

*Our approach has been found to be **10 times** more effective, per dollar spent, in converting farmers to better farming practices than classical approaches to agriculture extension.*

-Digital Green 'Key Facts'

Reporting beyond the facts: improving how AGRED captures and communicates field successes

In an effort to continually improve how it captures and articulates the impact of its work, AGRED is committed to producing compelling success stories of how AGRED / MAIL / DAILs mini-project interventions have improved the lives of individuals and communities. The AGRED Communications Department is currently developing stronger systems and tools for gathering, producing, and disseminating success stories and case studies. In the near-term, a success story has been internally finalized (see breakout) and a complete version will be submitted shortly to USAID's Communications Department for their input and approval.

Working side-by-side: figuratively, and now literally

In November, AGRED's Monitoring & Evaluation and Gender teams officially moved from the AGRED office to the MAIL office. This movement was a planned effort to maximize opportunities available to AGRED staff to provide more direct technical support to MAIL.

Off-Budget Technical Support [of On-Budget Implementation]

Through its three technical and two cross-cutting teams, AGRED continued its support in anticipation of official On-Budget approval. This section offers an update on technical support provided by AGRED teams.

Mini-proposals / projects: a means for capacity building and direct support



Higher yields mean greater income. AGRED's mini-projects provide direct technical and financial support to farmers for increasing yields and improving lives

Most of AGRED's current technical support is delivered through mini-projects, which offer small sums of start-up support (typically around \$5,000) to implement projects for improved farming techniques, introduction of improved crop varieties, and other pilot-based initiatives. The mini-projects were developed to ensure that on-the-ground implementation of AGRED activities could begin immediately; there are currently 34 total mini-projects (see Annex 1) in different stages of the project cycle.

The mini-project model is structured to institutionalize within MAIL and the

Success Story Teaser...

DAILs Build Their Capacity and Double Rice Harvests with AGRED Support

Rice cultivation in Afghanistan has a long history ... improved production practices were 100% higher than the local varieties... AGRED realized the key constraint to adoption was the lack of dissemination of information... DAILs in Kunar, Laghman, and Nangarhar began planting the new rice varieties...this is more than double the mean yield of harvested per hectare than local varieties and traditional practices ...

"...with relatively the same production cost, my yield in my area was double compared to last year's harvest"

-Mr. Namirullah, farmer

DAILs bottom-up approaches to addressing field-level agricultural needs as well as preparing MAIL and DAIL staff for future On-Budget implementation. It's important to recognize that the mini-projects are only a means to an end. They are an administrative structure for delivering tailored technical assistance; offering opportunities to pilot various technology-based initiatives and building stronger linkages between farmers and the DAILs. Provided in the next section is a progress report on mini-project design, start-up, and monitoring activities.

Strategic Goal A *Bottom up research and extension planning approach to addressing farmers' / herders' issues*

Benchmark A.2- DAILS design research and extension activities that directly address specific issues faced by farmers

Technical support: moving from an idea towards a viable project

Positive field impact begins fundamentally with ensuring that MAIL and DAILs can properly design, launch, manage, and report on implemented mini-projects. AGRED's Research and Extension teams have been working with MAIL and DAIL to develop viable and effective mini-projects, beginning with the project orientation - concept development - proposal creation - approval continuum.

Successful field implementation begins with thoughtful project design.



Technical support on the front end of launching a mini-projects is a crucial design element of the AGRED approach

Project orientation: The AGRED-North Extension team conducted a four day mini-project orientation workshop for DAIL-Balkh staff from November 19-23. The session is the first step in the AGRED mini-project process. AGRED staff introduced to participants basic principles on crafting viable concepts, writing successful proposals, report writing requirements, and preparation of work plans. Out of the working session, newly developed mini-proposal drafts were initiated and will be developed more thoroughly by respective DAIL staff for final approval by MAIL and AGRED. Subsequent implementation of these mini-projects will be reported in future reports.

Additionally, the AGRED Gender team provided technical support throughout November to DAIL- Kabul's Extension, Research, and Home Economy departments on improving mini-proposals, work plans, and reporting. Technical supported consisted of direct consultation with DAIL department staff that focused on writing fundamentals such as structure, content, and overall messaging.

Concept and proposal development: Three mini-proposals have been drafted by DAIL-Kabul with direct consultation and technical input from AGRED's Extension team. In November the projects moved from the concept development phase into rough drafts for future approval by the AGRED COP. Two of the project proposals will introduce new cherry and wheat varieties using demonstration plots, while the third proposal is focused on improving communications of extension activities to farmers using new types of technologies and approaches.

Proposal approval and project start-up: In November MAIL approved a greenhouse mini-project presented by DAIL-Sar-e-pul. The AGRED Extension and Research teams provided technical input into the design and development of the proposal in direct consultation with DAIL- Sar-e-pul. The project establishes six greenhouses to be used for application of technical assistance delivered through the local DAIL with support of AGRED's technical teams (currently focusing on off-season tomato and cucumber planting). This project will tangibly demonstrate the advantages of off-season vegetable production and help the farmers

make a more informed decision about their own production practices. The head of DAIL-Sar-e-pul conducted site visits to each plot and was satisfied with the final selections.

Technical support: Gender-focused promotional material development

Additionally, the Gender team provided direct assistance on developing women-specific educational materials such as success stories, pamphlets, brochures, calendars, and video clips. These materials are intended to increase the awareness of how gender plays a crucial role in the overall implementation of MAIL and DAILs activities. As the materials are finalized and produced, AGRED can share these documents.

Multi-stakeholder collaboration: towards improved coordination of mini-project implementation

In response to existing needs, and with a recognition of increased future implementation of mini-projects, AGRED’s Extension team organized a workshop coordination meeting (held on November 7) which was chaired by representatives from DAIL-Balkh and attended by USAID, USDA, DAIL-Balkh agriculture partners, agriculture-based NGOs, and other stakeholders such as cooperatives groups.

The purpose of the meeting was to present new capacity building coordination Standard Operating procedures (SOPs) which were recently drafted by the DAIL-Balkh senior management team, with technical direction from AGRED’s Research and Extension teams. The new guidelines were developed to better coordinate trainings and workshops taking place in DAIL-Balkh and to minimize NGO and DAIL-Balkh project overlaps. Further, DAIL-Balkh presented the details of its newly-established Capacity Development Board, which consists of five DAIL-Balkh Department representatives. The Board was formed as the administrative unit to oversee the proper application of the SOPs and coordinate capacity building efforts in the region. The meeting participants formally accepted the terms of reference and SOPs.

Benchmark A.4- DAILS systematically implement MAIL-approved research and extension work plans

Mini-project implementation: introduction of improved wheat varieties and production methods

Building on progress made from last month on three mini-projects, the AGRED Extension team introduced improved wheat varieties and production methods in Faryab, Balkh, Jawzjan, and Samangan provinces. AGRED assisted with clearing 18 plots (six per mini-project) across the four provinces using the roughing method. The demo plots were selected by the respective DAILs and approved by AGRED staff based on a pre-defined set of project criteria. The farmers were amenable to the terms and an agreement was signed to offer their plot for the demonstration-farm and accept the technical assistance and responsibilities outlined in the proposal.

Mini-project implementation: purchasing and distributing pre-harvesting materials

On November 2, the DAIL-Paktya research staff— together with AGRED regional staff—purchased and handed over pre- harvesting tools and inputs for the Paktya wheat research mini-project. Further, AGRED helped establish a work plan moving forward on the Chashma Maran research farm. Following up that activity, from November 6-9, AGRED and DAIL staff initiated land preparation of the farm and incorporated practical learning throughout the three day working session in areas such as wheat seed purity, germination tests, optimal land design, and seed bed preparations.

Purchased materials for DAIL Paktya project implementation

- ✓ 2 wheel barrows
- ✓ 8 shovels
- ✓ 1,000 meters of rope
- ✓ 5 measuring sticks
- ✓ Chemical fertilizers (DAP 50 kg. / Urea 100 kg.)
- ✓ 9 tons animal manure
- ✓ 72 kg. improved wheat seeds

Mini-project implementation: workshops as complementary capacity building tools

There were two AGRED workshops conducted in November (see Annex 2 for complete list). These workshops were used to provide technical training that complemented mini-project implementation. The workshop topics were identified by the respective DAILs and reflected farmers' most immediate needs.

Title: Saffron Cultivation Workshop

Location: DAIL office- Samangan province

Date: November 11-12

/ Type of participants: 11 (9 male, 2 female) / Head of DAIL- Samangan, Head Advisor to DAIL, five extension experts, DAIL Plant Protection and Cooperative Managers, and two DAIL Home Economy representatives

Purpose: To introduce new methods and techniques for systematic changes in saffron production



The instructor provides practical demonstrations of saffron planting techniques

Objectives:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of key aspects of best saffron production practices such as: land preparation, corm selection, fertilization and irrigation required, harvesting, and marketing for the higher profitability.
2. Describe the quality characteristics of good

saffron corms and its source.

3. Discuss best practices and timing of irrigation and fertilization.
4. Explain different planning systems (plain and ridge) and their advantages and disadvantages.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of best post-harvest / handling practices.
6. Produce a professional and well articulated executive summary, introduction, goal and objectives, methodology, discussions sections and recommendation. [moving forward with mini-project proposal development]

Methodology: Participants were given time to discuss their own experience about saffron production, to identify shared challenges, and propose new techniques for addressing the challenges. The final day included a field visit to a demonstration plot in which participants were able to practically apply lessons learned in the 'classroom'.

Assessment results: A pre- and post- test was conducted to measure what information participants were able to attain throughout the workshop. Across the 11 participants, the average improvement in scores from the pre- and post- test was 55%.



"This is very big chance for us, presenting AGRED project staff and working on DAIL capacity building."

-DAIL Kabul Director, Pre- and Post- Apple Harvesting Workshop opening ceremony

Title: Pre- and Post- Apple Harvesting Workshop

Location: DAIL office- Kabul

Date: November 11-13

/ Type of participants: 20 (20 male) / Kabul DAIL, Charsib district DAIL, Shakardara district DAIL, AGRED provincial staff

Purpose: To educate participants and offer practical application of pre- and post- apple harvesting techniques and methods (fruit harvesting, pruning, grafting, marketing, transportation, storage house, and cooling house) towards higher harvest yields

Objectives:

1. To build the capacity of DAIL extension staff in scientific and technical skills and practices.
2. To introduce and apply new technology around pre- and post- apple harvesting.
3. To ensure that DAIL- and extension agents are able to train other extension workers and lead farmers in applying learned techniques.

Methodology: The three day workshop consisted of a mix of classroom learning combined with practical demonstrations



Participants get 'hands-on' experience with apple pruning techniques

by workshop organizers using the Badam Bagh research station. Lessons learned, new and modified techniques, and challenges were discussed and applied throughout the three days. Specific techniques such as pruning, grafting, and post-harvesting marketing were covered.

Assessment results: A pre- and post- test was conducted to measure what participants were able to attain through the workshop. Across the 20 participants, the average improvement in scores from the pre- and post- test was 40%.

"All topics were important, especially ways to improve apple pruning were good and I will use them in the future."

-Mr. Abdul Razaq Charasyab Farm Extension worker



Mini-project monitoring: saffron demonstration plot visits

On November 10-12, the AGRED Extension team and DAIL-Ghazni extension staff jointly visited the Ghazni center and Khaja Omari saffron demonstration plots to collect monitoring data. The biggest challenge in Ghazni province is the cold weather; if the cold weather remains manageable over the next month, it's expected that at least 90% of all the corms (64 total) should germinate normally. The



Regional AGRED staff member explains to DAIL-Ghazni staff improved saffron collection and culture methods

AGRED staff also provided technical assistance to the DAIL extension staff and farmers on improved saffron flower collection methods, culture practices (weeding, hoeing, irrigation), and stigma removal, storage, and drying. Technical input was also provided to increase growth speed as a way to mitigate risk against the cold weather.

More than 70% of the saffron corms were fully germinated; while all remaining corms were sprouting. It's expected that 90% of the corms will germinate [by early-mid December]

Strategic Goal C Systematic institutional incorporation of Gender into research and extension plans and activities

Benchmark C.1- MAIL institutionalizes a policy to ensure each research and extension activity addresses gender

Women in Agriculture Working Groups: a platform for integrating gender into MAIL and DAIL implementation

A brief conversation with Ms. Nazira Rahmani- Director of Home Economics, MAIL

On expectations of WAWGs:

I expect more coordination and cooperation regarding gender from partners. Also I expect partners to be honest, practical and focused, so that we together can bring a positive change to lives of Afghans.

On importance of these meetings:

...it's to improve understanding of gender from different perspective as well as we will know who does what in relation to gender. Such [a] meeting definitely increases coordination and cooperation among stakeholders.

On longer-term outlook

...I am working to include gender into [the] Home Economics Department, currently the gender unit is functioning as a separate unit; after approval of the His Excellency the Ministry, we will develop a comprehensive work plan to include gender into all affairs of MAIL.

AGRED's Gender component led the creation of a Women in Agriculture Working Group (WAWG) in Kunar province. Establishing this group was the culmination of AGRED-led efforts in October and throughout November. Members of the working group include a wide range of interests, including: DAIL departments (Extension, Research, Home Economics), the Agricultural Institute and Agricultural Professional School, private sector interests, DAIL agriculture partners, and farmer associations and cooperatives.

The WAWG-Kunar will meet once a month to address various challenges, opportunities, and other strategic considerations as they relate to promoting women's extension and research. The group will be working towards:

- Advising DAIL to expand research and extension projects for women farmers in Kunar province
- Working with DAIL to engage women farmers in implementation of research and extension programs promoting applied techniques in improving agriculture practices
- Assisting DAIL to develop mini-proposals for AGRED's consideration based on women farmers' needs

Currently, there is no female staff within DAIL-Kunar as the provincial coordinator; AGRED will continue to assist DAIL-Kunar in the recruitment of this position to oversee the working group.

Coordination meetings around a December USAID OAG Gender Working Group meeting

The AGRED Gender team held two important meetings in November focused on making final arrangements for an anticipated USAID Office of Agriculture (OAG) Implementing Partner Gender Working Group Meeting in December. The first meeting was held with the USAID OAG Gender team. Decisions were made around finalizing an agenda, coordinating logistics, following up with confirmation for participants, and providing a list of attendees.

As a follow up, the AGRED Gender team conducted a second meeting which included the MAIL Deputy Minister, Home Economy Director, Gender Head, and the DAFA III Budget Execution Expert. The purpose of the meeting was to brief MAIL representatives on the purpose of the working group and the importance of MAIL taking leadership of future meetings and follow-up. The meeting established guidelines, outlined important strategic decisions, and committed to a follow-up meeting on December 10.

Strategic Goal E An effective monitoring and evaluation system

Benchmark E.1- MAIL designs and implements a monitoring and evaluation system which is capable of capturing activity outputs and outcomes

Maintaining environmental compliance capacities

USAID's Environmental Officer visited AGRED (November 10) to discuss new environmental reporting requirements. While AGRED already had a USAID approved Environmental Mitigation and Management Plan (EMMP), during the meeting AGRED recommitted to updating the AGRED EMMP to comply with recently provided USAID Environmental Review Forms and Reporting formats. Additionally, USAID has an approved *Pesticide Evaluation Report and Safer Use Action Plan* (PERSUAP) which AGRED is required to follow. USAID and AGRED agreed to hold a future meeting (date yet to be determined) with MAIL and Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) to coordinate on these and other environmental compliance requirements.

Recruitment for Short-Term Technical Advisor (STTA) on environmental matters

To further strengthen AGRED's commitment to environmental integrity, a scope of work was developed for a STTA Environmental Specialist. The Specialist will be responsible for minimizing negative environmental impacts by ensuring that all of AGRED, MAIL, and DAIL activities are in compliance with the Afghanistan PERSUAP, USAID Environmental Regulation 216, and NEPA. Subsequent monthly reports will report on the recruitment of this position as it progresses.

Annex 1-Complete list of AGRED mini-projects

This document is available as an Excel file and has been attached with the report submission

Annex 2- Complete list of AGRED Workshops

This document is available as an Excel file and has been attached with the report submission.