



Middle East Water and Livelihoods Initiative plans for a new generation of water and land managers

Cairo, Aleppo and Amman—A series of three workshops, sponsored by a start up grant from USAID, were attended by over 150 people from about 30 different organizations dealing with water and land management in the Middle East. The Water and Livelihoods Initiative (WLI) has renewed relations between U.S. Universities and Middle Eastern institutions; however, the value of this endeavor was in the results-based planning and bottom up focus on key constraints in the three major agro-ecosystems that make up the Middle East – fully irrigated areas; rainfed zones and the rangelands.

Participants agreed to link proposals in all seven countries – Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen through outputs that are tailored to the individual needs of a selected watershed in each country where new technologies can be tested and scaled up for broad scale replication in each country. The three major outputs of the proposed effort will be as follows:

1. Integrated water and land-use strategies for policy making, tools for sustainable benchmark management and organizational mechanisms for community inclusion at the benchmark site.
2. Enhanced knowledge, skills and qualifications for key stakeholders in the benchmark sites.
3. Improved rural livelihoods of farmers in the benchmark site through the adoption of sustainable land and water management practices and livelihood strategies.

Proposals are now under preparation with the facilitation of the International Center

for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and they will be reviewed by all partners. Expectations are high because of the comprehensive nature of the planning and attention to livelihood improvements for poor people in USAID presence countries.

It is time to rebuild the human resource base of Middle Eastern water and land managers. The involvement of very strong U.S. universities – namely Texas A&M University, University of California at Davis and at Riverside, University of Florida, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and Utah State University allows the WLI to tackle all of the problems in a consortium approach, exploiting major comparative advantages of each partner.

The Middle East countries also benefit greatly because of very large differences in development that exist from one country to the next – allowing for a significant transfer of international public goods from one team to another.

The WLI will now head into a public awareness phase in selling their comprehensive ideas on addressing constraints in the benchmark communities to the USAID Missions in the Middle East Region. ICARDA will impress upon its national partners in the region that the WLI must have their steadfast political support; US universities will need to launch a multi-faceted, full-fledged public awareness campaign to convince Middle East government officials, donors, and community leaders to emphasize that the WLI should move forward, owing to its participatory development and maturity, strong connections between the US and Middle Eastern country organizations, and long-term development logic.



Cairo Irrigated Benchmark Workshop 7-9 April 2009



Aleppo Rainfed Benchmark Workshop 5-7 May 2009



Amman Rangeland Benchmark Workshop 12-14 May 2009