



16 April 2020

## Summary note

### **Impact of COVID-19 pandemic to implementation of Africa RISING activities**

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#### 1. East and Southern Africa Project [Tanzania, Malawi & Zambia]

*Update by Mateete Bekunda*

**Status of activities in ESA:** Mid-way of the cropping season; experiments established by end of January 2020. Harvesting is within the next 2 months (May to June).

**National COVID-19 guidelines:** For all the three ESA Project countries (Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia), the guidelines still allow for (research) work to continue but with restrictions on public gatherings. National research institutions are still working. Universities are closed for undergraduate activities. Graduate research and laboratories are still functional.

**Partner international institutional COVID-19 guidelines:** Work-at-home. ILRI has suspended all field activities and closure of laboratories.

#### **Implications for ESA Project activities**

##### **Promising**

- i. It is highly likely that crop-related biophysical data will be collected. International research partners who are non-resident in the project host countries have developed local capacity (one is hiring a local consultant) to collect the data.
- ii. There is more time available for desk-top work. We are encouraging more attention to “custom” outputs, especially developing manuscripts for publication. Several of our partners are already indicating this as an appropriate opportunity.

##### **Negative**

- i. Community-related activities linking to on-going field trials are cancelled (e.g. field days, short-term capacity development, participatory variety and technology selection). Those that are independent of the on-going field activities are postponed (indefinitely – guided by the evolving institutional and national guidelines).
- ii. Monitoring and guidance from the Chief Scientist during the cropping season is cancelled. In one of these, we had planned to engage the USAID Mission in Zambia as an entry point for discussions on reinstatement of support.
- iii. Planning for country meetings that prepared scientists for the project-level report and planning meeting is on hold, pending developments in updating of institutional and national guidelines. These meetings were usually held during July. The project report and planning meeting itself (usually held during September) is under the same status.
- iv. The most seriously affected activities are those that are based on surveys (more than 10). For now, they are suspended – everyone hopes for not more than 2 months. Unfortunately, it is these studies that are addressing the social and economic aspects of

our biophysical research outputs that we are leaning more into during this part of Phase II.

- v. Engagement with development partners for scaling (new or continuing) is also impacted by the institutional and national guidelines. Meetings, capacity building for development partner staff and farmer engagements in the field are suspended.

**Final thought:** It is possible that the national guidelines may get more restrictive in future. Even then, experience from neighbouring countries still show that agricultural activities do not get locked down. We may need discussions with our research partners to prepare their local expertise to still secure collection of the biophysical data.

## 2. Ethiopian Highlands Project

*Update by Kindu Mekonnen*

**Status of activities in the Ethiopian highlands:** Data compilation and analysis, and planning period for the upcoming main cropping season (June – September 2020).

**National COVID-19 guidelines:** The Ethiopian Government has enacted a state of emergency (SOE) last week. The decree will remain enforced for five months. A follow up detailing restrictions and measures has been circulated to the public. Public gatherings of more than four persons are disallowed. The SOE recognizes the imperative of food production and encourages all development actors and research organizations to support agricultural activities/ programs during the upcoming cropping season. The government doesn't have a complete lockdown plan like some of the African and western countries for various reasons.

**Partner international institutional COVID-19 guidelines:** Work-at-home. ILRI has gone to the extent of suspending local and international travels, meetings and all field activities. For a project like Africa RISING it expects CGIAR partners to respect the lead centre policies.

### **Implications for Ethiopian highlands project activities**

#### **Promising**

- i. Most data from last main cropping season (2019/2020) have been collected with the help of our site coordinators, local contact persons and field technicians of the core CGIAR partners.
- ii. Working at home has created opportunities to have more time to work on collected data and produce different research products including peer reviewed journal articles. It also improved our skill to explore various virtual communication tools and use them accordingly.
- iii. A number of emerging recommendations from the recent review report could benefit from some redirection of effort in the event of reduced field activities (e.g. moving towards meta-analyses, forward thinking, virtual meetings).

#### **Negative**

- i. Any site and central level planning meetings with various development partners will be prevented if travel and meeting restrictions continue in the coming four weeks. These restrictions will also affect multi-stakeholder engagement platform meetings in different Africa RISING operational sites and regions.

- ii. Some socio-economic survey activities related to high value fruit trees, mechanization, gender outcomes and the contribution of Africa RISING validated technologies to nutrition have been already postponed because of travel and meeting restrictions.
- iii. Some capacity building activities such as trainings, visits, technology demonstrations and community consultations have not been conducted in the last few weeks because of travel and meeting restrictions.

Activities that have been already affected and some to be affected in the coming few weeks are summarized in table 1 below.

**Table 1.** List of Africa RISING project planned activities affected because of travel and meeting restrictions in the Ethiopian highlands.

Planned activities	Leading institution	Sites where the work is planned to take place	Time frame
MSIP meetings and scaling assessment	ILRI	AR four sites	April-June 2020
Site level review and planning meetings	ILRI	AR four sites	April-May 2020
Survey - lentil viruses and chickpea production in the short cropping season	ICARDA	Basona and Sinana AR sites	April 2020
Data collection for SIAF	CIAT	N Shewa, W Gojam, Hadiya and E Tigray	April - May 2020
Field visit in Ashenghe lake area	CIAT	S Tigray	April-May 2020
Training of experts on INRM – Hocheche dam	CIAT	S Wollo	May-June, 2020
Field visit and discussion with Inter Aide to develop recommendation domain for scaling	CIAT	Hadiya and Kembata zones	May – June, 2020
Field visit to discuss joint activities on INRM	CIAT	N Shewa, Debre Birhan	April 2020
Data and field instruments collection - irrigation activities	IWMI	N Shewa	May-April 2020
Field visits to see the current status of the high value trees	ICRAF	Basona, Sinana and Endamehoni AR sites	Feb-April 2020
Avocado -socio-economic survey	ICRAF	Lemo AR site	April-June 2020
Survey on nutrition activities	Bioversity	AR four sites	March- April 2020
Survey to assess the influence of mechanization on hh gender roles	CIMMYT	Selected AR sites	March- April 2020

**A snapshot of Africa RISING strategies and project activities that are planned to be implemented in the 2020 main cropping season**

Africa RISING project in the Ethiopian highlands has established strong partnerships with national and regional research organizations, higher learning institutions, CGIAR centers, extension offices, NGOs, farmer cooperatives, unions, breweries, private entrepreneurs and communities in the last seven years. The project has also site coordinators and a number of focal / contact persons in four regions. The project intends to implement some of the research activities and facilitation of scaling efforts through engagement of focal persons and local partners who will operate in line with the government guidelines on COVID-19 mitigation and maintenance of food production.

The site coordinators, while respecting ILRI policies and good COVID-19 practice, can still play a coordination role in their respective operational areas to implement plans. Field activities that require travel can be undertaken by the focal persons as adjuncts to their normal required activities with no increase in risk. We will also use different ICT tools for communication both amongst ourselves as well as with our local partners. The Africa RISING research team will share protocols, briefs translated into different local languages and other materials to the focal and local researchers. We have a plan to develop an Africa RISING COVID-19 mini guide on how to Keep ourselves and our partners safe, hold meetings with partners and communicate with each other and out partners. This will help us have harmonized execution of our field activities. Examples of some project activities that will be implemented in the upcoming cropping season with partnership engagement are indicated on Table 2.

**Table 2.** Some project activities planned for implementation during the main cropping season in 2020.

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Leading institution</b>	<b>Sites/regions where the work is planned to take place</b>	<b>Time frame</b>
<b>Avocado varieties yield measurement</b>	ICRAF	SNNPR	June -Dec. 2020
<b>PVS on bread wheat and faba bean crop varieties</b>	ICARDA	SNNPR	June-December 2020
<b>Community seed multiplication of farmers selected crop varieties</b>	ICARDA	Four AR operating regions	June-Dec. 2020
<b>AR validate crop varieties scaling</b>	ICARDA	Four AR operating regions and beyond	June-Dec. 2020
<b>Improved forages, management and utilization technologies scaling</b>	ILRI	Four AR operating regions and beyond	June-December 2020
<b>Baby trials demonstration from the ongoing improved forage technologies mother trials</b>	ILRI	Four AR operating regions	June-Dec. 2020
<b>On-farm demonstrations on planting, harvesting, threshing and shelling using two-wheel tractor technologies</b>	CIMMYT	Four AR operating regions and beyond	June-Dec. 2020

Facilitate scaling of disease tolerant enset clones	Areka Research Center	SNNPR	June-Dec. 2020
Facilitate scaling of high value fruit trees	AR site coordinators	SNNPR and Tigray region	June-Dec. 2020
Co-implement integrated land and water management activities in different watersheds	CIAT	SNNPR, Amhara and Tigray regions	June-Dec. 2020

### 3. West Africa Project [Ghana & Mali]

*Update by Fred Kizito*

**Status of activities in WA:** Cropping season is normally July through November of each year. Field activities were successfully concluded in 2019. On-going activities were principally around capacity building and conducting surveys and focused group discussions.

**National COVID-19 guidelines:** For the two WA Project countries (Ghana and Mali), the national guidelines do not allow public gatherings and there are movement restrictions. All National research institutions are working from home pending directives from higher government authorities to re-open. Universities are closed for both undergraduate and graduate research and laboratories.

**Partner international institutional COVID-19 guidelines:** All international partners are working from home.

#### **Implications for WA Project activities**

##### **Promising**

- i. All season-related field work was conducted 2019, there will be little disruption on crop-related biophysical data.
- ii. The situation has created opportunities for synthesis of results, consolidation of findings into publishable results that will help in developing manuscripts.
- iii. Apart from 1 activity on socioeconomics, all other activities in Mali were not affected by COVID-19.

##### **Negative**

- i. There has been disruption on activities related to capacity building, surveys and focused group discussions and key informant interviews. These have been suspended indefinitely – guided by the evolving institutional and national guidelines.
- ii. There were pre-planning meetings for both Ghana and Mali that had been planned for March, these were cancelled. Initial plans were to hold them virtually, but most national partners had not access to good internet connectivity.
- iii. The West Africa Joint (Ghana and Mali) Planning Meeting had been organized for May 12-14. This was cancelled till a later unknown date pending developments in updating of institutional and national guidelines. A virtual meeting of this size and inclusiveness is not feasible due to poor internet connectivity for many participants and due to the required length of such a meeting. This has serious implications on how the upcoming cropping season will evolve since most of the season preparations begin in June.

- iv. A meeting to discuss the recommendations from the external evaluation to inform the future research focus cannot be held in time. This affects next season's research.
- v. Maintenance and continuity of Technology Parks in Ghana and Mali is at risk if travel bans are not lifted before the start of the next field season.

**Final thoughts:** The strategy will be to maximize the current lockdown towards ensuring that pending desk-related activities are finalized.