

A PERIODIC NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND DEVELOPMENT



The project leverages smartphone apps built using blockchain technology to address bottlenecks that prevent Kenyan agriculture actors from generating income in the indigenous vegetables value chain. Photo/AgUnity

## Dr. Jessica Agnew and Dr. Ralph Hall help land project to develop app that improves food security in Kenya

Kenya is one of the most developed countries in East Africa, yet 40 million people live in poverty and are unable to meet their nutritional needs. African Indigenous Vegetables (AIVs), known for their nutritional and health benefits, could help improve food nutrition, especially among low-income households. However, challenges such as mistrust between buyers and sellers, preferences for exotic vegetables such as cabbage or kale, and lack of knowledge about food preparation have limited their potential.

Thanks to a project awarded to CIREDCONNECT, actors in Kenya's AIV value chain may soon benefit from a technology that helps close financial and informational gaps.

In September 2020, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) awarded CIREDCONNECT and partners, Egerton University and AgUnity, a \$250,000 one-year project to develop a smartphone app using blockchain technology that addresses inefficiencies in AIV value chains in Eastern Kenya.

The app will result in improved trust and transparency, means to verify transactions and enforce contracts, increased access to market information, and greater bargaining power. Consumers will, in turn, benefit from lower prices, increased supply, and more information about AIV food safety and preparation. (continued on p. 2)

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## Kenya project cont.

Jessica Agnew, a former CIRED graduate assistant and new assistant director for Research, Operations, and Program Management, played a key role in developing the proposal, in collaboration with Ralph Hall, principal investigator (PI) and associate professor in the School of Public and International Affairs.

Agnew, who will serve as the project's co-PI, said, "We look forward to this opportunity to bring AIV actors such as farmers, consumers, women, and youth into the forefront of this innovation. This project opens the door for new applications of blockchain technology, specifically in Sub-Saharan Africa's horticultural produce sector, where it has the potential to increase access to nutrition and to enable farmers to trade in high-value markets."

Ralph Hall, Agnew's former committee chair, added, "The idea for this project emerged during Jessica's Ph.D. research that focused on the potential for market-based approaches to increase diet diversity among households in Nampula, Mozambique. The Kenya project presents an opportunity to evaluate the perceived value of a transparent farmer-to-buyer platform that is designed with input from all actors in the AIV supply chain. While blockchain technology has been used to increase transparency and traceability in food supply chains in developed economies, this research holds great potential to identify how the technology could be successfully deployed in an emerging economy."

Using a co-design process, the Virginia Tech team, Egerton University in Kenya, and AgUnity, an Australian-based private sector firm, will conduct research on bottlenecks in AIV value chains in the Kakamega region with a focus on the four most popular Kenyan indigenous vegetables – cowpea, amaranth, spider plant, and nightshade. The team will leverage AgUnity's blockchain-backed application to further address the needs of value chain actors in conducting their respective activities.

Agnew added that the app offers new hope for Kenya's smallholder farmers, low-income consumers, women, and youth that often the benefit the least from economic and nutritional gains in the value chain. "Initial research will focus on engaging youth ages 29 and under and women to ensure that they are able to benefit from gains realized by the app."

Research has shown that Kenya ranks high among users of smartphones globally, thus increasing the project's scalability throughout the country.



The research team will explore how the app assists groups such as women, youth, and low-income consumers that typically face constraints in accessing economic or nutritional benefits from value chain improvements.

## From the Executive Director

I'm pleased to share this new edition of CIRE Connect. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, CIRE continues to carry out its mission to seek partnerships and funding in support of Virginia Tech's global land-grant mission. Providing opportunities for faculty and student involvement in research, teaching, and development of solutions to problems beyond the boundaries of the Commonwealth of Virginia and our nation, results in benefits to the university and to the many people and communities it serves. To this end, CIRE managed the following projects and programs during 2020:

- USAID-funded Integrated Pest Management Innovation Lab (IPM/IL)
- USAID Senegal Youth in Agriculture (YIA)
- USAID Catalyzing Afghan Agricultural Innovation (CAAI)
- UNICEF-funded African Drone and Data Academy (ADDA)
- USAID Honduras Rural Livelihoods, Migration and Violence Study
- MCC Guatemala - Strengthening Escuela Nacional Central de Agricultura (ENCA)
- VT Peace Corps Program
- Women and Gender in International Development Program
- Workforce Education and Development Program

In addition, there are two projects pending: a 3-year associate award from USAID Bangladesh to the IPM/IL and a 5-year sub-award from the USAID Advancing Higher Education for Afghanistan's Development (AHEAD) project.

Across these programs and projects, 36 sub-awards and agreements were managed, approximately 13,874 people were served, and 1,465 students were engaged in research and learning.

As the global pandemic persists, CIRE continues to face challenges related to grant-seeking and project implementation, especially those with in-country offices. Project activities have been affected by country bans on travel and gatherings and, as a result, country project teams have had to adjust accordingly. CIRE has put in place project-specific COVID protocols that

take into account country, donor, and Virginia Tech guidance. Short-term technical assistance by VT faculty has been largely eliminated and support has shifted to online, distance mentoring and training.

The changing donor landscape due to COVID, but also a result of global political and economic uncertainties, also poses challenges. Numerous USAID solicitations have been delayed or cancelled. We are seeing funding shifting to certain priority sectors with COVID itself being a major focus, but also other infectious diseases and more broadly, health systems strengthening, food security and nutrition, and workforce development. We are focusing on these funding shifts in addition to still focusing on other sectors where VT has appropriate expertise.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend CIRE staff and faculty for their hard work and persistence during these challenging times. I would also like to thank our numerous partners, internal and external, for their continued support and understanding as we stay the course of carrying out our mission despite the many obstacles. We are all in a race to defeat COVID-19. As we run this race, we should remember that perseverance and success are not the result of one long race, but come from winning many short races one after the other.

Take care and best regards,



Van Crowder  
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Through the CAAI project, CIRED facilitated trainings that have improved teaching in Afghanistan, directly targeting institutional practitioners of agriculture education. The AHEAD project award is expected to further strengthen educational networks in Afghanistan.

## **IMPACT**

# CIRED prepares for award to continue improving higher education in Afghanistan

Since 2018, the CIRED-managed Catalyzing Afghan Agricultural Innovation (CAAI) project has improved the relevance and capacity of agricultural education in five provinces in Afghanistan. Building upon its successes on the CAAI project, CIRED is looking forward to an award announcement for a new project that will strengthen higher education networks throughout Afghanistan, with CIRED responsible for establishing and strengthening a network around agriculture.

The upcoming Advancing Higher Education for Afghanistan's Development (AHEAD) project supports the government of Afghanistan and the Ministry of Higher Education to strengthen Afghan Higher Education Institutions. The five-year activity builds upon the results of USAID's previous higher education investments, to go beyond traditional capacity

building such as training, construction, or equipment purchases and faculty/student exchange models, to accelerate sustainable human and institutional capacity within Afghanistan's higher education institutions.

Led by FHI 360 in partnership with four universities, the AHEAD project will create higher education networks that support professional development and capacity building in four sectors: agriculture (Virginia Tech), education (University of Massachusetts), health (University of Minnesota), and business (American University of Afghanistan).

The project will work through the networks to deliver activities that improve higher education access and catalyze learning through scholarships, internships and experiential learning, e-learning, training, research collaboration, policy implementation, assessments, curriculum revisions, faculty professional development, and peer exchanges. The project will also work closely with the Ministry of Higher Education and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority to strengthen their capacity to operationalize reforms.

## **IMPACT**

# New CIRED Workforce Education and Development program expands opportunities to engage international partners

The Center for International Research, Education, and Development recently launched the Workforce Development and Education (WED) program. The WED program will seek opportunities to engage with partners and funders around the world to capitalize on our expertise in workforce education and workforce development.

Rick Rudd, professor and community viability chair in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership and Community Education, is serving as director of the new program. Rudd has domestic and international experience in workforce development, particularly in career and technical education, leadership development for teachers and administrators, and youth-focused workforce development programs.

One key component of this new program is the collection of national and international partners who are joining the WED program to bring a wide set of skills and talents to problems and challenges facing workforce development globally. The current consortium includes faculty from Texas A&M, Iowa State, Penn State, Hawkeye Community College, Tennessee State University, the University of Florida, University of Juba (South Sudan) and Sokoine University (Tanzania). In addition, the consortium has international members with expertise in workforce development who are not affiliated with a university. The consortium will continue to grow and add expertise as appropriate.



**Dr. Rick Rudd, director of the CIRED Workforce Development and Education (WED) program**

One recent opportunity was developed in response to a call from USAID to build technical and vocational education and training capacity in the country of Georgia. CIRED is a primary partner with Creating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA), an international non-governmental agency as well as other local Georgia partners in the proposal submitted last month. Should this proposal be awarded by USAID, CIRED will receive nearly two million dollars to lead a grant award program for industry partners to increase capacity and effectiveness of Georgia TVET programs. In addition, Virginia Tech and the WED consortium partners will work with TVET providers in Georgia to improve current programs and implement new initiatives.



The Rural Livelihoods and Violence Study examined the pathways that Honduran youth choose, with the goal of developing improved education, youth development, agriculture, gender, and violence mitigation programs.

## **IMPACT**

# Community support is most important driver of Honduran youth migration, according to USAID study led by CIRED

Unemployment, poverty, and violence have driven many Honduran youth to the Mexico and U.S. borders in search of a better life. Instead of choosing careers in a risky agriculture sector – a primary livelihood for many rural Hondurans – many choose to leave their country or turn to an illicit trade.

A recent USAID study managed by CIRED sheds light on the factors that deflect some rural Honduran youth away from agricultural livelihoods toward violence or migration.

Rebecca Williams from the University of Florida was the study's principal investigator. She surveyed 4,528

Honduran youth and 676 households during the past year to better understand the relationship between changing rural livelihoods, perceptions of livelihood opportunities, and pathways into violence and migration.

Williams noted, "Farming is an inherently risky way to make a living, given the risks such as weather, pests, commodity prices, and competition. In Honduras, it is becoming so risky that some youth see migration or livelihoods of violence as better alternatives. Understanding the pathways that youth choose and why is necessary to developing approaches that help them improve their lives."

Low community support was one the strongest predictors driving youth to consider migration. The household survey showed that 41% of participants perceived low community support of youth, a result that was echoed in the school survey of students. Many youth feel that they are not valued or a part of community decisions, which results in fewer social bonds that protect against delinquent behavior.

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## Honduran youth migration cont.

Other key findings included:

- Adults and youth were concerned about the viability and sustainability of farming due to impacts of climate change. While the perceived impacts of climate change varied by community (e.g., storms versus droughts versus newly arrived pests), there was a consensus about its strong negative impacts on livelihoods.
- Poor employment opportunities for high school graduates and a pervasive apprehension by teachers and administrators that young male students could be gang members are two of the few factors pushing male youth towards agricultural livelihoods. Young men do not feel that education will result in employment, which drives them to wage agricultural labor in the short term rather than spend time in a school where they feel unwanted. Youth who abandon or are abandoned by the school system have very few opportunities to increase their income. Some turn towards illicit activity (i.e., drugs or gangs) or migration.
- Among youth who finish secondary school, many do not believe education will lead to a better life.
- Students who were food insecure were significantly more likely to view illicit livelihoods as a survival pathway than youth who were more food secure. The study also showed that residents see narcotraffickers investing in rural community development.
- When individuals are victims of violence, they have weaker connections to family, making participation in delinquency and violence more acceptable.

The study results are expected to inform the design of development programs and intervention strategies for youth.



Farmers in Nepal plant seeds in seedling trays with *Trichoderma*, a sustainable technology that helps boost plant defense mechanisms against threats.

## IMPACT

# COVID-19 disproportionately affects female farmers in Nepal

Like many nations in the developing world, Nepal's agricultural sector and systems were at a critical juncture before the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially becoming more profitable, inclusive, and resilient. Unfortunately, the economic and food insecurity shocks generated by country-wide lockdowns may inadvertently undo much of the progress made by marginalized communities, especially women.

The newest project out of the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Integrated Pest Management — named Feed the Future Nepal Integrated Pest Management (FTFNIPM) — is culturing a gender-responsive and socially-inclusive approach to the economic disparities magnified by COVID-19. Studies show that women are often disproportionately impacted by crises, with COVID-19 as no exception.

Women play key roles in family nutrition outcomes in Nepal and around the world, be it through food preparation, food purchasing, or their own nutritional

status. In a rapid gender and social inclusion assessment, the FTFNIPM team interviewed Deepa Poudel — a community business facilitator (CBF) and plant doctor in Nepal — about the nuanced impacts of COVID-19 on women in her community. CBFs are local farmer-entrepreneurs who help deliver supplies from agri-businesses and offer integrated pest management (IPM) recommendations to remote rural farmers.

“Women farmers who used to earn [income] by selling vegetables are out of cash now,” Poudel explained.

Poudel said that due to the country lockdown, more family members are cohabitating, children are no longer in school, and other family members are no longer working, leaving women to bear a disproportionate burden of food purchasing, preparing meals, and additional household responsibilities (such as caring for children home from school and unwell family members).

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## Female farmers in Nepal cont.

The virus has caused disruptions of the typical opportunities, supply chains, and markets that women often turn to for additional income for food purchasing. Limitations such as the closure of local transportation facilities and street markets reduce a family's ability to sell produce, or simply force them to sell produce at the lowest market price.

Poudel noted that farmers she has interacted with since the rise of COVID-19, including her own family, are experiencing major stress during this uncertain time with women's workloads at an all-time high. Consequently, due to time restrictions and strict social distancing guidelines, women may be unable to attend farmer training sessions — leading to further challenges in achieving agricultural prosperity.

"All family members are together [now]," Poudel said. "This has never happened before."

In addition to increased care-giving responsibilities, another gap that continues to widen during the time of COVID-19 is access to trusted crop and market information. Based on preliminary findings, the constraints that women in Nepal already face in accessing information could intensify. CBFs like Poudel will play a critical role in generally providing farmers the trusted resources they rely on for growing crops as commercial agri-businesses and other businesses remain closed. In order to reach women and other disadvantaged groups that may have limited access to technologies like smartphones, FTFNIPM is turning to the radio and other easily accessible platforms to deliver information on emerging pests and pest management. One of those pests includes the invasive fall armyworm, which is currently wreaking havoc on maize and other staple crops throughout Asia.

Weekly text messages on fall armyworm management and recommended IPM packages for vegetables are also being disseminated to staff from Feed the Future development projects, agro-vets, farmer cooperatives, CBFs, and others to ensure widespread access to crop health information.

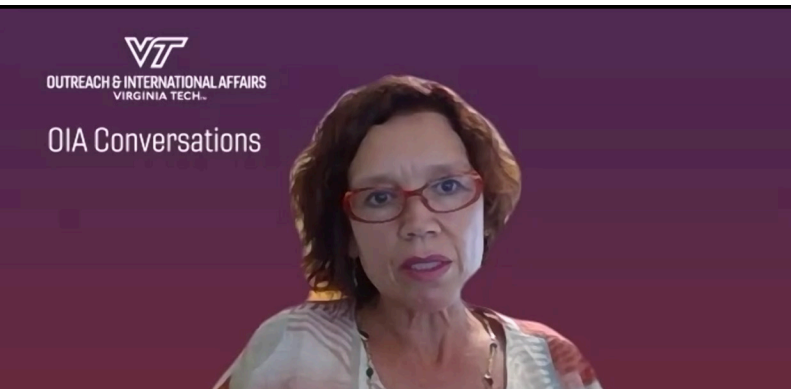
However, as the COVID-19 pandemic persists, unanswered questions remain about how to provide for and protect disadvantaged communities: How can pest management messages be refined to better address current needs, challenges, and priorities? How can FTFNIPM overcome inequities in phone and internet access?

FTFNIPM plans to conduct a qualitative study to assess the potential impact of applying IPM practices and technologies on women's time and labor. The study will document the different pathways that are available and attainable for women to learn about IPM practices and technologies, as well as assess any unintended negative effects for women. The study will also adapt the recently developed toolkit titled *Assessing How Agricultural Technologies Can Change Gender Dynamics and Food Security Outcomes* designed by the Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services (INGENAES). In the current context, now more than ever, it is essential that efforts to promote the application of IPM do not exacerbate women's already increasing workloads and burdens, and instead increase access for women to information on improved agricultural technologies.

"Farmers are facing many new challenges right now," said Niki Maskey, a gender specialist with the FTFNIPM project, "including cash-deficits to buy agricultural inputs, shortage of seeds, decreased suppliers, and more. But FTFNIPM is mobilizing to assist these farmers, specifically women and marginalized groups, by continuing to shift our responses as the pandemic shifts. In this regard, we are coordinating with government officials at the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MOALD) and Plant Quarantine and Pesticide Management Centre (PQPMC) – through discussion within the fall armyworm technical committee – to make IPM technologies for fall armyworm management such as safe pesticides, pheromone lures, and other agriculture inputs from local agri-businesses readily available during the lockdown."

## SPOTLIGHT

# Dr. Maria Elisa Christie spearheads efforts to combat racism



Maria Elisa Christie, director of CIRED's Women and Gender in International Development program, addresses participants virtually during the first OIA Conversations Series.

Following the recent wave of police brutality against Black Americans, CIRED has redoubled its efforts to fight against racism.

Leading these efforts is Maria Elisa Christie, director of CIRED's Women and Gender in International Development program. Christie was appointed the Office of International Affairs' InclusiveVT representative in 2016. Prior to that, she was named one of six university-wide inclusion coordinators supporting President Sand's InclusiveVT framework.

In September, Christie organized and kicked off a new OIA Conversations on Race Webinar Series, "Racism, Justice, and Community Resilience." The Conversations Series aims to build community resilience through stimulating conversations and personal and professional growth. It also provides a safe space for difficult conversations, learning, and dialogue surrounding systemic racism.

More than 400 people attended the first virtual talk that was moderated by Julie Walters Steele and featured Virginia Tech police Chief Mac Babb; faculty members Brandy Faulkner, Wornie Reed, and Michael Williams; and Karen Jones, chair of the political action committee of the Montgomery County/Radford



Local leaders and race experts in the Virginia Tech community discussed local perspectives on race relations during the Conversations Series.

City/Floyd County National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

According to Christie, "This first OIA conversation on race focused on national and local events, including what is going on right here on campus. Participants appreciated the opportunity to have this frank dialogue with local leaders and race experts. It served to spark reflection on what we can all do as individuals and as part of Virginia Tech. The next OIA conversation will expand this conversation with an international perspective."

CIRED has also initiated a series of internal conversations led by Christie focused on encouraging open and honest dialogue among CIRED colleagues. According to Christie, "CIRED frequently engages with people of color around the world through development projects. Racism is not only a domestic problem, but it is often a shared experience among people of color globally. Thus, it is incumbent upon us to create spaces to discuss, identify, and implement approaches for addressing system racism globally."

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## Dr. Maria Elisa Christie cont.

To demonstrate its commitment to combating racism, CIRED faculty members and staff discussed and shared a statement of solidarity against racism. Additionally, CIRED launched a reading and reflection group for OIA employees to discuss Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist*. The group uses the book as a guide for exploring race and racism as they relate to the U.S., the OIA community, and the communities OIA works with around the world, as well as reflect on ways the department can facilitate and support racial equality and diversity both locally and globally.

The second talk in the OIA Conversations on Race Webinar Series is planned for November 12, and it will spotlight the experiences of three faculty members from Africa, Emmanuel Frimpong, Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation, Khaled Hassouna, Center for International Research, Education, and Development, and Joseph Mukuni, School of Education. It will be moderated by Kathy Alexander, Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation.

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## PROFILE

### CIRED welcomes new Assistant Director for Research, Operations, and Program Management



Dr. Jessica Agnew

CIRED is pleased to welcome its newest faculty member, Jessica Agnew, as the assistant director for research, operations, and program management.

A former graduate assistant with CIRED, Agnew brings to the team expertise in food and nutrition security, food and agriculture economics, and health education and behavior. Her research has involved improving the competitiveness and commercial viability of small and medium-sized enterprises that sell nutritious foods to low-income populations.

She has also explored the business enabling environment, policy, and planning systems that promote private sector engagement in food security and nutrition to create positive outcomes for low-income households globally. In 2017, she developed the [BUY2THRIVE](#) initiative that aims to connect consumers to markets for nutrition. Currently, she serves on the VT Food Access and Security working group to address food security on campus at Virginia Tech.

In her new position, Agnew will serve as the co-Principal Investigator on a project that she and Ralph Hall, assistant director of the School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) were awarded to conduct research in using blockchain technology in value chains for Kenya's African Indigenous Vegetables to advance food and nutrition security. In addition, she will oversee trainings and continue acting as program coordinator for the Catalyzing Afghan Agricultural Innovation (CAAI) project. Agnew will also continue to support CIRED's business development, proposal preparation, and project implementation activities.

"Working at CIRED as a graduate assistant was an amazing experience," said Agnew. "I am thrilled to be able to stay on at the center and support the work that Virginia Tech is doing internationally, especially continuing to advance our engagement in food security and nutrition as well CIRED's research portfolio across our core competencies."

A 2020 graduate of Virginia Tech's doctoral program in Planning, Governance, and Globalization, Agnew looks forward to continuing to inspire students at Virginia Tech, where she will teach graduate-level courses as an adjunct faculty member in SPIA.

## PROJECT UPDATES

# African Drone and Data Academy graduates first online cohort

Less than one year after graduating its first class, the UNICEF African Drone and Data Academy (ADDA) has made history again, graduating the first online cohort.

In September, 19 Malawian youth received drone operator Level I certificates, following the completion of a four-week program on the foundations of drone technology and data applications. The Level I certificate is the prerequisite for the Level II certificate program, an internationally recognized accreditation program that enables students to fly remotely-piloted aircrafts.

The graduation was conducted remotely via Zoom, and while there was no in-person hand-shaking, the students were able to share reflections on the intense four-week program. Grace Ghambi from Blantyre, Malawi found the program to be “very amazing,” expressing that she “did not expect such wonderful things” from the course.

The online cohort was originally scheduled to meet in-person, but plans shifted as a result of the pandemic, according to Virginia Tech Assistant Professor Kevin Kochersberger, who led the development of the ADDA curriculum.

“We talked with UNICEF and realized that we needed to come up with 3-4 alternate plans. The lecture material and computer-based material didn’t need to



ADDA instructors Alex Mtambo and Tadala Makuluni act out a preflight inspection for one of the instructional videos used in an online course.

be in-person and that led to the development of online material using the learning management system Moodle.

As part of the program, Kochersberger taught a one-week course on remotely-piloted drones, and Suresh Muthukrishnan, a professor at Furman University, taught a three-week course on drone data and geographic information system (GIS) technology. Four Malawians from the inaugural ADDA cohort were also hired through the Malawi University of Science and Technology to virtually assist students in the online program.

Kochersberger added that ADDA is modifying several parts of the program for future cohorts, as a result of the pandemic. The Level I certificate program will be offered online for the two remaining 2020 cohorts. However, participants in the Level II certificate program will meet in-person. “We have shortened the Level II certificate program from ten weeks to six weeks. Also, given the uncertainty of the pandemic, it is likely that only Malawians will participate in the first 2021 in-person course,” said Kochersberger.

Brian Kamamia, project manager in Malawi, added that students in the Level I online cohort will be the preferred applicants for the Level II certificate program.

## IPM Innovation Lab featured in United Nations publication

The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Integrated Pest Management has been featured in “Good Practices in South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development,” a publication out of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC). The publication, now in its third volume, highlights cooperation among developing countries within the Global South, sharing knowledge, skills, and successful programs in areas such as agricultural development and climate change. This particular volume spotlights efforts made towards attaining the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

One of the IPM Innovation Lab’s initiatives featured in the publication is promotion of *Trichoderma*, a naturally occurring fungus that helps boost plant defense mechanisms against threats. The IPM Innovation Lab has catalyzed its use around the world by conducting numerous awareness workshops on the fungus, the results of which include stimulated sales of the product, improved crop yields, and the development of plant nurseries in Asia, which has helped boost job opportunities for women.

Another IPM Innovation Lab initiative highlighted in the publication is knowledge facilitation between India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. In South Asia, where access to IPM products such as pheromone traps and biopesticides are limited, farmers increasingly rely on excessive pesticide application and battle pest and disease issues. Thus, the IPM Innovation Lab arranged for entrepreneurs from Bangladesh and Nepal to visit India to develop contacts and observe the productivity of IPM products developed by different companies – some of the outcomes of the meeting include increased awareness on IPM products in more than 153,000 households in Nepal and 20 awareness workshops on the tomato pest *Tuta absoluta*, bringing together participants from 50 different countries.

Both of the IPM Innovation Lab’s initiatives showcased in the publication aim to address Sustainable Development Goal 2, or “Zero Hunger.”



## CAAI holds second annual National Agriculture, Education, Research, Extension, and Economics Conference

Following a successful inaugural conference last year, the Catalyzing Afghan Agricultural Innovation (CAAI) project held the second annual National Agriculture, Education, Research, Extension, and Economics (NAEREE) Conference on September 26-27, in collaboration with the Technical and Vocational Education and Training - Authority (TVET-A) in Afghanistan.

A total of 60 representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), Agriculture Faculties, agriculture and veterinary institutes (AVIs), agriculture high schools (AHSs), and Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) participated in the event that aimed to create an efficient platform for agricultural coordination and collaboration among relevant actors.



The conference provided a platform for close coordination, discussion, and result-based outcomes in agricultural development by involving national actors from agricultural education, research, extension, and economic institutions. Participants finalized the NAEREE Committee Structure, terms of reference, and roadmap, providing for a clear understanding among agriculture sector actors to support Afghanistan’s long-term agricultural education development.

According to Hamid Akbar, TVET-A deputy of academic affairs, “We will focus on smart, realistic, and achievable activities in the roadmap and the further institutionalization of the NAEREE Committee.”



## UPCOMING EVENT

# Registration now open for 2021 Women and Gender in Development Virtual Conference

The Women and Gender in Development (WGD) team at CIRED is preparing for the second Women and Gender in Development Conference, this time a virtual, online event due to the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic. Titled “Women and Gender in Development Virtual Conference 2021: Out of the theory & into the field—A dialogue on gendered approaches to inclusive rural development,” the event will take place February 23-26, 2021. It includes two days of asynchronous, pre-event material and networking and an optional workshop, and two half-days of synchronous programming.

The conference will create an environment where students, early career faculty, practitioners, and extension professionals are able to learn from gender experts and international agriculture experts promoting inclusive agriculture and rural development. Once again, we will focus on research, practice, and methods, this time with a dialogue between people working internationally and domestically. The conference will foster dialogue between organizations and professionals engaged in the international development sphere and those that are engaged in US-based research, outreach, and development. It will offer plenty of opportunities for engagement, networking, and discussion.

Scholars, students, and practitioners alike are welcome to submit abstracts for the poster session, and students are invited to compete in an undergraduate and graduate poster competition. Masters and Ph.D. students who have completed their research are also invited to compete in new four-minute student flash talks, inspired by the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) research communication competition developed by the University of Queensland in Australia and held in academic institutions around the world. Folks will also enjoy a virtual career panel as well as extensive networking with other participants through the popular events app, Whova.

Keynote speakers are Jemimah Njuki from Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Carolyn Sachs from Pennsylvania State University. Panelists include experts from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Women’s Ag Network (WAgN), Promundo U.S., MenEngage, the Barnard Center for Research on Women, and the United Nations.

Early registration, starting October 26, will be \$20 for all students, \$30 for other Virginia Tech (non-student, including Cooperative Extension), and \$40 for all others. Scholarships are available. Space is limited.

The conference is supported by the Innovation for Rural Entrepreneurs and Communities, grant no. 2020-67023-30959, from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture. It is also sponsored by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Academic Programs.

Visit the conference website or Twitter (@wgdconf) as the date gets closer for more information. If you have any questions, please email us at [womengenderdev@gmail.com](mailto:womengenderdev@gmail.com) and use 2020 WGD Conf in the subject heading.

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