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FEED THE FUTURE INNOVATION LAB FOR LEGUME SYSTEMS RESEARCH

August 2023



The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Legume Systems Research fosters dynamic, profitable, and environmentally sustainable approaches that contribute to resilience, productivity, and better nutrition and economic opportunities. The lab is managed by Michigan State University.

SAVE THE DATE

Legume Systems Innovation Lab Close-Out Meeting
Tuesday August 29 10:00am - Noon Eastern Time

[Register](#)

From the Management Office

Legume Systems Innovation Lab Program Nears End

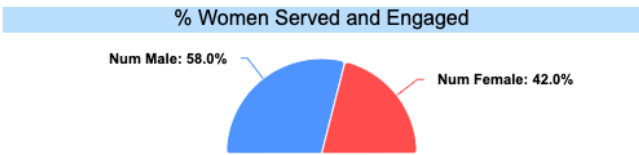
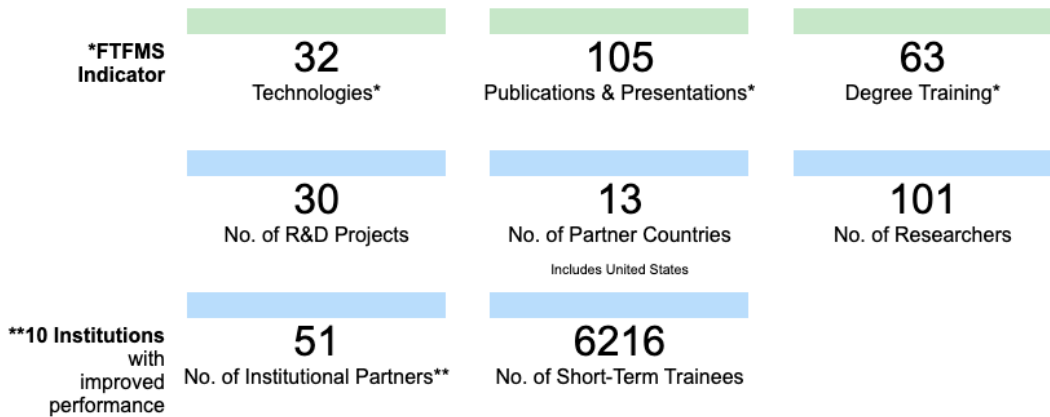
As the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Legume Systems Research nears its program end date of August 2023, we reflect on our milestones and accomplishments.

Over our five-year program, the Legume Systems Innovation Lab executed six initial activity projects, seven competitive projects, five commissioned projects,

two Mission buy-ins, and one associate award. We also implemented a science communication and grant writing seed grant competition and provided support to projects on cross cutting themes of gender, youth, nutrition, resilience, and capacity development.

Key metrics to date include degree training for 63 individuals and short-term trainings to over 6,200. The Legume Systems Innovation Lab has engaged 49 institutional partners in 13 countries and engaging 100 researchers with 32 technologies.

Legume Systems Innovation Lab Key Metrics



We are excited by the progress we have made in global legume systems and hope to continue this important work. Please visit our [website](#) for final program closeout technical reports and as a resource for continued legume research in West and Southern Africa.

Don't miss our program close-out meeting on Tuesday, August 29 from 10:00am - Noon Eastern Time. Register at this [link](#).



Maria Mazala from Zambia was one of the 63 degree trained legume researchers supported by the Legume Systems Innovation Lab. Maria previously studied under project PI Kelvin Kamfwa at the University of Zambia and was mentored by collaborating project PI Juan Osorno at North Dakota State University where she earned her Masters degree in Plant Sciences supported by the lab.



The Legume Systems Innovation Lab Management Entity in Washington D.C. during the Innovation Lab Congressional Reception hosted by Michigan State University. The reception provided an opportunity to showcase the important work of the Legume Lab and the impact of U.S. research and development funds on building self reliance and resilient neighbors abroad.



It seems like only yesterday... the first Legume Systems Innovation Lab Global Convening held in Saly, Senegal set the stage for a systems approach to legume research.

In the Field

Legume Lab Project Close-Out Meetings

As the Legume Systems Innovation Labs begins to wind down program activities many of the projects are holding close-out meetings to share their successes.

A project led by Veronique Theriault titled, “**Quantifying the Scale and Scope of Nutritious Cowpea Products in Local Markets of West Africa**” recently held dissemination workshops in Mali and Senegal.

West Africa is the global locus of cowpea production. Yet, little is known in quantitative terms about the scale and scope of cowpea products supplied in local markets and demanded by households. Our research in Mali and Senegal has contributed to closing the information gap by building a quantitative inventory of cowpea products supplied locally and consumed by urban and rural households. In each country, key findings were presented to a diverse group of stakeholders during dissemination workshops organized by Dr. Mamadou Sissoko in Bamako, Mali, and Dr. Aliou Diagne in Thies, Senegal.

In both countries, the participants learned and discussed the opportunities and constraints in processing, selling, and consuming cowpea-based products, such as sho-froufrou, accra, and fari, in Mali and ndambe and akara in Senegal. At both workshops, processors were invited to display their processed cowpea products, and participants were offered cowpea-based products at lunch to their delight.

In Mali, the quality of the presentations given by the graduate students was noticed and appreciated as demonstrated by the testimony of one of the participants: “ I want to congratulate the students for speaking so eloquently. I was positively surprised to see them present with confidence. It shows that they were well-mentored.”

In Senegal, the presentations were followed by a fruitful discussion on how to better integrate cowpea-based products into school canteen menus. The two close-out workshops were a success, with stakeholders engaged and committed to further developing the cowpea value chains.



Participants of the Legume Systems Innovation Lab project, “Quantifying the Scale and Scope of Nutritious Cowpea Products in Local Markets of West Africa” dissemination workshop in Bamako, Mali

Reflections

Muddy Hands, Mighty Voices

By Sony K.C.

“Early dawn, I wake up a farmer and dirty my hands and feet in my muddy farm. During dusk, I sleep a farmer with a vision that these muddy hands and a day long perseverance will reap utmost benefits. There are many women like me who sacrifice their soul in the farms but their contribution goes unrecognized,” stated Laxmi Bohora, a lentil farmer from Lumbini province.

“We would never have learnt more about ourselves [women] if we were not invited to this multistakeholders platform, today. Most of the time we just do what comes without honoring ourselves and our capabilities,” opined Indira Acharya, a miller of lentils amongst other producers.

These testimonies came during an interview as part of a multistakeholder platform (MSP) workshop held in Lumbini province between 19th and 21st July, 2023. This platform is an initiation of the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Legume Systems Research led by Michigan State University to connect the value chain actors in lentil production and marketing. Laxmi’s audacious statement gives me hope, as someone who works to address the issues of gender equity and social inclusion (GESI), that women’s unrecognized roles in the increased feminization trend of agriculture, can be recognized through right support and platform.

As these women were reflecting their life along with few other women, myriad of thoughts crossed my mind, thinking, social change involving women and their progress is still a dream for my country. I went into flashbacks, 15 days before the MSP happened, when I was dialing lentil farmers of Lumbini Province, trying to get the GESI balances on participation through my invitation. Reaching out to these farmers through the list we created beforehand was an ordeal expedition. First, as I called, about a dozen of women received their calls with children crying on their arms, or background, giving a hint that it would be close to impossible for them to travel for the MSP workshop. Few women handed over the calls to their husbands, who showed no interest in sending their women to the workshop providing multifarious reasons as “these platforms come and go but no one will help farmers,” “who will do household work if women are gone,” “it is time for us to plant paddy now,” “this is the wrong time for farmers to attend as it is planting season,” et cetera.

In retrospect, of the many calls made, very few women decided to trust me and my team and made it to the workshop. For this, I had to reach out to them every day for about six days so I wouldn't lose the loop. These women represented Brahmin, Chhetri and Janjati (Tharu) castes, though my intention was to make it more inclusive, I remained content. The most important and a turning point for me was hearing from them that they had never ever been invited to a platform like this. And if they had a chance, they would have reached their highest potentials as farmers. As the only miller, Acharya, who represented the platform, evidently, there are more men in the marketing of lentils or any other crop in our country, Acharya's one voice as a miller gives thousand pictures about the situation of women who work beyond farms.



Samjhana Shahi, Laxmi Karki Bohora, Jugmani Tharu, and Ichhya Chaudhary are smallholder lentil farmers from the Lumbini province of Nepal

Additionally, their stories of becoming lentil farmers or millers, their struggles in juggling between home and farms, their rise by becoming a part of cooperative, learning and unlearning through each other and trainings was not only great for the ears but also gave insights to make the platform more inclusive through better leadership and support within the MSP committees.

As main objective of the MSP has been to create a momentum between various stakeholders engaged in *musuro* (a type of lentil) farming as producers, seed suppliers, technical supporters, institutional supporters, holistically, those engaged in the lentil value chain, the importance of GESI seemed evident. This is because we were successful in creating a connection between multifarious stakeholders from various age, caste, background and status. Additionally, without inclusive approach, we will only under shadow our human capital who are women from various ethnic groups and culture. It is also evident from my experience that women, in particular can voice their concerns if they have a platform as opposed to society deciding that women cannot speak or bargain from their side. All these require platform that allows them to freely express their concerns away from their muddy farms.

I came home with a big relief learning from these mighty women whose stories are powerful than it ever can be, whose contributions are extraordinary in the agriculture sector and who need a pinch of support to improve their livelihoods through lentil farming.



Indira Acharya is a Nepal lentil miller



Dr. Sony K.C., Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) expert, Nepal

Featured Legume of the Month

COWPEA

Cowpea is a highly nutritious crop important for food security in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. The pods can be eaten prior to maturity providing food during the "hunger gap" (time between when food from the previous years



planting runs out and when food from the current crop is harvested) and the plants are also used as livestock fodder.

Naturally high in protein, low in fat, and affordable, cowpea has been referred to as "poor man's meat." Cowpea tends to be drought tolerant and can grow in poor soil conditions making it a crop of choice among

smallholder subsistence farmers.

Cooking with Cowpea Flour...

Cowpea Flour Soup

In less than 30 minutes you can make an easy and tasty cowpea flour soup with fish.

Begin by combining tomatoes, onions, bouillon and seasonings to make a stock. Then mix cowpea flour with water and blend into the stock by stirring briskly.

Lastly, prepare your fish and add to the soup. Cook 10-15 minutes and season generously. Enjoy!



[Get recipe here](#)

For More Information on the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Legume Systems Research

[Visit our website](#)



This newsletter is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Feed the Future initiative. The contents are the responsibility of Michigan State University and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.



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