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# Cultivating dry lands to help environment

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The International Centre for Agriculture Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA), which began its three-day strategic coordination meeting here on Saturday, is expected to adopt an aggressive agenda for converting more dry lands into cultivable land.

Advocating Government intervention, experts felt such a step was need keeping in mind rapid loss of fertility in non-dry areas already in use for agricultural purpose and stem off the adverse effects climate change.

An agenda paper cautioning the South Asian Governments said that with dry areas of the developing world occupying some three billion hectare (about 19 percent of total global land area) and home for one-third of the global population with over 1.7 billion people, should get a better bargain when it comes to strategizing agricultural growth.

"About 16 percent of the world population lives in chronic poverty, particularly in the marginalised rain-fed areas. The decline in soil fertility, changes in water-table depth rising salinity will further aggravate the poverty and push the livelihood of people" in this region to a much stiffer challenge unless the issue is not taken up seriously at the Governmental level, the agenda hinted.

Established in 1977, ICARDA is supported not only by the member countries but also by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). It has recently established its South Asia Regional Programme Centre in New Delhi to reinforce collaborative research efforts in the region.

This newly established New Delhi Centre has organised its first three-day regional coordination meeting for South Asia and China at the National Agriculture Science Complex here.

The agenda paper said renewed thrust becomes important in wake of "global warming where heat tolerant varieties with less water requirement is going to be the major requirement."

The joint meeting of this nature would also enable the member countries to focus on barley improvement for high yielding malt, food and feed in various agro-ecologies: resource use efficiency and policy options improving livelihood of rural communities of South Asia and China and integrating crop-livestock system and rangeland management, the agenda paper noted.

Scientists from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Pakistan and representatives from ICARDA headquarters Syria would deliberate for the coming two days on various aspects and develop programme in networking mode for future implementation.

Among a dozen of food legumes cultivated in the world, known for ensuring nutrition and food security with high protein content (17-35%), low price giving an easy access to the poor, would be put on a priority list during the meeting, sources indicated.

An integrated, demand-driven, people-oriented approach to ensure rural rain-fed populations food and nutritional security with livelihood options conserving their natural resources in the face of climate change and globalization is most essential to offer new avenues and opportunities to promote food and nutritional security and peace in the developing world, the agenda paper said.