



# ICARDA News

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH  
IN THE DRY AREAS

P.O. Box 5466, Aleppo, Syria

Phone: (963-21) 2213433, 2213477, 2225112, 2225012

Fax: (963-21) 2213490, 2225105; E-mail: [ICARDA@CGIAR.ORG](mailto:ICARDA@CGIAR.ORG)

Media contacts: Suren Varma ([s.varma@cgiar.org](mailto:s.varma@cgiar.org)) , Ravi R. Prasad ([r.prasad@cgiar.org](mailto:r.prasad@cgiar.org))

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## **Fighting poverty with herbal and medicinal plants**

Researchers and practitioners from all over the world began deliberations on the role of herbal, medicinal and aromatic plants (HMAPs) in improving the livelihoods of the rural poor.

Addressing participants attending the regional expert workshop held at the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), Aleppo, Syria, Dr Mona Bishay, Director of the Near East and North Africa division of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) said that several obstacles hinder full exploitation of the potential of HMAPs in reducing poverty and improving livelihoods of rural people in the region.

“Poor local technology, inadequate business and entrepreneurial skills and awareness on quality requirements, limited knowledge on properties of HMAPs beyond traditional knowledge, and limited access to intellectual property rights restrict production and the use and marketability of the HMAPs,” Dr Bishay said.

Underscoring the need to analyze and find means to address the obstacles, Dr Bishay said the most important handicap was the inability of the collectors and growers of such plants to take advantage of potential markets due to lack of access to resources, inadequate extension and training services, lack of improved technology and business skills, insufficient marketing information and local organizational skills that could enable them to take advantage of emerging market opportunities.

Dr Mahmoud Solh, director general of ICARDA, said it was regrettable that indigenous knowledge on HMAPs was not backed up with adequate use of modern technology, despite the fact that folk medicine still serves 80 percent of the rural population in the world.

“HMAP sector faces various challenges and constraints, such as over-exploitation of naturally occurring species, fragmented approaches and projects that address only limited aspects of selected HMAP value chains, lack of quality control standards of locally

produced HMAPs and products, and poor distribution of benefits in value chains,” Dr Solh said.

“Our partners in National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems possess rich knowledge on HMAPs and this gives us a great opportunity to add valuable new crops to our joint knowledge of eco-geography and farming systems in the NENA region,” said Dr Solh, elaborating ICARDA’s role in research on HMAPs. “Tremendous room for growth and export opportunities are available if quality products are available that can compete with other suppliers. New science and technology can be deployed to understand potential new uses for processing, transforming, and adding value to natural products – with the purpose of generating income for poor farmers.”

Dr Remi Kahane, executive secretary of the Global Horticulture Initiative, emphasized the need to promote HMAPs through effective marketing and product development to support small farmers.

The three-day workshop focused on evolving strategic directions in finding solutions to the challenges, constraints and prospects of using herbal, medicinal and aromatic plants in improving the livelihoods of the rural poor.

For more information : Dr Ahmed Sidahmed ([a.sidahmed@cgiar.org](mailto:a.sidahmed@cgiar.org))

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About ICARDA: Established in 1977, ICARDA ([www.icarda.cgiar.org](http://www.icarda.cgiar.org)) serves the entire developing world for the improvement of barley, lentil, and faba bean; and dry-area developing countries for the on-farm management of water, improvement of nutrition and productivity of small ruminants (sheep and goats), and rehabilitation and management of rangelands. In the Central and West Asia and North Africa (CWANA) region, ICARDA is responsible for the improvement of durum and bread wheats, chickpea, pasture and forage legumes and farming systems; and for the protection and enhancement of the natural resource base of water, land, and biodiversity.

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) (<http://www.cgiar.org>) is a strategic alliance of countries, international and regional organizations, and private foundations supporting 15 international research centers that mobilizes cutting-edge science to promote sustainable development by reducing hunger and poverty, improving human nutrition and health, and protecting the environment.