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## **REVIEW: FARMING SYSTEMS RESEARCH AND EXTENSION: FUTURE DIRECTIONS - THE 12th ANNUAL AFSR-E<sup>1</sup> SYMPOSIUM: HOSTED BY THE MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, 14 - 18 SEPTEMBER 1992<sup>2</sup>**

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Ted Stilwell

*Rural and Agricultural Group, Development Bank of Southern Africa, Halfway House*

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### **1. Introduction**

The theme of the symposium was "future directions for Farming Systems Research and Extension (FSR-E)". AFSR-E planned the symposium, in cooperation with the Institute of International Agriculture of Michigan State University, to develop a strategic plan for Technical advancement using a systems approach to address sustainable agricultural systems. The conference was attended by 157 delegates from around the globe representing Asia, Latin-America, Africa, Europe and North American groupings.

### **2. Proceedings**

In line with the theme, the debate centred around what has been accomplished by FSR-E. There was general consensus that because of its logic framework and participatory approach FSR-E was an effective tool in providing and transferring improved technologies that were responsive to farmers' needs and objectives. Considerable FSR-E success has been recorded in Asia in particular, notably the Philippines, Bangladesh, Thailand and India. Failure of FSR-E to bring about increased agricultural production in Africa, has been described to the lack of "on-the-shelf" technologies suitable for resource-poor farming systems. Increasingly this has been questioned as the dominant constraining factor, as it became obvious that policies should not be taken as a parameter exogenous to farming systems but rather as a leverage point for farming systems improvement. Rather than a predetermined focus on technical change the scope of FSR should be broadened to include policy considerations in respect of farmer support systems, markets, research and extension and also gender issues. While FSR-E should not try to substitute for conventional policy research, the FSR-E methodology, particularly participatory on-farm diagnostic research, can provide relevant data for policy analysis. As such FSR-E practitioners should not be insensitive to policy issues and be able to provide the feedback to policy analysts and decision makers.

### **3. Salient papers**

#### **3.1 New paradigms**

##### **3.1.1 Inability of Farming Systems Research to deal with policy - Doyle Baker (International Institute of Tropical Agriculture)**

Traditionalist with a technical orientation focused on new appropriate technology systems to bring about improvements in African agriculture. Results have been disappointing. Norman, while working in Africa in the late

seventies developed the FSR approach and attached significant weight to policy intervention, specifically farmer assistance (Farmer Support Programmes) and market development. This was ignored by FSR-E practitioners who considered policy an exogenous parameter and not part of the farming systems. It is concluded that FSR-E should address policy issues.

This is a fairly logic conclusion in that increased production can be achieved through a change in technology or a change in incentives, provided the other element is not a constraining force.

##### **3.1.2 Making the farmer's voice count: Issues and opportunities for promoting Farmer Responsive Research - Deborah Merrill-Sands (International service for National Agricultural Research)**

FSR is designed to make research more responsive to clients. In the analysis of a large number of case studies in developing countries, it has been found that the systematic involvement of farmers in setting the research agenda of research stations has been weak. In many instances it is clear there is a lack of internal motivation on the part of research to do problem directed research and a lack of external pressure for appropriate research. Resource poor farmers are not well organised and are rarely included in the decision making.

A number of strategies to bring resource poor farmers' input into the research planning and priority setting are suggested that make worth while reading.

##### **3.1.3 Methods for Analysis by Farmers: The professional challenge - Robert Chambers (Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex)**

Until recent years, professional attention has concentrated on improving "our" analysis of farming systems. The challenge is to explore the scope of methods for enhancing farmers' own analysis. Farmer Participatory Research (FPR) and Participatory Rural Analysis (PRA) are complementary and overlapping sources of experience. FPR methods are more verbal and observational while PRA methods (as a new paradigm for rapid rural appraisal) are more visual. PRA methods include techniques such as participatory mapping, analysis of aerial photographs, matrix scoring and ranking, flow and linkage diagramming, seasonal analysis and trend diagramming. Visual methods have strengths. Farmers and rural communities have a greater capacity to diagram and analyse than outsiders have supposed, and farmers are proving good facilitators for other farmers. The

challenge for professionals is to further develop, spread, test and improve farmers analysis through these methods.

### **3.2 FSR-E Networking**

#### **3.2.1 Information exchange and networking: Regional Initiatives in southern Africa - Ted Stilwell and Giel Laker (Development Bank of Southern Africa and University of Pretoria).**

The paper draws attention to the initiatives taken over the past few years to foster regional cooperation in southern Africa as well as the success that has been achieved to date. There is consensus on the thesis that looking at the relative strengths of different countries in the southern African region reveals complementarity - South Africa with its reservoir of technology and the SADC countries with their strength in understanding the 'rural dynamics' as embodied in FSR-E practice. The Southern African Association for Farming Systems Research-Extension (SAAFSE-E) network is justified as a vehicle to integrate these relative strengths and promote the FSR-E approach.

### **4. Resolutions**

A pertinent resolution of the symposium was that FSR-E must adjust and expand in the developing and developed world. The modified vision encompasses a shift in emphasis in its core mission as well as expanded emphasis upon policy, farmer participation, sustainability, efforts to influence and inform policy and strengthen regional FSR-E initiatives.

#### **4.1 Mission**

The mission of FSR-E scholars and practitioners is to enhance the welfare of rural families, primarily but not exclusively relying on improvements in farm productivity through technological innovation.

FSR-E will particularly focus on the following components of farmer welfare:

- i. The FSR-E approach has a comparative advantage in evaluating and designing intervention and monitoring strategies for household food security.
- ii. FSR-E analysis and interventions give explicit attention to gender and continued attention will be given to making the full range of methodological tools gender sensitive.
- iii. FSR-E will devote more resources to equity issues and assessment of the level and distribution of benefits from technical change.
- iv. Policy reform will receive more attention.

#### **4.2 Farmer orientation**

FSR-E will commit even more fully to a "Farmer First" orientation.

- i. Farmer Participatory Research (FPR) methods (including Participatory Rural Appraisal) will be the focus point of application of FSR-E methods. PRA methods can help in all respects with all participants becoming

involved in the development and dissemination of innovations and policy initiatives.

- ii. FSR-E will promote institutional change to further the empowerment of farmers.
- iii. FSR-E will intensify its collaboration with farmer organisations, NGOs and other technology transfer agents to define needs and strategies for strengthening farmer support services provided by these institutions.

### **4.3 Sustainability**

A major focus of FSR-E will be developing and adapting innovations which contribute to sustainability of agricultural systems.

- i. FSR-E has a comparative advantage in identifying and assessing bio-technological innovations which "fit" farmer circumstances and raise welfare while contributing to long term systems sustainability.
- ii. FSR-E practitioners will work closely with disciplinary colleagues in developing valid field measures for agricultural sustainability.

### **4.4 Policy**

FSR-E will expand to include a policy dimension in its work.

- i. The farm family will remain the focal point of FSR-E but the level of analysis and action will incorporate efforts to influence policies which affect farm families.
- ii. The first priority is to improve FSR-E scholars and practitioners' effectiveness in taking policies and farmer support systems into account in their own technology development efforts.
- iii. FSR-E will take into account the changing policy environment, specifically with reference to performance of structural adjustment programmes; world market prices and traditional exports and imports.
- iv. FSR-E will participate in efforts to address market related problems.

### **5. General**

Regional networks need to be encouraged and strengthened:

- i. AFSR-E will hold global symposia bi-annually in the future to allow for regional symposia on alternative years.
- ii. Institutional support toward strengthening regional networking will be promoted.

### **4.5 Regional initiatives**

In general the conference succeeded in developing a framework for future directions for FSR-E. It also provided a platform where the regional groupings could meet and improve global and regional networking.

During the 1991 symposium the idea of a Pan-African FSR-E symposium was mooted. This reached fruition this year as an endogenous African initiative when the African Group met. Kenya extended an invitation to host the symposium toward the end of 1993. A symposium organizing committee was elected with strong representation from the southern African region.

**Notes**

1. Association for Farming Systems Research-Extension (FSR-E)
2. Note that this review has also been published in *Development Southern Africa*.