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BOOK REVIEW: Czech Conroy. *Participatory Livestock Research: A Guide.* Warwickshire, UK: ITDG, 2005, xvi + 304pp., $29.95 paperback. ISBN 1-85339-577-3.

Czech Conroy demonstrates a wealth of experience in participatory livestock research. The book begins with some very useful definitions for readers not familiar with the subject. For example, the up-front discussion of the distinction between participatory situation analysis (PSA) and participatory technology development (PTD) helps the reader to distinguish between the two concepts, which are discussed at length in subsequent chapters. Following the introduction (more on the introduction later), the author devotes approximately 60 pages to a very detailed discussion of PSA. Based on his experience, Conroy does an excellent job of covering both the general aspects and livestock-specific details regarding how the participatory researcher gains a better understanding of the local people and the local situation being studied. General aspects include observation techniques, the use of statistics, and the importance of recognizing various social categories. Specific details include pointers on how to gain an appropriate overview of livestock operations being studied, how to assess feeding systems and resources, and how to look at animal health issues. The author also presents a helpful discussion describing how to identify the principal problems and opportunities associated with the specific livestock production system.

The next 70 pages (Part II of the book) provide a very detailed roadmap for scientists interested in conducting participatory research trials (PTD), identifying specific problems or issues that need to be addressed. Specific topics discussed in detail include when to carry out participatory trials, how to get started, experimental design, evaluation, and broadening the impact. Again, the author's wealth of experience and knowledge of the background literature are skillfully pulled together in this section, serving as an excellent guide for physical scientists interested in conducting participatory research.

The third section of the book is devoted to a series of example case illustrations where the approach has been implemented in less developed countries (LDCs). The examples, covering a variety of livestock-related problems in diverse geographic and social settings, demonstrate that many problems have been solved, and numerous individuals have been helped, through this type of research.

Given that the aforementioned sections, which constitute the majority of the book, are so well done, I feel a little guilty (but at the same time obligated) in focusing the remainder of my review on the first few pages (the introduction) and to a lesser degree the last few pages (the conclusion), where the author alludes to the differences in paradigms of participatory versus traditional livestock research. The distinction is primarily made along two lines: (*a*) the degree of respect for the knowledge and skills of the farmer stakeholders, and (*b*) the degree of recognition that the individual farmers are the most important stakeholders. These are the sections of the book that are of most interest

to an applied economist, yet they reveal that the author has limited expertise in the field of economics. These few pages (at the critical beginning and ending of the book) distract the reader, and detract somewhat from the substantial contribution the remainder of the book can make to those interested in this type of farm-level research.

Conroy correctly points out that the "productivity" of animals in LDCs tends to be well below what is possible. From an economic perspective, the livestock sectors are apparently operating well below the production possibilities frontier, suggesting resource wastage. The author recognizes the tremendous potential for increased livestock production (and the economic benefits of such) in LDCs. As emphasized repeatedly throughout the book, it stands to reason that increased efficiency in livestock production and marketing channels is important to improving livelihoods and overall economic development in LDCs.

Several times in the introduction and conclusion, the author implies that traditional research paradigms have often failed to garner sufficient input from the end users, and in particular have not adequately taken into account the systems under which production in LDCs takes place. Conroy argues that the strong incentive to publish in peer reviewed journals, many of which have not been particularly receptive to research falling under the "participatory" paradigm, may have contributed to this shortcoming of "traditional" livestock research. These arguments suggest scientists need to become more aware of the overall production system being examined (government, history, etc.). I certainly agree it is valuable and necessary to obtain more input from farmers when conducting farm-level research; however, one can take this concept too far. It is always difficult to weigh the need for local input against the constraints to "big-picture" thinking that the local producer may be facing.

As an example, consider an economist conducting research into the impacts of lowering trade restrictions between countries. If the research were to be based on the feelings and opinions of local participants in a globally noncompetitive setting, the economist would be unlikely to find local support for the project, let alone willing assistance in conducting the research. The local stakeholders would feel threatened. Does that mean the study would have no benefit or positive policy implications? Of course not. In the grander scheme of things, we know the overall economy would improve, incomes would rise, standards of living would increase, etc., in the presence of more open trade. The interesting research questions would revolve around magnitudes and distributions of benefits, and alternative transition programs for those individuals in the globally noncompetitive setting. Local participants would (understandably) be hard pressed to see the "big-picture" benefits of such a research program, yet the benefits to the overall economy could be huge.

From a physical research perspective, the same may well be true for livestock producers in LDCs who do not recognize the value of research that seems more pertinent to larger scale commercial producers (frequently referred to as a "threat" in the book). In reality, those systems may actually be the most efficient systems, leading to a more globally competitive industry, increasing incomes, rising standards of living, a growing economy, etc. My point: Sometimes it is difficult (again, understandably so) for the local stakeholders (small livestock producers in this case) to consider the bigger economic picture.

This issue leads directly to my next observation. Conroy frequently refers to competition from commercially oriented livestock production units, implying these large-scale intensive producers undermine the viability of small-scale production. Conroy cites previous authors who have concluded (arguably incorrectly) that the increased viability of the larger scale (Western style) livestock production units is (or will be) responsible for exacerbating rural poverty. The policy implication is that governments in LDCs should support small-scale production. The overriding implication appears to be that the primary goal of livestock research should be accountability to individual small producers (with a secondary goal of maintaining a livestock production system based on large numbers of small producers). While different individuals can have alternative goals and objectives in mind, fundamental economic realities suggest there may be significant benefits to society (the LDCs) in achieving the most efficient livestock production systems possible. The reality is that the most efficient system may very well be associated with larger scale production units (capturing economies of scale, capitalizing on the benefits of geographic concentration, achieving better labor utilization, etc.). If this is the case, the author fails to point out that imposing a less efficient industry on the economy would result in constrained economic growth and less economic opportunity for everyone in the economy, including the individual farmers over time.

The author suggests that a shortcoming of traditional research and traditional livestock production systems for LDCs is that traditional systems rely increasingly on purchased inputs (feed, health supplies, etc.), relegating these systems to a status clearly beyond the economic reach of resource-constrained farmers. Participatory research may help resource-constrained farmers to increase their efficiency without the need for purchased inputs—and if so, great. We do know, however, that traditional research is improving the efficiency of larger scale production systems worldwide. If the efficiency gap between those production systems that are capturing the benefits of specialization (purchasing inputs from those who can produce them most efficiently), and economies of scale (better utilization of labor, for example), becomes too large, then the costs to the overall economy of maintaining small livestock production units will become large. An overriding goal of maintaining small-scale farming will in this case not make a contribution to eradicating rural poverty, but instead will stifle economic growth, lower standards of living, and enhance the problem of rural poverty in LDCs.

Clearly, participatory research has some advantages for individual localized farming communities. An alternative challenge for any type of research in LDCs is whether or not it leads to improved economic growth, increased incomes, and reduced poverty levels. This book provides those interested in conducting participatory research in LDCs with a roadmap, an outline of potential obstacles, and a framework within which to work.

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