

PRA methods are most valuable for conducting irrigation research studies?; and (3) what are the limitations to using PRA methods, either by themselves or in association with other methods (e.g., formal surveys) for irrigation research? If a participatory approach is to be adopted it must be supported by a political commitment not to interfere and distort the activities and programs which emerge when villagers are involved in participatory planning according to the views of the majority of participants.

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Organization and Management Aspects of Agricultural Services for Small Farmers in Asia

The support service system and input delivery mechanism are managed and administered by various government departments, statutory bodies, boards and corporations as well as NGOs. There is room for extending the scope of the delivery system at the grass-roots level. The receiving mechanisms for small farmers are weak as yet though there are several types of farmers' organizations in all these countries.

CIRDAP in collaboration with FAO, Rome conducted a case study project on 'Organization and Management of Agricultural Services for Small Farmers in Asia' in six countries, namely, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. The study was primarily based on data collected from selected areas through administering four sets of questionnaires for four groups of respondents: small farmers, field agents, farmers' organizations and institutions. The sample areas for the study in the countries were selected on the basis of concentration of small farmers with diversification of cropping pattern and with diversity of their income sources. The synthesis paper entitled "Organization and Management of Agricultural Services for Small Farmers in Asia" was published jointly by CIRDAP and FAO in December 1991.

Conditions of Small Farmers

Although there is wide variation in the literacy rate and family size, there is much common ground among the small farmers of the six countries who participated in the study. With intense pressure on the ground, with holdings of extremely small size, and with the possible exception of Indonesia and Vietnam, the small farmers generally cultivate the less favorable areas. Water is sometimes a scarce resource. But the socioeconomic condition is that the small farmer has such limited access to agricultural services and inputs that he cannot

adopt new technologies. A few of the small farmer families were headed by women. The larger part of the farm work was undertaken by women members of the family, although women participated only in an extremely limited way in taking decisions in respect to the small farm enterprise or the delivery system.

Use of Inputs and Services

Most farmers use fertilizers, perhaps not at the recommended level; but high-yielding certified seed is much less used — mainly on the grounds of cost, availability of cash or lack of credit. Small farmers in Bangladesh and Pakistan use a variety of other inputs, but apparently less so in Nepal, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In the first two, agrochemicals and vaccines and animal feedstuff are widely used. Use of extension, credit and marketing facilities also deserves mention.

Availability and Accessibility of Inputs and Services

Most country studies showed that 'unavailability' and 'timeliness' of supply were critical factors affecting the use of agricultural inputs. Price was another factor, especially in the case of seed and fertilizer. In Sri Lanka, the recent abolition of the fertilizer subsidy has hit the small farmer very hard.

Gaining access to inputs presented problems in all cases. The considerable distances to be traveled, extremely limited transportation, and poor management of supply 'depots' are among a number of constraints mentioned. Repeatedly stated in all the studies is the weak, limited supply system. Preference for local dealers/traders, frequently found at village levels, predominates. Ease of access and availability, even though offset by higher prices, attracted small farmers in all countries — even in Vietnam where the private sector is an extremely small but growing one.

Priority Needs of Small Farmers

The analysis of the data/information collected from the case study sites in the six countries revealed that small farmers lacked access to various institutional supports such as extension, agricultural credit and also had inadequate inputs like fertilizers, improved seeds, plant protection services, irrigation facilities and marketing facilities.

Conclusion

The general view emerging from the studies of six countries is that small farmers participate in only a very limited way in decision making and planning of activities affecting their farming

enterprises. Participation by women members of farm families is even less satisfactory.

The major constraints barring increased production by small farmers were the nonavailability of such essentials as credit, high-quality improved seeds, fertilizers, irrigation facilities, pesticides, improved breeds of animals, animal vaccines and technical advice at the right time, in desired quantities, of good quality and at an affordable price.

Agriculture is still profitable for those people who can afford new improved inputs and have access to land, water and other resources. But the majority of people are poor, with little access to land, irrigation, inputs, knowledge and credit. So it is essential that at the village level, services be well-organized, supervised, managed and coordinated under an effective network system.

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