

Role of research-extension systems in promoting food and nutrition security

A panel discussion on the role of research-extension system in promoting food and nutritional security was the first interactive session during the Expert Consultation on 11 December 2013. Panel moderator **Dr. Raj Paroda**, Executive Secretary of the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI) put the following questions to the panelists who included **Dr. Iftikhar Ahmad**, Chairman,



Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC); **Dr. Annie Wesley**, Senior Program Specialist, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada; **Dr. Abdus Salam**, Advisor, Agriculture & Food Security Program, BRAC, Bangladesh; **Dr. Ir. Agung Hendriadi**, Director, Indonesian Center for Agricultural Technology Assessment and Development (ICATAD); and **Mr. Sopheap Pan**, Executive Director, Farmer and Nature Net (Cambodia) :

- How to bridge the gap between research and extension and increase the impact of extension?
- How to ensure that extension is related to the farming system with knowledge and multi-disciplinary approach are needed for food security?
- What role do stakeholders play in strengthening extension to fill gaps which governments cannot fully respond to?

In response the first question, **Dr. Ahmad** acknowledged that although research and extension have contributed to food security to a great extent in Pakistan, there is still a gap between research and extension systems. "Government policy advocacy is important. Unless the government understands, they cannot create good policy for smallholder farmers," he pointed out.

He said agriculture must be seen as an industry and not just as an issue of subsistence in order to ensure a holistic approach. Private sector involvement must be encouraged with new investment concepts such as 'minimize external resources and utilize local resources'. He called on all stakeholders to work together to develop a regulatory framework integrating such an approach. He emphasized the importance of doing more to attract youth into research and extension.

Dr. Wesley, representing the donor community noted that "nobody can deny that research and extension are highly significant and unprecedented improvements have been seen, especially in Asia and Pacific." Yet, achievement in strengthening the three pillars of food security has been mixed, she added, with most progress in the area of food availability with room for improvement in the area of accessibility and utilization.

As a researcher, she thought that “making sure that research objectives incorporate what is necessary for research results to be implemented right from the beginning is important.” There is need to share research from the beginning for better connectedness and responsibility among all stakeholders to implement the results of research.

Dr. Salam raised the question of sustainability, insisting that “we must look at this from the perspective of sustainability of research and extension system to produce more food for improving livelihoods of those in marginalized areas.” Research systems should target multiple cropping, rather than single cropping for better sustainability.

Dr. Hendriadi listed four subsystems that can be developed to make research and extension more effective in promoting food and nutrition security. These include institutional capacity-building, cooperative research and extension systems, translating scientific research into easy-to-understand language and farmers’ participation in research. Public-private partnership should also be promoted given the budgetary constraints for many governments.

Mr. Pan Sopheap pointed out that the most important challenge is that “extension services provided by the government do not yet fulfill the needs of farmers.” To address such problems, he suggested regarding farmers as scientists and extension workers themselves, because they can be more effective in transferring knowledge to colleagues and the next generation.

Comments from the floor pointed out the importance of indigenous knowledge, sustainable food-value chains, the need to set up more farmers’ organizations and constant upgrading of knowledge.

Concluding the session, Dr. Paroda reiterated the importance of advisory services and advocated that national systems must be reoriented to link research and extension systems. This requires reorienting the research agenda to address small farmers’ concerns “‘Farmer first,’ is the message,” he said.

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