



# Social Science in the CGIAR

Proceedings of a Meeting of CGIAR Social Scientists  
held at the International Service for National Agricultural  
Research (ISNAR), the Hague, the Netherlands, August 1992

Edited by Michael P. Collinson and Kerri Wright Platais





# Social Science in the CGIAR

Proceedings of a Meeting of CGIAR Social Scientists  
held at the International Service for National Agricultural  
Research (ISNAR), the Hague, the Netherlands, August 1992

Edited by Michael P. Collinson and Kerri Wright Platais



- Policy recommendations for identification and implementation of measures to facilitate technology adoption

Participatory planning sequences provide the opportunity for systematically integrating input from users into the formulation of research agendas. The mechanisms for achieving this are an important focus for CGIAR social scientists. An important issue in devising such mechanisms is aggregation of local-level information to make it meaningful for decisionmakers, who will be represented in this process. A basic data set from all regions designated as a priority for development should provide a balanced expression of demand.

### **Strengthening Farmers' Influence on Research Agendas**

Mechanisms to bring the farmers' perspectives into policy formulation will not be enough. Farmers must be able to exert pressure on research institutions and need empowerment to do this. Farmers' organizations and NGOs have great potential leverage. Social scientists in IARCs need to analyze experiences and define the conditions under which organizations of resource-poor farmers can accrue power; rather than NARS, perhaps they should be primary clients for training in adaptive research methods. Until ways are found for resource-poor farmers to represent their interests more directly in the decisionmaking process, on-farm researchers should represent the farmers' interests in the institutional process of setting research priorities. These researchers will be most effective when the farmers also view them as their representatives in determining the research agenda.

### **+Issues Related to the Users' Perspectives**

#### ***Robert Tripp, CIMMYT***

This paper reviewed how the users' perspectives affect the actions of IARC social scientists and raised issues for IARCs in incorporating those perspectives.

#### **Facets of the Users' Perspectives**

It is important to precede research on users' perspectives by clearly defining which set of users is being targeted. Tripp provided several guidelines:

- The perspectives derive from socioeconomic information articulated directly by farmers, individually or as groups, or inferred from social science survey and analysis.
- The perspectives are subject to change: seasonal variation and the dynamics of external circumstances, such as policy and market forces, may alter users' views. These sources of variation should be recognized as relevant to an understanding of the users' perspectives.

- Technology does not have to satisfy all users' criteria. To be acceptable to farmers, it does have to offer major gains on some criteria if it fails on others.
- Research agendas are rarely developed anew. Farmers can influence priority-setting for research or program design or be involved in adjusting ongoing programs.

### **IARC Contributions and Issues**

Various IARC activities contribute to an understanding of the perspectives of farmers. Sponsorship, networking, and the coordination of local-level studies on the users' perspectives, through NARS or NGOs, are the best ways to improve the design of a research effort. Often such studies will be conducted as part of a capacity-building program in which training in methods is important. IARCs have made strong contributions to development of methods in FSR, OFR, and FPR. IARCs and NARS often share a common interest in identifying target populations for research products. Zoning and the characterization of farming systems and prototype technologies allow better matches between what is needed and what is available.

The aggregation of the perspectives of users in a variety of local situations is an issue even at the national level. Breeding programs, for example, cannot respond to the needs of small groups of farmers. This aggregation problem is even more evident at the international level. The question remains, can a mechanism be developed to synthesize local-level information to guide international breeding? If an effective mechanism is ever developed at the national level, carrying those syntheses to international planning should be relatively easy.

A second issue is the lack of coordination of efforts by individual IARCs. Each IARC does some diagnostic work and maintains its own data bases. When an IARC, or a NARS partner, mounts a field survey, small increases in cost would allow the collection of additional data on farming in that area to meet the needs of other centers. As yet there is no attempt to coordinate needs and methods to build a collective data base of on-farm information in developing countries.

### **Users' Perspectives for Participatory Research and Development**

*Doug Vermillion, IIMI*

The author sees the researcher's model as his best friend and worst enemy. He makes the argument that drawing the users into research on natural resource management is likely to lead to more flexibility in models and frameworks and hence to greater creativity. He