

Farmer First Revisited: Farmer-Centred Research

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Abstract

[To be completed]

Introduction

International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) considers research critical and a driving force in agricultural development. IFAP has been very active in working with research institutions over the last six months. It has participated in the following meetings:

- Nineteenth GFAR steering committee meeting, Cairo, Egypt, May 21–22. The meeting provided an opportunity to hold constructive discussions on the different GFAR programmes designed to protect the position of farmers and contribute to solving the administrative and financial difficulties of GFAR.
- Africa Agriculture Science Week and FARA General Assembly 2007, South Africa. Participants agreed to create an Africa Alliance of sub regional farmers organization.
- International ERA/ARD (European Research Area/ Agricultural Research for Development) Conference on 'Agricultural Research for Development in Europe: Towards a Shared Vision', Brussels, 28–29 June. The conference brought together about 150 participants from European Countries, the European Commission and regional and world ARD forums. The president of IFAP stressed the value of Agricultural research to farmers for development.

In this light, it has established a committee on agricultural research and operates through national member platforms. Kenya National Federation of Agricultural Producers (KENFAP) is a member of IFAP and working in partnership with the IFAP's committee to promote farmer-centred Agricultural Research in Kenya and elsewhere across Africa.

Research Focus

The main focus of the committee is to put research findings into use and develop framework for consultation with research and legalized forums within the respective member National platforms and Regional Agricultural Research Institutions to address the farmers' problems. IFAP committee visited several Agricultural research institutions such as FARA and also invited them to attend regional meetings to share information. Consequently impressive achievements have been recorded so far. Some research institutions have incorporated farmers participation component in their research agenda and others created permanent farmers representatives positions in their Boards. This initiative is geared to transform scientific research findings into simple and available for immediate farm application.

Progress In Kenya

In Kenya, KENFAP is working closely with research institutions such as Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) in development of National Agricultural Research Strategy (NARS) and Science Technology & Innovation policy formulation process purposely to entrench farmers issues in the policy. KENFAP has been lobbying for participation and involvement of farmers networks at all levels of research work and advocate for Research Institutions to develop mechanisms for soliciting farmers research needs from grassroots, to categorize what research to be taken where, on enlightening farmers on what specific research products and their benefits, training farmer's leaders on importance of research, capacity building of Farmers Organizations and ensure support to prioritized farmer-led agricultural research.

Research Agenda

It is imperative that research problems should originate from the farmer to be relevant in addressing farmers problems. Researcher should seek research ideas to developed applicable and affordable research that is based on low input agricultural production in line with traditional and original knowledge and foster diverse production systems typical of small scale farmers in Africa. Supportive policy framework to elaborate farmer driven research and research information dissemination is paramount to put research findings into use. Researcher should respect and incorporate indigeneous knowledge and farmers innovations in research work which will cultivate trust and confidence for sustainable utilization of research results.

The main research challenge is to develop an innovative farmer driven research approach that will liberate poor rural small scale farmers from subsistence farming trap under the prevailing conditions; rapidly population growth, declining land productivity, shrinking land sizes and traditional cultural beliefs given Africa economies and technologies. This scenario could lead to uneconomic farming practices, resource conflicts especial on human settlement, pastoralists, agriculturalists, industrial development and wildlife & environmental policies among others.

The opportunity for research would be to investigate the viability of traditional agricultural farming systems in the changing environment, recent evolution on International Agricultural Markets, biofuels, genetic engineering, depletion of ozone layer, intellectual property rights as well as farmers rights & previledges in the perspective of the Kenyan farmer. These have very far reaching effects on the farmers and required joint effort between the farmers, farmers oganizations and the researchers to arrive at mutually acceptable solution.

The main research constraints Research funding, Farmers require immediate solutions but research work takes time to yield results, Researchers attitude, limited research fund sources and stricngs atached to multinational research which is driven by profit motive. moreover, increasing population pressure, deforestation and climate complicates farming hence unpredictable. There is need to harmonize research and the needs of the farmers to develop a sustainable programme. Farmers should set the agenda of the research.