

A new tone is set

It is strongly believed that the stakeholders in the ILEIA-Philippines Research Programme came together for a noble purpose: to prove the viability of LEISA as an alternative option for farming in this part of the world. This was a common goal shared by everyone involved in the programme and it was made concrete by the support of ILEIA Netherlands.



photo: Marilou Abon

Looking for ways to continue collaboration.

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The farmers' organisations expected financial support from ILEIA and technical and moral support from the NGO and the academe. The academe expected acceptance by the farmers: acceptance of their thoughts, hearts and persons. Both groups were willing to make compromises. The farmers had a stock of learning obtained from a lifetime of farming. The academe had received theirs from books and simulated experiments. Each made a paradigm shift and decided to complement the other's learning in order to come up with concrete and scientifically accepted proofs that would substantiate their belief in sustainable agriculture as a viable option. ILEIA was expected to provide a forum through which this information could be shared with policy makers.

Negotiating working relations

The LEISA Working Groups were not spared conflict. In the initial encounter between academe and the farmers, the latter candidly stated that they felt academics were inexperienced as far as everyday farming activities were concerned. The people from the university felt they were not accepted by the farmers as partners in the programme and were, in fact, seen as competitors when it came to apportioning the budget. Farmers' resistance became more obvious when the academe recommended some scientific indicators and methodology in the experimental design. This resistance was spurred by the farmers' belief that they should be the ones to identify what was scientific and that the people from the academe should follow what they, the farmers, wanted to do in their experiments.

It was difficult to sustain the enthusiasm felt at the beginning of the PTD experiments when farmers, NGO staff and academe had invested a considerable amount of their free time. Not everyone could afford to invest so much time for a long period in activities with little paid compensation. Weekly visits to the farmers' fields by the academe and NGO staff had to be

scaled down and were partially replaced by an 'on-call' system. Better payment, funded by ILEIA, made it possible to involve a broader group of specialists from the CLSU. Initially, farmers were disappointed with this development. Later it was understood that this system was more realistic and gave them more freedom to invite the specialists they needed.

The Working Groups went through a long period of adjustment before establishing stable working relationships. CLSU, KADAMA, KALIKASAN and PRRM were not always in agreement on a number of issues during the course of the programme. Issues such as approach, indicators, methodology, treatment of PTD and LEISA were continually being raised and other difficult questions included who should call the shots and who should take the leading role in projects. These differences were settled by continuous dialogue, meetings, and consultations among all involved in the programme and by constant work on 'team building' activities.

Lessons learned

Despite these differences and conflicts, the farmers' organisations and the CLSU-ILEIA task force worked hand-in-hand to accomplish their respective tasks, roles and functions for the sake of sustainable agriculture and in the end the stakeholders all claimed to have learned important lessons.

As a process, PTD - as practised within the ILEIA research programme - was seen to answer the farmers' wish to be involved in the process of articulating their needs and aspirations and having a real share in social and political power. The projects undertaken strengthen the experimental and technology management capacities of local farmers and communities. Farmers played a key role in the process and they participated in and facilitated project activities from problem identification to decision making on experimental designs and parameters. With continuous support this positive step can become a genuinely 'sustainable' progression.

Setting up a research framework based on farmers' perspectives puts farmers in a lead position. In all these activities they need technical backstopping from aca-

deme and financial support from organisations such as ILEIA. Stakeholder Concerted Action, through common activities such as planning, monitoring, evaluation, capacity building, networking, library support and documentation of results and lessons, is a support mechanism that allows the programme to achieve its goal and meet its objectives.

Initial encounters of stakeholders and the mix of negative and positive reactions were seen as part of a natural process that can be found in any development initiative. It is a familiar stage. Mental baggage is unloaded and new ideas gradually accommodated. A new tone is set - one that facilitates better working relationships. It is a stage when new things are learnt and these can serve as the foundation for a new beginning.

We, as academics, have learned many things in the course of this research programme.

- Recognising the capability of farmers ensures their capacities will be developed in technology management.
- A complementary working relationship among stakeholders could serve as a model in any farmer-led development programme.
- The more farmers are exposed to scientific activities, the more they can develop their innovative skills and knowledge.
- Given all the necessary skills to conduct experiments and generate technology, the farmers could easily duplicate what scientists are doing in the interests of sustainable agriculture.
- Training to develop knowledge, skills and the attitude of farmers towards undertaking experimental activities is a prerequisite for programme implementation.
- Internalising farmer-led research is a continuous process that cannot be achieved in a short period of time.

What has been learned here will provide a basis for future activities in similar programmes.

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