

# Summary of SARD Initiative Good Practices Workshop

2 November 2005, during the IFSA GLO

## Introduction

The SARD Initiative Good Practices (GP) workshop brought together over sixty participants of the International Farming Systems Association's Global Learning Opportunity for a group exploration of the identification, assessment, sharing and upscaling of good practices.

The participants divided into six groups to discuss these areas in more detail. Each of the groups (one each on identification and assessment of GPs, and two each on sharing and upscaling) worked around the following questions.

Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• By whom are they identified?</li><li>• How do we find them?</li><li>• How do we recognise them?</li></ul>
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• By and for whom do we assess them?</li><li>• Who is benefiting?</li><li>• How do we know it's working and why is it working?</li><li>• Is it practical?</li><li>• What do we do with this information?</li></ul>
Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is working?</li><li>• In what context?</li><li>• What are the constraints?</li><li>• What are the solutions and innovations?</li></ul>
Upscaling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are there good examples?</li><li>• What keeps it from happening?</li><li>• What are the solutions/context?</li><li>• What are you going to do?</li></ul>

The following sections provide an overview of the outcomes of the group discussions. Tables reflecting the outputs of the groups on pin-boards during the workshop are attached in Annex 1.

## Identification

Good Practices can be identified from a wide variety of actors, from those working on a local level (e.g. end users, farmers and farmers' groups, and community members) to those working as intermediaries (e.g. extension workers and NGOs) to those working at a regional or international level (e.g. researchers, government and policy-makers). Finding GPs can be achieved through asking local people, conducting interviews, internet or literature searches. However, it is important to look in diverse places, and to look at whether the practitioners consider that it works, and that it works in a minimum of settings for a defined time. Factors discussed by the group in relation to how to recognise GPs included whether it is ecologically sustainable, if it has been replicated by others, if it improves local economic conditions, if it meets at least some of the expectations of the end user, and if it is scientifically valid. The

group also pointed out that it is important to define criteria for GPs, under such headings as the purpose of the GP, context, people, places and methods.

### **Assessment**

GPs are assessed by and for many groups, from those who were the target of the GP, practitioners and local researchers, to NGOs, governments, consultants and donors. Those who benefit from the assessment of the practice include farmers, innovators, input suppliers, retailers and consumers. Good practices are of interest and can benefit the research community and the environment. In order to know whether a practice is working and why involves consideration of factors such as the resources needed (e.g. whether the changes are sustainable without external financing), the impact of the GP (e.g. does it have a socio-economic impact or help to empower the beneficiaries), and external indicators. The group noted that practice is a dynamic process, and as such it is sometimes difficult to perceive processes and how they are working.

It is important to consider how practical a GP is in relation to the farmer or beneficiary, because what is practical for institutions often is not practical for farmers. In relation to what to *do* with information related to the assessment of GPs, the actions discussed by the group mostly related to communication, in particular to two-way communication. They stressed the importance of building on past experience to develop practices, of using GP assessment as a basis for local action, of sharing the information at all levels (bottom-up communication), of publishing the information for scientists, including it in an expert system and publishing it, or disseminating it on the SARD website. An important factor of this communication is feedback, both with the local people and partners.

Please also see the assessment form that was used as a basis for discussion during this session in the workshop (Annex 2)

### **Sharing**

The groups that discussed sharing approached the issue from different perspectives. One group looked at the questions in general terms, identifying for example general approaches which are working for sharing GPs. These included enthusiasm, local workshops, networking with research and development actors, volunteer farmer extensionists and using the judgement of experienced farmers. The context of these activities differs, but many relate to sharing GPs between or within local communities. Constraints involve resources such as lack of organisational skill in communities, lack of supporting infrastructure or policy, and the problem of local-specific practices. Solutions which could help foster sharing include improving communication and connectivity, putting training programmes in place to facilitate sharing, and involving all stakeholders. From this discussion, some common needs were identified. Seminars across regions or countries could help to connect farmers and facilitate the sharing of GPs. Farmer-to-farmer networks can help farmers to update their skills. Demonstration plots can help with on-the-ground demonstration of GPs; a possible problem with this approach is the supply of inputs, however farmer collaboration could be used to encourage them to lend their land for this use. The use of websites to share information can be very useful in sharing GPs, and an adequate reviewing mechanism before posting would help solve the issue of quality control which can be a constraint in developing online resources.

The second group that discussed sharing looked at the issue through contributing examples of sharing of good practices, and then looked at the examples collected to see if any logic or order could be discerned. As a result of this they identified sharing at different levels, from local to global. At the level of farmers, an example given was that of using incomplete tools in test plots to foster innovation and new technology development. At the community level, an example was improving production of vegetables for market in Papua New Guinea through village extension in highland areas. At a global level, broadening the understanding of the role of animal well-being in SARD was cited as an example. A number of cross-cutting examples which happen at some or all levels were also given, including the use of an email list server to share information about identification of and solutions to pests and diseases. Across these different levels, the solutions offered for varying constraints nearly all revolved around a similar theme: that of raising awareness. Whether through raising awareness of SARD policies in local regional authorities, using social debate and action to promote land reform, advocacy, or improving communications infrastructure in rural areas, raising awareness and improving communication are vital.

### **Upscaling**

The two groups that discussed upscaling also looked at the issue from a general perspective, and on the basis of examples. The group which looked at upscaling in a general way concentrated on constraints, solutions and actions. In terms of constraints and solutions, they looked at problems on the ground and at policy level, and the exchange between these two. For example, the problem of one-way communication from a policy level to local level could be overcome by encouraging participation, listening and dialogue. The lack of utilisation and recognition for local knowledge could be overcome through two-way communication to establish the credibility of indigenous knowledge. On a policy level, donor resistance could be overcome by educating donors, improving public relations and through exposure and dialogue. Actions discussed to overcome these and other constraints included supporting community exchanges, encouraging farmer empowerment, building leadership, strengthening collaboration, exposing policy leaders to good practices and holding policy-makers accountable.

The second upscaling group looked at individual examples of upscaling GPs in terms of the constraints and solutions. One example discussed was upscaling tree planting to hold soil and water, which is problematic because of the long time before benefits are experienced, and by the value to farmers of the wood for immediate use (e.g. for fuel). A second example was setting up local markets for organic products. Sometimes it is difficult for small farmers to work together but this can be overcome through facilitating small farmer cooperatives. On the basis of these and other examples, the group developed some general constraints and possible solutions to them. Constraints included local and time specificity, lack of human and financial resources, a weak enabling environment in terms of policies and infrastructure, lack of economic market opportunities and an economic 'spark' to start up and activity. Solutions for these constraints are farmer peer training and farmer-to-farmer exchange, linking local communities to global resources, developing local financial sustainability mechanisms, and developing communication strategies.