

Prioritising the role of the farmer: Summary report of the ABDC-10 parallel session¹

Forty-four delegates attended the session. Three presentations were made, focusing on the role of small producers (fishers and farmers) in R&D programmes to develop appropriate technologies.

The group identified following gaps:

1. R&D is not sufficiently addressing small farmers' needs; lack of public investment in R&D.
2. Lack of:
 - opportunities for farmers to participate in R&D priority settings;
 - national level consultative mechanism for farmers' participation in R&D work;
 - sufficient information in local languages at the rural level, enabling informed decision-making by farmers;
 - involvement of young people in identifying R&D programmes;
 - recognition of farmers' knowledge and needs by researchers and policy makers; and
 - skills with researchers to effectively communicate with the farmers.

The group decided that following steps should be taken to address the gaps:

- formulate national policies to address needs of small farmers and enable their active participation in R&D programmes;
- national governments should develop policies to oversee and monitor corporate R&D agenda involving farmers;
- farmers should be empowered with knowledge and information enabling them to prioritise their needs and to communicate them to decision makers;
- mechanism should be established to allow farmers participation in R&D priority setting;
- R&D agenda should be driven by farmers' needs, and they should be involved from the very beginning -- from planning and designing the R&D work to its execution;
- for developing R&D programmes, traditional knowledge and culture should be taken into consideration. Role of women in addressing this issue should be recognized;
- national R&D agencies and ministries should be proactive in approaching farmers to identify their needs and problems and develop R&D programmes to address them;
- international organizations should make the inclusion of small farmers' needs mandatory into the programmes for providing financial and technical support; and
- farmers' role in the form of farmer-to-farmer extension should be recognized as a promising strategy for wider dissemination and adoption of technologies. Researchers and extension workers would then play the role of only the facilitators.

¹This is the summary report of the parallel session organized by FAO, with support from the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), on the second day of the FAO international technical conference on Agricultural Biotechnologies in Developing Countries (ABDC-10) that took place in Guadalajara, Mexico on 1-4 March 2010 (<http://www.fao.org/biotech/abdc/parallel/en>). The session was facilitated by Karin Nichterlein and the Rapporteur was Harinder Makkar.