

Lasting Footprints

Facilitation stories



Government of Japan



Conservation of
Iranian Wetlands Project
"Savvy Wetlands: for People, for Nature"



Department of Environment



Ministry of Agriculture
Jahad



Foreword

“With population growth and environmental fragility in CDR (complex, diverse and risk-prone) areas”, the main agenda, from a development perspective, would be to transform the third CDR agriculture¹ [in semi-arid, sub-humid and humid tropical areas in Asia, Africa and Latin America] into “more sustainable and productive systems ... that can generate more sustainable livelihood for the much larger populations of the future” (Chambers, 1993). However, conventional research and extension are incompatible with this type of agriculture. The prevailing paradigm amongst agricultural research and extension professionals is the “transfer of technology”. In this paradigm, research priorities are determined by scientists and donor agencies. Experts and researchers then experiment on the priorities in laboratories and research stations in order to produce technological solutions, which are then handed over to extension workers to transfer to farmers. This model of research and extension originated with the “green revolution” agriculture model pursued in fertile and water-rich plainlands in some Asian, African and Latin American countries, in areas where conditions could be adapted and modified to resemble those of research stations. The structure of these areas can be simplified, their conditions are more controllable and predictable, and ultimately the results achieved on them can be generalized and extended to areas with similar conditions.

The transfer of technology paradigm is deeply embedded in normal professional thinking and prescriptions; be it in training, behaviour in the field or in development discourse. However, this paradigm has proven less effective for third agriculture. The primary reason for this has been the dissimilarity between the natural and economic conditions of research stations and that of third agriculture farmer

families and fields, farmers who are mostly small and resource-poor. Another reason could be the lack of coherence between the nature of third agriculture and normal professionalism.

Throughout the history of agricultural development, farmers' non-adoption of extension prescriptions has been attributed primarily to their ignorance, and secondarily to farm-level constraints. The thinking has been that with more and better extension, farmers will become more aware and by reducing farm constraints, their conditions can become similar to those of research stations. However, with the third agriculture, these explanations have proven inaccurate. Farmers are far more knowledgeable than agriculture professionals assume, and third agriculture conditions are not and never will be similar to research stations, and this should not be seen as a flaw or weakness. The lack of coherence between normal conventional professionalism and the complexity, diversity and risk-proneness of the third agriculture has led to the neglect of the potential of this type of agriculture. In other words, when farmers have rejected the pre-determined packages of "transfer of technology", experts have come to the conclusion that third agriculture areas have no potential. Over the past two decades, innovators in agricultural and social sciences have increasingly collaborated with farmers of complex, diverse and risk-prone systems to seek solutions to this incoherence. This has led to the emergence of a new paradigm for agricultural research and extension. Many names and labels have been given to the approaches of this paradigm, but the key characteristic of them all is the priority and participation of farmers. These approaches are members of the "farmer-first"² paradigm family.

This book can be seen as the practical depiction of the farmer-first paradigm, with each of its narratives demonstrating one or more of paradigm's aspects. The writers of this book are individuals who have worked, over the past five years, as part of the agricultural service companies implementing the project, "Cooperation in the rehabilitation of Urmia Lake through the participation of local communities in the establishment of sustainable agriculture and preservation of biodiversity". They have repeatedly and systematically been trained on how to adopt participatory approaches to their work with agriculture communities. In fact, the true value of this book could be in that whatever we read about and discuss in meetings and workshops are portrayed in practice. In view of this, there is hope that the narratives of this book can provide a platform for connecting and comparing local experiences to global developments.

We have to thank Andisheh Ensanshahr Institute for their facilitation of the process of producing this book. For the compilation of this book, we reached out to the implementing companies of the above-mentioned project, and ten individuals stayed on board till the end of the process. So, we would like to extend our gratitude to Farshad Joodian, Nowrooz Shahamatazar, Latif Haqqi, Chico Amini, Haleh Taram, Sahar Akbarzadeh, Shirin Abdollahi, Leila Vejdan Qarebaq, Sonia Piran and Sonia Roshanroo for the energy and time they invested, from their personal resources, in the process of producing the book. This does not imply that Jihad for Agriculture personnel, other people working in the agricultural service companies or other stakeholders working in the project do not have their own unique participatory experiences. Each may have, in some way and in their own capacity, understood and experienced change in their attitude and practice, and a shift from extension to facilitation, in which case they would have a lot to say that would relate to the purpose of this book. (Even for those whose writings have been included, this book cannot claim to be a comprehensive recollection of all their experience). We carried out the compilation of this book with a group who could afford the time and whom we could easily access, so that we could manage the scope of the work and arrive at the final product in a relatively short time, in the hope of reflecting, more urgently, good field occurrences and the learnings on how to document field experiences.

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1. The third agriculture is a term coined by Robert Chambers – in contrast to industrial (first) and green revolution (second) agriculture - to describe the mainly rainfed agriculture found on “undulating land ... in hinterlands, mountains, hills, wetlands and the semi-arid, sub-humid and humid tropics” (Chambers, 1993). Complexity, diversity and risk-proneness are the characteristics of the “third” agriculture. Chambers does not, in any way, belittle this third type of agriculture. Rather, he emphasizes that this type of agriculture has deep roots in the areas where it is practiced and possesses a richness that would justify placing it at the core of agriculture in these areas.

2. Chambers introduced ‘farmer-first’ as the umbrella term for participatory approaches in agriculture.
