

Mid-Term Reviews

South Asia and West Africa Components

of the

Action Research Program:

***Democratising the Governance of Food Systems -
Citizens Rethinking Food and Agricultural Research
for the Public Good***

Dr. Marc P. Lammerink, Summary Highlights (Sept 2011)

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Summary Highlights

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South Asia and West Africa Components of the Action Research

Program: Democratising the Governance of Food Systems – Citizens

Rethinking Food and Agricultural Research for the Public Good

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1. Introduction

Between 2005 and 2007 conversations with farmers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, policymakers and representatives of social movements led to the development of a major multi-country initiative to enable citizens themselves to decide on the kind of food and agricultural research they want. In 2007 this initiative became an action research programme co-ordinated by IIED: *Democratising the Governance of Food Systems: Citizens Rethinking Food and Agricultural Research for the Public Good*.¹ The project uses a decentralised and bottom-up process to enable small-scale farmers and other citizens to (a) decide what type of agricultural research needs to be done to ensure their food sovereignty and (b) plan how to push for change in policies and practice. The planning and methodology workshop held in November 2007 in Monte Saraz, Portugal, marked the start of the operational phase of the project. At this event the regional teams and coordinators jointly assembled common values, objectives, methods and work programmes, and mapped the relationships to be developed within the overall initiative.² The project is now established in *four regions*, with one country acting as host for each region: West Africa (Mali), South Asia (India), West Asia (Iran) and the Andean region in Latin America (Bolivia/Peru).

This mid-term review covers two regions: South Asia and West Africa. In South Asia, the process is called the Alliance for Democratising Agricultural Research South Asia

¹ Oxfam Novib provided EUR 450,000 over a period of three years and the Christensen Fund and the Netherlands Directorate-General of Development Co-operation (DGIS) provided additional funds for this project.

² Proceedings of the International Planning and Methodological Workshop on Democratising the Governance of Food and Agricultural Research, Monte Saraz, November 2007, IIED.

(ADARSA) and in West Africa it is called the Espace Citoyen d' Interpellation Démocratique (ECID) (Citizen's Space for Democratic Deliberation). ADARSA is co-ordinated by the Deccan Development Society (DDS), a civil society organisation that has been working with Dalit women farmers in Andhra Pradesh for the last 25 years, while ECID is supported by regional coordinators from Kéné Conseils.

The theory of change behind both initiatives is to work inclusively with local partners and indigenous and local communities to collectively develop local solutions to global problems in order to both address the needs of excluded community groups (women, *Dalits* and *Adivasis*,³ marginalised farmers, herders, young people) and empower communities directly, enhancing a research process for more equitable and sustainable natural resources use and agri-food systems. By linking local voices, experience and research evidence to policy processes it is hoped that debates are influenced and better policies and institutions are shaped. The initiatives should combine local knowledge and cutting-edge science to develop alternative models and countervailing power to reframe dominant narratives, policies and practice in relation to agricultural research and its systems.

In South Asia the work included commissioning descriptive research in Nepal and India on agricultural research trends; building an alliance of groups who share a desire to democratise agricultural research; investigating agricultural research in relation to inputs from small and marginal farmers; and providing a platform for excluded farmers who are affected by research developments to discuss and make recommendations on agricultural research. In the host country, India, ADARSA conducted a *Raita Teerpu* (literally 'people's verdict') in Karnataka in December 2009.

In West Africa, regional co-ordinators mobilised partner organisations in Mali and the sub-region (Senegal, Benin and Burkina Faso) between mid-2007 and the end of 2008, establishing different bodies to take forward a deliberative process. The actual

³ *Adivasi* is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups believed to be the aboriginal population of India. *Dalit* is a self-designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as untouchable. *Dalits* are a mixed population of numerous caste groups all over South Asia, and speak various languages. While the caste system has been abolished, there is still discrimination and prejudice against *Dalits* in South Asia.

processes of citizen deliberation took place in January and February 2010, in the form of two separate ‘citizen juries’ (ECID 1 and ECID 2).

The *Raita Teerpu* provided a space for 30 citizens – women and men farmers from Karnataka, India – to learn about agricultural research, deliberate together and develop well-informed opinion and recommendations on agricultural research. Eleven specialist witnesses – drawn from government, academia, farmer movements, and pastoralist and consumer groups – presented evidence on various aspects of agricultural research. After hearing all the specialist presentations the jury members evaluated and scrutinised the evidence⁴ and formulated 22 recommendations, representing a farmers’ verdict on agricultural research.⁵

The two Citizens’ Spaces in Mali (ECID 1 and 2) brought together almost 100 citizens to deliberate about the governance of food and agricultural research. For each ECID 50 men and women were selected (ECID 1: 50% women and ECID 2: 46%). The participants were mainly from Mali; six citizens in ECID 1 were from the sub-regions and all the citizens in ECID 2 were from Mali. In each ECID around seven witnesses and a panel of farmers provided evidence on various aspects of knowledge needed for both greater food sovereignty and democratising research. Witnesses were representatives from agricultural research organisations, the multinational private sector, farmer organisations, universities and civil society. The four juror commissions⁶ of each ECID formulated many sometimes overlapping recommendations: more than 60 for ECID 1 and 41 for ECID 2. The overlap between recommendations allowed for triangulations and for a more concise verdict to be drawn up.

1.1 The mid-term review: A reflexive process

The review of the ADARSA process engaged participants in a reflexive process through conversations. The evaluator used a combination of open and semi-structured interviewing techniques. The principal aim was to interview participants within their embedded positions, and thus to draw from these perspectives when reflecting upon

⁴ See www.raitateerpu.com/the_process.html

⁵ See www.raitateerpu.com/index.html

⁶ The small-scale producers and food processors who took part in the two citizens’ juries were organised into four separate commissions: 1. Farmers’ and Forest Users’ Commission; 2. Women’s Commission; 3. Herders’ & Fishermen’s Commission; and 4. Food Processors’ Commission.

the ADARSA and citizen jury process. For the evaluator the validation of the ADARSA approach is a subjective one, because ADARSA draws on the traditions of participatory action research and is open and transparent. The approach is political and value-laden from the onset.

The review of the West Africa component implemented in Mali covers November 2007 to March 2010 and three different stages: emergence of the process (up to November 2008); formalisation of the process and preparations for the citizen deliberations (between December 2008 and 2009); and the citizen deliberations themselves (until March 2010). The evaluation did not cover the dissemination of the recommendations made by the citizen juries, their impacts on policies and practices, or the global co-ordination with South Asia and the Andean region in Latin America. The reviewer attended two citizen spaces for democratic deliberation (in the villages of Nyéléni and Sélingué) and conducted a series of interviews. The West Africa review seems to be more about commenting on and suggesting improvements for the ECID's themselves, and does not share the reflective nature of the ADARSA review.

2. Findings

2.1 The organisational framework of citizen juries in Mali

International and regional co-ordinators mobilised partner organisations in Mali and the sub-region between mid-2007 and end of 2008, establishing different bodies to take forward the deliberative process.

One of the bodies was a group of five organisations sharing similar values which provided *policy support* to the deliberative process. This affirmed the accountability and autonomy of this initiative to promote democratic governance of public policies. This group represented a clear position in the debate on agriculture in Mali and West Africa. Its composition was helpful in terms of social mobilisation and freedom to decide on the deliberative process – supporting an open and plural process that included different actors and viewpoints.

The *steering committee* was composed of various farmer and rural women's organisations. Its composition gave the policy support group access to a range of organisations with a common interest in citizen deliberation and similar concerns. All of them defend the interests of small producers and disadvantaged social groups, and

have an alternative vision of agriculture and development and democratic governance. The committee's national dimension strengthened the position and legitimacy of ECID in Malian civil society. They met three times (less than planned because of budgetary constraints). The member organisations showed satisfactory levels of commitment and their contributions at key points of the process were vital for the smooth running of the ECIDs. For example, Convergence des Femmes Rurales pour la Souveraineté Alimentaire (COFERSA) played an important role in organising the first farmer evaluation of public research on seed selection in West Africa. Members of the steering committee were positive about the way it worked, particularly the circulation of information, open and collective working procedures and lack of imposition by the project, non-hierarchical style of collaboration, mutual trust, good use of complementary skills and allocation of responsibilities, and the transparent financial management. The steering committee created favourable conditions for the organisation of ECIDs. They provided an excellent framework for exchange and horizontal collaboration, and this will also strengthen rural and civil societies as actors of social change in future.

A *committee of independent observers* was composed of eight individuals with national, sub-regional and international profiles and a wide range of skills. The composition reflected its importance. The steering committee furnished them with the most important documents, invited them to meetings where important decisions were taken, and gave members every opportunity to discuss matters informally with anyone involved in the ECID.

However, this committee as a whole did not function satisfactorily. There was relatively little prior internal discussion about the ECID methodology – despite the abundant documentation provided by the steering committee – and members were not always available to attend the ECIDs. This prevented the committee from fulfilling its role, although members who did attend the ECIDs threw themselves into the task and brought a critical and constructive approach to the proceedings.

The composition of *the extended committee* reflected the desire to establish links with the institutional environment, for example agricultural research, local government, the private sector, producers and civil society organisations, in order to endorse the deliberative process and disseminate the recommendations. It is too early in the process to evaluate their role and impacts.

The *regional coordinators* provided administrative and organisational advice and support to the different bodies, especially helping the steering committee with preparatory activities for the ECIDs. IIED's overall co-ordinator reinforced this support, especially on the design of the process and the methodological and conceptual aspects.

Members of the steering committee were very positive about the procedure and content of the support team. They particularly valued that national partners' views were respected and that the support team was able to engage in the dynamic of collective thinking without imposing their view. They also valued the support team's desire to support participation and to ensure that the experience and knowledge of every member of the steering committee was valued. Members gained a better understanding of the citizen deliberation methodology. Flexible financial management allowed the process to evolve. There was a complementary role between the African actors and the global co-ordinator (Michel Pimbert), a result of a long-term effort to involve African actors in the governance of the process: steering it and shaping its future. The funds spent before, during and after the ECIDs were largely controlled at the local level.

2.2 Practicalities of the process in Mali

The jury was set up in a number of stages: steering committee defines selection criteria; farmer or civil society organisations pre-select candidates; steering committee selected for each ECID, balancing on gender, provenance (village and commune), type of activity, farm size and the organisations that had proposed them; and a two-day preparatory workshop of members on thematic issues to familiarise them with methodology for the process, the two ECIDs, their roles and responsibilities and the rules for citizen deliberations.

The first ECID was about the transformation of knowledge (what kind of agricultural research and knowledge is needed to ensure greater food sovereignty) and the second was about the governance of agricultural research (how to make agricultural research governance more democratic in order to increase food sovereignty). Each ECID took place in two stages: an opening session and presentations by the expert witnesses (three days) and deliberations (two days) by four commissions. Each commission

appointed a chairman, secretary and team of moderators and translators to support them, while independent observers attended the sessions.

The rules about and procedures necessary to run an ECID – setting out the respective roles of the citizen jurors, expert witnesses, moderators, committee of independent observers and organising committee – provided a suitable framework for citizen deliberation. The presence of independent observers as well as the creation of video archives helped ensure the transparency of the ECID proceedings.

All the work proceeded properly, from the preparatory workshop to the sessions with the expert witnesses and commissions. In the evaluator's opinion, however, the preparatory workshop should formally have been part of first stage of the ECID. That would have allowed the independent observers to attend and assess the process. An experienced team was in charge of moderating, translating and reporting and they ensured that jurors had an equal say and genuinely participated. Using the national languages (Bambara, Fulani and Songhai) rather than French enabled everyone to express themselves freely, especially the women. It also allowed producers to strengthen their knowledge of agricultural research. The daily reporting was very good, but this material could have been better used in the final presentations. On a practical level, the ECIDs were very well organised. The village of Nyéléni provided the venue, board and lodging. It was a good choice with sufficient facilities and pleasant surroundings, and where work was conducted in a convivial atmosphere.

A considerable amount of work went into identifying and meeting expert witnesses. The planned list of expert witnesses for the two ECIDs shows a good balance between different points of view. The overall balance came more from the diversity of subjects, disciplines, approaches and views rather than from hearing opposing views on a particular topic. This was due to the complementary nature of the themes selected for the testimonies, and the lack of a central controversial topic. Most of the testimonies were of very high quality, in terms of both the presentations and the ensuing discussions with members of the jury.

The four commissions (farmers/forest users; women; herders and fishermen; processors) within the group of jurors should have ensured that participants felt comfortable in their space and were able to talk to other people engaged in the same livelihood (farmer, herder, fishermen, etc.). Much care was taken to create safe spaces

for women too – hence the women-only commissions – and to work with the differences within the group of jurors rather than viewing them as a homogenous, undifferentiated community. A setting in which different socio-professional groups were clearly respected and valued helped make jurors feel comfortable contributing to the discussions after the expert witness presentations.

Every commission had the same template for their discussions, and it was broad enough to encompass all the themes covered by the expert witnesses. Each of the four commissions was able to work in its own way and at its own pace, using their particular framework for analysis and reflections. They started to develop their own way of working by the end of the first day. This helped the producers to think freely and form their own opinions during a decisive phase in determining their position.

Each commission made a presentation at the ECID closing session, resulting in a very high number of recommendations (71 at ECID-1 and 41 at ECID-2). There was a certain amount of repetition, but this enabled triangulation and crosscutting verification of their work. It reflects the methodological rigour and quality of the ECID process in contextualising the issues, motivating participants, and helping close the gap between different views on food sovereignty and different types of research.

The commissions' views were thus both diverse and convergent. Nevertheless, a joint synthesis should be prepared for the post-ECID work with the authorities and the media.

The content of the recommendations undoubtedly reflects producers' concerns and priorities, and highlights the changes, improvements and transformations desired by producers and citizens. They certainly call for a fundamental reorientation of research, but we will have to wait for the outcomes of the follow-up reports, round tables and policy dialogues with the public authorities to track the full extent of this process of citizens' deliberation and the impact of the producers' recommendations.

Thus it is still too early to judge what effect the farmers' recommendations will have in reforming the governance of the conventional public agricultural research system. This can only be evaluated in the next period of the programme.

The ECID procedure was useful, and many actors felt that these participatory procedures open up new prospects for (re-)kindling democracy in West Africa. Local

producers repeatedly emphasised that they felt able to express their opinions ('*we could speak freely*') in their own space. For jurors it provided:

- training that improved their knowledge; and
- lessons in citizenship.

Research institutions could see the advantages of directly engaging with producers and citizens at the grassroots level. As one scientist commented: '*These farmers were amazing: they asked the same questions as my Board asks me.*' (Director of *l'Institut d'Economie Rurale*) For the steering committee, the ECID was a special opportunity to learn about the methodology.

Media coverage was achieved by mobilising a large number of journalists for the ECID. This resulted in wide coverage by different branches of the local, national and international media. Furthermore, the organisers of the ECIDs used a wide range of media formats, channels and languages to disseminate information. In addition to calling in about ten national and foreign newspapers, televised reports were made in French and broadcasted in different national languages in news bulletins. Local radio stations from the district of Yanfolila also covered the events in local languages to ensure that local communities were kept informed.

The involvement of the media in every key organisational stage of the event was remarkable – announcing, following and explaining it to the public, and reporting on its outcomes and their relevance for African society. They gave a high profile to the two ECIDs – the themes under discussion, the participants, the rural world and its problems – and set a precedent for such participatory events, not just in West Africa but at the global level. Thus, the ECID broadly contributed to the objectives of the initiative. Of course the question of sustaining the process still needs to be addressed in the period to come.

2.3 Indian experiences with *Raita Teerpu*

The media was also widely involved in India and ensured that the voices of farmers reached a wide audience, both in English and local languages. The media engagement through ADARSA's work was impressive. Reporting of the process reached local, regional, and national Indian media outlets and even a popular English-language TV channel. The combined media coverage reached up to two million members of the

public, a positive step in alerting the wider public and politicians to the crisis in agriculture. The objective of gaining access to an audience and disseminating through the media was clearly achieved, which is one proof of the effectiveness of the ADARSA project. However, this review cannot measure the full influence of the media in the public sphere or its potential impact on decision-makers, policymakers, politicians and civil servants.

The jury provided an opportunity for the different communities to listen to each others' questions. It acted as a form of popular education on how the agricultural establishment viewed farming practices and development. There is a wide gap between the reality and knowledge of farmers and scientists, even wider where *Adivasi* women's knowledge systems are concerned. The world of female *Dalit* farmers is very different from that of well-schooled male scientists. One interviewee said: *'the imaginations of the poor are very different to the imaginations of the scientific community and this is even more complicated with indigenous people'*. The review revealed social learning on the side of these marginalised (women) farmers. However, the review cannot say for sure if scientists also learned something.

The jury also proved a useful tool for *enhancing democracy* by including normally excluded voices. Participant observations and interviews made it clear that the farmers' views were effectively aired during the jury process and the 'quality' of their voices was based on informed, careful, considered inquiry. Although the jury is just one of a range of approaches for enhancing democracy, in the social, political and geographical context of both Mali and India it proved very effective.

Strong benefits of the jury process that became clear are its innovativeness (with use of media before, during and after the jury) and the sense of theatre/drama built into it. Powerful role reversals were achieved by making farmers central: they become the experts who cross-examine agricultural scientists and policymakers. This unusual situation led to greater media attention, which amplified the farmer's voices and extended their reach into different realms. A citizens' jury treats farmers and their historical knowledge as equal to, or more important than, the knowledge created by scientists, NGOs and think tanks. It also affirms the right to participate, as a fundamental human right. A male interviewee commented: *'Demonstrating the legitimacy of marginalised knowledge and experience, and giving them sufficient*

profile to reach the policy-makers that make decisions about farmers lives, might have implications for how the government makes decisions in the future.

2.4 The citizens' jury as a social science research tool

The citizen jury can be seen as a non-traditional social science research tool. As a method of action research it offers a high degree of methodological transparency, participatory deliberation and scope for future advocacy based on the authentic people's voice (Wakeford, 2002⁷).

In Mali the citizen's space for democratic deliberation (ECID) was seen as innovative in a broader sense: combining citizens' juries with social mobilisation. The citizens' jury part is based on a fairly standardised procedure. However, it also involves a process of mobilising and strengthening social actors from civil society. The aim is to give disadvantaged social actors a greater say in public actions or decisions that concern them. This means mobilising and building capacity at different levels, with member organisations as part of the steering committee; the jurors and organisations to which they belong during the citizens' jury phase; and all the actors who disseminate and defend the recommendations at the regional, national and international levels once the results have been validated during the citizens' jury process. The overall aim of ECID is to support the dynamic of social change and reduce power imbalances in the running of public affairs.

The review in India revealed a range of perspectives on the citizens' jury model as a method. Its major strengths are its underlying values and broader objective of democratising agricultural research (rather than the technicalities of the jury). It provides a safe space and a platform and opportunity for marginalised communities from the South (small and marginalised farmers make up nearly 85% of South Asians farmers) to speak and be heard. Specialist information about agriculture can be debated, cross-examined, evaluated and synthesised by the jury, leading to an informed opinion on agricultural research and priorities. This opinion takes shape through the enhanced understanding of the jurors, and in an informed and well-articulated verdict. This verdict, a stand-alone document, is situated in farmer's

⁷ Wakeford, T. (2002). Citizens juries: a radical alternative for social research. Surrey Research Update, 37.

experience and serves as an indicator of the quality of discussion, and as an authentic, immutable ‘voice’ of the jurors, to be disseminated to different audiences.

The key achievement of the process is: providing the voiceless with an opportunity to deliberate and voice their concerns based on transparent inquiry. As one participant in the ADARSA review said: *‘How different would the verdict be if the farmers in the jury did not have a chance to listen to expert witnesses?’* And a women [also a review participant] said: *‘The entire concept is to democratise agriculture research... Does it cater for small farmers who don’t have a platform? There is a transformation in them [the jurors] in these two days – they are posing questions, whether relevant or not doesn’t matter. This is their first opportunity and they are speaking their mind.’*

Another key achievement of the *Raita Teerpu* and ADARSA is to unite a range of different stakeholders. Its meetings provided a platform for NGOs, farmer movements, the media and scientists to share ideas and collectively steer the project. This led to enhanced networking capacity and friendships. It cemented partnership development in India and South Asia.

However, a key concern of some participants is about *bias and objectivity*. The ADARSA evaluator found this a valid concern. The jury was specifically designed to build a platform for small and marginal farmers, as powerful multinational corporations and large-scale farmers already have sufficient channels to air their views. Hence, this is bias towards the voiceless. However, the jury model is a transparent procedure⁸ and was inclusive of academics and large powerful research organisations (as stakeholders and/or specialist witnesses).

IIED and DDS, the organisers, are clearly aware of the inherent bias. They have instituted a refreshing jury process without claims of total and pure objectivity. It instead fosters a process that is rigorously transparent. Procedural safeguards against direct bias, both in Mali and India, include a process with a steering committee, the careful selection of witnesses and jurors, an oversight panel and invited international impartial observers, and a video-documentation of the entire process which makes it open to public scrutiny. This jury process is a deliberate attempt to tackle bias, and to be openly honest and transparent in the methodological design and execution. Other social science methods probably have the same bias but are much less transparent.

⁸ See the *Raita Teerpu* website (www.raitateerpu.com) for an overview of the method.

Another concern is related to triangulation in the methodology: the verdict of the jury could be supported by a parallel research process to validate it. However, in South Asia it was supported by descriptive research that analysed research trends (DDS, 2008; ABDAN, 2009). Both the descriptive research and the jury reached a similar conclusion: agricultural research is not focused enough on the needs of marginal farmers, especially women. Although not every recommendation can be cross-referenced with parallel research, the broader message does coincide. In this respect the verdict and the jury do seem to withstand scrutiny in India at least.

2.5 Citizens' juries, gender and youth

Women are central to agriculture in South Asia. According to the evaluator, the men involved in the *Raita Teerpu* jury process are unquestionably gender sensitive. The steering committee insisted on 50% women in the *Raita Teerpu*. This is a significant achievement considering the poor social position of women in parts of India. All of the people interviewed during the review were impressed by the results. However, some participants emphasised that simply reserving a seat for women does not necessarily translate into meaningful engagement. In practice, at the beginning the *Dalit* and *Adivasi* women participants were largely hesitant and reserved. The facilitators and the jury organisers – aware of the dynamic – intervened to raise the women's confidence so that their voices could be heard. They were actively encouraged to ask probing questions, while the men were asked to be respectfully silent after witness presentations to ensure that *Adivasi* and *Dalit* women's voices were not dominated by those of the men. These combined efforts ensured that marginalised women's voices were aired and taken seriously. This speaks volumes for the gender awareness and active inclusion of the *Raita Teerpu* team. Women said: '*It is crucial to have 50% women farmers... women are increasingly more important as men migrate. Otherwise you are not representative of farmers.*'

The wider significance of the jury's inclusion of women, *Dalits* and *Adivasis* is profound and immeasurable. In India the perception is that the opinions of *Dalits* and *Adivasis* are not valid. However, here *Dalit* and *Adivasi* communities were represented as strong, articulate, and informed farmers, instead of as poor and illiterate. Providing excluded communities, such as the *Dalits* and *Adivasi*, with this platform for positive articulation was a significant achievement in its own right.

Women held just 19% of seats on the steering committee. Better representation should have been more of a priority, but many women invited onto the steering committee were unable to make the commitment. This was not because of a lack of effort by the project team, but is evidence of society's subtle reinforcement of the normalised absence of women in strategic positions. However, according to the evaluator, procedural adjustments could have been made to guarantee more seats for women on the steering committee.

Young people included in juror selection added an extra dimension to the process. They later organised light-hearted evening dramas and many of the participants enjoyed the activities. However, there was a relative absence of young people in the jury deliberations themselves. Many of the students commented that young people should also be included in the process, as rural areas are witnessing a wave of youth migrating to urban areas. Including young people in future juries will undoubtedly bring an extra dimension to the platform. It is important to include young people because: (a) there is a perception that young people are moving away from agriculture as a livelihood option; (b) there is increased youth migration away from rural regions; (c) young people do not have opportunities to explore their relationships with their elders, rural regions and the agricultural way of life; and (d) the absence of young people has become normalised.

In Mali the jury composition was sufficiently diverse and balanced to debate various viewpoints, and the gender balance was satisfactory. The jury was a good national representation of the rural world of Mali, with jurors of mixed age groups from a range of areas in each region. The selection was broadly based and included the views of all the main occupations: farmers, herders, fishermen, forest users, artisans, processors and consumers. A large proportion of jurors were women (ECID 1: 40%; ECID 2: 47%), and they represented all the occupations. The jurors (of both sexes) proved willing and able to engage in the work. A good demonstration of this was the quality of their questions following the experts' representations, and their active involvement in the commissions. However, the sub-region (Senegal, Benin, Burkina Faso) was not represented sufficiently well. The composition of the jury could have been limited to Mali, with certain organisations from other countries in the sub-region as observers.

2.6 Mali's political context is appropriate

The West African review mainly discussed the citizens' deliberations themselves. Nevertheless, it is clear from the report that the political context in Mali is rather different from the sub-region, and of course from South Asia. Involving rural and civil society actors in the governance of agricultural research is very appropriate in the political context in Mali.

Mali is different from the sub-region in three ways in particular:

- (a) Mali has made the greatest advances in democratisation and decentralisation, creating favourable conditions for freedom of expression and for society to engage in public debate.
- (b) Malian agricultural policy has adopted the *principle of food sovereignty*. The key challenge now is to determine which model of agriculture is consistent with food sovereignty. Research should support the shift towards such a model of agriculture. Just like in Indian citizens' juries, small-scale family farming, as a strategy for food sovereignty, is set against agriculture supported by agri-business with its considerable influence, substantial financial resources and ambitious strategy.

This politically sensitive debate with different interests at stake was first conducted in the preparatory workshops for the ECIDs in Mali. Clarifying aspects of the desired model of agriculture helped determine the relationship between agricultural research and food sovereignty.

- (c) Mali has been reforming agricultural research since the 1990s, radically changing its governance. It has established a national committee on agricultural research (CNRA) which co-ordinates the 'national agricultural research system'. Producers are involved in decision-making in regional and national commissions of research users (CRU/CNU). Progress includes the participatory formulation of a long-term strategic plan for agricultural research (covering the period 2010–2019), regionalising research through regional councils for agricultural research and outreach (CRRVA), and funding of user-led research (80% of funding).

The general issue considered by the deliberative process –the governance of food and agricultural research and its sub-themes - is particularly relevant in this global context. There is so much at stake related to choices for the future, such as: shifting to

sustainable agriculture from a dominant focus on export-oriented cash crops farming; control over food production while food becomes an increasingly important issue; and the evolution of small-scale farming – marginalised and without support from public policies – which involves most of the population in West Africa.

2.7 In India clear themes came to the surface

Many of the interviewees identified food security as a critical concern in the region.

They even redefined the problem as a full-blown crisis: of knowledge, the financial system, the climate, oil, agriculture/food system, democracy and decision-making, the power of the market and farmers' lack of power, and the reduction in biodiversity and bio-cultural diversity. Interviewees painted a bleak picture of the state of agriculture, politics and the environment. Food security is critical. One interviewee said: *'the challenge is allowing people who are on the margins, at the centre of food insecurity, to see what the issues are and how they want them to be addressed'*.

This would imply linking (marginalised) people's voices with the future direction of agricultural research and production systems in order to achieve food security.

ADARSA's process is widely perceived by interviewees as a possible solution to some of the problems facing South Asia. India, however, was the main frame of reference. The complexity of India alone is so great that it is difficult to create a grand narrative around South Asia as a whole. ADARSA is rightly not trying to attempt to be a single 'voice', but instead is generating views and building alliances across this diverse, agrarian and densely populated region.

India's malnutrition rate (approximately 47%) is worse than that of Sub-Saharan Africa, as was often mentioned. Furthermore, the group questioned the dominant development paradigm in India, in which a growing economy is expected to deliver infrastructural support, development and a 'trickle down' effect, increasing the purchasing power of the poor. In reality this model is often associated with land dispossessions, poor labour rights, pollution, and occasional violence towards those who resist. Interviewees also mentioned the lack of public involvement in national policies and legislation at the local level (for example the Biotechnology Bill, Plant Variety Act), which undermine customary ways of negotiating and farming by peasants and landless people. They situated the importance of ADARSA within this

undemocratic context of development and policymaking, which does not even involve the very people affected.

They considered that crises of climate change, democracy, and broader agrarian issues could all be linked to the science and research establishment, as drivers of development. For example, bio-prospecting is seen as the acquisition of resources and local knowledge for commercial gain, which strengthens the power of corporations and/or the state. As one interviewee exclaimed, bio-prospecting is *'grab for raw material and biodiversity and the entire system is turning farmers into data providers to consumers from end to end, a full circle, by selling products back to them...the whole perversity'*.

On balance, agricultural research seems to benefit the corporations rather than producers or farmers. Agricultural research often undermines farmers' traditional knowledge and systems, like their seed banks, and their rights to common resources and territories. One interviewee commented that *'it is issues of power, who gains and who loses. Resources are finite, cultivable lands are diminishing, fresh water is going down fast, sea levels are rising, coastal areas are flooding and something has to change very quickly if governments are serious about food'*. According to many people, 'business as usual' for agricultural research is not an option. Agricultural research would require radical change to make it more democratic and aligned with the desires, needs and imaginations of farmers. One female interviewee stated: *'This is an alternative, not a reversal'* to the current dominant agricultural research paradigm.

All but one interviewee agreed: democratising agricultural research is needed and this will require a dialogue between farmers, scientists and the broader research policy establishment. This is precisely the significance of ADARSA and the *Raita Teerpu*: it provides a space for small and marginal farmers (who have very little formal political power) to discuss agricultural research and to set the research agenda in consultation with the agricultural establishment, as active citizens and not as subjects of market trends or scientific developments.

2.8 Citizens' juries and power

ADARSA made an important achievement in offering a space for reflection on the broader questions of agricultural research and put the corporate agricultural research

nexus under scrutiny. Another key achievement is related to issues of power and knowledge in agricultural research: the jury space recognises that knowledge creation can take place outside traditional spaces and not just by the so-called experts. It demonstrated, both theoretically and practically, that the knowledge of peasant farmers (women and men) is both legitimate and innovative, complex, geographically specific and informed. *Raita Teerpu* recognises traditional knowledge and takes it one step further by providing a platform for a plurality of knowledge to be discussed. One male interviewee stated: *'In the jury there is a countervailing power. Some question-and-answer sessions were really shameful in how some witnesses misused their power. The way the answers were given [by specialist witnesses] was really intimidating, but a collective of people were able to say: "It is nonsense.....the officials say they are listening to farmers but they are not, especially not to the dryland and indigenous farmers".'*

It became very clear: current science is not dealing with the complexity of the farmers' fields, modes of production or the broader village dynamics. As one participant said, *'Small farmers manage complex risk systems and inter-cropping and these are the kind of systems that do not feature in the laboratory, which deal with isolated variables in clinical experiments'*. The jury shows that there is a mismatch between the knowledge produced in the lab and that produced in the village. Furthermore, corporate interests form a powerful lobby in agricultural research. As one participant said: *'Intellectual property rules are changing the nature of science and the nature of the scientific questions. You ask if there is something that can be commercialised and how it can benefit corporations rather than how to improve livelihoods...a move to protect knowledge through IP'*.

The economics of agricultural research are linked to intellectual property (IP). IP rights effectively control knowledge and consequently act as a driver for knowledge production in agricultural research. One commented: *'The public sector has produced a range of rice varieties; small-scale farmers have produced millions. ... The innovative practice of indigenous farmers, maximising ecological systems to use resources with great efficiency, is all discounted in most scientific literature and yet it is the most innovative. This is a difficult task but it is needed to protect against biopiracy'*.

Indian modern agricultural research has become a key intellectual instrument in

commodifying natural and common resources, using the power of IP to protect knowledge creation. Corporations set the agricultural agenda. Academic research uses its power to omit indigenous (and women's) knowledge and innovation. Both appropriate the commons for bio-prospecting, carbon markets and bio fuels.

The jury offered a counter-intellectual instrument embedded in the imaginations of women and peasant farmers. According to them research should move into areas that are more aligned towards farmer-centred agricultural development, rather than profit. For example, abandon hybrids and focus research on dryland rain-fed crops, such as millet.

ADARSA has some influence, but can of course only achieve modest change itself. Its ability to induce social and environmental change depends on the broader political economy and ecology of the nation state. ADARSA has strengthened the engagement of civil society with key agricultural issues. Its limitations reflect the wider limitations of civil society in stimulating meaningful change for the poor and marginalised. Furthermore, it is impossible to measure this change. It may only bear fruit in ten years time or more...

2.9 Citizens' juries' contribution to development

The following points list the contributions the programme has made in relation to development, according to one of the evaluators (India):

- The implementation of the right to participate in decision-making and social life (fundamental human right).
- The building of human assets (skills, voice) and social assets (strengthening networks and local organisations) within a sustainable livelihood framework.
- Reversal of policy-making processes by making the powerful (donors, corporations, NGOs) more accountable to the weak and marginalised, ensuring that 'development' meets the needs and aspirations of the vulnerable and excluded.
- Challenging racism and developing innovative non-discriminatory practice through the active inclusion of marginalised communities.
- Influencing the media to be accountable to issues that matter for the majority, e.g. agriculture.
- Locating agriculture and food systems at the heart of rural development.
- Mainstreaming gender in participatory processes.
- Recognising and strengthening the rights of peasants.
- Encouraging more pluralistic views on the kind of research and knowledge needed today: for whom, for what, why, how and with what effects.
- Opening a communication channel between small and marginal farmers from South Asia, the Andes, Iran, and West Africa, which unites their voices on agricultural and food systems issues.

As one male interviewee commented: *'A large group of actors consciously or unconsciously do not engage with the small people who form the majority. Therefore development goals are set by a vocal and powerful minority and this goal becomes the framing agenda. They don't give the "little people" a chance to set the agenda. This is a conspiracy and with businesses ganging up together. Or perhaps, to give them the*

benefit of doubt, they honestly think that “little people” are not able to contribute. Perhaps there is genuine apprehension that they can’t engage in this process’.

3. Conclusion

Both reviews point towards a clear focus of the programme: by centring attention on food sovereignty and agricultural research they offer a relevant contribution to the situation of small and marginal farmers in South Asia and West Africa, where these farmers are still the big silent majority. The programme includes a clear gender focus. Activities seemed to fit in well with the priorities of small and marginal farmers (men and women), as could be witnessed in several interviews and video recordings during the Raita Teerpu and ECIDs. Many of the objectives for this first period, like the capacity building and experiential learning on deliberative approaches, as well as the involvement of research institutes and scientists in these processes, has been accomplished, at least in India and Mali.

In participatory action research (PAR) it is not only the outcome that is important but also the process by which these results were achieved. The choice of methods in PAR is thus crucial. The citizens’ juries are a clear attempt to engage in PAR ‘from below’. The process has enabled the participants of these spaces to develop high-quality knowledge and get engaged in an emerging process. It forced farmers and citizens to take an attitude of inquiry, which can become one of life-long learning. This emerging process has certainly deepened their understanding of the issues to be addressed and has developed their capacity for co-inquiry both individually and collectively. The participation of the rural poor in planning and decision-making during the citizens’ juries has been impressive. Furthermore, the relevance of outcomes – both its practical significance and the degree to which the knowledge from the action research process contributes to realising the intentions of the actors – has been high. The outcomes also have a high degree of factual accuracy, because of the thorough process followed in the deliberations.

Citizens’ juries allowed researchers to see farmers as active and knowledgeable actors who can be involved in scientific innovation. Of course, the alternative design of participatory farmer-led agricultural research needs a whole lot more than a citizens’ jury or activities that primarily show the need for such research. In Mali there is

probably the best opportunity to get food sovereignty and small farmer's agriculture on the agenda of research institutes. The new phase of policy dialogue and dissemination has to show this. In countries with a different political context, the change will definitely be slower, but also in Mali because the forces in favour of the *status quo* will come to the surface when trying to push for change.

Thus to be able to review the lasting impact on the agricultural research agenda more activities are needed during the remainder of the programme. These activities will uncover the real obstacles to change. Thus the effectiveness of the action research in helping to change policy and research practice has yet to be shown. As Kurt Lewin, one of the pioneers in action research, comments: *'If you want to know how things really are just try to change them'*. The resistance to changing the existing corporate research agenda and that of the other interests behind the existing agenda could well be much bigger than the collective power of a verdict of small and marginal farmers. As a male interviewee commented: *'I wonder if deliberative processes are powerful enough to tackle vested interests'*.

The sustainability of the intervention is also difficult to assess yet. Whether this programme will change the situation or poverty level of farmers is an open question, but the experience of many of the participants is certainly one of empowerment.

Annex 1

Executive Summary: Mid-Term Evaluation, Democratising the Governance of Food and Agricultural Research, West Africa Component

Pierre Kwan, Consultant, June 2011

Process approach and concept

1. Agricultural research has done little so far to change the situation of small producers and poor people. This is because their problems cannot be addressed effectively by purely technical solutions, but also need to be tackled through the broader issue of governance. The hypothesis is that democratising research by involving small producers and citizens in the governance of the process will result in research goals that better serve the public good. This is particularly relevant given the major issues associated with the evolution of small-scale farming.
2. The political context in Mali is a favourable environment in which to tackle this general issue, as the shift towards democracy and decentralisation fosters freedom of expression and encourages different elements of society to engage in public debate.
3. An additional advantage is the fact that Mali has made food sovereignty the guiding principle of its agricultural policy. This has led to a fresh approach to the governance of agricultural research, in accordance with the framework agricultural law, and raised questions about a model of agriculture in which family farming is set against the kind of agriculture promoted by agri-business. This whole process of citizen deliberation has been defined and guided by the relationship between ‘food sovereignty’ and the ‘governance of agricultural research’. This relationship was the main focus of the preparatory workshops, which also set the debate in the context of the framework agricultural law. The discussions between producers during the two ECIDs (Espace Citoyen d’ Interpellation Démocratique) clearly show that the link between agricultural research and food sovereignty has been made at several levels, as do some of the ensuing recommendations.
4. Agricultural research in Mali has been going through a process of institutional reform since the 1990s, aimed at fundamentally changing its mode of governance and

involving producers in decision-making processes. This has largely been done through the creation of regional and national commissions of research users (CRU and CNU) within the CNRA (National Committee on Agricultural Research), participatory formulation of the long-term strategic plan for agricultural research, the regionalisation of research, and modes of funding that favour user-led research. Examining the strengths and weaknesses of agricultural research in Mali has helped feed broader citizen reflection on the priorities and governance of research in West Africa.

5. The fact that the conceptual framework has a thematic entry point enables participants to explore different aspects of the problems associated with the governance of research. The relationship between the themes under discussion and the notion of food sovereignty was clearly established, and participants came away with a reasonable grasp of the complex topic of the transformation of knowledge. Their work established the links between the themes of the two ECIDs – especially in the pre-ECID workshops, which not only showed the articulation and complementarity between the two ECIDs, but also provided an opportunity to discuss the concept of food sovereignty in greater depth with participating farmers.

6. The concept of the deliberative process is highly relevant to the political context in Mali. The progress made in democracy and decentralisation unquestionably make it the most favourable setting in the sub-region in which to conduct deliberative processes, as the authorities are open to consultation with civil society and there is public debate in the country, albeit in a limited form. Nevertheless, much still needs to be done to enable civil society to play an active role in the formulation and evaluation of public policies, which are heavily influenced by donors. The principle of inclusion underpinning the deliberative process contributes to this democratisation by involving disadvantaged social groups and placing considerable emphasis on gender issues and the inclusion of women – in accordance with the general objectives of this remarkable initiative.

Recommendations

7. The design of the process could be improved by changing the way that stages of work are organised – especially in the first stage of the process. It should be noted that the proposed approach described below retains many aspects of the initial

process, but would require much more time and financial resources. Also, that what follows is presented as a possible option for future ECIDs, not an alternative to the rigorous procedure followed by the steering committee for the ECID in Nyéléni.

The first stage would cover the relationship between the notion of food sovereignty and the model of agriculture in Mali, as part of the ‘process’ of mobilising local and regional actors through workshops held in the different agro-ecological zones of West Africa. The second stage – the actual ECID – would consider the governance of the conventional agricultural research system in light of the results of the previous stage. The emphasis would be on considering producers’ specific situations and agro-ecological contexts according to different domains, priorities, agricultural research methods and modes of governance. The third stage would consider alternative agricultural research models for each agro-ecological zone. Once again, this would be part of the regional- and local-level ‘process’, as exploration of this groundbreaking issue should be based on the realities on the ground.

Implementation of the process

8. Enlarging the policy support group to include the steering committee was beneficial in terms of fostering social mobilisation and freedom to act. Although it can be difficult to get people with different views to engage in the process, this problem can be addressed through overall process co-ordination. This citizen initiative is widely acknowledged as being sufficiently open and plural to include actors with different outlooks (local and national elected officials, representatives of official public research, AGRA (Alliance for the Green Revolution in Africa, etc.) in the steering committee and the enlarged committee, and among key figures invited to play a central role in these citizen deliberations.

9. The level of commitment shown by member organisations on the steering committee was satisfactory. The decision to organise proceedings so that the executive committee’s operational role dovetailed into steering committee meetings was well judged, as it helped reduce the practical problems posed by distance, members’ availability and the expense of organising meetings, while facilitating collaboration with the regional co-ordinators. Members of the steering committee

were very positive about the way this committee functioned, in terms of circulating information, the openness of the procedure, the non-hierarchical collaboration, the trust that was established and the use of members' skills. Its activities were in accordance with the project's objectives.

10. The committee of independent observers did not function satisfactorily, as there was relatively little prior internal discussion of the methodology, despite the abundant documentation provided by the steering committee, and its members were not always available to attend the ECIDs. This prevented the committee as a whole from fulfilling its role, although members who did attend the ECIDs threw themselves into the task and brought a critical and constructive approach to the proceedings.

11. The mobilisation of a large number of journalists resulted in wide coverage by different branches of the local, national and international media. The number and diversity of media (national and international TV, radio and press) represented at the press conferences before, during and after the ECIDs was quite remarkable, and the high profile that they gave these events – the themes under discussion, the participants, the rural world and its problems – set a precedent that will constitute a watershed in the history of citizen deliberations, not just in West Africa but on a global level.

12. Members of the steering committee were very positive about the procedure and content of the support provided by Kéné Conseils and IIED. A measure of how this helped strengthen partner organisations can be seen in their appropriation of the only external element of this initiative – its funding – as the institutional framework and governance in West Africa ensured that the management and allocation of funds before, during and after the ECIDs was largely controlled at the local level.

Making funds available to the regional co-ordinators facilitated flexible and efficient financial management that could adapt to the evolution of the process, and encouraged the steering committee to operate in a transparent and accountable manner. This initiative is the result of collaboration and co-operation in which the complementary role played by African actors is no less important than that of the global co-ordinator and IIED. It is part of a long-term effort that began with farmers at the grassroots level, and has directly involved African actors in steering a process that

they have now appropriated, motivated by a keen desire to (re-)kindle democracy in West Africa.

13. The initiative's qualitative effects on partners include increased interest in citizen deliberation, consolidated skills in deliberative methods, and a strategic rapprochement between local partners. These qualitative effects are remarkable in the current political context of West Africa, and will help establish rural and civil society as drivers of social change. They are in accordance with the project objectives.

Recommendations

14. In future the steering committee should have clear guarantees that independent observers will be able to provide the requisite input before (preparatory phase) and during the ECIDs. The President of the committee of independent observers should be able to devote enough time to its internal functioning and methodology, ensure that members are available when necessary, and circulate information among them to ensure that they are all up to speed with the committee's work. It would be useful for this committee to have a permanent secretary, who would be responsible for instigating, co-ordinating and developing its work.

15. It would be good to share the lessons from this experience more widely, given the important role and positive impact of the media. A document setting out the objectives, strategy and budget for communication could be produced, describing the proactive mechanism that enabled the journalists who followed the ECIDs in Nyéléni to produce such high quality work.

16. IIED and the regional co-ordinating committee now need to consider (a) securing dedicated funding to establish these spaces on a permanent basis; and (b) perpetuating the democratic process of citizen deliberation on research priorities and governance.

Citizens' spaces for democratic deliberation

17. The composition of the jury was sufficiently diverse and balanced to legitimise its claim to represent producers and citizens. The fact that it drew on various organisations provided a broad basis for selecting candidates from the different regions and rural professional groups. All viewpoints were represented:

farmers, herders, fishermen, forest users, artisans, processors and consumers, and it should also be noted that a large proportion of participants at the ECIDs were women. On the whole jurors demonstrated both the benefits of getting involved in this type of initiative, and a remarkable capacity to do so.

18. The ECIDs provided a particularly suitable framework for citizen deliberation. This is largely due to the fact that the procedure governing the process was respected, and because the methodology resulted in a high-quality process. While these technical aspects are certainly significant, it is equally important to note the ‘democratic quality’ of these citizen deliberations and the emerging political dynamic that is giving farmer-citizens real power to speak and act.

The transparency of the ECIDs was ensured by the presence of members of the committee of independent observers and specially invited members of the enlarged committee (HCCT (Haut Conseil des Collectivités Territoriales), AGRA) and research institutions, who attended the events as expert witnesses. One limitation was that none of the committee of independent observers attended the preparatory workshop, and so they were therefore unable to assess the process in its entirety.

19. The final list of expert witnesses for the two ECIDs struck a good balance between different types of view: public research institutions, the private sector, farmer organisations, universities and civil society. In the event, this balance was slightly altered by the absence of a representative from the private sector who had been invited to participate as an expert witness.

The overall approach to the themes covered by the ECIDs seems to have been to consider a wide range of subjects, disciplines and approaches rather than addressing opposing views on a particular subject. Finally, it should be noted that the time allocated to the expert witnesses could have been managed more even-handedly.

20. The commissions were set up to create spaces where participants would feel comfortable discussing the different themes with others involved in the same occupation (farming, livestock rearing, fishing, etc.), with whom they would have an affinity and shared understanding of rural problems. Great care was taken to create safe spaces for women, hence the women-only commissions. This mechanism also made it possible to recognise – and work with – the differences between jurors rather than treating them as a homogenous group.

The recommendations made by these four sets of producers are a good example of how the results of each commission's work were triangulated and verified. This triangulation – and the concordance of the different commissions' recommendations – further validates the results and confirms their relevance for the rural world, and is another indicator of the quality of the process followed during the ECIDs.

21. Each of the four commissions presented their recommendations to the authorities and the media, giving a clear account of producers' concerns regarding the priorities and governance of agricultural research in West Africa. The decision to allow each commission to present the results of its work rather than prepare a joint synthesis for the authorities and media was well judged, as it seems to have allowed the producers to communicate their diverse messages to the audience.

22. The ECIDs contributed to the objectives of the initiative through their transformative effects on participants. For citizen jurors, they offered a unique opportunity to learn about research and the issues associated with the modernisation of agriculture, and to pass this information on to their communities. They also provided a remarkable lesson in citizenship, encouraging participants to play a more active role in running community affairs in their respective localities. For the steering committee, the ECID was a special opportunity to learn about the methodology of citizen deliberation and direct democracy in action.

Recommendations

23. In future, ECIDs should proceed in three stages of equal length in order to give greater emphasis to the first stage, which involves basic thematic and methodological training. The thematic element examines the concept of food sovereignty and agricultural models, and includes a presentation on the agricultural research system in West Africa. The aim of the methodological element is for jurors to prepare a framework for analysis that will enable them to identify the main lines of questioning about the governance of agricultural research for food sovereignty, which will then determine the composition of the commissions. This is one possible option for future ECIDs on this theme. However, it should be noted that it is much lengthier and more time-consuming and expensive than the option that was finally retained for the two ECIDs in Nyéléni.

24 Rural actors' influence on the governance of agricultural research should also be reinforced through the framework of decentralisation. Pursuing the process at the regional level would help implement the recommendations from the ECIDs through two complementary axes: revitalising the regional commissions of users of research results (CRU), and developing producers' knowledge through alternative research models. This would entail supporting the CRU from Sikasso region in formulating and testing a procedure to revitalise the commissions and alternative research models that could inspire CRUs in other regions. Finally, a whole series of actions should be envisaged to inform regional and national actors concerned with the governance of research (local government, farmer organisations, political and administrative authorities) about the outcomes of the ECIDs.

25. At the West Africa regional level, the priority action after the ECIDs is providing information for regional and national actors involved in this domain (local government, farmer organisations, political and administrative authorities). Consideration needs to be given to the place of farmer organisations, and their relevance and effectiveness in association with regional agricultural councils. Could this kind of platform be effective without the local governments that guide, plan, build and evaluate local development? Or should more autonomous farmers' strategies be developed to re-orient agricultural research for greater food sovereignty in West Africa? All these questions need to be discussed in the post-ECID work planned for the next two years, which will include round tables, farmer consultations, feeding back results, and policy dialogue with decision-makers and representatives of public research at the national and international levels.

Annex 2

Executive Summary, A Mid-Term Reflexive Evaluation, Alliance for Democratizing Agricultural Research in South Asia (ADARSA)

Dr. Jasber Singh, December 2010

Introduction

The IIED project on Democratizing the Governance of Food Systems involves a decentralised and bottom-up process enabling farmers and other citizens to decide what type of agricultural research is needed for food sovereignty and to push for change in policies and practice. It is operating in four regions, with one country acting as host for each region: West Africa (Mali), South Asia (India), West Asia (Iran) and the Andean region in Latin America (Bolivia/Peru).

In South Asia, the process is called the *Alliance for Democratizing Agricultural Research in South Asia* (ADARSA). ADARSA's work includes commissioning descriptive research in Nepal and India into agricultural research, setting up a similar process in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, and holding discussions between farmers and scientists in these countries. In the host country, India, ADARSA recently held a 'citizens' jury' (*Raita Teerpu*).

This document reports on the findings of a mid-term reflexive evaluation of ADARSA, which took place from January 2009 to March 2010. The reflexive evaluation combined participant observations, open interviews of nearly 45 specialist stakeholders across South Asia and Europe, field visits and secondary analysis to reflect on ADARSA's approach and draw some initial conclusions and recommendations for the next phase of the work.

Background: ADARSA in a South Asia context

Throughout the reflexive evaluation process participants placed ADARSA in a broadly-defined South Asian context. Strong concerns were raised over agricultural issues (such as the Green Revolution and farmer suicides), the broader democratic process of nation states and the growing influence of globalisation, especially free

trade agreements (FTA). Many of the participants went further and redefined the context from a problem to a full-blown crisis: of knowledge, the financial system, the climate, oil, agriculture/food system, democracy and decision making, the power of the market and farmers' lack of power, and the reduction in biodiversity and biocultural diversity.

These and similar thoughts aired indicate that ADARSA has to be understood within a context of multiple overlapping crises which are in turn linked to the farmers' and peasants' socio-environmental worlds. Within India many members of civil society highlighted the lack of public involvement in national policies and legislation at the local level, for example the Biotechnology Bill, Seed Bill, Plant Variety Act and the National Biodiesel Policy. A number of interviewees highlighted the fact that the ADARSA project must be seen within this undemocratic context of development and policy making, which is occurring without the involvement of the very people it affects.

ADARSA's outcomes and strengths

- *Building democracy.* The Raita Teerpu brought farmers, especially women, *Dalits* and *Adivasis* from different parts of Karnataka together to assess the benefits of current agricultural research in India. It was the first ever farmers' jury to explore such a topic. Its value was that it provided a platform and opportunity for marginalised communities to speak and be heard collectively and to exchange views with the scientific agricultural research community. Many participants indicated that, as well as being a research tool, the jury aided participants' social learning and acted as a form of popular education, especially on how the agricultural establishment viewed farming practice and development. The public education element of the jury has significant value, which separates it positively from traditional forms of research.
- *Developing partnerships.* One of the key achievements of the Raita Teerpu and ADARSA is to unite a range of different stakeholders. As a consequence it has enhanced the networking capacity of organisations in the South Asia region, particularly in Karnataka. The regular meetings of the partners involved in both ADARSA and the jury have provided a platform for NGOs, farmer movements, the media and scientists to share ideas and to collectively steer the project. ADARSA has

also opened a communication channel between small and marginal farmers from South Asia and farmers in the Andes, Iran, and West Africa, thereby uniting their voices on agricultural and food systems issues.

- *Highly effective dissemination.* Reporting of the process successfully reached local, regional, national Indian and international media outlets.
- *Gender and being inclusive.* The significance of the jury's inclusion of women, *Dalits* and *Adivasis* is profound and immeasurable. There is the perception within certain elements in India that the opinions of *Dalits* and *Adivasis* aren't valid, whether due to direct racism or poor education (indirect racism). The jury has gone some way towards representing *Dalit* and *Adivasi* communities as strong, articulate, informed farmers instead of as poor and illiterate. The steering committee also insisted that 50% of the Raita Teerpu must be women. The fact that this representation was achieved is significant considering the poor social position of women in parts of India, and given that women are central to agriculture in South Asia. The *Dalit* and *Adivasi* women participants, initially lacking in confidence, were actively encouraged to have their say. In addition, young people were included in the process as researchers, and they learned much about *Adivasi* ways of life.
- *Challenging assumptions about knowledge and power.* The jury has demonstrated, both theoretically and practically, that the knowledge of peasants is legitimate, innovative, complex, geographically-specific and informed. The jury process enabled the recognition that legitimate knowledge can be created outside traditional spaces and not just by the so-called experts. For example, the jurors highlighted the need to abandon hybrids and focus research on dryland rainfed crops, such as millet. This moves research into areas that are more aligned towards farmer-centred agricultural development, rather than profit or modernity. By changing the questions that research asks, the jurors have the potential to hand the power from the corporations and scientists/institutions back to the farmers, and especially women. In Nepal, ADARSA's research into current agriculture research priorities concluded that governmental institutions and public bodies were driving the direction of research towards a corporate influenced public-private domain.

ADARSA's lessons learnt and challenges

- *The South Asian geo-political landscape.* The political situation in Pakistan has meant that it has not been able to be physically represented in the project as planned, despite the efforts of the ADARSA team. This highlights the challenge of working across regions where there is political instability. Furthermore, project partners expressed a feeling of Indian dominance within the project. The challenge will be how to effectively conduct projects that involve both small and more powerful larger nations and that can continue to engage despite political disturbances.
- *Objectivity.* There were some perceptions of bias and lack of objectivity in the jury. These are valid. The IIED and DDS project organisers are acutely aware that organisers can introduce bias into the jury process. This admission of inherent bias is refreshing and honest; the organisers instituted strict and transparent procedures to safeguard against such bias. They increased transparency through the use of video-documentation of the entire process, allowing third parties to assess the process and make their own judgement on the existence of bias. This, along with a steering committee, the careful selection of witnesses and jurors, an oversight panel and invited observers, all provide robust procedural safeguards that are transparent and open to public scrutiny.
- *Increasing inclusion.* Despite its success in including 50% women in the jury, there were far more men than women on ADARSA's steering committee; women accounted for just 19% of the seats. Ideally, there should have been better representation of women here, especially given its strategic role. Future work should insist on reserving 40-50% of places on the steering committee for women.
- *Balancing different administration styles.* Tensions arose from IIED's financial accounting style, which is far from participatory. The administrator of ADARSA has had to balance the needs of two different approaches: ADARSA's participatory one with the accounting requirements of an international NGO.
- *Influencing the culture and outputs of research institutions.* For example, democratising agricultural research would require a radical change in the way many agricultural research centres operate. How ADARSA proposes to influence these centres is not clear and requires further thought.

- *Integrating the lessons from ADARSA into IIED.* A number of interviewees from IIED were clear that the lessons coming out of ADARSA were not being adequately integrated into IIED as an organisation. The reasons they gave related to the lack of any structured space for collective learning from different projects, whether conducted by IIED staff or externally. This explains the lack of institutionalised learning around participation and more broadly from different projects.

Recommendations

For ADARSA

1. Building communities of practice in South Asia and beyond

- ADARSA has successfully demonstrated that farmers can make a unique and necessary contribution to agricultural research. It can build on this to address other issues affecting the region, such as climate change, hunger and malnutrition, regional security, rapid economic development, growth in biofuels and other cash crops, free trade agreements and bilateral trade. Whilst it is unrealistic to expect ADARSA to tackle all of these challenges, it is crucial that ADARSA remains mindful of, and positively contributes to, the region's broader concerns.
- Social movements are making significant gains in creating and sustaining alternative paradigms. ADARSA has insights to share with both civil society groups and social movements. ADARSA could explore further how it connects and builds sustainable interfaces with both civil society and social movements in a more effective, robust and sustainable manner in South Asia and beyond.
- Influencing agricultural research remains a challenge for ADARSA. It could foster direct links with agricultural centres to develop durable and equitable interfaces between researchers and small and marginal farmers and researchers.

2. Increasing research and policy impact

- ADARSA could expand its descriptive research into a comparative study of the state of agricultural research across South Asia, highlighting commonalities and differences. It could develop a policy briefing paper on the project for South Asian organisations and institutions directly involved in agricultural research or food

systems. It could also significantly contribute to the policy community by running workshops on ADARSA's wider lessons with policy representatives in agricultural research both in the EU and South Asia.

- ADARSA could further develop its use of local, regional and international media. It could explore the use of new digital media techniques to widen dissemination and support alliance building between South Asian nations, and with the rest of the world.

- There needs to be further development of the interface between farmers and the media. It would be useful for ADARSA to explore how farmers can be more actively involved in or with the media and this could go a long way towards raising the profile of agriculture in the South Asian region.

3. *Becoming more inclusive*

- ADARSA should remain committed to gender inclusion and reserve 40-50% of seats on steering committee for women. ADARSA should also consider devising a youth inclusion strategy for future activities.

4. *Improving project management*

- Regular financial updates and forecasts could be developed in a participatory manner with the global partners and regional co-ordinators, which could then be translated into accounting formats for IIED, reducing the administrative burden of managing ADARSA. Embedding evaluation within the ADARSA process could also help improve project management.

For IIED

- *Integrating lessons better.* Identify and address structural barriers within IIED that impede the uptake of lessons from ADARSA's work. This will benefit both the effectiveness of ADARSA and of IIED. Furthermore, it could provide IIED with the opportunity to allow knowledge from the South, in particular peasant knowledge, to shape and prioritise its future work and directions.

- *Learning by doing.* Give people within IIED and the wider research community more hands-on experience with citizens' juries and other participatory methods used by IIED's Agroecology and Food Sovereignty Team.