

It is time for a radical change in agriculture research systems!

We need to look at researchers in agriculture differently, considering that they come and go. Over the years, many have visited thousands of poor communities around the world to study poverty and raise hopes of alleviation. Many of them have returned to comfortable academic positions, their reports have languished with powerful institutional experts in different countries. But the poor remain prisoners of their misery, hopelessness, humiliation and poverty.

No wonder research is seen as a fruitless activity by many among the poor, of presumably far greater benefit – materially and in terms of careers – to the researchers than to their poor subjects. No wonder researchers are so often greeted with skepticism or with open hostility.

Don't send researchers to the poor or pretend they are working for their betterment. Instead, we believe it's time to send them activists – men and women of passion, vision and commitment – who will help mobilize the poor to effect positive changes in their lives and their environments.

I am trailing below a unique and unprecedented consultation, followed by a very successful, transparent, inclusive, democratic and bottom up process, representing all facets of opinion to ensure that there is no bias in the entire process. As a result the action AR4D needs of those applying and using the action research (small holder farmers and labour) has been ascertained.

A JURY ON DEMOCRACY

A Verdict on Science

By

S.G.Vombatkere**

The silicon capital of India , Bangalore , was the scene of yet another First, which however was quite at variance with the money-spinning IT industry. This occasion was Raita Teerpu or Farmers' Jury, when small and marginal farmers of Karnataka spoke out about current agricultural research on December 5, 2009.

The Farmers' Jury is a unique social experiment, the first of its kind in India and probably the world, aimed at democratizing the governance of agricultural research. This is an initiative of the Alliance for Democratising Agricultural Research in South Asia (ADARSA), supported by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in U.K; Deccan Development Society (DDS), Hyderabad ; Centre for Agriculture Media, Dharwad; Institute for Cultural Research and Action (ICRA), Bangalore ; and Chipko of Karnataka.

ADARSA formed a 18-member Steering Committee to provide overall guidance for the process. Based on this, volunteers of Roshni Nilaya School of Social Work, Mangalore, interviewed 100 small and marginal farmers in all the districts of Karnataka. This was followed by screening according to criteria set by the Steering Committee, to identify 15 women and 15 men who would form the Farmers' Jury with representation from all districts and including dalits, adivasis, small farmers, dryland farmers and landless labourers. An Oversight Panel consisting of senior-level people from civil society with a record of public service, headed by former Supreme Court Chief Justice M.N.Venkatachalaiah, was also constituted for detached observation to ensure that there was no bias in the entire process.

Proceedings

The actual program began by assembling the Jury members from across Karnataka at the Fireflies Intercultural Centre just outside Bangalore on November 30, 2009. They were housed separately and not permitted to meet anybody except for logistics volunteers, and they also dined separately from other participants (including members of the Steering and Oversight Committees) in the program.

During the sessions held on three successive days, the Jury was seated on an elevated platform with all due deference, and were addressed by 12 selected "specialist witnesses" who were government officials, farmers' movements activists, media persons, agricultural scientists, social scientists, agriculture industrialists, academics, and social and development activists. Thus, all facets of opinion were presented before the Jury. The names of the persons on the Jury, Steering Committee, Oversight Panel and specialist witnesses may be seen at <http://www.raitateerpu.com/the_process.html>.

The daily proceedings were videographed as a record. In four 90-minute sessions per day for 3 days, each

of the specialist witnesses was allotted 30 minutes to speak and 60 minutes allowed for the Jury to confer amongst themselves, to ask questions and hear the response from the specialist witness. After hearing the specialist witnesses, on December 4, 2009, the Jury went into conclave to finalise their verdict.

The Verdict

The Farmers' Jury pronounced their verdict on December 5, 2009, at a public function presided over by former Supreme Court Chief Justice M.N.Venkatachalaiah, at the Institution of Agricultural Technologists in Bangalore . The function, attended by over 200 people, began with an explanation of the concept and process of the Farmers' Jury. An international expert and consultant to the Farmers' Jury process, Dr.Michel Pimbert spoke about similar concerns in Africa (e.g., Benin and Mali) and South America (e.g., Bolivia and Peru). It was clear that the Farmers' Jury as a social experiment was unique and without precedent. Members of the Steering Committee and Oversight Panel presented their frank impressions and finally spokespersons of the Farmers' Jury read out the verdict that they had arrived at after hearing the specialist witnesses and due internal discussions and deliberations. The 22-point verdict reads as follows:

1. Today the farmer is unable to return to traditional farming and nor can he pursue expensive modern farming practices. There is great need for pro-farmer agricultural research.
2. Government must recognize farmers' innovations, respect the innovators and compensate them the way it compensates scientists in formal institutions.
3. We do not want research in hybrid crops that demand repeated purchase of expensive chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Instead, we demand research on local landraces that adapt to their ecosystems, are drought-resistant, provide quality and tasty food and fodder, and can be produced by the farmer himself.
4. Information on agricultural research done in public-private partnership must be transparent and accessible to farmers.
5. Agricultural universities and other public sector research institutions must make farmers equal partners in research and offer farmers an equal share in profits resulting from research.
6. When private or multinational corporations conduct research in their own or farmers' fields, the effects of these trials on farmers' health, the changes in the soil and the impact on the surrounding environment must be monitored by citizens' groups including farmers. This information should be made known every year to the farming community through media and Gram Sabhas. If there are negative consequences (resulting from such trials), the companies or corporations must be held responsible and accountable for those consequences.
7. Farmer Field Days and Farmer Field Schools conducted on various crops must be held under the jurisdiction of all Gram Panchayats in the state.
8. Information related to agricultural research and technology must be made available in local languages and made accessible to farmers.
9. We feel that sufficient research on sugarcane, which is an important crop in Karnataka, is not being carried out. A research centre for improvement of sugarcane cultivation must be established.
10. Weather-based crop insurance schemes must be abolished and every farm must be made a unit for the assessment of losses and resultant compensation.
11. In order to make water and soil testing available to farmers, government must set up and use mobile laboratories.
12. There must be a scientific system to predict reliable information on rainfall, and this information must be available to farmers.
13. In partnership with the farming community, government must establish at every hobli level, cottage industries for processing agricultural produce and value addition. Such cottage industries must be related to the local crop produced and must be funded by government.
14. Seed banks of local seed varieties must be established at the level of every Gram Panchayat. Seed distribution, seed festivals, field trials and seed improvement programs must be through Gram Panchayats with government support.
15. We oppose anti-farmer seed laws.
16. In view of the fact that farmers constitute 70% of the population and the farming sector makes a very important contribution to the economic system, the state and central governments must have a separate agriculture budget.
17. Pastures and tanks reserved for grazing of cattle and sheep have disappeared. They must be renewed and made available to the farming community.
18. In order to educate the younger generation on agriculture and to help them develop interest in this sector, agriculture must be incorporated in school syllabi.
19. Stop grabbing land from farmers in the name of development and Special Economic Zones.

20. The Forest Department must stop distributing saplings of Acacia and Eucalyptus to farmers. Instead of monoculture planting of such species that harm the environment and deplete ground water, the Department must plant diverse species that protect land and water and are needed by animals, birds and human beings.
21. Small farmers, farm labour, artisanal communities such as carpenters and potters who produce farm-related instruments must be taken into partnership in formulation of agricultural policies that are location-specific.
22. Shepherds and pastoralists must be part of the Karnataka Sheep Development Board and must play a role in the formulation of related policies.

What is special about the experiment?

The social experiment of Farmers' Jury has brought out some interesting facets of rural culture which are not really surprising but which bear highlighting:

Women members of the Jury were observed asking questions just as much as the men.

The questions to the expert witnesses were information-seeking, often searching and sometimes pointed, but never with rancour or ill-intent.

The Jury members who had met together for the first time on November 30, 2009, were always well behaved and cordial with each other regardless of their varied castes and socio-economic backgrounds.

Small and marginal farmers may be illiterate and uneducated in the conventional sense, but their deep knowledge of farming and understanding of the complexity of nature and the inter-dependence of all things living and non-living, spoke volumes for their innate cultural strength arising from 5,000 years of agricultural tradition of India.

The message of the Farmers' Jury

In the context of climate change and the economic situations, there is a growing number of agriculture scientists who opine that the current trend of agricultural research cannot ensure food security with justice and equity for the under-fed or starving millions across the continents. These scientists, who are not a minority in the scientific community, are free from the corrupting influence of MNCs in the seeds, farming and retail food sectors, and hence practice true science. It is these scientists who are addressed by the Jury's verdict to make their science relevant to on-the-ground situations and recognise farmers' knowledge systems.

It is abundantly clear that business-as-usual, market-oriented agricultural research will not only not address food security but will intensify existing and growing hunger and malnourishment, and resultantly spread the existing and growing social discontentment and militancy. Importantly, this verdict comes from people who are not heard because planners and scientists at national and state levels presume that they are ignorant or lazy. The Farmers' Jury initiative and their verdict demolishes all doubts as to their competence to judge what they need and what is good for them, and also as to their mature ecological awareness and understanding that is absent among many formally trained scientists.

Living the Constitution

This social experiment in democracy designed and led by P.V.Satheesh of DDS is path-breaking because for the first time ever, poor and marginalized farmers were enabled to form a responsible jury, and show that they are the best judges for their own progress and development. This is giving a voice to the voiceless.

Highly qualified scientists, even if they are committed, are often unaware of the actual needs and problems of poor and marginalized farmers who form the bulk of the agricultural community and are an important part of the economy since they feed the nation. The Jury's verdict clearly shows that farmers are not against science and scientific research, but they demand that science be used with due regard to people's needs. This is because it is well known that there are scientists who conduct research and produce results that benefit those who pay their salaries or finance their research – and practice "bad science".

The Jury's verdict demands more inclusive governance to "pull in" participation of the farming community. This is especially required because Chief Ministers and the Prime Minister's Office are regularly and routinely advised by the industrial lobby (CII and FICCI) even on agriculture matters without any manner of farmer representation.

The Constitution of India can be brought to life for over 60% Indians only when science and technology can be made to work for their progress and development – living the Constitution instead of leaving the Constitution, as at present.

(1,847 words of text)

**Maj Gen S.G.Vombatkere retired as the Additional Director General Discipline & Vigilance in Army HQ, New Delhi , in 1996 after 35 years service in the Indian Army with combat, staff and technical experience. He holds a PhD degree in Structural Dynamics from I.I.T., Madras , and the President of India awarded him Visishta Seva Medal in 1993 for distinguished service rendered in Ladakh. Since retirement, he is engaged in voluntary work with Mysore Grahakara Parishat, and is a member of National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL). He coordinates and lectures a Course on Science, Technology and Sustainable Development for undergraduate students of University of Iowa , USA , and two universities of Canada , who spend a semester at Mysore as part of their Studies Abroad in South India . He is Adjunct Associate Professor of the University of Iowa , USA .

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Tel:0821-2515187; E-mail:sg9kere@live.com

From: Calestous Juma <cjuma30@gmail.com>
To: FARA network <fara-net@dgroups.org>
Sent: Mon, 7 December, 2009 1:30:06 AM
Subject: [fara-net] Call for input: Agricultural innovation in Africa

http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/19783/new_harvest.html?breadcrumb=%2Fproject%2F60%2Fagricultural_innovation_in_africa

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posted yesterday by Subhash Mehta from email

Dear All,

If the diagnosis is acceptable, the why and how need more cool thinking. We cannot generalize to all researchers and scientis. The small,poor farmer need today and more than before science to help him improve,diversify his production and its quality and to link him to market.

The problem is how???? this is the big question! we need democratic CBOs and empower them.

There are so many scientists and researchers in agriculture in Africa who do not go back to those fancy hotels and offices described by our friend. They are struggling to get means to do good research and to be recognized.

Best regards

Dr. Mohammed El Mourid
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Regional Coordinator,
ICARDA Tunis
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--- En date de : Sam 12.12.09, Subhash Mehta <icapsmum@yahoo.com> a écrit :

De: Subhash Mehta <icapsmum@yahoo.com>
Objet: [fara-net] It is time for a radical change in agriculture research systems!
À: "FARA network" <fara-net@dgroups.org>
Date: Samedi 12 Décembre 2009, 14h15

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In order to make water and soil testing available to farmers, government must set up and use mobile laboratories.

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In partnership with the farming community, government must establish at every hobli level, cottage industries for processing agricultural produce and value addition. Such cottage industries must be related to the local crop produced and must be funded by government.

Seed banks of local seed varieties must be established at the level of every Gram Panchayat. Seed distribution, seed festivals, field trials and seed improvement programs must be through Gram Panchayats with government support.

We oppose anti-farmer seed laws.

In view of the fact that farmers constitute 70% of the population and the farming sector makes a very important

contribution to the economic system, the state and central governments must have a separate agriculture budget. Pastures and tanks reserved for grazing of cattle and sheep have disappeared. They must be renewed and made available to the farming community.

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Tel:0821-2515187; E-mail:sg9kere@live.com

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To: FARA network <fara-net@dgroups.org>
Sent: Mon, 7 December, 2009 1:30:06 AM
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http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/19783/new_harvest.html?breadcrumb=%2Fproject%2F60%2Fagricultural_innovation_in_africa

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posted yesterday by Mohammed El Mourid from email

Dear Mehta,

What you have said is very relevant. Also the article you posted is relevant. The main weaknesses in developing countries research system is funding. Quoting just from your article "This is an initiative of the Alliance for Democratising Agricultural Research in South Asia (ADARSA), supported by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in U.K". We see this initiative being supported from outside, may be not totally but there is a hand from outside. What we need is research being funded by developing countries themselves and small percent can come from outside. That way our people will have say on what research should be done. The citrus research in Florida is mainly funded by growers and the panel that evaluate research proposals and funding decision include a good number of growers representatives. Anyone who wants fund for research must come and

defend his/her proposal before the panel. Therefore, to me real reforms will only come once our countries start to provide a significant percent of research funds and the panel include farmers representatives or "farmers jury". For researchers to get funding they must pass the 20 verdicts.

Siza

On Sat, Dec 12, 2009 at 9:15 AM, Subhash Mehta <icapsmum@yahoo.com> wrote:

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> http://www.raitateerpu.com/the_process.html>.

>

> The daily proceedings were videographed as a record. In

> four 90-minute sessions per day for 3 days, each of the specialist witnesses

> was allotted 30 minutes to speak and 60 minutes allowed for the Jury to

> confer amongst themselves, to ask questions and hear the response from the

> specialist witness. After hearing the specialist witnesses, on December 4,

> 2009, the Jury went into conclave to finalise their verdict.

>

> *The Verdict*

>

> The Farmers' Jury pronounced their verdict on December 5,

> 2009, at a public function presided over by former Supreme Court Chief

> Justice M.N.Venkatachalaiah, at the Institution of Agricultural

> Technologists in Bangalore . The function, attended by over 200 people,

> began with an explanation of the concept and process of the Farmers' Jury.

> An international expert and consultant to the Farmers' Jury process,

> Dr.Michel Pimbert spoke about similar concerns in Africa (e.g., Benin and
> Mali) and South America (e.g., Bolivia and Peru). It was clear that the Farmers'
> Jury as a social experiment was unique and without precedent. Members of
> the Steering Committee and Oversight Panel presented their frank impressions
> and finally spokespersons of the Farmers' Jury read out the verdict that
> they had arrived at after hearing the specialist witnesses and due internal
> discussions and deliberations. The 22-point verdict reads as follows:

>

> 1. Today the farmer is unable to return to traditional farming and nor
can he pursue expensive modern farming practices. There is great need for
pro-farmer agricultural research.

> 2. Government must recognize farmers' innovations, respect the
innovators and compensate them the way it compensates scientists in formal
institutions.

> 3. We do not want research in hybrid crops that demand repeated
purchase of expensive chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Instead, we
demand research on local landraces that adapt to their ecosystems, are
drought-resistant, provide quality and tasty food and fodder, and can be
produced by the farmer himself.

> 4. Information on agricultural research done in public-private
partnership must be transparent and accessible to farmers.

> 5. Agricultural universities and other public sector research
institutions must make farmers equal partners in research and offer farmers
an equal share in profits resulting from research.

> 6. When private or multinational corporations conduct research in their
own or farmers' fields, the effects of these trials on farmers' health, the
changes in the soil and the impact on the surrounding environment must be
monitored by citizens' groups including farmers. This information should be
made known every year to the farming community through media and Gram
Sabhas. If there are negative consequences (resulting from such trials), the
companies or corporations must be held responsible and accountable for those
consequences.

> 7. Farmer Field Days and Farmer Field Schools conducted on various
crops must be held under the jurisdiction of all Gram Panchayats in the
state.

> 8. Information related to agricultural research and technology must be
made available in local languages and made accessible to farmers.

> 9. We feel that sufficient research on sugarcane, which is an important
crop in Karnataka, is not being carried out. A research centre for
improvement of sugarcane cultivation must be established.

> 10. Weather-based crop insurance schemes must be abolished and every
farm must be made a unit for the assessment of losses and resultant
compensation.

> 11. In order to make water and soil testing available to farmers,
government must set up and use mobile laboratories.

> 12. There must be a scientific system to predict reliable information
on rainfall, and this information must be available to farmers.

> 13. In partnership with the farming community, government must
establish at every *hobli* level, cottage industries for processing
agricultural produce and value addition. Such cottage industries must be
related to the local crop produced and must be funded by government.

> 14. Seed banks of local seed varieties must be established at the level
of every Gram Panchayat. Seed distribution, seed festivals, field
trials and seed improvement programs must be through Gram Panchayats with
government support.

- > 15. We oppose anti-farmer seed laws.
- > 16. In view of the fact that farmers constitute 70% of the population
 - > and the farming sector makes a very important contribution to the economic system, the state and central governments must have a separate agriculture budget.
- > 17. Pastures and tanks reserved for grazing of cattle and sheep have
 - > disappeared. They must be renewed and made available to the farming community.
- > 18. In order to educate the younger generation on agriculture and to help them develop interest in this sector, agriculture must be incorporated in school syllabi.
- > 19. Stop grabbing land from farmers in the name of development and Special Economic Zones.
- > 20. The Forest Department must stop distributing saplings of Acacia and Eucalyptus to farmers. Instead of monoculture planting of such species that harm the environment and deplete ground water, the Department must plant diverse species that protect land and water and are needed by animals, birds and human beings.
- > 21. Small farmers, farm labour, artisanal communities such as carpenters and potters who produce farm-related instruments must be taken into partnership in formulation of agricultural policies that are location-specific.
- > 22. Shepherds and pastoralists must be part of the Karnataka Sheep Development Board and must play a role in the formulation of related policies.
- >
- > *What is special about the experiment?*
- >
- > The social experiment of Farmers' Jury has brought out some interesting facets of rural culture which are not really surprising but which bear highlighting:
- >
- > I Women members of the Jury were observed asking questions just as much as the men.
- >
- > I The questions to the expert witnesses were information-seeking, often searching and sometimes pointed, but never with rancour or ill-intent.
- >
- > I The Jury members who had met together for the first time on November 30, 2009, were always well behaved and cordial with each other regardless of their varied castes and socio-economic backgrounds.
- >
- > I Small and marginal farmers may be illiterate and uneducated in the conventional sense, but their deep knowledge of farming and understanding of the complexity of nature and the inter-dependence of all things living and non-living, spoke volumes for their innate cultural strength arising from 5,000 years of agricultural tradition of India.
- >
- > *The message of the Farmers' Jury*
- >
- > In the context of climate change and the economic situations, there is a growing number of agriculture scientists who opine that the current trend of agricultural research cannot ensure food security with justice and equity for the under-fed or starving millions across the continents. These scientists, who are not a minority in the scientific community, are free from the corrupting influence of MNCs in the seeds,

> farming and retail food sectors, and hence practice true science. It is
> these scientists who are addressed by the Jury's verdict to make their
> science relevant to on-the-ground situations and recognise farmers'
> knowledge systems.
>
> It is abundantly clear that business-as-usual,
> market-oriented agricultural research will not only not address food
> security but will intensify existing and growing hunger and malnourishment,
> and resultantly spread the existing and growing social discontentment and
> militancy. Importantly, this verdict comes from people who are not heard
> because planners and scientists at national and state levels presume that
> they are ignorant or lazy. The Farmers' Jury initiative and their verdict
> demolishes all doubts as to their competence to judge what they need and
> what is good for them, and also as to their mature ecological awareness and
> understanding that is absent among many formally trained scientists.
>
> *Living the Constitution*
>
> This social experiment in democracy designed and led by
> P.V.Satheesh of DDS is path-breaking because for the first time ever, poor
> and marginalized farmers were enabled to form a responsible jury, and show
> that they are the best judges for their own progress and development. This
> is giving a voice to the voiceless.
>
> Highly qualified scientists, even if they are committed,
> are often unaware of the actual needs and problems of poor and marginalized
> farmers who form the bulk of the agricultural community and are an important
> part of the economy since they feed the nation. The Jury's verdict clearly
> shows that farmers are not against science and scientific research, but they
> demand that science be used with due regard to people's needs. This is
> because it is well known that there are scientists who conduct research and
> produce results that benefit those who pay their salaries or finance their
> research – and practice "bad science".
>
> The Jury's verdict demands more inclusive governance to
> "pull in" participation of the farming community. This is especially
> required because Chief Ministers and the Prime Minister's Office are
> regularly and routinely advised by the industrial lobby (CII and FICCI) even
> on agriculture matters without any manner of farmer representation.
>
> The Constitution of India can be brought to life for over
> 60% Indians only when science and technology can be made to work for their
> progress and development – living the Constitution instead of leaving the
> Constitution, as at present.
> (1,847 words of text)

> **Maj Gen S.G.Vombatkere retired as the Additional Director General
> Discipline & Vigilance in Army HQ, New Delhi , in 1996 after 35 years
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> President of India awarded him Visishta Seva Medal in 1993 for distinguished
> service rendered in Ladakh. Since retirement, he is engaged in voluntary
> work with Mysore Grahakara Parishat, and is a member of National Alliance of
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> *To:* FARA network <fara-net@dgroups.org>
> *Sent:* Mon, 7 December, 2009 1:30:06 AM
> *Subject:* [fara-net] Call for input: Agricultural innovation in Africa
>
> http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/19783/new_harvest.html?breadcrumb=%2Fproject
%2F60%2Fagricultural_innovation_in_africa<http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/19783/new_harvest.htm
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