



ICRA and agricultural research for development

Towards a new R&D paradigm

Organisations and professionals engaged in agricultural and rural innovation and development are facing increasingly complex challenges. Just 10 or 15 years ago, their work would have focused on a single crop or a specific natural resource. Now, they are expected to contribute to a broader set of objectives, including poverty alleviation and environmental protection in addition to productivity increases. In the era of globalisation and the information technology revolution, it is becoming increasingly apparent that knowledge and knowledge sharing are the keys to agricultural, economic and social growth and development.

A new 'ARD' approach

At ICRA, we share with a growing number of partners worldwide the belief that research designed and implemented by teams drawn from different disciplines, institutions and stakeholder groups is better able to solve



complex problems and meet multiple objectives. In our experience, this kind of research is more likely to come up with the full range of technological, policy and institutional options needed if a broader set of users is to support and benefit from change. We call such research 'agricultural research for development', or ARD for short.

ICRA's ARD approach is not a method or a model. It is a way to guide thinking and promote attitudinal change. It provides the framework on which we base our learning

experiences. Users become familiar with a wide range of tools and, more importantly, develop the mindset needed to tackle complex issues. Such an approach encourages departure from conventional 'top-down' and linear thinking and helps move scientific knowledge and technology 'off the shelf' and into the field, thereby improving development impact.

What makes good ARD?

The essence of ARD is a participatory process that paves the way for agreed collective action at many different levels (e.g. community, policy, institutional, agro-industrial, etc).

The process:

- fully involves all concerned stakeholder groups in addressing the problem (e.g. in identifying needs, finding a compromise strategy and evaluating solutions)
- applies a systems approach that incorporates the perspectives of different disciplines and stakeholder groups
- uses teamwork and partnerships to solve complex problems
- contributes to broader development goals than mere increases in productivity
- recognises that technological innovation by itself is not enough; research must lead to social, economic and political reform if it is to bring lasting benefits.

Changing the focus of grassland research in India

The Indian Grassland and Fodder Research Institute (IGFRI) has changed its focus since several of its staff attended an ICRA course. 'IGFRI previously had a very narrow academic focus and tended to ignore socio-economic factors, with the result that many new technologies were left on the shelf', reports researcher Ranjitha Puskur. 'The insights we gained from ICRA helped us refocus on the technical and socio-economic needs of client farmers, put greater emphasis on the poor, and look more at rainfed farming systems. ARD has become a household name!'



An impact assessment study showed that ICRA training has influenced a change of outlook in IGFRI, which has begun to adopt an ARD approach and to work in interdisciplinary teams in a more client-oriented and participatory way. 'The change is embodied in our mandate', explains Dr Prem Pathak, IGFRI Director. 'Instead of focusing solely on grassland and fodder research, we now aim to develop a range of forage-related technologies that can alleviate poverty and promote sustainable rural livelihoods. In addition, the enhanced research capability and professional attitude of our ICRA-trained researchers contributes to the overall development of the institute.'