The Management of Sloping Lands in Asia

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ANONH KHAMHUNG
FOREWORD

Millions of resource-poor people farm the sloping land areas of Asia, and their numbers are increasing as the population of the region grows. These people have been called the neglected clients of international agricultural research, because the Green Revolution focused on the irrigated, high potential areas. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the ASIALAND sloping lands network, since its formation in 1988, has helped to redress this neglect by focusing on the problems of the poor rural communities of the uplands. The first 6-7 years of the network produced valuable experimental data on the seriousness of the problem of soil erosion in steepland areas and showed that soil erosion can be controlled by a variety of promising land management technologies, mostly based on shortening the slope length using vegetative barriers planted on the contour.

The ASIALAND sloping lands network is built on the principle that the agencies in collaborating countries can...
exploit substantial synergies by sharing common methodologies and results from a coordinated programme of research projects. However, research results are of little use until the ultimate clients, the farmers, put them into practice. The last phase of the network therefore shifted the focus of the programme away from the research stations so that the various experimental technologies could be evaluated in cooperation with the farmers. This shift coincided with a major change in IBSRAM's research philosophy. The well-known Greenland paper of 1994 exhorted IBSRAM and its partners to reject the traditional researcher-led paradigm and adopt a participatory approach that involved farmers at all stages in the research. The new approach required an interdisciplinary research team, so IBSRAM encouraged network-participating countries to broaden the disciplinary base of their teams through links with other national institutions. IBSRAM had to follow suit and, with generous support from the Swiss Government, recruited a social scientist to work with the soil scientists and agronomists already on staff.

The 1996 annual ASIALAND sloping lands meeting is a watershed for the network because of the shift to adopt the participatory approach to research. This is unfamiliar territory for many traditional soil scientists and agronomists, but the challenge must be faced. The only alternative is to ignore the clients of the research and continue to have little impact on the land degradation processes that are so damaging to the resources of the Asian region. I am confident that our partners will meet this challenge and pledge IBSRAM's continuing support as they move ahead.

Eric T. Craswell
Director General
IBRAM

PREFACE

To transfer soil-conservation farming technologies from experimental plots to farmers, the ASIALAND management of sloping lands network seeks collaboration from farmer co-operators. They validate soil-conservation technologies of their choice on their farms while researchers act as facilitators. A positive response from the farmer co-operators is a prerequisite for extending these technologies to other farmers. To understand the co-operators' attitude and response over time, they are visited and interviewed periodically. In addition, crop performance and economic returns under different practices are evaluated. The implementation of these activities commenced in 1995 as the first year of Phase 3 of the network and the results were reported during the 7th annual meeting of the network, which was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Since the last report from Chiang Mai, many interesting changes have occurred, especially in farmers' attitudes towards accepting alley cropping, planting crops along contours, and maintaining only one or two plants per hill. In many countries, more farmers have expressed a desire to join the project, although our extension activity has not begun yet. The results of these changes together with the agronomic performance of indicator crops were reported during the second annual meeting of Phase 3, which was held in Vientiane, Laos in 1996.

This proceedings contains materials and reports presented by invited scientists and the network co-operators from different countries during the Vientiane meeting. It is divided into three sections: (i) the Laotian experience, which reports on agricultural development, farming systems, land use, and production constraints in Laos; (ii) country reports, which describe the results obtained from the on-farm research and the long-term sites from different network-participating countries; and (iii) the move from consultative to interactive participation in the evolving research paradigm.

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