

User and NGO Perspectives

A group of farmer and NGO participants put these ideas forward. To play more effective roles in the process of SRI evaluation and dissemination, they need more **information** about SRI — its practices, its results, its limitations — and more **knowledge** about how SRI works and how it can be made to work best so that rice production can be improved. There is a real need for scientists, extensionists, NGOs and users to work together for advancing the application and benefits of SRI.

Examples of knowledge and information that users and NGOs would like to have are:

- How to increase the number and proportion of *effective tillers* in terms of plant, soil, water and nutrient management practices with SRI.
 - How to optimize *spacing* to get best results. The Chinese innovation of “triangular” planting (page 00) elicited considerable interest among participants.
 - What *varieties*, improved or traditional, respond best to SRI practices. This could be established by research programs or by users exchanging information about their experience.
 - Use of *herbicides* vs. use of hand weeders to control weeds, considering the effects of each on the soil and ecosystem. What are the critical times for weeding, and how often is it necessary?
 - What options are available for *improving soil fertility* — methods, timing and benefits of adding organic matter through compost, green manures and other means, and the use of inorganic fertilizers separately or in conjunction.
 - How to monitor and assess changes in the *rice field ecosystem* in terms of pests, nematodes, microbes, nutrient availability, etc.
 - What are the best methods for *raising seedlings*. A number of methods have been described, e.g., use of plastic trays to facilitate transplanting seedlings without root trauma, but without assessments of their cost-effectiveness.
- How can the *labor-intensity* of SRI be reduced, such as with redesigned weeders, or easier water management methods.
 - What are the possibilities for combining *zero-tillage* with SRI practices.

Promotion of SRI

There is need for simple extension materials. These could be shared among countries, with instructions, pictures and information put into the local language. Also, materials need to be differentiated between those intended for farmer users and those for NGOs or government facilitators. Farmer suggestions should be sought on how to make these materials and the associated communication processes most effective. The communication process for SRI should itself be participatory rather than being top-down.

In general, farmer-research-extension linkages need to be improved, with more of a bottom-up approach. This should be supported by staff development initiatives for government agencies and NGOs since SRI requires new ways of thinking and of approaching farmers.

Recommendations

- The efforts of users and NGOs can be more effective if there is **policy advocacy** on behalf of SRI at higher levels of authority.
- A **family approach** should be tried, involving women as well as men, and also youngsters who are involved in paddy cultivation. This approach has been shown to be more effective in Bangladesh.
- Rather than focus just on *individual users*, there should be a **group/community approach**, seeking to raise interest in and knowledge of SRI for *sets of people*.
- Individual decisions and practices are invariably influenced by what others around them are thinking and doing.

Group Reports

- In presenting SRI to users through public, private or NGO extension efforts, it should not be described as a *single, set package* but rather as a **set of options**, justified with reference to certain understandable prin-

ciples. Local conditions vary, such as when good water control is difficult or even impossible. Practices need to be altered appropriately.