



Middlesex
University

Farm-centred learning in rural development

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Key questions

- How do farmers and researchers learn about the environment?
 - What different knowledges?
 - What types of informal research and learning are farmers carrying out?
- How can researchers learn with and from farmers?
 - Challenges for scientists of working with farmers

Farmer learning and knowledge

- Incentives and constraints to adoption
 - ‘Re-bugging the system’ RELU project
- Farmers adapt and experiment for their own context
- Context specific knowledge required for more complex and diverse farming systems
 - Farmers make holistic assessments using multiple criteria
 - Experiential learning

Farmer learning and knowledge (Cont)

- Implicit and tacit approaches to learning
 - Do new things to learn without considering it an experiment
 - Learning from accidents
- Roles of advisors and other information sources

Other RELU projects recognising different knowledges

- ‘Management of Soils’
 - Understand the views of different stakeholders
 - Promote dialogue
- Tools for interdisciplinary research on rural catchments
 - Different knowledges including lay knowledge
 - Importance of livelihoods and entitlements

Other RELU projects (Cont)

- ‘Understanding Loweswater; A study to generate new understandings of ecological, economic and social interactions’
 - Different kinds of knowledge
 - Locally oriented methodologies for cross-disciplinary research
 - Dialogue amongst farming families, environment agencies and scientists
 - Recognising issues of problem ownership and definition


Learning with and from farmers

- Focus on how farmers make decisions
- Interdisciplinary with challenges of
 - communication,
 - research methods,
 - institutional expectations
- Farmer participatory research
 - Building on and monitoring the types of experiments that farmers are carrying out already
 - Understanding how farmers use different criteria
 - The challenge of statistical significance v relevance to farmer's contexts

Learning with and from farmers (Cont)

- Building relationships between farmers and scientists
 - Acceptance of different ways of learning
 - Power relations and trust
 - Role of farmer groups- formal and informal
- Building on farmers' own dissemination channels

The balance of researcher and farmer control in research

	Researcher managed and implemented	Researcher designed and farmer implemented	Farmer managed and implemented
			
Design	<p>Researchers design study and control all treatments. Farmers rent or donate land</p>	<p>Researchers design study around farmers existing practices and observe</p>	<p>Farmers or advisors decide on trial design and evaluation criteria. Researchers observe</p>
Methods of data collection	<p>Researchers control all measurements. Farmers invited to offer their opinion</p>	<p>Researchers collect what quantitative data they can and get farmers' opinions through interviewing</p>	<p>Researchers document farmers'/advisors' evaluation/reflections at certain points during the season.</p>

Other RELU projects examining participation of farmers in research

- US/European ‘watershed alliances’
 - Community participation / ownership of problems
 - Focus groups/interviews with farming communities
- ‘Landscape Intervention Decision Support Systems’
 - Understanding the incentives for farmer to be involved in conservation
 - Listening to the views of farmers
- ‘Large scale experiments’
 - Observational studies of farmers’ land use as well as manipulative experiments

Conclusions

- Multiple sources of innovation
- Going beyond the hierarchical view of research and extension
- Farmers are actively experimenting in order to adapt farming to specific ecosystems
- Less intensive and lower external input farming face greater complexities and need to adapt to their specific context

Conclusion (Cont)

- Scientists need to recognise different knowledges
- Need to find ways to promote a dialogue
- Awareness of the limitations of lay knowledge and scientific method
- Learning from less developed countries