

Preface

A central principle of the reform of agricultural research and innovation systems, as advocated by stakeholders in the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), has always been that innovation systems should have the needs and concerns of smallholder farmers at their core. At the same time, there is a strong awareness that farmers themselves have always been innovators and should be recognized and involved as such, and therefore not relegated to the end of a technology pipeline.

That farmers are innovators themselves has been recognized for many years, in particular through the pioneering work of individuals such as Robert Chambers, whose book 'Farmer First' did much to set a new farmer-centred agenda for agricultural research. However, despite this, fundamental challenges remain in the way in which many innovation systems currently operate. It is not enough just to strengthen and create new forms of research partnerships. The scale of the challenges we face also requires the development of capacities throughout the Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D) system, from farmers to research, recognizing that we are combining two forms of knowledge and innovation. Alongside this, greater attention should be paid to the role of those who broker agricultural knowledge and technologies for development, in particular the farmers' own organizations.

Despite the enormous challenges we face in continuing to ensure food and nutrition security, viable livelihoods for farmers and the sustainable intensification of production, agricultural research and innovation have been grossly neglected in recent years. Governments have only recently woken up to the need to ensure food security as a cornerstone of national stability and progress. Moreover, resource-poor smallholders are usually last to benefit from any interventions or can even be further disadvantaged. The acceptability of agricultural technologies itself requires a common understanding and trust between farmers and consumers, which have often broken down as research has become further removed from its intended beneficiaries. We urgently need to strengthen and reform systems of agricultural innovation, reconnecting agricultural science with society.

Smallholder farmers comprise the majority of the world's farmers and most of the world's poor live in rural environments or have migrated to cities in order to escape rural poverty. 'Knowledge is power' resonates strongly in agriculture. Smallholder farmers are true entrepreneurs. In moving into more formalized markets, they become exposed to national and international markets that are determined by factors beyond their immediate control. Smallholder farmers face many challenges, including knowledge and technology-based decisions: in accessing markets; in infrastructure, storage and transport; in production scale, assuring frequency and quality of supply; in access to land, inputs, credit and insurance; and in negotiation with traders where they face many additional hurdles beyond those facing large-scale producers. Effective and equitable engagement in market systems means empowering farmers by breaking down these knowledge and technology-determined barriers. Long-term market access can be made viable by creating favourable trade policies, recognizing market demands and providing smallholders with knowledge-based bargaining power in the relationships involved.

There is a huge amount of information on knowledge, technologies and markets worldwide. Much of this information is constrained, however, by a host of barriers: Who wants to share it and with whom? Is it in the right medium, in the right language? Is it accessible? Can it be understood and used by farmers? Are our own institutions creating walls that prevent information from being shared because doing so would represent a loss of power, rather than an added value to be esteemed? Breaking down

these walls requires development-centered thinking, with the various sectors learning and innovating together. This necessitates institutional reorientation, changed values and a convergence of research and development, education and business policies, and resources.

GFAR stakeholders have pioneered a range of actions directly empowering farmers in agricultural innovation. The Prolinnova programme (Promoting Local Innovation) has mobilized and shared ecologically-based research led by smallholder farmers and civil society organizations. The DURAS programme pioneered research processes explicitly requiring the involvement of both farmer innovation and that of formal research in identifying and addressing agricultural challenges. The ESFIM programme reported in this book has taken the best of these considerations and brought them directly into addressing the constraints faced by smallholders, in accessing and benefiting from markets around the world.

Clearly, more needs to be done to empower resource-poor smallholder farmers to equip themselves and enable them to enter markets competitively. Discussions and development of case studies among GFAR stakeholders around this theme laid out a structured approach for tackling these problems. Concerted efforts among a broad range of GFAR stakeholders, including those by CIAT, CIRAD, FAO, The World Bank and Regional Forums around the world gave rise to new thinking on the needs and constraints in linking smallholder farmers to markets.

Arising from these findings, the ESFIM Global Partnership Programme became a Community of Practice, built from the bottom up, in the spirit of GFAR's principles. The farmers themselves, through their (former) global body the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) called for direct attention to be paid to their own role in innovation and research towards better market access and benefits.

With the support of the AGRINATURA network of European research institutes on agricultural research and capacity building for development, the Empowering Smallholder Farmers in Markets (ESFIM) programme was established. With financial aid from IFAD, Agricord and the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, this programme has been led directly by national farmers' organizations around the world and supported by local researchers and with technical backstopping from the AGRINATURA network and staff.

Through the ESFIM programme, the power of farmers' organizations themselves to articulate and address their needs, to work effectively with research organizations and to advocate for change has become very clear. The activities described in this book offer excellent examples of what can be achieved by national farmer organizations in shaping their own roles and advocacy and in developing the knowledge and innovation required to effectively and equitably access markets.

Drawing on a range of farmer-driven programmes from around the world, ESFIM has been truly pioneering in many ways. Bringing together collaborative research driven by national farmer organizations, comparative research between diverse country contexts and the sharing of learning to enable actions, the programme has shown the real value of linking farmer organizations and research to resolve challenges facing smallholders in engaging in markets. Furthermore, it has clearly also empowered farmer groups to challenge existing norms in how innovation systems have been operating within the countries concerned and demonstrated new paths to more enlightened partnerships.

Of particular note also are the analyses undertaken through the programme of the contribution it has made to changing the behaviour and efficacy of farmer organizations themselves. ESFIM has helped measurably to build their self esteem and willingness to shape their own destinies by addressing significant barriers, either through their own research or by making better use of technical knowledge available elsewhere.

This book is well written and the authors are congratulated on how well they have set out their case and the value of the ESFIM programme. I have no hesitation in commending it to its readers. I trust that it will in turn inspire many others to actively link farmers and research in addressing the challenges of agricultural innovation and enterprise, to give smallholder farmers real opportunities to grow their incomes and livelihoods, and thus give them a better future.

Dr Mark Holderness

Executive Secretary of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR)

