

## *Book Reviews*

**Farmer Research Groups: Institutionalizing Participatory Agricultural Research in Ethiopia.** Dawit Alemu, Yoshiaki Nishikawa, Kiyoshi Shiratori and Taku Seo (eds.), UK: Practical Action Publishing Ltd., 2016, pp. 220.

Participatory agricultural research (PAR) has long been recognized as an effective approach for generating technologies that are suitable for resource-poor farmers in their diverse situations. However, how many research institutes have effectively and sustainably adopted PAR? Practical information on PAR institutionalization is required for this approach to be further introduced into agricultural development. In Ethiopia, between 2004 and 2015, the Farmer Research Group (FRG) projects were implemented to institutionalize PAR as part of normal research practice within the national agricultural research system. The book under review was written by the members of the projects, who, in this study, share their practical experiences with those who are interested in the implementation and institutionalization of PAR.

The FRG approach is an important part of the PAR strategy and was promoted in all FRG projects in Ethiopia. Groups of farmers, extension workers, and a multi-disciplinary research team conducted joint research on selected topics, guided by farmers' needs in their respective fields. A distinctive feature of the FRG approach, distinguishing it from other PAR approaches, is the collaborative relationship between farmers and researchers. Farmers in this approach would participate in the research at every stage, from planning through implementation to monitoring, evaluating, and sharing the results. Another important feature is that the FRG approach is focused on producing new technical information based on scientific evidence, such as farming methods, adaptability of genetic resources, and processing methods of agricultural products.

The first part of the book, called "The need for Farmer Research Groups in Ethiopia," overviews FRG-based research in Ethiopia, presents the principles and processes of the FRG approach (Chapter 2), and describes the implementation process of two projects (FRG I and FRG II) that promoted the FRG approach and were carried out by the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research in collaboration

with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Chapter 3). The process of the implementation of these two projects, especially as concerns 1) offering guidelines developed by the researchers during FRG I based on their own experiences of the FRG approach, for the purpose of enabling any researchers to apply scientific research methods within a participatory context, 2) the training scheme for researchers in FRG II, in which the experienced researchers of the FRG approach worked as facilitators using the guidelines developed, and 3) monitoring and supporting each research activity by senior researchers during implementation of FRG II, are documented in detail. Challenges encountered in conducting the research and institutionalization are also discussed.

The second part of the book, "Experiences of Farmer Research Groups," provides practical case studies of FRG-based research activities and their results. The first four chapters are written by representatives of research groups that conducted research in different areas. The contents of these chapters include bean variety evaluation by Melkassa Agricultural Research Centre (Chapter 4), seeding rates of teff by Wolaita Sodo University (Chapter 5), fish processing by Bahir Dar University (Chapter 6), and farmer-saved seed by Mekelle University (Chapter 7). According to the principles of the FRG approach, each study followed a scientific method, and the results of each are presented as scientific reports. The authors also share the difficulties they faced at the different stages of their participatory research. Chapter 8 reports on the evaluation of FRG-based research on dairy production. Chapter 9 presents the results of interviews with both FRG-member farmers and non-FRG farmers regarding 13 FRG-based research projects selected from 43 projects supported by FRG II. From these results, the author argues for further improvements that affect the institutionalization and sustainability of the FRG approach, specifically targeting measures intended to develop the capacity of the researchers and related to matching the perceived needs of farmers and the research subjects.

The third part of the book, "Institutionalizing Farmer Research Groups in Ethiopia," reviews and analyzes the process of the institutionalization of FRG-based research and extension activity in

Ethiopia. Chapter 10 gives an overview of the historical trends of PAR in Ethiopia and presents the challenges faced during the institutionalization of the FRG approach within the existing research system. Chapter 11 analyzes the factors that influenced the success or failure of each FRG-based research activity, with specific examples of both successful and unsuccessful cases. Chapter 12 presents the experience of the Farmer Research and Extension Group (FREG), a group that involved farmers, assumed a participatory approach, and was derived from FRG but focused on demonstration and extension.

The final part, with one chapter, provides conclusive findings and lessons from two FRG projects in Ethiopia. First, the authors briefly summarize the state of the global discussion on PAR as a reference for understanding the situation in Ethiopia. The authors conclude that researchers in Ethiopia have generally engaged in PAR through the FRG approach, as a methodology for improving the efficiency of research and extension activities to address farmers' problems. The authors emphasize that if researchers wish to contribute to agricultural development through PAR, they should focus on research and accumulation of evidence in response to farmers' needs rather than on extension activities alone, and they should also maintain the attitude of learning from farmers.

The FRG approach detailed here will be attractive to agricultural researchers who, like me, are conducting on-station research and are motivated to translate research results into practical techniques, or who wish to learn from the farmers' experience. One of the important and difficult steps of the FRG approach for researchers, especially for those who have little experience with participatory research, would be developing a collaborative relationship with farmers and other stakeholders, such as extension workers, peasant association members, and traders. For instance, successfully collaborative relationships made it possible for researchers to adapt the research to the farmers' situations, such as changing the research methodology based on comments and opinions given by the farmers (Chapter 5) or promoting the farmers' innovation to address the challenges faced in the research activity (Chapter 7). On the other hand, in unsuccessful examples, lack of proper marketing arrangements discouraged the application of the research results (Chapter 4), or scientifically sound evidences were not obtained from the research where inappropriate scientific methods were applied, partly because of the temptation to serve each farmer's interest (Chapter 11). As the authors emphasize in the book, enhancement of researchers' capacity will be a key strategy for the institutionalization of the FRG approach. The detailed documentation of

the experience of implementing the supporting system for researchers during the FRG project in Chapter 3 will be a good reference for policy makers to institutionalize this approach. Additionally, the FRG approach guideline (Bedru et al., 2009) described in Chapter 3 is available online and worth reading as a practical training material based on concrete experiences of the authors.

This book seems to be lacking in one point: there are very few opinions of the researchers on the evaluation of the implementation process of particular FRG projects. When considering the sustainability of the FRG approach, it is important to know the motivation and incentives of the researchers undertaking these projects on one hand as well as what challenges the researchers faced as they engaged in FRG activities. For example, it may be more difficult to collect sufficient data for writing scientific reports in an FRG activity than in conventional on-station research. How did this aspect influence the researchers' motivation or impact their careers? A survey of the researchers who participated in an FRG activity, like that of the farmers presented in Chapter 9, could provide objective information for discussing these issues and address the kind of support needed for further development.

In summary, this book and the guidelines for implementing the FRG approach are a great support and inspiration for those attempting PAR and aiming at its institutionalization. Further studies on the development of the Ethiopian FRG project are expected to provide important information on PAR in both practical and academic contexts.

#### References

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**Livestock Mobility, Rangeland Use and Sedentarization among the Hamar in Southwest Ethiopia.** Samuel Tefera, Kyoto: Shoukadoh Book Sellers, 2017, pp. 99.

Ethnographic research on pastoral and agropastoral groups along the Lower Omo began in the 1960s. Since a renowned publication by anthropologists (Fukui and Turton 1979), inter-ethnic conflicts and relations became a common issue. Through the 1980s and 1990s, anthropological findings in the

area were re-interpreted in the broader context of modern nation-building of Imperial Ethiopia, which corresponded to increasing interest in the political economy and historical approach in anthropology (Donham and James 1986, James et al. 2002, Schlee and Watson 2009).

The collapse of the Military Regime in 1991 and activation of international intervention in development in the 2000s have necessitated a new theoretical framework to understand how peripheral groups are positioned in the current national and international environment, and how local people survive in such newly emerging economic and political conditions. The publication by Samuel Tefera describes how the Hamar people explored their survival through interactions between the local people and outside agencies.

The book focuses on the transition of the subsistence economy of the pastoral and agro-pastoral Hamar in South Omo. It attempts to understand how the Hamar people control resources in various natural and social environments such as an unstable climate, culturally defined modes of cattle herding, settlement pattern, and trading through markets, and examines the possibility of re-harmonization between them and alien intervention.

The book is structured in six chapters. Following the first chapter as the introduction and second chapter that provides an overview of the Hamar people, chapters three to five provide the research results, findings, discussions, and conclusion.

Chapter 3 tries to understand the dynamics of livestock mobility in terms of the associated factors of customary herd management, expansion of rangeland, governmental intervention, and hostile relations with neighboring groups.

Chapter 4 focuses on land enclosure, which has been rapidly progressing in recent years. The mechanisms of land enclosure can be explained with reference to factors such as the fluctuating rainfall and drought, and overall trend of a subsistence shift from pastoralism to agro-pastoralism. As pointed out by the author, types of land enclosure on three levels (individual, joint, and communal) proceed in different ways. Case analyses are developed, focusing on the organization of land enclosure projects and how participants are mobilized and acquire their ownership. Traditional and installed modes of authority and decision making by *bitta* and *donza* (adult men) are adopted as inevitable procedures of authorization in the process of reclamation and establishing new enclosed lands for pasture.

The issues addressed in Chapter 5 are resettlement and villagization. During the process of constructing a new village in a new place, all people involved as stakeholders must make rapid decisions by calculat-

ing the merits and demerits. It is ethnographically interesting how cultural conservativeness among the Hamar functions, and intervention pressure from the outside (like government) promotes and prevents their decision-making. An example indicates that people could construct a new village geographically outside Hamar territory where they could not conduct the *batsa* initiation ceremony. They overcame the difficulty through the authority of the *bitta* ritual chief.

Even though studies of pastoral and agro-pastoral people have been produced in the past few decades, a detailed description of pastoralism, land management, and cattle herding is lacking. In this regard, Samuel's contribution is significant, although the reviewer regrets that the author did not contextualize findings on the historical background and examine them in political and inter-ethnic social spaces. The fact that minimum bibliographies on the surrounding groups are referred to and that only a specific, related report by Ivo Strecker, who published several ethnographic works with Jean Lydall (Lydall and Strecker 1979a, 1979b, Strecker 1980) is cited, suggests that this book is not like anthropological texts. However, it does not reduce the value of the book as a challenging study of rural development.

The reviewer considers the importance of Samuel's work as illustrating how pastoral and agro-pastoral people make decisions by reacting to changing social conditions, wherein interventions such as social development focusing on education and health are "invading" their cosmos. Social, economic, and political conditions in South Omo have been in a phase of drastic transition since its domestic and global surrounding environments have varied in the past quarter century. Note that the most important change is qualitative and quantitative transformation of interventions from the outside: government, NGOs, or international societies. An example of communal land enclosure and the organizing process (and market activities) may be defined as a private company or corporation. Overall, changes transformed the contact zone between the local and outside, necessitating that researchers reconsider the framework of theoretical understanding. Modes of life among groups along the Lower Omo differ from those in the 1990s.

What justifies that the book was published in 2017 based on field research conducted between 2010 and 2013? The cases introduced in this volume outline the space of discourse where people of different generations and with different gender and educational backgrounds exchange different opinions. The situation appears in a limited historical moment. If the research were conducted in a certain social environment in the 1970s, the Hamar with a relatively

homogenous sense of value, could be observed, which might allow the ethnographer to write an ethnographic account of how a single distinct "ethnic" group responded to outsiders. The social discourse in Hamar in 2030 could differ from that in 2010. The social environment in the Lower Omo in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is in a transitional stage in which experiences of an Imperial and Socialist Ethiopia are still remembered. Furthermore, the community consists of the so-called conservative Hamar with a traditional sense of value and the new generation with strong engagement in the market economy, sense of value from the outside, and educational experience.

The question remains as to how the Hamar, with a pastoralist identity, participate or are incorporated in national and global society by retaining their cultural cohesion and avoiding conflict with neighbors, reaching the "re-harmonization" Samuel questions. The reviewer insists with confidence that this publication provides precious records for researchers in the future generation to evaluate and examine the possibility (or impossibility) of re-harmonization between the Hamar and the outside, the local and global, or tradition and (post-)modernity.

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