

Perspectives on Knowledge Sharing in Research

The knowledge Sharing project of

ict-km
Collaborate, Create, Communicate
A PROGRAM OF THE CGIAR



Research project: ICARDA Participatory Plant Breeding Program
KS approach: International Farmers' Conference
Perspective: Farmers from Sweida

A visit was also made to the village of Lahessa outside of the town of Sweida, about an hour and half outside of Damascus to talk to Camillia, Munifa, Ansaf, Ghazale, Ibdisam (5 women), and also Sammi (man)-all who had participated in the Farmers' Conference, held by ICARDA on May 4th-8th 2008.

When asked what could have been better for before-conference preparations, the farmers responded that they would have liked someone to visit them before the conference to discuss about the conference, what would happen and what they were expected to do.

While they had all been to a conference before, e.g Farmers' union, Women's conference, they mentioned that they had never been to a conference like this one where they were allowed to share their knowledge and everyone listened to them. This helped them to gain confidence and learn alot.

We asked all of them what they think of stories/storytelling as an approach for sharing their knowledge with others and learning from others. They all agreed that stories are better than speeches because "*it is more like real life*". They pointed out that 'if they do a speech they have to talk in formal language and will make mistakes. They feel more comfortable speaking in a story way.'

We discussed with them things they would like to see improved or different for an event like the Farmers' Conference. They suggested that it would be better to have more open discussions and time for questions and answers. They even proposed that some questions be asked directly to them, as they may otherwise never put up their hand to ask or answer a question.

When asked what they expected the conference to be like they replied that they expected stories to be told and some discussion to be had. But there was alot more happening at the conference. They liked going into the fields and discussing things there and also really enjoyed the Food Fair where they could look at seeds and products made from plants grown.



Farmers from Sweida being shown the Farmer Conference website.
Credit: Nadia Manning-Thomas, 2008.

Their list of things they learnt at the conference was quite long, including

- planting watermelon
- making crosses
- using fertiliser
- about nematodes
- putting thyme and garlic in the bags with seeds to avoid bugs eating them
- plant thyme in between wheat and barley to avoid nematodes

But what was really good about the conference for them was that it allowed them to interact with and learn from others. When asked if they thought anyone learned anything from them, they responded that the people from Eritrea asked them

some further questions and most people were interested in the way they make bread.

When asked how they felt about being at the conference with scientists, they said that they liked being with the scientists and would like the scientists to listen to them. They think it is a good idea to deal directly with scientists and tell them their problems, ideas and knowledge. They don't know if the scientists will accept the idea but they think they should work together. They would also like to be able to ask scientists questions and to learn from them. It will help to improve their agriculture.

The Farmers' Conference helped them to learn and to feel more comfortable to work with scientists. This will help improve their work with the ICARDA Participatory Plant Breeding Program (PPB).

They were also encouraged now to tell more farmers in their village to participate in the PPB program (since they got a better understanding and appreciation of what it is doing).

When asked what they would like to have as way of getting and keeping knowledge from the conference, they said they would

like printed materials (for those who are literate), and longer movies on the mobilephones. They also told us that they use the radio-so this could be a possible mechanism to consider for sharing stories and messages.

Alessandra spent time showing the women the website (on CD) and explaining the different ways they can access information from the conference-some of which is not yet available. Since there is a computer with internet available in the women's union in town, Alessandra encouraged them to try to use it and look at the website.

Overall, they expressed to us that the Farmers' Conference helped them to gain knowledge, skills and experience for doing agriculture. In addition it helped them to gain confidence too.

They said "now we feel that we can discuss with people"

A highlight of the conference for her was the feeling that others valued what she had to say, which motivates her to want to work more to improve her farming.

Sweida group with ICARDA and KSinR researchers.
Credit: Nadia Manning-Thomas, 2008.

