

Preface

The diagnostic studies reported on in this special issue were conducted in Benin and Ghana. They are part of a larger research project: Convergence of Sciences; Inclusive Technology Innovation Processes for Better Integrated Crop and Soil Management (CoS). This project seeks to carry out experiments with farmers, investigating problems that are relevant to them in a way that would allow agricultural research to have a real impact in terms of poverty alleviation, sustainable use of resources and democratization of science. The project is devoted to 'research on agricultural research', that is, on the relationships and practices of institutions and actors that produce particular kinds of research outputs. It is anchored in the values of North-South collaboration, cross-disciplinarity, and agricultural research designs that seek to ensure that its outcomes fit the conditions and needs of small-scale farmers. It entails participation of farmers in the research process. The aim of the project is to make transparent and explicit choices with respect to the research process, the formulation of objectives and research problems, and the contextualization of the research. The diagnostic studies reported in this special issue have played an important part in making these choices for the CoS experimental action research projects currently underway.

The project is implemented by a number of research and agricultural development organizations, co-ordinated by the University of Abomey-Calavi in Cotonou, Benin, the University of Ghana at Legon, Ghana, and Wageningen University, Wageningen, the Netherlands. It started in 2001 with eight African PhD students and one Dutch PhD student. The eight African PhD students have followed a similar process in that all of them have carried out a diagnostic study as a prelude to their participatory field experiments. The Dutch PhD student has carried out a comparative analysis of these diagnostic studies. The diagnostic studies and the comparative analysis of these studies form the substance of this special issue of NJAS – Wageningen Journal of Life Sciences.

Prior to these diagnostic studies, technographic studies were carried out in Benin and Ghana by national project staff. The technographic studies started the process of making explicit choices based on field realities. These choices shaped the future CoS research activities. The diagnostic studies served to further define and design individual participatory experimental field research projects in negotiation with farmers. At the time of publishing this special issue, the individual participatory experiments were not yet completed so that no conclusions can be drawn with regard to the extent to which the technographic and the diagnostic studies actually make a difference in terms of improving the impact of agricultural research. So the focus of this special issue is on the outcomes of the diagnostic studies, on how they influenced the original research plans, on how the researchers set up collaboration with farmers, and on how they anticipate scaling up.

The Editors of this special issue want to acknowledge the hard work of the PhD students in reporting their work, in what for many is a second or third language. The co-authors of each article are all supervisors in the academic and research institutions

that collaborate in CoS. The diagnostic studies were discussed in a large group of CoS researchers, faculty members and students, assembled in Benin in April 2004. Many improvements to the articles were suggested during that meeting.

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