

# SARD and... scaling-up of good practices

Agriculture and rural development programmes sometimes reach only a limited number of people, have a minimal impact on poverty, and are difficult to sustain over the long term.<sup>1</sup>

Better identification of practices that have demonstrated economic, social and environmental benefits at the community level, together with policies and programmes that support the spread of these practices, stand to benefit rural people, economies and environments.



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## Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD)

Agriculture and rural development are sustainable when they are ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, culturally appropriate, humane and based on a scientific approach.

Rural development policy must aim to meet the nutritional and other human needs of present and future generations; and maintain, and where possible, enhance the productive and regenerative capacity of the natural resource base. It must also provide for the durable employment of those generations, reduce their vulnerability and strengthen their self-reliance.

## Did you know?

- Rural communities, development programmes, policy-makers, and public and private service providers have successfully scaled up, replicated, spread or adapted SARD good practices, resulting in benefits for millions of rural people. Scaling-up of good practices can help to reduce poverty and provide sustainable and appropriate benefits to the 3 billion people who live in rural areas of developing countries.<sup>2,5</sup>
- Farmers have adopted and adapted zero-tillage farming practices on more than 11 million ha in Brazil since 1974 and on more than 50 percent of total arable land in Paraguay since 1990. The total costs of scaling up zero tillage are difficult to estimate, but initial stages were funded by the private sector and small grants. Farmers' associations and government support to research and extension services also helped to spread the set of practices.<sup>2</sup>
- Integrated pest management (IPM) has spread to several million farmers in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East over the past 20 years, because of a strong people-centred movement, support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international agencies and governments, and consistent investment: between 1989 and 2004, approximately US\$100 million in grants was allocated to IPM projects in Asia that used the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach under the guidance of FAO.<sup>6,13</sup>

## Why is action needed?

- Policies and programmes that disregard local institutions, capacities, conditions and people<sup>5</sup> are frequently unsustainable and can result in a poor use of funds. For example, rural people have abandoned many apparently promising approaches introduced by projects, owing to the inaccessibility of spare parts, lack of capacity for maintenance and repairs, and insufficient resources for purchase and maintenance.<sup>3</sup>
- Worldwide, many agricultural and rural development good practices remain on a small scale. Scaling-up of SARD good practices, including promoting local innovation, can be a valuable and cost-effective strategy to optimize past efforts and investments and to broaden positive impacts of rural poverty reduction.<sup>8</sup>
- Over the centuries, rural people in many parts of the world have successfully resolved serious agronomic, economic, institutional, environmental and technological problems, through their own ingenuity, innovations and learning processes. These successes form part of a country's knowledge capital; if recognized and shared, they can inspire

and enable rural communities in other parts of the country or in other regions to overcome similar constraints.

## What are the policy goals?

- Promote the uptake of SARD good practices, innovations and methodologies by mainstreaming them into research, extension, education and media systems, and rural development programmes and policies.

## Scaling-up

Scaling-up leads to "more quality benefits to more people over a wider geographic area more quickly, more equitably and more lastingly". Scaling-up can occur both vertically and horizontally. **Vertical processes** involve expansion from the level of grassroots organizations to national institutions and policies. **Horizontal processes** refer to geographical spread or replication on a larger human scale, from hundreds to thousands or millions of people.<sup>1,2</sup>



- Enable rural communities and grassroots organizations to satisfy their own needs, make better use of available resources and increase their access to and influence over public and private services, effectively, efficiently and sustainably.

## The policy issues

### Identifying whether scaling-up is feasible

In assessing the potential to replicate small-scale successes, policy-makers need to consider the balance among the social, economic and environmental impacts, the number of beneficiaries and the cost effectiveness.<sup>2</sup> Other prerequisites that determine whether scaling-up is feasible, include whether there are adequate financial resources, human capacities, extension services and infrastructure present in the area to support scaling-up processes; whether policy-makers are sufficiently aware of the development problems that a good practice can resolve; and whether beneficiaries and implementing actors have already shown some commitment to supporting the good practice and its scaling-up.

### Defining whether practices are “good”

There is no blueprint for defining a good practice. Prior to scaling-up, the first challenge is for development actors to identify SARD good practices that can be replicated within related or different contexts. Involving multiple stakeholders with different perspectives in documenting

and systematizing successful experiences is one useful way of discovering and identifying potential good practices.<sup>1</sup> Good practices often emerge when multiple stakeholders agree on a practice's cost-benefit ratio, ecological, economic and social sustainability, and poverty reduction impact.<sup>15</sup> Cost-benefit assessments need to consider both planned and unintended changes in income, social disparities, labour, and other direct and indirect benefits and costs for the target group and the larger community. To have any potential for scaling-up, stakeholders must screen and select practices, based on whether they address a need shared widely by the rural poor, whether they yield rapid and easily recognizable results, and whether they have already been thoroughly tested and evaluated. Practices that are flexible enough to be adapted to a range of conditions tend to be easier to scale up. For example, “climatically flexible” practices are viable in a variety of climatic settings.<sup>2,12</sup> Practices that poor people have already spontaneously replicated often have some potential to achieve a larger scale and should be given priority. Technological and institutional factors, such as whether a practice builds on or incorporates indigenous knowledge or whether active farmers, fishers and herders or other groups are present in the region, can also affect adoption.

### Matching practices to people and places

The main objective of scaling-up is to enable poor rural people, with their diverse priorities, needs and circumstances, to gain access to, develop and adapt appropriate

### A SARD good practice

A SARD good practice is any agricultural or rural development innovation, technology, behaviour, organization or approach that is consistent with core SARD principles. This means that the practice must be beneficial to the environment, profitable for farmers and communities, socially and culturally appropriate, and productive over the long term.

Good practices tend to be effective, efficient, easily replicated by a wide range of communities facing similar constraints, responsive to real local needs and adaptable to specific local conditions.

SARD good practices may deal with production, processing, marketing, governance or empowerment, and cover a wide range of sectors, from water harvesting to community forestry or land tenure security.<sup>7</sup>

solutions to priority problems. Given this diversity, policy-makers need to identify practices and scaling-up strategies that can be matched to a defined set of agro-ecological and socio-economic conditions. Even then, ensuring that the poorest and most marginalized can adopt the good practices often requires greater costs and longer time investments than for other groups.<sup>2</sup>

### Critical factors influencing the scaling-up process

Scaling up from thousands to millions of people is an enormous challenge and depends on many factors. The willingness and capacity of potential beneficiaries to take risks and test and adopt new practices, the availability of critical inputs such as seeds or livestock, and the presence of market demand and incentives can also determine whether scaling-up efforts will be successful. Whether the development agency responsible has a sound technical knowledge of the practice and sufficient funds and time to ensure its uptake can also influence scaling-up outcomes. Scaling-up efforts are more likely to succeed in contexts where governments, the private sector, development organizations and communities



are already engaged in effective partnerships or networks, informal groups are present and active, or rural people are involved in local and national decision-making processes.<sup>2,4,8,12,15</sup> The presence of supportive policies, clear and secure land tenure systems, and high literacy rates are other factors that can support scaling-up efforts.<sup>2</sup>

## What are the policy options?

Scaling-up is complex and there is no single process appropriate for all situations. Depending on the context, policy-makers may consider the following practical scaling-up strategies, which have different advantages and limitations in terms of impact, costs and numbers of people reached.

Scaling-up can take place through horizontal or geographical expansion of small-scale success, or through a vertical uptake of micro-level good practices into macro-policies and institutions. The following processes have been shown to be particularly effective in scaling up SARD good practices.

### Horizontal scaling-up strategies

- **Research, extension and education services:** Formal education and extension systems are crucial means of scaling up SARD good practices, through integration in existing institutions.<sup>14</sup> For extension services to be effective, staff training, broadening of technical mandates and encouragement of farmers' involvement in bottom-up research, experimentation and planning are vital. Incorporating good practices into educational and extension curricula and making them the subject of academic and on-farm research are other important means for validating and scaling up successful practices. Linkages among extension and research systems and farmers' organizations are essential for identifying, testing and improving good practices and ensuring their uptake and diffusion.<sup>11,12</sup>
- **FFS and variants (Fisheries, Herder and Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools):** These group-based and farmer-led learning processes combine concepts and methods from agro-ecology, experiential education,

participatory experimentation and community development over a full cropping season. Although limited to a small number of participants (an average of 30), FFS and their variants often result in high-quality learning among participants who have minimal formal education, and rapid adoption of good practices when there are visible economic benefits. FFS have also produced far-reaching behavioural changes in participants, such as reduced pesticide use, greater capacities of farmers, fishers, herders and youth to influence formal research agendas and extension systems, and group empowerment and involvement in research, training, marketing and advocacy activities beyond the scope or duration of the FFS itself.

- **Community exchanges:** Through community exchanges, farmers and rural communities learn about good practices. This approach can demonstrate the effectiveness of a particular practice, clarify otherwise invisible supportive conditions, and foster adoption by the visiting group because of a certain shared knowledge and trust among peers. Community-owned learning processes work best when supported by skilled facilitators or interpreters and incorporated into longer-term learning processes that permit testing, feedback and iterative learning. Peer-to-peer exchanges of ideas at farmer field days or other venues can also facilitate the sharing and uptake of good practices among rural organizations.
- **Media communication:** National communication strategies can promote widespread scaling-up of good practices through diverse media. Farmers' organizations can collaborate in government media campaigns by using their own communication facilities, such as information notes, newsletters, radio and assemblies, to reach local farmers. **Rural radio** although inadequate for providing detailed knowledge and training, has wide coverage, is cheap and accessible to those without formal education. It is therefore an excellent means for raising public awareness about valuable technologies and practices.<sup>9</sup> **Video** can also be an effective communication tool, but requires skilled producers, more sophisticated

repair and maintenance facilities for production and viewing and more costly dissemination campaigns. Well-designed **training material** can provide an important and cheap reference for extensionists and those rural people who can read the language in question.<sup>9</sup> As **computers and mobile networks** become more accessible in rural areas, new opportunities are opening up for interactive learning through the Internet, CDs/DVDs and other means.

### Vertical scaling-up strategies

- **Supporting policies and legal frameworks:** Political commitment and support at the national, regional and decentralized levels, financial assistance and supportive legal and regulatory frameworks can create an enabling environment for scaling up SARD good practices. For example, policies that reduce the relative price of agricultural inputs, or land tenure systems that protect farmers' long-term investments can directly determine whether adoption of a good practice is feasible or not.<sup>12</sup>
- **Exposure and dialogue:** During exposure and dialogue visits, government officials, international policy-makers and civil society representatives from other areas live and work with a host family in a poor rural community for several days. This direct contact increases mutual understanding, gives confidence to rural communities and enables authorities to develop policies and programmes that are more effective and relevant for the poor. A facilitating organization that is already known in the region and that has the community's trust, along with pre-visit orientation and post-visit reflection sessions, are key elements to making immersion visits a cost-effective and feasible strategy<sup>10</sup> for scaling up SARD good practices.

### The role of local champions

Individuals or groups with charisma, unique skills and drive can act as catalysts for building on small-scale successes and can greatly contribute to the scaling-up efforts of governments and development actors.<sup>1</sup>

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## References

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<sup>2</sup> **World Bank**, 2003. *Scaling-up the impact of good practices in rural development*. Report No. 26031. Washington, DC.

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<sup>6</sup> **Dilts, R.** 2001. From Farmers' Field Schools to community IPM – scaling up the IPM movement. *LEISA Magazine*, October 2001: 18–21.

<sup>7</sup> **SARD Initiative FAO**. 2006. *Guide to produce a succinct description of a sustainable agriculture and rural development (SARD) good practice*. Rome.

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## Tools and resources

**SARD Initiative Good Practice Database:**

<http://www.fao.org/sard/en/init/1574/2225/1846/index.html>

**FAO Best Practices Database:**

<http://www.fao.org/bestpractices>

**FAO Technology for Agriculture (TECA) Database:** <http://www.fao.org/sd/teca/>

**FAO Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Database:**

<http://www.fao.org/prods/GAP/>

**FAO Guide to identify and document SARD good practices:**

<ftp://ftp.fao.org/SD/SDA/SDAR/sard/GP%20Guidelines-English1.doc>

**FAO Research and Extension Portal:**

<http://www.fao.org/sd/sdr/portal/>

**FAO Communication for Development:**

[http://www.fao.org/nr/com/com\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/nr/com/com_en.htm)

**Global Farmer Field School (FFS)**

**Network and Resource Centre:** <http://www.farmerfieldschool.info/>

**PROmoting Local INNOVation (PROLINNOVA):**

<http://www.prolinnova.net>

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The “SARD and...” Policy Briefs are designed to encourage and assist governments in developing and implementing policies to achieve sustainable agriculture and rural development.

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