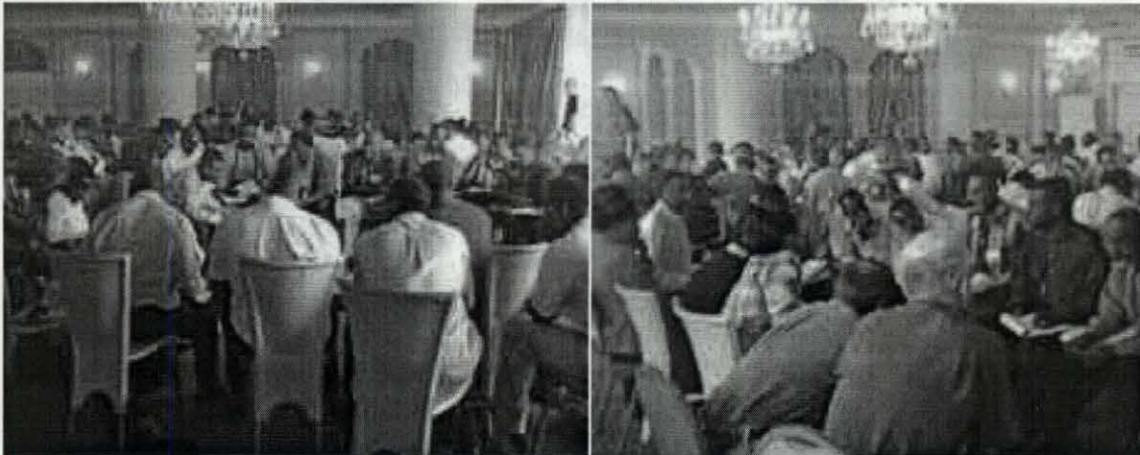


Strengthening AfNet: Towards implementation of the Yaoundé symposium recommendations

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In May 2004, AfNet held a symposium in Yaoundé, Cameroon on improving human welfare and environmental conservation by empowering farmers to combat soil fertility degradation that was attended by 155 scientists and donor representatives from 32 different countries. A total of 120 papers were presented and will be published in a book by Kluwer Academic Publishers. A few of these papers will also be published in a special issue of *Nutrient Cycling in Agroecosystems Journal*. During the symposium recommendations were made as a challenge of implementation to enhance AfNets' service delivery. These recommendations focused on the following issues:

A. Capacity Building

Recommendations

1. Revive the Curriculum Support Programme in soil biology and fertility, with a strong focus on encouraging "T-shaped" skills i.e. scientists with multi-

disciplinary skills and vision as well as disciplinary expertise

2. Assist members to develop their communication skills with respect to a wide range of partners and stakeholders: other scientists, extension workers, farmers, policy makers, etc
3. Utilise AfNet as a 'self-learning' network structured as a series of 'communities of interest' related to the TSBF themes and approaches
4. Promote and encourage the development of management and leadership skills.
5. Develop 'South-South' linkages for the transfer of knowledge, experience, technology and capacity building with MIS (Latin America), SARNet (India) and others

Progress made

Although AfNet is dominated by biophysical scientists, a special effort has been made to organize trainings in

social science to encourage T-shaped skills. For 2005, one training course on Participatory Research and Scaling Up and a second one on Gender Analysis are under preparation in addition to a biophysical one on Decision Support System for Agro-forestry Transfer (DSSAT).



A proposal was submitted to the African Development Bank (ADB) for the development of the soil biology and fertility curriculum as recommended. Also, a proposal between AfNet and MIS Consortium has been prepared and is under review to strengthen south-south linkages with Latin-America.

B. Concepts and Process Studies Recommendations

6. Embrace the opportunities for 'market-led ISFM' by linking TSBF's capacity for ISFM result generation with the complementary development-orientated expertise of other networks, institutes and NGOs
7. Develop a hypothesis-driven conceptual framework for the adaptive and market-led end of TSBF's work
8. Using partnerships, the conceptual framework and the

'success stories' of ISFM adoption to initiate pilot studies on market-led ISFM.

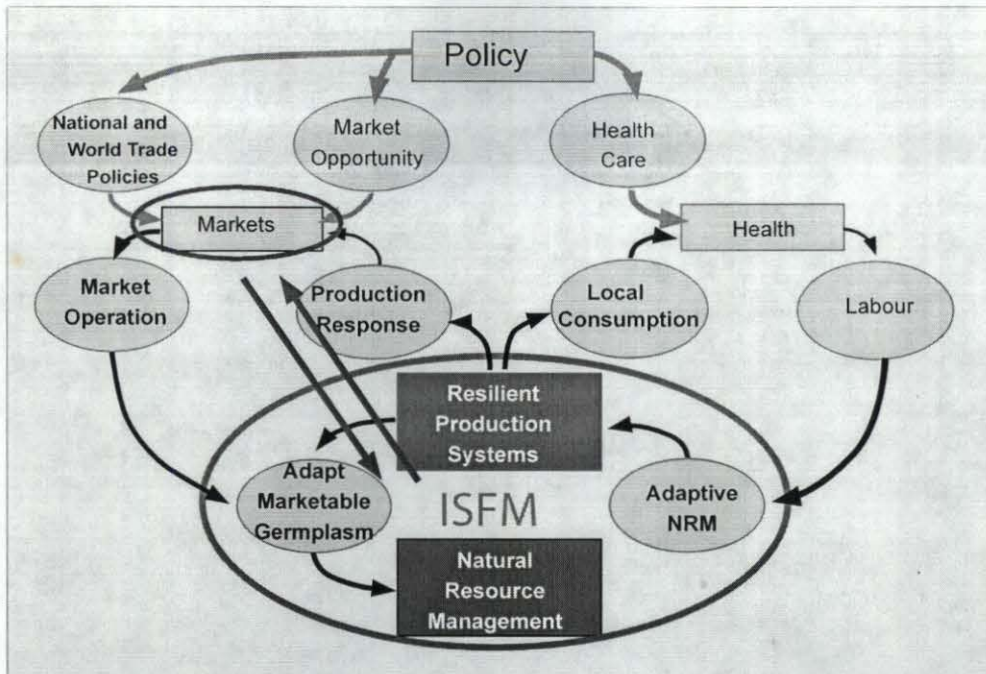
9. Ensure the "I" in ISFM is used in integrating water, germplasm and pest interactions in soil nutrient research
10. Include all capitals - Social, Human etc - with Natural Resource capital in models

Progress made

There are about 80 sites of network trials in different agro-ecological zones distributed

AfNet Bench mark sites in Africa





The processes and components of Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM)

in East, South, Central and West Africa regions that are now increasingly addressing adaptive research in addition to the basic focus. In these trials, we have adopted the new paradigm of Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM) which is a holistic approach to soil fertility research that embraces the full range of driving factors and consequences of soil degradation – biological, chemical, physical, social, economic, and political.

In addition to the present AfNet projects, other proposals have been developed and sent to Norway, CIDA, Syngenta and ADB and all these projects address the markets.

C. Scaling Up

Recommendations

11. Engage policy makers from the beginning to the end
12. Form institutional partnerships that link the private sector, the public sector, the farmer and the civil society
13. Integrate Impact Assessment into projects from the beginning.

14. Analyze success stories (warrantage, microdose, soybean multipurpose grain legumes etc.....) for opportunities to test elsewhere.

Progress made

AfNet is presently scaling up results of a micro-dosing project to more communities in West Africa. Also, in the Desert Margins Programme (DMP), a second phase has been approved that focuses exclusively on scaling up of water harvesting technologies tested in the first phase. The project targets six countries. In addition, there are three ADB/CORAF projects in which AfNet is a partner and these projects will mainly be disseminating technologies related to water harvesting, phosphate rock and micro-dosing. One more project with CTA has been developed that aims to transfer best bet soil fertility technologies to farmers employing a range of scaling up tools such as farmer field schools (FFS) and brochures interpreted in local languages.



Maize response to INM technologies in Western Kenya: In the foreground is a crop of maize showing N deficiency symptoms and stunted growth while in the background is a health crop

D. Institutional Links

Recommendations

15. Improve links with sub-regional bodies (ASARECA, CORAF, FARA, SAFGRAD.....).
16. Develop regional teams capable of contributing to the Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme.
17. Contribute to the African International Nitrogen Initiative.
18. Improve synergies with other networks (SWMNET, AISSA etc)

Progress made

The selection of the new AfNet Scientific Steering Committee was made to ensure geographical representation of all the sub-regions and one of their tasks is to consolidate multi-disciplinary regional team

building and interact with Sub-Regional Organizations. Special efforts have been made to link AfNet with other networks such as SWMnet of ASARECA and AISSA of IFDC. AfNet is also having an active role in SSACP. There are also discussions to have AfNet hosted by FARA.

E. Others

Recommendations

19. Form a professional association for scientists working in land productivity.
20. Exploit funding opportunities with national and bilateral budgets as well as multi-lateral donors.