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PROMISING PRACTICES

CONTENTS

PROMISING PRACTICES

- MPTS potentials for on-farm firewood production 1

NEW INITIATIVES

- Visiting scientists' scheme 4
- Extension of mangrove species beyond intertidal zone 4

MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

- Bamboos in agriculture—potentials and concern 6

PROFILE I

- Indian Institute of Spices Research (IISR), Calicut 8

PROFILE II

- Central Arid Zone Research Institute (CAZRI), Jodhpur 12

SPECTRUM

17

THE LAST PAGE

24

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MPTS Potentials for On-Farm Firewood Production

Continued deforestation and land degradation poses a serious threat to the sustainability of our land resources. At present, only 11.73% of the total land area is under dense forest cover, and there is a deficit of almost all types of woods, of which firewood alone accounts for 195 million cu m. Though other sources of energy for cooking food have increased but still firewood remains the major source for the rural households. And its deficit forces use of crop residues and animal dung-cake for cooking food. This deprives land of its rich source of organic manure.

Besides, the growing deficit of firewood in the proximity of use and its increasing price makes the situation still worse.

*I*N the last five decades since Independence, the research managers have had a relatively simple task of resource allocation, as accelerating over-all food production had remained their major task. Experience and informed judgements of the scientists led to fairly efficient research-resource allocation decisions and reasonable realization of the objectives. The last decade, however, has added considerable complexity. Sustainability, regional balance, trade-technology links, demand shifts towards non-foodgrains, income growth for the poor, are a few of the several new paradigms that are drawing attention worldwide. With time, this complexity is expected to grow further. On the one hand, resource allocation for agricultural research in government-funded institutions is gradually declining, and on the other there is a reduction in the donor support. These factors, obviously, neces-

sitate a critical analysis of the on-going research programmes. Research planning, prioritization, monitoring and evaluation have, thus, become a necessity, requiring specialized skills and procedures.

Fortunately in the ICAR, the basic system for informal research priority-setting and monitoring exists. To cite a few, the Governing Body, the Standing Policy Planning Committee, Standing Finance Committee, Regional Committees, ICAR-DAC interface, and the All-India Workshops of the various Co-ordinated Projects are the major instruments in place. At the Institute level, Scientific Research Council (SRC), Research Advisory Committee (RAC), Management Committee (MC), Quinquennial Review Team (QRT) are operative for priority-setting and monitoring. Yet in the changed context, there is an urgent need to review these, and where appropriate, to bring in required improvements in their context, design and implementation.

For any priority-setting, monitoring and evaluation (PME), information management through an Agricultural Research Information System (ARIS) is a prerequisite. In addition, an effective administrative set up, linking project information system with project-based funding and evaluation of scientists and institutions, is required. It is well understood that so long as an evaluation system is not effective and transparent, the very purpose of priority-setting, monitoring and evaluation mechanism will not be served. Hence, our efforts to build an effective ARIS for Indian NARS will have to be further accelerated at all levels.

It is also important that any PME is based on the existing system, and should be implemented as well as institutionalized in a phased manner with required authority and accountability. The procedures needed for this should be simple, transparent and time-bound.

Another as-

pect which requires greater attention is procedure for project evaluation and impact assessment, which is often critical for attracting required funding/donor support. To add value for investment, an impact assessment must find priority in any research system. Impact Evaluation and Assessment (IEA) enables research managers to have mid-course adjustments as well as reprioritization of programmes for achieving desired objectives.

We, in the Indian NARS, must bring in these reforms to get better returns for investments made in agricultural research.



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