



EXTENSIONNET

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Participative Extension: a Key to Sustainable Agriculture

Report by Amabel Fulton, University of Tasmania

Sustainable agriculture is being achieved, and its practice can be expanded through participative extension, according to keynote speaker at the 2nd Australasia Pacific Extension Conference, Mr Jules Pretty.



Jules Pretty and others who gave the conference and international face. Sione Hausia (Tonga), Christine MacDonald (South Africa), Jules Pretty (UK), Mphoya Thobela (South Africa) and Samuel Rangae (PNG)

Jules, the Director of the Centre for the Environment and Society at the University of Essex in the UK, said that despite much of the negative talk about sustainable agriculture - that there are too many people, that developing countries will never be able to feed themselves, that environmental degradation is inevitable and that low input agriculture is low output - there is significant evidence to the contrary. Drawing on examples from the developing world, Jules showed that sustainable agriculture is a reality, and that participative extension, with its focus on increasing social capital, is a key element of its success.

"People are the solution, not the problem", he said.

True participation is one of the critical components of success in development projects, being associated with increased mobilisation of stakeholder ownership of policies and projects; greater efficiency, understanding and social cohesion; more cost-effective services; greater transparency and accountability; increased empowering of the poor and disadvantaged and strengthened capacity of people to learn and act.

But Jules stressed that if we are to achieve sustainable agriculture, we needed to ensure that real participation (or as he terms it, interactive participation) is occurring, not just the use of the terminology to give the appearance of participation.

"Participation has become part of the language of people involved in agriculture - it has become a fashion with lots of interpretations, but only sometimes does it lead to success," he said. "Truly interactive participation is where people participate in joint analysis, develop action plans and form or strengthen local groups or institutions. The learning methods used seek multiple perspectives and groups determine how available resources are used."

In demonstrating that sustainable agriculture was already a reality, rather than just a myth, Jules referred to study of the extent and impact of sustainable

(Continued page 3)

CONTENTS

Participative Extension: a Key to Sustainable Agriculture 1

From the Chair 2
From the Editor 2

Expressions of Interest 3
1998 Conference/Forum
1999 International Conf.

Lyn Sykes: Dinner Speaker Extraordinaire! 4

Conference Fieldtrips 5
Alternative Industries in the Ovens Valley
Landcare and Agroforestry Tour: Mullengandra Catchment
Women Making a Difference: Rutherglen

APEN News: President's Report to the 3rd AGM, APEN Chapter and Secretariat Finances 6

Conference Evaluation – Part 1 – What Happened? 8

APEN Steering Group 12

From the Chair

John Bourne

People are still talking about the Albury conference, the range of topics covered in the sessions, the professionalism of the organising committee, the tours and social arrangements and of course the great networking with lots of new and old friends.

If you didn't manage to get to Albury then you will discover some of highlights in this edition of *ExtensionNet*, and also realise that you missed an important extension event.

In case you were not aware several groups took the opportunity to hold their own meetings as well as attending the conference. I was really pleased to see this, as it is very much part of the spirit of networking and collaboration that is APEN.

It was great to welcome our neighbours from across the Tasman and also from the Pacific. Once again we had representation from outside the Australasia-Pacific region, Jules Pretty of course from the UK, but also others from South Africa and the Middle East.

It was said several times during the three days that this conference was so successful because it was designed particularly for working practitioners, interacting with each other. At the same time I think that an important message from the key-note speakers was that even working practitioners can and should have an important part to play in policy making at a range of levels, and we should look for opportunities to make this happen.

Without going on too long I believe that the Albury conference contributed significantly to the spirit of professional extension, and we can all be proud of the part we each played.

1998 will be a new challenge. We welcome Chris Sounness and Elwin Turnbull as a new members of the Committee of Management, and at the same time thank Warren Straw and Dale Williams for their considerable efforts. Warren has been a tower of

strength as Treasurer and committee member, and of course we would not have had an *ExtensionNet* to read without Dale as editor.

Financially we are in good order at the present time, although we can not afford to become complacent about the dollars, and the agreement reached at the AGM to raise subscriptions to \$50 was a forward-looking decision.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Committee of Management to say we look forward to working with you in 1998.

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From the Editor

Elwin Turnbull

This edition covers the conference and since it was so rich we will have more from the most popular topics in our next Newsletter and some on the participant evaluation. We are also looking forward to an edition helped out with a Queensland flavour and another newsletter from a range of practitioners in other fields and in the Asia Pacific region. Later in 1998 we expect a joint event with the Institute so a newsletter on those events will be of interest.

One criticism of the newsletter is that it is not applied enough. The content is only as applied as the papers we receive from you all. So how about you put pen to paper and write a note or longer piece on the things that help you to be more effective in your day to day work. If you know of someone you admire for their effectiveness in extension maybe you could interview them and let us all know what you found out from them. I will be watching my mail box! ✱

The very large and comprehensive conference proceedings ran out at the conference and there are people who did not attend who would like copies! The committee needs information on potential demand before running more copies so if you would like copies please Fax the secretariat (02 6056 1967) or email (rcurrie@albury.net.au).

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(Continued from page 1)

agriculture in 20 developing countries which found there were some 1.93 million households farming 4.1 million hectares with sustainable agriculture technologies and practices (Pretty et al, 1996). Jules argued that although this was only a small proportion of the world's agriculture, it did signal hope for not only developing countries, but for industrialised countries as well.

In facilitating farmers through the transition from conventional to sustainable agriculture, Jules said it is important that sustainable agriculture should not prescribe a defined set of technologies, practices or policies, rather it should be an evolving process of development which allows farmers and communities to adapt to changing circumstances.

Describing a development project in Northern Thailand, Jules demonstrated the power of participation. The project was concerned with developing hedge rows, integrated pest management and livestock integration. It had four phases, with the adoption to withdrawal ratios measured in each phase (shown here in brackets).

Phase 1: Cash incentives, free inputs, high adoption, no adaptation (5:1)

Phase 2: All incentives stopped, participation begins (2:1)

Phase 3: Participatory approach became embedded, whole village planning (1:1)

Phase 4: Farmers adapting and innovating, generating new technologies (3:1)



Jules Pretty involved in leading a workshop as well as his keynote presentation

"The hills where they lived looked the same in 1990 as they did in 1997 - but your confidence about whether they would be sustained has to be different," he said.

Jules emphasised the importance and value of natural and social capital in sustainable agriculture.

Natural capital refers to the stocks of plants and animals, and the ecosystems they make up, the minerals, atmosphere and water. **Social capital** refers to the structure of relations between actors and has four central aspects:

1. **Trust** - this leads to confidence and co-operation, but it takes time and breaks down easily
2. **Common rules** - this means the group interests are put ahead of the individuals through mutually agreed rules of behaviour

3. **Reciprocity** - this increases trust
4. **Connectedness** - this refers to the networks and civic engagements (clubs, societies etc.) which are vital for social capital formation and maintenance

"Natural and social capital provide the basis for economic growth and enhanced human welfare," Jules said. While they are fragile, they can increase with use. Under certain circumstances, the more they are used, the more they regenerate. But equally, they can each be rapidly diminished with the wrong kind of approach for social and economic development.

"One of the big challenges we face is making agriculture productive in a natural capital and social capital sense, and ending up with more in the bank," he said.

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EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

The APEN Committee of Management is looking for Expressions of Interest from APEN member(s)/Chapter to run either:

***An event in November/December 1998 to include the 4th Annual General Meeting of APEN**

***The 3rd Australasia Pacific National Extension Conference in November/December 1999**

A share of the profit of such an event would go back to the APEN Chapter concerned in organising the event and Rosemary at the APEN Secretariat would be willing to provide paid assistance.

The written expression of interest should include details of possible venue, topic of forum/conference, speakers/presenters and the organising committee. The expression of interest needs to be at the Secretariat by **March 16th 1998** to allow consideration by the Committee of Management before its April 1st teleconference. Please address correspondence to: **APEN Conference 1998 (or 1999), PO Box 1239, Wodonga 3689 OR email rcurrie@albury.net.au**