

Some Comments on the XXI International Conference of Agricultural Economists

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Some Comments on the XXI International Conference of Agricultural Economists

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1. A brief introduction of International Association of Agricultural Economists (IAAE)

The XXI Conference of IAAE was held for the first time in Japan between 22nd to 29th, August, in Tokyo. Its main theme was " Sustainable Agricultural Development, the Role of International Cooperation ". The reason why this theme was chosen was made clear in the opening speech by the President, Mr. Longworth. He stated as follows :

Less than a decade ago, the idea and attitude of sustainable agriculture were very limited to dedicated but numerically small groups in a few developed countries. But the current widespread public concern about the sustainability of human activities and of natural resources is not a passing fad. Surely there has been a permanent shift in public opinions. Historically agricultural production is one of the most basic human activities. Few people doubt the need of these activities to be sustainable in the long terms. But practically many modern agricultural production systems appear not to be sustainable, which are the result of the application of science and technology to solve the problem of increasing food and fiber production to feed and clothe a rapidly growing world population. In this context there were many papers of this conference that had focused on the sustainability of agriculture and on its related problems.

IAAE was organized in 1929 by a group of agricultural economists from 11 countries who met at Darlington Hall, Devon, England. These countries include Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom and the United States. Those who attended concluded that such conferences would be great benefit to agricultural economists throughout the world in increasing their knowledge and understanding of their people and their problems and in promoting mutual understanding and good will.

IAAE is a world wide organization of agricultural economists and others concerned with agricultural economic problems. Its objectives are : a) to foster the application of the science of agriculture to the economic and social conditions of rural people and

their associated communities ; b) to advance knowledge of agricultural process and the economic organization of agriculture ; c) to facilitate communication and exchange of information among those who concerned with rural welfare throughout the world. Since 1974, IAAE has had special consultative status with FAO. It is recognized as an international non-governmental organization with interest and objectives which fall within FAO's field of activities. IAAE has had similar relation with ANCTAD. Previous conferences have treated wide range of themes. For instance they include since last two decades as follows : 1973 Agricultural Economist and the Farmer (Brasil) ; 1976 Decision Making and Agriculture (Kenya) ; 1979 Rural Changes challenge for Agricultural Economist (Canada) ; 1982 Growth and Equity in Agricultural Development (Indonesia) ; 1985 Agriculture in the Turbulent World (Spain) ; 1988 Agriculture and Government in an Interdependent World (Argentina). In every conference the number in attendance was increasing and amounted at this time to 1546 from 60 affiliations that is the record number of its history. It was very impressive that many participants from the developing countries took important role in discussions. In the words of Mr. Johnson, " Our association was growing out of its earlier UK/US/European orientation" . The scope and role of the IAAE are now surely expanding.

2. Personal comment on some interesting topics

I would like to comment on some topics among many papers including Elmhirst Memorial Lecture and invited papers. Mr.V.S. Vyas points in his lecture that in context of poverty eradication there are questions on environmental and economic sustainability of the present agricultural system. Current anxiety about its sustainability can be ascribed to two related factors ; the growing pressure of population on land resources and deteriorating quality of earth resources partly due to intensification of agriculture.

For the poor countries it is a serious challenge to raise agricultural productivity without endangering its sustainability. It is already well known there is no outlet in the developing countries today to use " open frontiers or spaces " for food production. The poor in these countries have to find solution to the poverty problem within their own countries. In this situation the main sources of livelihood in rural area, namely, agriculture, plays a pivotal role, and the poor are often blamed for " over-exploiting" the resources, as they heavily depend upon natural resources and also discount the future value of income streams. This is particularly true of the exhaustible resources but one should not overestimate the damage caused to the natural resources by petty pilferage by the poor. The rich due to the wastful living style deplete the resources. More demand on land and natural resources is made by the life style of the rich than by the need-based exploitation by the poor. These remarks are very instructive for us, namely, the Japanese who has often little attention to sustain world natural resources. Surely we will not be able to talk about the sustainable agriculture and preservation of environment unless we seriously question, and suggest alternatives to, modern style of living.

In his paper "Food Security: Issues and Options ", Mr. K.S. Parikh explains the meaning of food security, in which he insists as follows : Food security should mean

that a country will be able to provide "adequate" food to all its citizens under all circumstances that can be reasonably expected. The most essential objectives should be to provide food security to all as a matter of right and without inflicting any humiliation on the poor or the poor countries. At what level of food energy intake a person should be considered adequately fed is still a point of discussion among experts. Yet no matter how one measures hunger and poverty, one finds hundreds of millions of people in the world, almost all of them in the developing countries, suffer from persistent hunger. In addition to these people, many others live precariously on the margin of subsistence. One has to recognize that to deal with hunger is to deal with poverty and underdevelopment. Lack of food security is a problem only for the people and poor nations.

The understanding of food security as that of Mr. Parikh may be theoretically accepted by most of agricultural economists in Japan, but they may practically use the term of " food security " in a little different way such as " to keep good level self-sufficiency in domestic rice consumption ". I am sure that the Japanese participants in this conferences could learn the common meaning and usage of food security from the global point of view. The difference between both agricultural, economical situation of food security and its common usage remind us that we must rethink our positions for management of rice trade under present GATT-negotiation in Uruguay Round. In this context, the words of Mr. de Zeeuw has made a strong impact on us : " Agriculture, like the rest of the economy, will have to be integrated more closely into the international trading system. Europe and Japan should stop trying to make the agricultural sector an exception by using arguments based on the concepts of security and the preservation of the environment. Trade liberalisation for agricultural products can go well with food security and a sound environment policy." Which lesson should we learn from this ? What kind of defence could we make in official negotiations or in informal discussions against the majority opinion and the trend for free trade in the world?

Mr. R.P.Yadav stresses in his paper " Sustainable Development Strategies in less favoured and marginal production areas" that special strategies will have to be organized in the mountain areas of the Hindu Kush Himalaya region where the rural population is at present suffering from socio-economic problems, namely, overpopulation, poverty and environmental deterioration. The necessity for such strategies is likewise apparent in the mountainous regions of most developing countries. Under present economic and social conditions it seems to be very difficult problems, but if we would like to solve the poverty and to keep the sustainability of environment in these areas from the global point of view, we should have to contribute step by step to build up the fundamental preconditions fostering sustainable agriculture and adequate rural society. For these tasks it may be useful to learn from the policy system of these less favoured areas and these of mountainous regions in Europe, if those who may concern these strategies could consider and understand exactly the differences in socio-economic and political conditions between both. Especially for infrastructural improvement Japan should have to prepare reasonable supports with all kind of method.

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