

Reference 1 Selecting PLAR-IRM sites

Summary

This reference provides guidelines for choosing inland valleys where the participatory learning and action research (PLAR) approach for integrated rice management (IRM) will be implemented. This is a very important step which will largely determine the probability of success and the ease with which results obtained can be diffused.

Each inland valley is a complex entity in which biophysical, agricultural, human, socio-organizational and economic factors interact and influence crop management and the level of intensification and diversification. This includes:

- Size of the catchment area and land use.
- Interest, motivation and capacity of farmers.
- Social organization.
- Land tenure and population pressure.
- Production systems.
- Agronomic characteristics of the inland-valley lowlands (water management, soil type/quality, etc.).
- Accessibility of input and output markets.

The choice of sites is very important, as it determines to a large extent the probability of success and the ease with which results can be diffused. It is important to note that selected sites will become PLAR-IRM Centers in the area. Such centers have an important role to play in the diffusion of results through farmer-to-farmer training (*see* Section 3.2 of the *Facilitator's Manual*).

Major factors to consider in selecting intervention sites are:

- *Size and diversity of the target area*: the number of intervention sites will depend on how diverse the zone is and on how many staff are available to facilitate the PLAR-IRM work. Limit the number of intervention sites at the start to gain experience and to ensure that the approach is properly implemented.
- *Inland-valley typology*: the most important criteria are: degree of water control, social organization, land tenure, production system (rice, rice–rice, rice–vegetables, etc.), the size of the catchment area, its morphology, its agricultural potential, and market accessibility.
- *Representativeness*: a site has to be representative of a large proportion of the inland valleys in the target zone (as based on typology). The site also needs to be reasonably close to other inland valleys with the same or a similar typology to facilitate extension of PLAR-IRM to neighboring villages through farmer-to-farmer training.
- *Accessibility*: the site needs to be easily accessible throughout the year to avoid cancellation of PLAR-IRM sessions because of bad weather, and to facilitate diffusion of PLAR-IRM to neighboring villages.

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- *Distance to the site*: it is important to choose sites that are not too far away from where the PLAR-IRM team members are based, as PLAR-IRM sessions are held once every one or two weeks.
- *Prior knowledge of the area*: it is preferable to select sites that are relatively well studied in terms of farmer community and environment.
- *Degree of water control*: water control is a determining factor for inland-valley potential. If there are striking differences in water control, intervention sites should cover such differences.
- *Intensification and diversification*: this aspect is closely linked to water control; in general, good water control increases the levels of intensification and diversification. It is also influenced by market accessibility and by farmers' interest, motivation and capacities. The technical options that will be discussed in the PLAR-IRM sessions will to a large extent depend on the levels of intensification and diversification.
- *Social cohesion*: PLAR demands a strong commitment from participating farmers as they are expected to attend all the PLAR-IRM sessions, which are held every one or two weeks. PLAR is based on collective learning and implementation of collective activities, such as the maintenance of irrigation and drainage infrastructure. Good social cohesion among farmers is, therefore, important. Such cohesion may be lacking, for example, where inland-valley lowlands are jointly exploited by more than one village.
- *Farmer organization*: strong farmer networks will facilitate the spontaneous and autonomous diffusion of PLAR-IRM from farmer to farmer.

Bibliography

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