



United Nations

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

INNOVATION BRIEFS

Issue 7

May 2009

The contribution of sustainable agriculture and land management to sustainable development

This brief discusses the potential for sustainable agriculture to contribute towards sustainable development with a particular focus on developing countries. It describes different sustainable agricultural practices and the extent of their adoption, identifies constraints to their further adoption, and presents actions and policy options that could accelerate the widespread adoption of sustainable agricultural practices.

Why sustainable agriculture?

The past decades have witnessed a dramatic change in agriculture with food production soaring due to the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution entailed the use of improved technologies (particularly the breeding of high yielding food crop varieties), the expansion of irrigation, mechanization, specialization, and the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. While the Revolution led to dramatic production increases

especially in Asia and Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, the increase in production was not sustainable. Rice yield growth in Asia declined sharply in the 1980s, from an annual growth rate of 2.6% in the 1970s to 1.5% during the period beginning in 1981, owing partly to increasing prices of chemical fertilizer and agrochemicals (pesticides and herbicides). More importantly, despite the productivity gains associated with the Green Revolution, poverty and hunger persist while land degradation and agriculture-related

environmental damage are prevalent and unabated. FAO's estimates indicate that, even before the recent food crisis, 848 million people suffered from chronic hunger worldwide between 2003 and 2005, 98% of whom lived in developing countries.

This brief was written by Menale Kassie and Precious Zikhali, from the Environment for Development Initiative. Kassie is with the Department of Economics of the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Zikhali is at the Centre for World Food Studies, VU University, Amsterdam.

Table 1

Impact of sustainable agriculture practices on food production and carbon sequestration (in soils and above-ground biomass)*

FAO farm system category	Average increase in crop yields (%)	Carbon sequestered (ton C/ha/year)
Smallholder irrigated	129.8 (±21.5)	0.15 (±0.012)
Wetland rice	22.3 (±2.8)	0.34(±0.035)
Smallholder rainfed humid	102.2 (±9.0)	0.46 (±0.034)
Smallholder rainfed highland	107.3 (±14.7)	0.36 (±0.022)
Smallholder rainfed dry/cold	99.2 (±12.5)	0.26 (±0.035)
Dualistic mixed	76.5 (±12.6)	0.32 (±0.023)
Coastal artisanal	62.0 (±20.0)	0.20 (±0.001)
Urban-based and kitchen garden	146.0 (±32.9)	0.24 (±0.061)
All projects	79.2 (±4.5)	0.35 (±0.016)

*Standard errors in parentheses. Authors compare change in crop yields with and without interventions (or with and without project). The interventions are sustainable agriculture practices.

Source: Pretty et al. (2003, 2006).



A publication of the Policy Analysis and Networks Branch of the Division for Sustainable Development

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Decreasing hunger requires increased food production, which in turn requires farmers' access to productivity-enhancing inputs, knowledge and skills. However, the majority of the chronically hungry are smallholder farmers in developing countries who practice subsistence agriculture on marginal soils, lack access to inputs and product markets, as well as financial resources to procure costly chemical fertilizer and other agrochemicals that might enhance the productivity of their land.

Moreover, the Green Revolution has been criticized for its adverse human health and environmental impacts. Agricultural intensification, through excessive and inappropriate use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, has polluted water bodies and degraded soils, led to biodiversity loss by killing beneficial plants, insects and wildlife. Irrigation has led to salinization (build-up of salt within the soil) and retreat of groundwater levels in areas where more water is pumped for irrigation than can be replenished by rainfall. Monoculture systems have led to biodiversity loss, including loss of natural predators, and, with heightened pest resistance, have required more or stronger agrochemicals to sustain yield levels. All these costs have not been properly internalized in the calculation of production costs of the Green Revolution model. In addition, inorganic fertilizer loses effectiveness when the organic matter of soil is low, which is of particular concern in many developing countries due to continuous cultivation and soil degradation.

Sustainable agriculture has emerged as an alternative agricultural system that addresses many of the constraints faced by resource-poor farmers and at the same time ensures environmental sustainability. It refers to the capacity of agriculture over time to contribute to overall welfare by providing sufficient food and other goods and services in ways that are economically efficient and profitable, socially responsible, and environmentally sound. This system involves a combination of inter-related soil, crop and livestock production practices in conjunction with the discontinuation or the reduced use of external inputs that are potentially harmful to the environment and/or the health of farmers and consumers. Instead, it

Table 2

Adoption of sustainable agriculture in developing countries in 2000

<i>FAO farm system category</i>	<i>Number of adopting farmers (million)</i>	<i>Hectares covered under Sustainable Agriculture (million)</i>
Smallholder irrigated	0.18	0.36
Wetland rice	8.71	7.00
Smallholder rainfed humid	1.70	1.08
Smallholder rainfed highland	0.40	0.73
Smallholder rainfed dry/cold	0.60	0.74
Dualistic mixed	0.54	26.85
Coastal artisanal	0.22	0.16
Urban-based and kitchen garden	0.21	0.16
All projects	12.56	36.95

Source: Pretty et al. (2006)

emphasizes the use of techniques of food production that integrate and are adapted to local natural processes such as nutrient cycling, biological nitrogen fixing, soil regeneration and natural enemies of pests. Using local resources to make initial soil and land improvements can get farmers on a virtuous cycle where rising incomes relieve the constraints to adoption of more resource-intensive sustainable practices.

Principles of sustainable agriculture

Economic sustainability. In order to be truly sustainable, a farm must be economically profitable. Sustainable agriculture can improve the economic viability of a farm in a number of ways. In the short term, improving soil management and crop rotation can increase yields while, in both the medium and long term, improved soil quality and water availability, as well as other environmental benefits from sustainable practices, may raise the value of the farm and provide for payments for environmental services. Economic viability can also be achieved through, for example, reducing machinery, chemical fertilizer and pesticide costs (for farmers who can afford these inputs), depending on the specific characteristics of the production system.

Environmental sustainability. Sustainable agriculture is frequently described as ecologically sound practices that have little to zero adverse effect on natural ecosystems, or even enhance environmental quality and the natural resource

base upon which the agricultural economy depends. Typically this is achieved through protecting, recycling, replacing and/or maintaining the natural resource base such as land (soil), water, biodiversity and wildlife that contribute towards conservation of natural capital. Synthetic fertilizers can be used to supplement natural inputs, as needed. Under sustainable agriculture, synthetic chemicals known to harm soil organisms, soil structure and biodiversity are avoided or reduced to minimum use.

Social sustainability. Social sustainability relates to the quality of life of those who work and live on the farm, as well as those in the surrounding communities. It includes ensuring equitable revenue or returns to different stakeholders of the agricultural production chain. In the context of high unemployment, sustainable agriculture can promote sharing of agricultural value added by more members of the community through more extensive use of available labor, at least for some techniques, thus contributing to social justice and cohesion. Fair treatment of workers and choosing to purchase supplies locally rather than from more distant markets are also elements of social sustainability.

Although the abovementioned elements are often discussed separately, they are not mutually exclusive: sustainable agriculture meets environmental, economic, and social objectives simultaneously. In many cases, sustainable agriculture practices are not new, but draw on traditional knowledge and practices, many of which have now been positively evaluated by scientific methods.

Can Sustainable Agriculture ensure food security over time?

A key question is whether sustainable agriculture can be productive enough to ensure food security. While there is a clear consensus as to the environmental and social benefits of sustainable agriculture (see examples below), there are still fears that it might not address the future demand for food. There is growing evidence, however, that sustainable agriculture practices have been able to increase productivity compared to conventional agriculture. A review of 286 sustainable agricultural projects carried out between 1999 and 2000 across eight categories of farming systems in

57 developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America revealed that farmers increased yields by an average of 79% by adopting sustainable agricultural practices (**Table 1**). In those projects, many practices were used but three types of technical improvements are argued to have played substantial roles in yield increases: 1) more efficient water use in both dryland and irrigated farming; 2) improvements in organic matter accumulation in soils and carbon sequestration; and 3) pest, weed, and disease control emphasizing on-farm biodiversity and reduced pesticides through integrated pest management or other techniques.

Evidence from global modeling is also clear. While organic systems produce only 92% of the yield produced by conventional agriculture in developed countries, they produce 80% more than conventional farms in developing countries. Organic methods could produce enough food on a global per capita basis to sustain the current human population, without putting more farmland into production. Leguminous cover crops could fix enough nitrogen to replace the amount of synthetic fertilizer currently in use.

The Tigray region of Ethiopia illustrates how sustainable agriculture can ensure sustainable development by raising yields and household income, improving the environment and attracting much needed community and government support (**Box 1**). **Box 2** presents selected case studies from developing countries to illustrate benefits of sustainable agriculture.

One promising and rapidly developing sustainable agricultural practice is the **System of Rice Intensification (SRI)**. The SRI, developed in Madagascar in the late 1980s, is a method of rice cultivation that combines less water, less seeds and more organic fertilizer. It is associated with healthier, more productive soil and plants by supporting greater root growth and promoting the abundance and diversity of soil organisms. Empirical evaluation of SRI systems shows that, among other benefits, SRI reduces production costs; enables farmers to overcome the problems associated with water scarcity; is especially accessible to the poor since it has practically no capital requirements; and is more resistant to other biotic and abiotic stresses besides drought, thereby reducing farmers' risk (**Box 3**).

Adoption of sustainable agriculture practices: where do we stand?

There is a growing body of literature documenting the extent of adoption of sustainable agriculture practices. The projects reviewed in the survey mentioned above made use of a variety of packages of resource-conserving technologies and practices, including: integrated nutrient management, conservation tillage, agro-forestry, water harvesting in dryland areas, livestock integration, and integrated pest management. As of 1999-2000, about 12.6 million farmers had adopted sustainable agricultural practices on 37 million hectares (see Table 2). This was equivalent to 3% of the 960 million hectares of arable and permanent crops in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Although the general trend since 2000 has not been thoroughly documented, adoption has increased as benefits of sustainable agriculture have become better understood and articulated in the scientific literature and global support for environmentally friendly agricultural practices has been growing. Available figures for specific practices at the national level point to an increase in areas cultivated under sustainable agriculture practices by both large scale and small scale farmers. For example in Brazil the minimum tillage system has spread from less than 1,000 hectares in 1973/74 to 22 million ha by 2003/04. In Argentina, there are more than 11 million hectares under zero-tillage, from less than 100,000 hectares in 1990. A study from 2005 reported 10% adoption rates of conservation tillage among small-holder farmers in Zambia. In Cambodia, the number of SRI users grew from 28 farmers in 2000 to more than 100,000 in 2008.

Main constraints to the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices

Given evidence indicating that sustainable agriculture practices can in fact create multiple benefits, including reduction in production costs, environmental benefits and at the same time increased food production, it is crucial to understand what drives or constrains resource-poor farmers from adopting such technologies.

Heterogeneity in agro-climatic environments implies that no single approach can be applied all over the world in a uniform manner. Different techniques and systems are applied, and adapted, in different agro-ecological conditions, giving different results. For example, in Ethiopia, reduced tillage and stone terraces perform better in semi-arid areas compared to high rainfall areas. Local or regional biophysical factors such as land quality and plot characteristics have been found to be key determinants of adoption of soil conservation technologies. Similarly, the same technologies may not fit all households equally because of different endowments in resources and imperfect or non-existing markets such as credit markets.

Biomass availability. The adoption of sustainable agricultural practices by resource-poor farmers

Box 1

A success story in sustainable agriculture: the Tigray region in Ethiopia

A sustainable agriculture project has been carried out since 1996 in the Tigray Region in northern Ethiopia. The main technologies promoted under the project include composting, water and soil conservation, and crop diversification.

Empirical evaluation of the project demonstrates the superiority of compost over chemical fertilizer in terms of productivity. Specifically, the data collected in 1998 indicated that using compost gave similar yield increases to chemical fertilizers while data collected from 2001 through to 2006 showed that, on average, composted fields gave higher yields, sometimes double those treated with chemical fertilizers. In contrast to chemical fertilizers, composted soil remains productive for up to four years, so compost does not need to be applied every year. In addition, the fact that compost increases the moisture retention capacity of soil is of crucial importance to the region, given its susceptibility to drought. Other documented benefits include improved hydrology with raised water tables and permanent springs, reduced weeds, pests and diseases, rehabilitation of degraded lands and increased incomes. Overall, between 2003 and 2006, grain production for the region almost doubled from 714 thousand to 1,354 thousand tons while use of chemical fertilizer decreased steadily from 13.7 thousand to 8.2 thousand tons since 1998. These numbers clearly testify to the success of sustainable agriculture practices in the region.

Increased yields have raised farmers' incomes and enabled them to avoid debts from buying chemical fertilizer on credit. This has further empowered local communities who have taken an active role in the implementation and management of the project, lending support to its social sustainability. The success of the project has also led to its expansion to many communities in other parts of the country. The Ethiopian government has now included this approach as part of its strategy for combating land degradation and poverty.

Source: Third World Network, 2008.

depends on the amount and availability of biomass (e.g., crop residues, animal dung). This is because benefits of most sustainable agriculture practices (e.g., erosion control, moisture conservation, soil fertility enhancement, carbon sequestration) are directly related to the amount of biomass used as soil amendments. The quantity of biomass available to smallholder farmers is commonly insufficient because resource-poor farmers have limited resource endowments (e.g., land, livestock and/or labor). Studies have found evidence that livestock ownership conditions the adoption of compost, while a household's total landholdings and labor availability limit the adoption of conservation tillage. Adoption of techniques such as cover crops and crop residue incorporation in the Ethiopian highlands depends on farm size and availability of labor. Thus, although resource-poor farmers might be aware of soil and environmental degradation caused by not using biomass as soil amendment, they may still choose to divert scarce biomass to use either as cooking fuels or as fodder for the cattle because they do not have alternatives.

Economic incentives are crucial in determining the economic viability of sustainable agriculture. The profitability (both in the short and long term) of sustainable agriculture practices will affect their broader diffusion. The adoption and economic returns of a technology are a function of several factors such as prices, consumer demand for food type, physical infrastructure, market access and development, agro-ecology, and household characteristics (e.g. rich versus poor and male versus female headed households). Importantly, the profitability of a given practice depends on prevailing agro-ecologic conditions. Increasing prices of purchased inputs are expected to encourage adoption of sustainable practices as farmers substitute external inputs with practices that are often more labor-intensive and utilize locally available resources.

Final demand also drives adoption of technologies. Greater knowledge and improved channels of communication are leading consumers to demand food increasingly produced through organic methods in many developed countries. At the same time, consumers are increasingly demanding that their food be produced using techniques that

conserve natural resources, limit environmental pressures and pay greater attention to rural viability and animal welfare. This could be an opportunity to adopt sustainable agriculture practices by developing countries.

Farmers in developing countries are not well integrated into input and output markets. This affects promotion and adoption of technologies. Studies in Ethiopia, Kenya and the Dominican Republic found that better infrastructure and market access impacts positively the adoption of modern technologies including sustainable agriculture practices. The upfront investment costs and transition costs in learning, in developing or adapting old technologies are also a barrier to adoption of these practices, particularly in developing countries where capital markets are imperfect.

Access to information is crucial in creating awareness and attitudes towards technology adoption. Inadequate information on availability, net benefits of adoption, and technical details of implementation of sustainable practices are barriers to adoption. In Ethiopia, recent studies found that access to agricultural extension services impacted adoption of compost and reduced tillage positively, while formal education (as opposed to no education at all) increased the probability of using compost. Lack of awareness of the extent of soil erosion problems as well as lack of knowledge of conservation technologies were identified as the two major constraints to farmers' adoption of soil and water conservation technologies in Tanzania.

Land issues. Insecurity of land tenure has been proven to be a constraint to any investment whose returns are weighted toward the future, while requiring immediate cash outlays. This is the case for all technology adoption including sustainable agriculture practices. However, the impact of tenure insecurity on investment in sustainable practices has been found to be country- and site-specific. In the Philippines and Honduras, tenure security positively and significantly influences adoption of hedgerow and minimum tillage, respectively. In the highlands of Tigray, northern Ethiopia, insecure land tenure is an important factor inhibiting investment on soil conservation practices and tree planting. However, other studies undertaken in Uganda and Southern Ethiopia,

where resource scarcity is prevalent, find that land tenure insecurity does not significantly constrain investments on land. Other factors such as participation in credit and extension programs are more important in stimulating investment.

Institutions are important in facilitating the promotion and adoption of sustainable agriculture practices. Applied research, extension services, and NGO networks could typically serve as a vehicle for the development, implementation, and adaptation of these practices. Participatory approaches that take into account local social capital in implementing technologies have been identified as one of the key factors influencing adoption of sustainable agriculture practices.

Lack of proper **extension services** has been identified as constraining adoption of productivity-enhancing technologies. Lack of skills of extension workers, particularly on sustainable agriculture practices, has been recognized as a key shortcoming of many extension delivery systems. In order to ensure that correct and up-to-date information is efficiently disseminated by extension workers, there is need for a system of training and organizational development that constantly upgrades the capacity of extension workers to ensure their technical competence, particularly in 'unconventional' farming practices such as sustainable agriculture practices.

Given limited governmental resources and the fiscal pressure on existing extension services, it is important to recognize the value of encouraging farmer-to-farmer extension through proper training of selected farmers. Informal networks among farmers have always been powerful channels for exchanging information and spreading knowledge. In Cambodia, for example, the number of SRI users grew almost 4000-fold from 2000 to 2008, mainly through informal dissemination mechanisms. An evaluation of 120 farmers who had used SRI methods for at least 3 years found that, all together, they had informed 969 households within their respective villages, and 967 households outside. However, although such diffusion of sustainable agriculture is encouraging, it does not replace the need for properly trained extension workers. They are still needed to provide farmers with reliable

Box 2

Specific examples of the impact of sustainable agriculture practices

Selected Evidence from Africa

- Soil and water conservation in the drylands of Burkina Faso have combated land degradation, resulting in the average family shifting from being in cereal deficit of 650 kg per year to producing an annual surplus of 150 kg.
- Soil fertility management using a range of biological pest management methods together with legumes, cover crops and green manures has doubled beans and groundnut yields from 300 to 600 kg/ha in western Kenya.
- In low rainfall areas of Ethiopia, reduced tillage without chemical fertilizer increased gross crop revenue by US\$ 106 per hectare compared to conventional tillage without chemical fertilizer. Moreover, this productivity impact was superior to that of chemical fertilizers with conventional tillage (US\$ 13 per ha). Lower impacts of reduced tillage without chemical fertilizer were found in high rainfall areas (US\$ 6 per ha).

Selected Evidences from Asia

- In northern Vietnam, contour planting of hedgerows on sloping lands reduced soil loss from 18 to 7.4t/ha/year.
- In Pakistan, yields of citrus fruits increased by 150-200% after adopting sustainable agriculture practices such as mulching, no till production, and composting.

Selected Evidences from Latin America

- 45,000 families in Honduras and Guatemala have increased crop yields from 400-600 kg/ha to 2000-2500 kg/ha using green manures, cover crops, contour grass strips, in-row tillage, rock bunds and animal manures.
- Soil and water conservation using contour grass barriers, contour ploughing and green manures have raised maize yields from 3 to 5 tons/ha and soybeans from 2.8 to 4.7 tons/ha in the states of Santa Caterina, Paraná and Rio Grande do Sol in Brazil.

Sources: Pretty et al. 2003; Kassie et al. (2008, 2009); Third World Network, 2008.

information on these practices, thereby ensuring sustainability.

A large number of developing country farmers remain outside the cash economy because of high risks and transaction costs. This means that rural institutions have an important role in reaching these farmers, providing them with information, credit, and marketing services. Farmers' associations and unions constitute important sources of information available to farmers. In northern

Ethiopia, a household's membership in at least one farmers' organization significantly increases the likelihood that conservation tillage and/or compost use are practiced on the farm. Also in Ethiopia, credit services and associated technical assistance from micro-finance institutions are associated with increased use of compost and investments in soil bunds, trees, and live fences.

Political constraints. At the national and international level the policy environment may be more or less conducive to the widespread adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. A first factor affecting the design of agricultural policies is the degree of awareness of policy-makers of the benefits of sustainable agricultural practices, some of which represent significant departures from previously accepted paradigms. In addition, sustainable agriculture, by discouraging the use of external inputs such as chemical fertilizers and chemicals for weed management and pest control, might face resistance from agro-chemicals industries and other traditional actors in intensive agricultural supply chains. To successfully scale up

sustainable agriculture will require political buy-in at different levels from the local to the national.

Conclusion: what policies to accelerate the development of sustainable agriculture?

Given the empirical evidence on the potential benefits of sustainable agriculture, the main policy question is what changes in policies, institutions, research and development are required to encourage broader adoption of sustainable agricultural practices?

As a first requirement, in order to develop, sustainable agriculture practices need to benefit from an enabling policy environment at the national level. Policy changes that promote sustainable agriculture practices on a par with more conventional technologies are needed. These can include reform of subsidies that currently favor resources and input-intensive methods of cultivation and extension of credit facilities for non-capital purchases.

The adoption and economic performance of sustainable agriculture is determined by different factors such as agro-ecological conditions, household

Box 3

Impacts of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI)

SRI, which focuses on changing the way plants, soil, water and nutrients are managed rather than on purchased inputs, is still experimental and performs differently under particular soil, climatic and other conditions. But beneficial results are being validated in a growing number of countries and on a rapidly-expanding scale. In addition, SRI is being extended to rainfed rice production in India, Cambodia and Myanmar, with yields averaging as much as 7 tons/ha, and to other crops like wheat, finger millet and sugar cane.

China: SRI use in Sichuan Province has expanded from 7,290 ha in 2005 to 204,000 ha in 2008, according to the Sichuan Academy of Agricultural Sciences. Yields averaging 9.4 tons/ha (22% higher than with present prac-

tices) have been achieved, generating additional net income/ha of US\$ 265.

Cuba: The Urban Agriculture Program reported average yields from trials/demonstrations in 11 provinces in 2008 of 5.55 tons/ha (60% more than the country average rice yield).

The Gambia: Evaluations by the the National Agricultural Research Institute documented SRI average yields of 6.2 tons/ha vs. 1.8 with conventional practice, and a six-fold increase in water productivity (kg of rice per m³ of water) and 9-fold increase in net returns/ha.

India: The state of Tamil Nadu, in 2008-09, had 750,000 ha of its rice under SRI (vs 40,000 in 2005-6); yields averaged 2 t/ha higher than previously. In Tripura, over 160,000 farmers used

SRI methods in 2007-08, compared with 880 in 2004-05. The Department of Agriculture reports an SRI yield average of 4.32 tons/ha compared to the state average of 2.55.

Indonesia: A nine-season evaluation (2002-06) supervised by the Japanese consulting firm Nippon Koei on 9,429 ha documented an average increase of 3.3 tons/ha with 40% less water, a 50% reduction in chemical fertilizer use, and 20% lower costs of production.

Mali: In the Timbuktu region (by Sahara Desert), the NGO Africare demonstrations on farmers' fields documented average SRI yields of 9.1 tons/ha, with 5.5 tons/ha on comparison plots cultivated with farmer methods.

Sources: <http://ciifad.cornell.edu/sri/>; Ceesay et al. (2006).

types, farm types, supporting institutions, among others. This makes blanket recommendations and promotion of agricultural practices inadequate in many contexts. Instead, policies seeking to promote adoption of sustainable agriculture technologies should be based on an understanding of how different factors condition the performance of those particular technologies. Stable and remunerative market prices for agricultural products produced using sustainable practices can help enhance the economic viability of adopting sustainable agriculture, as well as provide important safety nets for resource-poor farmers. Organic and fair trade price premiums and procurement programs that favor sustainable agricultural products such as school feeding programmes could be considered.

The role of institutions (both formal and informal) in facilitating the promotion and adoption of sustainable agriculture practices cannot be over-emphasized. Up-scaling sustainable agriculture requires raising farmers' awareness and understanding of the potential benefits of sustainable agriculture practices. This in turn requires improving access to, as well as the quality of, information and education and training programs on sustainable agriculture for farmers and extension workers. It also requires institutional support to formal and informal farmer networks. Applied research, extension services, and development practitioners could serve as vehicles for the development and implementation of these practices. However, finding ways to create closer links between applied

research and farmers on the ground, through improved extension systems or other channels, is still an area where much work is needed.

One of the major constraints facing the adopters of sustainable agriculture practices is biomass availability. To ease biomass constraints, policies have to be developed that: provide access to modern cooking fuels to rural households (e.g., via wider dissemination of cooking gas, including biogas, locally produced biofuels, rural electrification); encourage incorporating forage legumes in the cropping systems and rotation cycle to improve livestock productivity; encourage using integrated nutrient management; and encourage the strengthening and structuring of available rural labor sharing mechanisms.

Lastly, policies which strengthen social capital, for example by supporting rural institutions and networks, could help better integrate farmers in developing countries into input and output markets. Also, policies should strive to improve security of tenure among farmers, thereby decreasing the risks associated with undertaking long-term investments.

Selected References

- Ceasay, M., Reid, W.S., Fernandes, E.C.M. and Uphoff N. 2006. "The effects of repeated soil wetting and drying on lowland rice yield with System of Rice Intensification (SRI) methods". *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*, 4: 5-14.
- Kassie, M., Zikhali, P., Pender, J., and Köhlin, G. 2008. "Organic Farming Technologies and Agricultural Productivity: The case of Ethiopia." Gothenburg University, Memo.
- Kassie, M., Zikhali, P., Manjur, K., Edwards, S. 2009. "Adoption of Organic Farming Technologies: Evidence from Semi-Arid Regions of Ethiopia", EfD Discussion Paper 09-01, Resources for the Future, Washington DC, January 2009.
- Pretty, J.N., Morison, J.I.L. and Hine, R.E. 2003. "Reducing food poverty by increasing agricultural sustainability in developing countries." *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment*, 95: 217-234.
- Pretty, J.N., Noble, A.D., Bossio, D., Dixon, J., Hine, R.E., Penning de Vries, F.W.T. & Morison, J.I.L. 2006. "Resource-conserving agriculture increases yields in developing countries." *Environmental Science and Technology (Policy Analysis)*, 40 (4): 1114-1119.
- Uphoff, N. 2007. "Reducing the vulnerability of rural households through agroecological practice: Considering the System of Rice Intensification (SRI)", *Mondes en Développement*, 35:4.

Innovation Briefs

The *Innovation Briefs* series provides insights into the most recent policy-relevant research on emerging challenges to sustainable development, with the objective of broadening the knowledge base of policy makers in responding to those challenges.

**United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Sustainable Development
Policy Analysis and Networks Branch
2 UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017**

Voice: (1-917) 367-3269

Fax: (1-212) 963-1267

E-mail: djobo@un.org

<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/innovationbriefs/index.htm>

