

GLOBAL IPM FACILITY WORK WITH ZIMBABWE

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I would like to share the experience of the Global IPM Facility work with Zimbabwe in 1997. At that time, Zimbabwe plant protection was intending to start an IPM programme on cotton and maize (combined focus in the Farmer Field School including poultry). In IPM up to that time, we defined "principles of IPM" as (1) grow a healthy crop; (2) conserve natural enemies; (3) observe fields for decision making; and (4) farmers become experts. As the Zimbabwean Ministry of Agriculture staff looked more carefully into "IPM" programmes during a study tour to Pakistan and Bangladesh, they discovered that growing a healthy crop meant good soil management, proper varieties, proper planning times and planting methods and other processes that in general produced a robust strong crop (or not!).

Field Observation included counting pests, natural enemies, weeds, rat damage, etc.. But observations also included looking at soil moisture, assessing plant deficiencies due to soil problems and projecting potential disease or insect problems based on the weather forecast by plant interaction. These are all things farmers in fact do on a regular basis, but the field school "agroecosystem analysis" process made these observations and decisions more explicit and directed. [It is one reason that the Australian rice-check is a welcome development in that it helps to create explicit observation and is based on an ecological-economic understanding of the cropping system].

To continue with the story... The Zimbabwean IPM working group (most of whom were entomologists, pathologists and extensionists) thought it would be good to include agronomists, soil scientists, plant breeders and others. The problem was that these other experts did not identify well with IPM. The working group tried Integrated Crop Management (ICM) but found that the insect and disease experts did not identify well and the chemical industry had already starting using this term. In the end the working group settled on Integrated Production and Pest Management (IPPM). This term also made a lot of sense because only vegetables, cotton and tobacco over-used pesticides while production levels were (are still!) low in most crops. The farmers and extension staff wanted to focus on both production and pest management so the new term IPPM fit well. This term is now used widely over most of southern and eastern Africa by national programmes. It was also used in some Latin American programmes. Personally I feel very comfortable with IPPM in that it takes into account explicitly the numerous interactions between production (soil, water, crop) issues and pest management.

Fortunately in the Farmer Field Schools which are based on field management sequences (e.g. study based on crop stage - not in classroom intensively), all the issues of crop management are covered. The participatory processes allow combining local knowledge with new ecological literacy (e.g. what is soil microbial life? what are parasitoids? etc.).

In many African programmes, the inclusion of soil management means that a year cycle needs to be covered for wet-dry season areas. I believe that IPM is in general easier to teach because the insects, rats, birds, and some disease symptoms are easier to see and touch than soil aspects. But both are important, and whether we call pest management IPM or IPPM, there is a need to consider soil, water, crop, environment and other factors in pest population dynamics management. I would predict that OPPM (organic production and pest management) will be the next term to emerge - and no organic farmer would say that it is either soil OR pests - it is always the interaction that is important.