



It has been called a 'Silent Revolution'. Farmers across Asia, particularly in Indonesia, are taking huge steps to increase their position in society. There are more than one billion farmers in the world, yet they are often marginalised and experience discrimination, both socially and economically. Most significantly, they are left out of decision-making processes that directly affect their livelihoods.

Farmers, the majority of the population, serve an important role in the national life as the backbone of food security. But they are not given the recognition they deserve and instead, face various problems:

- Farmers are often not given the opportunity to utilise natural resources (land, water, fauna, flora) in an optimal manner.
- Farmers in some countries must plant seeds as determined by the Government, and these seeds are accompanied by all kinds of 'packages' including irrigation and chemical fertilisers.
- Farmers are constantly pressed to use chemical inputs in line with agricultural services. These are often not appropriate for local conditions and are dangerous to health and the environment.
- Farmers are frequently forced to sell their crops at prices that they have had no voice in determining.
- The technology transfer paradigm remains, and programs similar in spirit to the Green Revolution continue to disempower farmers and force them to depend on government recommendations and agro-company promotions.
- Common perceptions persist that farmers are backward, incompetent and weak. In this case, any form of 'guidance' becomes oppressive.

The Indonesian IPM Farmers Association (IPPHTI) was founded as an outcome of the National Meeting of Farmers held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 1999. There

were 461 IPM farmers in attendance from 12 rice-bowl provinces across Indonesia. The Minister of Agriculture and the Sultan and Governor of Yogyakarta attended the meeting. Activities over the three days

included: IPM farmers' trade fair; two group discussions with local and national mass-media journalists; more than two hours of dialogue with the Sultan and Governor, and a presentation to, and lively dialogue with, the Minister of Agriculture. The Minister of Agriculture signed a statement with the

following remarks: "I support the Farmers' Association; I will accommodate the Farmers' aspirations; I will follow-up the Farmers' request for some seats in Parliament, and Please report to me if there is any village co-operative which is not supportive to farmers' aspirations". The organising committee rejected the offer of financial support from pesticide companies, which wanted to hold their own exhibition and promote their products during the Congress. Further, the committee successfully negotiated with Government officials so that they would not use the event for promoting their own agricultural programs.

The IPPHTI was born out of the awareness that a dedicated network run by farmers was needed in order to empower IPM farmers. Such an association enables farmers to tackle pressing problems in which farmers are treated as objects by different parties, especially by the government. The IPPHTI works to overcome conditions of injustice via several strategies and programmes. The primary strategy is to strengthen farmer organisations at the group level.



- As local groups gain strength, members of the group are able to identify, understand, and solve local problems on their own.
- Strong local farmer groups are a foundation for networking to create a broader farmer association

Activities to strengthen farmer group organisations include:

- Trainer workshops where group facilitation skills are increased and an understanding of the vision of farmer movements is established;
- Farmer research activities where scientific studies are strengthened to assist in understanding agro ecological concepts;
- Advocacy training to increase the awareness of participants of the importance of forming groups, increasing the communications at the group level, learning how to build alliances with other groups, and building skills to design advocacy strategies and movements.

Political education is also vital for farmers to understand their rights and their responsibilities as citizens, and thereby become active members in all processes affecting their livelihoods. Agricultural education increases the capacity of the farmers to utilise their agro ecosystems through the application of IPM principles. These can be learnt through the



Farmers at the Congress, Yogyakarta, 1999