

ICRISAT Village Level Studies – Then and Now

Introduction

A flagship program of ICRISAT Socio-Economics Team since 1975 covering ten villages in four states of Semi-Arid Tropics (SAT) India and four villages in West and Central Africa (WCA) provided dependable data for testing and refining models of decision making behaviour of farmers in developing countries.

An efficient way of understanding the farming systems in rural areas and identifying socioeconomic constraints faced by the farming community of SAT in technology adoption and development.



JG Ryan visiting VLS field in Maharashtra in 1997.



Village Reconnaissance visit in Karnataka state.



Discussion with farmers in Gujarat state.

Objectives

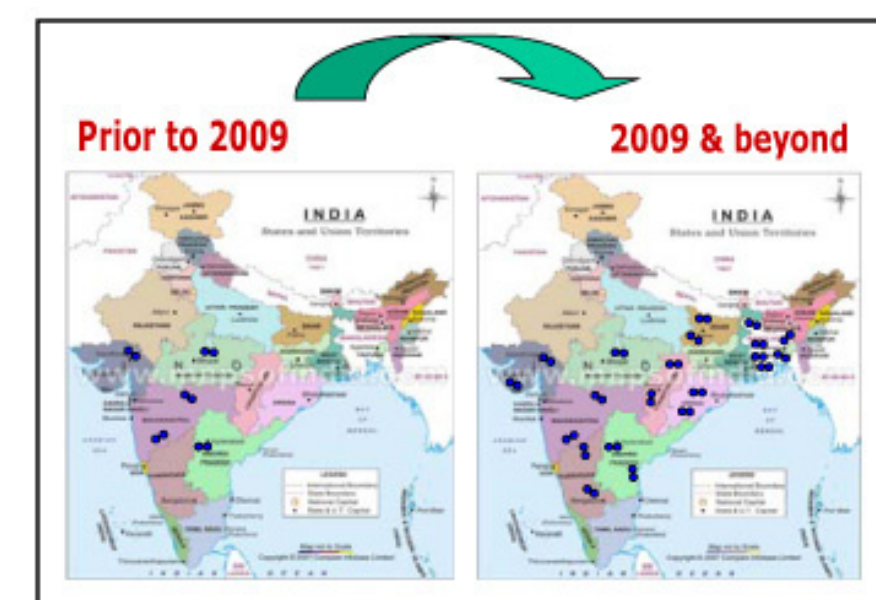
- To track changes in the livelihood options of the rural poor.
- To understand farmers' response to changing markets, policies and technologies.
- To understand farmers' perceptions on climate change and their coping mechanisms.
- To provide a socio-economic field laboratory for teaching and training of students and researchers.
- To provide feedback for designing policy interventions, setting research priorities and refining technologies.
- To understand the dynamics of agricultural transformation.

VLS Domain: Past, Present and Future

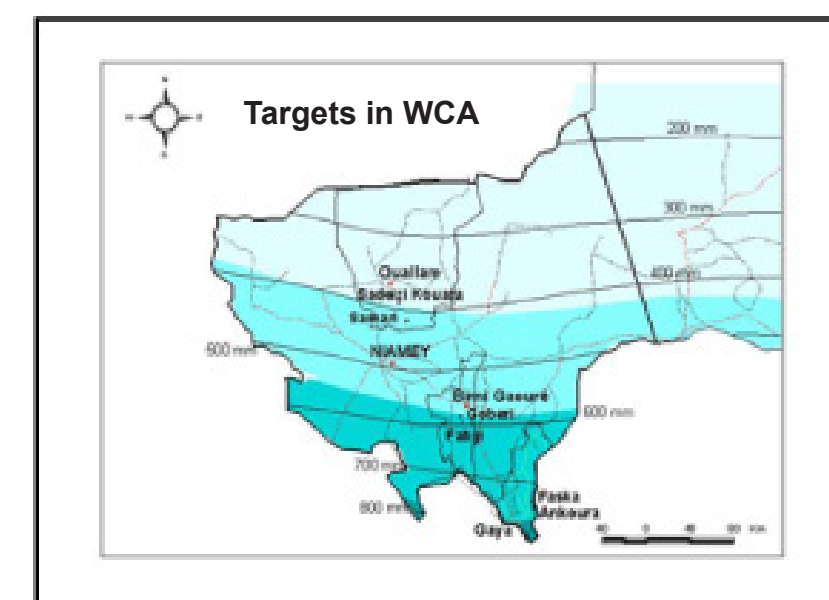
- 1975-85: Intensive data collection in six villages of SAT India.
- 2001-08: Linkage with SSIR of NCAP to cover more villages.
- 2009 onwards: High frequency data collection from 42 villages [18 in SAT India, 12 in Humid Tropics of East India and 12 in Bangladesh].

Role and recognition of VLS

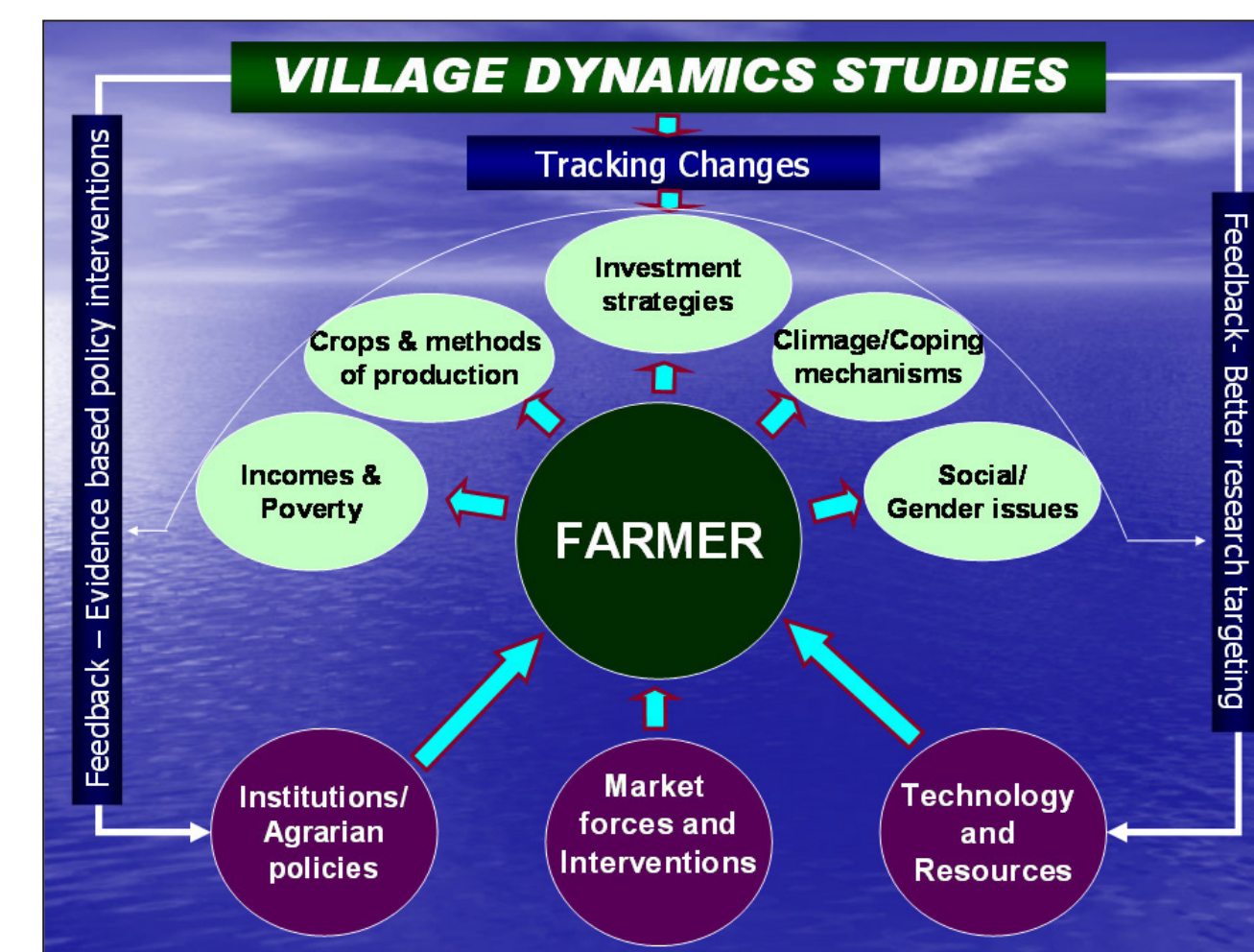
- "Gene bank of social scientists".
- An International Public Good – unique longitudinal household panel data.
- Testing grounds for ICRISAT technologies.



VLS target domain in Asia.



VLS target domain in Africa.



Climate change: A new component of VLS

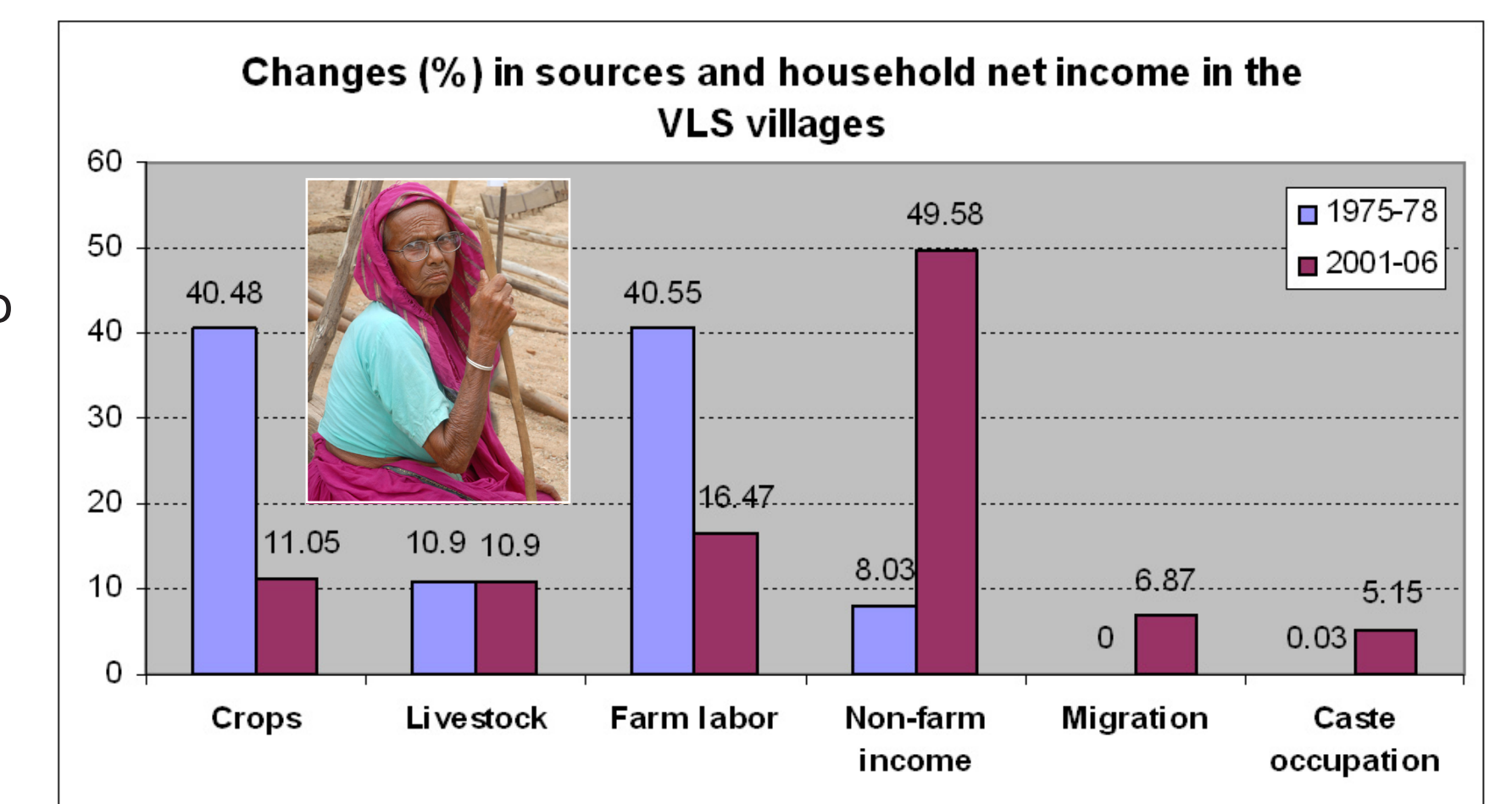
- Climate change/variability becoming prominent
- Monitoring of direct and indirect effects of climate change
- Vulnerability and adaptation strategies of village communities
- Building layers of resilience through social networks and partnerships

Key findings

- The drivers of change are: surface and groundwater irrigation, technology adoption, non-farm income.
- Proportion of incomes from non-farm sources, migration and caste occupations increased, while that of farm income decreased.
- About 33% of the sample households belong to "Never Poor" category while about 10% are mired in "Chronic poverty". The remaining 57% move up and down the poverty line based on seasonal conditions and non-farm opportunities.
- Annual per capita income increased from Rs 3466 in 1975-78 to Rs 8013 in 2001-06.
- Farmers invested little on soil conservation measures but heavily on groundwater exploration even though the rate of return on investment was only 10%.
- Changes in labor markets: increased real wages of labor, increased migration and spatial integration.
- Welfare and development programs of the government have helped households in coping with income shocks.
- Organization of women into self help groups has reduced dependence on money lenders for small loans.



On-site training to Resident Field Investigators.



Policy interventions for sustainable rainfed agriculture

- Strengthen public investment in soil and water conservation and recycling.
- Food stamps may be given to the households below the poverty line in lieu of Public Distribution System subsidy.
- Minimum support prices provided for rainfed crops have to be backed up by procurement mechanisms by the government.
- Provision of improved access to institutional credit and insurance.
- Empowerment of women by bestowing ownership rights on the lands and house sites distributed by the Governments.



Project Team, Steering Committee & Consultants meeting farmers in Dokur as a part of Project Launch.

Future Directions

- Deepening of enquiry to include social and climatic aspects.
- Identification of drivers that help in moving out of poverty and achieving food and nutritional security.
- Development of adaptation strategies and layers of resilience for the people vulnerable to climate change.
- Encouragement to smallholders to invest in natural resource development.



Farm exhibition at Dokur VLS office.



Project Team: ICRISAT Staff, IRRI & NCAP Partners and Indian NARS Collaborators.