

Preface

This volume is the outcome of an International Conference held in Agadir (Morocco), in November 2009, titled “The Integration of Sustainable Agriculture, Rural Development, and Ecosystems in the Context of Climate Change, the Energy Crisis and Food Insecurity”, chaired by Dr. Mohamed Behnassi. The Conference was jointly organized by the Faculty of Law, Economics and Social Sciences of Ibn Zhor University of Agadir (Morocco) and the North South Center for Social Sciences (NRCS), with the fruitful support and sponsorship of the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ).

The ambitious goal of this volume, and of the Conference that forms its basis, is to effect a serious *rethinking* of the complex interface of a baffling array of problems, issues, challenges and opportunities. Deliberations at Conference focused on the critical challenges of sustainable agriculture, rural development, and human and environmental support systems (all within a multilayered context of climate change, the energy crisis, the rise in global population and food insecurity). This complex interface defines the boundaries of paradigms, policies, practices and management actions that converge in such a way as to threaten the condition and well-being of humankind and of ecological systems, globally.

As a focus for the Conference and this volume, what could be more compelling than food? It is no mistake that foods are known as staples (that is, they are major parts, elements or features) of all human activity, aspiration and undertaking. Take away these staples and civilization disappears – completely. Without food, there can be no reasoned, sustained development; there can be no trade; there can be no life. The focus of our efforts is, therefore, most fundamental to humanity.

We take comfort in utilizing reductionist approaches to the measurement and observation, and to the mitigation or resolution of questions; and, such approaches have served – and continue to serve – human inquiry and subsequent action relatively well. Nonetheless, from such approaches we are reminded continually of the sheer complexity of the world around us. Arising from this growing recognition of the complexity of things, processes, and social constructs, there is corresponding growth in recognition of the need for *integrative* tools (and integrative *mindsets*). Such tools, based in science and in technology – and in social dynamics – now look to include a wider complement of stakeholders that are enmeshed in taking decisions and in undertaking solutions under illuminated, participatory mindsets.

Significantly, the Conference's participants agreed that scientific and technological development is not enough in itself. It is critical to make sure that sustainability and poverty reduction remain the guiding principles, and that we use our resources, harness our intellect and direct our knowledge to benefit the poor and the marginalized. In addition, they found that networking and knowledge sharing must become encouraged and undertaken among all stakeholders. The strengthening and broadening of linkages, networking and collaboration fit solidly within their mantra. In a wider realm, objectives of the Conference's expected outcomes include the strengthening of democratic governance, crisis prevention and recovery, development of processes for reducing poverty, and bridging the gap between traditional knowledge and Western approaches to scientific inquiry and assessment, worldwide.

These observations hint at the beginnings of a roadmap to address the central foci of the Conference (that is, agricultural sustainability, rural development and food security). This volume aims at providing structure to effect achievement of this critically needed roadmap.

The Editors

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Behnassi, M.; Draggan, S.; Yaya, S. (Eds.)

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