The subtitle to this book: “Revisited Resource-poor Farmers and the Millennium Development Goals” supplies the necessary specification of the broad main title.

The Millenium Development Goals (MDG’s) of the United Nations are the driving force behind the analyses and the discussions in the book, and the emphasis is on the global struggle to combat hunger and poverty. “Agricultural Research” focuses on research in crop production by individual farmers. “Crossroads” indicates that the book is drenched in the global political and economic aspects of promises and their realizations.

The complete set of eight MDG’s, agreed to by the heads of states and governments of almost all countries in the world and to be achieved in 2015, is presented in an Annex. The book deals with goal no. 1 only:

Goal 1: ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

- Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than $1 a day.
- Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Against the background of four decades (1965–2004) of observations of the progress made by small farmers in two developing countries (Trinidad and Ethiopia) and farmers with small holding in a developed country (Sweden), the author presents an analysis of a wide spectrum of global issues. He provides extensive and detailed information about of the fate of small-scale individual farmers in those countries.

In Trinidad the author noticed adoption of the use of fertilizers and pesticides and the increased contact with extension agents. He mentions the established and the subsequent demise of an irrigation system. Here, the overriding impediment to progress for small farmers is the neglect of agriculture by the government.

In Ethiopia too, the use of fertilizers and herbicides increased significantly over the four decades of observation. The promising early adoption of new farm implements like the CADU plow, however, led to nothing. The increase in acreage planted to wheat led to increased soil erosion. Major impediments for small farmers remain the high cost of fertilizers and, more recently, high land taxes.

In Sweden, while agricultural extension grew over the years, the number of family farms decreased dramatically. All remaining farmers are now members of agricultural producer cooperatives.

THE CHALLENGE: The author then spells out the global challenge more than double the food production in the next 30 yr to keep pace with population growth.

Reach the hungry, malnourished and poor by accomplishing the MDG’s by 2015.

Although the author presents some frightening statistics, his tone is optimistic.

He mentions the six-fold increase of population over 40 yr in Kenya and Nigeria.

He states: “In fact, without its one-child policy, an additional 240 million more people would have been born in China over the last two decades.”

That is eight times the population of Canada. Yet, the urgency of global population management seems to get lost in the discussions.

Within the framework of global food supply and food security, the author addresses a wide variety of topics such as agrarian change, agricultural development, and agricultural research to benefit the less privileged, the effect of AIDS and the loss of biodiversity on food production, and the growing strength of transnational corporations. He discusses the threats to food safety coming from water pollution, waste disposal, urbanization, new diseases in animals, “chemicalization” of food. There are extensive discussions on the present and future availability of fertilizers, on the techniques, policies, dangers, and risks of the use of genetically modified organisms and observations of gene movement in the environment, followed by an overview of the ethical implications. Then there are the problems with patented genetically modified seeds and the threats from industry directed toward scientists, reporters and farmers.

In the context of “humanity and agriculture” the book contains a wealth of factual information, sometimes seemingly unrelated, but useful nevertheless. The multi-faceted influence of globalization on food supply and food safety is vividly discussed and spiced with detailed facts, data, and thoughts. Thoughts like: “Emerging scarcity of fossil energy may become apparent sooner than most consumers in the North would like to imagine. The price of fossil energy will significantly increase because of both emerging scarcity and continued tension over oil resources.” This book was written before the year 2008, with its rapid rise in oil and gasoline prices and in the prices of rice, wheat and corn; the year of the emerging biofuel industry. All this, while the year 2015 is rapidly approaching.

In an Annex the author presents a complete overview of all international organizations involved in food production and food safety, their history and accomplishments. Much is written about the past, present and future of CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research). The author presents his thoughts as to how these international research organizations should be reorganized.

The book provides a benchmark against which future developments can be tested and judged. It is a must-read for all who are or will be involved in the politics of global food supply and safety and in agricultural research and development, both on a local and a worldwide scale.

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