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Toward a Sustainable Development in Agriculture — An Analysis of Training Needs for Potential Extension Agents in Myanmar

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Abstract

Determination of training and development for personnel in any organization is a challenging task. Although the Agricultural University and Institutes provide courses on basic sciences and various aspects of agriculture in their curriculum, they only teach agricultural extension subjects during the students' final year of study. Many of the students that graduate from the Agricultural University and Institutes become extension agents employed by Myanmar Agriculture Service. The Central Agricultural Research and Training Centre carries out the pre-service training program that provides only for potential extension agents before they are going to work at farmers' fields and a number of in-service training for field extension agents. However, most of the training was crop production oriented and training in extension education has been scarce. Much of the training emphasized on new technical knowledge and on one-way communication skills needed for the transfer of technology and there was a lack of training needs analysis. These training institutions have a vital role to play in the sustainable development of agriculture in Myanmar. The purpose of this paper is to explore how the agricultural training program in Myanmar could be improved by analysing the perceptions of experienced extension agents towards the training needs for potential agents who are recent graduates from the agricultural University and Institutes. The questionnaire survey has been done with 70 extension agents. The research findings indicated that the following training topics were perceived to be required for potential extension agents. The importance of needs in order of priority were extension program planning, educational process and human development, research methods and evaluation, agricultural extension philosophy, organization and administration, communication in extension and sociological factors. Agents responded their perceptions based on their experiences in performing extension activities at farmers' fields, knowledge that they learned in University or Institutes and pre-service as well as in-service training. These training topics should be emphasized in the pre-service training program. Many of the social science skills are lacking in the agricultural graduates working as extension agents in the agricultural extension division. To improve performance and increase the motivation and job satisfaction of extension agents, a greater need for continuous training and guidance in respect to extension methods and content is required.

Keywords: Agricultural extension agents, Myanmar, training