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## Challenges and Policy Options for Sustainable Rural Development — Future Development of a Participatory Extension Approach in Myanmar

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### Abstract

The participatory extension approach in Myanmar is in the very preliminary stages of the development by international NGOs and United Nations organizations. Although its present status in Myanmar is very small, a growing interest has been noticed among farmers, extension agents, NGOs and some quarters of the government. NGOs are putting efforts into the development of participatory extension approaches in many developing countries. The main objectives of this paper are to explore the organization of current agricultural extension agents, and to suggest a suitable network among governmental and non-governmental organisations for the future development of a participatory extension approach in the Myanmar Agriculture Service. The perceptions of agents regarding the practising extension approaches, extension methods and awareness and attitudes of agents towards the participatory extension approach were identified through personal interviews with 60 extension agents, conducted from January to April 2001 in Myanmar. The research findings indicated that the current extension approaches practised in Myanmar are the selective concentrative strategy approach and the training and visit approach. Both of these are top-down approaches and the major aim is to transfer the technology. The organizational framework did not provide for decision-making from below and consequently, left little or no room for participation of all members of the extension system. Approximately 83% of the respondents have an awareness of the new participatory extension approach and they have acquired this knowledge mainly from UNDP and NGOs projects in Myanmar. Some respondents have been involved in participatory workshops provided by the UNDP and NGOs. Responses of extension agents showed that they are very interested to implement the participatory approach in agricultural extension services. For the sustainable agriculture and rural development in Myanmar, agricultural extension services will play in the most important role. In order to promote the development of agricultural extension services in Myanmar, the effective institutional linkages between the governmental and non-governmental organizations will be required. With this in mind a new forum for participatory extension movement in Myanmar is proposed in this paper.

**Keywords:** Extension organization, participatory approach, Myanmar