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Transformation of Agri-Environmental Schemes in an International Context

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Abstract

In order to guide the impact of agriculture on the environment, many countries have established diverse economic, regulatory and advisory measures. The EU’s “agri-environmental schemes”, in which farmers are paid to practice environmental cultivation, may set a benchmark for developing countries as well. The challenges associated with the adoption of European agri-environmental policies in developing countries will be explored here, using Israel as a case study. Israel, with stronger economy than many developing countries, nevertheless shares some significant characteristics with them, such as a high rate of population growth, the emergence of “mega-cities”, and limited resources for agri-environmental schemes. Drawing from ongoing efforts to develop agri-environmental schemes in Israel, it is concluded that several aspects of European schemes should be modified when implemented in other geographic contexts: **(1)** Matching the characteristics of the local ecosystem - North-European agri-environmental schemes emphasise production extensification; in Israel, as in many other Mediterranean countries, biodiversity is dependant on agricultural cultivation, and the pressing problem that agri-environmental schemes should tackle is the abandonment of fields. **(2)** Land use patterns - European agro-environmental schemes are usually practised in rural areas. In Israel, as in many developing countries, agriculture and biodiversity conservation are practised more and more in the urban context, which places environmental considerations in an inferior position to urban land-use demands. However, city dwellers may donate financial support for agri-environmental programs. **(3)** Institutional framework - European agro-environmental schemes are grounded in a long tradition of agricultural subsidies. In Israel, as in many other countries, there are no income-payments for farmers; however, other types of institutional support (extension services, investment support) may be mobilised for environmental purposes. **(4)** Farmers / conservationists relations - The current cooperation between farmers and conservationists in Europe is a result of a long reciprocal discourse between the interests groups. In Israel, where public discussion on agro-environmental issues is more recent, farmers and conservationists’ participatory frameworks may radicalize conflicts rather than mitigate them, and therefore it is advisable to consider other forms of participation. We outline possible solutions to the presented challenges, which may be useful in other countries around the world.

Keywords: Agri-environmental schemes, biodiversity, policy adaptation, policy transfer

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