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Locally Derived Indicators for Evaluating Sustainability of Farming Systems

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Abstract

A lot of research has focused on developing indicators for measuring sustainability of farming-systems. But only recently has it been widely acknowledged that there is no "one size fits all" set of indicators, but that sustainability indicators should be adapted to local conditions and therefore involve the opinions of the different stakeholders concerned.

This study presents first results of an ongoing study project on the island of Leyte, Philippines. Three study sites were chosen for identification of sustainability indicators and for a later comparison of local farming systems. Stakeholders identified included farmers, being either involved in a development project or not, as well as government officials, University researchers and NGO workers. Eight focus group discussions were carried out with the farmers, while the other nine stakeholders were interviewed individually. Indicators of successful/sustainable farming practices were identified and organised using the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Framework, which is based on five capital assets: financial, physical, natural, human and social. Indicators were then ranked by participants.

The farmers perceived security of tenure to be of utmost importance for a sustainable farming system followed by the access to credit to buy farm implements, while most other stakeholders ranked (high) income as priority, and assumed that farmers would answer the same. Overall, the farmers ranked mainly natural indicators (soil, climate) high, while other stakeholders had the indicators distributed more evenly among financial, human, social and natural indicators, being dominated by financial indicators.

Certainly this qualitative way of research has its methodological problems, starting with the need for translators and a different cultural understanding of terms, such as sustainability. But it is concluded that the SRL Framework is well suited for exploring local views on sustainability of livelihoods and farming systems.

Keywords: Local indicators, Philippines, sustainability indicators, sustainable rural livelihoods

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