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Agricultural Extension in the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam: the Case of Integrated Agriculture-aquaculture

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Abstract

In the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam, agriculture is primarily characterised by small-scale, rice-based farming systems. Even though integrated agriculture-aquaculture (IAA) is a common production system in the Delta with a considerable potential for poverty reduction, farmer's adoption rate of IAA remains slow. Former research and extension models to support IAA activities have mainly focused on a top-down approach for the transfer of technology, yet farmers' needs have not been met. Hence, the key question of this study centres on agricultural extension and suitable concepts to ease the development of IAA systems in the region. Findings show that IAA systems are complex and affected not only by the selection of promising production technologies but also by the households' access to capital assets, markets for agricultural inputs- and outputs as well as the policy environment. Among other aspects, IAA systems mainly require a high level of knowledge relating to technical and management skills. Today, research and extension agents in the region often aim at increasing productivity by merely addressing single elements of a multitude of interrelations adherent to IAA systems, following a reductionism ideology. In order to cope with both the inherent complexity of IAA systems as well as issues emerging from the countries' recent WTO membership, the prevalent extension approach is required to change. In response, a concept towards the inclusion of participatory and multi-disciplinary issues such as participatory technology development (PTD) is perceived as a promising option. However, evidence suggests that the integration of PTD into daily extension services can only be realised if an appropriate policy set-up is in place. Extension efficiency may be then strengthened via an enhanced linkage between national extension authorities and local governments. In addition, a comprehensive collaboration between professional agricultural extensionists and other stakeholders (*e.g.* research institutes, NGOs, private enterprises, mass organisations, mass media, other governmental organisations) is a key concern and may open up new avenues towards a facilitation of IAA development in the Mekong Delta.

Keywords: IAA, integrated farming systems, Mekong Delta, participatory extension, participatory technology development