



Tropentag, October 6-8, 2009, Hamburg

“Biophysical and Socio-economic Frame Conditions
for the Sustainable Management
of Natural Resources”

Potential and Constraints in Institutionalizing Group-based Participatory Extension in Northwest Viet Nam

IVEN SCHAD¹, REGINA RÖSSLER², ANDREAS NEEF³, MARIANNA SIEGMUND-SCHULTZE², ANNE
VALLE ZÁRATE², VOLKER HOFFMANN¹

¹University of Hohenheim, Department of Social Sciences in Agriculture, Germany

²University of Hohenheim, Department of Animal Production in the Tropics and Subtropics, Germany

³University of Hohenheim, The Uplands Program, Germany

Abstract

Viet Nam's northwestern mountains have undergone rapid economic, institutional and social changes and need a vital and adaptive extension sector to improve rural livelihoods and enhance sustainable development, particularly in ethnic communities. Diversification of production through enhancing pig husbandry is considered a viable option by many actors. Yet, despite high growth rates, the sector is insufficiently supported by state extension services, struggling to shift from conventional top-down to approaches that view innovation as a product of multi-stranded interaction among multiple actors. We argue that such a paradigm shift requires the promotion of knowledge and innovation partnerships (KIPs) to familiarize farmers with new breeds and breeding schemes, progressive management and marketing strategies, and support in adjusting information to local conditions.

Employing an interdisciplinary research approach that integrates perspectives from animal sciences and innovation studies, we address the question how KIPs in Viet Nam's smallholder pig husbandry can be sustained and how such partnerships are viewed as compared to 'conventional' approaches. Five recently-evolved forms of extension groups, varying in set-up, actors' participation and state involvement were assessed along three focal points, namely a) concept of knowledge dissemination b) farmers' motivation to participate and learning effects, and c) advantages and disadvantages in comparison to conventional extension approaches as perceived by farmers.

The paper draws on data of two ongoing subprojects of the 'Uplands Program' (SFB 564) in Son La province, combining ethnographic methods with a review of reports from extension providers involved in the KIPs.

Results show that involvement of government actors plays a vital role in both initiating and sustaining KIPs, even though farmers' linkages to public organisations are limited by ethnic and cultural boundaries. KIPs respond better to individual needs than conventional extension; however, opportunities for revising extension curricula through enhanced participation are still underutilised, mostly due to misperceptions of group members as regards the potential of group-based approaches and the lack of communication between KIP initiators and other stakeholders.

We conclude that group-based extension requires further institutionalisation to enhance effectiveness, in combination with changes in organisational cultures to strengthen linkages among actors and support scaling out of KIPs to a wider area.

Keywords: Knowledge and innovation partnerships, Northwest Viet Nam, smallholder pig production