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“Resilience of agricultural systems against crises”

Towards Resilience? The Evolution of the Agricultural Knowledge System in Vietnam’s Mekong Delta

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Abstract

Innovative changes of agricultural and rural development of a region, in a knowledge-rich globalised world, are growingly directed, if not determined, by vigorous transformations of its local knowledge system whose functions are to bridge and nourish global and local knowledge interaction and new knowledge creation. This paper adopts a dual issue-based and actor-oriented approach to explore the evolution of the agricultural knowledge system of the Mekong Delta (MD), the largest and highly productive region of agricultural production in Vietnam. Data used in this analysis were collected and selected from one-year field-research in the MD in April 2010–2011.

From our issue-based analysis, the region has been confronted chronic post-Green-Revolution challenges of a long pursuit of agricultural modernisation characterised by top-down planning, water control system improvement, high yield-led intensive production and growth-based progress. As an alternative, over the past decades, sustainable principles and practices have been introduced. At the implementing level, however, the transfer of such new knowledge, because of its more complicated nature, even with foreign concepts is facing difficulties in overcoming epistemological, technical and cultural barriers. Moreover, ever-increasing negative repercussions of the so-called climate change effects such as salinisation or drought as well as dam and dyke-controlled water resources over- or mis-exploitation at inter-provincial and cross-border scales are posing a threat to any sustainable development efforts, with marginalised communities as the most vulnerable groups. Such old and emerging challenges require localised and instrumental knowledge and innovation from novel seed varieties, farming techniques to systemic management of natural resources and pro-poor rural development. Our actor analysis has demonstrated new role-taking of plural stakeholders in knowledge diffusion and generation for agricultural and rural development spanning public, private and civil society arenas, especially the involvement of farmer groups who have less been recognised.

It is argued in this paper from the case of the MD that the resilience of the region’s agricultural system to new development challenges more than ever before is greatly dependent upon the resilience of the transformational knowledge system on which it is based, and thus *a fortiori*, to which extent professionals and farming communities co-produce knowledge in partnership.

Keywords: Agricultural knowledge system, resilience, Vietnam’s Mekong Delta