Extension Strategies for Sustainable Agricultural Development in Myanmar

DR. KHIN MAR CHO & DR. HERMANN BOLAND

Introduction: The system of research-extension linkage is an important factor influencing the success of an extension organisation. The conventional model (one way, top down) of Transfer of Technology is no more valid in most of the areas of Myanmar. Farmers presently require a different kind of support from agricultural extension than they received in the past. To become relevant, extension organizations have to undergo internal reforms and have to adopt new approaches for working with the farm families. They also have to integrate knowledge from more diverse fields to meet the needs of their clients and have to work with more diverse organizations.

Purpose: The purpose of this project was to explore the current agricultural extension services in Myanmar and to point out the potential extension strategies that may be needed in order to address sustainability issues.

Major Points: It was found that only researchers identify farmers’ needs and take decisions research themes. Apart from meetings between researchers and subject matter specialists twice a year, there was no other evidence of routine linkage mechanisms between research and extension. There was no joint evaluation of on-farm trials, no farmers’ participation, no joint decision-making, and no staff exchanges. The major hindering factors for extension agents in performing extension activities were farmers’ inadequate technical knowledge in agriculture, the lack of proper extension programs for the needs of the local community, inadequate extension agent, poor transportation facilities, lack of suitable market and price assurance for farm products, lack of farmers’ finance, illiteracy of farmers, no insurance for crop damage, no cooperation of local people in program implementation, and reluctance of farmers to accept new technology.

Educational importance: As many of the technologies for rain fed agriculture are knowledge-based and need community action, farmers’ groups have to be organized and sustained at the grass roots level. It is a greater need to emerge new institutional arrangements in partnership with the private sector (input firms, farmers’ associations, NGOs, etc.) for providing extension services. Some important suggestions to the government extension services are adoption of participatory approaches (in technology development and transfer), decentralized planning, managing common property resources, group approaches to technology transfer, wider use of mass media and information and communication technology.