Results of the Virtual Meeting on Multiple Benefits of Paddy-based Agriculture in Monsoon Asia

26 Sept to 14 Oct 2005

reported by David Groenfeldt
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Overview

- 156 members, majority from Japan
- 240 posts
- 92 topics
- 5 meeting rooms (varied from 33 to 81 posts)
- 3 weeks (26 Sept to 14 Oct 2005)
Purpose of the Virtual Meeting

- Identify the multiple benefits of paddy agriculture
- Discuss and understand how the various benefits are important
- Dream about the future we wish for
- Suggest policies that can help get us there
5 Meeting Rooms
(5 Questions)

1. What services does paddy agricultural contribute to the larger economy, to society, and to the environment?

2. How can paddy-based agriculture provide the greatest overall value to society, and in particular to the goals of poverty alleviation and food security?

3. What governance arrangements can provide the greatest overall value to society, both in terms of water use efficiency and enhancing social capital?

4. What policies are needed to support the multiple roles of agriculture?

5. Visioning the Future of Paddy Cultivation: What changes do you hope to see in the next 20 years?
Why Are These Questions Important?

• Farmers are leaving paddy agriculture
  – Economic stress
  – High suicide rates
• Environment is degrading
  – Water pollution from agrochemicals
  – Soil structure
• Local varieties are disappearing
• Agriculture is becoming more industrialized
• Paddy is becoming “mono-functional”
Meeting Room #1

“What services does paddy agricultural contribute to the larger economy, to society, and to the environment?”

Chinese 3-fold concept:

1. Production (food)
2. Ecology (nature)
3. Livelihood (social)

Plus…

4. Spiritual/cultural: identity, aesthetic and spiritual experience
Economic Services
(in addition to paddy)

• Efficient use of land and water
• Maintains groundwater for other uses (agriculture and industrial)
• Employment
• Multiplier effect on broader economy
• Builds social capital
• Agri-tourism
Environmental Services

• Habitat for nature
  – water life (crabs, fish, frogs)
  – birds (stork)

• Environmental quality
  – cooling effect
Services to Society
(Livelihood Services)

• Promotes social harmony and community cooperation
• Builds social capital and creates social structure
• Recreation (for children playing)
• Education
  – teaching about nature’s rhythms, insects, etc
  – moral guidance, reminds us of traditional values
• Health benefits (malaria control through fish in paddies)
Spiritual/Cultural Functions

- Links human and natural worlds
  - in personal experience
  - through urban-rural educational programs
- Aesthetic beauty (changing colors)
- Emotional experiences
  - Melts into everyday life
  - connection to childhood, and to ancestors / history
  - direct comforting experience on the mind (soothing)
- Cultural identity
  - defines a way of life
  - reminder of traditional values
- Religious experiences/practice?
  - (not mentioned in VM)
Meeting Room 2

Paddy’s Contribution to Poverty Alleviation and Food Security

- **Cheap, abundant rice & multifunctionality**
  - Large-scale farms better to keep price down?
  - Or small-scale farms to absorb labor?
  - Is mechanization good or bad?
  - Is large-scale irrigation good or bad?
  - High population densities best supported by small, intensive agriculture
  - Large-scale gives more rice; small-scale gives more jobs
Meeting Room 2 (cont)

*How to Enhance the Productivity of Paddy Agriculture?*

- Improve water use efficiency
- Reduce costs
- Organize farmers
- Diversify cropping (monocrops only for large-scale)
- Rice-fish-ducks plus horticulture (and poultry)?
- Upland – lowland - vegetables
- SRI (System of Rice Intensification)?
- Ecological / Organic
Meeting Room #2 (cont)

Direct Measures to Help the Poor

- land access so poor can cultivate
- mixed strategy of increasing paddy yield, crop diversification, value-added processing, aquaculture, and credit
- redefine poverty to include multifunctional features => small holders no longer poor
- economic stability helps the poor
- Paddy combines 2 basic human needs:
  - food and water => public aspect
Meeting Room #3

“What governance arrangements can provide the greatest overall value to society?”

• Cases:
  – Sri Lanka: INMAS
  – Philippines: IAs and Local Govt Units
  – Japan: LIDs

• Key topics:
  – WUAs: optimal size, levels, focus, etc
  – Water rights
  – Water fees
  – Transfer process (IMT)
  – How to support WUAs after transfer
Meeting Room #4
What Policies Are Needed?

- Educate the public about paddy agriculture
  - School programs
  - Urban – farmer linkages
    - Agritourism, participatory farming, etc
    - [Promote media interest in agriculture]
- Environmental Regulation
- Support to Farmers
  - Legal rights and policies
  - Direct and indirect payments
  - Rural investments
Meeting Room #4 (cont.)

• Governments should promote ecological agriculture in development policies [and trade negotiations?]

• Research priorities:
  – Understanding the multiple interpretations of multifunctionality, including farmers and consumers
  – Understanding the mind of the farmer

• URGENCY – no time to lose
Meeting Room #5
What Is Your Vision of the Future?

A. What do you expect?
   – Less paddy, more vegetables
   – Participatory farming and eco-tourism
   – Climatic instability
   – More interest from civil society
   – Fewer farmers, and older ones
B. What do you wish for?
   - a future landscape that looks like 3 decades ago
   - “Ecologically clean paddy fields”
   - Children can catch fish
   - New technologies should be compatible with the environment
   - “A sound partnership between city and countryside”
Conclusions

- What we have identified as a desirable future is NOT where we are headed.
- Conflict between current policies and desired outcomes.
- Should we change our desires, or change our policies?
For more information…

Please visit the website of the Virtual Meeting:

http://inwepf.dc.affrc.go.jp/