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Advancing Participatory Technology Development: an international comparison of experiences in institutionalising the approach

Ann Waters-Bayer^a, Laurens van Veldhuizen^a, Scott Killough^b, Marise Espineli^b and Julian Gonsalves^c

^a ETC Ecoculture, POB 64, NL-3830 AB Leusden, Netherlands. Email ecoculture@etcnl.nl

^b International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), Y.C.James Yen Center, Silang, Cavite 4118, Philippines. Email iirr@cav.pworld.net.ph

^c Toledo Apts, Maitim Segundo, Tagaytay City 4120, Philippines. Email julian@accessway.ph

Abstract

In the last decade, a growing number of organisations have approached agricultural research and extension in ways that involve farmers in all stages of the development process and that focus on strengthening the capacities of farmers and rural communities to experiment and innovate. It has been increasingly recognised that these approaches, often referred to by the umbrella term Participatory Technology Development (PTD), are necessary in order to improve agriculture and natural resource management, especially in the less well-endowed rural areas. Scientists, extensionists and other agricultural service providers have been learning to work together with farmers in supporting local initiatives to improve rural livelihoods. Some promising efforts have been made to institutionalise PTD within large organisations of agricultural research, extension and education/training – both governmental and non-governmental. This paper compares and analyses some of these recent experiences in institutionalising PTD. It is based on a study initiated by the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) in the Philippines and ETC Ecoculture in the Netherlands. The case studies come from a wide range of countries, including Brazil, Cameroon, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, Ethiopia, Honduras, India, Kyrgystan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. The foci of the comparative study are on how constraints encountered in institutionalising PTD were dealt with and how methodological innovations in the PTD approaches were made to permit wider application without comprising on the aim of strengthening local capacities to innovate and adapt to changing conditions in smallholder agriculture.