



Australian Government

Australian Centre for
International Agricultural Research

Social Systems

Next generation agricultural extension: social relations for practice change

Overview

The extension of agricultural technologies has long been advocated as a pathway to improve farmer livelihoods and rural development. However, after decades of limited impact on farmer adoption, poverty alleviation, and wellbeing, an innovative model and associated methods remain needed.

This need is strongly felt in Northwest Cambodia, where the challenge facing agricultural extension is not 'availability' nor 'awareness' of production options. Farmers currently have access to a wide range of technologies and to the credit needed for purchase, with the commercial sector, government departments of agriculture, and non-governmental actors providing information and expert advice. Nevertheless, extension efforts are not achieving lasting results. Extension is hampered by farmers' lack of enabling social relations which is required to implement successful and lasting improvement of agricultural practices.

This project will build on the findings from a previous project that extension does not overcome powerful social relations, especially credit and debt. This project will analyse the social relations that farmers actively avoid, wish to avoid, or prefer and wish to strengthen as part of self-determined efforts to improve their livelihoods. Ultimately the project seeks to define pathways that support farmers to benefit from agricultural development.



KEY FACTS

ACIAR Project No. SSS/2019/138

Duration: January 2021 to December 2025 (5 years)

Target areas: Cambodia

Budget: A\$4,500,000

Project Leader

Dr Brian Cook, University of Melbourne

Key partners

- Cambodian Centre for Study and Development in Agriculture, Cambodia
- Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement, France
- Department of Agricultural Land Resource Management, Cambodia
- Lakhon Komnit Organization, Cambodia
- Macquarie University
- Partners for Rural Development, Cambodia
- The University of Adelaide
- The University of Battambang, Cambodia
- The University of Canberra
- The University of Melbourne

ACIAR Research Program Manager

Dr Clemens Grünbühel

Objective

This project aims to produce an innovative model of agricultural extension founded on expanding enabling social relations, which will complement and/or replace existing models of extension based on the provision of technology, capital, and information.

The objectives are to:

- Broaden extension outcomes for small-scale, less affluent, and vulnerable farmers and their households.
- Expand the social relations needed across the participating smallholder households in Northwest Cambodia to successfully and lastingly implement new practices.
- Measure the knowledge-practices of women farmers and women within farming households through analysis of household dynamics and engagement.
- Determine whether our project partners understandings of agricultural extension evolve in response to involvement in a project founded on social relations.

Expected scientific results

- Reconceptualise agricultural extension drawn from the context of the gendered knowledge-practices of smallholder households in the case study area and guided by an appreciation for the spatial distribution of enabling and disabling social relations.
- Provide a comparative analysis of competing models of extension.
- Provide new insights into the comparative advantage of different extension models and methods, enabling the entire sector to direct its activities more efficiently.
- Reformulate the practice of extension by extending smallholders' connections with enabling individuals and organisations, which will be followed by empirical analysis and comparison of perceived and material impacts, including the primary and secondary impacts of past provisionist extension versus extension via social relations

Expected impact/outcomes

- Complement and/or replace the globally dominant but limited agricultural extension model reliant on transferring technology capital and information.
- Confirm or refute that existing provisionist methods have significant but under-recognised impacts.
- Address significant gaps in understanding agricultural extension in Cambodia and Southeast Asia.

