WOMEN AGAINST CROP PESTS
INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Although they provide less than one-fifth of the actual labour needed for rice production, they have a major role in managing the Family income, they also augment the family income, they also make important decisions about the purchase of agrochemicals.

A recent project funded by IDRC shows that these women can act as effective agents for the adoption of integrated pest management (IPM) -- an environmentally and economically sound way to control agricultural pests (see box).

Under the project, Filipina researchers introduced IPM to five communities in Calamba, Laguna, 50 kilometres south of Manila. "At first, the men denied any participation of their wives in the farming process," observes Dr Candida B. Adalla, an entomologist working on the project. "But in further discussion, some revealed that the women were responsible for choosing and buying pesticides during their trips to market."

Dr Adalla and her predominantly female staff from the nearby University of the Philippines at Los Banos found such information significant. "More than ever, it convinced us of the need to educate women as well as the men," she says.

Women attended the Sessions because they were busy with household chores, carrying children, and augmenting the family income, they also make important decisions about the purchase of agrochemicals. The Farmers actively managed both IPM and 'control' plots (For comparison) where current farming techniques, including liberal use of pesticides, were followed.

The farmers actively managed both IPM and control plots, but they were required to consult the project staff before applying pesticides in the IPM control area.

For IPM to succeed, certain conditions must exist. One Filipino agriculturist described these as "all the right type, all the right amount, all in the right sequence, all when the stage of the plant, the weather, and the pest are right to achieve significant control for the least cost". Like most technologies, IPM must be fine-tuned and adapted to specific locations.

In considering their results after the first year, the researchers agree the project is succeeding and should continue. "IPM practices began to greatly influence the farmers' way of thinking," says Dr Adalla. "If they didn't spray in the IPM plot, they wouldn't spray the non-IPM plot as well."

More than three-quarters of the rice farmers obtained higher yields in the IPM portion. If not for a series of bruising typhoons which struck the Philippines last October, IPM yields could have been even higher, say the researchers.

More IPM experiments are currently being conducted on the vegetable plots since last year's results proved inconclusive. A much misunderstood technology, IPM was initially seen by people as risky. Cooperators were difficult to attract. "We were cynical about the project," Mereng Manzano, a woman rice farmer, admitted. "We had been the victims of too many government projects in the past. Researchers came and went without even telling us of the results of the experiments."

Alejandro Muya, a school teacher who also manages a farm, said, "We thought that any insect had to be eliminated. We didn't know that 'friendly insects' help destroy pests."

The staff employed various methods to bring the IPM message to the farmers and their families. They held regular meetings to share ideas and problems. Since few women attended the sessions because they were busy with household chores, the staff visited them at home to solicit their opinions.

The researchers also learned that the women were eager for new ways to earn extra income. Seminars in mushroom culture, accounting, and beekeeping were arranged. And now there are plans to organize a cooperative store stocked with basic goods such as soap, canned food, and coffee.

"A beautiful ecological balance between prey and predators in rice ecosystems has evolved over centuries," said Dr Merle Shepard at a recent briefing in Washington for representatives of international agricultural research centres. Dr Shepard is former head of the entomology department of the International Rice Research Institute in Los Banos, Philippines. "Pesticide misuse upset that balance in many areas. But researchers hope to restore it through integrated pest management."

In Asia, four countries have adopted IPM as official policy on crop protection: the Philippines, Indonesia, India, and Malaysia. "Wide scale IPM adoption should reduce pesticide use on rice by 50 percent," according to Dr Shepard. That could save the Philippines about US$5 to 10 million per year, and Indonesia as much as $50 to $100 million.
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