

Improvement of rural training to suit Chinese farmers' needs

Chinese agriculture has made tremendous progress. Agricultural extension and training are key elements for the further development of the country's agricultural sector, which is still dominated by small farmers. Investigations in two Sino-German projects showed that China is confronted with similar problems to those of other countries that rely on the traditional government extension service. Better understanding of the farmers' problems and more participatory methods are required.

In China, farmers have traditionally been considered instruments of the government's food security policy and less as individuals with their own economic interests. After the Cultural Revolution, economic opening started in the countryside, and the first to become comparatively wealthy were a small group of farmers. But this trend has changed rapidly. For 20 years, the economic and social gap between the cities and the rural areas has been widening. To overcome this problem, already in the 1990s, the Chinese government started to adapt its rural training and extension programmes to meet farmers' needs and to improve agricultural productivity. So far, however, the government has not been satisfied with the results. One of the main objectives of the Chinese Five-Year Plan 2006–2010 is to reduce the gap between cities and the rural areas. Better and science-based training for

the farmers shall contribute to achieving this objective.

Findings of a study on agricultural training

Studies on the quality of rural training carried out within two Sino-Ger-

man projects in the province of Hebei that may be in some way representative for the whole of Chinese rural areas revealed that during the last five years, 72 percent of the farmers attended technical training once a year on average. However, in some villages, there was no agency, and no training was provided at all.

Training facilities are normally offered by three different groups: sales agencies of agricultural inputs, national extension services and township administration and research institutes. Some villages receive their training exclusively from sales agencies. In a number of cases, farmers received information via television or rural radio and from neighbours.

All farmers who had attended a training course gave high scores for the training provided. Some farmers confidentially admitted that they were not satisfied with the training they attended.

China's agriculture is still based on small-scale farming. The training facilities so far are inadequate.

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Zusammenfassung

Untersuchungen über die Qualität ländlicher Trainingsmaßnahmen, die im Rahmen zweier deutsch-chinesischer Projekte in der Provinz Hebei durchgeführt wurden, haben gezeigt, dass die Bauern nur wenige Möglichkeiten haben, an formellen Trainingsprogrammen teilzunehmen und dass sie sich stattdessen auf die Informationen der Agrarmittel-Händler verlassen müssen, auch wenn sie diesen misstrauen. Die Bauern sind mit den Informationen, die sie von Händlern oder staatlichen Technikern erhalten, nicht zufrieden, glauben aber, dass die schlechten Ergebnisse durch ihr eigenes beschränktes Wissen bedingt sind. Die Ergebnisse lassen sich wie folgt zusammenfassen: Das Hauptproblem der bäuerlichen Schulung ist der Mangel an Ausbildern, die entweder von Handelsgesellschaften oder von staatlichen Stellen

kommen, und deren geringe Qualifikation. Die meisten Bauern möchten mehr über geeignete Technologien zur Verbesserung der landwirtschaftlichen Erzeugung und Vermarktung wissen. Die meisten Ausbilder möchten mehr über moderne Technologien und Trainingsmethoden erfahren und die Gelegenheit erhalten, sich mit nationalen und internationalen Fachleuten auszutauschen.

Resumen

Los estudios sobre la calidad de la capacitación rural llevados a cabo en el marco de dos proyectos sino-germanos en la provincia de Hebei han demostrado que los agricultores tienen muy pocas oportunidades de cursar una capacitación formal y se ven obligados a depender de los comerciantes de insumos agrícolas para recibir la información que requieren, a pesar de

que no confían en ellos. Los agricultores no están satisfechos con la capacitación provista por estos comerciantes o por técnicos del gobierno, pero piensan que la insuficiencia de resultados se debe más bien a sus limitados conocimientos propios. Los resultados en sí pueden resumirse como sigue: El principal problema de la capacitación agrícola reside en que sólo se cuenta con unos pocos instructores que provienen de empresas comerciales u organizaciones gubernamentales y cuya calificación es deficiente. La mayoría de los agricultores desearían aprender más acerca de tecnologías para mejorar la producción y comercialización agrícolas. La mayoría de técnicos desearían aprender más acerca de tecnologías avanzadas y metodología de la enseñanza, y les gustaría acceder a oportunidades para compartir experiencias con especialistas nacionales e internacionales.

The training provided by sales agencies was considered most critical, with a conflict of interests being assumed. On the other hand, this training can easily be accessed by the farmers.

Farmers' training needs are not met by the extension service

The farmers interviewed in the survey considered the training they received to be too theoretical and not adapted to their local agricultural conditions.

The farmers' demands are specific and vary among the producers of various crops and animal products and during the production cycle. Very often, they are not taken into account. The farmers' demand should be the key issue for the technicians, but normally their decisions are based on their supervisors' orders and their experiences. Furthermore, they are overloaded with administrative work so that a major share of them will not spend more than 30 percent, and some of them only 10 percent, of the available time on extension work. Neither is there any incentive to provide good extension work.

The technicians' demands and training needs

The majority of the extension workers do not know what the farmers want to learn and what interests they have in common with the farmers. They believe that farmers do not have sufficient technical knowledge, but they themselves do not take the initiative to participate in the training of the trainers in order to be able to provide the necessary know-how and better training methodologies. Concerning the training they received, most of them pointed out that they had not been sufficiently trained in the past and needed more practical knowledge. Most technicians would like to learn more about advanced technology, and some of them want to learn training methodology and have the opportunity to share experiences with national and international specialists.

Farmer co-operatives and the farmers' demands

The formation of co-operatives could help to solve this problem and

could compensate for the deficiencies of the individual members. The majority of the existing co-operatives, however, have been established by government institutions and considered as instruments to implement government policies.

Only in 2006 was a new co-operative law published which states for the first time that co-operatives are self-help organisations of the farmers. Co-operatives have better access to training options outside the normal extension service. Some of them even hire their own specialists.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the farmers need more training. But, according to them, only a few trainers with low qualification and little time are available either from commercial channels or from government organisations.

Training need assessment (TNA) is a fundamental tool to improve rural training to suit Chinese farmers' needs and change the trainers' mentality, perceptions and capabilities.