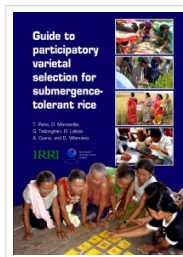


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Guide to Participatory Varietal Selection for Submergence-tolerant Rice

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T. Paris, D. Manzanilla, G. Tatlonghari, R. Labios, A. Cueno, and D. Villanueva

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The Green Revolution averted the threat of famine through the rapid adoption of improved rice varieties. However, despite this huge success, hundreds of millions of poor rice-farming families in rainfed areas still live in poverty and suffer from food (rice) insecurity. Despite many released improved rice varieties for rainfed conditions, farmers still use local varieties that can withstand drought and floods but have low yields or they use the same varieties for many years because of a lack of better varieties. Rainfed rice farmers are slow to adopt improved varieties because of several problems. One problem is more of extension than breeding - many farmers, particularly those living in remote rainfed areas, may not have access to or information about the seed of new varieties. Another problem is that variety testing programs are often conducted on-station, which does not represent farmers' fields. Moreover, conventional rice breeding programs usually seek farmers' input only at the very end of the process, when newly released varieties, usually one or two per year, are evaluated in on-farm demonstration trials. Often, in remote and unfavorable areas, subsistence farmers, who comprise the majority of the rural farming population in Asia, give importance to social and cultural dimensions aside from the agronomic performance of the new rice varieties. The complexities of developing acceptable varieties for variable and stressful rainfed environments require that breeders become deeply familiar with men and women farmers' needs and preferences. Since 1977, IRRI has been making efforts to improve communication among farmers, breeders, and extension workers so that men and women farmers' concerns and preferences are considered in plant breeding objectives. Participatory varietal selection (PVS) is a simple way for breeders and agronomists to learn which varieties perform well on-station and on-farm and to obtain feedback from the potential end users in the early phases of the breeding cycle. It is a means for social scientists to identify the varieties that most men and women farmers prefer, including the reasons for their preference and constraints to adoption. Based on IRRI's experience in collaboration with national agricultural research and extension system partners and farmers, PVS, which includes "researcher-managed" and "farmer-managed" trials, is an effective strategy for accelerating the dissemination of stress-tolerant varieties. PVS has also been instrumental in the fast release of stress-tolerant varieties through the formal varietal release system. This guide on PVS will complement the various training programs given by IRRI for plant breeders, agronomists, and extension workers engaged in rice varietal development and dissemination.

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