BRIDGING PADDY YIELD GAP: ISSUES IN RESEARCH, EXTENSION AND ECONOMICS

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Paddy yields are reported to have reached a plateau in several high potential areas of the country. However, a few farmers are obtaining a very high yield. The majority is realizing a low level while a small minority are reporting a very low yield. It is significant to note that both the high and low yielding farms are located in many instances in the same irrigation scheme with similar hydrological and ecological environments. The stagnation in average yield and its erratic distribution will have negative implications on the income of the majority of people involved in paddy farming, and the country at large.

The main variables affecting paddy yields other than ecological factors are, application of fertilizers and other technologies such as new high yielding varieties, past, disease and weed control methods as well as water management practices. Analysis of data indicates that the majority of farmers apply these technologies. However, the yield realized by the majority is less than 50% of the potential. This suggests that the constraint to higher yields is not the non-application of high yielding technologies but possible other factors such as time and method of applying the correct technology which requires investments on farmer training and education.

The paper draws experiences from two main paddy growing areas in the country and identifies gaps in research and extension in bridging yield differentials; it finally pin points the economics of an effective farmer-based educational programme which would facilitate bridging the paddy yield gap.