

Effective Governance of Rice Paddies for Wetland and Biodiversity
Conservation
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A B S T R A C T

Since time immemorial, rich biodiversity has been associated with rice paddies as man-made wetlands with unique ecosystems. Varied practices in rice production and the growth stages rice crops go through have made paddy fields a haven for plant and animal life. They provide, shelter, food, nesting and breeding grounds as well as temporary refuge for various migratory species.

Records reveal Asia is the source of 1/3 of the world's rice supply from irrigated rice fields which account for numerous scientific researches dealing with, among others, food web interactions, economics of insect pest damage, agronomic practices which impact on the rice paddy ecosystem. In fact, rice paddy cultivation is the pride of many Asian societies and plays an important role in their cultural heritage.

A look at the legislations across Asia will show that provisions related to rice paddies as artificial wetlands are distributed in laws governing agriculture, land use, water resources, irrigation, agroforestry, fishing, pesticide regulations and, in a few instances, recent legislation dealing with intellectual property rights. The problems and issues involved in the use of rice paddies and their management call for sound management policies and legislations which include, but is not limited to, adoption of policies on rice paddies as artificial wetlands and their inclusion in a national wetland management system; improved government policy of government subsidization on pesticide and other agricultural chemical application; conservation of rice paddies as wetlands and the diverse species found therein; prohibition of conversion of rice paddies to other land uses; coordination among rice-paddy related government agencies, strict implementation and enforcement of legislations and regulations.

Of late, rice paddies had become important not only for the health benefits, food safety and food security they provide but also for their resilience in view of climate change. The role of legislation and institutions in their proper maintenance, development and use or effective governance for wetland and biodiversity conservation deserve attention too.