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**Submitted to:** Special Session: Knowledge Brokerage as participatory interaction processes linking research, policy and civil society

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## Neither top-down nor bottom-up: Farmer-led knowledge brokerage for sustainable rural development in Vietnam's Mekong Delta

### Abstract

Knowledge brokerage, the work to translate and transmit knowledge to various end-users, is increasingly important in the wake of globalisation due to the fact that a wide gap has often arisen between the epistemic culture and the social and cultural conditions in which knowledge is applied (Evers 2005). In Vietnam, the development demand that focuses on poverty reduction and sustainable development has encouraged the involvement of diverse knowledge brokering actors such as government agencies (through agricultural extension systems and governmental programmes), universities and research institutes (via their technology transfer centers or practical research projects), and civil society (including international non-governmental organisations, mass organisations and community-based organisations).

Grounded on study cases of sustainable agricultural and rural development in the Mekong Delta, the largest and most productive agriculture region in Vietnam, the present paper, based on empirical data collected during a one-year field research project within the period April 2010-11, argues that knowledge brokering at the local level is prominently featured by technocratic, unidirectional knowledge flows from experts to farmers. Such vertical knowledge brokering structured by outsider's knowledge imposition, hierarchical and top-down decision-making, and a "model"-farmer based method has failed to reach wider rural communities in need. Consequently, the introduction of a "participatory" or bottom-up approach becomes lip service whereas local elite's power is further strengthened through project's benefits. The research focuses its analysis on farmers who have, through intensive (formal and informal) learning processes, coalesced and practiced as knowledge brokers in areas of IPM (integrated pest management), VACB (integrated farming system of horticulture (V), pisciculture (A), animal husbandry (C) and biogas installation (B)) and fruit planting. It is highlighted from our findings that farmer-to-farmer horizontal knowledge brokerage has extended and co-created knowledge and innovative alternatives for the sustainable development of farming communities in the Mekong Delta. In order to harness farmer-led knowledge brokering by groups who are informally operated and unknown by the State, it is suggested that local rural development agencies should identify these networks and communities to help enhance their work performance as well as cultivate their within and inter-community learning culture.

**Keywords:** Farmer-led knowledge brokerage, sustainable rural development, Vietnam's Mekong Delta