Improving water and nutrient management for double cropping in Cambodia

by Anika Molesworth

Growing dry-season crops after rice on hard-setting soils can pose serious challenges to Cambodian farmers seeking to diversify and intensify with greater efficiency, profitability, and sustainability.

Fried frog legs and duck tongues are still sizzling on the hot plate plonked down in front of me. My Cambodian dinner acquaintances smile broadly. I sometimes question whether the serving of these local delicacies is an act of hospitality or the blunt end of a wry sense of humor testing the reaction of foreigners trying hard not to offend.

Cambodians love their food and love eating it with company. No one should eat alone, they say. It’s not surprising they appreciate sitting down with friends, family, and workmates to multiple plates piled with steaming greens, succulent meats, and a hefty serving of rice, as the horrific past of hunger, community dislocation, and nationwide devastation lingers in the not-too-distant past (see Revisiting the “Killing Fields” 30 years later on pages 22–29 in Rice Today, Vol. 15, No. 1).

Rice culture and cultivation

The staple food of Cambodians is rice. Only a few kilometers out from the capital city of Phnom Penh are verdant rice paddies offering a tranquil reprieve from the city’s hustle and bustle. Rice-based farming systems have been the mainstay of rural livelihoods in Southeast Asia for centuries. However, trends suggest an increasing diversification and intensification within these systems, which are opening up new opportunities for farmers as well as highlighting existing production constraints.

Puddling or wet cultivation is the traditional method of land preparation for establishing rice—a practice that destroys soil aggregates, breaks the capillary pores through which water enters,