

# Mobilizing the potential of rural and agricultural extension



# **Mobilizing the potential of rural and agricultural extension**

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# Contents

<b>Acronyms</b>	iv
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	v
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Overview	1
1.2. What is extension?	2
1.3. The Challenge	5
<b>2. New global, national and local institutions and approaches</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1. Overview	13
2.2. Towards pluralism through policy reform	15
2.3. From privatization to selective commercialization and accountability	17
2.4. Prospects for regional and global platforms	18
<b>3. Poverty alleviation, food security and risk reduction</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1. Overview	21
3.2. Pro-poor extension: can it ensure the viability of smallholder farming?	21
3.3. Gender bias in extension, beyond shooting the messenger	23
3.4. Rethinking priorities for pro-poor extension	25
<b>4. Market-orientation and demand-drive</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1. Overview	29
4.2. Market-oriented extension	30
4.3. Demand-drive	32
4.4. Approaches and methods for promoting demand-drive	33
4.5. Extension financing	35
<b>5. Extension and the climate change – food security nexus</b>	<b>41</b>
5.1. Overview	41
5.2. Extension and climate risk	43
5.3. Extension and low-carbon futures	44
5.4. Extension and food security	45
<b>6. Extension in research for development</b>	<b>49</b>
6.1. Overview	49
6.2. Challenges to achieving the potential of extension in research for development	51
6.3. Learning from extension	53
<b>7. Conclusion</b>	<b>57</b>

## List of Acronyms

AFAAS	African Forum of Agricultural Advisory Services
ATMA	Agricultural Technology Management Agency
BTT	Block Technology Team
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CASC	Commercial Agricultural Service Center
CATIE	Tropical Agriculture and Higher Education Centre
CIRAD	Agricultural Research for Development
CRISP	Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy
DAAS	Danish Agricultural Advisory Service
DOA	Department of Agriculture
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FC	Facilitation circle
FFS	Farmer field schools
FSC	Farmer study circles
GCARD	Global Conference on Agricultural Research and Development
GFRAS	Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ICAR	Indian Council of Agricultural Research
ICTs	Information and communication technologies
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
KHDP	Kenya Horticulture Development Programme
KHDP	Kerala Horticultural Development Programme
MAFF	Management Advice for Family Farms
MANAGE	National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management in India
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
NARS	National Agricultural Research System
NATP	National Agricultural Technology Project
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
NRI	Natural Resources Institute
NUCAFE	Uganda Coffee Association
PPPs	Public Private Partnerships
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and Enhancing Forest Carbon Stocks in developing countries
RKN	Rural Knowledge Network
T&V	Training and Visit
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VERCON	Virtual Extension and Research Communication Network
VEWs	Village extension workers

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Overview

This paper presents an overview of current opportunities and challenges facing efforts to increase the impact of rural and agricultural extension. The starting point for this analysis is in recognition that the days when agricultural extension was synonymous with the work of public sector agencies are over. The ‘extension services’ described here may just as likely consist of an input vendor advising a farmer about what seed to plant, a television station broadcasting a weather forecast, a supermarket advising traders about what standards are required for the vegetables they purchase or a farmer organization lobbying for research that reflects the demands of its members for new technologies. Mobilizing the potential of extension is about enhancing this broad and complex flow of information and advice in the agrifood sector. The ideas presented here describe how extension systems can contribute to the improvement of the profitability, sustainability and equity of smallholder agriculture within broader innovation systems. This paper outlines the potential role of extension in achieving the aims of the L’Aquila Food Security Initiative, which has mobilized a massive international commitment to enhancing food security. Effective extension systems are a precondition but not a guarantee that these aims can be achieved. Extension will only be effective if other services are in place, if research is focused on the problems facing farmers, if markets and land are accessible and if there is sufficient social, political and economic security in place to create an enabling environment for rural development. Extension is part of agricultural knowledge and information systems, which are in turn part of the agrifood and rural development innovation systems that frame the prospects for rural poverty alleviation and food security. Extension has a crucial contribution to make to these broader systems.

Even if these conditions are present, none of the ideas presented here can ensure that the majority of smallholder farmers will be able to continue farming. Even if there is massive investment in extension in the coming years, there are multiple reasons to why hundreds of millions of smallholders are likely to leave the agricultural sector entirely or switch to more diversified livelihoods wherein agriculture becomes a part-time occupation or a fallback food security activity. There will still be a huge need for extension to support the efforts of those smallholder farmers who will remain and to contribute to greater household, national and global food security. Extension can and should be mobilized to both increase food production and to alleviate rural poverty. The demand for food is expected to double by 2050, and this will only be met if smallholders contribute to increasing production. There are over 600 million smallholder farmers in India alone, of which most are likely to continue farming for the foreseeable future. In addition to the need to contribute to the food security and livelihoods of these smallholders, investment in their productive capacity is often the most effective way to support global food security and national economic development. Despite low yields per hectare, African smallholders generally have lower farm-level production costs than many international competitors, and assumptions about the likelihood that economies of scale will push them out of markets have been repeatedly refuted.<sup>1</sup> Smallholders are not being

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank and FAO, 2009, *Awakening Africa’s Sleeping Giant: Prospects for Commercial Agriculture in the Guinea Savannah Zone and Beyond*.

put out of business by the market, but rather by a range of factors that keep them from reaching the market at all. Extension is an essential part of the answer to realizing the potential of smallholder farming and rural development more generally.

This paper presents the position of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) on where agricultural extension stands today and where it needs to go in the future. The findings presented here are intended to better situate extension in consideration of the future of agricultural research for development. It incorporates feedback from a number of stakeholders from the Neuchâtel Initiative ([www.neuchatelinitiative.net](http://www.neuchatelinitiative.net)) and others. This paper includes a number of brief case studies. These cases are presented as illustrations of the range of experience and approaches that characterize today's pluralistic extension systems. They are presented here to raise awareness of the variety of ways that extension is contributing to sustainable rural development and poverty alleviation.

## **1.2. What is extension?**

Extension is no longer just about men from public sector agricultural agencies riding around on motorcycles talking to farmers, even though this stereotype still describes a significant proportion of extension agents. The term 'extension' conjures up images from the past and leads to inaccurate assumptions about what extension reform is all about. This paper uses 'extension' as an admittedly amorphous umbrella term for **all the different activities that provide the information and advisory services that are needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in agrifood systems and rural development**. The term extension, as used here, is taken to be synonymous with rural advisory services. The word 'extension' is seen by some as an old fashioned term related to one-way technology transfer. Despite these connotations, extension is used intentionally here to highlight the importance of breaking out of these past assumptions and infusing the concept of extension with new meaning.

Extension includes technical knowledge and involves facilitation, brokering and coaching of different actors to improve market access, dealing with changing patterns of risk and protecting the environment. This takes place within complex systems involving old and new service providers and even information and communication technologies (phones and mobile phones, internet, radio and television). The 'extension systems' described here are generally not very systematic. They reflect the diverse priorities and accountabilities of a wide range of public, private and civil society organizations that are providing advice and information. In fact, some of these providers would not even classify themselves as "extension" but rather as community developers, innovation brokers, natural resource planners, etc. However, they are all linked by a primary focus on providing advice and information.

Furthermore, and most importantly, it must be recognized that nobody controls these unruly extension systems. Regulatory and policy structures influence different extension actors in different ways and to different degrees. This paper provides guidance for considering how public and civil society international, national and local actors should engage to increase the benefits from extension accruing to the rural poor. It does not assume that any of the readers will have control over these systems, but rather that with clearer normative guidance and acknowledgement of what extension consists of today, a basis can be found for more realistic and effective investments and reform efforts.

**Extension is defined here as systems that should facilitate the access of farmers, their organizations and other market actors to knowledge, information and technologies; facilitate their interaction with partners in research, education, agri-business, and other relevant institutions; and assist them to develop their own technical, organizational and management skills and practices.**

The role of extension has thus widened to include issues in rural areas that go beyond agriculture and may include services such as:

- Dissemination of information about technologies, new research, markets, input and financial services, and climate and weather.
- Training and advice for individual farmers, groups of farmers, farmer organizations, cooperatives and other agribusinesses along the market chain.
- Testing and practical adaptation of new technologies and practices on-farm.
- Development of business management skills among smallholder farmers and other local entrepreneurs.
- Facilitation of linkages among market actors (including financial and non-financial inputs, processing, trading, etc.) including brokering collaboration and promoting social learning among them.
- Linking smallholder farmers, rural entrepreneurs, and other members of the agricultural community with institutions offering training and education in fields relevant to the agricultural sector.
- Facilitation of linkages between farmers, their organizations and the public sector.
- Support to institutional development processes and to social, institutional and organizational innovations.
- Development of informal and formal farmer organizations, and rural youth organizations, and helping them to articulate their demands.
- Support to implementing government policies and programmes through information, awareness and advice on technological options, including land stewardship, food safety and animal welfare.
- Contributing to the development of more appropriate policies and programmes by facilitating feedback from farmers and local entrepreneurs.
- Increasing awareness of new opportunities for certification of 'green,' fair trade and other production methods.
- Facilitating access to non-extension government support (such as weather-related insurance, phytosanitary and certification services) and subsidy programmes, including payment for environmental services and other schemes related to carbon credits.
- Facilitating access to credit from rural finance institutions for farmers and local entrepreneurs.
- Nutrition education and home sciences.
- Mediating in conflicts over natural resources.
- Legal and fiscal advice.

Some of these tasks are unlikely to be undertaken by the types of organizations normally associated with extension. A transnational mobile phone service provider may offer access to climate information and rural legal service and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may provide

farmers with essential advice on land tenure and regulatory issues. Some tasks, such as home sciences and natural resource management, are often undertaken through partnerships between governmental agricultural extension agencies and other actors such as ministries of health or the environment, or NGOs with mandates related to nutrition or environmental protection.

Extension services include both public and private goods. Private goods include one-to-one advice provided to commercial farmers. Public goods involve many tasks related to natural resource management, climate change adaptation and food security. However, in countries, where development of the agricultural sector is crucial to the national economy and food production is relies on huge numbers of smallholders, there is a great public interest in strengthening extension. Extension services therefore require and deserve public investment along with private investment. A complicated aspect of extension is that many tasks are in a grey area between public and private goods. For example, many extension tasks related to promoting food security can be perceived as either a task related to increasing profitability or ensuring the right to food, depending on the values of the observer, the choice of target group and the expected outcomes if public investment is provided. Extension related to food production is a public good in that experience has shown that when it is seen as a purely private matter, this may lead to exclusion of smallholders, which in turn may lead to widespread hunger, political instability or destruction of the environment.

For better or for worse, extension agents do not just do extension. Extension service providers, particularly public sector agencies, are often treated as all-purpose rural development agencies, implementing anything from seed multiplication to distribution of disaster relief. Such tasks may have little directly to do with advice and information and can be a serious distraction from core tasks, but they are a fact of life and it is often important that extension agencies provide these services in an effective manner to retain the confidence of their clients and funders. It is, however, highly problematic when extension agencies are primarily seen by farmers as channels to access free or highly subsidized inputs, especially if these inputs are being distributed as part of political campaigns (as occurs far too often). It is even more problematic when extension agencies are sometimes tasked with responsibilities for collecting taxes or loans, or when they are expected to enforce regulations. In order to perform core tasks, extension agencies must retain the trust of their clients. Policing, politics and advice do not mix.

Thus, extension agencies may undertake non-extension tasks and organizations that are not normally categorised as ‘extension agencies’ are currently providing some of the most innovative and relevant extension services. To understand extension it is therefore essential to look beyond those organizations that are normally seen as ‘extension agencies’, to instead focus on farmers’ and entrepreneurs’ demands and needs for information and advice, rather than fixed notions on standardized, top down diffusion processes. Mobilizing the potential of agricultural extension requires an open mind about what needs to be done and who is likely to do it. This should be informed by experience regarding the different roles of public, private and civil society actors in a variety of extension service tasks and the importance of capacity development investments among all service providers. The old debate about what to do with the traditional government extension agency starts at the wrong end.

Extension reform must therefore involve a broad range of stakeholders. At the outset many of these stakeholders may not recognize that they are stakeholders in an innovation system (much less an extension system). Those that do recognize themselves to be part of these systems, may have deeply ingrained assumptions about the roles of the civil service or about linear technology transfer that create obstacles to open-minded reflection on what local and global experience indicates

about what a sustainable, appropriate system could consist of and how scarce public resources should best be utilized. Extension reform will often be about shifting public investments towards strengthening the capacities of private actors, but this will only come about if there is ownership within the public sector for such changes.

### ***Preparing a fresh start for extension in Niger<sup>2</sup>***

*Convinced of the fact that a future advisory system can only be sustainable if developed under multistakeholder national ownership, in Niger, FAO designed a process for assessing the existing systems and for developing the future advisory system with them. Emphasis was on considering the features of pluralism, demand and market-orientation. This gave room for developing a country-specific system based on existing institutional and organizational capacities, which could be targeted to the poor and vulnerable producers. One of the main objectives of the initiative was to promote farmers' participation in the design process and empower them to take a leading role in the future advisory system.*

*A conclusion from this process was that the assessment and redesign of an extension system should be done in the larger framework of agricultural knowledge services (research, education and training, extension) and their institutions. A process is required in which the various stakeholders are involved from the very beginning in order to express their views and reorient the advisory system based on the capacities in the country and on lessons learned from the past. In addition, the involvement of the farmers' organizations and support to them in the process was crucial in order to translate the idea of a demand-led system into concrete mechanisms. The involvement of the regional farmer federation brought in experiences from other countries, an aspect which could be further strengthened in the process with respect to the entire innovation system.*

### **1.3. The Challenge**

Extension is a much needed investment in the human and social capital of the rural population. There is currently an enormous need to mobilize agricultural extension services for food security and to achieve a range of rural development goals. Urgent efforts are required to:

- enhance women's and men's access to and knowledge about new technologies;
- ensure that farmers and other actors in value chains can deal with changing markets;
- enable farmers to understand, mitigate and adapt to new climate change challenges;
- support rural communities to manage their natural resources more effectively;
- assist farmers to make optimal use of their available resources to ensure access to food and income for their families.

Rural extension services must also address rural livelihood needs related to better nutrition, dealing with the impacts of HIV/AIDS on labour for farming, local institutional development (e.g.

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<sup>2</sup> Blum, M.L. & Mbaye, A. 2009. A Participatory Process Approach for Developing a Pluralistic, Demand-led and Market-oriented Advisory System – Case Study of Niger. In Paffarini, C. & Santucci, F.M. (eds) Theory and practice of advisory work in a time of turbulences. Proceedings from the European Seminar on Extension Education. Assisi 15-19 September 2009.

cooperatives, women's associations) and promoting job creation. There is a growing realization that many of the urgently needed reforms in addressing food security, market development and climate change will only be effective if strong advisory institutions are in place to empower and provide a foundation of support to rural populations to reach markets, to access technologies and to influence the policies that affect their lives.

Today, few agricultural extension service providers can meet this challenge. Capacities are limited in terms of human resources, effectiveness of organizations, funding and, most importantly, leadership and direction. In discussions from food security to climate change, there are mounting calls for 'more extension', but this has not yet led to a consensus on what these scaled-up extension services should actually consist of. If mistakes of the past are not to be replicated, more awareness is needed of what has worked and what has not, what has proven sustainable and what has not, and who has accessed and benefited from different forms of extension services. There are ten overall challenges that need to be addressed if the potential of agricultural extension is to be realized:

1. *Proceeding with normative reform without relying on a single, grand model:* Much has been learnt about which actors can provide different services. A clear conclusion is that there is no simple answer to questions about who should provide extension and how. Public investment in extension services is increasing in some countries, but this is after a long period of steady decline. This revival of commitment to extension is heartening and long overdue, but it needs to be informed by lessons from the past about the failures inherent in choosing a very limited palette of methods and organizational forms through which to channel new resources. There is no single approach that can simultaneously increase market-orientation, food security and mitigate climate change, but the rush to deal with these 'crises' has sometimes carried with it unrealistic hope for just such a 'silver bullet', while in fact country and even location specific solutions are required.
2. *Moving towards pluralism while retaining public financial commitments and coordination:* A decade ago, there were hopes that various forms of private advisory service providers would fill the gap created by weakened public agencies, i.e., that the vacuum in service provision would create a market that private service providers would recognize and that they would scale up their businesses to profit from these new clients. Private advisory services indeed provide services to a limited clientele, primarily related to high value products and relatively well-off producers. Input suppliers are increasingly providing information regarding new varieties and planting methods, but these usually fail to reflect the need for impartial advice and issues related to sustainable natural resource management. Private advisory services are essential and provide a sustainable service for their clients, but there is now a general acknowledgement that there are hundreds of millions of poor farmers, particularly women, who are not likely to access the services provided by these private sector actors who, if they are not subsidized with significant levels of public funds, will only serve better off farmers. Institutional pluralism through different service providers must be matched by pluralism in financial flows if extension is to be broadly accessible. Private investment will not address the needs of all farmers. Hence, targeted public investments in extension will remain crucial, even when services are carried out by non-state providers.
3. *Increasing accountability:* Farmer organizations in many countries recognize that there are serious gaps in access to appropriate and impartial advice and are beginning to search for ways to identify, choose and provide services for their members. This represents a potentially

important form of farmer-driven extension, but as yet these services are generally limited in scope and most farmer organizations are struggling to balance a range of demands for extension with other often more pressing tasks. Furthermore, these farmer organizations and their higher level federations are often weak, especially in terms of being representative of their members and inclusive of male and female smallholders. They themselves need advice in order to develop their organizations and their capacities to empower all their members (and potential members) in product marketing, in policy formulation, and for setting priorities for inclusive services. Farmer organizations are not the only way to make extension more accountable. Decentralization, if well planned, can increase accountability through subsidiarity. The ways that extension services are financed can be a way of holding them accountable for the quantity and quality of services they provide. When the client pays (perhaps with public financial assistance) this forces service providers to adopt greater client-orientation to ensure their economic survival.

4. *Creating service provision markets:* When public sector agencies began to decline there was a hope that local and international NGOs would contribute to filling the gap. Activities have been contracted out to these organizations on a significant scale. While these organizations have in many cases shown ability to innovate and provide greater flexibility in responding to the demands of poor farmers, their capacities to scale up these efforts have proven limited and the costs of their services are in many cases higher than the public agencies they were expected to replace. The same has often happened in contracting out to private advisory firms. Contracting out with increased costs is only justified if the impacts of such services are also significantly greater. There is a need to learn from initial experience in contracting out to find new ways to create competitive markets for extension services and find new ways to combine contracting out with different forms of publicly funded contracts based on performance criteria. There are also opportunities to learn from how private traders, processors and retailers have contracted extension services to ensure a reliable and timely supply of quality agricultural products.
5. *Facing up to and addressing human resource limitations:* Human resources are a fundamental constraint to extension reform. Extension is no longer a matter of simply providing information about set technological packages to farmers. It is now generally acknowledged that advisers need skills in how to facilitate discussions and coach different stakeholders in natural resource management and market supply chains. They must shift from lecturing to being able to empower farmers themselves to learn about how to manage their farms and crops. The uncertainties and variability inherent in climate change and market trends mean that they need to help farmers consider a menu of options and reflect on probable risks rather than promoting standardized advice. These tasks require skills in critical thinking and problem solving, which were discouraged in the extension bureaucracies of the past. These skills are currently beyond the capabilities of most public sector extension agents. Furthermore, the average educational level of advisers is dropping in many countries due to weakened education and training institutions relevant for agriculture and rural development, competition for quality staff from better paid job markets, and loss of experienced personnel due to HIV/AIDS. Agricultural education for farmers themselves (such as that provided by agricultural high schools) is an important component in efforts to enhance their capacity to demand and utilize extension advice, but these institutions are also in a serious state of decline in most countries. Plans for extension must reflect this human resource crisis and include concerted and sustainable investment strategies to address it.

6. *Transcending projects:* Sustainable extension services need government commitments and effective, sustainable financing forms. Agricultural extension projects have shown that the injection of project resources can mobilize extension efforts for a short period of time, but also that the sustainability of these projects has generally been very poor. Additional temporary resources may be needed for particular campaigns or for dealing with temporary problems (such as responding to a drought or raising awareness of a new set of food safety standards), but too often these high profile ‘quick impact’ investments have distracted attention from the need to strengthen the institutions that will carry out future programmes. Pressures to address the food security crisis, respond to climate change and support a range of other rural development goals have meant that extension is still often supported as a temporary component of broader projects addressing various themes, only to be later blamed for failing to maintain service levels when these programmes are subsequently ‘handed over.’ If this syndrome is to be avoided, project support must be balanced with systematic, institutional approaches to reform and strengthening pluralistic extension systems.
7. *Balancing investments in extension supply and demand:* There is a growing body of knowledge about how to increase demand-drive and how to improve the quality of services, but these two aspects of extension reform are not always pursued in a coherent and coordinated manner. If the voice of farmers is made stronger, but the capacity of extension to respond is in decline, the result will inevitably be disappointment and distrust. It is important to involve a wide range of service providers, as well as farmer organizations, in stakeholder processes to create institutional environments wherein the supply and demand for extension services are both supported. However, challenges remain in applying these approaches in a systematic and sustainable manner. There is a lingering faith that support for either increasing the capacities of advisers or the voice of farmer organizations will create more effective collaboration. Investments in both the supply and the demand for extension are needed if the equation is to balance.
8. *Focusing on institutions rather than grand methodological or technological solutions:* There is starting to be an acknowledgement that there is no ‘methods fix’ for extension. The aforementioned association between extension and projects has also carried with it an assumption that with the ‘right’ method or technological investment, extension agencies will achieve new objectives and become more sustainable. This has led to the development of a range of innovative and effective methods that have proven that extension actually can make a profound contribution to environmentally sustainable and market-oriented rural development. The changing technological landscape, including the spread of Internet and mobile phones, has shown the potential for enhancing access to information about markets, weather and technological options and improve communication and linkages among stakeholders. Challenges remain in anchoring these methodological changes in prevailing institutional structures and organizations, and in recognizing and addressing the financial and human resource constraints in scaling up their use. Methods need to be adapted to prevailing capacities and the context where they will be used. Furthermore, this implies the need to adapt extension approaches technological investments for different countries, products and clients and the different types of relations that exist between public and private sectors in any given country.

9. *Moving from standard packages to tailored advice:* A further major challenge is to be able to provide advice that fits the need of specific farmers in specific circumstances. Rapid and unpredictable changes in markets and in local climates demand a new paradigm that rejects blanket advice. This will have different implications for extension systems that provide detailed one-on-one advice to individual farmers and those where extension staff-to-farmer ratios make such approaches unviable, but both require approaches that recognize that farmers will inevitably unpack and repack the packages they receive. Part of this is the challenge of synchronizing and making accessible the materials, credit, training and information (at the right place, time and format) needed to ensure that innovations are accessible and transaction costs minimized. Another aspect is the aforementioned need for skills in critical thinking and problem solving, which are a precondition for extension agents to understand what is happening when their packages are unpacked.
10. *Addressing gender, age and ethnic differences and the specific needs of these groups of farmers and entrepreneurs:* With regard to equitable and inclusive rural development, extension has often been portrayed as exemplifying the problem, rather than contributing to the solution. In addressing the challenges listed above, groundwork can be laid for either more efficient extension for those who already possess high potential for growth, or extension reform can be a way to create a more level playing field for rural development more generally. Women have an important role in agrifood systems, different ethnic groups have different links and obstacles to reach different markets, youth often have very limited access to information and inspiration related to agriculture and rural development, which has in turn contributed to alienation, rapid urbanization and in some countries a highly problematic aging of the agricultural workforce. Extension is not a panacea for addressing any of these trends. Extension alone cannot make research developed for well-off farmers accessible to their poorer neighbours. But extension must be part of more comprehensive solution to equity challenges by involving wider sets of stakeholders in innovation systems and among the government, private sector and civil society.

Pluralism is almost certain to prevail and deepen with respect to organizational forms, methods and institutional structures. Opportunities for increasing the effectiveness of extension are to be found in two areas. First is to better apply the lessons that have been learnt in recent years by carrying out long overdue structural reforms towards pluralistic, demand-led and market-oriented extension systems. Second, some of the strongest demands for 'more extension' are coming from unexpected areas: expansion in the provision of climate information, growing food security programming, the changing aid-for-trade agenda and comprehensive reform in global agricultural research for development. All imply the need to apply existing knowledge but also to explore the necessity and relevance of changing extension forms within new development agendas, aid architectures and institutional structures.

### ***Lessons about what not to do: the rise and fall of Training and Visit in India<sup>3</sup>***

*The Training and Visit (T&V) extension system was effective in disseminating Green Revolution technology in India, especially in the high potential, irrigated areas, but it had little effect on productivity and incomes among farmers in rainfed areas. In addition, by the early 1990s, many other systemic problems were apparent:*

- *The introduction of T&V extension greatly expanded the number of village extension workers (VEWs) in the Department of Agriculture (DOA), beyond the capacity of state governments to finance recurrent costs.*
- *Government's continuing focus on increasing food production resulted in extension being commodity and supply-driven, in contrast with a focus on diversification and farm income (i.e., being more market-driven).*
- *Dissemination of Green Revolution technology substantially increased the production of food staples; therefore, commodity prices fell during the 1980–90s resulting in declining farm income.*
- *The emphasis on food security during the 1960–80s resulted in an extension system that was limited to the staple food crops and dominated by the DOA. The other line departments, including Animal Husbandry, Horticulture, Fisheries, Sericulture, etc. had few extension staff, virtually no extension programmes and operated separately from each other. As a result, there was no integration across departments (i.e. no 'farming systems' approach).*

*By the 1990s, the line departments primarily focused on the distribution of centrally-funded subsidies and inputs. This situation had the following effect:*

- *Line department staff became increasingly accountable to the Government, rather than to farmers.*
- *Since the Government was partially involved in input supply, the government field staff viewed private input supply dealers more as competitors than as partners.*
- *Given this focus on central government schemes, there was less need for extension to work closely with researchers, resulting in weakening research-extension linkages.*
- *Finally, with the exception of donor sponsored schemes, extension gave very little attention to organizing farmers into groups and, thereby, empowering farmers.*

<sup>3</sup> Singh, J. P., Swanson, B. E., & Singh, K. M. (2006). Developing a decentralized, market-driven extension system in India: The ATMA model. Good Practice Paper. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

***New forms of networking are part of the new extension agenda<sup>4</sup>***

*The Rural Knowledge Network (RKN) Pilot Project for East Africa supports the emergence of commercially viable market access services for building effective and efficient rural marketing chains for the benefit of all actors. RKN is developing a people-centred knowledge management process that is built on an understanding of farmers' needs, shapes the existing technical information to respond to farmers' requirements and delivers knowledge in a form they can understand. The network encompasses market access networks in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, with actors at national, district and local level keeping a constant and effective communication link (e-mail, telephone, SMS, face-to-face meetings, Internet, etc) for information sharing and business to business learning. Lessons learnt at all levels are captured, documented and shared widely using an Internet platform.*

*An associated initiative, the First Mile is conducting rental trials to test the affordability, usefulness and appropriateness in rural areas of solid state laptops that use a SIM-card enabled modem to access the Internet. These laptops are currently being tested by selected information board managers and market access companies.*

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<sup>4</sup> RKN-FAO 2009. The Rural Knowledge Network: Facilitating smallholders' access to markets in East Africa. Sharing Knowledge with rural people. FAO Research and Extension Division. Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome Italy.



## 2. New global, national and local institutions and approaches

### 2.1. Overview

Extension is recognized as a strategic component of new institutional frameworks at global level, such as within the Global Partnership on Agriculture and Food Security and new structures that may emerge to address climate change adaptation and mitigation. Parallel processes are underway regionally through, for example, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and a range of other regional initiatives, as well as within national efforts to strengthen food security and trade. Institutional changes are underway to ensure that extension becomes an integral part of the new institutions that are emerging to deal with agricultural, rural and environmental change, and also for extension systems to become better aligned with national priorities and smallholders' demands.

If the voice and experience of the extension community are to be heard, platforms at global, national and local levels will be needed that include, or are even led by, key extension actors. The policy dialogues that are underway in agricultural development, food security and climate change at all three of these levels will become more relevant and evidence-based if people knowledgeable about extension are 'at the table.' The extension community has valuable experience in what it means to put policies into practice in rural areas.

In order to mobilize this engagement, extension stakeholders also need their own fora to reflect on experience and formulate useful and forceful inputs into these wider discussions. The new GFRAS recently established will provide a voice for the international advisory service community in aligning extension policies with broader rural development frameworks. The African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) is assuming a similar responsibility within Africa, and it is likely that other networks may emerge in other regions.

Redefining the role of extension in new institutional structures requires recognition that extension alone is not a solution. The complex nature of extension systems, tasks and roles within agrifood and natural resource management systems has meant that a more integrated perspective is required on the facilitative role of extension for achieving synergies with new investments in research, other rural services and new types of participatory programming. The ways that extension can and should impact on rural development need to be better understood. Research can point to the development of an improved seed variety, but it is impossible to attribute the adoption of that variety to either extension or research alone (even though extension is often blamed if the variety is not adopted). Extension investments have been justified by claims of important but often diffuse outcomes that are difficult to reliably measure. There is a need for better evidence, better methods to collect evidence, and more champions to convince the key decision-makers in governments and the private sector that extension is a cost-effective stimulant to economic growth, a prerequisite for rural poverty alleviation, and a basic tool for meeting the challenges of global environmental change. This needs to be coupled with acknowledgement that these outcomes will only be apparent within joined-up approaches to rural development, anchored in platforms for learning, exchange and coordination.

The need for an integrated perspective is particularly important at local levels. With decentralization and more pluralistic arrangements, progress is being made in promoting the subsidiarity of extension services and in making them accountable to farmers. Yet, more exchange for learning and coordination among local government, the private sector and civil society is still needed. The shift of responsibilities to local levels has often not been accompanied by a shift of resources or readiness to pay the relatively high recurrent costs of these services. It has also been difficult to transfer human resource capacities from ministry-led bureaucracies to local government. Decentralization must include clarity regarding needs and objectives and strong leadership to make sure that the effectiveness and sustainability of extension is also recognized as a local responsibility, albeit often with financial support from central government. Decentralized extension must not become the responsibility of everyone and nobody, but should be managed by professional service providers specialized in agricultural and rural development. New forms of collaboration, coordination, communication and cost-effective access to new innovations (e.g. by using modern ICTs) are crucial for decentralized extension providers to enable them to respond to these new challenges and to keep up-to-date with their knowledge and skills.

Many of the new institutional challenges in enhancing extension effectiveness will require a fresh look at an old and often forgotten institution - agricultural education. Agricultural high schools and colleges are an essential channel for investment in the capacity of both farmers and extension agents to adapt to new tasks and rethink their roles. Great demands and grand expectation regarding how farmers, and those advising them, should undertake the range of tasks described in this report need to be matched with investments in their capacities. But this has often been a missing link. The search for quick fixes to pressing problems has distracted attention from those institutions that are required as the foundation for developing the skills and knowledge base that are required.

#### ***Problems in project-driven decentralization in India<sup>5</sup>***

*The World Bank supported National Agriculture Technology Project (NATP) was an important testing ground for innovative approaches to decentralizing the Indian extension service. Prior to NATP, nearly all operational funding for extension programmes in India came from the central government in the form of predefined or earmarked, extension activities, such as fertilizer demonstration packages or new irrigation technologies (generally in the form of subsidized inputs). Because these pre-allocated central government funds for specific extension programme activities were channelled through the separate line departments, the district- and block-level extension staff had no other funds available to address the local needs of different farmer groups within their service area. Therefore, a central feature of NATP was to pilot a decentralized extension model, whereby national funds would be transferred directly to these semi-autonomous, registered Agricultural Technology Management Agencies (ATMAs). Each Block Technology Team (BTT) developed its annual work plan, in close consultation with and approval by the local Farmer Advisory Committee, the proposed work plan was sent directly to the ATMA Management Committee for technical review and then to the ATMA Governing Board for final approval and funding. Once each work plan was approved by the ATMA, then programme funds were transferred back to each BTT, so that*

<sup>5</sup> Singh, J. P., Swanson, B. E., & Singh, K. M. (2006). Developing a decentralized, market-driven extension system in India: The ATMA model. Good Practice Paper. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

*the front-line extension field staff could then implement these location specific extension programmes.*

*Because these ATMAs were created and registered as semi-autonomous NGOs, they could receive both public and private sector funds, including some cost-recovery for services from participating farmers. It should be noted that when this ATMA model was being piloted, most programme and operational funds used at the district and sub-district levels were actually project financed. Therefore, this more rapid availability of funds by each ATMA had a significant, positive impact on activities. Unfortunately, the availability of these unrestricted programme funds largely disappeared after the project ended. The problem was not lack of funds per se, but that nearly all national funds were still 'earmarked' for specific extension activities.*

*Specifically, the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) did not follow through with the reform process initiated in NATP by transferring previously earmarked programme funds directly to the ATMAs in each district as a continuing source of unrestricted funds. Instead, the different line departments within the MOA argued against this new policy arrangement and were able to continue transferring earmarked funds directly to individual line departments. The resumption of this top-down funding arrangement severely restricts the capacity of both the ATMAs and the sub-district extension staff in addressing the local needs of different farmer groups within their districts.*

## **2.2. Towards pluralism through policy reform**

Agricultural extension reform exemplifies what needs to be done to promote aid harmonization and alignment with national structures and priorities. It is a clear indicator of whether the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (agreed upon in 2005) is impacting on the services actually reaching the rural poor. Better harmonization and alignment will require changes in the ways that extension systems have been supported in the past. Extension interventions have suffered from weak harmonization, whereby different donors, NGOs and research institutions have promoted different 'models' even in the same countries. This has not led to pluralism, but rather to fragmentation where each aid agency has promoted a different service model in each province, district or even village, with little choice provided to the ultimate clients of these services.

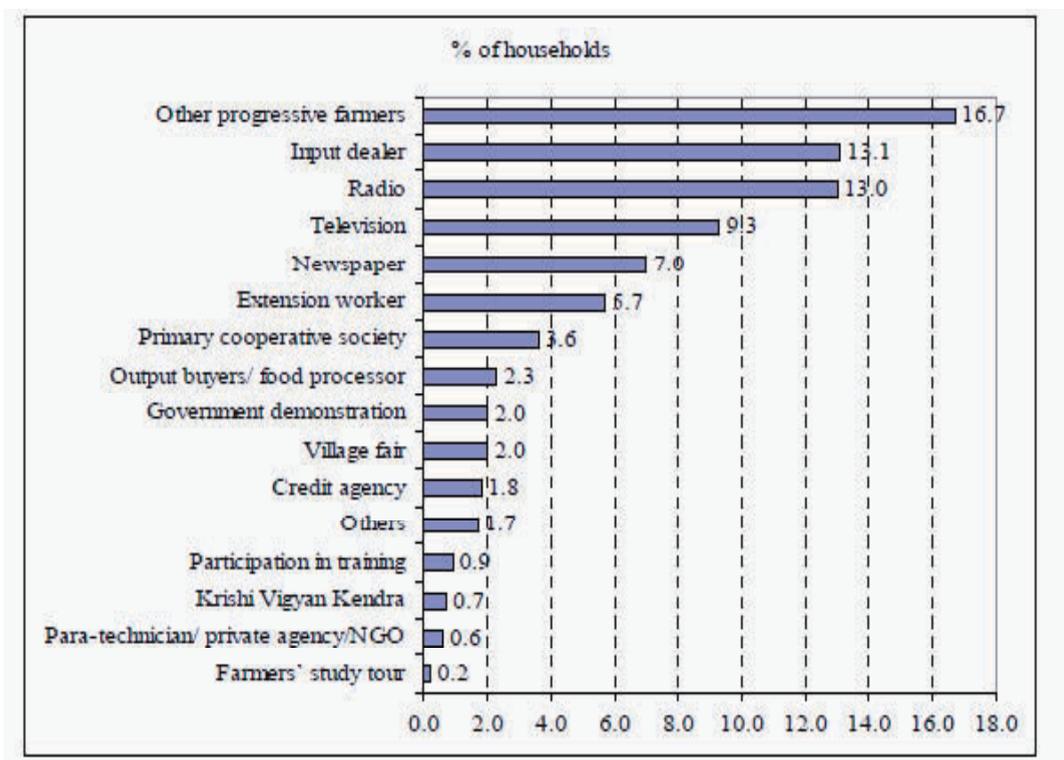
Alignment has also been poor, as these interventions have been managed with little effort to support policy reforms and the development of understanding and principles for more effective service provision at national level. Donors, NGOs and researchers have frequently concentrated on creating structures to implement their projects at the expense of finding ways to sustainably serve farmers. Extension capacities have too often been borrowed or rented for project implementation, rather than developed. Investments in extension training have dwindled, just as outside agencies have 'poached' those remaining staff with high skill levels for their projects.

In order to reverse these tendencies, institutional development efforts should be reinforced by building on the comparative advantage of different actors in different localities. Much can be learnt from extension projects, but only if attention is paid to the realities of institutional development right from the start. It is thus not just about the introduction of new models and methods. Pluralistic extension relies on changing the rules of the game, and strengthening the capacity of actors to understand and take advantage of these new rules through better coordination and contextualisation.

The goal should be new markets for services and trusting, synergetic relations among a range of service providers and their clients. This will require well considered structural and organizational support for increasing the quality and quantity of supply of services, both in public and private sectors, paired with investments in the capacity of farmers to demand services, primarily through farmer organizations.

***Pluralism exists!***

*Farmers continuously seek and receive information from many different sources. The figure below shows that pluralism already exists as it demonstrates the percentage of farm households accessing information on modern agricultural technology through different sources in India.<sup>6</sup>*



<sup>6</sup> Birner, R. & Anderson, J.R. 2007. How to make agricultural extension demand-driven? The case of India's agricultural extension policy. IFPRI Discussion Paper 00729. November 2007. Note Kishri Vigyan Kendra refers to Farmer Information and Advisory Centres.

### **2.3. From privatization to selective commercialization and accountability**

During the 1990s, declining confidence in the effectiveness of public sector extension agencies led to the emergence of an alternative paradigm, where it was assumed that market-based solutions and privatization of extension provision could become an effective and sustainable base for pluralism. Experiments were undertaken by many governments and aid agencies. At the same time, the decline of public extension agencies was leading to increases in private sector investments in extension services. Today, services for relatively well-off commercial farmers are increasingly dominated by private advisory services, but these investments are rarely serving the rural poor. In many countries, privatization (often undertaken by the mere withdrawal of funding for public sector agencies) resulted in the majority of farmers losing access altogether to impartial and independent advice. This experience showed that creation of a level playing field for private extension providers is very important, but that this needs to be part of a wider reform process which promotes pluralism while recognizing the need for public financial support.

If the poor are to attain and retain access to extension it has now been recognized that public finance is essential. However, this does not mean a return to the free public service approaches of the past. Publicly funded but privately provided extension can be combined with measures to place resources at the disposal of poor farmers and their organizations. Most importantly, the ways that services are contracted can greatly enhance the accountability of extension to farmers. Markets for extension services can work, given the proper stimuli and structural reform. Public sector agencies may still have a role in provision of information through mass media, provision of certain public goods (e.g. environmental protection, and ensuring that resource-poor farmers and neglected groups are included) and in quality control related to private service provision. Or, public sector delivery may occur, but closer to the farmers, through local government. These agencies may also have a role in arranging opportunities for farmers to hear from a range of private service providers (for extension and other agricultural services) so that farmers can then make more informed choices about which services best meet their needs. Global experience has shown that appropriate roles for public sector agencies will differ from place to place. The 'either-or' discourse on public or private service provision is therefore becoming more nuanced. This has led to a shift of focus from blanket statements about who should provide extension, to a search for better ways to guarantee that all service providers are genuinely accountable to the clients - male and female, poor and rich - that they serve.

#### ***Fairtrade and privatization, partnerships for greater equity<sup>7</sup>***

*In Malawi, there are several examples of new types of partnerships emerging from the opportunities that fairtrade can create for smallholder farmers. The smallholder tea sector is developing fast. Tea husbandry extension is provided by the tea estates, which buy the green leaf tea, and therefore have a vested interest in its quality and the continuity of supply. In addition to advice, the estates provide fertilizer on credit. Recently some of the smallholder associations have become Fairtrade certified. The price premium that comes with sale to*

<sup>7</sup> Chipeta, S.; 2008; FARA.AFAAS-RFO-NI Consultation 2008, Consultation in Malawi; Pound, B. and Phiri, A., 2009, Longitudinal impact assessment of Fairtrade certified tea producers and workers in Malawi, London, Fairtrade Foundation.

*Fairtrade is enabling smallholders to invest in improving their tea gardens, as well as in social development services. Another example is the Mzuzu Coffee Planters' Union, which organizes smallholder farmers in coffee production, provides extension, processes and markets the coffee. The extension is thereby financed through the fairtrade marketing of the coffee.*

Another lesson of these reform efforts is that the transaction costs of commercial contracting relations are usually too great for poor farmers and for extension agencies working with individual farming households. Group approaches are essential in many contexts to increase outreach and impact. In some places, paraprofessionals receiving small payments for their services have been able to create links to the poor. Farmer education can also play an important role in enabling educated farmers to develop links to extension service providers by which they and their neighbours can access advice.

Accountability to farmer organizations is usually a far more realistic and politically appropriate basis for placing power in the hands of the farmers than expectations that individual poor households can contract the services that they need. Cooperatives working with particular commodities have proven effective in getting crops into markets and reinvesting some of the profits in extension services. This is, however, not a panacea. Poor farming households often see the transaction costs of joining farmer organizations as too high. Special efforts are needed to support more inclusive farmer organizations and to ensure that those households that choose not to join these organizations are not forgotten. Support for the development of commercial pro-poor market access services can further facilitate those households reaching markets.

#### ***Public-private partnerships in Uganda<sup>8</sup>***

*Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are starting to be recognized as a way to improve agricultural extension together with other rural services. PPPs can bring the efficiency of business to public service delivery, with the government playing an enabling role. Under the oil palm component of the Vegetable Oil Development Project in Uganda, the Government has put in place a unique PPP by promoting direct investment to introduce oil palm cultivation by a large scale private operator (Oil Palm of Uganda Limited- OPUL), while IFAD has providing funding to Government to establish the Kalangala Oil Palm Growers Trust (KOPGT) which provides funding to smallholders to develop their oil palm gardens. OPUL provides the know-how and inputs so that smallholders are using the same technology on their plots as on the large nucleus estate, while KOPGT is the 'go between' for farmers. While IFAD is financing the start-up costs and extension during an initial period, provision has been made for KOPGT to become a self-sustaining organization, financed by a margin of the earnings of their crop.*

<sup>8</sup> Vegetable Oil Development Project - Uganda: Interim Evaluation, IFAD, December, 2009.

## **2.4. Prospects for regional and global platforms**

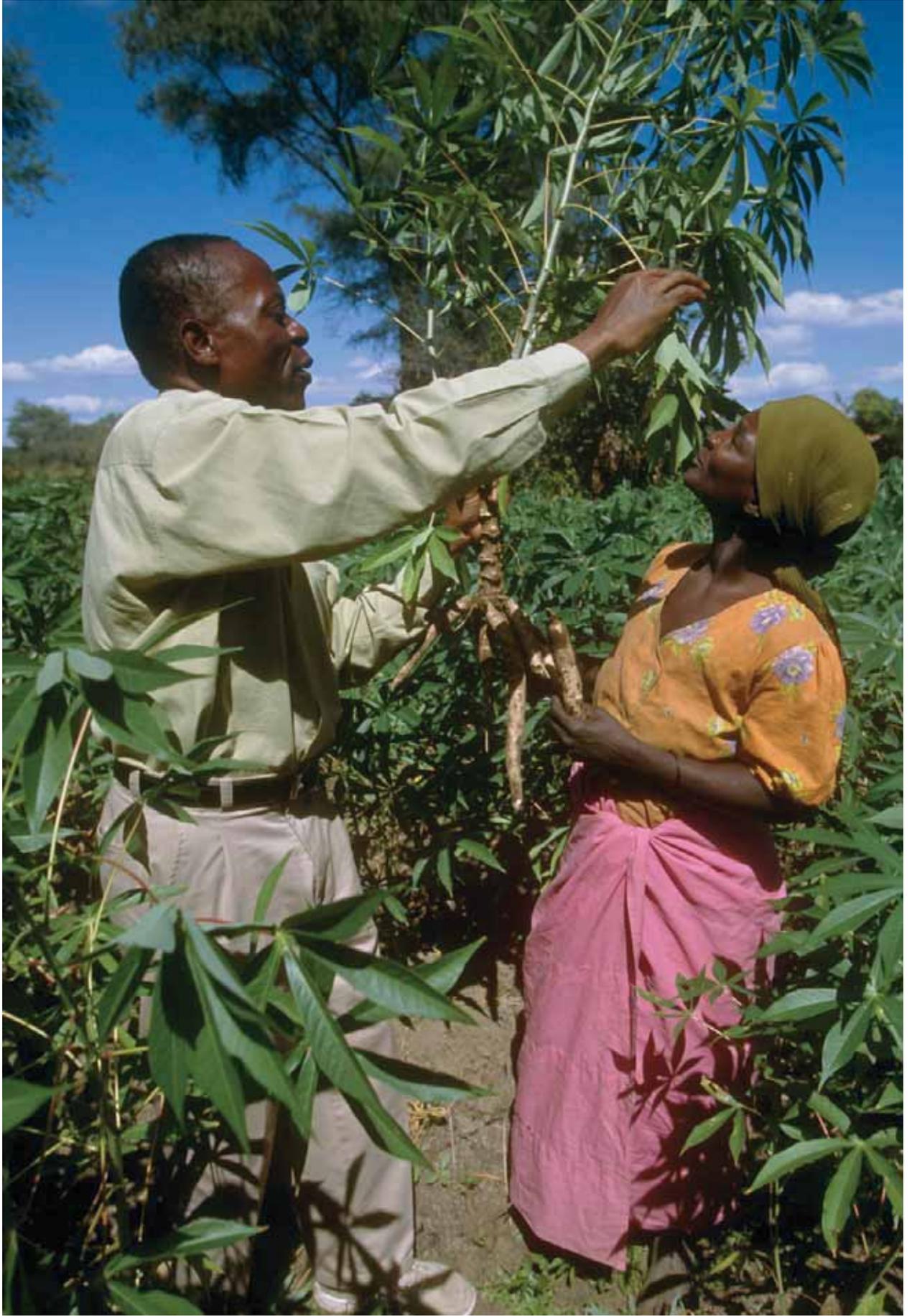
To better serve their constituency, including the poor and women, extension needs a stronger voice; vigorous analysis and guidance on policies, principles, approaches and investment; enhanced interaction and dialogue; and the synthesis of innovations.

Due to a confluence of factors - rising food prices, the L'Aquila Joint Statement on Global Food Security, which stressed the importance of agricultural extension services, renewed donor interest in agriculture and advisory services, and a broad commitment to restructure global agricultural development institutions - there is major opportunity to strengthen and support extension. There is also a great need for the extension community to guide these new efforts. In light of these developments, GFRAS was recently created. The GFRAS mission is to provide leadership and advocacy on pluralistic, demand-driven rural advisory services that promote rural growth and help the poor within the global development agenda.

The forum's objectives are to:

1. Support the synthesis and development of ideas for improving the effectiveness of advisory services and for rethinking extension.
2. Enhance interaction, networking, peer exchange, institutional strengthening, and experience sharing in relation to rural advisory services.
3. Provide a voice for extension at the global level and play role as convener, mobilizer, energizer, and harmoniser for rural advisory services.
4. Promote the creation of an enabling environment for investment in advisory services.

GFRAS has an important global role to play, but will need to work closely with a range of partners if it is to have impact on extension practice. Regional networks of extension practitioners are currently few and far between (compared with regional research and farmer organization networks). AFAAS has been recently established to service the needs of the African extension community. The role of AFAAS is to enhance market access for farmers, strengthen capacity, document and share best practices, and start an extension knowledge management system in Africa. One of the major tasks for GFRAS will be to develop a strategy to encourage and support the development of regional networking such as AFAAS.



## 3. Poverty alleviation, food security and risk reduction

### 3.1. Overview

Extension has long been justifiably criticised for being biased towards farmers who are wealthy, male, have good market access and controlled environmental conditions. Extension is not always to blame, as advice may only be demanded by and useful to those with access to markets, and capital for inputs or labour. Because of this, a road or a credit programme may actually be the most effective investment in making extension pro-poor. Pluralism, subsidiarity and alignment with national priorities are placing the challenge of reaching poor clients in a new light. Reform is not just a matter of providing new directives to governmental extension agencies to work with specific target population. The rural poor have a broad range of farming and livelihood strategies. Pro-poor pluralistic reform is therefore a matter of finding ways to mobilize and coordinate those service providers that can best meet the needs and demands of different groups. Extension is in many respects the institution that will ‘make or break’ attempts to find coherence between efforts to increase productivity and initiatives to target food insecure households and to address the different risks facing resource poor male and female farmers.

One aspect of this is to mobilize extension for flexible livelihood support through initiatives that encourage the diversification of the strategies through which the poor are themselves managing the risks that they face. The poor and those who are vulnerable to climate and market uncertainty and variability need new forms of extension to help them to understand such risks and manage them. Services must be flexible enough to respond to the varied and changing demands of the poor who are struggling to deal with overwhelming challenges to the future of their farming systems. As part of this, extension services need to provide or link to information and knowledge regarding weather and climate change, market prices, regulatory structures, quality standards and consumer demands, and access to financial services if they are to help the poor to deal with the changing landscape of risk.

### 3.2. Pro-poor extension: can it ensure the viability of smallholder farming?

Despite long-standing recognition that extension usually fails to reach the poor, insufficient progress has been made in overcoming traditional elite and gender biases. New policy declarations, such as the L’Aquila Joint Statement on Global Food Security, are calling for new efforts to transcend these long-standing biases in rural development efforts.

However, there are dissenting voices that question the value of supporting marginalized farmers. There are those who claim that pro-poor rural development falsely ‘romanticizes’ smallholder agriculture.<sup>9</sup> This narrative is based on assumptions that the rural poor and indeed many relatively better-off farmers should abandon agriculture and ‘do something else’ since they will in any case fail in the new global agrifood system and cannot contribute sufficiently to global food security.

<sup>9</sup> Collier, P. 2009. Africa’s organic Peasantry: Beyond romanticism. *Agriculture*. Vol. 3(2) Summer 2009 Issue.

These claims are being used by some to justify withdrawal of publicly financed extension services targeted to the poor. This ‘romanticization’ critique furthermore suggests that the wealthy can afford to pay for their own services (including extension), and that the provision of subsidized services for the poor will merely delay a needed transformation. Despite considerable evidence that smallholder agriculture can be effective both in terms of production and in poverty alleviation, such arguments are gaining traction within many governments and ministries of agriculture. Questionable claims about supposedly greater efficiency in large-scale farming are even being used to justify the transfer of ownership of large tracts of land to commercial investors for plantation agriculture.

Counter-arguments for continued public finance of extension services for the poor need to be anchored in a clear analysis of options for rural household food security and the rights of the rural poor, even if their livelihoods appear to be approaching tipping points. Extension may support smallholders under stress to modify and thus hold onto existing production systems when failed farms results in acute human suffering or activities that undermine other goals and national commitments -i.e. where lack of livelihoods, loss of land and alienation lead to political unrest.

Extension may, in many cases, have little impact on production among the poorest farmers, but this implies the need to shift attention to local rural economic development rather than merely declaring the rural hinterlands to be ‘unviable.’ Where the poor are leaving their farms, extension may help former farmers to ‘do something else.’ Globalization is indeed drastically raising the thresholds for commercial smallholders in terms of demands for quality, timeliness, bulk, food safety and certification. Extension is not a panacea that can help all farmers to engage in markets. Some will indeed fail and markets for some products are becoming dominated by large farmers. Some of these farms create a significant level of employment for rural people (e.g. horticulture), whereas others do not (e.g. oil palm). At the same time, there are many examples of smallholders engaging effectively in markets with relatively modest public investment in extension or none at all, including fairtrade marketing, organic farming and production for local markets. Extension can ameliorate some of the negative aspects of transformations that are underway in agrifood systems that exclude poor farmers. It is important to find such opportunities and target extension investments in these areas.

Furthermore, analysis of the political economy of access to extension services illustrates some of the inaccuracies in the critique of ‘romanticisation.’ Large farmers often have privileged access to inputs, services and markets due to their position in society, whilst the poor may actually produce with greater economic efficiency. The ‘romanticisation’ critique rests on assumptions that pro-poor rural services skew markets and make them less efficient, but these markets may already be skewed in favour of others. There are reasons to question the assumption that the market will automatically enhance ‘efficiency’ by driving poor farmers into bankruptcy, and also the assumption that this will eventually result in improved welfare.

New factors that could reduce the elite bias include awareness that in many countries the poor have either not abandoned their farms as the economists predicted (e.g. parts of Eastern Europe where trends towards land fragmentation have withstood ‘market forces’) or where the rural poor have taken to undesirable livelihoods based in illicit activities (in many post-conflict countries). New attention to addressing the problems of fragile states has brought with it a realization that provision of livelihood support services to the large proportion of the poor who are still smallholders is an essential part of any peace-building strategy. Extension is a tool by which populations under stress can see that their government cares about their livelihoods. This is a cornerstone of the social contract between states and citizens in any post-conflict society.

Furthermore, failure to publicly finance extension does not mean that extension will not exist, just that it may not contribute to public goals. One of the greatest ‘success stories’ in extension for smallholder, market-oriented agriculture has been the extraordinary spread of opium poppy production in Afghanistan, particularly to areas where there was in the past no tradition of opium production. Where there is a sufficiently profitable market there will be a demand for extension and a supply of services.

### **3.3. Gender bias in extension, beyond shooting the messenger**

Over the past two decades much attention has been given to the need to overcome gender biases in extension, but complaints about extension may be merely ‘shooting the messenger’ when these biases are grounded in the wider policy environment and rural development norms. Overcoming gender bias requires attention to what stands in the way of equitable service provision, rather than just complaints that extension agents do not talk to women.

Gender inequality persists in the agricultural sector because it is deeply rooted in gender relations in several areas that are crucial for farming: Gender relations at household level, land and property rights, access to agricultural inputs, extension services, credit and financial services, business development services, agro-processing, just to name some of the most significant areas. Extension is in many countries tasked with promoting agriculture for cash crops, either for export or to achieve national grain self-sufficiency. These goals may clash with objectives of reaching female farmers as they may have little or no incentive to adopt or plant cash crops because they will not control the income resulting from this production. They often prefer to concentrate on subsistence crops and/or petty trade or casual labour because these are sources of income that they can more easily control. Extension may therefore not be able to achieve gender equity because the broader policy environment, including priorities for research, finance, etc., is not equitable. Gender equity in access to extension services requires attention to gender roles in households, society, agriculture and rural development more generally.

#### ***The factors that make women poor limit access to extension***

*A study from Uganda on strengthening linkages between poverty and gender analysis<sup>10</sup> noted the following issues affecting extension in reaching women:*

- *Women have limited opportunities to access extension services in situations where culture dictates restrictions in movements outside the domestic sphere*
- *Lack of access to and control of land result in women having far less interest than men in investing in expanded or intensive agricultural production and hence in the extension messages related to such topics*
- *Women’s daily workload leaves no time to seek services that are only available in the public sphere*
- *Extension messages are not responsive to strategic agricultural activities, interests and responsibilities of female small-scale farmers*

Extension is an arena where the underlying goal conflicts in rural development, economic growth, household and national food security and poverty alleviation come to the fore in concrete

<sup>10</sup> Mukasa, Stella; Nite, Tanzam; Hope, Kabuchu and Santa Vusia Kayongo (2004) Uganda – Poverty and Gender Assessment – strengthening Linkages between Poverty and Gender Analysis in Uganda, Royal Danish Embassy, Kampala.

decisions about extension targets. Rather than ‘shooting the messenger,’ the failures of extension in supporting gender equity should be seen as an indicator of the importance of more closely analysing how approaches to agricultural knowledge and information systems and overall policies fail to equitably address gender.

Context is key, but this does not mean that extension is powerless to overcome its biases. Extension actors can choose to be pro-active and challenge key constraints to gender equity, for example by including legal advice in their services or directly challenging gender relations at household levels through facilitating discussions in farmer organizations or cooperatives.

### ***Extension for women: Addressing power more than production<sup>11</sup>***

*An organization of Ugandan women lawyers, FIFA- Uganda have had good results in providing legal aid services through legal aid clinics, to women, responding to gender issues of property rights. They provide advice on legalizing business operations and other forms of commercial justice. This improves women’s incentives to develop farming and agribusiness enterprises and at the same time improves their access to financial services.*

*The Uganda Coffee Association (NUCAFE) showed that it was possible through facilitating inter household negotiations of fairer gender relations among their members to increase family income and welfare, as well as overall productivity and quality of the coffee supply to the association.*

*Moreover, significant progress has been made in methodological innovations that have proven effective in increasing inclusiveness. Gender issues can be addressed through innovations related to women and men as different clients, which in turn means adapting extension methods to relate to social networks, mobility constraints and farming systems. Other approaches have been developed through critical reflection on how different extension methods are received within different cultures.*

### ***Approaches and methods count<sup>12</sup>***

*Choice of advisory methods and approaches can make an enormous difference in terms of who can access extension services. In Benin, the African Rice Center (AfricaRice) found that the use of farmer-to-farmer video was accessible to women from all socio-economic strata and was therefore a way to avoid the skewing of access to services that was inevitable when using traditional extension methods, relying on village leaders as a go-between. Everyone could observe and comment on a video, which meant that traditional communication channels were no longer necessary to reach farmers. Pre-existing notions about the need to go through ‘progressive farmers’ or ‘village leaders’ may lead to extension planners ignoring the ways that these categories are socio-cultural constructions that must be understood, but not necessarily adhered to.*

<sup>11</sup> Danida, 2008; Preparatory study of U-growth component Gender Equality for Rural Economic Growth and Poverty reduction.

<sup>12</sup> Zossou, Espérance, Van Mele, Paul, Vodouhe, Simplicie D. and Wanvoeke, Jonas(2009) ‘Comparing Farmer-to-Farmer Video with Workshops to Train Rural Women in Improved Rice. Parboiling in Central Benin’, The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension, 15: 4, 329 – 339.

### ***3.4. Rethinking priorities for pro-poor extension***

In order to impact on the livelihoods of the poor, policy-makers must recognize that the poor require a range of services. For example, semi-subsistence farming is important as a way to cushion the effects of market and climate uncertainty. The poor may need to retain a subsistence buffer for their household food security in order to take the risk of engaging in markets. The gender roles noted above relate to ways that women are often responsible for the food security of the household and therefore concentrate on subsistence. Even if market-oriented agriculture is an increasingly important way for the poor to escape from poverty, it is important to recognize that the poor rely on a mix of strategies to manage the risks that they face and consequently require a mix of extension support.

Another example of where extension can make an impact on the food security of the most vulnerable households is through advice related to ‘home sciences.’ This used to be a significant task for extension in the past, and is now making a comeback in extension efforts due to acknowledgement that food security is about consumption and healthy utilization of food and not just production. Maximizing the nutritional impact of the food that is available through better preservation, storage, processing or preparation practices may have greater impact on the wellbeing of the poor than trying to increase yields on tiny plots.

Particularly, in isolated areas distant from major markets, there may be little market access, which in turn suggests that extension should give priority to crops that support subsistence or are intended for local markets. There may be potential to increase capacities to collect and bulk certain commodities for trade in more distant markets, and to promote high value – low volume products, but the poor sustainability and spread of many such initiatives suggests the need to assess potential competitiveness of these products in a realistic manner. There is rarely a ‘silver bullet’ to link isolated producers to markets without major government investments (usually in infrastructure). In higher potential areas, with good market access, extension is more likely to be able to combine poverty alleviation objectives with commercialization.

As noted above, the poor are being excluded from markets due to lack of capacity to attain high standards of quality, uniformity, bulk, timeliness and food safety. Extension cannot solve this alone, but can support farmers, rich and poor, to understand the entry barriers to different local, national and international markets and thereby make informed choices about their marketing, production and livelihood strategies. It is extension - usually private, but sometimes public – that must provide large and small farmers with the information and knowledge needed to attain the standards required by the market.

Pro-poor extension also requires recognition of indirect impacts on poverty through labour markets. As noted above, it is inevitable that many of the rural poor will leave smallholder farming. Extension for other forms of farming and processing enterprises can make some contribution to poverty alleviation by supporting the wider rural economy. Extension for the poor is thus not only about advice related to smallholder farming, but also advice in how to benefit from the rural economy through livelihood diversification. Jobs in processing, agritourism, market access services, ICT services and other areas may require different skills and understanding. Business development services or vocational training may be the most appropriate form of extension for the rural poor who are diversifying their livelihoods or leaving farming altogether.

Extension has a special role in helping the rural poor to manage risks related to extreme events. These may include either natural hazards or conflict. Poverty alleviation is rarely possible through the quick-impact projects that are initiated after disasters and conflicts, but extension is often engaged in these efforts and can make a positive contribution. Seed and input provision are often a part of humanitarian responses in post disaster and post-conflict situations. Such input provision is not ‘extension’ per se, but it is often carried out by extension agents and they can have a central role in informing those providing such assistance about what is appropriate in the affected areas, where inputs could be possibly provided from local sources and also helping farmers learn to use new varieties. As an intermediary institution, with knowledge of markets and natural resource management regimes, extension can also help to ensure that agricultural rehabilitation programmes are relevant and sustainable. Finally, extension is often the only agency in place in rural areas to assist after a disaster. Failure to respond in time of crisis can damage the trust that must exist between extension agents and their clients.

Even if such tasks receive considerable attention, the main role for extension in terms of risks of extreme events should be before the disaster. Extension for sustainable watershed and natural resource management can reduce risks from floods and droughts. Extension that facilitates platforms for different stakeholders to meet and discuss market, land-use and other contentious issues can contribute to mitigating local conflicts.

