

Project Concept Note

Pilot Innovative Market-oriented Extension and Technology Transfer Systems

Background

Situation now: The WANA Region countries have gone through decades of centralised economy during which the agriculture extension programs were ineffective as they served governments' monopolized plans and rarely responded to farmers' needs or catered for their welfare. This situation resulted in a gap between knowledge, generated or obtained technologies and applications.

Currently and due to complexity of constraints, the livelihood of small and medium scale farmers are threatened than ever as they are in a weak position facing the challenges of the new world trends towards privatization, free markets, trade liberalisation and globalisation. Such constraints include inadequacy in the education system, less qualified experts, farmers' illiteracy, farming fragmentation and inadequate mechanisms of technology transfer just to name a few.

With the collapse of the centralised economy comes on top of the constraining list the consequential relative vacuum in extension and its weak linkage with farmers causing the obvious failure of effective flow and exchange of information (in contradiction with the current world's trends), new technologies, problems and market exposures, real assessment of farmers development needs and activating relevant and practical methodologies. The inherited features of the current farmers-extension relationship can be summarised in the following points:

- a. On farmers side:
 - Mistrust in extensionists and the message they carry as for decades there has been always a conflict of interest.
 - Mistrust in cooperatives and farmers organisations as these were introduced by governments and not the public.
 - Farmers have not simply seen the success of new techniques with their own eyes.
 - Miss-appreciation of high yields value as sometimes there are not adequate markets for the production surplus and lacking of markets demands in respect of food quality and safety.
 - Misconduct in taking advantage of privatisation and trade liberalization.
 - Great tendency towards individualism.
 - The bottom-up flow of information from farmers through extension is either completely lacking or ineffectively performed which negatively influence the process of technologies innovation suiting local conditions and farmers culture / traditions.
- b. On extensionists side:
 - Inadequate vision of the extension message whereby extensionists see themselves as servants of the government and not the public (farmers communities).
 - Inadequate personnel training on the following key issues and skills:
 - ♦ Reporting to their supervisors, *vis-à-vis* the political decision makers. In many events extensionists report what they assume is expected from them irrespective of its reality following "the easier said than done" approach.
 - ♦ Effective means of communication with farmers and technology transfer and monitoring.
 - ♦ Proper procedure of problems diagnostic analysis and of evaluating and assessing results.
 - ♦ The use of IT technologies as an important tool in extension activities.
 - Extension programs do not provide farmers with enough information or accessibility channels to recognize domestic and export markets needs in respect of produce quantity, quality and safety and it does not as well transfer the means of meeting such needs.
 - Jack of all trades approach, physical isolation and lack of incentives.

Desired situation at the end of project:

- In certain sub-sectors (olives, dates, cotton, herbal plants), establish pilot and localised projects of effective extension and technology transfer systems and mechanisms within the WANA region through incorporating successful practices of FOs, private sector and extension agencies.
- Activate the role of AARINENA networks and highlight the important role they can play in disseminating information and exchanging of success stories on the regional level.

Expected changes and improvements of the project's interventions:

- Qualified extensionists and farmers.
- Strengthened linkages and trustworthy channels.
- Changing and improving cultural concepts and attitudes toward extension workers.
- Improved productivity and quality.

Project description

Development goals:

- Integration of developments efforts among stakeholders of sub-sector commodities.
- Capacity building of human resources (extensionists and farmers).
- Better utilization and management of natural resources.
- Better understanding of market needs.
- Enhance competitiveness capability through quality improvement.
- Involve Farmers in decision making on extension and development.

Purpose of the project:

- Activate the role of extensionists to become productive members of the community.
- Melt the accumulated ice in the relationship between farmers and extensionists.
- Train farmers to become semi-extension workers to introduce farmer to farmer extension.
- Improve farmers' livelihood and alleviate poverty.

Outputs & principal activities to achieve each output:

- ***Improved farmers' quality and representation:*** for the pilot project to be successful it should have a cultural content to improve farmers' awareness of the importance of collaborative work. This can be achieved through encouraging the formation of farmers' organizations in sub-sector commodities and strengthening recent emerging ones which reflect actual farmers' interests. Such organizations will provide a platform for better interaction with extensionists and thus promote farmers self-esteem and their role as developers of technology and will to some extent resolve the fragmentation pattern through collective purchases of production inputs and introducing economics of scale. In all it will improve farmers quality in addition to their income.
- ***Build effective and integrated farmers-extensionists relationship:*** to improve extensionists' knowledge and foster farmer to farmer extension, in the pilot project selected extensionists from government extension agencies will be reassigned on loan basis to FOs and trained intensively with farmers' leaders on specific sub-sector commodities. The training will cover areas not exploited by the existing system such as social science, community mobilization, human resources development, problems analysis and solving, organic farming, biological control and IPM, promotion of small scale farmers through value addition, marketing and collective market information, the use of IT as an important channel of securing and disseminating information, natural resources management, socio-economic impacts, integrating environmental considerations into the development equation, training farmers to improve their technical abilities. The capacity building program will include workshops to establish a collective data base of farmers' positive and negative experiences of applied cultural practices to save farmers from reinventing the wheel and long field stay visits to successful entrepreneur businesses farms which are directly linked to the markets.
- ***Better and effective production systems, better quality and safe products:*** the interaction frame of the project will expose actual farmers' needs which will be effectively addressed by the trained extensionists and farmers' leaders will exchange information on good practices of low cost technologies which will facilitate appropriate application of acquired knowledge.

- *Better procedures and methodology for technology generation, transfer and monitoring.*

Innovative nature of the project

The project will build on the following experiences:

- Previously discussed creative approaches to identify and resolve the problems of the ineffective current extension systems in the WANA region, recent successful extension systems developed locally or in collaboration with international agencies in the region or other regions of similar conditions such as in central Asia and Africa which can be adopted and cooperative systems in developed countries.
- The provision of utilizing the advanced IT techniques. In Egypt for example there is a leading project sponsored by FAO which is the (VERCON) “Virtual Extension and Research Communication Network” project aiming at harnessing the potential of the Internet and applying it to strengthening and enabling linkages among the research and extension components of the national agricultural knowledge and information system.
http://www.vercon.sci.eg/Vercon_en/vercon.asp
<http://waicent.fao.org/tour/tour/Demos/vercon/briefing/briefing.htm>
- Introduction of incentives for extension personnel from donors at the initiation of the project followed by FOs financing as they will benefit from the new system. Cost recovery might be an option as farmers need to be convinced they are making a profit.

New and innovative approaches which the project will use:

- Changing of social and cultural attitudes toward extension activities and extension specialists, semi-privatise the extension system, specialized agencies and specialists rather than general ones.
- Integrate development efforts of farmers and extensionists into a team work pattern.

Target beneficiaries

Farmers, extension specialists, food production chains, handling players and indirectly consumer.

Institutions that might participate and their roles

- Current extension agencies and specialists: human resources, previous experiences, field contacts.
- Farmers’ organizations, trade unions, NGO's: needs, model systems.
- Ministries of agriculture (MOAs) and NARS: resources, experiences, infrastructure.
- Information technology agencies: tools, techniques, mechanisms, programs.
- AARINENA as a regional organization: exchange of knowledge and experiences.

Institutions from outside the region that should participate: successful extension agencies such as USDA, California Cooperaive Extensions, NGO's, FOs, etc.

Project Team

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Immediate next steps

- Prepare and finalize the concept note: 25 April 2005
- Submission of the Concept Note to GFAR and AARANINA: May 15, 2005
- Exploration and presentation to donors
- Following acceptance of Concept Note by donors:
 - Formulating the draft project
 - Submission of project to donors
 - Project implementation

Donors who might be interested in funding this project: Islamic Development Bank, European Community, Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development, IFAD, FAO and other regional and international donors who have interest in poverty alleviation, agriculture development and human resources capacity building.