Mobilizing the Potential of Rural and Agricultural Extension

– a FAO and GFRAS study

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Intention ~ to outline challenges and a new vision on extension

Views ~ on Demand-drive, market orientation and poverty focus

Links with research currently very weak: Can GCARD start to rebuild these relations?
What is extension?

Not what you might expect

- Information and advisory services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in agrifood systems and rural development, such as...
  - Dissemination of information about technologies, new research, markets, input and financial services, and climate
  - Development of business skills and market linkages
  - Linkages between farmer organizations and market actors
  - Support to institutional and organizational development
  - Facilitating access and collaboration with non-extension programmes
  - Mediating in conflicts over natural resources, land tenure, ...
Core challenges to extension –

*Institutional change and strengthening*

- Normative reforms without grand models
- Change \sim{} from project support to systematic, institutional development
- Country-specific institutional and organizational solutions
- Processes involving all stakeholders concerned
- **New institutional arrangements needed**
  - flexible \Rightarrow{} lean/flat
  - continuous changes \Rightarrow{} learn & adapt
  - increased complexity \Rightarrow{} collaboration, multi-disciplinarity
Core challenges to extension –

**Tailored advice, not a method or technology ‘fix’**

- False assumption that extension can be ‘fixed’ with the ‘right’ formula
- Diversity of clients and situations require tailored advice and a menu of options
- Innovative methods and communication tools have emerged

**Challenges remain in**
- anchoring these innovations in existing institutional structures
- addressing the financial and human resource constraints in scaling up their use
Core challenges to extension – Increasing equity and accountability

- Extension has a bad reputation regarding equitable and inclusive rural development
  - Breaking with gender and wealth biases

- *Pluralism and subsidiarity* required to best serve different client groups

- Extension is central to addressing equity and accountability challenges through *stakeholders involvement and empowerment*
  - Willingness of farmers and their organizations to cost sharing
  - Enabling farmers to pay for their services
Core challenges to extension – *Addressing human resource constraints*

- Human resource capacities are a major constraint

- New skills (facilitation, coordination, coaching, mediation, ...) are needed

- Enabling to deal with complexity which demands critical, systemic thinking and problem solving

- Educational levels are also dropping and agricultural education institutions are in a serious state of decline

- *This HR crisis demands sustainable long-term investment strategies*
Core challenges to extension – Investments and new financing mechanisms

- Not a question of simply increasing investments, but of where and how investments are done

- Public commitment needed to reach the poor, even where services are carried out by non-state actors

- Need for sustainable financing mechanisms with
  - a supply and demand side balance
  - small producers and their organizations are enabled to pay for the services they receive ⇒ accountability
  - a competitive market for service provision is created
  - performance criteria for support to service providers
  - learning from the private sector and how they contract extension services to ensure quality agricultural products
Can a new relationship between research and extension address these challenges?

- The one way technology transfer role of extension is no longer viable
  - Dynamic and flexibility required in today’s innovation systems
- Extension cannot make research developed for better off farmers accessible to the poor farmers
- Multiple innovations are needed (technological, financial, methodological, institutional, organizational, ...)
- More attention to farmers’ own innovations
- Uncertainty (climate, markets, technological change) requires dealing with risks ~ research and extension
- Extension agencies must transcend their image / roles
  - ‘Expert’ providers of knowledge from research ⇒ facilitation and advisory roles increasingly important
Can a new relationship between research and extension address these challenges?

- **New research – extension agenda**
  - more than linking research and extension

- **New respectful relationship and institutionalized collaboration**
  - learning from extension
  - strengthening of extension and research institutions, and FOs

- **Pluralistic extension ‘systems’ are highly unsystematic and extension providers act locally ⇔ few research institutes**
  - increasingly producer-owned extension networks

- **A common approach ~ producers needs and demands**
  - supply side pressure likely to be counter productive

- **Farmer representation and influence where decisions about research and extension priorities are being made**
Thank you for your attention