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Extension Plus: A New Face of Extension

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Extension-plus is a framework for investment in strengthening and reforming extension to be a strong partner and nodal agency within the AIS, providing technological and non technological services to farmers. The larger goal of investments in extension-plus is to strengthen the capacity of extension and advisory services to play a much wider role (a bridging role) and at the same time enhance the ability of other actors in the AIS to support producers in an integrated way. All current extension-plus arrangements have emerged from small pilot efforts that have expanded their scope and service provision based on experimentation, learning, and adaptation to local circumstances over time.

Investments should focus on encouraging and enabling staff capacity to initiate small experimental projects in partnership with other organizations. Promoting the vision of extension-plus will prove challenging among public extension organizations unless reforms target the macro-institutional and policy context in which extension is practiced the scope of the specific extension investment and the priorities will vary in relation to the national, district, and local situations.

Emerging paradigm

Worldwide, it is now widely recognized that agricultural extension needs to reform in ways that allow it fulfill a diverse set of objectives. This ranges from better linking of farmers to input and output markets, to reducing the vulnerability and enhancing voice of the rural poor, development of micro-enterprises, poverty reduction and environmental conservation and strengthening and support of farmer organizations. So, while technology transfer is important, what is also required is the strengthening of locally relevant innovation processes and knowledge systems. Extension is being forced to embrace a broadened mandate that while in reality has always existed, has rarely been addressed. The limitations of a single model of extension for all kinds of situations are now well recognized and there is an increasing realization that new extension approaches need to emerge locally, based on experimentation, learning and adaptation to prevailing circumstances. The need for this new and expanded view of extension is nearly emerging in the case of Indian agriculture, which is characterized by declining land and water availability, degradation of natural resources, an unfavorable price regime, low value addition, particularly in rural areas and increasing competition from import of agricultural commodities. Farmers thus find themselves in an ever more complex production and market environment, with an expanding need for information and services.

Concept of Extension Plus

The larger goal of investments in extension-plus is to strengthen the capacity of extension and advisory services to play a much wider role (a bridging role) and at the same time enhance the ability of other actors in the Agricultural Innovation System (AIS) to support producers in an integrated way. Worldwide, it is now widely recognized that agricultural extension needs to reform in ways that allow it fulfill a diverse set of objectives.

Extension Plus

Extension plus is a framework for investment in strengthening and reforming extension to be a strong partner and nodal agency with Agricultural Innovation System (AIS), providing technological and non-technological services to farmers. The larger goal of investments in extension-plus is to strengthen the capacity of extension and advisory services to play a much wider role (a bridging role) and at the same time enhance the ability of other actors in the AIS to support producers in an integrated way. All current extension-plus arrangements have emerged from small pilot efforts that have expanded their scope and service provision based on experimentation, learning, and adaptation to local circumstances over time. Investments should focus on encouraging and enabling staff capacity to initiate small experimental projects in partnership with other organizations. Promoting the vision of extension-plus will prove challenging among public extension organizations unless reforms target the macro-institutional and policy context in which extension is practiced.

Agriculture innovation system

A network of organizations, enterprises and individuals focused on bringing new products, new processes and new reforms of organization into economic use together with the institutions and policies that affect the way different agents interact, share, access, exchange and use knowledge. It highly focus on policy structure and ensures positive administrative system where the actors of agriculture sector empower farmers and integrating them with consumers under local market

The key elements of extension-plus are

- A broad scope of service provision (beyond technology transfer).
- The extensive use of partnerships to fulfill an expanded mandate.
- A learning-based approach.
- Negotiations with a wide range of stakeholders for developing workable and effective service arrangements.
- An institutional mechanism to represent clients' interests at the management level, so the program remains accountable to its clients

Changing demands in extension

- Top down to bottom up approach
- Donor accountable to farmer accountable
- Input intensive to knowledge intensive agriculture
- Supply driven to demand driven technology development
- Focus from research-extension-farmer to research-extension-farmer-market

Measures to reform the existing extension arrangements

- Rigid professional hierarchies and patterns of control, with highly centralized modes of planning. This tends to stifle deviation from prescribed procedures, restricting innovation, particularly by middle and lower level staff.
- A tradition of assessing performance in terms of technology adoption and hence a focus on improved technology transfer mechanisms at the expense of other activities that may have a perfectly legitimate role in supporting farmers
- A history of only rewarding successes and thus a reluctance to report and analyze the reasons of failure of a technology or a new approach.
- A tradition of working independently and a mistrust of other agencies. This is particularly so with regard to external agencies, NGO's and private sector, but also with other public agencies including research organizations.

Indicators for evaluating and monitoring Extension Plus Approach

1. Farmers groups or producer associations formed
2. Formation of new markets

3. Distribution and use of new inputs and technologies
4. Credit use and repayment
5. New value-added products
6. Partnership and quality of interactions
7. Increased income and additional employment created

Key Shift required from Extension to Extension-Plus

Technology dissemination to supporting rural livelihoods. Improving farm productivity to improving farm and non-farm income. Providing services to enabling farmers to access services from other agencies. Innovation in extension centrally generated to locally evolved.

Government initiative

- Kerala Horticultural Development Programme (KHDP) was conceived in 1992 as a project to improve the overall situation of fruit and vegetable farmers in Kerala; by increasing and stabilising their income; reducing cost of production and improving themarketing system.
- KHDP used self-help groups (SHGs) as its key concept for promoting the development of farmers and experimentedwith different approaches to provide better access by farmers to technology markets and credit.
- Every SHG selects three master farmers;one each for production, marketing and credit related activities and each one of them are trained by KHDP.
- KHDP has so far constituted2312 SHGs, involving 41913 registered farmers. KHDP has encouraged group marketing where farmers now form their own market and gottraders to come and buy.
- In the year 2002-03, about 31 thousand tonnes of produce worth around Rs.29 crore was tradedthrough 112marketing centres. KHDP developed a unique credit package that could be availed by lease-land farmers and at the same time acceptableto the banks.
- Loans totalling Rs. 52 crore has been disbursed to farmers. To generate and access needed technologies for its farmers,KHDP contracted the state agricultural university for research and also undertook participatory technology development with farmers.

Conclusion

Extension can and should expand its role, given its significance for the larger AIS. The principles of extension-plus provide an opportunity for expanding the role of extension by raising questions on the nature of extension's tasks, recognizing the need for new expertise, facilitating a review of extension's current interactions, and highlighting the importance of institutional changes. These tasks are important for developing and sustaining a capacity for innovation, which should be the main focus of investing in this kind of approach. Extension services need to be put in the context of the broader institutional development essential for poor people's livelihoods. Attention is concentrated on dealing with physical remoteness, but less attention has been given to dealing with the social marginalization common to the poor in market-integrated areas.

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