

# ***RURAL DEVELOPMENT FORESTRY NETWORK***

FROM THE FIELD  
Shorter Contributions from Networkers

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# THE PROCESS OF PARTICIPATORY RURAL EXTENSION

by  
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## RESUMEN

Es importante asegurar la sostenibilidad a largo plazo de los proyectos de extensión participativa durante las etapas posteriores al retiro de las agencias financiadoras externas. Este artículo, y un manual de extensión escrito por el mismo autor, se apoyan en este precepto. Aunque los casos de estudios provienen de Perú y Nicaragua, el autor sugiere que esta proposición se aplica a un gran número de países. También discute el proceso de adopción de tecnología por los campesinos, da pautas para la adaptación del método de extensión participativa a cada caso de trabajo, y examina el papel del extensionista.

## RESUME

Le travail de vulgarisation participative rurale devrait se concentrer à garantir un facteur de pérennité après le départ de l'agent de développement. Ce document est tiré d'un manuel de vulgarisation basé sur ce précepte et rédigé par le même auteur. Il se sert d'expériences vécues au Pérou et au Nicaragua mais son champ d'application peut être largement étendu. Le document discute du processus d'adoption de la technologie par les paysans, et s'interroge sur la façon de modeler le travail de vulgarisation participative afin de l'intégrer au processus. On présente les grandes lignes de travail de vulgarisation participative suivie par une présentation du rôle de vulgarisateur.

## INTRODUCTION

Development processes initiated by external agencies often stagnate or even collapse after the departure of the development agent (be it a person such as a rural social worker, a project, or any other institution). It is therefore crucial that the emphasis in a development strategy is not on technology transfer, but on guaranteeing a level of capability and skill in the target group which will be sufficient to identify future problems and find appropriate solutions. Practical guidelines for translating this concept into action in participatory watershed planning and management projects are given in Ho (1992). This extension guide, written in Spanish, is based upon experiences in Peru and Nicaragua. The concepts and guidelines described are nevertheless relevant to other geographical areas.

This paper summarises the above-mentioned guide, and focuses on three crucial aspects:

- 1 The farmer and the process of participatory extension
- 2 Key guidelines for a participatory extension system

- 3 The role of the extension worker.

## **THE FARMER AND THE PROCESS OF PARTICIPATORY EXTENSION**

### **The Farmer's Process of Technological Adaptation**

Farmers are continually adapting their farming systems to improve technologies already in use (agricultural, livestock, forestry and/or fisheries etc.). This is in response to their fundamental striving to stabilise or, wherever possible, augment their economic base.

Within this process of adaptation one can distinguish the following phases:

- 1 Identification of problems and of solutions
- 2 Decision-making; which solutions to initiate
- 3 Execution of the selected solutions
- 4 Evaluation of the results.

These four phases are in reality not mutually exclusive nor strictly sequential.

The process of adaptation occurs in every activity the farmer undertakes, be it the cultivation of maize or the breeding of pigs. The timing of the phases depends on the cycle of that particular activity, eg the calendar for cultivating maize is different from the cultivation of beans. As a result, it is common for farmers to manage different phases of different activities at one and the same moment.

For example, in the month of January, in Leon, Nicaragua, the following phases in the adaptation process may be determined.

**Evaluation:** the results of the harvest of maize and beans are in process of evaluation.

**Identification of problems and solutions:** the farmer is analyzing possible problems in the marketing of products such as maize and beans.

**Decision-making,** the farmer has taken the decision to start the breeding of chickens to sell during Holy Week.

**Execution,** the farmer is installing fire lanes to protect his fields.

The process of adaptation is not only a continuous one, but also a reiterative one. Having identified problems and solutions, and made decisions about what to undertake, the farmer acts. Following the execution of the selected solutions, the evaluation of the results will nourish the next cycle of problem identification, decision-making, etc. Since evaluation serves to accumulate and consolidate learning experiences and knowledge, and these are included in the planning of new solutions, the process of adaptation is also one of progressive learning.

Thus the farmer's process of adaptation of technology is a *reiterative* and *progressive* learning process.

### **The Process of Participatory Extension**

Participatory Rural Extension is one method of external intervention<sup>1</sup>. As such its objective must be to quicken and/or to (re)orientate the farmer's learning and experimenting process. In order to achieve this, participatory extension must also be conceptualised as a continuous and progressive process, and the same logic of the phases of the farmer's process has to be followed. The phases of the extension process can thus be understood as 'counterparts' of the farmer's phases.

In Table 1 the phases of the farmer's learning process and those of the Extension 'counterpart' are given. Although the phases are here represented as if in a linear sequence, one should imagine them situated in an advancing spiral, because both processes (the farmer's and that of extension) are reiterative and progressive.

Although interrelated with the farmer's phases, extension should always be 'thinking one step ahead' to be able to accelerate/(re)orientate the farmer's process.

This 'thinking ahead' of the extension process is expressed in the objectives per phase (see Table 1). For example, in the identification of problems, extension emphasises a participatory diagnosis, with the objective to expand the farmer's scope of analysis. To illustrate this point,

- ! If farmers do not see cattle as a possible problem for their production system, the results of compaction by animals on crop productivity should be demonstrated.
  
- ! When erosion is identified as a problem and farmers already use sand and twigs to form a barrier, the extension worker can propose the construction of wooden dams to broaden the range of alternatives.

'Thinking a step ahead', as extensionists should do, is not possible without a knowledge of the farmer's economy. Thus a rural appraisal must be conducted before starting extension activities.

Since local situations are both complex and dynamic, knowledge of them

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<sup>1</sup> A credit system is another example.

**Table 1: Phases of the Extension Process and its Objectives Per Phase**

<b>Phases of a farmer's learning Process</b>	<b>Extension phases</b>	<b>Objective of the extension phase</b>
Identification of: - problems  - solutions	- Participatory diagnosis  - Promotion of alternatives	- Extend horizon of analysis  - Accelerate or catalyze awareness of possible solutions
Decision making	- Remind farmers of results and conclusions of previous phase	- Transform interest initiated into an Action Plan
Execution	- Training capabilities to execute `new' alternatives	- Orientation on `how to do it' to guarantee capabilities and skills needed for the `new' alternatives
Evaluation	- Evaluation	- Analysis of viability of alternatives  - Guarantee of a progressive learning process

should be detailed, corrected and complemented during the entire process in which the extension worker and the farmer are work together. A participatory diagnosis is therefore an ever returning phase in the extension process cycle, and knowledge thus gained enriches both parties. However, during the rural appraisal period, emphasis is on data collection, mainly so that the extension worker can benefit from a basic knowledge of the local situation.

## **Modalities of the Extension System**

In the participatory rural extension process four different modalities are used:

### **1 Field Visits**

Activities executed in the field with a group of farmer, organised to look at one or more specific site(s). It can serve various objectives (diagnosis/promotion of alternatives/evaluation).

### **2 Demonstration**

Extension activity in which learning takes place by doing. The standard procedure is of demonstration, followed by group practise.

### **3 Technical Assistance**

Visits by the extension worker to an individual or a group of farmers without special arrangement (eg after a demonstration, the extension worker visits farmers applying the newly learned activity to see how things are going).

### **4 Meeting**

Extension activity in which farmers are called together in a certain place in order to

- plan a programme
- evaluate
- follow a training programme (eg a slide-show about tree-planting)
- reflect, eg after a promotion visit.

These extension modalities are not to be used at random. Their application has to obey the logical sequence of the extension process, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Modalities of Extension in Relation to its Phases**

Extension Phases	Modalities of Extension
- Participatory phases  - Promotion of alternatives	- Field visit (Diagnosis) Reflection Meeting  - Field visit (Promotion)
Reminding of results and conclusions	Planning Meeting
Training	- Demonstration  - Training Meeting  - Technical assistance
Evaluation	- Field visit (Evaluation)  - Evaluation Meeting

### **KEY GUIDELINES FOR A PARTICIPATORY EXTENSION SYSTEM**

Two guidelines are essential for the Participatory Rural Extension Process, notably the extension calendar, and the group forming process

#### **The Extension Calendar**

To insert new or adjusted activities into the farmer's daily life, it is necessary to start with his or her reality and the activities which are already undertaken. Therefore, the extension calendar has to be based on the farmer's calendar.

It is implicit in Table 1 that the phases of the extension process and therefore the use of the modalities have to follow the cycle of each activity. Starting with the best time for execution of an activity, (for example, the sowing of maize is best conducted in the last week of May), the modalities of extension are programmed to take place either before (eg field visit for



identification of solutions) or after this period (eg evaluation meeting), according to the logical sequence of the extension process. When this is done for each of the farmers' activities a table can be constructed (Table 3).

The extension calendar is divided into periods according to the agricultural seasons (monsoon, dry period, etc), just as it is in the farmer's activity calendar. To avoid overloading the farmers with meetings, but to be in time with corrections needed, periodic evaluation and planning moments should be organised at the end and the beginning of each period of the calendar.

The Extension Calendar can be constructed to combine these two aspects: the process phases (and thus the modalities), and the moments of evaluation and planning. The result visualises the different extension phases and their modalities in a logical sequence and as part of a process.

The calendar also serves to programme the training of the extension workers in a timely and logical way, following the extension activities to be undertaken.

**Table 3: Example of the construction phase of an extension calendar**

<b>Time/ activity</b>	<b>Cultivation of maize</b>	<b>Cultivation of sesame</b>	<b>etc</b>
January	Promotion visit		
February	Planning Meeting		
March			
April etc	Demonstration		

### **The group forming process**

A second key guideline is to look for ways to catalyze the formulation of farmer groups, which can sustain and carry forward the process of technological development after the external development agent has gone.

To avoid negative experiences, the main priority in group formation has to be that a group is functional for its members, eg through the group the interests of its members should be better served. Catalyzing the organisation of people has to be based on natural group formation processes to give such groups better survival possibilities.

Considering these aspects, the first step in the organisation of the inhabitants of an area is to

start from the social reality and look at existing and potential links, eg:

- family relations
- geographical relations (neighbourhood)
- problems and/or interests in common.

To reinforce the existing links, group activities are undertaken during the planning, training and evaluation phases. In each case the same people are invited to the group. During these phases, group sentiments and coherence are easily developed. This is due to the opportunities they offer to exchange ideas, experiences and to reflect together.

In the course of the extension process the extension worker, little by little, sifts the group members. Those who show more interest and initiative are given special attention (more training, and in other subjects, more responsibilities etc.). They represent possible future group leaders. By stimulating communication and cooperation between the group members and leaving more and more responsibilities and opportunities to use their own initiative, the group gains its own identity and coherence.

Organisational 'instruments' are developed according to the process of consolidation and activities undertaken. They may include collective regulations (eg membership, sanctions), resource regulations (funds, etc.), a governing body and an organisation structure, or a more formal status, etc. It should be noted that formal organisational characteristics (such as the election of a president, secretary, and treasurer) are not obligatory, certainly not in the beginning.

## **THE ROLE OF THE EXTENSION WORKER**

In practice, the extension worker often functions as the external development agent. The two processes, the farmer's learning process and the extension process, have to be entwined by means of a permanent dialogue between the farmer and the extension worker. This dialogue blends and fits together the farmer's knowledge, experiences and technologies with those of the extension worker. It dynamises and enriches the process of technological adaptation. Two aspects are crucial for the successful functioning of the extension worker.

- 1 It has to be made clear that the extension worker is not an instructor on how to realise an activity, nor is (s)he someone who has to accept everything a farmer proposes. The role of the extension worker balances between being active (eg promotion of alternative solutions) and supportive (eg during the planning phase, leaving it to the farmer to take his or her own decisions). (S)he has to know how to stimulate and motivate the desire to pursue, and the curiosity to experiment, whilst always looking for the best learning atmosphere. This implies, on the one hand, that the imposition of pre-conceived solutions has to be avoided, as it puts the farmer in the position of being a mere labourer. On the other hand, there is also the implication that the extension worker has to guarantee success of a chosen alternative; for example, if a

farmer proposes to plant trees during a time when there is danger of frost and the extension worker accepts this, without any discussion, (s)he puts the learning opportunity and his or her credibility in danger.

- 2 The extension worker also has to bear in mind that his/her presence is only temporary. Therefore, from the start, (s)he has to look for opportunities to gradually decrease the need to be present. As this differs from situation to situation, no blue-print strategy can be given. However, the following are aspects to be considered.
  - a **The group of farmers:** what catalysts (incentives) does the group need, in the beginning, and later on?
  - b **The formal authorities:** what role do they play, and what role could they play?
  - c **The informal authorities** (or natural leaders): what role do they play, and what role could they play?
  - d **How should the balance between the individual and the group be determined?** eg. How should the extension worker divide his time and efforts between leading individuals and the group as a whole to realise its independence? How should this change over time?
  - e **What indicators can be used to determine the rate at which self management of the group evolves?** How can these be used to monitor and evaluate progress in order to adjust the extension strategy?

An important aspect is to analyze whether the level of existing knowledge and experiences on a particular subject is sufficient to stimulate farmer-to- farmer training or exchange of experiences.

## **EPILOGUE**

As Rural Development is an ever changing concept, all guidelines or orientations will always be subject to improvements. It is hoped that these comments will stimulate others to continue with the process.

## **REFERENCE**

**Ho, Wenny, (1992), 'Guía Metodológica para la Extensión Rural Participativa', FAO Project GCP/NIC/019/NET, Nicaragua.**

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