

2. Agricultural Extension

DFID

The purpose of these *Key Sheets* is to provide DFID Natural Resource Advisers with an easy and up-to-date point of reference on issues relating to development in the natural environment.

The sheets are designed for those who are managing change and who are concerned to make well-informed implementation decisions. They aim to distil theoretical debate and field experience so that it becomes easily accessible and useful across a range of situations. Their purpose is to assist in the process of decision-making rather than to provide definitive answers.

The sheets address three broad sets of issues:

- Service Delivery
- Resource Management
- Policy Planning and Implementation

A list of contact details for organisations is provided for each sub-series.



Overview of the debate

Over the past 5 years, the debate about agricultural extension has focused on:

- The relevance, impact, coverage and financial sustainability of large, state extension systems which aspire to meet the needs of all farmers.
- The merits of the training and visit (T&V) extension model.
- Finding ways to improve the linkages between extension and research.
- The relative roles of extension professionals, paraprofessionals and farmers as providers of agricultural information.
- Rethinking the underlying objectives of external intervention in rural areas (eg. increased production, empowerment, environmental protection, poverty alleviation) and assessing whether extension is the most (cost-) effective tool to achieve these aims.
- The scope for cost recovery and fully private extension provision.

Key issues in decision-making

The debate surrounding T&V extension systems has underlined the futility of searching for a single, universally applicable model for extension. Equally, it has demonstrated the dangers of giving priority to extension *structures* over *functions* and of neglecting to identify how extension interacts with other services and information sources, and contributes to a broad process of rural development.

There are numerous options for investment in extension. The first step in the decision-making process is to gather information on the existing situation:

- How important are different information sources to different categories of farmers? For what purposes are they used?
- What types of information are failing to reach farmers?
- What efforts have been made by the various extension suppliers to tailor their services to the needs of particular farmers and to increase efficiency?
- How good are the links (in both directions) between extension suppliers and research and between various extension suppliers?
- What efforts have been made to put extension on a more sustainable financial footing?

Bilateral donors such as DFID are seldom in a position to support the recurrent costs of large public extension systems. They must therefore seek to target particular sections of the population (for example by supporting NGO efforts in neglected regions) and/or to invest in areas with strong multiplier effects. Options for the latter include the following:

- To finance/stimulate innovative delivery systems with a view to replication:
 - Can mass media (radio, TV) or information technology be used more widely? How should use of such communication channels be balanced with provision of face to face advice?
 - Are there ways of reducing the costs of face-to-face extension to facilitate wide, cost-effective coverage (eg. working with existing groups, utilising existing gathering places, training farmers as extension paraprofessionals, working with traders in remote areas)?
 - Can production advice be coupled to input sales? How can private sector input suppliers be supported to provide such advice?
 - Will capacity building with membership organisations increase their involvement in extension? Which farmers would benefit?
 - How viable are various options for cost-recovery for extension services?
- To focus on improving the links and collaboration between different suppliers of agricultural information and clients:
 - How can the public and private (commercial and non-profit) sectors work together better? Are there any mechanisms or forums for mutual learning that can be developed/supported?
 - Are there appropriate incentives to bring all sides together? If not, can they be created (eg. earmarked funds for which joint bids - research/extension, extension/NGOs/community organisations - must be submitted)?
 - Can client-orientation be improved through improving users' access to extension decision-making or supporting user-controlled funds?
- To build policy-making capacity within government or to support the restructuring of public systems:
 - Is there a vision for how the public sector can support and monitor a pluralistic extension system without monopolising it?

DFID financed research

- Financing agricultural research and extension for smallholders in SSA (OPM - start 1994)
- Implications of environmental and sustainability issues for the organisation and practices of agricultural extension (AERDD, Reading - start 1994)
- Equity implications of reforms in the financing and delivery of agricultural extension services (AERDD, Reading - start 1996)

DFID project experience

- Bangladesh: Agricultural support services project (start 1991)
- Romania: Agricultural extension workshop and training activities (start 1994)
- Malawi: Estates extension service (start 1991)

UK and other expertise

- **University of Reading**, AERDD
- **Overseas Development Institute**, Natural Resources Group
- **Wageningen Agricultural University**, the Netherlands, Department of Communication and Innovation Studies
- **The International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (IIRR)**, the Philippines

Agricultural Extension *continued*

- How well is the public sector able to identify those tasks for which it must retain residual responsibility?
- Are decisions taken at the most appropriate level?
- Do extension officers have the flexibility, resources and incentives to respond to local circumstances?
- Is there an on-going process of decentralisation to which extension reform can be linked?
- To invest in training and human resource development (once a vision for the role of extension has been mapped out):
 - Have agricultural curricula been modified to take into account the new demands upon extension officers (especially the need for extension agents to act as catalysts linking rural people with other service providers)?
 - Do field extension officers have the knowledge, connections and skills (technical, in social mobilisation and in rural appraisal) to be able to gain the trust of farmers and perform their jobs effectively?
 - Can extension officers be trained to help farmers learn about their own environments, monitor their own needs and formulate their own demands?
 - What changes to extension agents' own working environments are required to improve their motivation to work with farmers (eg. more flexible working practices leading to the provision of a more customised service)?
 - Do senior managers have a firm grasp of the new vision for extension, including a widely-shared framework for identifying public and private roles, and a willingness to put the client first. Do they appreciate the requirements for in-service training?

Concerns about longer-term financial sustainability and the relevance of extension argue for cost recovery and the creation of a market for technical services. However, this is easier said than done. There are likely to be problems, especially in poorer areas:

- Is there a range of alternative suppliers competing for custom?
- Has adequate attention been paid to mobilising demand for services?
- Are there quality control mechanisms in place?
- How are links with research to be maintained?
- Is it cost effective to 'privatise' information (eg. it may be more cost effective to support publicly financed mass media campaigns)?
- Have the full cost implications of the residual public role been addressed?
- Are there provisions in place for identifying and addressing failures of the market (eg. failure to reach poorer areas or poorest groups, failure to address externalities such as disease control and environmental issues)?

Cross-country learning – especially from Latin America where market reforms are most advanced – should be valuable in this challenging new area.

Seminal literature

- Christoplos, I. & U. Nitsch (1996) *Pluralism and the Extension Agent: Changing Concepts and Approaches in Rural Extension*. Stockholm: SIDA.
- Moris, J. (1991) *Extension Alternatives in Tropical Africa*. London: ODI.
- Kaimowitz, D. (ed.) (1990) *Making the Link: Agricultural Research and Technology Transfer in Developing Countries*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview.
- Rivera, W.M. & D.J. Gustafson (eds) (1991) *Agricultural Extension: Worldwide Institutional Evolution and Forces for Change*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- World Bank Operations Evaluation Department (1994) *Agricultural Extension: Lessons from Completed Projects*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

Key Sheets are available on the Internet at: www.odi.org.uk/keysheets/
or through DFID's website

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