

Common Framework on Agricultural Extension



NEUCHÂTEL GROUP

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Foreword

During the 1980s, a heated debate developed over different views of how agricultural extension in Sub-Saharan Africa should be supported. That debate moved matters forward. The present document seeks to review the current discourse.

This Common Framework has been drawn up by an informal group of representatives of bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies and institutions involved in agricultural development in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.

The group was formed in 1995 after a meeting hosted by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Neuchâtel (Switzerland), and comprises representatives of the German (GTZ), American (USAID), British (DfID), Danish (Danida), French (MAE), Swedish (Sida), Swiss (SDC) and Dutch (DGIS) cooperation agencies, as well as representatives of the FAO, the IFAD, the European Commission (EC/DGVIII), the CTA and the World Bank.

Through a series of case studies and joint reflections, this informal “Neuchâtel Initiative” is helping to bring a measure of convergence to thinking on the objectives, methods and means of support for agricultural extension. The different members of the Neuchâtel Initiative have contributed to this framework in order to establish a basis for better applying these ideas in extension practice.

This framework was discussed at a seminar in Ségou (Mali) in November 1998, attended by extension workers, agricultural producers, and representatives of the co-operation agencies involved in the Neuchâtel Initiative. This version of the provisional document has been revised to reflect the issues and concerns that were raised at the seminar.

Common Framework on Agricultural Extension

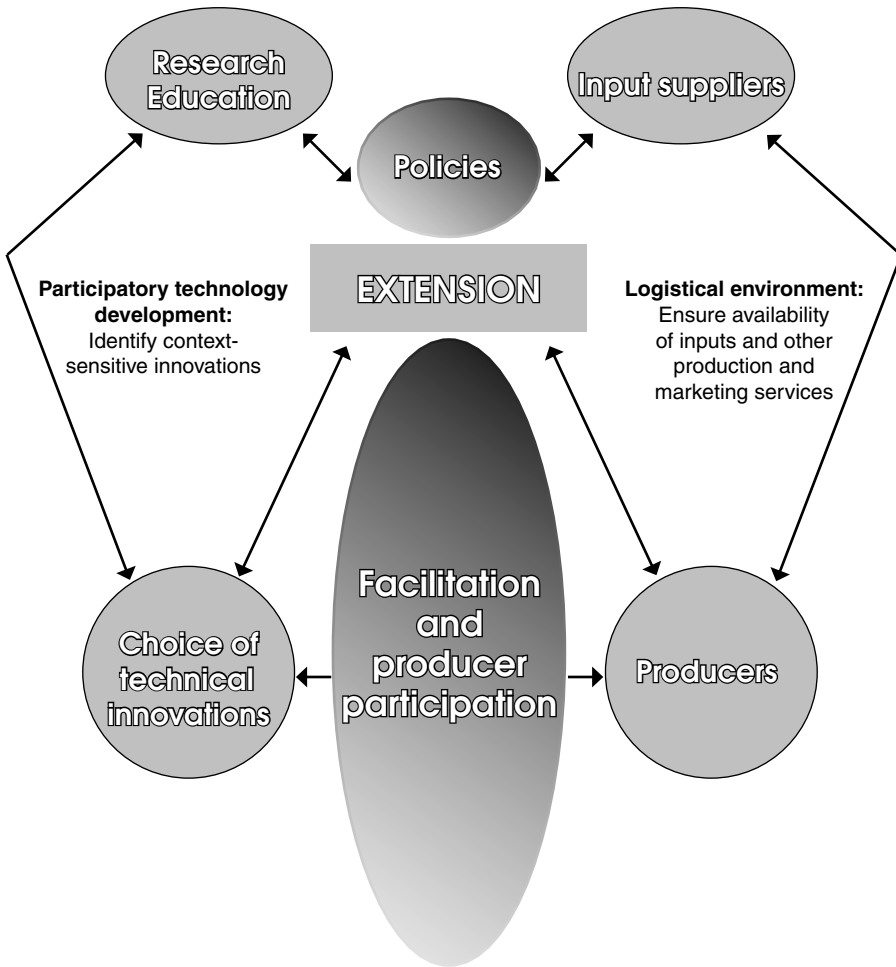
Six principles

1. A sound agricultural policy is indispensable
2. Extension consists of “facilitation” as much if not more than “technology transfer”
3. Producers are clients, sponsors and stakeholders, rather than beneficiaries of agricultural extension
4. Market demands create an impetus for a new relationship between farmers and private suppliers of goods and services
5. New perspectives are needed regarding public funding and private actors
6. Pluralism and decentralised activities require coordination and dialogue between actors

Six commitments of NI members

1. Support negotiated national policy-making between actual stakeholders
2. Consider the long-term financial viability of extension activities
3. Include exit strategies in all planning
4. Facilitate funding of producer initiatives
5. Ensure that all extension activities are flanked by support for agricultural training, farmer organisations, and agricultural research
6. Establish closer coordination between co-operation agencies

The Extension Butterfly



The environment of agricultural extension is changing

1. The aims of official development assistance are becoming more focused

Reducing poverty and social inequalities, the sustainable use of natural resources, and participatory development, are overall objectives to which extension policies can make a significant contribution.

The majority of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa consists of farmers and their families.



This rural population is expanding rapidly, notwithstanding urbanisation, and has limited access to health and education services.

Food security is often a problem for the rural poor, a large proportion of whom live only by agriculture.

Food security in towns and the sustainable management of natural resources hinges on farmers' work.

By helping to improve farming and farm yields, agricultural extension can be a very powerful tool for empowerment and support to community livelihoods.

These objectives highlight the fact that extension systems must be accessible and useful to the poorest, and address the special concerns of women farmers and young farmers.

2. Changes are afoot in the Sub-Saharan states: decentralisation, liberalisation, privatisation and democratisation

Many developing countries are at various stages in the process of economic liberalisation, decentralisation and privatisation.

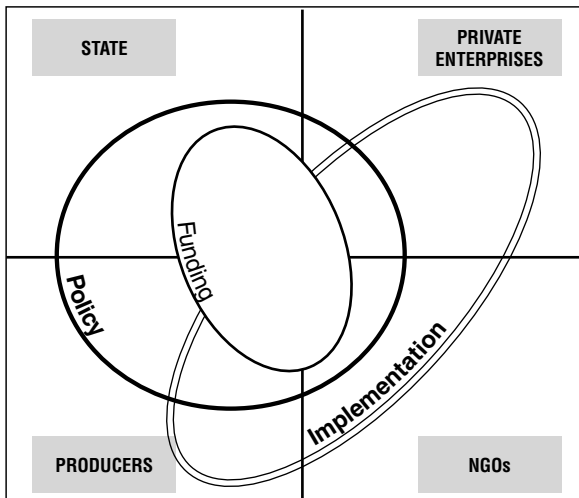
Economic liberalisation particularly involves the dismantling of public farm price controls. This leaves producers with increased needs for market information.

Privatisation signifies a government withdrawal from economic activities, such as input supply and the marketing and even production of agricultural produce. Balanced relations between private producers and other actors, including producer organisations, must be established.

Decentralisation is a means of transferring selected public responsibilities to regional or local level institutions (municipalities, districts or the equivalent). Technical programming, personnel management and budget appropriations for extension service delivery can all be delegated.

Democratisation of public life, though uncertain in many countries, gives a voice to civil society at local and national levels. New links are being forged between government and people. The emergence of producer organisations is an aspect of this democratisation.

**Four actors and three functions
focused on extension**



3. New actors are becoming involved in extension activities

There are today four types of actors in agricultural extension: public agencies, private service providers, producer organisations (POs), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The main **public actors** are the national agricultural extension services. But other agricultural advisory services also play a role: public agricultural research systems, educational systems (from primary schools to vocational training centres), state-owned media, etc. Progressive adjustments have tended to refocus government agencies on roles related to guidance, encouragement and supervision.

There are four types of **private actors** in the agricultural sector:

1. Input suppliers (seeds, fertiliser, animal/crop health products, farm equipment, etc.) include advice and training as part of marketing their products.
2. Purchasers of agricultural products advise, train, and recommend techniques to ensure supplies of guaranteed quantity and quality.
3. There are now private trainer-advisor-outreach agencies emerging in response to the demand from public agencies and professional organisations.
4. Private media geared to agriculture (radio and television programmes, farming magazines) are beginning to emerge.



As **professional actors** farmer organisations (trade unions, associations, cooperatives and other forms of grouping) may offer a range of service provision:

- inputs and product marketing,
- loan facilities,
- representation,
- training, information, facilitation and extension services.

Non-governmental organisations act in a variety of ways, fulfilling a key role, not least through pilot projects and as mediators.

They operate in spheres of activity and regions where neither the state, private operators, nor farmer organisations can deliver appropriate services. The independence and initiative of NGOs has benefits for other actors.

The roles of these four groups of actors (public, private, professional and NGOs) vary according to their specific national contexts.

4. Public spending on extension is shrinking

Policies to bring down public deficits in most developing countries have led to expenditure ceilings on agricultural extension and the introduction of fee-based schemes. In some ways, this is a positive development. Users can dictate, or at least influence, the type and quality of the services they buy. On the other hand, it may put some of these services beyond the reach of the poorest.



A new approach to extension is needed

A new approach to agricultural extension is needed to accommodate the developments and trends described. But it must emerge from an analysis of the successes and failures of existing operations. This is no easy task.



The reason is that the success of extension programmes must be gauged over the long term. The main benchmarks must be their impacts on agricultural output, the welfare of rural communities and environmental sustainability, but consumers' interests must not be left out of the equation.

It has proven difficult to assess these objectives in practice. While indicators for monitoring outreach activities are often available, final impacts are rarely assessed and are not strictly comparable between different types of interventions and contexts.

These constraints notwithstanding, the following six principles can be said to form the basis of an extension policy.

1. A sound agricultural policy is indispensable

An agricultural extension programme is more likely to succeed if the conditions for growth in agriculture and related industries are in place. Extension is only one aspect of agricultural policy.

Also, agricultural policy is largely a matter of a proper broad economic policy (stable and appropriate exchange rates, currency convertibility, investment protection, etc.).

The cardinal elements of an agricultural sector policy are:

- Market access: rural infrastructures, market organisation
- Agricultural producer prices: taxation of industry sectors, price stabilisation
- Availability and cost of inputs: taxation and distribution system
- Supply of and access to credit
- Security of tenure
- Freedom of association, regulation of cooperatives and groups/associations
- Basic education and agricultural training
- Applied agricultural research
- Effective central and sub-national government provision of arbitration and supervision of service providers
- Crisis management, early warning and rapid response to changes in the market and other production factors
- Most importantly, establishing a strategic vision for agricultural development

2. Extension consists of “facilitation” as much if not more than “technology transfer”

Extension is too often merely seen as a vehicle for spreading scientific and technical progress and technology transfer. But this is a narrow and highly unsatisfactory definition.

The dissemination of knowledge is not a one-way street from scientists to producers. Farmers’ own knowledge must be collected, analysed, capitalised on, propagated and disseminated.

Producers need more than just technical information. There is rarely a “one size fits all” solution to address the mix of technical, economic, commercial, social and environmental aspects that farming problems consist of. Farmers need information on markets, credit facilities and consumer demand. But simply making information more readily available is not enough to ensure that it is used effectively. On the various levels of their activities (farm, local community, industry subsector), producers must themselves be able to analyse the constraints, seek out and test solutions, and make choices from an array of existing service providers.

The essence of agricultural extension is to facilitate interplay and nurture synergies within a total information system involving agricultural research, agricultural education and a vast complex of information-providing businesses.

By building producers' capacity to take individual and collective initiatives, facilitation makes available technical solutions that are more relevant to farmers' constraints in the short term, and in the long term provides a framework for ongoing innovation.

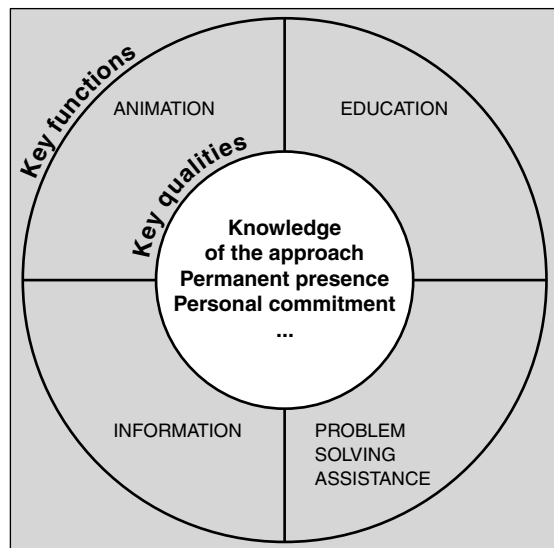
Therefore, agricultural extension activity facilitates:

- direct exchange between producers as a way of diagnosing problems, capitalising on existing knowledge, exchanging experiences, disseminating proven improvements, and even fashioning common projects,
- relations between producers and service providers (including public extension services).

Extension services give ongoing support to producer projects, evolving together with the clients. Extension provides sources of support, analysis, and methods to producers. Extension is advisory, not prescriptive.

This requires extension workers to be “actors in” not “instruments of” extension. Trust must be established between the customer small farmer and the adviser.

Key functions and key qualities of extension



Solid technical expertise remains essential, but the abilities of extension workers must go beyond that.

Extensionists must nowadays be adept in participatory techniques, and resourceful in drawing on a mix of communication methods and technologies. They must think in terms of market opportunities, increasing producer incomes and total farm management.

Facilitation demands high-calibre human resources marrying know-how to people-skills. Both can be developed through initial and continued training of field workers.

At the same time, however, producers must have an opportunity to present their views on the recruitment and development of extension workers.

3. Producers are clients, sponsors and stakeholders, rather than beneficiaries of agricultural extension

Extension activities are more effective when farmers are directly involved in defining, managing and implementing them. When farmers fund or purchase training services the impact is significantly better than when they attend training entirely designed and funded by someone else.

This happens when:

- farmer organisations manage their own technical services,
- producer groups and private (management, literacy training) or public (research, training, extension) service centres work together on a contract basis,
- producers can target funding on problem solving for their specific needs.



Three questions about how public extension services can become more accountable to producers

1. What responsibilities should producers have in extension services?

Producers can exercise responsibility in public extension programmes in two areas: the content and nature of extension activities, and management of financial and human resources.

This can be done at all levels of extension activity from local to national via farmer representatives in different levels of management in extension institutions.

One essential element of producer empowerment is that representatives feed back information to those who appoint them, and convey their extension needs to appropriate levels in extension services.

Producers can exercise these responsibilities by mobilising funds with which to co-finance extension activities.

Appropriate ways of consulting and informing producer representatives on the technical and financial aspects of extension programmes must be deployed. Monitored lists of negotiated objectives and clear and verifiable activity and performance indicators are needed as much for the management of extension systems as to inform and provide accountability to producers and stakeholders.

2. How can strengthening producer organisations improve extension?

Effective POs can give direction to extension structures through their participation in management bodies, their financial commitment, and as channels for information and training.

POs can themselves establish extension activities.

3. Can public extension providers help strengthen POs?

No, if their approach is prescriptive, supervisory, propagating a standardised model for POs, supplanting PO management.

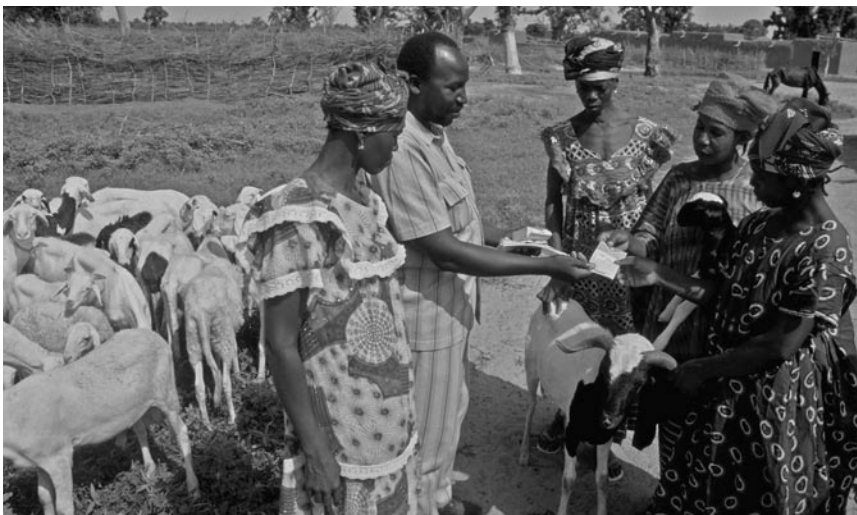
Yes, if they can support and facilitate, foster exchanges between producers, disseminate information, help POs develop outreach, decision-making and management abilities.

4. Market demands create an impetus for a new relationship between farmers and private suppliers of goods and services

A major theme in agricultural development is the gradual transition from low-productivity subsistence farming to specialised production based on comparative advantage and the trading of surpluses on the market. Small farmers must produce a sufficient range of competitively-priced outputs in the right quantity and quality at the right time. This move from subsistence to commercial farming is consumer- rather than producer-driven.

Because input suppliers and produce buyers are business people, they must have their finger on the pulse of demand and offer suitable products and services. Without inputs or markets, extension service recommendations are a dead letter.

Better linkages between farmers and the private sector are essential, but the inherent biases of business must be recognised. Impartial and unbiased marketing and technical information are essential if producers are to be enabled to respond to market conditions. An extension activity which delivers that advice and facilitates balanced relations between producers and private business is a development-nurturing source of security for producers.



5. New perspectives are needed regarding public funding and private actors

Public funding of extension is essential; but that does not necessarily mean that public extension institutions should carry out or run extension services.

Agricultural extension is a medium- and long-term investment in the same way as education and research, so the investment of domestic and external public resources is fully justified. In the context of the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, such resource allocation must be prioritised and deployed with care.

- It is essential to develop extension approaches which match the country's financial resources. Continuity of activities cannot depend exclusively on external funding. Proper evaluation of the financial return of specific activities improves sustainability.
- While providing funding, governments may contract out some or all of the implementation to non-governmental institutions (farmer organisations, specialised consultants, NGOs). If the contract terms are sufficiently precise, this often delivers a better quality of service. In order to do this effectively, governments must develop the capacity to monitor and evaluate the activities they finance in this manner.
- Having producers and private sector actors cofinance extension, either individually or through their professional organisations, can result in savings and more efficient use of public resources.

6. Pluralism and decentralised activities require coordination and dialogue between actors

Centralised and standardised national extension systems do not produce satisfactory results. No single approach or organisation fits all. The wide range of social environments, economic contexts, agro-ecological conditions and many different types of crops have produced a varied mix of farms.

Farming conditions change in an instant at the whim of markets and the weather. To be effective, extension must be able to address change. Extension systems must be ultraflexible to respond to new situations (opportunities or crises). Decentralising guidance and decision-making bodies can facilitate that.

Also, monopolies – whether private or public – limit the extension mix. Producers should have a choice of a range of providers in terms of methods, quality of service and cost.

Finally,

- a broad portfolio of advisory, training, information and other services is essential,
- locally-based arrangements with real independent decision-making powers are the only way to take account of unique local characteristics and involve the different actors.

Nonetheless, the multiplicity of actors combined with decentralisation make national coordination and consultation essential.



National and local forums for dialogue and coordination between farmers and other stakeholders (public institutions, NGOs, private firms) are required to:

- set common aims and frame policies,
- harmonise working methods and tools,
- capitalise on experiences and exchanges of information,
- carry out follow-up and evaluation,
- orchestrate activities and fairness in target groups,
- achieve efficient deployment of public resources,
- pool training and research facilities.

This dialogue must be equitable. Coordination must not become central control by a different name.

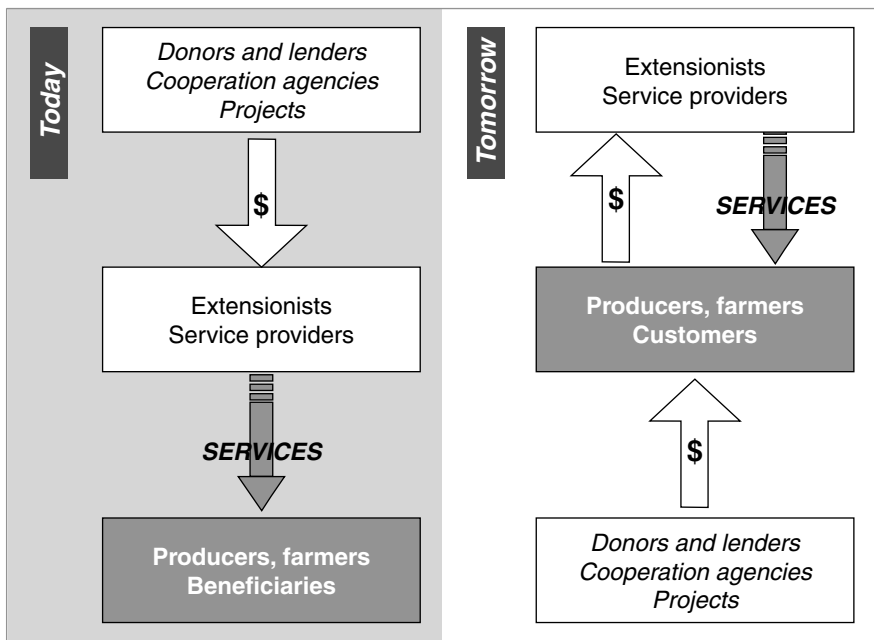
Proposed commitments by co-operation agencies

Governments and national actors are responsible for fashioning their agricultural extension strategies together. Cooperation agencies give technical and financial input to support policy options, not to initiate policies. The following proposals reflect such an approach. The six practical proposals below aim to enhance the quality of cooperation agency input.

They are:

- Support negotiated national policy-making between actual stakeholders
- Consider the long-term financial viability of extension activities
- Include exit strategies in all planning
- Facilitate funding of producer initiatives
- Ensure that extension activities are flanked by support for agricultural training, farmer organisations and agricultural research
- Establish closer coordination between cooperation agencies

Reversing the flow of funds



1. Support negotiated national policy-making between actual stakeholders

The emphasis should be on national extension policies rather than national extension structures.

A policy is a flexible, indicative framework for incentives intended to create synergies between the different actors.

Through their regulatory powers and financial resources, governments can guide the activities of private and professional actors by setting:

- sectoral, geographical or issue-specific priorities,
- skill requirements for agricultural advisors,
- the eligibility criteria of private training, outreach and advisory services,
- frameworks for necessary consultative mechanisms.

However, national extension policy-making cannot be left to general government alone. All the stakeholders must be involved, especially farmers.

This means facilitating:

- farmer representation in policy discussions, including management and policy bodies of public and semi-public extension, as well as training and research structures,
- producer representatives' input into groundwork for activities,
- capacity building for producer organisations to handle such functions by training their elected leaders and staff.





2. Consider the long-term financial viability of extension activities

External resources are too often used to implement programmes for which long-term national funding cannot possibly be found, irregardless of how optimistic our projections are for agricultural economic growth. The recurrent secondary operating and capital replacement costs involved must be considered in relation to farm incomes and taxation structures. This applies to both nationwide programmes and community-based projects, many of which can neither be extended nor replicated because of cost barriers.

A cooperation agency's involvement in an extension programme must be guided by five considerations.

1. There must be a thorough assessment of the amount of long-term financial resources available for agricultural extension in each country. The funding abilities of central and local government, producers and their organisations, and the private sector must be assessed realistically, together with the question of access to human resources.
2. Agri-business, including farmers, must be involved in running extension activities. First, they should have an individual or collective financial stake in them. Second, the public financial effort must be expressly driven by these actors' demands for extension activities.
3. Decentralised and locally-managed resources make it easier to address needs, focus on aims and, in so doing, raise co-funding.
4. Annual contracts which place performance obligations on service providers promote both effectiveness and efficiency.
5. The political will to allocate public funds to extension must be frankly assessed and given a central place in the planning process.

3. Include exit strategies in all planning

From the start of any programme, there must be a strategy for withdrawal of external support by co-operation agencies. This involves two parallel strategies, the phasing-out of financial support and the phasing-out of technical assistance.

An exit strategy requires in particular:

- involvement of local stakeholders (PO leaders, national authorities, existing field service providers, etc.) starting from the planning stage of activities,
- flexible programming and realistic objectives,
- activities to promote, train and consolidate national service providers,
- ownership demands that funds are raised and efficiently managed at a local level. Capacity building for this objective is a central aspect of any exit strategy.

4. Facilitate funding of producer initiatives

The passive acceptance of free service provision by agencies financed by international co-operation does not always reflect the real felt needs and demands of producers.

For this reason, financial flows must be turned around, i.e. financial resources must be made available for POs to manage extension functions and to contract directly with public and private partners.

Flexible and decentralised mechanisms are needed for channelling external resources directly to producer groups with which to implement projects initiated by them. Such arrangements have at least three advantages:

- **Relevance:** producers demand only those services that they really need, since resource use is not tied.
- **Efficiency:** service providers are accountable for their performance to producer-clients.
- **Sustainability:** conventional market economy flows are established between customer and service provider, and can survive the withdrawal of external assistance.

5. Ensure that all extension activities are flanked by support for agricultural training, farmer organisations and agricultural research

Human and financial resources must be balanced among all the elements which help take agricultural knowledge forward: education, training, research, extension and professional organisations. Targeting all available resources on extension alone is not effective.

Interrelations between these various components should be developed parallel to one another. Participation by producers and private sector actors in the management of institutions, and increasing contractual relations between them, will contribute to the articulation of different components in the agricultural knowledge system.

For this reason, the following activities should be specifically targeted:

- initial and continuing training for extension workers and farmer organisation officials,
- literacy training for young farmers,
- training for farmer organisation leaders,
- increasing the abilities of researchers to communicate with other actors.



6. Establish closer coordination between co-operation agencies

It is essential not to under estimate the requirement for cooperation agencies to follow their own national policies and establish their own profiles. The differences in approach stemming from their individual agricultural development cultures are real and significant factors. Nonetheless, where there is a desire to reactivate the national extension policy in a country, donor coordination should be established to:

- pull local and sectoral activities together within a framework agreed upon by the national stake holders,
- optimise the allocation of available resources,
- pool different experiences,
- apply a common approach to follow-up, so as to enable comparison of outcomes,
- conduct joint and mutual appraisals of projects and programmes.

This means establishing common approaches to the monitoring and evaluation of extension activities. To improve the analysis of extension schemes, clear frameworks should be offered to evaluators of projects with an extension component. Donor agencies could also devise common reporting procedures.

The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) was established in 1983 under the Lomé Convention between the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) Group of States and the European Union Member States. Since 2000, it has operated within the framework of the ACP-EC Cotonou Agreement.

CTA's tasks are to develop and provide services that improve access to information for agricultural and rural development, and to strengthen the capacity of ACP countries to produce, acquire, exchange and utilise information in this area. CTA's programmes are designed to: provide a wide range of information products and services and enhance awareness of relevant information sources; promote the integrated use of appropriate communication channels and intensify contacts and information exchange (particularly intra-ACP); and develop ACP capacity to generate and manage agricultural information and to formulate ICM strategies, including those relevant to science and technology. CTA's work incorporates new developments in methodologies and cross-cutting issues such as gender and social capital.

CTA is financed by the European Union.

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This group comprises representatives of the cooperation agencies of Austria, Denmark (Danida), France (MAE), Germany (GTZ), the Netherlands (DGIS), Sweden (Sida), Switzerland (SDC), UK (DFID) and the USA (USAID), as well as representatives of the FAO, the IFAD, the European Commission (EC/DGVIII), the CTA (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation) and the World Bank.

Through a series of case studies and joint reflections, this 'Neuchâtel Initiative Group' is helping to bring a measure of convergence to thinking on the objectives, methods and means of support for agricultural extension policies.

