

6th GFRAS Annual Meeting

Global Good Practices in Rural Advisory Services

14 - 17 September 2015, Issyk Kul, Kyrgyzstan

Community-Based RAS: Challenges and Ways Forward

Summary of the Parallel Workshop¹

Introductions

Fifteen participants from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Australia, and the US discussed experiences in community-based rural advisory services, first agreeing on what was meant by the term, who are the service providers, and who is the community. We then had two inputs followed by a debate of the pros and cons of community-based rural advisory services.

The first input was on a RELASER farmer-to-farmer extension study in 2014 in Peru, Guatemala, Honduras, and Bolivia. They found that farmer-to-farmer extensionists were average of 45 years old with 25% women. The programmes are mostly promoted by NGOs with donor funding and involve local institutions. The community-based approach was mainly cheaper than traditional models as promoters worked voluntarily and didn't receive salaries in most cases. Municipalities cover some costs in some cases. Some promoters sold inputs. Effects of the programme: Promoters became community leaders; producer organisations were empowered; increased productivity; more organic solutions were chosen. Strengths of the approach were that it was found to be more responsive with a direct reach and low cost. It reinforced the value of local knowledge. Weaknesses were that not all promoters had good communication skills and the approach was not recognised as valid by some governments.

A second input was on income-generating initiatives for women farmers and rural women in Indonesia, where many different types of women work collectively (farmers, fishers, etc.). They have small farms (0.3 ha farm size) and struggle to have enough income. The women's group helps to organise institutional demand for income-earning activities through participatory rural appraisals with stakeholders and focal points. They concluded that multi-lateral appraisals contributed to the strength of advisory services. Constraints included defining appropriate times for events. Opportunities included availability of resources to implement plans and economic growth in urban areas. Challenges included lack of knowledge; sustainability and scaling; diverse capacities; and domestic issues.

What are community-based rural advisory services? Why do we need them?

- Lack of political will, withdrawal of government services, decreased investment leaves a gap
- Transaction costs are lower
- Relevance – farmers are the best convincer of other farmers, trust, ownership; people know best how to solve their own problems
- Scale – reach more people

¹ Compiled by Kristin Davis

- Counter the typical linear approach research-extension-beneficiaries
- Increase sustainability– build capacity and independence on political will and donors
- Empowerment
- Natural occurrence – nurture farmer leaders and legitimise existing RAS

We concluded that community-based rural advisory services are critical to achieve impact; synergy should occur through other complementary approaches; technical backstopping is needed; and there is no one “magic bullet” solution.