



## RURAL EXTENSION WITH AN INCLUSIVE RURAL DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

\*By Linda Baez Lacayo<sup>1</sup>

- **Poverty is multidimensional and requires differentiated responses.** In addition to increasing their income, rural families seek to improve their means of life and have more participation and representation in the life of their communities and countries.
- **Technology is not enough.** Rural extension must contribute to provide opportunities to the most vulnerable members of society in areas such as food safety, changes in their productive systems, access to markets, the financial system, and representation in political arenas.
- **Access must be improved for women and young people, and an effort must be made to recognize different forms of collective action.** These are effective ways of increasing the social capital of the rural poor and allow them to decrease risks, develop new skills, create networks, decrease transaction costs, or improve opportunities for access to markets.
- **A rural extension public policy should form part of a global strategy for poverty reduction, social inclusion, and rural development.** This requires political will and long-term commitments.
- **The State plays a key role** in the generation of conditions that allow rural extension to have results and impact and cover spaces that other stakeholders will not occupy. It must address the gaps and imperfections in the market and ensure that people who live in conditions of poverty in rural territories have opportunities and the resources that they need to participate in development processes in a more equitable manner.

### Rural Extension: A Contribution to the Effort to Reduce Rural Poverty

Rural extension<sup>2</sup> has played an important role in the promotion of agriculture as a motor for economic growth and continues to be an effective tool for helping thousands of families to improve their living

conditions in terms of food safety and economic and social management. In Latin America, **extension systems will not prove their effectiveness in the reduction of rural poverty unless their strategies and actions are complemented by solid public policies, investments, and other services.**

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(2) The term extension is also presented as a synonym for rural advising services. Taken mainly from FAO and GFRAS documents such as "Como movilizar el potencial de la extensión agraria y rural" and "Estudio mundial sobre buenas prácticas de los servicios de extensión y asesoramiento agropecuarios" and the GTZ document "Extension and Research Approaches for Rural Development."



**Extension with a focus on inclusion and development supports innovations in the productive systems of family farms, the creation of more and better job opportunities, and focuses on ensuring that the most vulnerable people access a variety of subsistence strategies and means of living.<sup>3</sup>**

When it is understood in this way, extension involves facing several challenges:

- Exploring and understanding the priorities and characteristics of those living in poverty in rural territories;
- Gaining more knowledge of the markets' demands;
- Rethinking innovative financing strategies for the provision of services, which is an especially key issue in countries with limited fiscal resources; and
- Developing innovations and updating technical staff members' knowledge of them.

In Latin America, poverty continues to be an eminently rural phenomenon and agriculture continues to be an important activity for a large part of the poor rural population.<sup>4</sup> Food safety and an adequate institutional framework have once again been proven to be of global and regional importance with a strong presence on the regional political agenda and a significant space in legislative and public debates. In several countries, **the role of the government is limited to areas linked to rural extension. Public policy is redefined and the use of public resources is made a priority, or the State participates directly in the provision of services to**

the most vulnerable members of society, as seen in Brazil and Ecuador. In other cases, an effort is made to promote the participation of the private sector through coordinated efforts and synergies, promoting links between producers, markets, and networks, as is seen in Chile and Paraguay.

Poverty is multidimensional, and the goals of those who live in a condition of risk go beyond generating income. They also seek to improve their representation and voice and develop multiple life strategies. Two large segments can be identified within this segment of the population:<sup>5</sup> **small and medium-sized producers<sup>6</sup>** with a certain amount of resources who take more risks, access more dynamic markets and chains of value, and engage in more dynamic economic activities; and a **majority segment of rural households,<sup>7</sup> which are agricultural and pluri-active,** socially vulnerable, and have restricted assets and diverse sources of income. The latter have a limited ability to resist adverse conditions, and though they do participate in the (formal or informal) economy and the markets, they do so with practices which are not very sustainable.



Photograph: © Flickr - Rimisp, Bruno Portillo

(3) Common Framework for Supporting Pro-Poor Extension. Neuchatel Group, 2003.

(4) FAO. Panorama de la Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional en la Region (Overview of Food Safety and Nutrition in the Region- Spanish language document), 2010; ECLAC: 2009 and 2010 Economic and Social Report.

(5) Developed for the purposes of illustration based on reports issued by FAO, IFAD, the Ford Foundation, and other agencies.

(6) This is the case of fruit producers linked to Fecoprof or Paraguay's fruit chain or wheat producers linked to Coopeumo in Chile.

(7) They produce over 60% of the supply of basic food products for internal consumption and only 7% have access to extension services. Their productive areas are generally located in depressed regions with limited agricultural potential. This is the case of producers linked to Fecoprof in Paraguay, Coopeumo in Chile, producers from the province of Chimborazo in Ecuador, and 80% of the population served by rural extension programs in Brazil.



## Factors of Success in the Experiences Analyzed

The region presents a great diversity of forms and mechanisms for rural extension, both public and private, and a broad range of stakeholders. This is seen in the five experiences analyzed in the study *Rural Extension with an Inclusive Rural Development Approach*:<sup>8</sup>

- Decentralized public policy for rural extension with an emphasis on family farming: The experience of the MDA's PNATER in Brazil and EMATER<sup>9</sup> in Minas Gerais.
- The importance of associativity for achieving options for the integration of the poorest members of society into the markets: Chile's Coopeumo Cooperative.
- A new way of developing rural extension policy and actions: Wheat production groups in the Chimborazo Province of Ecuador.
- Linking family farmers to networks and value chains: The Federation of Limited Production Cooperatives (FECOPROD) and the experience of small-scale fruit producers of Caazapá, Paraguay.

The main factor of success observed in the experiences is the **commitment and coordinated action of a diverse group of stakeholders**. This is clear in the experience of Brazil with its rural extension public policy. There is a need for a new public institutional position and new professionalism, commitment to people, and respect for the diverse economic systems used by rural families with the allocation of public resources for the execution of direct actions for the marginalized population.

In order to apply this new approach, there is a need to **transform conventional practices** related to the ways in which services are offered, promote a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach, and encourage the

adoption of new participatory methodologies and the use of local knowledge. Similarly, institutional adjustments must be made in order to decentralize and delegate functions to local levels.

Changes were observed in Brazil and Ecuador, particularly in regard to the way in which services are provided (working more closely with beneficiaries and allowing for the participation of diverse stakeholders) and the knowledge of and link between technicians and the rural population. **Rural extension must be broad and participatory and consider spaces for active and diverse discussion with producers and their organizations, civil society, the private sector, and government entities.** Each of them contributes in different ways, achieving a synergy in order to move towards a single goal, as is the case of Ecuador in which the role of FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture was key. By contrast, the producers' organizations maintained this leadership in countries like Chile and Paraguay.

**Rural extension with this approach is a good tool for rural organizations that promote active participation by the most vulnerable residents of rural areas.** It allows the objectives sought to be clearly defined and for management to be performed with austerity and autonomy as well as professionalism and commitment with defense of the social aspects of the organization. **This is seen in the experiences of Chile and Paraguay, where this type of rural extension is in keeping with the demands of the most disadvantaged stakeholders. It is participatory and marked by the experiences and realities of producers.**

**Training is essential for ensuring processes of change in individuals.** Systematic teaching about the use of the best technologies produces modernization and moves organizations towards acceptable standards for the market (seed, post-harvest management),

(8) Developed for Rimisp, the Latin American Center for Rural Development, in the context of the "Design of an Agenda for Latin American Rural Extension That Contributes to Inclusive Rural Development" by consultant Linda Baez Lacayo. 31 October 2011.

(9) PNATER: National Rural Assistance and Extension Policy; MDA: Ministry of Agricultural Development; EMATER: Corporation for Rural Technical Assistance and Extension.



as seen in Ecuador, where producers entered the wheat market, and with small-scale producers in Paraguay and their participation in the fruit chain (product management and adequate volume and quality). **The use of material and information from the communities themselves (local knowledge) and the adoption of technological bases that improve productive and economic processes is another key element for success.**

**Extension agents** who are linked to the local and committed to acting as facilitators of change **play an educational and formative role in development processes.** These are long processes and have already begun in Ecuador and Brazil. **Pro-inclusion rural extension recognizes the differences between and specificities of rural families, highlighting the role(s) that each member plays in the family economy.**

### **Notes for a Regional Rural Extension Agenda from an Inclusive Development Approach**

The study and the contributions obtained from the fora held<sup>10</sup> by the Latin American Network for Rural Extension Services allowed for the identification of at least five topics of discussion:

- Going beyond technology and opening up opportunities for the most disadvantaged population.
- The need for a clear inclusive rural extension policy that is centered on rural at-risk families.
- Extension should be seen as an instrument for contributing knowledge and innovation and changing paradigms in order to offer services.
- Associativity is an opportunity and an essential mechanism for improving social and economic inclusion in the rural sector.
- There is a need for a new institutional framework that recognizes the importance of the role of the government.

**Going beyond Technology: Opening up Opportunities for At-Risk Families.** Pro-inclusion rural extension plays a key role in creating opportunities, improving food safety, reducing vulnerability, and promoting the voice and representation of the most at-risk members of society.

In order to serve the segment of small- and medium-scale producers who have better access, public intervention must be complemented by existing links in order to improve their productive activities, strengthen links with the market and chains of value, improve their participation and governance systems, and expand their capacity to give sustainability to the processes that they have developed. By contrast, **the majority of the most vulnerable rural households require innovative forms of extension that are linked to boosting their participation in job markets, access to rural organizations, and links to chains of value.**

As such, there is not only a need for “traditional” services linked to agricultural production, but services to improve food safety and opportunities to join markets (including the job market, which has become more important for young people and women). Beneficiaries are focused on having a voice, strengthening associativity and a sense of self-esteem, and generally improving their means of life and achieving inclusive rural development. **In Chile and Paraguay, a varied menu of services is directed at member families as part of an effort to respond to a wide range of needs. Meanwhile, Brazil's public policy is complemented by social interventions and investments in infrastructure.**

**There is a growing need for a clear, pragmatic, realistic policy that is focused on the most vulnerable rural families. In addition, this policy must be integrated with other sectors and close to the territory with a commitment to the most vulnerable.** There is a need for a public institutional posture and new professionalism

(10) The Latin American Network of Rural Extension Services organized a series of virtual and on site meetings with the representatives of the five experiences analyzed and organizations linked to the topic that form part of this work and action network. The most important contributions and agreements were presented at the Second Latin American Meeting of Rural Extension Services in Managua in September 2011.



centered on respect for rural families' economic systems, the pluri-activity of families, regional and local differences, and social and cultural diversity.

Along these lines, **Brazil and Ecuador have promoted a more comprehensive, systemic, and exchange-based government policy that promotes the adoption of new participatory methodological approaches with a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary focus based on local knowledge.**

But there is no one "recipe" for all countries that can serve as a "model of extension." Nor can lessons that generalize learning be applied without first analyzing the environment and processes in which each experience occurs. **Rural extension policy designed with an inclusive development approach should address the following issues:**

- The diversity of rural families in which each life strategy is considered;
- A global vision and programs that go beyond agriculture and technology;
- Highlighting the improvement of food safety as a central element of the policy;
- Reducing risks and uncertainties faced by the most vulnerable families, the barriers that they face in regard to the markets and chains of value, promoting access to job markets and non-agricultural activities and taking the issues of gender and generation into account.

**Extension with a pro-inclusion approach is a fundamental instrument for contributing knowledge and innovation and promoting a paradigm shift in the way in which services are offered.** There is a need to change how knowledge is shared and how technologies or technological packets are "transferred." The new framework is to focus on facilitating, using participatory practices and methodologies that promote sustainable rural development, and the autonomy of rural communities and organizations. There is a need to overcome the traditional paradigm

of the extensionist-farmer relationship and establish a more horizontal relationship in which the technician is a facilitator in processes of change.

**The "extensionists" should be facilitating agents with new concepts and ways of seeing the rural and rural poverty.** It is important to take their process of training or knowledge adjustment as a point of departure whether in the private or public sphere, though in the case of the latter they have more commitments given that the public sector continues to be one of the main providers of services to the population that lives in poverty. The "extensionists" must improve their knowledge of rural poverty and the challenges involved with it, the growth of people and social organizations, the adaptation of the use of methodologies with the participation of rural stakeholders, strengthening their capacities to undertake individual and collective actions, the promotion of equity, participation, and the preservation of local and ancestral values. It is a matter of providing rural families with a set of technical, economic, and social knowledge that is appropriate for their needs, spaces, and contexts.

**The integration of local promoters is key for the establishment of more long-term commitments and advancing more quickly with the coverage and quality of services through horizontal communication models.** At the same time, this approach allows for greater closeness to and appreciation of the territory and greater coverage, which results in the development of the skills and abilities of the populations served. It takes into account the roles of members of families in which women are encouraged to participate in initiatives and collaborate on accessing new and better opportunities.

**Associativity for Economic and Social Inclusion in the Rural Sector.** Rural producer organizations are increasingly involved in markets and consumers with better-quality products. As we have observed in Chile, Ecuador, and Paraguay, experiences with associativity have been excellent spaces for developing platforms



of services for their members, reducing transaction costs and creating economies of scale, particularly for the poorest members of society. They have responded to the demand for high quality products and food safety, improving their low productivity and strengthening their businesses in order to lead the management of their economic initiatives.

**The Need for a New Institutional Framework and the Role of the State.** The government plays a key role in bringing rural extension to at-risk rural families and promoting inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction. **Governments can promote production and food supply safety, define policies and instruments, sign commercial agreements, create incentives for forming chains of value, promote the competitiveness of small-scale farming, and provide financial support for extension services and activities that others will not finance.**

In this context, the decentralization of extension is vital, as are efforts to involve other entities and organizations and to grant authority to local or regional public entities so that they can take over the coordination and eventually the execution of the actions. It is important to consider spaces for discussion and action at the local and national levels with diverse stakeholders in which agreements are established in the area of objectives and policies related to extension, instruments and strategies, knowledge and sharing of experiences, development of learning processes and training stakeholders in this approach.

**In a time of limited resources, it is important to have various financial models and clear and well-defined priorities based on the characteristics of the various segments.** Public financing should not only be directed at reaching productive or economic goals. Many times, there will be a need to finance basic goods and services in order to improve the spaces in which the rural poor live or work.



*Soy Plantations, Paraguay. Photograph: © Flickr - Olmo Calvo.*

In the experiences analyzed, some extension approaches have been successful because they are based on multiple contributions, diverse institutional arrangements (networks and allies), and incentives (investments or services). The initiatives supported by international cooperation promote a diversity of approaches with resources and proposals for supporting lines linked to the definition of public policies for pro-inclusion extension, sharing visions, experiences and lessons learned. They strengthen rural organizations, finance actions, replicate successful experiences, and fund initiatives that can ensure that national programs have a greater impact in addition to promoting the decentralization of the actions and coordinating activities and policies.



## Recommended Reading:

- CEPAL-Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Espacios iberoamericanos: Hacia una nueva arquitectura del Estado para el desarrollo. desarrollo (Ibero-American spaces: Towards a new architecture of government for development- Spanish language document). October 2011. [www.eclac.cl](http://www.eclac.cl)
- FAO. Estudio mundial sobre buenas prácticas de los servicios de extensión y asesoramiento agropecuarios en el mundo. (Global study on best practices of extension and agricultural advising services around the world- Spanish language document). Rome, 2010.
- FAO. Como movilizar el potencial de la extensión agraria y rural. (How to mobilize the potential of agrarian and rural extension- Spanish language document). Rome, 2010.
- Neuchâtel Group, 2002. Common Framework on Financing Agricultural and Rural Extension.
- Neuchâtel Group, 2003. Common Framework for Supporting Pro-Poor Extension.
- Neuchâtel Group, 2008. Common Framework on Market-Oriented Agricultural Advisory Services.

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**RELASER – Latin American Network for Rural Extension Services**, contributes to improving the competitiveness, sustainability, and equity of agricultural and agro-food sectors and the rural territories that surround them through the strengthening of rural extension as a part of an innovation system. Its purpose is to create mechanisms for collaboration and spaces for dialogue and learning that allow for the strengthening of rural extension systems in Latin America through cooperation and the exchange of information and knowledge.

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### Cita / Citation:

Policy Notes: Rural Extension with an Inclusive and Rural Development Approach /Notas de Políticas – Extensión Rural con Enfoque Inclusivo y de Desarrollo Rural  
RELASER – Latin American Network for Rural Extension Services  
Rimisp – Latin American Center for Rural Development  
December 2011  
Santiago, Chile

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