



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



KIT



# New directions for inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems

Report of  
FAO Expert Consultation

# **New directions for inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems**

## **Report of FAO Expert Consultation**

Rome, 11–13 May 2016

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and Royal Tropical Institute  
Rome, 2016

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The report was prepared by Mariana Wongtschowski, Verena Bitzer (KIT), May Hani and Magdalena Blum (FAO).

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# List of Acronyms

<b>AIS</b>	Agricultural innovation systems
<b>ANCAR</b>	National Agency for Agricultural and Rural Council (Senegal)
<b>ASPRODEB</b>	Senegalese Association for the Promotion of Development at the Base
<b>CABI</b>	CAB International
<b>CADER</b>	Centre of Learning for Rural Development (Guatemala)
<b>CLF</b>	Cluster level federation
<b>COLACTEOS</b>	Nariño Dairy Products Cooperative (Colombia)
<b>CONPAPA</b>	Potato Producers Consortium (Ecuador)
<b>CRISP</b>	Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (India)
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>DAAS</b>	Danish Agricultural Advisory Service
<b>D2F</b>	Direct2Farm (CABI)
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>FIRCA</b>	Inter-professional Funds for Agricultural Research and Extension
<b>GFRAS</b>	Global Forum on Rural Advisory Services
<b>Helvetas</b>	HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communications technology
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>INDAP</b>	Institute for Agricultural Development (Chile)
<b>KIT</b>	Royal Tropical Institute (Netherlands)
<b>LSMS-ISA</b>	Living Standards Measurement Study – Integrated Surveys on Agriculture
<b>MAGA</b>	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (Guatemala)
<b>MEAS</b>	Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services
<b>MVIWATA</b>	National Networks of Farmers' Groups in Tanzania
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>NRLM</b>	National Rural Livelihoods Mission (India)
<b>PNDRI</b>	National Policy for Integrated Rural Development (Guatemala)
<b>PO</b>	Producer organization
<b>PPILDA</b>	Project for the Promotion of Local Initiative for Development in Aguié (IFAD)
<b>PSAOP</b>	Agricultural Services and Producer Organizations Support Programme (Senegal)
<b>PSS</b>	Pluralistic service systems
<b>RAS</b>	Rural advisory services
<b>SDC</b>	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
<b>SHG</b>	Self-help group
<b>SNER</b>	National Rural Extension System (Guatemala)
<b>VO</b>	Village organization
<b>VRP</b>	Village resource person
<b>WB</b>	World Bank





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# 1 Introduction

A growing variety of public and private rural advisory services (Box 1) are available today, leading to increasingly “pluralistic service systems” (PSS), where advisory services are provided by different actors and funded from different sources (Wongtschowski *et al.*, 2013). This is generally regarded as an important step forwards, away from reliance on monolithic, mostly state-led service systems.

PSS have the potential to overcome constraints related to funding, staffing and expertise, and to make advisory services more demand-driven. But are they really able to reach the hundreds of millions of small-scale farmers in need of services?

Reality seems to indicate that too many farmers still fall through the cracks between service providers and remain without any services at all. The inclusive aspect of PSS thus warrants closer attention.

***What characteristics of pluralistic service systems are necessary to improve access to services for diverse small-scale farmers, especially the most vulnerable farmers?***

***What actors, policies and mechanisms are needed to make such systems work in practice?***

***How can public and private actors support service providers in improving the quality, relevance and reach of their services?***

***What is the role of farmers and their organizations in inclusive PSS?***

These were some of the questions that the FAO Expert Consultation on Inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems, held in Rome from 11 to 13 May 2016, aimed to address.

## The expert consultation

FAO called for the expert consultation to:

- commence a debate on inclusive pluralistic service systems (PSS) to create a common understanding of the challenges and issues at stake;
- inform policy and development planning focusing on the themes of (1) governance and coordination; (2) accountability; (3) financing mechanisms and sustainability; and (4) scaling;
- formulate actionable recommendations in terms of policies and transformative investments.

The meeting brought together 31 participants, including researchers, rural advisory service (RAS) practitioners and decision-makers. A full list of participants can be found in the Annex.

Before meeting in Rome, participants were asked to respond to a number of questions on “inclusive services”, and to bring their experiences into the wider debate, highlighting what they had learned thus far and the challenges that needed to be addressed. Based on this initial input, the key terminology was defined (Box 1) and themes for discussion during the meeting were selected: accountability, coordination, financial sustainability and “from pilots to scale”.

Each theme was introduced by a keynote speaker who raised questions for the broader group of participants. Mariana Wongtschowski (KIT) gave the presentation on “Accountability”; Regina Birner (University of Hohenheim) presented “Coordination”; Sanne Chipeta (international adviser) introduced the theme of “Financial sustainability”; and finally, Peter Schmidt (Helvetas) discussed issues related to “From pilots to scale”. The key messages from the presentations and the discussions that followed are found in sections 3–6. During the meeting, a number of “cases from the field” were also presented in the form of poster sessions (Boxes 2–7).

On the third day, participants elaborated a number of recommendations for policy- and decision-makers and RAS experts and practitioners (summarized in sections 3–6). Section 7 highlights the knowledge and data gaps identified, and section 8 presents the main conclusions drawn from the deliberations.

**BOX 1****BASIC DEFINITIONS**

**Rural advisory services (RAS)** are understood as encompassing all intangible services to farmers, including information, knowledge, brokering and advice, on issues such as production, inputs and technology, credit, nutrition, processing, marketing, organization and business management.

Services are considered **inclusive**, if they are:

- responsive to resource-poor and vulnerable farmers, especially women and youth;
- tailored to the multiple capacities, needs and demands of farmers;
- characterized by continuous dialogue and learning between farmers and service providers;
- complementary to the services of other providers.







# 2 Inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems

Initial discussions and the preparatory work before the Expert Consultation indicated that advisory services are considered inclusive when responding to the local demands of and opportunities for all types of farmers and rural producers. To be effective, services need to go beyond agronomic advice, looking at farming systems, agribusiness and markets as well as livelihoods from a broader perspective. This includes technical advice on other activities, such as livestock and fisheries, as well as advice on processing, marketing, organizational development, farm management and financial issues.

A single service provider cannot be fully inclusive. At times, services might be rather exclusive when focusing on particular demands/needs or categories of producers. As such, the notion of “inclusion” can best be addressed within “inclusive service systems” having a range of services and providers that meet a variety of needs and cater to different types of farmers. Inclusive service systems can be conceptualized at different levels – including farm, local and national level – or along a value chain to specify the availability and accessibility of complementary service providers in a pluralistic setting.

See, for example, the case of India’s National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM, Box 2), focusing on the rural poor, with particular attention to women; and the strikingly different case presented by Agriterro (Box 3), servicing well-organized, commercial farmers. Close collaboration, participation and downward accountability to end users are critical in both cases to make them core elements of inclusive service systems.





Inclusion demands recognition that services, innovations and risks (whether climate- or conflict-related) vary depending on the different groups in society. It requires the following:

- Appreciation of the heterogeneity of farmers (men, women, youth) and their organizations, taking into account their different service needs and demands.
- Coordination of existing services and a thorough understanding of good practices and of current gaps in the overall landscape of service provision.
- Understanding of how local government, service providers and others might be held accountable for the services they offer.
- Accessibility and relevance both for those who can and for those who cannot pay for services, in particular the more marginalized and vulnerable farmers.
- Consideration of incentives and disincentives for inclusion of farmer and producer organizations in the political institutions steering service provision.

**BOX 2****THE NATIONAL RURAL LIVELIHOODS MISSION EXPERIENCE IN BIHAR, INDIA**

India's National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) aims to benefit some 350 million people in 12 states who account for almost 85 percent of the rural poor. It aims to make a multidimensional impact on the lives of India's rural poor by mobilizing them, particularly the women, into robust grassroots institutions of their own. As a group, they will be able to make their voice heard and exert accountability over providers of education, health, nutrition and financial services. NRLM is funded by the Government of India and the World Bank.

In Bihar, NRLM aims to scale up the Jeevika Programme (Bihar Rural Livelihoods Initiative), initiated in 2007 as a pilot in nine districts, across all 38 state districts. Its two core strategies include social mobilization and enhancement of livelihoods.

In terms of social mobilization, different levels of organization were established, including self-help groups (SHGs) of poor women, village organizations (VOs) and cluster level federations (CLFs). NRLM aims to ensure that at least one member from each identified poor rural household, preferably a woman, is brought under the SHG network. SHG members receive support to develop their skills in interacting with service providers, whether government or private, enabling them to negotiate for better quality services (e.g. education and health) and have their voice heard in local governance institutions. By the end of March 2016, the programme had established 180 CLFs, 9 531 VOs and 149 000 SHGs, reaching 1 800 000 households in Bihar, India.

In terms of livelihood enhancement, the emphasis has been on skill-building, productivity enhancement and provision of extension support through trained village resource persons (VRPs) who are accountable to VOs. A VRP is a local farmer identified by the VO. Extension in this case goes beyond the transfer of technology to a broader livelihoods approach. Each VRP is responsible for developing integrated livelihood plans for SHG members and providing guidance to 50–80 SHG members under his/her command during the entire crop cycle. Livelihood specialists and managers provide training in agricultural practices to VRPs. To date, 400 000 households have been reached with the enhancement of agricultural productivity and marketing skills.

Key factors contributing to the success of Jeevika were as follows:

- VRPs (from the same community) receive regular training and educational aids/tools, and are accountable to VOs who engage with rural poor on a regular basis.
- Demand-driven planning is based on integrated livelihood plans compiled at block level.

Source: Rasheed Sulaiman, personal communication



**BOX 3****AGRITERRA: MARKET-ORIENTED AND COMMERCIALY EXPLOITED EXTENSION SERVICES IN FARMER ORGANIZATIONS**

Agriterra is an organization for international cooperation founded by civil society organizations (CSOs) in rural areas and the agricultural private sector. Its involvement in agricultural advisory services currently entails the promotion of international farmer-to-farmer exchanges, trainings and advisory visits using the Agripool advisory service. Work is in progress to establish market-oriented and commercially exploited extension services in producer organizations (PO). The work involves pre-competitive arrangements, both with private companies providing farm inputs, machinery, funding, insurance and information, and with offtakers.

A pool of active members, directors and staff of producer organizations exchange knowledge with other cooperatives and producer organizations in developing countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Thus, farmers and cooperative members or employees are involved at both ends. Farmers improve their activities or business through their own efforts. The focus is on governance, advocacy, financial management, (financial) commitment and business development.

Agriterra focuses on organized farmers, who are members of ambitious cooperatives and producer organizations. It only engages with rural poor who demonstrate entrepreneurial spirit. Women and young entrepreneurs, albeit small-scale producers, are given special consideration by facilitating and promoting their integration in high-value-added activities in value chains. On a yearly basis, the activities involve about 800 000 farmers, 40 percent of whom are female.

*Source: Kees Blokland, personal communication*



# 3 Downward accountability

## KEY MESSAGES

- Accountability to producers is crucial to ensure relevance, service quality and demand-drive.
- Farmers' voice and power to influence service provision and decision-making is often missing.
- The more direct control farmers have over resources (e.g. by contracting and paying for services), the more “critical” – i.e. relevant and demanding – they are as customers.
- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is intrinsically linked to accountability. Participation of producer groups and local stakeholders in M&E is an important step towards strengthening downward accountability of service providers to farmers.

## 3.1 Power and politics

Downward accountability should not be taken for granted. It is a challenge in many kinds of services (e.g. water, sanitation and education), but is even more problematic in the case of intangible services, such as rural advisory services (RAS). It is not easy to attribute results directly to RAS, and intangible advice is likely to be less popular with politicians.

*Regarding the question of what is the linkage between accountability and inequality, the important aspect lies in the political economy. When you are implementing a time-bound programme in service delivery, is it going to reach a wide range of actors and players who are supposed to benefit from it in the long run? Or is it short-term in terms of gaining political benefits so that you opt to focus on the key players that will support you in the political process?*

*Suresh Babu*

Accountability is intrinsically related to power. Given the inequality in the power structure, those receiving services often have a “weak voice”, especially at political level, as well as limited capacity to articulate and negotiate their priorities with those financing the services.

Both accountability and inclusiveness require a favourable political framework, appropriate decisions and effective tools. Decentralized local governance structures may be of help, bringing service providers and decision-making on service provision closer to the farmers. However, while local governments are accountable to their voters, they do not necessarily support inclusive service provision. Given that financial resources in decentralized systems are frequently limited – while farmers lack collective voice and representation – local government may decide to focus on the short term, keeping individual voters happy with inputs and subsidies rather than investing in long-term benefits from RAS. Alternatively, macroeconomic policies (e.g. agricultural productivity growth) may emphasize services supporting larger, rather than smaller, farmers and neglect livelihood and market-oriented advisory services in favour of boosting productivity.

## 3.2 Joint design and M&E

Most extension services are focused on increasing agricultural production. However, for many small-scale farmers the prime concerns may actually be marketing their products and increasing income. To address these concerns, they require services on farm management, organization and business development support to reduce costs, increase revenue and link to markets. A pluralistic service system that addresses a range of different demands is therefore needed. Such a pluralistic system is more likely to be relevant to farmers if providers avoid one-size-fits-all approaches.



Accountability is strengthened when farmers become co-owners of the services they receive. Payment for services plays an important role in this, as it enables farmers to choose or discontinue using services as paying clients. However, given the cash constraints of many small-scale farmers, payment for services requires financial support and innovative financing mechanisms for these farmers (see section 5 for a more detailed discussion).

In addition, capacity development is a necessary condition for empowering farmers to make informed decisions and to create a sense of co-ownership. The case described in Box 7 illustrates a process of farmer capacity development in the context of the *Project for the Promotion of Local Initiative for Development in Aguié* (Niger). The process involved the identification and valuing of farmers' own knowledge, which built farmers' confidence and stimulated their active engagement in the project. Among others, farmers identified the most vulnerable members in their communities, on the basis of which they decided who should receive what kind of services. Such processes empowered farmers who became much more active in local policy- and decision-making.

Service providers likewise require capacity development to become more "professional", especially on so-called "soft skills" (such as communication, gender sensitivity, cultural norms, brokering) and ethics, for example through in-service training and sensitization.



M&E is intrinsically linked to accountability. The participation of local groups and stakeholders in M&E is an important step towards strengthening accountability of the service system towards its users. Farmers and their organizations should be included in the governance structure of rural service delivery so that they can play an active part in the process – in facilitating bottom-up planning, design and implementation, as well as developing indicators and M&E.

*We need to enhance the awareness of local knowledge and farmers' innovation and incorporate these into a participatory M&E process.*

Karim Hussein

In practice, however, M&E is mostly an extractive process, with accountability geared upwards to donors and large parts of the service system operating in “project mode”, i.e. based on short-term efforts, dependent on donor funding and interest and largely disconnected from other ongoing efforts. Breaking the “project mentality” is key to ensuring that ownership lies with local stakeholders. Nevertheless, project funding is still the preferred mode for donor funding, with only few donors willing to provide long-term support to a system where they have little control over results.

### 3.3 Lines of accountability

Lines of accountability are often clearly upwards-oriented: public service agents are accountable to their supervisors; service providers (public, non-governmental organizations [NGOs] or others) to bureaucratic hierarchies and to donors in the case of donor-funded programmes; donors are accountable to their governments and tax payers; and private providers are accountable to their shareholders/owners.

In a functioning market, private providers are also accountable to clients, i.e. those who pay for services. However, paying for services does not necessarily ensure that the client has a strong voice. There is a difference between clients with power (e.g. because they are major clients or because they are able to collectively exert influence) and those without power (i.e. clients who have little say even if they are paying for a service). For example, clients' power may be undermined in places where a monopoly situation exists with little or no choice of service providers. This is often the case in remote rural areas, with regard not only to private providers but also to public ones. Changing service providers may be too costly or not an option at all, especially when farmers are seen as passive recipients of whatever the service provider is willing to offer.

*We really need to think along the lines of social accountability, farmers' voice and power to influence service delivery. Farmers' voice and power are critical to influence and put pressure on service providers, regardless of whether they are public, private, or other.*

May Hani

Improving the accountability of private service providers may be achieved through contracts with governments or donors for concrete service delivery. While this creates accountability to the donor/funder, it does not address the challenge of downward accountability. In this context, regulating service quality (e.g. through accreditation and professional standards), promoting transparency (e.g. through reporting requirements and web-based information on service providers allowing at the same time public feedback by clients on the services provided) and contracting through producer organizations, can be important instruments to encourage increased accountability vis-à-vis the users of services. Helping private companies to identify and develop inclusive business models may also improve the lines of accountability.



### 3.4 Mechanisms and tools to promote accountability

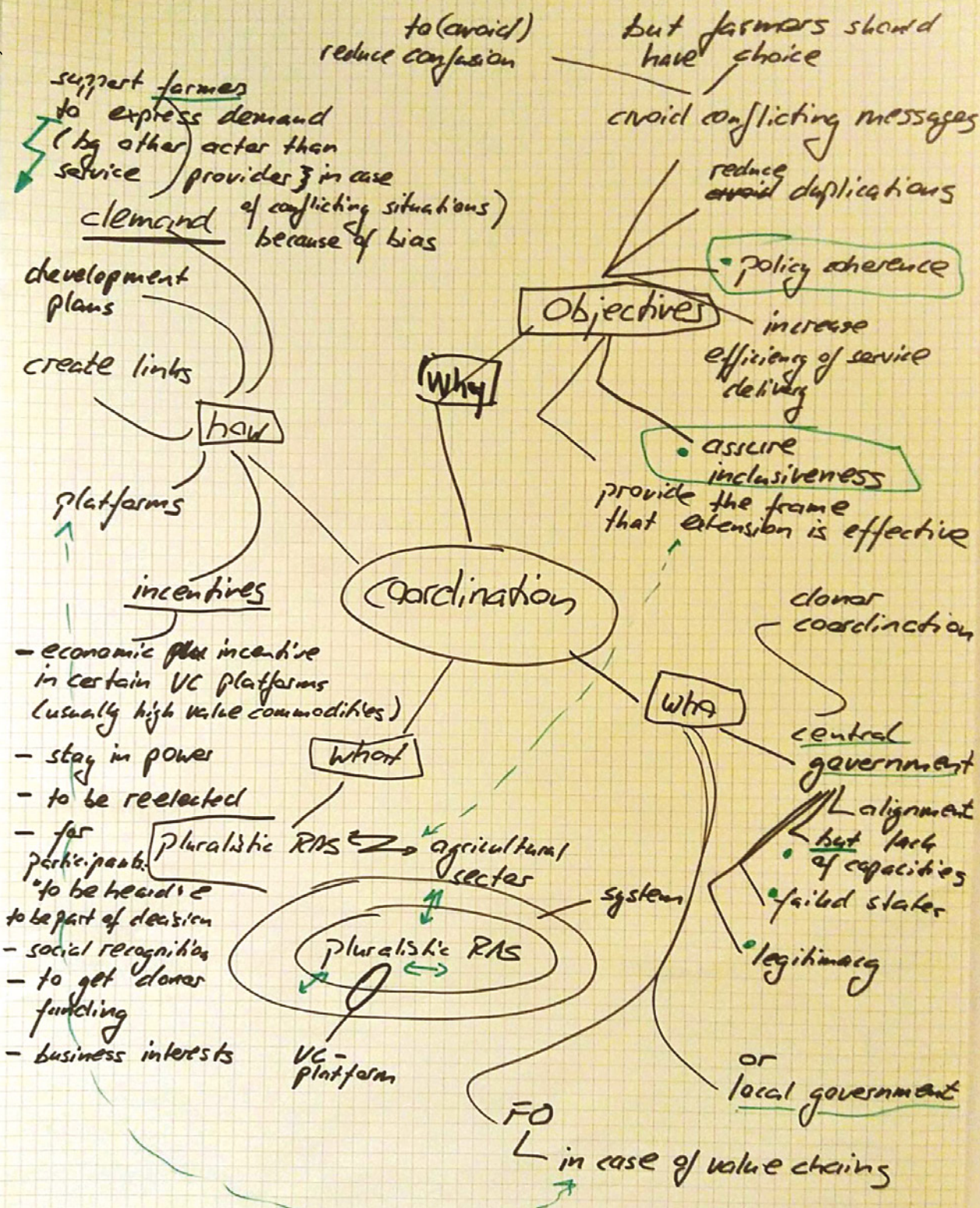
Various practical mechanisms have evolved and are employed in a range of contexts to promote accountability. These include the following:

- Institutionalized stakeholder platforms, such as innovation platforms or value chain partnerships, play a critical role in improved accountability to bring together producer organizations, service providers, value chain actors, research institutes and other relevant stakeholders.
- Community Score Cards (Wongtschowski, Oonk and Mur, 2016) are a good example to promote accountability. The basic idea of the Community Score Cards, pioneered by Care International, is to establish a dialogue between providers and users, starting from the early phases of service provision and culminating in joint M&E. This implies a fundamentally different relationship between advisory service providers and farmers, based on joint activities and transparency, as compared to the “traditional” top-down approach to extension.
- In NRLM (Box 2) para-extensionists are recruited and funded by the public sector, but with explicit accountability requirements to the local village organizations, though money is coming from the public sector.
- Vouchers (including mobile phone payments) are a powerful idea that enable farmers to choose between service providers. However, vouchers in particular have proven to be problematic in practice and require an adequate regulatory framework to prevent their misuse.
- Competitive funds constitute an interesting mechanism for increasing farmers’ voice in service provision. Such funds can be used to distribute available resources according to agreed (demand-driven) priorities and thereby stimulate competition between service providers (including public ones). However, experience indicates that competitive funds are only successful when linked to transparent selection processes and monitoring.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) tools can potentially play an important role in improving accountability, especially SMS-based mobile technology. For instance, farmers are able to rate the value of the advice received by sending a text message to the service provider/donor in real time.

### 3.5 Key policy recommendations on accountability

- Support organizational development and institution building of producer organizations to empower farmers to have a stronger say on the types of services provided to them, including enhancing their capacity to analyse their context, articulate their demands and influence policies and decisions.
- Include farmers and their organizations in the governance structure of rural service delivery so that they can actively take part in the process – in bottom-up planning, design and implementation, as well as development of indicators and M&E.
- Consider that upward accountability can support downward accountability if and when donors, supervisors or other responsible parties require clear evidence of downward accountability vis-à-vis farmers as part of RAS performance management.
- Regulate service quality. Although quality regulation is usually a role for the public sector, it can also be assumed by networks or associations of providers or producer organizations themselves. Promoting transparency of service providers and informing the public of the quality of services and the feedback from users should be an integral part of any quality regulation. Importantly, the legal and institutional framework for regulation should be flexible enough to promote local entrepreneurship in service delivery and to allow changes and quick responses to the market and to producer demands.
- Prioritize investment in capacity development of both farmers and service providers. Capacity development is fundamental to promote professionalism in service delivery, as well as to empower farmers to make informed decisions and to create a sense of co-ownership for them to have a stand and hold service providers accountable.







# 4 Coordination

## KEY MESSAGES

- Data on RAS are scarce. Information on pluralistic systems at the macro level is still patchy at best. How can one coordinate service provision in the absence of key information on the different actors?
- Competition, working in silos, and overlapping areas of coverage are often a reality that constrain coordination. Consequently, a large percentage of farmers (particularly women and small farmers in remote areas) lack access to advisory services.
- Coordination within RAS and with other actors in agricultural innovation systems (AIS) remains important for policy coherence, learning and experience sharing as well as for linking with other complementary services (e.g. access to markets, credit and inputs).
- Different actors may play a coordination role in pluralistic service systems. This includes local governments and public extension officers (for localized coordination and transparency), producer organizations (for getting farmers' voices heard, coordinating farmers' demands and matching these demands with service providers), as well as private actors in various roles along the value chain.
- Coordination requires capacities and resources that are often lacking. Many actors do not have the necessary managerial and organizational capacities or the financial resources to carry out a meaningful coordination function.

## 4.1 Understanding the current state of advisory service systems

*Designing coordination mechanisms starts with good information. You need to have transparency and evidence of what is the actual status of fragmentation – is it real or perceived? What is the cost of fragmentation and what is the relative advantage of investing in coordination?*

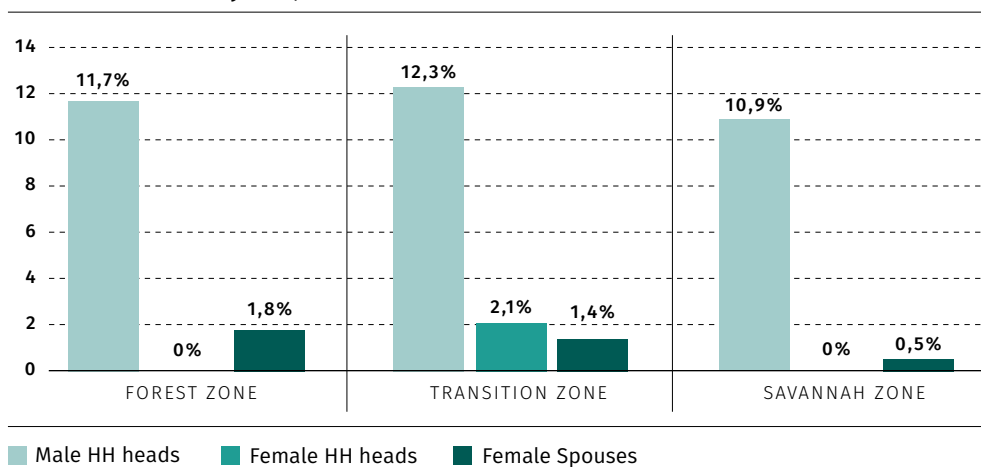
Laurens Klerkx

Surprisingly limited data are available on key indicators of agricultural advisory services, including on percentage of farmers who have access to different types of advisory services (disaggregated by gender and type of farmers), and investment in RAS (by the public/private sector, NGOs, donors). Moreover, those data that do exist are limited to public sector services with limited information on non-state (or other) service providers (type, resources, area of intervention and capacities). Information remains scarce and fragmented, despite various initiatives, including: the Global Forum on Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS); the Worldwide Extension Study by IFPRI-FAO-IICA; the Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services (MEAS) initiative; and the Living Standards Measurement Study – Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS–ISA), a project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and carried out by the World Bank’s Development Research Group.

The available data (Figures 1 and 2) show that access to advisory services generally remains limited. There is some evidence of exclusion, as farmers with higher income and/or larger farm size have significantly better access than poorer/smaller farmers. Figure 1 also illustrates the gender gap in service provision, with services usually directed at male farmers.

Given the absence of comprehensive data, it is increasingly difficult to measure the full extent of modern extension, which is becoming more and more decentralized, covers an ever broader range of areas and is often delivered by the private sector and NGOs (FAO, 2014, p. 62).

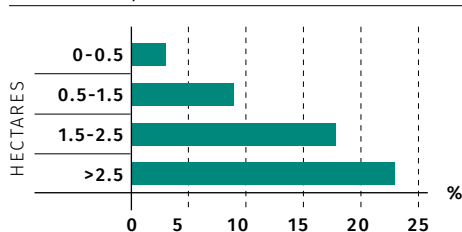
**FIGURE 1. Ghana: Access to agricultural extension during 2007, in percentage of respondents. ISSER-IFPRI Survey 2008, in six districts.**



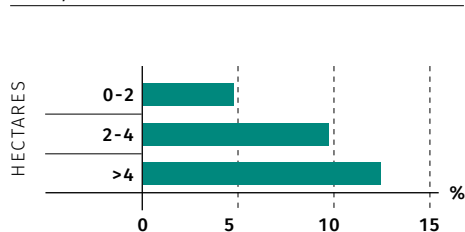
Source: Birner, 2016 (citing World Bank and IFPRI, 2010).

**FIGURE 2. Shares of farms accessing information through agricultural extension, by farm size**

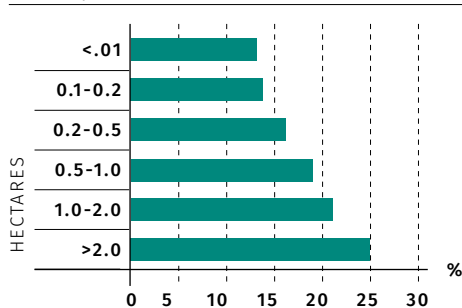
**BANGLADESH, 2011-12**



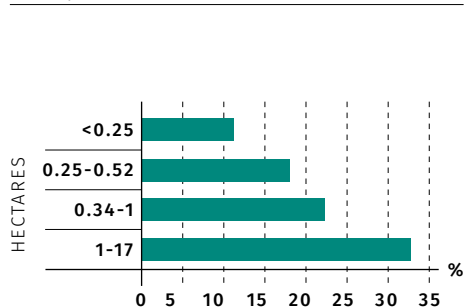
**INDIA, 2005-06**



**MALAWI, 2006-07**



**NEPAL, 2003**



Source: FAO, 2014.



This raises the question: How do you coordinate in the absence of sufficient information? At local level, institutions often interact through existing community and personal links. It is at the higher level, when it comes to policy- and decision-making, that coordination becomes a real issue.

Coordination is critical in PSS for enhancing several aspects of service delivery:

- *Effectiveness*: coordination increases the chances of satisfying the needs of different types of farmers (outreach), and enables learning between providers, thus improving the quality of services.
- *Complementarity*: coordination allows advice to be linked to complementary services such as access to markets, financial services and inputs, and helps avoid conflicting messages and duplication of efforts in areas with a higher concentration of providers.
- *Relevance*: coordination enables relevant service provision based on filling gaps in service demand and supply. Matching farmers' demands that other providers are unable or unwilling to meet can represent an important business opportunity for private sector providers.
- *Scaling*: coordination serves to achieve policy coherence and goal alignment based on good practices and an environment conducive to collective action.
- *Collaboration*: coordination is not only necessary between RAS providers, but also with other actors in the agricultural innovation system, such as input suppliers, producer organizations, market actors, local governments and researchers.

## 4.2 Levels of coordination

Coordination is needed by various actors at all levels. At the innovation system level, coordination refers to the need for better communication, joint work and learning between farmers and their organizations, RAS providers, researchers, input suppliers and (local) government.

Coordination is context-specific. Where government structures, decision-making and advisory services are decentralized, coordination mechanisms may be more successful at district/local level. This is, for example, the case in Zambia, where district administrators play an important role in bringing together all the organizations working on agriculture.



At national level, coordination aims at consultation on policy and action priorities, learning between providers and other actors, and evaluation of existing programmes and practices. Different coordination functions may be better performed by different actors depending on the context. For example, public extension services coordinate with government agencies, while producer organizations coordinate with their members to ensure that farmers' interests are properly taken into account and addressed. See, for example, the case of the National Networks of Farmers' Groups in Tanzania (MVIWATA, Box 4). However, it is not always clear to what extent producer organizations are truly "representative" of the farming community in terms of the number of male/female farmers and rich/poor farmers, or how well they relay the voice of their members.

**BOX 4****MTANDAO WA VIKUNDI VYA WAKULIMA TANZANIA (MVIWATA) –  
NATIONAL NETWORKS OF FARMERS' GROUPS IN TANZANIA**

MVIWATA is the Tanzanian national farmers' organization. It was founded in 1993 and has a membership of more than 150 000 small-scale farmers. The organization focuses on lobbying and advocacy by strengthening farmers' groups and networks, representing its members in policy dialogues, and facilitating communication and learning.

Members are entitled to training opportunities on leadership, advocacy, communication and cross-cutting themes, such as climate change or sustainable agriculture. Interested farmers can apply, and around 100 farmers per year are selected and trained in the residential training centres of MVIWATA.

The organization also offers various services and resources to its members, including technical advisory services on business skills, market access, internal audit of rural enterprises and crop banking.

MVIWATA plays an important role in land governance, which is characterized in the United Republic of Tanzania by a high degree of institutional fragility, resulting in limited farmer participation in decision-making processes and insecure landholding. In order to face these challenges, the organization provides village-based training on land rights, organizes legal clinics in villages and facilitates the provision of customary certificates of rights of occupancy, including demarcation of village and individual lands.

MVIWATA issues evaluation forms to farmers so that they can comment on the services. The feedback suggests that after 23 years of operation, farmers are more confident about addressing their problems. Nevertheless, major challenges remain, including low accountability of services, insufficient farmer participation in priority setting and limited transparency.

*Source: Stephen Ruvuga, personal communication.*

Where services are organized around value chains (e.g. tobacco, coffee and cocoa), both vertical coordination and horizontal coordination are needed among value chain actors, producer organizations, their members and other farmers and producer groups. Where, on the other hand, services address features such as irrigation, including water quality and quantity, coordination needs to be organized around “landscapes”, adopting territorial approaches rather than conventional political boundaries.

Rural advisory service platforms (e.g. AFAAS country fora) and innovation platforms are two mechanisms for bringing together interdependent stakeholders to jointly discuss problems and opportunities and to plan (joint) action; they are potentially powerful coordination mechanisms. However, the mere attendance of stakeholders at meetings is not enough: quality (content) discussions, informed decision-making and joint action are all key to the process, in addition to ownership and engagement. Often, innovation platforms are initiated (and owned) by (donor) projects, becoming inactive when these projects terminate.

#### BOX 5

##### FARMER-TO-FARMER APPROACH IN GUATEMALA

In Guatemala, the National Rural Extension System (SNER), funded by the Government of Guatemala, is part of the National Policy for Integrated Rural Development (PNDRI). SNER applies a farmer-to-farmer approach and targets all poor rural families who make their living from agriculture. The approach is based on groups of families, not on individuals, and utilizes so-called Centres of Learning for Rural Development (CADERs) for the exchange of knowledge and learning within communities. In each community, a “promoter” is elected (on a voluntary basis). The promoter is responsible for capturing the service demands of all families in a group plan, which feeds into a community plan, which in turn feeds into an extension municipality plan. The extension municipality plan eventually feeds into a development municipality plan. SNER operates throughout the country and includes 340 extension agencies with 1 039 extension agents. By working with around 15 000 organized rural groups, SNER has to date reached 49 percent of the target population and 35 percent of all rural communities. The focus of SNER is on improving traditional agricultural production, diversifying production and marketing, and improving preventive health and nutrition. For example, in 2015, soil conservation practices were carried out on almost 52 000 ha.

However, SNER also faces a number of challenges, including interference of political actors, budget constraints, prevalence of top-down approaches inside and outside the Ministry of Agriculture, limited extension experience (Guatemala was without extension services for almost 20 years) and limited integration of extension services into the institutional structure of the Ministry of Agriculture. Finally, a modern M&E system is required to measure impacts.

*Source: Sergio Ruano, personal communication.*



### 4.3 Who can contribute to coordination?

Governments play a key role in coordination at different levels. The approach adopted in Guatemala (Box 5) shows how public extension advisers can facilitate planning and discussions at local level. At the same time, experience in many countries indicates that governments' capacities for and interest in coordination is limited in practice. Public agencies often seem prone to pursuing their own activities in service provision rather than following considerations of efficacy and complementarity. This highlights the importance of understanding coordination not as a single role, but rather as multiple roles played by multiple actors – attributing responsibilities to governments, producer organizations and other interested parties able to broker between the different entities.

*Coordination needs to be driven by demand – coming from both farmers and the government to ensure that service provision contributes to the objectives of national policy and farmers' needs.*

*Dannie Romney*

Recent case studies have highlighted the key role of producer organizations in coordination (Mangnus and Oonk, forthcoming). The authors documented, among others, the case of the Potato Producers Consortium (CONPAPA) in Ecuador, which channels the services of different providers to their members. Another example is the Inter-professional Funds for Agricultural Research and Extension (FIRCA) in Côte d'Ivoire, which operates using contributions paid by producers and agribusiness to finance programmes related to the plant production, forestry and livestock sectors.

Donors can also assume an important function in coordination by ensuring alignment and complementarity of their projects/programmes to existing efforts in a particular country or region. Project/programme design and funding are influential factors in determining who will play a key role in service provision and who has funding available for coordination. All too often, such funding is provided to government services or NGOs, but less frequently to empower producer organizations to engage in coordination.

Successful coordination does not occur spontaneously. It must be catalysed and facilitated; moreover, it requires skills that are not always available. It is vital

to develop the appropriate capacities and skills for interaction with different organizations. For example, increasing the outreach of services can only be achieved when stakeholders agree on objectives and good practices for upscaling. Credible individuals or organizations, recognized for their expertise and neutrality, can broker relations between different actors. They bring actors together when needed, identify common interests or mediate conflicts, match demand and supply for services, and facilitate the flow of information within a system.

*Networking is a priority for connecting people and sharing information. It is a fundamental precondition for coordination and partnership building.*

*Alessandro Meschinelli*

## 4.4 Key policy recommendations on coordination

- Identify and map service demand and RAS providers. Generate Knowledge and collect and analyse data and information on the current state of RAS with regard to service providers, reach, approaches, inclusiveness etc.
- Involve multiple actors. Coordination should not be considered as a task exclusively for the public sector. Different actors may play a coordination role in pluralistic service systems, including local governments and public extension officers, private entrepreneurs as well as producer organizations.
- Engage producer organizations, especially to coordinate access to services among their members and negotiate service delivery with providers. This represents an opportunity to empower producers and their organizations. A number of documented case studies offer insights into what form coordination by producer organizations may take and what type of support and capacity development they would require to take up this role.
- Ensure that donor-funded programmes incorporate appropriate coordination mechanisms/arrangements, and that the capacities of different actors to undertake coordination functions are developed.
- Catalyse and facilitate the appropriate institutional arrangements for inclusive governance and coordination of pluralistic demand-led service systems, with respective investments by governments and donors.





# 5 Financial sustainability

## KEY MESSAGES

- There are a variety of funding and financing mechanisms for RAS through the public sector, donors, NGOs, the private sector and producer organizations. In order to ensure quality, close ownership by farmers is key. Ownership is often linked to the flow of funds.
- New financing mechanisms for demand-led services that will empower farmers are those that enable farmers to pay for the services they want/demand, make RAS providers responsive and accountable to farmers and give greater responsibility to farmer/producer organizations for RAS.
- Demand orientation requires empowerment of farmers and a functional market of qualified RAS providers. The former can be developed through demand-side financing for demand formulation/negotiation, increased purchasing power of farmers and their organizations, and improved access to markets to raise farmers' income. Creating a functional market of qualified RAS requires the promotion of multiple service providers in healthy competition as well as transparency on service provision and its quality.

## 5.1 Need for alternative financing mechanisms

*It is extremely difficult to find valuable examples of innovative demand-led financing mechanisms from which we can learn. There was a short period after the T&V<sup>1</sup> model during which some experimentation took place, but then attention and funding shifted to Innovation Systems, without continuing the discussion on how rural services should be financed.*

*Magdalena Blum*

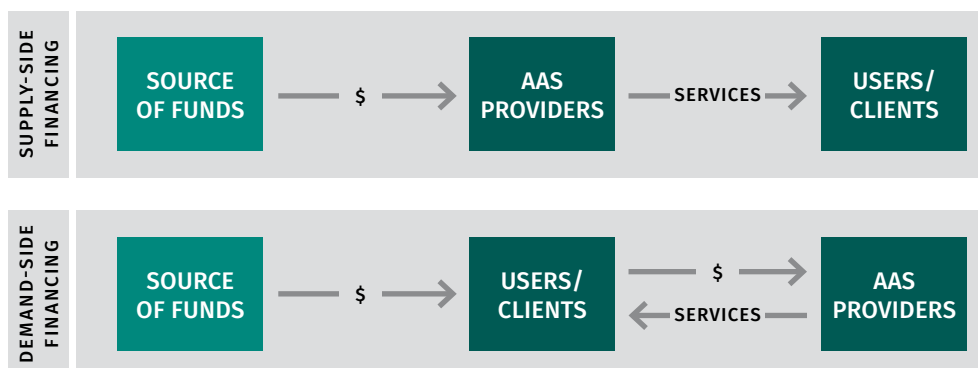
Section 3 of this report discussed the need for more demand-driven and farmer-accountable services, concluding that accountability was largely related to financial flows. As such, financing mechanisms are important tools for empowerment of farmers. New financing mechanisms that will empower farmers are those that: enable them to pay for the services they want/demand; make the RAS providers accountable to the farmers; and give greater responsibility to farmer/producer organizations for RAS, ranging from articulation of demand for services to evaluation of RAS.

The main principles for new financing mechanisms are that RAS providers are accountable to users regarding content and quality, and that users have a choice of service providers. Chipeta and Blum (forthcoming) referred to two main fund flows: supply-driven, in which financial contributions are given to the provider by a third party, and demand-driven, in which funds are (at least partly) in the hands of those who will receive the services, i.e. farmers or their organizations (Figure 3).

Demand-side financing mechanisms stimulate financial participation by users through either direct or indirect payment for services. Direct payments are those that include farmers' own resources or third-party resources (e.g. donors or public funds) channelled through farmers. Indirect payments are based on levies and taxes paid by farmers that are redirected to service provision. In these latter cases, farmers and producer organizations do not pay directly for the services, but their resources are indirectly invested in service delivery. However, those farmers who pay the levies and taxes cannot necessarily influence how the levies and taxes are invested and who will benefit from the services.

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<sup>1</sup> Training and visit extension approach.

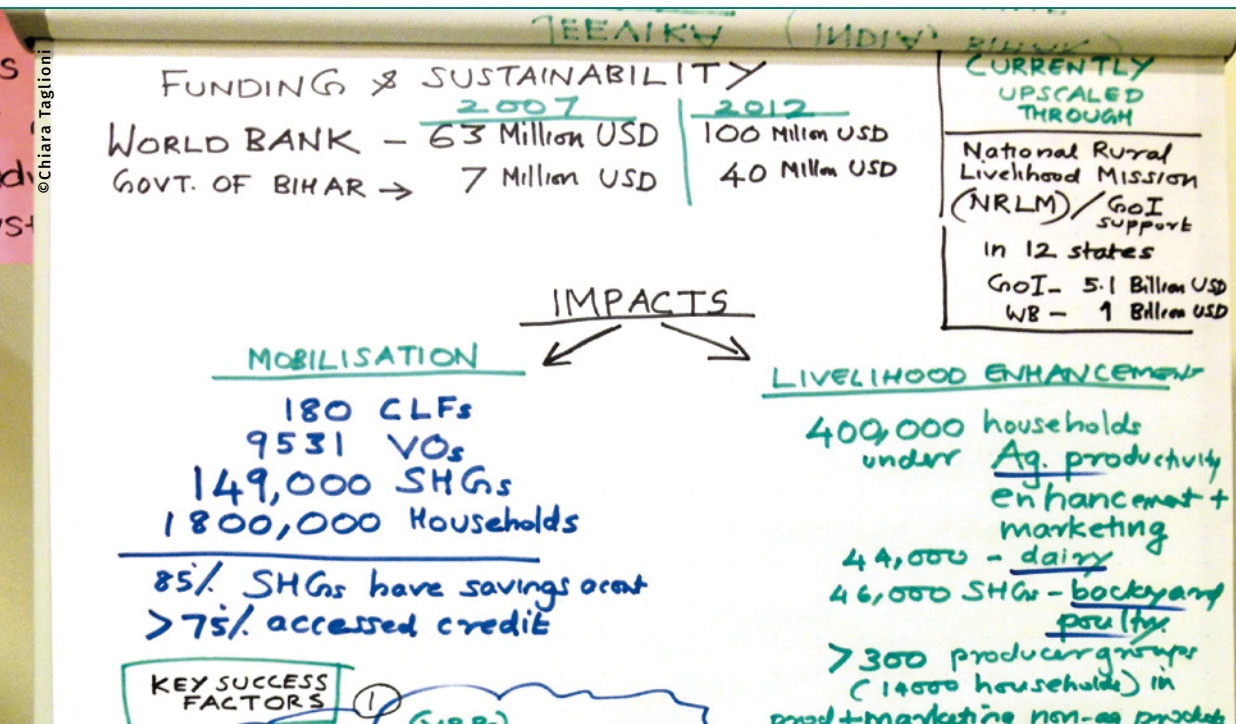
**FIGURE 3. Financing flow of funds**

Source: Chipeta and Blum (forthcoming).

Producer organizations can potentially play important roles, as suggested by the cases documented by Mangnus and Oonk (forthcoming) and Chipeta and Blum (forthcoming). In addition to their coordination role (explored in section 4 of this report), producer organizations can and should provide services to their members, either by contracting external services or by directly providing services to farmers, e.g. through lead farmers or hired advisers. In both cases, they are accountable for quality control and timely delivery of services. This requires management capacity to handle the services and funds as well as to put in place an M&E system.

To maintain quality, providers require continuous access to or training on technical information, methodologies and approaches, as well as significant linkages with research. Any financing model therefore requires a (built-in) system of continuous capacity development of service providers (supply side) and of producers and their organizations (demand side). Such a system could entail paying for experts to enhance the technical capacities of the advisory service providers on a regular basis; alternatively, it could be more institutionalized, using public or private capacity development organizations/institutions.





## 5.2 Lessons on sustainable financing

Chipeta and Blum (forthcoming) have documented four cases of pluralistic, demand-side financing: the Danish Agricultural Advisory Service (DAAS); the Agricultural Services and Producer Organizations Support Programme (PSAOP) in Senegal; the programme of the Institute for Agricultural Development (INDAP) in Chile; and the Nariño Dairy Products Cooperative (COLACTEOS) in Colombia. Highlights of the cases are shown in Table 1.

The main lessons learned from the cases include:

- Institutional set-ups and organizational capacities of the demand side are key and can be strengthened through reforms.
- Demand orientation requires a functional market of qualified RAS providers. This can be developed through demand-side financing for: demand formulation and negotiation; increased purchasing power of farmers and producer organizations; increased access to markets to raise farmers' income; and/or access to multiple service providers with quality services, operating in healthy competition.

TABLE 1. Snapshot of financing RAS in four countries

CASE STUDIES	DENMARK	SENEGAL	CHILE	COLOMBIA
	Danish Agricultural Advisory Service (DAAS)	Agricultural Services and Producer Organizations Support Programme (PSAOP)	Institute for Agricultural Development (INDAP)	Nariño Dairy Products Cooperative (COLACTEOS)
MAIN CHARACTERISTICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Historical development since 1870s.</li> <li>&gt; Advisory system and services provided by POs.</li> <li>&gt; Public grants to POs to subsidize salaries of advisers employed.</li> <li>&gt; Combined with farmer/user payments.</li> <li>&gt; Advisory Service Centres (from 1970s) created by POs, owned and governed by them.</li> <li>&gt; National Centre created (in 1981) to provide backup services.</li> <li>&gt; Gradually developed to full user payment.</li> <li>&gt; Backup services and applied research financed through production levies and tax refunds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Reforms towards decentralized demand-led services.</li> <li>&gt; Public funding provided to ANCAR, the main service provider.</li> <li>&gt; Shares into ANCAR by POs.</li> <li>&gt; Structures, procedures and finances for farmers' demand and their negotiation of services.</li> <li>&gt; Public funding to ASPRODEB, PO-owned NGO) financing demand process of POs at community level as well as projects proposed and carried out by POs.</li> <li>&gt; Services based on contractual arrangements with ANCAR, or other RAS providers where ANCAR cannot provide the services requested by farmers or POs, but does provide funding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Several reforms since 1978 of public extension services, including important changes based on shifting government policies.</li> <li>&gt; Public RAS coordinated by the national institute INDAP, which outsources advisory services through calls for tenders.</li> <li>&gt; Multitude of decentralized public and private service providers, including POs, emerged through this tendering approach. Grants managed by INDAP.</li> <li>&gt; Public grants mechanism combined with users' financial contribution (10–20%) to the service provider.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; PO-based RAS.</li> <li>&gt; Team of technical advisers employed by COLACTEOS.</li> <li>&gt; Technical services provided to all cooperative members to ensure milk quality.</li> <li>&gt; Technical services fully financed through benefits from processing and marketing activities of the cooperative.</li> <li>&gt; Additional services contracted from external providers and organized by the cooperative on request of members, who bear the costs.</li> </ul>

Source: Chipeta and Blum (forthcoming).





### 5.3 Financial and institutional sustainability

The most important challenges highlighted during the discussions are the need to achieve long-term political commitment for supportive policy and finance, and at the same time independence from government interference. How to facilitate the transition from funding advisory services to promoting financing mechanisms that ensure inclusiveness, demand drive and sustainability of service provision? How to increase the purchase power of farmers and producer organizations, and enhance their influence in policy- and decision-making on RAS?

Experience shows that one way of reducing the costs of service delivery for producers is to support POs and private service providers in the early stages of operation. The CABI Direct2Farm (D2F, CAB International) project illustrates an example of the mechanisms involved and shows how services can be made accessible to a larger group of farmers (Box 6).

**BOX 6****MOBILE AGRI-ADVISORY SERVICES**

CABI developed the Direct2Farm (D2F) database to support mobile agri-advisory services aimed at making high quality information readily accessible to farmers. D2F allows technical content to be repurposed and stored in small packages of information, which are then broadcast in the local language directly to farmers (sent to a comparatively localized audience) via SMS, voice messaging and a cloud-based helpline.

D2F work started in **India** in 2009 and the D2F service backstopped two mobile value-added services: mKisan (available on multiple telco platforms) and IKSL, on the Airtel India platform. The IKSL service operated in conjunction with Bharti Airtel; subscribers received free advice messages when signing up for the “green SIM” and were also able to call a charged helpline. In 2014, the service had around 2 million active users. The mKisan service was charged to farmers on a monthly or 10-day basis and in 2014 it had around 350 000 active users.

In **Africa**, CABI D2F backstopped an Airtel Kilimo service in 2014 that reached 22 000 farmers in Kenya.

In **Pakistan**, CABI backstopped E-ZARAAT, an ICT-based extension service reaching 50 000 farmers.

CABI D2F now operates in India as a service fully owned by CABI and subscribed to by over 400 000 farmers. The service is currently free, but it is planned to convert it into a “freemium” model, i.e. farmers initially receive the service free of charge before introducing a charging model and integrating with agribusiness networks. This new service uses a network of field agents on the ground to act as an extended customer relations and acquisition team.

*Source: Dannie Romey, personal communication.*

For farmers unable to pay for services, ownership can still be strengthened by ensuring that they have a say in who is contracted to provide what services. This can be done by contracting advisory services, channelling funds through producer organizations or stimulating co-funding of services. Embedded services are another option to enable farmers to pay for services, i.e. by linking services to tangible economic benefits, for example, marketing of produce or value addition.

## 5.4 Key policy recommendations on financial sustainability

- Consider various options for sustainable financing mechanisms for RAS, through and/or by the private sector, producer organizations, governments and donors or individual farmers. To ensure relevance and quality, close ownership by farmers is key, and this in turn is often linked to flow of funds, empowerment and participation.
- Strengthen ownership of service delivery by ensuring that farmers determine who is contracted to provide what services. This can be done by channelling funds through producer organizations, stimulating co-funding of services and making producer organizations part of decision-making processes on service provision.
- Adopt group approaches, farmer-to-farmer approaches and use of ICTs in service provision as effective ways for making services affordable and accessible to smallholders.
- Support smallholder farmers to access services through their producer organizations. Such organizations composed of smallholders could be subsidized in order to be able to contract service providers for the services needed by their members, while cooperatives could use their income to pay for key services for members.
- Promote experimentation on new demand-led financing mechanisms, and secure flexible donor and government support. Learning from these experiments and new mechanisms is essential for the long-term development of RAS and for the empowerment of farmers in RAS and the innovation system.



# 6 From pilots to scale

## KEY MESSAGES

- There is a critical need to move from project to systemic interventions. It is time to abandon piecemeal approaches and to focus on long-term institution building and performance of the entire pluralistic RAS system. This requires a broader view of RAS, incorporating mechanisms for systematic demand articulation and aggregation; mapping of demand and supply; capacity development of providers, farmers and POs; and promotion of enabling policies.
- Scale is not reached from one day to the next. Scale is a long term process that require readiness and commitment for joint action, as well as flexible financing and adaptive capacity. Notably, conditions and contexts change at scale. What worked well in the pilot location may not work in other locations or within different institutional settings, even within the same country.
- Private sector providers, including those offering embedded services, are critical for increasing outreach and delivering the range of complementary services needed and demanded by farmers.
- Donor and government support is necessary to develop the capacity of service providers, foster and institutionalize effective demand mechanisms, and provide an enabling environment to induce a wide range of service providers, while ensuring that investments in RAS are inclusive, non-exploitative and ecologically sustainable.

## 6.1 Areas for intervention

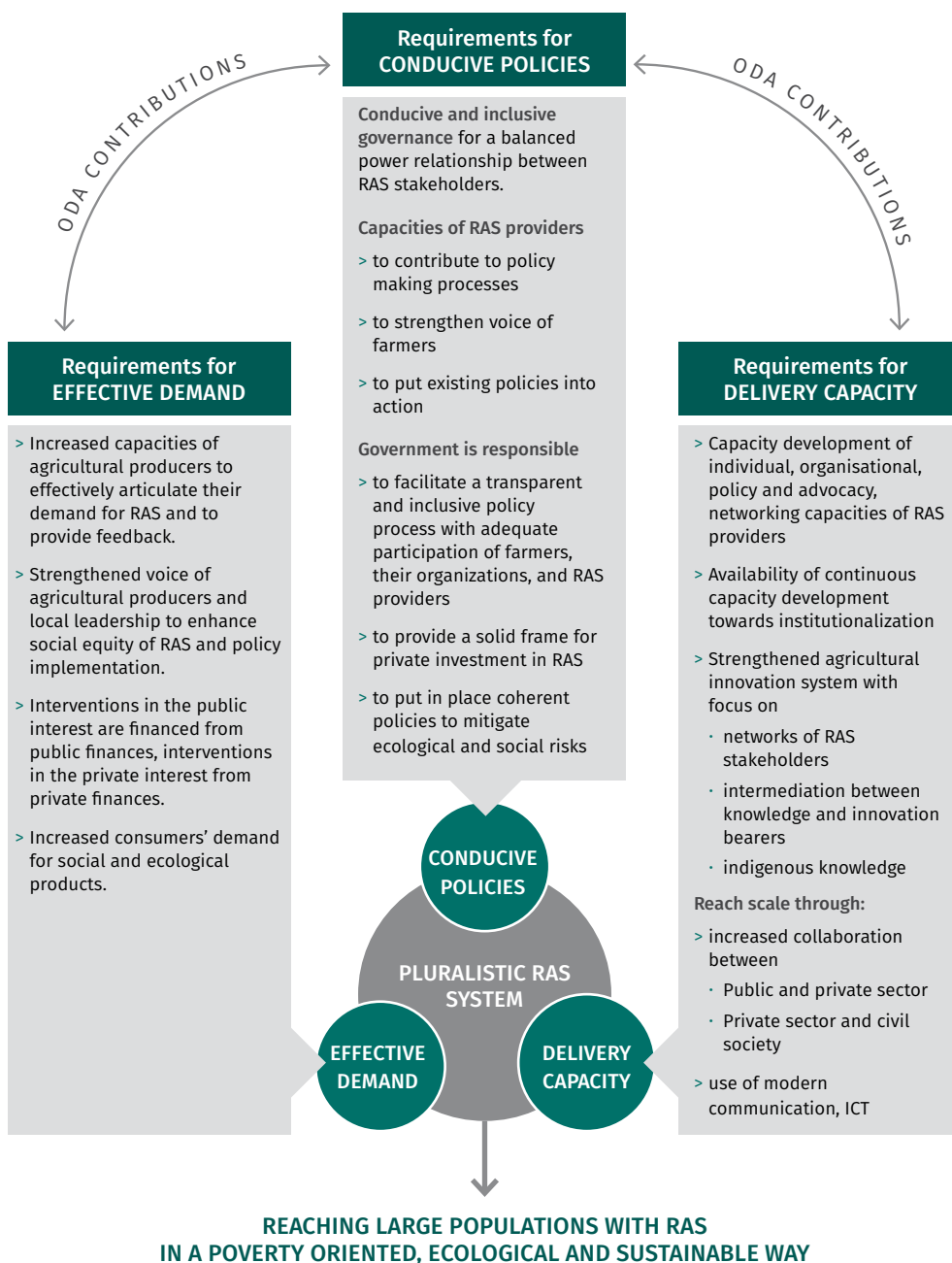
There are a vast array of interesting initiatives on RAS, each successful in its own small area of intervention. The challenge is how to move from “islands of success” and small accomplishments to large-scale, inclusive RAS systems with a wider impact?

Recent experiences of the HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation (Helvetas) provide interesting insights in this regard. Between 2014 and 2015, Helvetas was involved in a one-year learning process with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) to answer the question of “how to reach large numbers of agricultural producers with rural advisory services”. Helvetas reviewed SDC-financed RAS projects in Viet Nam, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Bangladesh, Nepal and Kyrgyzstan, in addition to the RAS experiences of India and China (Kaegi and Schmidt, 2016). The conclusions were reflected in the resulting “Hanoi Statement” (Figure 4). The projects studied shared certain characteristics: they were all successfully integrated into existing structures (government or otherwise); and they established a dialogue with policy-makers from the start to facilitate institutionalization. The main conclusion is that in order to reach large populations (i.e. scaling in terms of outreach), initiatives must address three main points:

- 1. Demand articulation: supporting effective demand articulation to enable farmers and their organizations to engage in policy dialogue.**
- 2. Delivery capacity: establishing networks to link different actors and promote knowledge exchange with the objective of aligning programmes and objectives; strengthening formal and informal training and education of service providers.**
- 3. Conducive policy: increasing transparency and improving governance of RAS, putting in place policies that (i) do not arbitrarily crowd out certain providers, and (ii) mitigate or prevent ecological and social risks.**

Scale is not reached from one day to the next. Scaling is a long-term process and can only occur if other conditions are in place: flexible financing; readiness of implementing agencies (public, NGOs, private, POs etc.) to commit to joint action; adaptive capacity – especially of governments and donors – in terms of adjusting to changing circumstances and lessons learned; and establishment of a demand-led M&E system. Unfortunately, it appears that not many donors are ready to commit to such a process.

FIGURE 4. The Hanoi Statement on Rural Advisory Services



Source: Kaegi and Schmidt, 2016.





## 6.2 From pilots to scale – really?

*You may have excellent rules that work at small scale because people are committed but you cannot expect the same level of commitment at bigger scale. You need rules that allow you to replicate without losing the good characteristics you have discovered.*

*David Nielson*

Traditionally, interventions are divided into pilot and scaling phases. The pilot phase is a period of learning when a project operates in a more or less controlled, small environment. Lessons learned from this stage can then inform scaling strategies to understand how to organize interventions in order to reach more farmers in a larger area. Learning and gathering evidence of what works and what does not, under

what circumstances, remains key. However, the experts gathered in Rome pointed out that there are fundamental flaws in thinking that what works at pilot phase will also work at scale. For example:

- Pilots focus on quality on a small scale. There is great incentive to achieve rapid results and a good performance within the project time frame. This can result in lack of attention to scaling mechanisms during the project design phase.
- Pilots operate in a controlled environment where attention to certain details is possible and affordable. The same level of attention is not feasible when increasing the scale of operation.
- Conditions and contexts change at scale. What worked well in the pilot location may not work in other locations, or within different institutional settings, even within the same country. Approaches also become standardized and, often implicitly, bureaucratized. They tend to lose flexibility and quality control becomes a challenge.
- As scale levels change, local actors who once may have owned a particular initiative become “disempowered”, i.e. relationships between actors weaken and they lose the level of control they once had, including access to funds. This is especially true for farmers/POs, whose participation in and ownership of processes are more difficult (or diluted) at a large scale.
- Some approaches are easier to scale than others. For example, radio programmes are relatively easy to bring to scale, broadcasting them in other regions, while farmer field schools require considerable financial and technical support if they are to reach a substantial number of farmers.
- Finally, it is important to note the difference between “scaling out” specific initiatives and “scaling up” (i.e. changing the way that organizations operate). For the latter, it is necessary to embed initiatives in the existing service system, including governmental operational frameworks, in order to trigger change from within.

*One of the major challenges of scaling lies in the lack of evidence to show whether a model works at a pilot stage, what conditions have enabled this model to work and to what extent the same model is able to work at large scale.*

*Stephen Ruvuga*

How, then, can these challenges be tackled? First, by considering the system level, its institutional settings and actors when contemplating scaling, and by analysing driving forces such as policy, effective demand and delivery capacity of the various providers: Who are the players, what are the gaps in service provision and what are the needs? What kinds of services can respond to the needs and demands, and how can they complement what is already in place? Thinking only of scaling without understanding the context is often counterproductive.

Second, by creating linkages from the start between existing service providers from public entities, private actors, NGOs and producer organizations – linkages in terms not only of obtaining buy-in of service providers and including them in initiatives, but of actively lobbying for policy changes required to create a functioning service system.

*Scaling is linked to M&E because scaling requires change and adaptation. At every level of scale, things need to be re-evaluated, assessed and changed.*

Wafa El Khoury

Third, by identifying and collecting data needed to ensure political support and, at the same time, internal learning. For the former, going beyond “adoption rates” is necessary to understand what works where, under what conditions, and how farmers adapt new ideas to their own realities. For the internal learning, there is a need for systematic capitalization on experiences from projects and pilots. For example, donor organizations must ensure that the lessons learned from one project are taken into consideration when designing or implementing another.

Fourth, by taking care to understand farmers’ realities, priorities, concerns and own ideas – as entry points for service delivery (see, for example, the case of PPILDA in Niger in Box 7). Scaling will not succeed if services ignore farmer realities or if farmers do not benefit from advisory services. Thus, farmers’ buy-in is critical. At scale, this requires a much more systematic approach to demand identification and aggregation, farmer participation and empowerment as well as their involvement in evaluating services and in decision-making on how to improve the system and its services.

## 6.3 Political economy

When talking about getting initiatives that reach millions on the ground, long-term political support is fundamental. For example, in Guatemala (Box 5), political support to hire three public sector advisers in each administrative unit of the country was critical in order to roll out the SNER programme countrywide. Public advisory services had almost disappeared in Guatemala until a minimum budget within the Ministry of Agriculture was mobilized to implement the SNER programme. Despite the support, hiring of qualified extensionists remains a challenge.

Moreover, there tends to be a lack of data to back up well-intended professionals and politicians. Section 4, “Coordination”, highlights the lack of evidence in various areas: the actual budget spent on services by public sector agencies, private sector companies, producer organizations and NGOs; the coverage of these services and whether or not they reach poorer farmers, minorities, youth and women; and the quality and effectiveness of the services. More and better systematic data collection on RAS and documentation of initiatives are required (to which all service providers and POs are required to contribute ), if politicians are to be fed with credible and solid data and evidence.

At the same time, political and electoral cycles largely determine the initiatives and programmes supported by politicians. For example, if concrete (and visible) cases of success can give visibility and credit, this may enhance local politicians’ motivation to become engaged and to support advisory services. Election and re-election are important incentives for politicians, which also offer an opportunity for lobbying by producer organizations, if they are supported in fulfilling this function.

*Policies are developed out of politics, out of a broader collection of solid evidence. There are a number of drivers of change and we have to anchor our recommendations in the different drivers of political changes we want to get involved in.*

*Ian Christoplos*

## 6.4 The role of partnerships and alliances

Increased collaboration between the private and public sector, producer organizations and civil society is key to scaling. In particular, the private sector is becoming an increasingly important and diverse player, ranging from private advisory companies to input suppliers, operators of contract farming schemes and large-scale agricultural investors. The private sector today holds an important place in advisory service systems (e.g. in India and China) – as identified in the Helvetas-SDC learning journey (Kaegi and Schmidt, 2016).

*Private sector is part of PSS; there is no other way than to engage with them. The goal of the international community is to ensure that the private sector's engagement is as inclusive and ecologically sound as possible.*

Peter Schmidt

An emerging new role for governments is, therefore, to oversee the identification of good practices and lessons learned as well as gaps for policy-making, quality control and accreditation of service providers (see section 3, “Accountability”). However, these are new roles for the public sector RAS, and officials do not usually have sufficient management capacities and budget to undertake such roles – including interacting, negotiating and dealing with private service providers – let alone to effectively control the quality of the services they provide. In addition, fundamental conditions, such as the rule of law and good governance, need to be in place to allow government to play its role.

Working with the private sector to promote inclusive and ecologically sustainable services cannot be done by governments alone. Quality control is linked to M&E, which requires the efforts of all RAS actors, especially producer organizations. Farmers and POs are the central actors in inclusive service systems and all the other actors need to orient their actions according to their needs. This demands participation and representation in policy- and decision-making bodies. Yet, in many cases, farmers are represented in a pseudo manner instead of being in a position to influence decision-making according to their needs and demands.





## BOX 7

**FARMER-BASED AND FARMER-RUN ADVISORY SERVICES IN NIGER**

Farmer-based and farmer-run advisory services stem from one of the main components of the Project for the Promotion of Local Initiative for Development in Aguié (PPILDA) set out by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in 2005 in Niger. The approach used by PPILDA is characterized by the involvement of the local population in the whole process in identifying, validating, promoting and disseminating (local) innovations.

PPILDA aims to train high-performing farmers selected from the *Champ de Diversité* (working platforms of peer-to-peer exchange on seeds) and the *Parcelles d'Initiative Paysanne* (research parcels to scale local best practices and technologies deriving from agricultural research). Farmer-advisers support at least ten farmers in at least one technology, who in turn will inform at least 50 other farmers, creating a snowball effect of up to 15 000 contacts. Inclusiveness of this approach is supported through the careful selection of farmers and by targeting vulnerable categories of farmers. Downward accountability in PPILDA is ensured through self-evaluation by local committees, in conjunction with project M&E coordinated by local authorities and project staff. Project costs are shared between donors and clients (who contribute in kind).

Although the project has been very successful in terms of scaling up, demonstrating the impact chain of the new approach in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and strong linkages between research, extension and education, remains a major challenge.

Source: Alessandro Meschinelli, personal communication.

## 6.5 Key policy recommendations on scaling<sup>2</sup>

- Identify pathways and mechanisms for scaling, incorporating them at an early stage of programme/project design and planning.
- Generate evidence and learning on what type of service provision, approaches and scaling mechanisms work best, where, and for whom.
- Address the demand and supply side of RAS simultaneously, in terms of both financing and capacity development, in order to reach scale.
- Ensure long-term and flexible financing from multiple sources, geared towards empowerment of farmers and their organizations, to promote relevant and inclusive services at increased scale.
- Maintain continuous capacity development of RAS providers, for example, through better quality professional education and in-service training.
- Leverage partnerships and alliances for joint action in scaling initiatives to achieve inclusive and sustainable impact.

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<sup>2</sup> Kaegi and Schmidt, 2016 (adapted).



# 7 Knowledge gaps

Throughout the consultation, participants highlighted “knowledge gaps”, i.e. areas that need to be better understood and documented. These are listed below.

## Mapping farmers’ demand and access to (quality) advisory services and other sources of information

- **Providers.** Who are the service providers in a particular setting and what services do they provide? What approaches do they use in service provision? What capacities do they have to respond to demand and how? Who are their clients?
- **Users.** Is demand articulation in place? How can it be scaled up to system level for policy use? What support is required to achieve ownership by users, and improve demand articulation and service provision?
- **Information sources.** How do farmers know what services are available and under what conditions? Where do farmers get their knowledge and information from – peer-to-peer learning, public services, private services, radio etc.?
- **User access.** What types of farmers have access to advisory services and under what conditions? What types of farmers do not have access to services and what are the main barriers?
- **Quality.** What is the quality of service provision? How do providers aim to ensure quality? Who determines what quality is? What differences are there between service providers? How do farmers assess service quality?

## Improving accountability and M&E

- **Accountability.** What is the role of POs in strengthening the demand base, mediating with the private sector and influencing government policies and decisions on service provision?
- **M&E systems.** What type of M&E systems are in place? What are the consequences of M&E for project/programme performance? How are farmers and POs included in M&E?
- **Learning.** How is M&E linked to learning and innovation in service delivery? How is learning stimulated, including learning from failure as well as from success?
- **Indicators.** What are the key indicators to benchmark performance in terms of inclusive pluralistic and demand-led service systems?

## Understanding coordination mechanisms and models

- **Incentives for coordination.** What incentives need to be in place to bring actors together for coordinated action, and what are the main barriers to date to putting this into practice?
- **Coordination by public actors.** What are the measures and skills needed for formal authorities to assume a coordination role in PSS?
- **Coordination by producer organizations.** How can producer organizations be supported and empowered to take up coordination functions?
- **Coordination and knowledge-brokering skills.** How can local-level capacities for coordination and brokering be strengthened, not only at individual and organizational level, but also at policy level? What are the business models for knowledge brokers? What barriers have RAS and POs faced when taking up coordination and/or brokering roles in AIS?
- **Coordination models.** What are the pros and cons of actual coordination models on the ground (e.g. hubs, innovation centres, knowledge centres, one-stop shops)? How can these models be inclusive and efficient?
- **ICT for coordination.** How can ICT enable coordination and what are the risks of ICT-led coordination?

## Promoting innovation in sustainable financing

- **Funding.** How much funding goes to advisory services from public and private sources?
- **Innovation.** What are the recent experiences with innovation and experimentation in new financing mechanisms (demand and supply side)? What are the success models and lessons learned?

## Gaining insights on models of scaling

- **Systems perspective.** How can advisory services situate their own projects/programmes within a systems perspective?
- **Analysis tools.** What analysis tools can be applied for better understanding of pluralistic service systems and the overall institutional and policy framework?
- **Capacity development.** How can RAS interventions address capacity gaps and needs on both the demand and the supply side of service systems?
- **Partnerships/alliances.** What are drivers for partnerships? What is required (context, institutional settings, leadership etc.) to achieve successful partnerships for impact at scale?



Scaling to context -  
Think of scale in context  
of decentralization &  
territorial development

Rethink of the whole  
set, radically from  
international (donors) to  
national govts to local.

to donors: systems  
thinking means a  
variety of services,  
no one-size-fits-all

break project thinking  
& move to systemic  
thinking & interventions

SYSTEMS  
THINKING

Funding agencies  
keep flexibility and  
longer funding

The inclusive Approach  
Should consider Research  
and Extension as just one  
Process

services may be exclusive,  
yet when put together they  
become essential components  
of an inclusive system. This  
is where plurality of service  
providers is needed to achieve  
inclusive services

Develop framework to  
tackling scale-up  
challenges

Strengthening learning  
in pilots so that  
good principles are  
scaled up.

Incorporation of  
pathways/vision for  
scaling-up + exit strategy  
during implementation

Scaling up should  
mean impact to an  
important proportion  
of the population.  
The main goal has to be  
moving indicators up

SCALING

Learning from relevant  
real life examples - RAS  
in developed countries.

COMMON STATE  
WHY INVEST IN  
SOCIAL & ECON  
BEN

MORE & BETTER  
WHO DOES WHAT,  
HOW, WHY

Documentation  
learning + EV  
for policy  
(M&E)

Generating  
Evidence

Mechanisms for  
Donor level, national govts  
local level to ensure  
inclusivity + accountability  
protocols/guidelines

Develop a Resource Portal/  
web page to promote  
examples/evidence on  
improved accountability/  
better coordination

Coordination can be  
Achieved Sharing a Common  
Plan at local level and  
other levels

Alliances, partnerships &  
platforms are central  
elements of governance  
in pluralistic system.

Representatives  
of donors to be  
part of Learning  
or Innovation Platforms

Mechanism  
for collaboration/  
governance

MEGO LEVEL Focus  
FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING,  
COORDINATION, M&E, L

Empowerment of farmers  
and FOs is crucial for  
governance and accountability  
of RAS

Accountability  
- M&E by FARMERS'  
organizations (Formal &  
non-formal ones)

Downward Accountability  
= tipping point for change  
in order to build it,  
enhance local knowledge  
and support farmers' innovation

FOs should have a  
majority in governance  
bodies of RAS

Increased inst. public financing  
needed for supporting pluralistic  
adv. services and FOs  
yet, co-financing mechanisms

Increased public financing  
needed for support to  
pluralistic services and  
to FOs

financing

Accountability  
& Incentives

CONSIDER NEED FOR INCENTIVES  
FOR LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS +  
HOW THE APPROACH/  
INITIATIVE RESPONDS TO  
THOSE INCENTIVES.

INCENTIVES



# 8 Conclusions

The Expert Consultation deliberated on shared experiences and knowledge to elicit key messages and make recommendations to inform policy and development planning. It also highlighted knowledge gaps where further data and research are needed to enhance the understanding of inclusive pluralistic service systems and to create a sound evidence base for improving policies and actions.

Rather than speaking of “inclusive services”, it makes more sense to speak of “inclusive service systems”. While individual advisory services and service providers usually focus on particular crops, farmer segments, areas, approaches etc., the system perspective specifies the availability and accessibility of complementary service providers based on the recognition that different types of farmers require different types of services at different points in time. This confirms the rejection of one-size-fits-all approaches, but reiterates the need to map the overall landscape of service provision and identify possible gaps, overlaps and missed opportunities for coordination and synergy.

The lack of downward accountability towards farmers continues to be one of the Achilles heels of rural advisory services and is fundamentally grounded in a lack of voice and power of farmers. Breaking with established patterns of upward accountability (to supervisors and donors) requires institutional commitment, especially from governments and donors, as well as a multi-angled approach,

including introducing accountability requirements of service providers to farmers, organizing M&E around the involvement of farmers, ensuring participation of farmers and their organizations in decision-making processes on service delivery, and regulating transparency of service provision. Most of these mechanisms to enhance accountability require capacity development and institution building of producer organizations. ICT tools seem promising to facilitate lines of accountability and feedback between the actors involved in service planning, delivery and use.

Practice has shown that governments often lack the capacity and/or the willingness to assume a comprehensive coordination role in PSS. This calls for a more differentiated understanding of coordination, including but not limited to governments. Producer organizations, in particular, are slowly being recognized for their important role in coordinating (and articulating) producers' demands and matching service provision accordingly. However, financial support and capacity development are vital if POs are to take up this role.

Although innovations in sustainable financing mechanisms are relatively scarce, there are a variety of models for funding and financing RAS from which it is possible to learn. There is increasing emphasis on the importance of empowering POs to pay for services to ensure farmer ownership and enhance the relevance of service delivery.

The scaling of pilot projects faces barriers that are not always factored into project or programme design. Scaling requires increased attention to the system level and to the actors and service providers involved in PSS, in order to create linkages for complementarity, synergies and the required policy changes. At the same time, it is crucial that scaling of advisory services depart from the producer demand rather than only from government or donor priorities. It is services that farmers need and benefit from that have the potential for creating impact of scale in the first place.

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# Annex

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**See also:**

**Towards inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems**

Insights for innovative thinking

FAO (2016)



**Rural Institutions, Services and Empowerment**

# New directions for inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems

## Report of FAO Expert Consultation

A growing variety of public and private agricultural advisory services are available today, leading to increasingly 'pluralistic service systems' (PSS) where advisory services are provided by different actors and funded from different sources. This is generally regarded as an important step forward, as it steers away from relying on purely state-led or privatised service systems. PSS hold the potential to overcome constraints related to funding, staffing and expertise, and to make advisory services more demand-driven. But are they really able to reach the hundreds of millions of farmers in need of services? Reality seems to indicate that too many farmers still fall through the cracks between service providers and remain without any services at all. The inclusive character of PSS thus warrants closer attention. What are the characteristics of pluralistic service systems that are necessary to improve access to services for small-scale farmers? What actors, policies and mechanisms are needed to make such a system work in practice? How can public and private actors support service providers in improving the quality, relevance and reach of their services? These were some of the questions that the FAO Expert Consultation on Inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems, held in Rome in May 2016, aimed to address. This paper presents a synthesis of the expert consultation deliberations, and highlights a set of key messages and policy recommendations on the main themes of accountability, coordination, financing mechanisms and scaling of inclusive PSS.

**Food and Agriculture Organization of  
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**Social Policies and  
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