



Extension Services: Case Studies

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Extension services are essential to enable farmers to improve their practices and help them respond to emerging challenges. Knowledge, ideas, and skills gained through extension programmes can help farmers increase their productivity, reduce losses, and gain better access to markets.

The positive impact of extension services is well demonstrated globally. Whether through Farmer Field Schools, marketing training, or by using innovative technologies, knowledge sharing underpins sustainable agricultural practices.

The examples below illustrate the importance of participatory processes and farmers' proactive participation in extension programmes to ensure they meet their needs. The case studies highlight the diversity of issues that can be tackled through extension and advisory services, and the positive impacts these can have on farmers' livelihoods. In many cases, extension services are an addition to existing structures, such as farmer co-operatives, and are offered as part of a package of services. This helps to ensure that the positive outcomes from extension, such as increased yields, can be translated into positive outcomes for farmers, for example by supporting the marketing of the improved crops.

MOZAMBIQUE – Casas Agrárias

Around the town of Lichinga in Mozambique's Niassa Province, farmer associations have established 'Casas Agrárias' with support from two NGOs to assist with their marketing needs. Casas Agrárias are agribusiness centres for marketing crops. They offer temporary storage and processing facilities – and facilitate access to credit, inputs, and agricultural advice. Each centre has four or five extension staff from public agencies, who provide farmers with advice on input and output marketing.

MALI – The Cheetah Network

Malian farmers can sell their products and derive better prices from their production by developing and honing their business skills. Specific programmes called 'business incubators' have been established to assist with the development of entrepreneurial activities. In Mali, small-scale farmer organisations formed a partnership with the national agricultural research organisation, the national agricultural university, and some American universities to develop the Mali Agribusiness Incubator Network – the 'Cheetah Network'.

The Network facilitated university students and staff to train farmers in business skills, and encouraged university staff to revise the university curricula to include greater skills development in marketing agricultural products.

One cluster involved a women's co-operative focused on producing, processing, and storing shea butter for export and on developing a high-quality market for its products in the United States and Canada. Another cluster involved the production of certified seed potatoes for regional export.

MOZAMBIQUE – Nhambita Community Carbon Project

Extension services do not only focus on increasing yields or improving marketing skills. Innovative programmes can help farmers protect and gain value from their environment.

In Mozambique, with the support of a specialised organisation called Envirotrade, farmers set up a successful business model for the sale of carbon offsets to support the conservation of forests and the planting of new ones. The project focused on increasing local productivity while protecting the forest in the buffer zone of the nearby Gorongosa National Park. Farmers' use of sustainable farming practices, introduced as part of the Nhambita Community Carbon Project, increased cashew and fruit yields and improved livelihoods for about 1,300 families. Since its launch six years ago, the initiative has traded more than 120,000 tons of CO₂, earning the community over US\$1 million.

Participants are paid for carbon stored by the trees they plant, the forests that they manage, and the fires that they prevent. Felicio Lucas Melo, one of the participating farmers, has two plots that can sequester over 55 tons of CO₂ per year, earning him US\$244 per year in direct payments and an additional US\$25 that is paid into the community carbon fund, which is used to improve schools, clinics, and wells.

INDIA – Kerala Horticultural Development Programme

Farmers' organisations can provide knowledge and learning for farmers, while also providing add-on services for marketing. These multiply the positive impacts of education and help ensure farmers have an outlet for their improved production.

Created in 1992, the Kerala Horticultural Development Programme aimed to improve the lives of Kerala's fruit and vegetable farmers by increasing and stabilising their incomes, reducing production costs, and improving their marketing systems. The Programme worked with fruit and vegetable farmers to promote self-help groups. It trained three farmers from each group to become master farmers who were competent in crop production, credit, and marketing. It promoted the concept of credit to farmers who leased land, promoted group marketing, and established modern seed processing and fruit processing plants.

To generate and access locally relevant technical knowledge, the Programme began research with a local agricultural university which strengthened the skills of farmers in participatory technology development.

The Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council, Kerala (VFPC) currently works with about 6,800 self-help groups (of which 405 are run by women) and reaches more than 132,000 farmers. An external evaluation and impact study of the project reported a significant increase in the area under fruit and vegetables in 86% of the self-help groups, and increased incomes in 75% of the groups. The same study also reported that the number of farmers receiving credit increased from 21% in the pre-programme period to 41% by 1999, with an increase in the efficiency of loan disbursement and an increase in the size of the loans.



Group marketing was promoted by establishing markets where farmers could bulk their produce for sale to traders, and improve their bargaining position by obtaining information on market prices inside and outside Kerala. In 2008–09, more than 200 VFPC farmers' markets operating across Kerala sold 87,000 tons of produce valued at US\$20 million. The council supports these committees by providing limited infrastructure.

PERU – Café Peru

Farmer education is often essential to enable farmers to reach global markets and meet the product standards imposed by major buyers, or achieve valuable certifications which allow them to sell their products at a premium.

Cacao production is a major source of income for farmers in Peru. Three cacao cooperatives in Huánuco Region partnered with Café Peru to acquire technical assistance and training to increase the productivity of cacao, obtain certification for organic cacao production, and increase the marketing of their organic cacao.

The co-operatives received market analysis and specific training in co-operative management and product promotion. Starting from zero in the project's first year, more than 1,200 producers had obtained organic certification by the end of year three. Over the same period, cacao productivity rose from 340 to 600 kg per ha, and the co-operative now markets some 1,500 tons of organic cacao.

Although cacao prices have risen overall, the productivity increases and the switch to organic production have enabled producers' returns to rise from US\$546 to US\$1,543 per ha.

MADAGASCAR – Best practices for improved soil

Farmer organisations are a key source of knowledge sharing and can play an important role in helping disseminate and scale-up the use of best practices. In Madagascar, la Coalition Paysanne de Madagascar (also known as FTM/CPM) is one of many farmers' groups that encourages best practices such as crop rotation by training their members. They use crop rotation to improve soil nutrients, foster soil quality, minimise soil erosion, and increase water efficiency. Continuous replanting of one crop in a field depletes soil nutrients and the organic matter in the ground.

National support programmes and international research and extension networks are critical to furthering these efforts. Co-operation with scientists and agricultural research centres, and conducting workshops with farmers to put practices into place locally, are both vital activities. In Madagascar, information campaigns on the radio and on key 'Action Days' have proven to be effective. They also hold forums to encourage farmers to share their experiences with each other.

MOZAMBIQUE – Women's farming co-operative helps shares knowledge

Women often form the majority of the labour force in rural areas, providing for their family and communities' livelihoods. However, they typically face difficulties and inequalities in accessing services, training, and technologies. Being part of a farmer co-operative can be a tremendous help in gaining access to resources and boosting productivity and incomes.

In Mozambique, a group of 250 women from Maputo responded to the difficulties they faced by pooling their resources, growing crops, and raising poultry as a group. With limited funds at first, many of the women brought in their own agricultural tools and invested their own money to support the project.

The women sold the excess produce and created a business that now has a membership of about 2,900 farmers, mostly women. And as the numbers grew, they expanded the reach of their operation and began helping others to gain credit to start their own businesses.

Now called the General Union of Co-operatives (UGC), this successful Mozambican network provides women with technical training, literacy education, and services such as childcare. Members now supply much of Maputo's vegetables, fruits, and poultry, with members making on average 50% more than the national minimum wage.

The Co-operative is helping women farmers to secure loans to start and run their businesses, giving them expert advice on how to farm, and helping them to market and sell their produce at local markets. The farmers now rear 8,000 chickens per month and are supplying local markets with their products.



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KENYA – Mobile telephony for delivery of animal health services

FARM-Africa, an NGO working in Kenya in conjunction with the Kenyan Government and other stakeholders, has developed a decentralised animal health care system as part of their Kenya Dairy Goat and Capacity Building Project (KDGCBP). To link key participants in the system, the project approached the Safaricom Corporation, the corporate social responsibility arm of the mobile phone company Safaricom.

The KDGCBP system works with a community animal health worker, who purchases a veterinary drug kit and mobile phone at a subsidised price. Animal health assistants and vets working with the project also receive mobile phones. Community phones are also installed in the project at vet shops, which have solar panels and batteries where there is no electricity. The owner of the community phone is responsible for repairs and can make a profit by charging for its use; a way for private vets to diversify their income. The phone system allows the animal health care workers to update one another, share information, and conduct referrals. This system has reduced transactions costs and increased the efficiency of animal health care in the area.

Sources

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