

Guide for Monitoring, Evaluation and Joint Analyses of Pluralistic Extension Support



NEUCHATEL GROUP

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Neuchâtel Group

Impressum

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website: www.lbl.ch/int
- Copyright:** Neuchâtel Group - 2000
- First Edition:** October 2000, 1000 copies

The text can be used if the source is mentioned.

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Introduction

The reform of agricultural extension is on the agenda in many countries and there is a growing convergence among many actors and agencies on key principles that should underpin the process of change. But reform needs to be firmly grounded in a sound analysis of issues relevant to a particular context. This guide provides a framework of such issues as a basis for monitoring, evaluation and analytical discussions to improve support to agricultural extension. It will provide a useful tool for donors, national and local actors involved in planning and organization of extension services seeking to accomplish:

- A strategic dialogue among donors and national and local partners regarding visions for extension and rural development.
- Integration of donor interventions with the broader policy framework and approaches of national partners.
- Optimisation of the allocation of available resources.
- Application of common approaches to analyses so as to permit comparison of experience and joint learning among various actors and agencies.

The guide is based on the “**Common Framework on Agricultural Extension**” a statement of the current discourse prepared by the Neuchâtel Initiative, an informal network for analysing and improving donor co-ordination on support on agricultural extension. The Common Framework presents a challenge for moving from a vision to concrete and sustainable action for the improvement of advisory services.

Not all of the important issues in judging extension effectiveness have been incorporated into the guide. It only focuses on the topics where it can provide added value as a complement, rather than a replacement, for other evaluation frameworks and sets of indicators already in use, particularly those related to measuring the direct benefits that farmers receive from extension.

The focus of the analysis presented here is on *process* issues and on issues related to *institutional arrangements* for extension. The ambition is to look beyond individual project interventions to understand how flexible but sustainable relationships among the many actors in extension are being fostered.

Common Framework on Agricultural Extension

Driving forces for change:

Several trends are having a particular influence on the current situation and make reform essential.

- Changes are afoot in many countries: Decentralisation, liberalisation, privatisation, and democratisation.
- New actors are becoming involved in “extension” activities.
- Public spending on extension is shrinking.
- The aims of official development assistance are becoming more focused.

The Neuchâtel Initiative vision of extension:

In light of the changes taking place, the Common Framework outlines six key principles of a vision for extension.

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

Proposal for the engagement and co-ordination of donors:

The Common Framework also recognises six key avenues for the engagement and co-ordination of donors.

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

The guide can help ask whether there is progress towards the goals set out in the Common Framework and also whether these goals are in harmony with the broader objectives of development assistance. Whereas there is no doubt that broad extension reform is essential, the jury is still out regarding the impact of proposed solutions. The narrower view of public goods, and the reliance on new forms of for-profit service provision may have negative effects on poverty alleviation, inclusive development, sustainable livelihoods and renewable natural resource management. Critical analysis is needed.

The Guide

The issues raised are intended to place the vision for extension within an analysis of the broader objectives for rural development, and within an understanding of the changing socio-economic contexts in which extension reform is set. The sections of the guide are structured according to six principles of agricultural extension reform given in the Common Framework.

Although in many situations the reply to the questions below will often be negative, this guide is not intended as a basis for mere critique. For example, it is rare when a truly enabling policy environment and a consensus on the new roles of extension are firmly in place. Furthermore, experience has shown that, whilst new extension concepts have often been widely embraced on a conceptual level, the implications of these new ideas for changing field level practice have not always been confronted.

The guide is a tool by which the divide between new policies and field level practice can be made more apparent. The next step in a policy dialogue would be to ask whether it is practice that needs to change or whether there is a need to adapt the vision to practical realities. Which alternative approaches can be relevant to a given situation?

The policy environment

Extension has often been analysed as a technical issue, with insufficient attention paid to how the effectiveness of extension reform is influenced by the overall policy environment. This has often led to blinkered and unsustainable interventions. Monitoring and evaluation of extension requires reference to the broader policy context. Key aspects of the policy context upon which success relies include the existence of an enabling environment for agricultural sector development and a sound agricultural policy. The following points are intended to provide a basis for reflecting on the links between extension and the broader policy environment.

To what extent do the principal *enabling conditions* for the development of the agricultural sector exist?

- Is the overall policy portfolio of government services *consistent with the vision* encoded in the agricultural sector policy?
- Are *fiscal priorities* of public sector investment consistent with the purposes of agricultural policy?
- In which ways do the macro-economic, legal and policy environment provide incentives or disincentives to *private sector development* (whether for-profit or not-for-profit) or to the *establishment and operation of producer organizations*?



Is there an agricultural policy which is supportive of a new vision of extension?

- To what extent does policy take adequate account of the *interests and values of different stakeholders*? How *inclusive is the process* of policy formulation?
- In which ways has there been *constructive engagement* of donors and national, regional and local partners in this process? To what extent is *donor co-ordination* either complementing or compromising the emergence and strengthening of local co-ordination efforts?
- Does policy consider the importance of *accompanying support* to agricultural education, to producer organizations and to agricultural research?
- Is agricultural policy coherent with the *policy orientation of other sectors* (e.g. health, education) that have an impact on the livelihoods of producers, particularly where they are also shifting some of the cost burden onto producers?

Policy framework issues to consider ...

Broad economic policy: stable and appropriate exchange rates, currency convertibility, investment protection, coherent public sector investment, etc.

Elements of a sound agricultural sector policy:

- market access: rural infrastructures, market organization,
- agricultural producer prices: taxation of industry sectors, price stabilization,
- availability and cost of inputs: taxation and distribution system,
- supply of and access to credit,
- security of tenure,
- freedom of association, regulation of co-operatives and groups/associations,
- basic education and agricultural training,
- applied agricultural research,
- effective central and sub-national government provision of arbitration and supervision of service providers,
- crisis management, early warning and rapid response to changes in the market and other production factors,
- most importantly, establishing a strategic vision for agricultural development.



Does policy give a coherent and comprehensive *framework to orient the actions* of different actors and agencies?

- Are the *actions of agencies* which finance or deliver extension, including donors, consistent with the agricultural policy framework?
- Does policy allow *room for manoeuvre* for a variety of different interests, methods and priorities for action in the renewable natural resources sector?
- To what extent does policy realistically envisage and promote *joint actions among agencies* (public, private, producer organizations) that builds on their different roles and strengths?

Extension as “facilitation”

Facilitation is a catchword in discussions of new forms of extension. The term refers to attempts to move away from traditional one-way technology transfer assumptions, to instead see extension as a collection of mechanisms by which to support farmers in their own ongoing efforts to access new technologies and services.



Agencies involved in extension should no longer merely provide new technologies, they should create conditions for a broader flow of information. This objective is at the core of the Common Framework, but there are profound challenges in its realisation. It is difficult to show the impacts of facilitation. The need for extension services to show results, both to farmers and to their superiors, has sometimes been overlooked in the focus on new relationships between service providers and clients.

Facilitation has also often been promoted, as new catch-words often are, as a mere additional task for overburdened and under-resourced institutions to ‘implement’. The costs in time, transport and human resources to engage in facilitation are frequently underestimated. The following points provide a first step in moving beyond platitudes to asking what this concept means in actual extension activities and real-life organizations.

To what extent are different agencies involved in extension implementing a “facilitation” mode of extension?

- What is the *balance* between “facilitation” and “technical” services being offered to users?
- To what extent is there *congruence in style and content of advice* among the range of service providers dealing with support for increasingly diversified (and non-agrarian) rural livelihoods?
- How do extension staff handle the balance between the *need for concrete results* (in terms of technical change achieved), and the *need to invest time* in listening to farmers, learning about complex situations and supporting unanticipated initiatives?
- How is *communication* defined by different key actors involved in extension (one-way, two-way, dialogue, etc.)? Are the different *perceptions conducive* to shaping an understanding of extension as facilitation among the parties involved?
- Is the form of communication (individual, group, use of media) the most *effective and efficient* given differing circumstances?

What is extension anyway?

Transfer of technology: supporting farmers improve their ability to use new technology.

Advisory work: supporting farmers to solve their own problems now and in the future.

Facilitation: supporting farmers to become more actively embedded in the agricultural knowledge and information system.

The balance between the three elements will depend on the context. Is there an appropriate balance among the various actors and agencies involved in extension?

Which factors determine the extent to which the different organizations involved in extension adopt a *facilitation mode of working*?

- Does the *management system* of the different agencies involved in extension create an enabling environment for extension as facilitation?



- To what extent do extension planners and providers show an appreciation that *different levels of interaction* (individual, group, organization, multi-agency) can be appropriate and cost-effective under different circumstances?
- Are advisors given the *flexibility* to act accordingly?

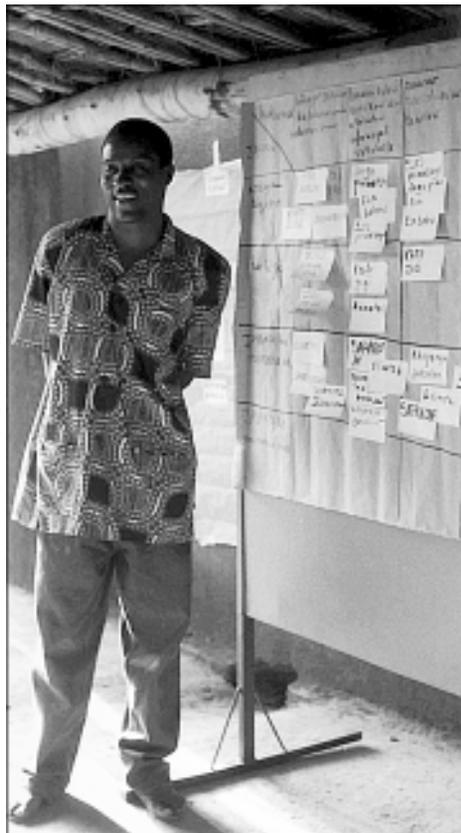
- In which ways do *accountability mechanisms* reinforce the notion of extension as facilitation? To whom are extension agents accountable?

On what basis is an advisor described as *qualified*?

- To what extent are the *users involved in defining criteria* for selection and quality standards (an expert is only an expert if s/he is recognised)?
- Is there any *professional body* that regulates the quality of an advisor?
- In what ways do *education and training* institutions support the development of understanding and skills related to extension as facilitation?

What mechanisms are in place for *mutual exchange, information sharing and joint learning*?

- What forms of *joint action and co-ordination* exist among different actors?
- How are extension planners *facilitating appropriate forms of interaction* and flow of information among different key actors?
- To what extent do current project *monitoring and evaluation systems* support an objective of joint learning?
- What mechanisms are in place for facilitating the free flow of information on *public goods* on the one hand and the “protected” flow of information on *private goods* on the other?
- How do *donor co-ordination* efforts impact on and relate to local co-ordination efforts?



Producers and their relationship to extension providers



In the end, it must be the farmers themselves who will judge the quality and appropriateness of the services that they receive. Various types of producer organizations have a clear role to play here. Fee-based structures have been found to cement demand-driven relationships and increase sustain-

ability, but have raised serious questions regarding equity. A central challenge here lies in the unequal power relations between different types of producers and between rich and poor. Realism with regard to the access which different groups may gain to different services demands frank analyses of existing socio-economic structures and power relations.

How are *producers regarded by agencies involved in extension: as client/customers (producers in control), as partners (joint decision-making) or beneficiaries?*

- How does this *perception influence the level of service provided?*
- Are the *interests and values of different groups* of actors being adequately integrated into the extension process?
- To what extent are producer organizations active in the *public policy process?* How are the needs of producer organizations being balanced with the needs of other groups in society?

In which ways are *agencies involved in extension accountable to users?*

- To what extent have *fees and other financing mechanisms* resulted in “ownership” by and accountability to the users?
- Does the *setting of fees* take account of “willingness to pay” and the extent to which a good or service can be consider of private or public interest?
- Are the *incentive mechanisms* (staff appraisal and reward system) for advisors supporting the implementation of a greater client/customer/partner orientation?

How is *producer involvement in extension services organized?*

- In which ways are *producers organized* and how are different advisory services using these organizations?
- Which mechanisms are in place for the *involvement of producers* in the recruitment and organization of extension services?
- To what extent are *power imbalances* being managed by extension planners in order to avoid distortions in the voice and access to services that different groups have?



- What degree of contact and co-operation is there between extension providers and *informal producer organizations*? Is their importance (particularly for addressing the needs of women and the poor) recognised?

What is the capacity of producer organizations in managing the relation to extension services?

- What are the *objectives* of the producer organizations? How *interested* are they in extension services?
- What is the *capacity of producer organizations* in management, communication, co-ordination and conflict management etc. regarding access to and provision of extension services?
- Are producer organizations equipped to *adapt to changing needs*, such as catering for non-traditional target groups (youth, part-time farmers, peri-urban producers, etc.) and the changing situation of their members?
- In which ways are *producer organizations accountable* to the producers? What is the balance in the accountability of producer organizations to donors compared to their members/clients?
- How *representative* are producer organizations of producers? How *inclusive* are they of different social groups like gender, wealth and ethnicity?

What is the role of the extension planners and donors in relation to producer organizations?

- Are producer organizations seen as a *worthwhile form of investment* by the public sector and donors? What attention is given to the *building up effective producer organizations*?
- What has been the role of the public sector and donors in reversing the flow of finances in order to *build greater ownership among producers* (and their organizations) and improve accountability mechanisms?
- Has public sector and donor support been able to take into account the *priorities of producer organizations* even when these are not congruent with their priorities?

Extension and the marketplace

Many agencies dealing with extension have inherited centralised organizational structures that hinder the ability to react and respond to emerging market opportunities and demands. Extension agents have often been discouraged from themselves analysing changing priorities and adapting their recommendations accordingly. They may also lack the know-how to conduct such an analysis. This does not serve farmers effectively and a greater market orientation is necessary. But market demand is not the only signal to which publicly financed extension services should respond. Broader issues of public concern, such as environmental protection and poverty alleviation, also need to be taken into account.



How well developed is the local, regional and national *marketing infrastructure* for both inputs and produce?

- To what extent are markets *accessible to a range of producers* (large-, small-scale; men, women; different production systems)?

- To what extent are extension planners and deliverers *attuned to the state of the market*? In which way are *market signals integrated into information flows* among advisors and producers?
- When new market opportunities arise, is the *research system* able to keep pace and provide the necessary support to advisors and producers?
- Do *education and training* institutions take the market imperative sufficiently into account and contribute to an enterprise culture?

Is there a balance between a *market focus* and *public concerns* among the advisory services on offer?

- Does policy and practice integrate sufficiently a market orientation with issues such as food security, environmental protection and equity? Are the institutional mechanisms in place appropriate to achieve the right balance given the context?
- Does a balance of market and public concern take into account the priorities of different social groups, particularly in terms of gender and poverty?
- Are there appropriate forms of *market regulation* that can act against uncompetitive practices (e.g. monopolies, cartels, market domination)? Is there sufficient regulation and quality control of the information and advice made available by commercial enterprises?
- Can farmers get access to *impartial and unbiased marketing and technical information*?

Public finances and private sector actors

The record of sustainable financing of public extension structures is poor. But public financing does not necessarily mean public delivery of extension. A variety of new ideas have emerged for innovative forms of collaboration between public finance and private sector actors that show potential for addressing these issues while increasing accountability to clients.

Some new contracting arrangements offer intriguing potential, but they have only just started to be analysed. Early experience has shown that the ability of the public sector to manage these contracting relationships and to identify appropriate roles for different actors is crucial to success. Significant attention will be needed in the coming years to better analyse and design these development management functions.



Is public sector investment being used to support agricultural extension in a viable and sustainable manner?

- Is there evidence of *proactive financial planning* for strategic investment, or is it mostly driven by reactive retrenchment in the face of fiscal crisis?
- To what extent has the *long-term cost implications of donor supported programmes* been in line with the local funding capacity and the priorities of public sector investment?
- Have donor *exit strategies* been clearly stated and designed? Are they realistic from a financial sustainability point of view?
- Does the financing and delivery of extension by various agencies take into account the *varying nature of agricultural goods and services* (private goods, public goods, externalities)?
- Is there *public-private co-operation* in the financing and delivery of advisory services? To what extent are these appropriate for enhancing the longer-term *effectiveness and efficiency* of advisory services?
- What mechanisms are in place to *enhance the role of producers* in financing and delivering advisory services?

Nature of Goods and Services

Public: benefits are easy accessible to all whether they pay or not. This can justify public support to make them available to people as there is no incentive for market mechanisms to operate. The wider good of society can legitimate public provision.

Private: benefits are only available to those who pay and market mechanisms can be effective for their allocation.

Externalities: one person's action can have a direct influence on the livelihoods of others in either positive or negative way, and can justify various forms of regulation or public investment to counteract the negative or support the positive.

Does the public sector demonstrate the necessary capacity for an enabling and regulating role in agricultural extension?

- To what extent are *public finance mechanisms* appropriately targeted, transparent and regulated? Are they coherent with overall policy objectives?



- In what ways have donors been engaged in determining *alternative financing mechanisms* for agricultural extension? What has been the impact of these activities?
- Is the public sector *capable of managing* new forms of public-private co-operation?
- Are there effective and transparent mechanisms by which the public sector can *monitor and evaluate the contracted private sector*?
- To what extent do the *flow of finances engender accountability* to the public sector and to the users, and support a client/customer partner relationship between advisor and user?
- In what other ways and to which other actors are private service providers (both for-profit and non-profit) held *accountable*? Are these appropriate for the given circumstances?
- Do *donor financing* mechanisms encourage and enable situation specificity and flexibility in agricultural extension?

Decentralization and pluralism

Following dissatisfaction with centralized and standardized extension systems, the decentralization of the organization and management of extension is a common tendency in the world today. This process has often been paired with an effort to involve a broad variety of actors in increasing the flow of agricultural information. Pluralism has been held up as the solution to the service provision gaps that have emerged in the wake of restructuring and cuts in public finance.

Decentralization and pluralism have been identified as pre-conditions for extension to take on a facilitation approach and to become directly accountable to clients at field level. Both pluralism and decentralization are, however, vague terms and different actors attribute different meanings to them. But a common understanding is important for both policy makers and development managers. Serious attention must be paid to what needs to be decentralised and how, and also to ways in which pluralism can be supported and guided towards the fulfilment of common objectives.

What choices have been made in terms of *decentralization* and are these appropriate to the circumstances?

- Has decentralization led to greater *situation specificity and flexibility* in the organization of advisory services? Are advisors able to act flexibly in the service of their clients?
- To what extent has decentralization shown benefits in terms of *accountability, decision-making and information flows* among advisors and users?
- Is there conflict between moves for greater local autonomy and national policy objectives? In which way is decentralization nested effectively within mechanisms for national co-ordination?

- Are strategies for the *decentralization of other agricultural services* complimentary to those of extension?
- To what extent are *links to agricultural research* being strengthened under prevailing decentralization strategies?

In which ways is *pluralism* in the financing and delivering of extension being promoted?

- To what extent has a *legitimate role for different actors* been accepted into policy and practice? Is there an open discussion on which actor is best able to perform specific functions and provide particular services?
- Have state institutions accepted the *need to reduce and better target* their range of intervention, and to better *define their role*? Does the public sector recognise its *strategic role* to encourage the development of greater pluralism?
- Has *donor support* managed to adequately capture the changing needs of their partners in the wake of decentralization, pluralism and greater client-orientation?



Four degrees of decentralization ...

Deconcentration: transfer of power to local offices of central government.

Delegation: transfer of power to government-constituted independent subsidiary and/or parastatals.

Devolution: transfer of power to subnational political entities.

Privatization: transfer of power to the private sector.

Three dimensions of decentralization ...

Political: increasing public participation, strengthening local government.

Fiscal: local revenue generation and allocation, intergovernmental fiscal transfers (conditional or unconditional), grants (matching or non-matching).

Institutional: legal framework for institutional arrangements, active civil society, capacity to undertake decentralized powers and responsibilities, local accountability mechanisms.

- Is there a clear distinction between *regulatory and advisory functions* in the way they are distributed among different actors and agencies?
- To what extent are *education and training* institutions equipping students for work in a more pluralistic institutional environment? Are the new employers of agricultural trainees exerting influence on the curriculum and/or helping to cover some of the costs?

Are inter-organizational relationships accepted as important mechanisms for an improving and evolving system?

- What mechanisms are in place *among a range of actors and agencies* for co-ordinated management of extension and related functions?
- Is there evidence of *multi-agency co-operation* that brings greater benefits to producers?
- Are *conflicts* accepted as 'part of the scene' to be managed, or are they disturbing elements to be resolved?
- Are there any *uncompetitive practices* (establishment of cartels, monopolies, forms of subsidy) that may hinder the development of greater pluralism and better service to users?
- To what extent are *extension – research linkage* mechanisms dealing effectively with the range of different actors and agencies?

An informal group of representatives of bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies and institutions involved in agricultural development in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa was set up in 1995 out of a meeting hosted by the Swiss Cooperation Agency in Neuchâtel.

This group comprises representatives of the German (GTZ), American (USAID), British (DfID), Danish (Danida), French (CF), Swedish (Sida), Swiss (SDC DDC) and Dutch (NeDA) cooperation agencies, as well as representatives of the FAO, the IFAD, the European Commission (ECIDG VIII), the CTA and the World Bank.

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