

Common Framework for Supporting Pro-Poor Extension



NEUCHÂTEL GROUP

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The context of poverty and extension reform

Extension policy in many countries has tended to be institutionally monolithic, centrally directed, and organised on the premise that public sector extension structures can effectively reach down to village level. Partly in reaction to this, 'reform' has been undertaken in the sense of wide-scale privatisation of extension and removal of the state 'subsidy' that public sector involvement is thought to imply. Neither of these two basic models has proven effective in providing services that poor people demand and find useful. In addition, neither has reflected what 'extension' means today. Extension is now broadly acknowledged to refer to a pluralistic array of institutions engaged in knowledge and information related to technological change. It is not restricted to the public sector, but the public sector remains, in many countries, a very significant actor.

In order to design extension policies and strategies that reach the poor in the development context of the 21st Century it is important to transcend the assumption that extension policy is a matter of a simple choice between traditional public sector service provision and full-scale privatisation. It is rather a matter of relating extension priorities and structures to an understanding who the poor are, where they live and what livelihoods they are striving to build for themselves. A broader reassessment is essential if extension is to find a new role in poverty reduction.

In its overall Common Framework on Agricultural Extension, the Neuchâtel Initiative stated that "a sound agricultural policy is indispensable". This document charts entry points for pro-poor extension within an analysis of what policies are sound from the perspective of poverty reduction. Options for 'pro-poor extension' thus include an array of approaches, including direct targeting, strategies to enhance the benefits of growth, and addressing vulnerabilities and livelihood shocks.

Extension programming has throughout the world been frequently characterised as having a weak and vague commitment to poverty reduction. Extension services are routinely and justifiably criticised for their elite biases and their failures to work with the rural poor. They also fail to take into account factors such as gender and ethnicity, that impact on the possibilities



of reducing poverty through agricultural development. These problems are a reflection of extension's internal priorities, structures and policies, as well as external factors, including the lack of commitment to or understanding of poverty reduction in ministries, lack of agricultural research of relevance to the poor, and the dominance of intermediary institutions (such as producer organisations) by better off farmers. As such, the limited impact of extension on the lives of the poor is symptomatic of a broader failure to achieve inclusive rural development.

It is essential, therefore, to take a wide perspective on the reform of rural development policies in considering how to promote pro-poor extension. The methodological fixes that are commonly suggested for ensuring that extension reaches the poor will not be sufficient for achieving genuine change. Pro-poor reform depends on the political will to support a target group that will in many cases not, in the short- or medium-term, generate an economic surplus. The emphasis in this common framework on the policy environment carries with it an implicit emphasis on the political environment that is needed to generate a commitment to seeing poverty alleviation through agriculture as an objective in its own right, independent of goals for increased production and economic growth.

At the outset it must be clearly stated that subsistence farmers are but one potential set of clients for pro-poor extension. Small farmers struggling to increase their commercial production are another. A large and rapidly growing target group, that this Common Framework emphasises, is those who lack sufficient, land, labour or markets to engage much in farming at all, and who are increasingly combining limited agricultural activities with an array of other livelihood options. Special attention is given to this sector of the rural population, which has been largely ignored by extension, with the intention of providing suggestions for how the impact of technological change on their livelihood options can become a more central concern in rural development planning.

This Common Framework is thus intended to provide policy-makers and extension planners with a basis for determining how extension could be redirected to be more pro-poor in a variety of contexts. A series of logical steps are presented for identifying appropriate policies for supporting pro-poor extension in different contexts. The *context and nature of poverty* is presented first, highlighting the need for wider policy reform. The primary *challenges for achieving pro-poor extension* are outlined. Suggestions are then provided for entry points in choosing appropriate *content of pro-poor extension*. The Common Framework concludes with suggestions of regarding the *shift of perspective that is needed if extension is to become pro-poor*, and also specific *recommendations for donor agencies*.

At the outset, it is important to stress that the preconditions for policy reform will differ enormously from country to country, but there is a growing consensus on several general key points of departure:

- The public sector alone cannot finance, let alone deliver, extension services to meet all requirements. Pro-poor extension is therefore a matter of prioritising the use of public resources.
- Public sector extension capacity to operate effectively at village level in remote areas is collapsing; hence the need for a reassessment of how to ensure maximum impact from the placement of public sector human resources vis-à-vis other extension related actors.
- It is no longer adequate for extension agents merely to be accountable to their superiors within a line department. 'Good governance' in extension derives from procedures and incentives for field staff that take into account the views of poor clients on the performance of extension workers and the extension system.

- The 'demand' side of extension needs to be strengthened through institutional interventions if the poor are to benefit from these new realities. New directives from above on poverty are not sufficient. Issues of power and 'voice' will need to be addressed if extension is to become genuinely pro-poor. This is particularly true for those who lack voice in existing structures, including in many cases women and ethnic minorities.
- The poor are not merely agricultural producers but also labourers and consumers. Pro-poor extension is therefore extension that takes into account how technologies may create more labour opportunities and cheaper staples for poor consumers. This implies less focus on aggregate production increase, and instead a commitment to helping poor people in their efforts to pursue a variety of livelihood strategies.
- The spatial aspects of poverty, including migration, changing rural-urban relations, marginalisation of inaccessible hinterlands and varying impacts of globalisation on local markets have created new challenges and opportunities for pro-poor extension. Poor people will best benefit from extension if it includes elements of both pro-poor growth and vulnerability reduction.

Poor people struggle to meet their livelihood needs in a very wide range of different natural environments, political structures and market contexts. Extension cannot influence many of these factors. It is therefore essential to consider what aspects can be influenced and what must be taken as 'given'. The rural poor have a range of different livelihood strategies – not only own-account agricultural production. Extension that promotes technical change in agriculture must take careful account of the broader impacts of technological change on the rural poor. This is very different from extension's conventional focus on the adoption of technologies by individual farmers. In order to understand the context in which potentially pro-poor extension services are being delivered, several key questions need to be asked.

- **To what degree are the poor 'integrated' into the market?** Markets never function perfectly, and they function most ineffectively with respect to the production and consumption requirements of the poor. Market failure can be attributed to a host of factors relating to the structure of demand or supply, the availability of information, and transport and communications infrastructure. Market interventions will be a precondition if the poor are to benefit from opportunities for increased agricultural production.



- **To what extent do the poor have ‘voice’ in their interactions with the government, the private sector and civil society?** In designing extension programmes it is essential to base plans on an understanding of the government’s vision regarding the roles of state (at different levels) and private agricultural service providers. This goes beyond what is often assumed to be the realm of extension itself. What, for example, is the rhetoric and what is the reality regarding decentralisation, and how does that affect the inclusion of the poor in local decision-making? What arrangements exist for ensuring accountability to the rural poor of the public administration at different levels? What is the role of traditional or customary authority, and to whom are they accountable? How do traditional or modern structures impact on the ability of women to express their needs?
- **Which rural livelihoods are considered ‘viable’, and what are the implications of policies that fail to address the needs of the ‘poorest of the poor’?** Remoteness, proneness to natural disaster, diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and chronic violence and political uncertainty have profound influence for the range of viable options for supporting rural development. Extension’s ability to deal with massive challenges such as these relates to the strength of government commitment to address the problems of marginal areas, and with that the availability of human

resources and investment in places where growth can be expected to be slow at best. If the government is effectively abandoning the hinterlands, it is important to consider the consequences (insecurity, reliance on food aid, out migration, etc.), and who are the main actors (NGOs, warlords, etc.) that are taking the place of the government in these forgotten areas. Ethnic divisions grow where services are withdrawn, especially in isolated mountainous areas. The 'savings' expected from exclusionary policies may be found to be illusory and/or ethically unacceptable.

- **In what respects do policies take into account how the poor actually cope with their poverty?** Individuals are often at the same time producers, consumers and hired labourers. It is therefore important to consider how technological change is impacting on employment opportunities, nutrition, etc. Are the expected benefits of new, more productive varieties trickling down to the poor in terms of jobs or lower prices, even if they lack the resources to use these technologies themselves? There is a wide range of different poor groups in the rural space, distinguished by their development context and livelihood strategies. The provision of appropriate technologies to one poor group – low-income farmers for example – can have significant knock-on effects on other poor groups who rely on wage labour. In addition, support to cultivators in exploiting resources that pastoralists also utilise can result in increased ethnic conflict. Are these factors being taken into consideration?
- **Is technical change being promoted that displaces labour where there is little prospect that those leaving agriculture will find comparable employment?** The possible negative impacts of development initiatives are part of the context for pro-poor extension. Even if extension may not be able to exert great influence on the overall direction of rural labour markets, it should reflect an awareness of where and how technological change may mitigate some of the resulting problems, or at least not result in greater harm by increasing social exclusion.
- **What is the role of induced technical change where agricultural production-maximisation is not the predominant livelihood objective?** Some households may see their prospects for a better livelihood as best served by reducing labour or capital inputs on the family farm in order to more actively pursue off-farm or non-farm opportunities. Farmers may be more interested in ensuring that their sons and daughters can get jobs driving tractors for a wealthy neighbour than in intensifying the productive output of a tiny plot. Gender roles may affect objectives, where women

may be more interested in production for regular household consumption than for the market. Pro-poor extension needs to reflect the fact that the poor may not see the family farm as the most important aspect of their livelihood and investment strategies.

In order to understand the impact of technological change on rural livelihoods, the potential of creating opportunities for poverty reduction should be assessed based on the following entry points:

- changes in on-farm production, whether consumed in the household or marketed;
- changes in local on-farm employment opportunities;
- changes in migration incentives and opportunities;
- changes in the quantity and reliability of staple food and fibre production;
- changes in vulnerability, either through sustainability of natural resource management or with respect to community stability through impact on political, ethnic or social conflicts;
- changes through pro-poor price effects in all of the above through relatively lower food prices, higher wages, increased returns to own-farm labour, etc.;
- changes in access to and use of forest and common property resources;
- changes in access to markets.



Policy challenges in supporting pro-poor extension

It is not enough to reorient extension programming alone to address the different ways that technological change and access to agricultural knowledge impact on the poor. Extension reform must be nested in a broader reorientation of agriculture, rural development and (even) urban development policy. If this does not occur, even well designed extension reform efforts will flounder. There is no 'ideal' policy: individual countries need to make choices based on their specific circumstances and on the resource constraints they face. The evidence suggests scope for incorporating pro-poor dimensions through changes in existing policies that may range from the modest to the more radical. Policy-makers face challenges in designing and implementing extension policies that take account of the following realities:

Poor people's livelihoods: Poor people manage diverse portfolios, often have objectives other than increased income (such as greater well-being, increased voice and reduced vulnerability), switch within their portfolios according to changing circumstances, and pursue their perceived rights to access a range of resources and entitlements according to their livelihood strategies. Support for the poor may therefore often be best achieved by interventions designed to reduce vulnerability, improve nutrition and provide jobs, rather than retaining a sole emphasis on enhanced agricultural productivity.

Globalisation: The majority of the poor still live in areas weakly integrated with regional and international markets. Their remoteness protects them from some of the negative competitive effects of globalisation, but also – and more importantly – prevents them from accessing its benefits. If extension is to be better synchronised with poor people's livelihoods, strategies need to transcend the polemical debate on globalisation, and instead be anchored in an empirical understanding of the challenges and opportunities that increasing globalisation presents in different contexts.

Role of the state: State financing (and possibly delivery) of services will remain valid in many areas, well beyond the 'facilitating and regulating' roles that are often recommended for public sector reform. Substantial support will be needed to civil society organisations if they are to play their due role



in making demands on the state, but also sometimes in direct provision of services such as extension. The key issue is to focus the role of the state in ensuring the provision of services to the poor in relation to market failure and the provision of public goods by targeting the provision of services and entitlements to the poor.

Policies towards pluralism: The roles of public and private sectors need reassessment in order to identify opportunities for partnership, and recognise the plurality of sources – nationally and beyond – from which information relevant to the rural poor can be drawn. Extension policy is not just about policies towards extension agencies, per se. The roles of agricultural extension agencies need to be defined within policies that facilitate the involvement of a far broader range of actors involved in ‘livelihood extension’. This involves making a realistic assessment of the capacity of the private sector, accepting that building capacity in the private sector and addressing market failure often require positive public action not just a ‘hands-off’ approach. Public delivery of services may still have to predominate in remote areas, and mixed ‘partnership’ arrangements may be necessary elsewhere, other than in areas where commercial relations dominate.

Political and natural resource instability: It is being increasingly acknowledged that pro-poor technological change in rural areas needs to include mitigation of the risks that are associated with changing settle-

ment and production patterns. Environmental protection is an area where the greater public interest justifies a strong role for the state, particularly where the poor are either most at risk from inappropriate natural resource management practices, or where they are causing further damage to fragile environments due to a lack of livelihood alternatives. Although government agencies may have difficulty in accessing areas of political instability, some kind of production system and market may continue to operate in these areas and merits support to reduce the threat of greater marginalisation and chronic conflict.

Spatial policies: Pro-poor policies need to reflect an awareness of where the poor are located, and how markets influence productive potential. Policies relevant to poorly integrated areas are different from those relevant to favoured areas. In all cases, close coherence is required between national and province-level policies if poorly integrated areas are to have some prospect of exploiting their competitive advantage. Efforts to reduce the 'poverty of place' will require both conventional and non-conventional (e.g. information communication technology) infrastructure based on a more profound understanding of the links between urbanisation (especially the role of small district towns), diversification and commercialisation.

Subsidies: Injection of external funds is a legitimate public policy instrument, but there is a need to target subsidies in relation to desirable and feasible improvements in the functioning of markets, through the development of infrastructure and institutions that support rather than crowd out nascent private activity. This implies the need to allocate a substantial part of government expenditure to the provision of public goods.

Labour market interventions: Policies regarding livelihoods must be related to intended trajectories of technological change by analysing, acknowledging and strategising around the indirect effects of agricultural and rural development policy on the poor, particularly in terms of labour opportunities. This requires greater coherence between the recognition of the importance of labour markets that is emerging in overall poverty reduction goals, and the own-account farm production and 'modernising' focus of many agricultural policies. Poverty analysis and monitoring may be incorporated into private sector investment and institution building initiatives. Again, a spatial analysis needs to be applied to poverty and labour markets that recognises the relationship between lack of alternative employment opportunities and isolation, and also includes a focus on the situation of labourers and marginal producers who live in higher potential areas.

Consultative processes: It is essential to identify what the poor themselves see as priorities, and also the wider possibilities that the poor may not be aware of. This, however, must be moderated by pragmatic acknowledgement of the declining potential for establishing viable village-level extension structures and human resource intensive participatory methodologies that actually reach isolated and marginalised poor communities.



Suggestions for making extension more pro-poor

The preceding analysis suggests that, to be effective, pro-poor extension must be embedded in broader pro-poor rural development policies, and that priorities and components should ultimately reflect an understanding of and commitment to poverty reduction. One of the most fundamental requirements for making extension more relevant to the poor and vulnerable is to build on a broader understanding of livelihoods. This means ensuring that the components of extension embrace not simply direct agricultural production related issues, but also those concerned with institution building. This is true for all extension efforts, but especially important when looking for ways to better support the poor, since they are very often excluded or marginalised by existing institutional structures.

Sustainable poverty reduction demands that the poor gain more power over their lives. Genuine reorientation of existing extension bureaucracies is a difficult task, as it will require reallocation of financial resources, and retraining of many extension staff. Attention must be paid to influencing the



perspectives and attitudes of the extension personnel that the poor encounter if they are to trust that civil servants (or NGO staff, representatives of producer organisations and 'community leaders' for that matter) are sincere in supporting their 'empowerment'. Again, sound understanding of the local context will be necessary before appropriate approaches, including institutional arrangements and allocation priorities, can be identified.

All governments and NGOs are resource-constrained to varying degrees, as is reflected in the steady decline of village-based extension service structures. This means that an incremental approach is necessary in piecing together the elements of a desirable agricultural policy and extension system. This puts a premium on careful selection of priorities, sequencing and identification of funding sources for a coherent strategy. It also demands a pluralistic yet realistic vision regarding what might be the roles of the state, private sector, civil society and external donors and NGOs. For the many countries that rely heavily on aid, donor support will be required to ensure that these priorities are reflected in the new architecture of aid – in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAs), for instance – and that external resources are adequately coordinated.

Even where policies are agreed and resources exist on the ground for their implementation, there will always be gaps between intended and actual patterns of implementation. This may be attributable variously to inadequacies in skills, rigid budgeting structures, corruption and non-legitimate political interference. There may also be positive changes when policy meets practice and is adapted accordingly.

Unintended patterns of implementation may be due to subsidiarity, as local actors discover the inadequacy of central level policies and adapt their efforts to better address the needs they encounter. These issues are particularly important in decentralisation efforts. Potential safeguards against both poor and inflexible implementation include not relying on a single delivery agency, but on a multiplicity of different institutions with different skills and structures. Competition among various extension organisations will be important when they address private goods, while more effective co-ordination or co-operation will be important to bring actors together to provide public goods, such as watershed management.

Enhancement of the capability of clients to make demands on the system will be important in all phases, from policy formation to implementation, and

above all to the relationships between poor producers and extension providers, particularly those reliant on public funding. This points to a need for strengthened coordination capacities at different government levels, even if the state is pulling out of direct service provision.

Poverty reduction has often been described as resting on three major pillars: creation of opportunities, enhancement of security and increase of empowerment. The following suggestions outline where components of pro-poor extension may be found within these three categories.

Creating and supporting opportunities for the poor

Extension can contribute to creating and supporting opportunities for the poor through increased agricultural production/productivity and access to employment. Options for enhancing production and labour markets through technological change include the following:

- Labour absorbing rural development trajectories can be supported on small, medium and large farms.
- Institutions can be developed capable in some degree of redressing market imperfections, including producer organisations, mixed institutional arrangements such as NGO/public sector models, para-extension workers, one-stop shops, and information communication technology (ICT) links with advisory services and markets.
- Institutions can also enhance the capacity of the poor to identify their technology-related requirements and to select appropriate sources of advice, inputs and credit supply. In high potential areas especially, this may often require providing support at other levels of the commodity chain and the broader service arena (e.g., rural banking, business development services and quality control).
- In more isolated areas, where there are usually modest prospects of linking low-income producers to markets, there may be some limited opportunities for niche products with high value relative to transport costs (e.g., honey, spices, organic products). Incentives for start-up (whether financial or non-financial) may be necessary where the private sector is hesitant to invest, but will need to be designed and implemented so as to ensure that collaboration with the private sector is encouraged and not displaced.

Enhancing security and reducing vulnerability

Vulnerability is a central feature of poverty. Reducing vulnerability means increasing resilience to livelihood shocks, protecting the environment, providing access to safety nets and supporting better health and nutrition. It also involves setting extension priorities within an awareness of broader threats to rural development stemming from chronic conflict and violence. Examples of priorities for enhancing security and reducing vulnerability include:

- In countries threatened by HIV/AIDS, finding an effective role for extension demands strong sensitivity to the changing labour economy and farming systems, and realistic adaptation to declining human resource capacities in extension services. These issues are currently being explored in many countries, and specific strategic options can be expected to emerge in the near future.
- Sensitivity is also needed where conflict or natural disasters have disrupted pre-existing markets for agricultural products and labour. Public extension services are frequently pulled in to assist with short-term (or even recurrent) food or cash-for-work programmes to shore-up the labour economy. There is potential for improving impacts by using the knowledge and experience available in extension agencies to better design these interventions within an understanding of pre-existing livelihoods and more long-term development priorities.
- Reducing vulnerability to floods, landslides, erosion and other hazards, stemming from environmental destruction, increasing population, climate change and settlement patterns is a major public responsibility. Some public funding of rural services in general (and extension in particular) will often be necessary to promote technological change that reduces these risks. Greater attention is needed to reviewing whether extension priorities that have been chosen for their potential for generating aggregate production increase may unintentionally aggravate such risks.
- Agricultural development has a contribution to make in addressing chronic insecurity. Without tangible improvements in people's livelihoods in poorer regions, the cycles of conflict that are apparent in many parts of the world can be expected to continue. Rural violence can be mitigated through livelihood opportunities for youth and marginalised groups. Despite profound challenges, extension is one of the few tools with which to promote livelihood stabilisation in areas plagued with chronic conflict.

- In general, since extension structures are often drawn into post conflict and post natural disaster rehabilitation efforts, greater systemic efforts should be made to ensure that the potential of linking such programmes to goals of reducing risk and contributing to overall development is achieved.

Livelihoods in Crisis: a new and growing challenge for extension

One of the most pressing and difficult issues facing extension is how to support the reconstruction, restoration, rehabilitation and eventual transformation of livelihoods where pre-existing strategies have collapsed in the face of war, environmental destruction and natural disasters. If there is anywhere that organised support to technological change is needed, it is in places where former livelihood strategies are no longer viable. Perhaps the biggest challenge in designing extension strategies for such contexts is to transcend the implicit assumption that support to agricultural rehabilitation should be about helping people to simply return to the livelihoods they pursued before the crisis. The starting point should be an acknowledgement of uncertainty about what it is that should be rebuilt.

As conflicts drag on for decades in many parts of Africa, and as entire production systems collapse in parts of the former Soviet Union, the rural poor are no longer farmers simply waiting in refugee camps to return to their farms. Many refugees and internally displaced persons returning to the rural areas of Afghanistan and Angola have little direct experience of smallholder production, having adopted livelihoods as soldiers, refugees, labourers and slum dwellers. Unemployed farm labourers in Tajikistan may have no experience in managing a farm.

Re-establishing rural livelihoods is not just a matter of sending these people home and pumping in fresh investment capital. Extension priorities must be anchored in an understanding of the livelihood opportunities, objectives and uncertainties of people who are no longer or not yet farmers if appropriate, sustainable and humane transitions from relief efforts to new forms of rural development are to be achieved. Extension plans also need to reflect an awareness of how different technological trajectories and land use patterns may either aggravate or mitigate ethnic and other conflicts over natural resources.

Knowledge is key. The need for extension when people return to rural areas is enormous. Institutional capacities, whether public or private, to meet these challenges are usually extremely limited. For this reason it is important to begin considering what it is that should or could be rehabilitated soon after a crisis occurs in order to ensure that local institutional actors can benefit and be strengthened by flows of international resources, rather than allowing them to be sidelined by large international actors, as is too often the case.

Increasing voice and empowerment

The poor need a stronger stance in dealing with institutions of government, civil society and the market if they are to transform production increases into better livelihoods. The following three points briefly summarise the relationship between extension and empowerment:

- Power is related to producers' knowledge of the market for their products, ability to update that knowledge, and institutions that create a critical mass for negotiation and a choice of production and marketing options. This primarily suggests that producer organisations and a variety of community organisations have an important extension role in helping poor farmers learn about markets, access regular information and join together to take advantage of market opportunities.

Rethinking extension and the role of the state

New visions for extension suggest that governments should primarily act as enablers, supporting an array of agents from the private sector and civil society, and should not merely provide services directly. In order for this to lead to genuine impact, extension policy must transcend a narrow focus on existing agricultural extension bureaucracies. It must also go beyond production technologies to provision of support to the production context. A major role for the state as enabler will be to empower the rural poor to meet their own technology needs and to make effective demands on providers of extension, inputs, marketing advice, and other types of services. In this context, it might pursue varying combinations of the following six possibilities:

- enhancing skills that increase producers' power to negotiate (knowledge of marketing, quality control, certification, etc.);
- improving infrastructure that increases producers' power to negotiate by not having to sell the harvest immediately (storage, processing and other post-harvest technologies);
- building organisations and institutions that increase producers' power to negotiate and demand services;
- encouraging the existence of more than one person for the poor to negotiate with (policies that provide incentives for more competition among traders and a more dynamic service economy);
- shifting the control of the production process to producers by strengthening capacity to manage linkages of credit, processing, marketing, quality control and input supply;
- encouraging diversification to avoid dependence on one crop, buyer or processing structure.

- Power is dependent on poor people having a choice among different livelihood options. Extension has a significant potential role to play in increasing entitlements to the knowledge and resources required to pursue such a broader range of livelihoods. Poor producers must have the voice with which to demand the services they require to take advantage of those opportunities.
- Extension services can deal with some of these factors directly. In others, its role will need to be developed within a broader policy and institutional environment that enhances the power different groups of poor people to exert their demands.

Considering spatial priorities

One of the central aspects to be considered when deciding how to promote pro-poor extension is that of taking into account where the poor actually live. This will determine the potential for either helping poor people to engage in market opportunities or, where market opportunities are very limited, helping them cope with their vulnerabilities by reducing risk or improving subsistence production. The following scheme suggests how one might differentiate priorities in high potential and marginal areas respectively.

In high potential and accessible areas, pro-poor extension priorities will in many cases mirror broader efforts to encourage pro-poor economic growth.

In these areas the poor obtain their livelihoods directly through own-account, market oriented farming, and indirectly through wage labour opportunities in the expanding rural economy. The private sector is increasingly dominating the agenda for technological change in accessible areas. The public sector plays a relatively limited role, and is increasingly limiting its focus to clearly defined public goods, especially as related to addressing vulnerability to livelihood shocks and social protection related interventions in environmental health, sanitation, and nutrition. Labour markets are increasingly important in the livelihoods of the poor in high potential areas.

Extension interventions that the poor may benefit from in high potential areas include:

- commercialisation of fruit, vegetable, livestock, and dairy production;
- expanded micro and small-scale irrigation;

- labour-saving technologies for households to help them to take advantage of wage labour opportunities;
- labour-intensive technologies for large-scale agricultural production;
- environmental health interventions (particularly in peri-urban agriculture) such as dealing with the pollution of water supplies by livestock, processing plants and horticultural pesticides;
- promotion of technologies that reduce risks of landslides and floods stemming from inappropriate land use patterns and population increase;
- improvement of product quality, timeliness, and sanitary control.

Coping strategies still are dominating the agenda for many low potential and isolated areas, although some openings do exist for limited growth oriented strategies.

Needs are enormous, but institutional capacities are often weak and getting weaker. To suggest that public-sector extension can reverse the overall trend of retrenchment from low potential and isolated areas is rather over-optimistic. There is, however, a role for public-service institutions to participate in finding synergy between social protection, temporary safety nets and 'normal' development.

Extension interventions that the poor may benefit from in weakly integrated areas include:

- subsistence production;
- diversification of diets;
- natural resource and watershed management;
- more effective use of safety nets, such as by providing agricultural training in conjunction with relevant social fund investments and microfinance;
- more effective links with relief and rehabilitation programmes through a focus on risk and vulnerability;
- skills for migration, such as training for semi-skilled employment in large agricultural enterprises;
- technical advice for products with high value relative to transport cost (where not already dominated by better off producers).

As discussion of the issues above has highlighted, the state will need to continue to play an important role in relation to extension in both high potential and marginal areas. But this will vary given the circumstances and will often require a realignment of its relationship with other actors and agencies. Where the state can have a role in the provision of extension, this may vary from being a service deliverer to being an enabler. Clearly the tendency in many situations is for the former role in delivery to be reduced due to resource constraints.

Extension for the poorest?

A question that must ultimately be addressed in assessing if and how extension can become more pro-poor is whether or not it can reach the so-called poorest of the poor. Even if national policies ostensibly promote pro-poor extension, in practice services may fail to reach the extremely poor and destitute. Extension for the poorest needs to encourage:

- redirecting research to focus on generating technologies that require minimal land and other resources;
- making institutional arrangements sufficiently attractive to draw staff to poorer areas and provision of logistical capacity to ensure that extensionists can reach the isolated poor;
- addressing ethnic differences through recruitment and training from minority populations;
- increasing knowledge and capacity within the extension organisation for judging markets for the non-traditional crops for which the poor may have a comparative advantage;
- reassessing policy directives to ensure that they explicitly take into account labour markets and consumption factors in extension priorities;
- judicious use of aid resources to avoid underlying assumptions that targeting the poor is the role of NGOs and donor-financed projects rather than line ministry structures.

It is clear from this list that reaching the poorest of the poor is not merely a matter of tweaking existing structures. Extension for this target group may perhaps be best developed within structures outside of regular line structures in ministries of agriculture, and with resources from social protection programmes, rehabilitation projects and civil society.

Recommendations: A shift of perspective from agricultural production to livelihood extension

A livelihoods approach to extension implies differentiating between extension for own-account *agricultural production*, where a failure to directly reach the poorest is in many cases inevitable and must be accepted, and extension for *livelihoods*, where a broader menu of options for support should be explored.

There is currently no consensus regarding how far extension providers could or should attempt to redirect their efforts to supporting livelihoods. It may be more effective to search for ways to better involve non-conventional 'extension services' in providing relevant advice. This could include working with public health agencies on nutrition issues and adapting to the new constraints presented by HIV/AIDS, or by seeing where livelihood extension could be integrated into social protection programming. Male dominance of



traditional extension channels may be best addressed by choosing to work with alternative service providers.

Some entry points for applying a livelihoods perspective in extension policy include:

- specifically analysing the mix of signals and incentives that are sent to frontline extension staff, including possible reconciliation of competing objectives in poverty reduction, modernisation and aggregate production increase;
- critical reflection on whether expediency has led to a concentration of resources on better-off areas, despite public policies to the contrary, and if so, what this implies for poverty reduction objectives;
- ongoing analysis of what actually occurs in the wake of decentralisation in order to close the gap between the rhetoric of decentralisation and the often weak commitment to providing services to marginal communities;
- designing decentralisation efforts within a frank and realistic assessment of the pre-existing incentive structures, resource flows and legitimacy of local government, civil service and civil society institutions;
- realising that the motor for vertical integration may not come from extension alone, but rather from other actors in the commodity chain;
- analysing and supporting the information, advisory and skill needs of a wider range of actors in and around the agricultural sector.

To summarise, principles for pro-poor extension policy include:

- creating and supporting opportunity by looking for where the poor can benefit from the market, as producers, labourers and consumers;
- enhancing security and reducing vulnerability by designing strategies and priorities that avoid or reduce risk;
- enabling empowerment by helping the poor to develop their power in relation to market actors and extension providers; and
- institutional reform by redefining the role of the state and other institutional actors in their interactions with the poor.

These are principles that are frequently referred to in current aid discourse, but which have as yet rarely been systematically applied in extension programming. The most important way to promote pro-poor extension is to establish clear coherence between extension programming and broader poverty reduction strategies and objectives.

Donor options for supporting pro-poor extension

There has been a tendency for donors supporting advisory services to polarise into two broad categories depending on their general policy orientation: those more market-oriented and those more poverty-oriented. This is a false dichotomy stemming from historical and political trends that have separated these policy narratives. There is clear scope for market mechanisms to contribute to poverty reduction. The challenge is not one of choosing between poverty and the market, but rather of identifying and prioritising extension efforts in light of the opportunities and limits that the market presents.

Of particular importance is the need for policies that more explicitly define extension priorities for those areas that will remain marginalised from the market opportunities. PRSPs and SWAs may provide a basis for this linking of the narratives of poverty reduction and the market, particularly if they are embedded in national and regional policy processes. Aid has a role to play, but here too, priorities must be clearer if significant impact is to be achieved.

The following points illustrate where donor investment may be required if extension is to become more pro-poor:

- There is considerable scope for major donor investment in different aspects of infrastructure that can support pro-poor technological change. If extension is to become more than a peripheral user of such infrastructure, greater articulation is needed at design stages. Appropriate balances must be sought among different kinds of infrastructure. For example, the role that innovative infrastructure such as ICTs can play will in many cases be related to the condition of roads and other more traditional market infrastructure;
- There is substantial scope for capacity building in aspects of policy analysis related to extension programming, particularly as related to the impacts of globalisation, emerging sectors, labour economies, gender roles and the spatial nature of poverty;
- Addressing capacity issues at decentralised levels, among local governments, producer organisations and NGOs, may benefit from donor sup-

port, particularly as related to better integrating district level extension services to the changing roles of other actors;

- There is some role for donors to experiment with new approaches in projects on the ground, but these must be designed in such a way that government or other regional/national actors can scale them up or otherwise integrate the lessons learned in viable institutional forms that do not rely on donor assistance;
- There is scope for donors to coordinate in incorporating a new vision of extension's relation to the poor as producers, labourer and consumers in PRSPs and SWApS. Support to broad consultative mechanisms in the elaboration of PRSPs and SWApS can often be a relatively cost-effective mechanism for promoting change and the local ownership of change;
- Finally, there is scope for donors to establish greater coherence in rural development policy by building developing country capacity in negotiating international trade agreements to favour their own agriculture, and to pressure northern blocs to reduce protectionism.



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 Agency for Development and Cooperation in Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

This group comprises representatives of the cooperation agencies of Austria, Denmark (Danida), France (MAE), Germany (GTZ), the Netherlands (DGIS), Sweden (Sida), Switzerland (SDC), UK (DFID) and the USA (USAID), as well as representatives of the FAO, the IFAD, the European Commission (EC/DGVIII), the CTA (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation) 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.