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Reform Strategy for Effective Agricultural Extension Delivery at the Local Level in Nepal

Introduction

The Nepalese agriculture extension system has experienced conceptual, structural, and institutional changes during the last seven decades. During this period, various extension approaches and models were tried, adapted and discarded. In 1999, the Government of Nepal (GoN) through the Local Self Government Act 1999 (LSGA 1999) endorsed a decentralized agriculture extension system to address the need for bottom-up planning, self-rule, territorial integrity and upliftment of local economy. It was one of the major paradigm shifts in agricultural service delivery in Nepal. However, the full implementation of LSGA (1999) remained incomplete and agriculture service delivery remained weak (Jaishi et al. 2022 a & b) as the institutional capability and competencies of implementers were not considered.

After endorsement of a new constitution in 2015, Nepalese agriculture service delivery underwent a structural shift. Along with this the top-down agriculture extension system was made to work on a bottom-up plan. However, the administrative issues resulting from the political and organizational shift are yet to be tackled institutionally based on the principle of co-existence, cooperation and coordination among the three tiers of government, namely the federal, provincial, and the local. As a result, agriculture service delivery has been adversely impacted. Without a sound agricultural extension policy framework, streamlining agricultural extension service delivery is almost impossible (Shrestha 2022).

This policy brief builds on the findings of two thematic papers presented at the 14th National Outreach Research Workshop (February 22-23, 2022) and the Conference on Strengthening Linkage among Agriculture Research, Extension and Education (AREE) for Effective Service Delivery in Federal Nepal (June 17-18, 2022), and it suggests measures to streamline agriculture service delivery at the local level.

Challenges in Agriculture Extension Service Delivery

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) has promulgated legislative powers within the constitutional mandate to ensure representation of all gender and ethnic groups in federal, provincial and local governments in all spheres of development including agriculture. The Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) promulgated in 2017 is the latest in the series of guidelines intended to promote local level development. Both the constitution and the LGOA suggests ways for mainstreaming the development process, including the agriculture extension delivery system, based on demand of local people and the needs of the community. However, agricultural extension services have low institutional capacity and front-line extension workers have inadequate competencies. Apart from these, they suffer from budget deficit, lack of a long-term vision, and proper guidelines for implementation of their programmes. Due to these reasons, they offer very poor-quality service that lack value chain orientation and reach only a small share of its potential clients. So, while the Government of Nepal reorganized its extension services delivery mechanism from top down to bottom up, the spirit and essence of the decentralized bottom-up services delivery is yet to be seen (Shrestha 2000).

In addition to this, the low effectiveness of extension system is also attributed to the weak linkage among the agriculture research, extension and education (AREE) stakeholders (Jaishi et al. 2022 a & b; Gauchan et al. 2022; Timsina et al. 2018). Weak linkage among these stakeholders is primarily due to inadequate functional linkages, lack of participatory methods, lengthy and complicated procedural hurdles, and lack of sector coordination mechanisms. Under-utilization of digital extension tools has also contributed to the low effectiveness of the extension system (Upreti and Shivakoti 2019; Babu and Shah 2019; Shrestha 2022).

Local Government & Agriculture Service Delivery

Constitutional Mandate

While developing the new mechanism of governance, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) has given tremendous authority, corresponding rights, responsibility and authority to local governments, which is unprecedented and has never been experienced before in the history of Nepal. Exclusively and concurrently two types of power are mandated in the Constitution of Nepal 2015. According to the constitutional mandate, Schedule (6), Schedule (8) and Schedule (9) are mostly aimed at promoting agriculture and rural development in the country. Primarily, , Schedule (6) of the Constitution, describes agriculture development as a local government mandate. Further, concerns of cooperatives, agriculture, education, service delivery and wildlife are stated in Schedule (9) as concurrent power of federal, province, and the local government combined.

Accordingly, massive organizational structures within the Ministry of Agriculture Development were divided into federal, provincial and local level (Shrestha 2022). The Ministry of Land Management,Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoLMAC) has been created as a leading institution at the provincial level. Under this provincial ministry, there are two divisions: Directorate of Agriculture Development and Directorate of Livestock Development. These directorates are equipped with basic laboratory facilities, training and business promotion centers, veterinary hospitals, farms and agriculture knowledge centers, veterinary hospital and livestock expert center (Figure 1). After restructuring Nepal, as per the constitutional provisions, most of the extension functions have now been vested with the local government. This has created abundant opportunity to make agriculture service delivery demand driven, participatory, inclusive, self-reliant, competitive, location specific and sustainable, but it has also led to several challenges.

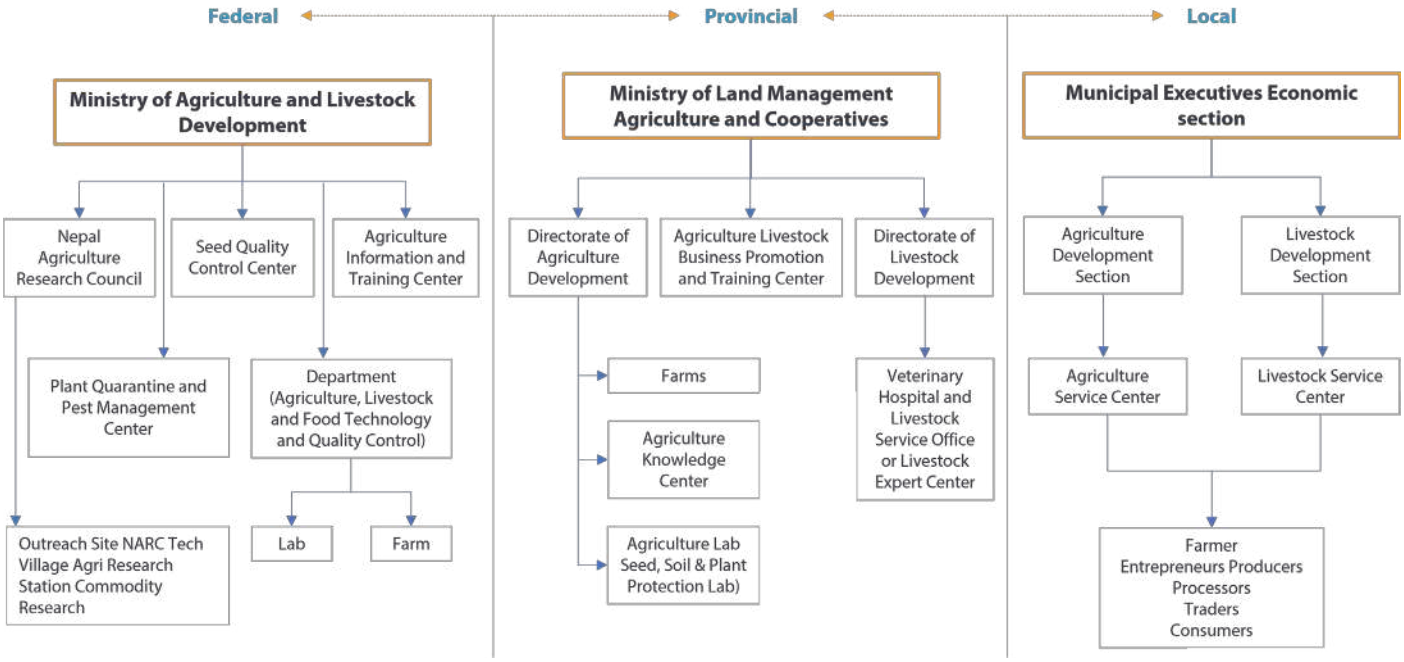

Figure 1: Public agriculture organizational structures of the three tiers of Government of Nepal at grassroot level

Realizing the Potential

Devolution of power, functions and responsibility together with accountability, authority of local government – have all raised hopes of effective service delivery and responsiveness towards the local people. A decentralized service delivery structure in principle has the potential to accelerate efficient service delivery and rapid inclusive economic growth in Nepal at the local level.

Four types of local government bodies, namely metropolis, sub-metropolis, municipalities and rural municipalities, hold 'stakes' in agricultural development. Local Government Operation Act 2017 (LGOA 2017) Section 3 (12, 22) and Section 6 (24,

25, 26) provide the legal framework for agriculture-related roles, functions and responsibilities to the local government. The agriculture service delivery unit at the local level have nearly doubled in number (753) as compared to the earlier (378) before Nepal Constitution 2015 (Table 1). This has created huge potential to reach unreached service seekers as well. However, our recent observations from the ground level extension service delivery revealed the enormous gap that exists between policy and practice.

Table 1. Number of agriculture extension service providers at local government level in Nepal

Local government level	Number of Provinces							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Metropolis	1	1	3	1	0	0	0	6
Sub metropolis	2	3	1	0	4	0	1	11
Municipality	46	73	41	26	32	25	33	276
Rural Municipality	88	59	74	58	73	54	54	460
Total	**151**	**144**	**132**	**96**	**121**	**89**	**97**	**753**

Note: 1 = Province 1, 2 = Madhesh, 3= Bagmati, 4 = Gandaki, 5 = Lumbini, 6 = Karnali, 7 = Sudupashchim
Source: Nepal Law Commission (2015)

Ideally, functional and operational outreach activities must be connected with local level linking of all stakeholders of AREE (Jaishi et al. 2022 b). As envisaged by the Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) (2015-2035), the community-based extension model is expected to be fully owned and managed by the communities with support from the local government. Fund for the establishment of community-based agriculture extension system can be managed through collaboration among local government, cooperatives, private sector, and the provincial government. Article (11, Na and Dha) of the Local Government Operation Act (2017) contains twenty three different roles of Local Government related to development, agriculture extension management, operation, and control. It includes policy-making authority, empowerment of farmers, import of agricultural inputs, regulation of farmer groups and cooperatives for resource management (LGOA 2017). Some of the important objectives that the Act focuses on include:

a. Provision of quality service by promoting a participatory approach, ensuring transparency and accountability;
b. Strengthening grassroots democracy that promotes equity and inclusiveness; and
c. Developing local leadership quality and strengthening local government by exercising and institutionalizing legislative, executive, and judicial authorities at the local level.

Proposed Reform Strategy for Strengthening Agricultural Extension Delivery in Nepal

The agricultural extension reform strategy in Nepal should consider these three fundamental strategies:

a. Strengthening local governance;
b. Promoting effective service delivery; and
c. Focusing on community-based extension (Figure 2).

The country is in an early stage of implementing the restructured three tiered government operation, and therefore, this is the right time to change and innovate extension and advisory system at the local level. Strengthening local governance of extension system is vital for achieving ADS's component framework. Governance in ADS refers to the capacity of government to design policies, formulate, and discharge the functions. Governance of extension system could be enhanced by considering participation, social inclusion, local governance and bottom-up planning.

Effective service delivery depends on the functional structure, capacity of service providers, competent human resources, and a coordinated pluralistic service delivery. The capacity of farmers, farmers' producer organizations, and service providers are also important to improve the quality of service delivered. The efficiency and sustainability of advisory service

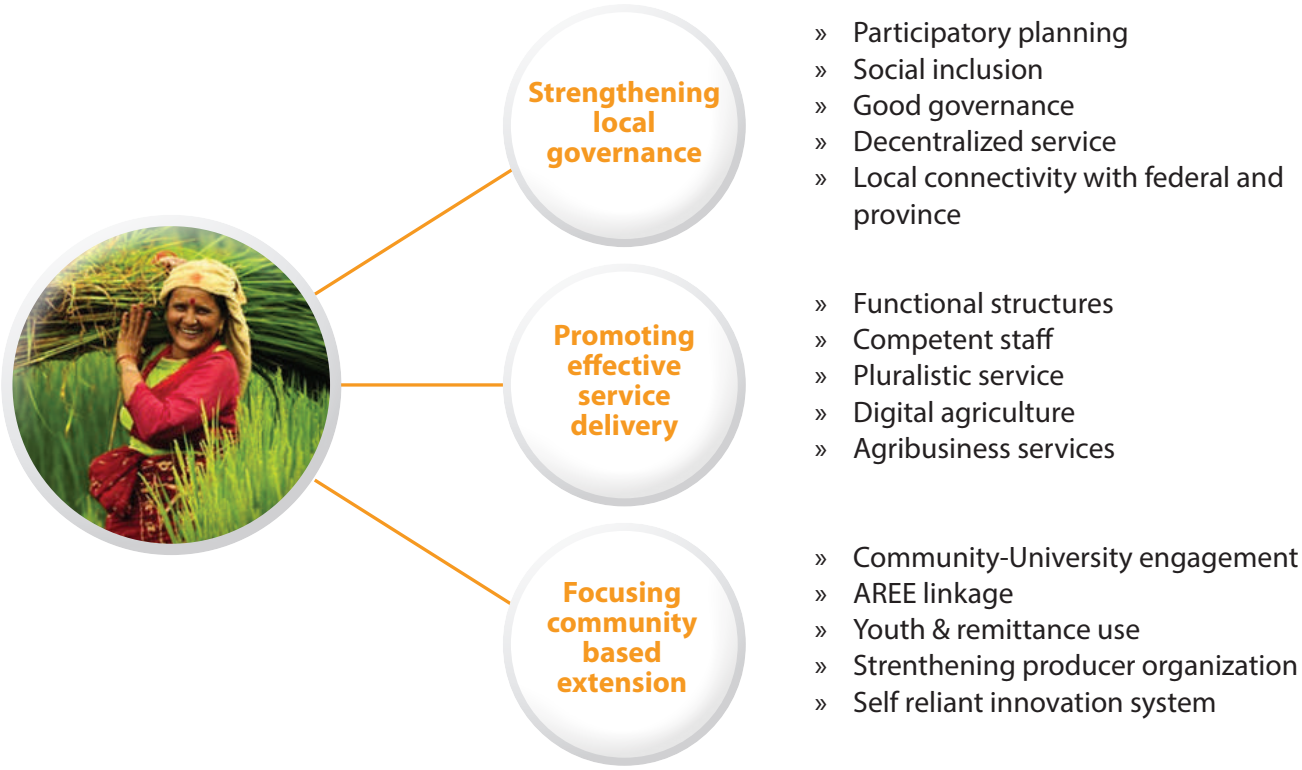

Figure 2: Agriculture extension reform strategies at the local level in Nepal

of local government is defined by its institutional strength. Farmers and producers' organizations (POs) have an important role to play in extension and advisory services as they have strengths and capability necessary for choosing the advisory service, and then negotiating and evaluating the service provided.

Yet another important reform is about strengthening of community-based extension service and enhancing agriculture service delivery at the community level. The responsibilities given to the municipality under the federal system have been considered carefully in the proposed Agriculture Extension System for Nepal, aiming to provide easy access to extensive extension services to the local communities. However, there is no provision on the mechanism of guiding, facilitating, and monitoring at the municipal level. Minimal support structures are required to facilitate agriculture- and livestock-related activities at the municipal and community level.
Recognizing the lack of functional linkages among the three tiers of government, in particular to link the local government with AREE institution, the Department of Agriculture (DoA) of the Government of Nepal is currently discussing with AREE on the need for a coordination mechanism. This was discussed during the AREE Coordination Meeting held on March 7 2022, by the Department of Agriculture. Agriculture Development Coordination Committee (ADCC) and/or Municipality Agriculture Technical Working Committee (MATWC) are suggested by a high-level AREE coordination committee. This could be a 'best possible' mechanism to guide and facilitate each of the 753 units of the local government. This platform could be operated as per the LGOA, 2017. The proposed ADCC or MATWC will be chaired by the Mayor or Chair of the municipality and would be the directing body of the Municipality to liaise with the producers, municipality authorities, AREE institutions, private sectors and market (Figure 3).

Producer organizations, civil society, community-based organizations, development agencies, service providers, private sectors, traders – all could be linked to promote pluralistic and demand-driven extension modalities. This may also help in tackling the real time issues of youth and remittance to boost the local economy. Additionally, current human resource gaps at the local level have to be filled by adopting the community-university engagement program by engaging graduating students in farming communities. The community-university engagement program would be a win-win strategy for both the university and the community for promoting learning and minimizing the impact of inadequate extension personnel at the local level (Jaishi et al. 2022 a).

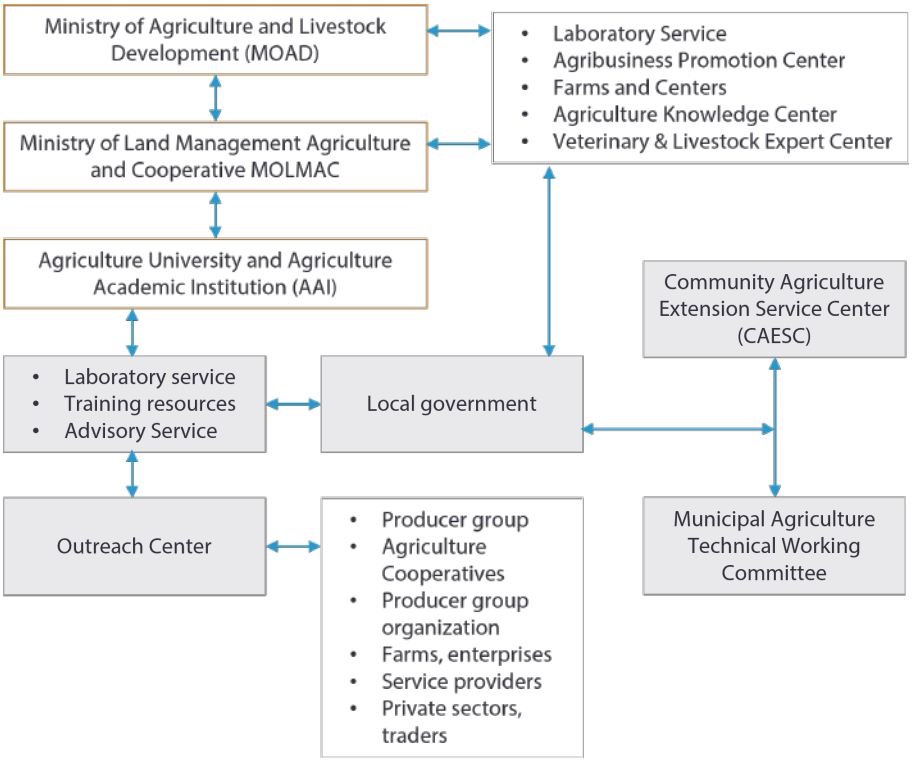

Figure 3: Extension and advisory service platforms to be developed and strengthened at the local level

Way Forward

1. **Establish Community Agricultural Extension Centers (CAESC):** These platforms must be equipped with basic infrastructure, such as laboratory facilities, training resources and advisory kits, and should be part of the local government and at least one CAESC or similar structure must be established at each local government level. These communities-based mechanisms must integrate researchers, extension agents, academic institutions, private sectors, and marketing institutions. This is one of the most promising strategies to link community and AREE institutions at the local level. Though these types of structures were clearly mentioned in the ADS (2015-2035), these have not been established so far.
2. **Setting up AREE coordination committee** at different levels (national, provincial, cluster, and municipal) which is under approval process. At all these levels, these institutional structures should not only perform the steering role but also assist in implementing programmes. Moreover, it is necessary to involve extension personnel and entrepreneurs from the beginning of technology verification to increase ownership for rapid scaling out of the technologies.
3. **Address the current human resource gaps at the local level, with short-term and long-term strategies.** In the short term, fresh agriculture graduates could be recruited and deputed to the Agriculture Knowledge Center (AKC). In the long run, a long-term human resource strategy should be implemented through the university-community engagement program linking local government and nearby Agriculture Academic Institutions (AAI). Under this activity, graduating agriculture students could be linked to the communities through farm study and practical field learning.
4. **Ensure the availability of human resources, capacity development of local authorities and local representatives:** It is very critical to manage human resources at local level. More attention, in terms of funding, development of training modules and training of trainers, have to be provided to enhance capacities of not only extension personnel but also local representatives to help them play a more creative role in strengthening agricultural extension.

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