

Reforming Governance to improve extension service delivery



Public delivery of extension services has not kept pace with the emerging expectations and challenges faced by farmers. Administrative, structural and legal reforms in extension governance are long overdue, argues Dr R M Prasad.

CONTEXT

Improving public service delivery is one of the biggest challenges world-wide. Organizing public service provision is deemed to be a core function of governance (Box 1).

Box 1: Governance

Though governance and administration are related, there is distinct difference between these two concepts. World Bank (2002) defined governance as “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development”. Governance is the brain that creates various aspects of society and identifies the functions, whereas administration is the act of implementing the end results of governance.



Extension is a public service in most developing countries and its failure to effectively support rural producers has led to its reform (Box 2).

Box 2: Reforms in Governance

When we refer to reforms, it is evident that there are both supply side reforms as well as demand side reforms.

Supply side reforms relate to public, private and third sector service provision and financing, administrative and fiscal decentralisation, capacity strengthening and budgeting.

Demand side reforms relate to the principles of participatory planning and implementation. For ensuring good governance, it is necessary that proper reforms are adopted, in relation to administrative reforms, structural reforms and legal reforms.

Administrative reforms seek to focus on issues related to people and systems / processes. Administrative reforms are defined as comprising reforms in three important elements, viz. Human Resources Development and Personnel Management; Internal Systems and Processes; and Citizen Interface Systems and Processes.

Structural reforms refer to changes in the structure and function of institutions as a result of structural or technological changes.

Legal reforms refer to changes in the function of institutions as a result of policy changes or changes effected by law or legislation.

REFORMS IN EXTENSION

There are many reasons for perceived failure of extension services, which call for reforms in extension service delivery. In the context of governance, administrative reforms focus on access in terms of *inclusion*, structural reforms focus on technological advances in terms of *innovation* and legal reforms focus on quality of services in terms of *incentivization*.

Extension programmes are shifting from a delivery model that prescribes technological practices to one that focus on building capacity among farmers to empower them to identify and take advantage of available technological and economic opportunities. Extension reforms, therefore, need to address three types of extension, namely clinical extension, livelihood extension and entrepreneurial extension (Table 1).

Table 1: Reforms-extension matrix

	Administrative Reforms (access) <i>Inclusion</i>	Structural Reforms (technological advances) <i>Innovation</i>	Legal Reforms (quality) <i>Incentivization</i>
Clinical Extension	Counselling	Facilitation	Farm & Rural Legal Service
Livelihood Extension	Access to Resources	Structural Adjustment related to Climate & Market	Policy on Food and Nutrition Security
Entrepreneurial Extension	Value Chain Development	Innovation	Regulatory and Quality Assurance Services

Clinical Extension

Clinical extension should be based on a thorough differential diagnosis, followed by an appropriate treatment regime. Clinical extension needs an overhaul in order to be much more like modern medicine, a profession of rigour, insight and practicality. The extension personnel have to adopt a strategy to meet the differential needs of the various categories of farmers. For instance, farmers in distress require a range of different resources and services to be provided by the extension system, such as financial counselling, legal advice, social support, personal guidance, emotional counselling, etc.

Counselling

Extension personnel have to be properly oriented to serve as counsellors, who are professionally trained to relate with, and empower farmers. They have to be trained and provided knowledge and experience on dealing with people who face stress. Farmers often need crisis counselling to tide over crisis situations in farming and to deal with risks and uncertainties involved. Similarly credit counselling is important for farmers to deal with debt and to compare different options to manage credit.



Facilitation

Facilitation refers to the process of developing an enabling environment for farmers to proactively participate in different extension services. Capacity building programmes may be organised with the help of domain experts to assist farmers to acquire practical skills to improve their access to resources and to create space for their actions by playing supporting and enabling roles.

Extension personnel have to engage in three categories of facilitation:

- *Technological facilitation* for productivity and profitability enhancement,
- *Process facilitation* in the contents and quality of extension service with focus on competitiveness, social sensitivity, environmental concern and sustainability, and
- *Empowerment facilitation* for new skills and competence for improved livelihoods.

Farm and Rural Legal Service

There is need to provide legal help to primary producers who are experiencing financial hardships related to their business. There is an absolute need to frame a policy to benefit small farmers so that they do not lose out in the windfall gains made by the corporate, the rich and the powerful in the urbanisation process currently underway. There is a growing trend of 'farming out' agricultural land (send out or subcontract work to other people) to realtors, which needs to be addressed.

Livelihood Extension

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required as a means to a living. Extension should contribute to sustainable livelihoods among rural communities. Analysis of existing livelihood patterns can help extension in organising the needed support. Extension should consider how different activities 'fit' with livelihoods rather than how it aligns spectral programmes (agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries etc) or with academic disciplines and this would require a shift in the way programmes are currently designed.



Access to resources and services

Women, youth and the landless are often at a disadvantage in terms of access to both resources and services, and therefore it is necessary that the extension services pay particular attention to reaching and supporting these unreached groups. Governments face constraints in terms of how much they can and should spend on different sectors depending on its finances. Constraints can also be gender-linked. For instances, constraints to increased productivity are often the result of gender-linked differences in access to inputs and resources.

Adjustment related to climate and market

Climate change is perhaps the most serious environmental risk impacting agricultural productivity. Agriculture is a major provider of environmental services and it plays an important role in sequestering carbon, managing watersheds and preserving biodiversity. At the same time, agriculture is also a major user and polluter of natural resources contributing to underground water depletion, agrochemical pollution of soil and water, exhaustion of soils and thereby also contribute to climate change. Agricultural extension personnel should have knowledge related to adaptation to climate change and also knowledge on ways of reducing the contribution of agriculture to climate change.

Policy on food and nutrition security

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 different activities involved in livelihood extension. The audience for 'pro-poor extension' comprises of subsistence farmers, small farmers struggling to increase their commercial production, those who lack sufficient land, labour or markets to engage much in farming and they need support in combining agricultural activities with an array of other livelihood options.

Entrepreneurial Extension

Entrepreneurial Extension should focus on enhancing value to the efforts of individuals and groups involved in farming by bringing together resources to develop and deliver projects while simultaneously pursuing financial sustainability of the project. The three underlying dimensions of

entrepreneurship are: innovativeness, risk-taking, and pro-activeness, which could be summarized simply as an entrepreneurial attitude and behaviour.

Value chain development

Value addition and efficient marketing determine the success of most of the production-oriented development programmes. Efficient backward and forward linkages play a significant role in lowering the cost of production and ensuring higher price realisation, resulting in higher returns. An ideal value chain should bring all the stakeholders engaged in the production system on a common platform to contribute their best, while ensuring fair deal and transparency. The value chain will include all the input suppliers, service providers, knowledge intermediaries such as research and extension agencies and all those that are involved in capacity development and linking different agencies. Agencies like financial institutions and market information centres are also part of the value chain. Efficient linkage of these various stakeholders potentially improves production, price realisation and profitability.



Innovation

Extension services enable farmers to take up innovations, improve production, and protect the environment. Enhancing individual and collective capabilities, ensuring farmers participation in innovation networks and value chains and influencing the enabling environment to be more supportive of innovation are critical for innovation. There is need to effectively link new knowledge with user communities such as farmers and enterprises. Developing an innovation strategy can potentially enhance innovation culture within extension organisations and also in identifying ways of enhancing innovation among farmers.

Regulatory services in extension

Regulatory services protect the state from exotic and invasive species, ensure that pesticides are used safely, regulate the input industry, monitor quality of inputs, certify products against standards including organic products, provide diagnosis of pest and disease infestation and ensure readiness to respond to catastrophic events impacting the state's agriculture. The presence of a legal and policy framework will help streamline the confusion currently existing in the efficient and effective delivery of extension services to farmers, particularly in the areas of service provision and networking and enhancing the capabilities of extension service providers.

Ways Forward

1. Farmers in different contexts require different set of support and services from the extension system. Extension services therefore should have staff with good understanding of technical knowledge plus skills to manage social processes.

2. To ensure good governance, the reforms should focus on administrative, structural and legal aspects of extension provision. Improving governance of extension and enhancing capacities at the organisational level to deal with these aspects should be the main focus of policy reforms in extension.
3. Extension should broaden its services from technology dissemination to facilitation, provision of legal services, inclusion of dis-advantaged groups, improving accountability and supporting farmers to deal with climate and market risks.

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