

# Pluralistic Extension Management for the Rural Transformation

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## INTRODUCTION

The extension system in India is essentially rural based and agriculture oriented. This is understandably so, as about 72% of India's population lives in villages and nearly 70% of it depends on farming for livelihood. Extension is one of the important support systems to mainstream this chunk of Indian population in the process of socio-economic development of the nation. Considering the diversities and hardships under which these farmers and rural people live and work, it is obvious that the extension system has to be pluralistic in nature, structure and functions.

But then, pluralism is an inherent feature of extension. However, it is only recently that this inherent pluralism has come in to limelight, as the challenges to extension have been increasing which again is an outcome of the rapid changes in all walks of human life. This concern for pluralism in extension is justified as it is being increasingly realized that, in the first place extension alone cannot solve all the problems of rural and peasant population of India and the conventional state-sponsored and public funded extension cannot handle it either. Hence, it is very much timely that we recognize pluralism in extension and most importantly analyze the preconditions and implications of this on performance of extension. Such an analysis allows us to narrow down on the future road map for extension by carefully weighing the pros and cons of a pluralistic extension approach to address the changing agricultural and rural development scenario.

## EVOLUTION OF EXTENSION IN INDIA

In this context, review of evolution of extension is restricted to post independence era as it was only then that extension was organized as a system to deliver the real extension services – information, education and technology transfer. In the free India, extension has largely been a state responsibility and it has undergone several changes. Looking back into the bygone years, we find that organized extension effort started with Etawah Pilot Project (1948). At the inception of free India, the administrators delivered programmes of human and

community development to transform the 'inner man' of rural India. During this period (1948-1960) and community Development Programme (1952) were implemented. However, they failed as concepts due to inadequate clarity and purpose and role of multipurpose village level workers (VLW). A significant achievement of this period was the creation of National Extension Service (1953) for delivering extension programmes. This was followed by intensive agricultural development programmes with focus on transfer of technology to augment crop productivity. During this period (1960-1974), Intensive Agricultural District Programme (1961-62), Intensive Agricultural Area Programme (1964-65) and High Yielding Varieties Programme (1966-67) were implemented. Here, the role of extension was to motivate and educate farmers to adopt improved technologies. The most significant development was the introduction of the Training and Visit (T&V) extension management system, in the mid 1970s. By the eighties most of the states in India had embraced T&V extension system. It was well suited to the rapid dissemination of crop management practices for the high yielding wheat and rice varieties released since the mid 1960s. The T&V system profoundly influenced extension practices and registered impressive gains in irrigated areas. Another notable development was the commissioning of the State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) in the 1960s in all the states to generate new knowledge and technologies for fostering agricultural development at the state level. Many support services like Farmers Training Centers (FTC) and Farm and Home Broadcasting Services were also launched. To complement the state extension services, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) launched research-based extension programmes like National Demonstration Programme (1965), Operational Research Project (1971), Krishi Vigyan Kendras (1974), Lab to Land Programme (1979) and Institute Village Linkage Project (1998). The latest extension innovation is the Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) model with a participatory bottom-up planning mechanism called Strategic Research and Extension Plan (SREP) with district as a base unit for planning, programming and implementing research, extension and developmental interventions.

## MAJOR CHALLENGES TO AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

- **Control and Accountability:** If there is little accountability to farmers, neither a government extension system nor an NGO is likely to be controlled by farmers.
- **Sustainability:** The implications of sustainability for agricultural extension both technical and economic dimensions and also political, cultural, social and other dimensions need to be considered.
- **Role of Women in Farming and Extension:** Gender issue pervades all aspects of extension activity. There are implications for women farmer led extension for the timing location and language of extension activities.
- **Participation:** Strategies for achieving more participation through farmer- led approaches to extension are significant and should guide the future.

## PLURALISM IN EXTENSION

The foregoing brief account on evolution of extension hits at how “extension”, during the course of its evolution, has carried along with it several pluralities. An important element in current discussions on rural development is pluralism, the realization that rural people and farmers are best served by the broadest possible array of information sources and structures. Agencies that had previously promoted set structural solutions to rural development problems are increasingly acknowledging that, not only did they have the wrong package, but also that the package concept was natural resource management decisions. As such, it is an institution through which poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, gender equality and even democratization goals could and should be addressed in a practical and concrete manner.

## PLURALISM AND NEW ROLE FOR EXTENSION

Common failures of extension approaches include issues such as the inadequacy of assessing extension effectiveness based on simple production and adoption targets; and extension institutions working under assumption that do not take diverse activities under farming into account. This has led to rethink extension’s role, based on an awareness of the ways in which farmers integrate technological information with other aspects of farm management, leading to the platform approach – a new way of conceptualizing extension. The complexity of rural development demands that farmers, input supplies, local officials and others meet and negotiate to arrive at joint decisions for addressing complex problems of natural resource management. Extension can play a key role in this process by initiating organizing, participating and following up on these platform. This suggests that extension institutions should not

strive merely to deliver research results but need to act as professional service organizations, being able to adapt priorities as ideas emerge from an ongoing dialogue between field staff and farmers.

This necessitates new attitudes towards structural reforms. Extension planning should shift from its present emphasis or administrative directives, to identifying ways to strengthen the links between the satisfaction of the extension agent and the satisfaction of the farmer.

## IMPORTANCE OF PLURALISTIC EXTENSION :

Agricultural extension is basically a system of actors / group include agriculture researchers, political authorities, farmer organizations, NGO, farmer training centers and the media. These actors assume the functions of research, information dissemination, training and so on. This lead us to realize the need and importance of certain core values for pluralistic extension approach.

## CONCLUSION

Pluralistic agricultural extension has an important contribution to make success of the rural development programmes. It is a tool that can be used to fight poverty, to faster education of rural people and to promote behavior and technologies that link high productivity with natural resources sustainability. In promoting a pluralistic approach, extension will also play an important role in empowering rural communities.

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