Tools of the Profession
Conference Summary Report

Transforming Agricultural Extension in Africa
Summary report of International Conference held in Ghana, November 2003

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The five-day international conference on “Transforming Agricultural Extension in Africa” was held in Accra from 24th to 28th November 2003 under the auspices of the Ghana Ministry of Food and Agriculture supported by the German Development Corporation through its agency the GTz, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Regional Office for Africa, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The conference, which was targeted at African extension officers, was a follow-up to an international workshop held in Washington DC in 2002 on “Extension and Rural Development”. More than seventy participants drawn from 13 countries in Africa, participated to tailor the recommendations of the Washington conference to suit African conditions and exchange experiences in the fields of ‘Extension and Poverty Reduction’, Decentralization, and Public-Private partnership in agricultural extension delivery.

In the opening remarks, it was noted that change today is global and rapid and that a new paradigm has emerged towards a market-driven, agribusiness orientation, stressing comparative advantage in a highly competitive global market. In this context, participants were challenged to come up with ways to rejuvenate agricultural extension so that African rural farming populations would be able to access the functional knowledge they require for economic stability. Comments also focused on the theme that Africa’s best hope for development would come from Africa itself. Also noted is that African agriculture is facing several challenges, notably erratic rainfall, lack of and use of appropriate technologies, non-availability and high cost of inputs, low value-addition, limited market access, and low rural infrastructure, all of which reinforce low productivity and increase poverty among farmers. In the view of the Ghanaian Minister of Food and Agriculture in his opening address, our ‘production-focused’ extension needed to give way to an extension system that could help farmers take informed decisions based on their understanding of the relationship between production and market demands. The Minister mentioned the need for extension to facilitate the formation and strengthening of Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs) and to develop and use extension approaches that facilitated the participation of farmers and other stakeholders in the planning of agricultural extension programs. Plenary presentations in the Workshop were delivered under the following themes:

- Current Extension Directions in Africa
- Private/Public Sector Participation in Extension
- Extension and poverty reduction, and
- Institutional Aspects.

Round Table discussions, chaired by Ghana’s Director of Agricultural Extension, were held on the under theme, “Institutional Reforms for Extension in Africa: Which Way?” A summary of the major issues discussed is included in the proceedings on the themes: Role of Private Sector; Public Sector Support; Extension and Poverty Reduction; and Institutional Arrangements to Support Stakeholder Linkages.

Working Groups where also organized focusing on issues related to “Improving Agricultural Extension Education and Training in Africa”. Key issues arising included:
Injection of donor support to agricultural development in Africa is laudable, but is it sustainable? Aren’t we getting back into the dependency theory quagmire? How do we manage the need for donor support without becoming always dependent on it?

How do we accommodate the high costs of delivering extension services for poverty reduction? How do we accommodate the social dimension of extension as a public good and the profit or market-oriented approaches of privatizing extension? In other words, how do we reconcile privatization of extension services with improvement of welfare of farmers and the rural poor?

How do we emphasize people’s general livelihood strategies instead of just concentrating on agriculture alone?

How can we make the farmer the center of strategies pursued?

How do we demonstrate the impact of extension? There is a need for clear criteria and indicators to measure the impact of extension on the life of poor people.

Are views of farmers really sought? Increase awareness at the grassroots (farmers) on the issue. Find out their views/contributions on decentralization, through extension methods/approaches.

How can we engage training institutions, especially Universities and Colleges, in the reflection process of transforming agricultural extension systems?

How do we create effective linkages between extension and relevant organizations for effective extension delivery?

How can we deliver effective extension to mobile groups such as pastoralists?

Are we adopting the right “Institutional Arrangements” or do we accept them to attract funding?

How do we deal with the multi-faceted and conflicting donor-driven interventions?

The following were some major conclusions arising out of the Workshop on “Transforming Agricultural Extension in Africa.”

1. This was a conference by and for Africans and should become an annual event. Furthermore, it was suggested that each country has its own ‘national conference’ as a follow up.

2. Many aspects such as decentralizing agricultural services, privatizing or commercializing services are donor driven, often heedless of local limitations and needs. It is time that African countries decided on and implemented approaches suitable to their respective conditions and situations. Conferences such as this one serve as a suitable forum.

3. Need for subsidizing services directly or indirectly for some groups of farmers;

4. Decision making process about the services must include the beneficiaries; this was particularly important to the francophone representatives.

5. Effective participation by all stakeholders should continue to be pursued and that effective strategies should be used to encourage a bottom-up approach in Extension.

6. Decentralization of services and responsibilities is important and necessary, but still lacks support at the national level; an important aspect is inadequate fiscal decentralization. In addition staff at local levels need capacity building in services, which go beyond information on production. Institutes and universities must include communication and management skills in their curricula.

7. Greater involvement of women and youth needs to be considered as they are gaining relevance in all sectors, for example, the small scale processing sector.

8. Public service should assist the private sector including farmer based organizations in initiating extension service delivery and also processing in rural areas to add value to produce, improve marketing chances and reduce transport losses.

9. Agricultural education and training must be made relevant for the necessary transformation in extension to occur.

10. There is a need to involve policy makers in AET to facilitate appreciation and understanding of AET in order to encourage proper commitment to AET, especially in terms of funding.

In March 2004, the complete proceedings of this conference will be available on the FAO website at: http://www.fao.org/sd/