

The Nature of Agricultural Extension

The nature of agricultural extension changes with the roles that are assigned to it by the experts. The differences in emphasis on varying aspects of these roles are reflected in the different names given to extension activities at different times and in different countries. The term 'extension' originated in England to describe a system of university extension education, taken up first by well-known Universities, and subsequently by other educational institutions in England and elsewhere. The objective was to bring the educational advantages of universities to ordinary people. This approach also influenced the concept of the land-grant colleges. In the American tradition, the term 'extension education' is used to emphasize that extension is an educational activity which seeks to teach people to solve their problems by 'exchanging' information. In the United Kingdom, Germany, the Scandinavian countries and others, the extension function is called '**advisory work**', because its major role is supposed to be solving specific problems. In the Netherlands, 'voorlichting' means to keep a light in front of somebody so as to allow him/her to find the way. In France and Latin America '**vulgarization**' means simplifying information so that the 'vulgus' (ordinary people) can understand the message brought to them. Reactions against the implications of these top-down definitions has led to terms such as 'animation', '**mobilization**', and '**conscientisation**'. The different aspects of extension have been defined by Roling (1987) as follows:

Information extension: Helping the people to make optimal decisions among alternatives provided by the extension agents.

Emancipatory extension: Helping the emancipation of the underprivileged sectors of society; correcting structural problems.

Human resource development: Enhancing the capacity of the individual to make decisions, to learn, to manage, to communicate with others, to analyze the environment, to be a leader-ship, to organize.

Persuasive extension: Inducing preventive behavior with respect to environmental pollution, soil erosion, health hazards, etc.

Extension as a policy mechanism: In most countries government uses agricultural extension as one of its implements for developing agriculture as a whole, and not for helping individual farmers.

Extension Education

Extension education is generally the main, if not the only, agent for farmer education in developing agriculture sector and countries, and is a specialized form of the larger concept of adult education. **Andersen** (1964) defined extension work as: An educational service for advising, training, and telling the farmer and grower about practical and scientific matters relating to their business, and influencing them to use improved techniques in their farming operations which, for this purpose, includes livestock and crop production, farm management, conservation and marketing. The task of the adviser is two-fold: to **advise** and to **influence**-to be a source of information and at the same time to encourage and lead their client to be receptive to means of improving his farming operations. According to Lionberger and Chang, (1981) three functions must be performed to provide a continuous supply of updated farm information that is essential for modernizing agriculture, are the **integrative function** -fitting new technologies into on-farm situations; **the innovative function** -provided by agricultural research; and the **dissemination function** (farmer education) provided by the extension service.

Farmers need information in the following major areas:

- New inputs: this involves up-to-date information on new varieties of crops, breeds of animals, agrochemicals, equipment, etc.
- Techniques of production: land use management; rates and techniques of fertilization, spraying and irrigation; effective crop protection, etc.
- Economic factors of production: choice of supplies that can be produced with a profit; information on marketing conditions and prices, techniques for preparing yield for the market, etc.

Much of the technological information required by the farmer must come from the research organization. Therefore, an important function of extension is to select information resultant from research or other sources, that can be helpful to the farmers they work.

General acceptance in farming loops as proper and in the interests of agriculture in general. Guiding and regulatory functions that are directly linked to the assumption of improved practices, are not only appropriate activities for the extension worker, but may actually strengthen his hand. For example, the facility of credit for essential inputs, to be effective, would require the extension worker to supervise use of these inputs in the field and to certify that they were applied properly; regulations requiring the adherence to certain soil conservation practices, collective pest control, fire prevention measures, etc. can properly be monitored by extension workers, provided they endeavor to explain the need for these measures to the farmer and make him aware that they are intended for his benefit. On the other hand, the extension worker should have no part in regulating or other activities that have no direct relation to promoting production, even if savings in government manpower can be achieved thereby. These activities will demoralize the trust in the objectivity of the field worker, a requirement to his efficiency.

Promotion of government development policies:

It is commonly approved that the objectives of extension education are not only to transport about a development in farming through the application of science and technology but also to promote the social, cultural, recreational, intellectual and spiritual life of the rural people. There is also general agreement, especially in developing countries, that whilst the advisory service has to adapt itself to the existing social framework of the farmers, it must also be active in promoting change towards a more progressive social structure as a prerequisite for technological change. A question that is frequently raised is whether the extension service should encourage central agricultural policies of government. Views range from considering this to be a prime responsibility of extension (many of less developed countries LDCs) to the opinion that such an approach is to be totally avoided (farmer-sponsored advisory work). Whilst extension has to be objective in its handling of information and supportive of the interests of the farming community it serves, its activities must be compatible with the political policies of government. Barker (1986) demonstrated in his proposal that:

- 1- the extension service has a role to understand and explain national policy to its clients.
- 2- the extension service should advise policymakers on the possible impact of decisions they expect to apply.