

INSTITUTIONALIZING PTD IN EXTENSION ORGANIZATIONS

In promoting and institutionalizing PTD, extension workers in both government and non-governmental agencies serve as bridges between researcher-scientists and farmers. If they are trained well, extension workers can balance research and practical applications, recognizing that when too much research-managed trials are going on, PTD cannot take off particularly if it is hamstrung by an emphasis on scholarly academic standards. As governments reduce budgets for agricultural research or in countries where there is little research to begin with, extensionists manage PTD on the field, access scientists when needed, and mediate in partnerships.

Issues related to extension agencies

The experience of institutionalizing PTD in government and non-government extension organizations highlights issues such as "over-institutionalization," farmer involvement versus opportunity losses, and the blurring of roles between researcher and extensionist. Pivotal in this setting is the role

Obstacles

- Tendency for top-down teaching and narrow production-oriented approaches
- Hierarchical government bureaucracies, poorly paid and trained extension agents
- Pressures from local politicians and within the community
- Different motivations and expectations of numerous stakeholders
- Reduction of research budgets as extension is de-emphasized in government decentralization.

extension agencies play as bridges in the PTD process. Extension workers are often sandwiched between farmers and researchers, between power blocs and people's organizations that seek change, between hard technology and process. Funds are drying up, the profile of extensionists is fading and extension organizations are dying slowly in many places. Farmer organizations have taken on the responsibilities of extension work while increasing numbers of research institutes go into PTD and roles start to blur even more. Extension organizations face problems similar to those of research institutes: motivation, funding, and role redefinition or transformation. One often has to ask what is the new and sustainable niche for extensionists?

Discussions to raise the profile of extension agencies, revolved around capacitating the extensionist by standardizing and packaging PTD (e.g. through farmer field schools). This step, however, was viewed cautiously as concerns were raised of PTD being absorbed by the bureaucracy and turned into rules, regulations and forms that could result in the loss of its essence. PTD would also have to deal with resistance from academe that tends to insist on scholarly standards in research.

Issues of sustainability and length of time for PTD affect this setting. Normally project timeframes are short but institutionalization takes time and completion periods are difficult to set. This clashes with the donor concern for time horizons and raises the need for alternative fund sources.

Furthermore, many governments have reduced budgets for agricultural research. Besides, there is a rising trend for international donor agencies to

Issues

- With research institutions reorienting towards PTD and farmer organizations being more empowered, what role should extension agencies play now?
- Should PTD be standardized and packaged for extension workers? Is it possible for PTD to be over-institutionalized?
- Particularly where high government officials intervene, should extensionists meet project targets or participation goals?
- Should scholarly standards be adopted in the field? Who owns the research results?
- How can farmers be motivated? How can we deal with farmers' opportunity costs?
- What happens when donors believe more in supporting farmers' organizations than in governments and NGOs?

believe less and less in government agencies and NGOs, preferring instead to go directly to grassroots organizations that have become credible.

In this discussion window, local governments were again perceived as such a source, making it necessary for training in order to level off ideas with prospective partners in the political sphere or lobby for local legislation that could allocate resources and support. Already development agencies, such as those in Ethiopia, are complaining that government officials were pressuring extensionists to meet targets instead of honoring the participatory approach inherent in PTD processes.

Lobby work could clarify what PTD is about. Social audits for accountability of local governments and government extension agencies were likewise suggested. Undoubtedly, in countries where there is little research, PTD can easily become a political issue.

Institutionalization appears to have been stalled by the systematic resistance by academe, which repeatedly raises concern about academic standards. The formal education system fuels tensions between researchers and extensionists, privileging researchers over field workers. Ownership of research results occasionally becomes an issue.

What worked, what could work

PTD requires multiple partners. This calls for a mechanism for effective coordination among different actors, each of which requires a common understanding of roles and expectations. Extension agencies can make more robust contributions when they are clear about the niche they occupy in the promotion and institutionalization of PTD. Extension can benefit from the realization that its work lends itself easily to the participatory process of PTD and the exchange of scientific and indigenous knowledge from farmer-to-farmer. Most extensionists have an affinity for PTD because of their orientation or educational background.

Knowing the different niches and institutional settings of stakeholders, which one then is best suited to lead the institutionalization of PTD? Discussions suggest that any sector or group (research, extension or farmer groups) could take the lead. Extension can blaze the trail, not as an institution, but as a function. For instance, between a researcher and an extensionist, it would be

Lessons

- Innovations whether initiated by local people or by scientists are entry points to PTD.
- Formal and informal strategies are useful in inserting PTD into formal organizations
- Institutionalization of PTD requires time; its achievements must be celebrated
- Capacity building is not a linear but iterative process.
- Farmers understand their problems. If they learn the principles behind the causes, they will come up with local solutions and can convey it to other farmers.
- Sustainability is essential. Timing of the release of funds is important for institutional sustainability. Farmer organizations and other institutions need help in generating and accessing funds for PTD. But one must think beyond donor timeframes.
- Advocacy and training is essential for attitudinal change and to influence decision makers. Stakeholders need to understand the motivations and the interpretations of what others are doing.
- PTD can help extensionists discover their roles

better for the latter to manage PTD in the field to ensure that there are not too many research-managed trials going on to the detriment of farmer interests. Although research organizations have reorganized to do PTD, they still need extension services to bridge gaps in the field. A renewed vision for extension services should include such roles in influencing agricultural research methods and meshing these with the unique need of natural resources management. This change in roles is a way forward for extension agencies. The case from Zimbabwe shows helps illustrate a number of important roles for extension.

ROLE OF EXTENSION AGENTS: PROCESS FACILITATORS

Participatory Extension Approaches (PEA) as developed and understood in Zimbabwe is an extension approach that transforms the way extension agents interact with farmers. Community-based extension, full community ownership of the process, and joint learning are central to PEA.

PEA is far more than a participatory methodology and distinct from participatory rural appraisal (PRA) which is essentially a toolbox. PEA is a comprehensive, iterative learning approach to rural innovation and problem solving that enhances governance and civil society in rural areas in which both farmers and extension agents experience an accumulation

of knowledge and skills. Inclusiveness and community ownership of the development process are core values of PEA.

Extension agents facilitate the following processes at the local level--

- **community development and innovation:**
 - social mobilization and local organizational development to enhance community management capacities and their articulation of demand for services
 - community needs identification and action planning processes
 - community self-evaluation to review critically the successes and failures so that learning can become effective
- **collective and individual farmer learning about innovation (technical and social) to enhance the community's capacity to innovate**
 - engaging the different actors in learning and experimenting together in order to improve their understanding and management capacities
 - developing appropriate technologies and enhancing the spread of solutions from farmer to farmer
 - enhancing the negotiation on land use and by-laws for natural resource management. This involves social innovations which need to be negotiated often in conflicting situations
- **rural knowledge management:**
 - identifying knowledge about given technologies, sources of innovation
 - linking various actors having and searching for knowledge to bring together the knowledge and experience
 - documenting the knowledge to record learning and make it available to a wider audience
 - preparing materials for effective knowledge dissemination (based on the knowledge generation)

The new role of managing and facilitating learning processes implies special skills and competencies that are far from the present technical focus and thus need to be developed.

Source: Moyo, Evison and Hagmann, Jürgen; *Facilitating Competence Development to Put Learning Process Approaches into Practice in Rural Extension*.

As mandates differ, so should roles. With some clarity, stakeholders could approach extension agencies for better technical processes and methods (high quality, user-friendly outputs). Even where farmers have taken responsibility for extension work in areas where these agencies have shut down, there continues a need to support farmer-to-farmer exchange for sustainable agriculture and development, particularly in the context of market-oriented crops.

The extension system can also rediscover its own role in drawing lessons from indigenous practices and scientific knowledge. PTD processes themselves, because of the stress on mutual learning and reflection, can help extensionists rediscover their roles.

Even among extension workers themselves changes are needed in behavior, attitudes, and emotions, as well as in skill levels. In Zimbabwe, PTD advocates found it important to open up rigid and structural thinking towards "lateral thinking" in terms of processes and systems perspectives. Exposure to divergent, alternative concepts and paradigms, creativity and mental flexibility were a premium so that extensionists could go beyond the "more of the same" solutions that fail to respond to new dimensions in the setting. Prevailing values, including the notion that formal education is better than experiential and non-formal knowledge, must change. This puts farmers and the extension agents in subordinate positions and undermines the esteem and confidence that drives development. This confidence, together with "groundedness" and cultural identity are factors seen as essential when managing complex and dynamic processes in communities. Experience also showed the approach of learning by doing through intervals of training and practice, backed by peer learning groups and coaching support have great potential in cultivating these skills and attitudes. The training of extension workers will thus have to be iterative to meet PTD standards that processes be both participatory but structured enough.

Institutionalization of PTD requires time, and often it is a continuous learning process that can start from simple experiments to complex ones that require a shift from project to program approaches. PTD works best when it starts from simple experiments. Doing PTD in groups enhances ownership and contributes to institutionalization.