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**RE-ORIENTING AND STRENGTHENING OF RURAL
EXTENSION FOR PRDP IN AFRICA**

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RE-ORIENTING AND STRENGTHENING OF RURAL EXTENSION FOR PARTICIPATION IN AFRICA¹

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

Most African countries depend on the rural sector for the development and strength of their economies. Agriculture has, by and large, served as the backbone of the economy in these countries. This means that the performance of each country's economy depends, to a large extent, on the performance of the agricultural sector.

Rural development initiatives undertaken by governments have generally utilized existing extension systems. Such efforts have been guided by conventional extension philosophy and practice. Conventional extension, as practised in most African countries, has been inherited from colonial times.

Agriculture has, in many countries, been the most favoured by an elaborate extension system compared to the rest of the rural sector. However, even then, agricultural production in a number of countries has been falling or performing unstably over the years. Where there has been an up turn in production its sustainability has been rather elusive.

Many reasons have been advanced for the poor performance of agriculture and the rest of the rural sector. A number of these centre around the failure of the extension system to respond to the real needs and problems of rural people in order to bring about desirable rural transformation.

In agriculture, for example, extension has been increasingly criticised for its inability to influence farmers to adopt improved innovations and change their attitudes and priorities. Critics of conventional extension have taken issue with its philosophy, methodology and overall socio-political milieu.

The challenges facing conventional extension have prompted an increasing desire for more effective approaches. The search for alternative approaches has led a number of experimental schemes and pilot projects.

While extension systems in Africa can be said to differ from one country in terms of specific operations, the following observations have been found to be generally true:

1. There is great similarity among extension systems in Anglophone countries. The operational character of these systems reflects the colonial pattern inherited by these countries in the 1950s and 1960s. Concentration of such systems has generally centred on improvement of cash and food crops.
2. There is inherent similarity among extension systems in Francophone countries. Most of these systems are patterned along the *animation rurale* model which reflects a community development orientation.

¹ Summary from a perspective study prepared for ERDEA by K.J.B. Karegero, Associate Professor and Director, Institute of Continuing Education, Sokoine University of Agriculture, Morogoro, Tanzania.

3. Most countries generally carry out extension in the framework of a transformation and modernization approach.

In a number of African countries, there has been tremendous increase in consciousness towards the provision of extension services to the poorest of the poor in rural areas. This has, over the years, led to the adoption of participatory rural development initiatives in order to address the problems and needs of the marginalized sections of the society. Experience has shown that the conventional extension system cannot adequately support and facilitate the evolution and development of such initiatives.

Consequently, a number of attempts to experiment on participatory extension approaches have been made through pilot projects. These attempts are beginning to yield useful and dependable experiences that can serve as lessons towards initiatives for re-orientating and strengthening of rural extension for participatory rural development (PRD) in Africa.

This perspective study explores the conventional extension system both conceptual and practical contexts. Special attention is directed to its evolution and philosophy. A specific case of agricultural extension in Tanzania is provided in order to document and illustrate the practical and operational context of conventional extension work in Africa.

The study develops a framework towards participatory rural extension as an alternative to conventional extension. In this connection, a critique on the conventional extension model is presented and, based on the philosophy of development as liberation, the concept and practice of participatory extension are discussed.

The Planning for Rural Development at Village Level (PRDVL) Project is cited as a case to illustrate the theoretical and practical considerations for re-orienting and strengthening rural extension for PRD in Africa. Specific attention is directed towards the delivery systems, linkages with relevant rural institutions and administrative mechanisms necessary for a more effective alternative.

2. AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

2.1. Evolution of Conventional Extension

The history of extension traces its roots in agricultural education. It is said that the forerunner of agricultural extension in both Europe and North America were agricultural societies.

The term "extension education" was coined by Cambridge University in Britain to underscore the concept of taking education advantage of Universities to the people. However, the evolution of extension in developing countries came about largely after World War II. In Africa, this mostly came after independence. Since most African countries attained independence in the 1950s and 1960s, it was during this period that most extension organizations were established. It should be noted, however, that nationalist governments in most cases took over from colonial extension systems.

2.2. Philosophical Orientation

The term "extension" as originally coined referred to teaching activities of universities away from regular campuses, thereby implying an expansion of the teaching function away from the campus. This teaching function was intended to improve the human condition.

When applied to agriculture this involved instruction and practical demonstrations. Thus extension espoused an educational role right from the outset. Consequently, extension's role was to bring about change in people's behaviour - that is, to enable them to learn.

Extension is intended to serve human beings who operate and live in a real-life situation. Since the work environment of extension's clientele is dynamic, clientele ought to engage in learning experiences that will enable them to cope with an ever-changing world.

3. THE PRACTICE OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF TANZANIA

In Africa, development is largely perceived as a national task to be pursued by governments. While extension systems are not the same all over the continent, most countries utilize a transformation and modernization approach which was dominant during the 1950s and 1960s when these nations became independent.

Consequently, many of these countries have invested and continue to invest considerable resources in agricultural extension systems in the hope of accelerating rural development. However, on the contrary, in a number of cases, extension has not lived up to the expectations of many and has, therefore, been the subject of mounting criticism in recent years. The following section analyses Tanzania's extension system as a case to illustrate the major operational characteristics and limitations of conventional extension in Africa.

3.1 Agricultural Extension in Tanzania

Tanzania has a population of about 23 million of which 95 per cent live in rural areas and 90 per cent depend on agriculture for a living. Agricultural production is organized around three systems.

1. **Peasant Smallholders:** These constitute the majority of the farm operators, contributing to about 25 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They mostly use traditional methods of production and operate, on average, up to 10 hectares of cultivated land.

2. **Medium and Large Scale Commercial Farmers:** These utilize improved agricultural practices, including inputs and mechanization. The farms operated range between about 10 and 100 hectares and have heavy reliance on hired labour. With increased liberalization of agricultural investment policies, this sector has great potential for growth.

3. **State Farms:** These are publicly owned estates, mostly for sisal, rice, sugar cane, cotton, pyrethrum and wheat. Performance in this sector has largely been plagued by problems.

Since Tanzania's economy is based on agriculture, the role and importance of agricultural extension cannot be overemphasized. Extension as traditionally carried out bears characteristics and limitations that reflect this reality.

3.1.1. Underlying Development Theory and Policies

Extension performance as inherited from colonial time calls for complete transformation of society and its economy from a traditional or backward status to a modern one. In this context, development has been seen as a process to be initiated by government or catalyzed by findings and innovations developed by researchers.

Thus the agricultural extension system in operation has been and continues to be an integral part of government administration, with a mandate for agricultural inspection and enforcement of agricultural by-laws. Even though this coercive approach was found to be ineffective and was discouraged towards the period of independence, it continues to re-surface.

A major turning point in policy guiding extension work came with the launching of the *Arusha Declaration* and its declared ideology of *Socialism and Self-Reliance* in 1967. This directed the country's development efforts towards an egalitarian society through self-reliance and collective endeavour. It prompted villagization, the massive resettlement of people from scattered homesteads into clusters. The extension service, as every government

department, was involved in the often coercive process of villagization. Planning of extension activities was bureaucratic and top-down in fashion. Thus centrally determined decisions took precedence over local needs and problems.

In 1972, a policy resolution *Siasa ni Kilimo* (Politics is Agriculture) was introduced to underscore the importance of agriculture in the nation's economy. The resolution implicitly called upon politicians at all levels to spearhead the agricultural revolution. This move has been criticized by extension professionals as the source of conflict and mis-communication between politicians and extension professionals.

In response to continued decline in agricultural production performance, the government launched *The Agricultural Policy of Tanzania*, and *The Livestock Policy of Tanzania* in the early 1980s. The former specifically asserted that agriculture is a science and that extension is a profession which should be respected and left to the professionals themselves. This reaffirmation was intended to forestall any potential conflict, and interference by politicians in matters of a professional nature.

3.1.2. Extension Philosophy and Methodology

The overall purpose of conventional extension is modernization through technological change and increased agricultural productivity, as opposed to human development. Human development is normally perceived as a by-product rather than a goal in itself.

Extension as seen from this stand point places the driving force for development external rather than internal to the people and their communities. In this context, extension has served to bridge the gap between government and the people and has been viewed by many as merely responsible for technological transfer.

Studies have shown that even though the outcome being pursued by extension ought to be educational, the desire for modernization has prompted extension workers to resort to regulatory, service-oriented and administrative fiat. Hence planning for agricultural improvement in villages is carried out by government agents rather than by the villagers themselves. By-laws are regarded as containing the prescriptions for improved farming. This calls for a clearly defined philosophy to guide extension work.

3.1.3. Extension Worker-Farmer Relationship

Extension workers, by virtue of their professional orientation, operate as experts who have knowledge and whose role is to transfer it to farmers who are considered to be lacking such knowledge. Indeed, studies have shown that in a typical village setting, extension workers initiate action about 68 per cent of the time as compared to only about 11 per cent on the part of the farmers. The latter are, in most cases, expected to comply with what is prescribed to them.

A marked feature of the modernization model is the concentration of extension efforts on "things" - plants, animals, practices, technologies - rather than human beings. This has frequently prompted extension workers to intervene directly with farming problems (of plants, animals, etc.) leaving the farmer out of such a problem-solving process. Farmers have, consequently, become passive recipients of solutions and prescriptions developed externally.

The communication method used most frequently by extension workers is "telling", and is accomplished through speeches, lectures and exhortations. This is used 60 per cent of the time as compared to demonstration which is resorted to in only 18 per cent of the time. This observation underscores the powerful position of the extension agents as custodians of knowledge as compared to the disadvantaged position of farmers.

As demonstrated in previous sections, decision-making at village level is a monopoly of extension workers and the government staff. The role of farmers' involvement is very much acknowledged in extension but, in practice, participation by villagers has, at most, been passive rather than active.

3.1.5. Organization Structure

The extension service has traditionally been an integral part of government bureaucracy. The Ministry responsible for extension has been frequently re-organized.

The structure is such that the relationship between front-line extension staff and supervisors tends to be more administrative and supervisory than professional. That between front-line staff and farmers tends to be more instructive than truly educational.

Extension workers, as civil servants, have an allegiance to the administrative structure rather than to the villagers. The terms and conditions of service are not necessarily pegged on the performance and welfare of villagers.

The research-extension-farmer link has yet to be fully developed. Extension programmes are generally executed without appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

3.1.6. Extension Staff Recruitment and Development

The extension service is still inadequately staffed in terms of quality and quantity. The ratio of extension workers to farmers is 1:1000 and it is anticipated to narrow to about 1:500-600 in the next ten years.

Most extension staff are certificate and diploma holders. However, a substantial workload has over the years been shouldered by semi-trained auxiliaries who are gradually being phased out. The training capacity is still low and therefore staff development is constrained.

4. TOWARDS PARTICIPATORY EXTENSION

4.1. Critique on Conventional Extension

Several developing countries after one or two decades of independence have realized the need for a different rural development approach. This has arisen in the face of unique problems of land tenure and distribution, class differentiation, economic dependence and its attendant constraints. With time there has evolved a growing trend towards a more humanistic concept of development.

The International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa that was held in Arusha, Tanzania, in February 1990 underscored the need for development as liberation. The Africa Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (Arusha, 1990) evolved as a further testimony of a desire for change.

In Tanzania, advocacy for the goal of development as being greater freedom and well-being of people began in the mid-1960s. Within this liberating concept of development, extension is seen both as a means and an end. Conventional extension has been criticised for its inherently questionable assumptions:

1. That all extension recommendations are good and that the experts are always right;

2. That extension's clientele are ignorant and, therefore, have no contribution to make to the development process;
3. That knowledge of innovations will trickle down from those who know to those who do not;
4. That extension's clientele must continuously seek for assistance from extension workers;
5. That working with progressive clientele has a greater chance of bringing about change in communities than giving everyone opportunity to learn from the real situation.

The challenge to these and other assumptions has stimulated greater thinking and action towards a more humanistic and liberating concept of extension. Its basic premise is that extension should help people to help themselves.

Thus the greatest challenge for extension services that attempt to facilitate self-sustaining development is how to empower clientele so that they can increasingly become effective actors in activities intended for their own development. Help people to change from a stance of "waiting to be told" to one of "acting because it is the right thing to do" calls for an extension approach that ensures active participation and guarantees system adaptability, continuity and sustainability.

Practice has shown that participation enhances learning from experience. Since extension is educational it must embrace the participation of clientele who seek to learn.

4.2. Participatory Extension: the Practice

The concept of participatory extension depicts an orientation towards increasing the extent of involvement and interaction of clientele in the extension process. In Tanzania, the Arusha Declaration and the Ujamaa Villages Act of 1975 have long provided the necessary socio-political and legal framework for participatory extension.

Capacity building for self-reliance is best achieved within a collective framework in order to enhance empowerment. Participatory extension is, therefore, a deliberate and active process for enabling people to take initiatives being guided by their own thinking, feeling and action, and using means over which they can exert effective control. Participatory extension is a response to the need for:

1. Changing people's behaviour and facilitating understanding, consensus and wise decisions;
2. Securing genuine acceptability and legitimacy;
3. Reaching out for people's real needs and problems;
4. Providing opportunity for the disadvantaged to make decisions and counteract their alienation;
5. Facilitating a genuine learning process;
6. Increasing chances for mobilizing clientele's resources;
7. Inculcating attitudes for initiative, creativity and self-reliance among clientele.

4.2.1. Planning Rural Development as a Village Level Project

The Planning Rural Development as Village Level (PRDVL) Project which was initiated in Tanzania in 1981, provides useful lessons and experiences for developing a participatory extension service in Africa. The project

which started in only 14 villages in three districts (Iringa Rural, Iloa and Mpwapwa) has now expanded into over thirty villages. It utilizes a participatory extension approach based on dialogue. Experiences from this project are based on the following key elements:

1. **Conscientization:** This is considered the core element of participatory extension and is concerned with the liberation of the creative potentials and initiatives of clientele through investigation, reflection and analysis. A key question to villagers in such a process is:

Why are things the way they are in our community?

Through dialogue, villagers have been able to identify and analyze the causes of their situation and the ways of dealing with such a situation;

2. **Participatory Organization:** In analyzing their situation, villagers engage in self-organization in order to take collective initiatives based on common goals. Villagers have sought to create their own interest groups built around income generating activities intended to address commonly identified problems and needs. For example, by December 1988, a total of 114 such groups had been formed of which 68 per cent concentrated agricultural projects.

Groups serve as:

- i) Instruments of collective action;
- ii) Means through which members express themselves;
- iii) Forum for collective reflection and analysis; and
- iv) Collective personality (= identity) for members, with collective power, solidarity and control.

Each group has its own democratically elected leadership. In some villages, groups have consolidated themselves to elect a "paramount leader" hence increasing their power and control;

3. **Animators:** These are promoters or catalysts for change who guide the process of dialogue at the village level in order to identify participatory initiatives. Extension workers who function as animators:

- i) Engage farmers in learning from their own real-life environment;
- ii) Share knowledge and experience with villagers;
- iii) Guide villagers in the process of systematic enquiry;
- iv) Work with villagers on their projects; and
- v) Assist villagers in capacity building.

4. **Orientation of Animators:** Animators were drawn largely from department of extension, community development and cooperatives. Orientation for them has largely constituted a series workshop for gaining experiences, village visits and study tours, and short courses;

5. **Facilitators:** These are mostly planning officers and trainers who:

- i) Serve as research persons from time to time;
- ii) Sensitize existing bureaucracies about farmers' needs and initiatives;
- iii) Organize district meetings; and
- iv) Effect mobilization of resources.

6. **Learning together:** This can best be described as a joint exploration between villagers and animators based on dialogue. This takes place mostly in the form of group meetings and farm and home visits;

7. **Progressive redundancy animators:** The true test of participatory extension is its progressive ability to reduce clientele's reliance on the external animator in favour of an internal animator who is a fellow villager. While this is an evolutionary process which occurs at different rates in different villages, it creates in-built opportunities for villagers to develop the capacity to animate. In PRDVL Project, this project has freed time for external animators to extend services to other villages and to more groups, hence the expanding the project's geographical scope. The expansion from 14 to over 30 villages now can be large attributed to this process;

8. **Networking:** This constitutes workshops, village visits, study tours and an animator's newsletter (*Santi ya Urughbishi*) which is published in Kiswahili, the national language;

9. **Linkage between theory and practice:** Since animation utilizes dialogue and learning through experience, villages have the opportunity to relate theory to practice in the process of developing solutions to identified problems. In this way research and extension are brought to bear on existing situations;

10. **Dialogue as a key education method:** Participatory extension utilizes maximum horizontal sharing of ideas among extension agents (animators) and clientele. During this process:

- i) Animators and villagers have both learned;
- ii) Animators and villagers have engaged in a process of discovering together;
- iii) The monopoly of knowledge has gradually been broken down, prompting each party to contribute freely and constructively towards problem solving;
- iv) Villagers have increasingly made their own decisions and put them into action;
- v) Women have increasingly participated in group activities.

There is evidence to show that decision-making at household level and village level have been very much enhanced. This has also influenced the nature of decisions being made at the district and regional levels.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Experience from PRDVL has so far demonstrated the following:

1. Villagers, especially the poorest of the poor, recognise the need to work together in order to increase their power and control of their own development process;

2. Villagers work cohesively together if they are homogenous and recognize a common interest amongst them;

3. Groups that receive competent guidance and support participate effectively in the initiation, design, operation and evaluation of their own development activities;

4. Participatory groups provide a sound basis for management of participatory extension processes. They also provide opportunity for enhancing and influencing overall village governance;

5. Members in their groups have generally utilized their own resources as a starting point. External resources have been sought and utilized mostly to enhance their capacity for self-reliance. In this way, groups continue to struggle towards self-reliance rather than dependency;

6. As more and more animators and animation groups confederate, opportunities for ultimately involving entire villages in animation increase;

7. Participatory extension is very much in line with the nation's political ideology. Participatory organizations are, therefore, easily compatible with normal structures of governance;

8. Efforts to re-orient and strengthen rural extension for participatory rural development do not necessarily require radical changes in current operational systems and structures. What is primarily required is an effective conceptual orientation towards bottom-up learning methods based on dialogue and experience;

9. Conceptual orientation from top-down to bottom-up functioning ought to take place gradually to provide opportunity for agents of change and clientele to unlearn what they have traditionally practised. To do so, opportunities for practical learning through experience should be provided;

10. The greatest strength of participatory extension is its ability to increase the capacity of villagers to gradually undertake tasks that have traditionally been left to the extension workers alone. Such progressive redundancy on the part of extension workers enables them to tackle more complex issues and offer assistance elsewhere. In this way, extension service support can be widely shared even when the trained manpower is small.