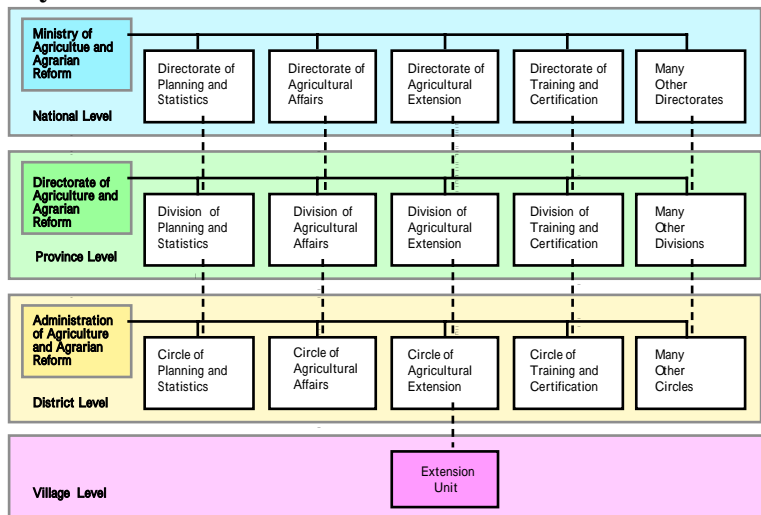


Agricultural extension and training for agricultural extension agents in Syria

Part 2: Agricultural extension system in Syria

In Syria the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, which was established by merging the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, is in charge of the entire agricultural administration. The agricultural extension system is being set up under the auspices of the Directorate of Agricultural Extension. In terms of the organizational structure of agricultural administration, as shown in the table, the same structure at the central government level is copied at the provincial and district levels. This means, for example, the agricultural extension division of the provincial level comes under both the central and provincial directorates, as if the division has two heads.



The Agricultural Extension Division is divided into four sections, namely the Technical Section, Media Section, Planning Section and Home Economics Section. This structure is again the same at the provincial and district level. At the village level, branch offices called Extension Units are placed, and each Extension Unit takes charge of several villages, sometimes presiding over as many as ten villages.

One of the main activities of agricultural extension is the nation-wide study led by the Technical Section on various problems faced by farmers in different types of agriculture. Based on the findings they are trying to better understand the current situation of agriculture in Syria and to draw up appropriate agricultural extension programs. One of the actual promotion activities in the field is the so-called Field Day demonstration in collaboration with experiment and research institutions. On such occasions, under the initiative of agricultural extension workers, researchers and innovative farmers present the results of their experiments, and also there are some other activities to show appropriate technologies in the field. The Media Section provides various types of information to farmers through the mass media such as radio and TV, and it also conducts a unique activity in the form of a mobile theater group. The group, which consists of agricultural extension workers, goes around villages and performs musical pieces of different content which change depending on the target region and the season. The musical performance has become very popular especially in remote areas with little entertainment, and the troupe can get quite a large audience.

In this way or the other, in Syria great efforts are being made to establish an agricultural extension system, and the number of the Extension Units is as many as 800, with some 4000 staff involved. If this system works efficiently and effectively, no doubt it will play a significant role in the agricultural development of Syria. In reality, however, there are a number of problems which still need to be overcome one by one, and among these the main ones are as follows:

- * The role of the Agricultural Extension Directorate within the Ministry of Agriculture is not clear, neither is the role of each section under the Directorate, and that of each staff member within each section. Besides, the division of responsibilities between the central, prefecture, district, and Extension Unit levels is also not clear-cut.
- * Collaboration between the Agricultural Extension Directorate and other related directorates is so weak that the information about farmers' problems held at the Agricultural Extension Directorate is not shared with other directorates, and results gained by the latter are not incorporated into the agricultural extension activities.
- * There is no systematic training of agricultural extension workers, and the knowledge and experience of those staff who participated in training courses or seminars inside or outside the country are not effectively shared.
- * Due to the planned economic system, production of the main crops is still controlled by the government, and agricultural extension workers are seen as a watchdog of implementation of the prescribed crop production plan. This makes it difficult to establish a good working relationship between farmers and extension workers.
- * With an insufficient budget for the agricultural extension activities, they tend to depend on financial support from development aid donors. The Agricultural Extension Directorate, with little ownership, tends to suffer problematic dealings with the donors, and it appears to be inviting "development aid hazards".

