

## ***Agricultural Extension and Training for Extension Workers in Syria***

### **Part 6: The future of agricultural extension and extension staff training - the common problems and the prospect of extension -**

In recent years as the focus of development aid projects has shifted from 'hard' to 'soft', the training of extension staff in the field of agriculture and rural development has become a very important theme. At the same time, however, such common problems as the incapability of the extension staff, insufficient facilities and equipment needed for extension activities, the vulnerable linkage between extension activities and research etc., have not yet been solved in many developing countries including Syria. In the final part of this series we would like to ask the question as to whether there is any concrete and effective remedy for such problems.

First of all, is there any problem in the current agricultural extension system itself? Will the traditional existing system keep functioning effectively in the future? The same shortfalls have long been pointed out about the system. Then, isn't it the case that there are some problems in the very current extension system / method itself? Take the example of the agricultural extension system in Syria. The number of extension staff is greater than 5,000, and at a glance it looks like a well organized system. What about the reality though? Aren't there some unattainable unrealistic preconditions for this system to function well? Then, isn't there any realistic and specific solution? Let us think of some.

#### 1) Separation of extension staff into 'Specialist' and 'Generalist' categories

It would be useful to create two different categories of extension staff, that is: the senior extension staff who are trained in good technologies for specific matters (thus called SMS: Subject Matter Specialists), and who would lead farmers and other ordinary extension staff; and the Generalist staff who would act as village development co-ordinators; not employing specialized technologies but rather applying their general overall knowledge. Different types of training should be conducted for these two types of extension staff. This is to solve the problem of the lack of capacity of the extension staff. It is necessary to give the most appropriate training according to each trainee's ability and needs, rather than to give the same sort of training to everybody.

#### 2) Learning from successful farmers in the locality (Farmer-to-Farmer Extension)

In general, farmers are conservative people who are reluctant to change their traditional methods or to try something new. However, if they are shown that a certain method is beneficial and profitable for them, they will introduce the same system without being forced to do so. Especially when farmers themselves try out some new technology and it turns out to be successful, other farmers will readily follow suit. Often that is the most realistic, non-text-type technique of extension, without any incomprehensible special terminology. What is to be learned is already there in front of their eyes. Often such technology and information that proves to be acceptable for the farmers spreads by word of mouth. Sometimes such a pretext as "there are not enough motorbikes" is used for unsuccessful extension activities. However, if that is a problem, then another method of information/technology transfer which doesn't require such modes of transportation should be used.

#### 3) Charge for the agricultural extension service (privatisation or creation of incentives)

In addition to the insufficiency of equipment for agricultural extension activities, the low salary level is another main reason for extension staff's complaints in many developing countries. In principle, agricultural extension activities are free of charge and are conducted as a public service. This said, there is a need for the system to give some further income for extension staff with their special abilities and technology/techniques. In Syria most civil servants have second jobs. For instance, after working at the Irrigation Bureau during the daytime, one of the staff members works as an irrigation-related consultant in the evening, planning irrigation facilities or giving technical advice. If the technical ability of agricultural extension workers leads to additional income, that would give a good incentive for extension staff to increase their knowledge and technologies. And this in turn may lead to the development of new technologies that are actually useful for farmers.



**Training for farmers (Syria)**



**Learning from a successful farmer  
(Zimbabwe)**



**PRA survey (Laos)**