



global forum for rural advisory services
forum mondial pour le conseil rural
foro global para los servicios de asesoría rural

Guide to **EVALUATING RURAL EXTENSION**

GFRAS is the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services. GFRAS is made up of various stakeholders worldwide who have an interest and role in rural advisory services (RAS). The mission of this forum is to provide advocacy and leadership by RAS stakeholders on pluralistic, demand-driven rural and agricultural advisory services. GFRAS does this in the context of the global development agenda, with a goal of promoting sustainable growth and reducing poverty.

THIS GUIDE TO EVALUATING RURAL EXTENSION
has been published by



Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS)
c/o Agridea Eschikon 28
8315 Lindau
Switzerland
Tel. 0041-(0)52 354 97 64
info@g-fras.org
www.g-fras.org

AUTHORS

Ian Christoplos
Peta Sandison
Sanne Chipeta

CREDITS

This guide was funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Natural Resources Institute (NRI) contributed to the background documents and an earlier version of this Guide.

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Marianne Kalriis

PHOTOS

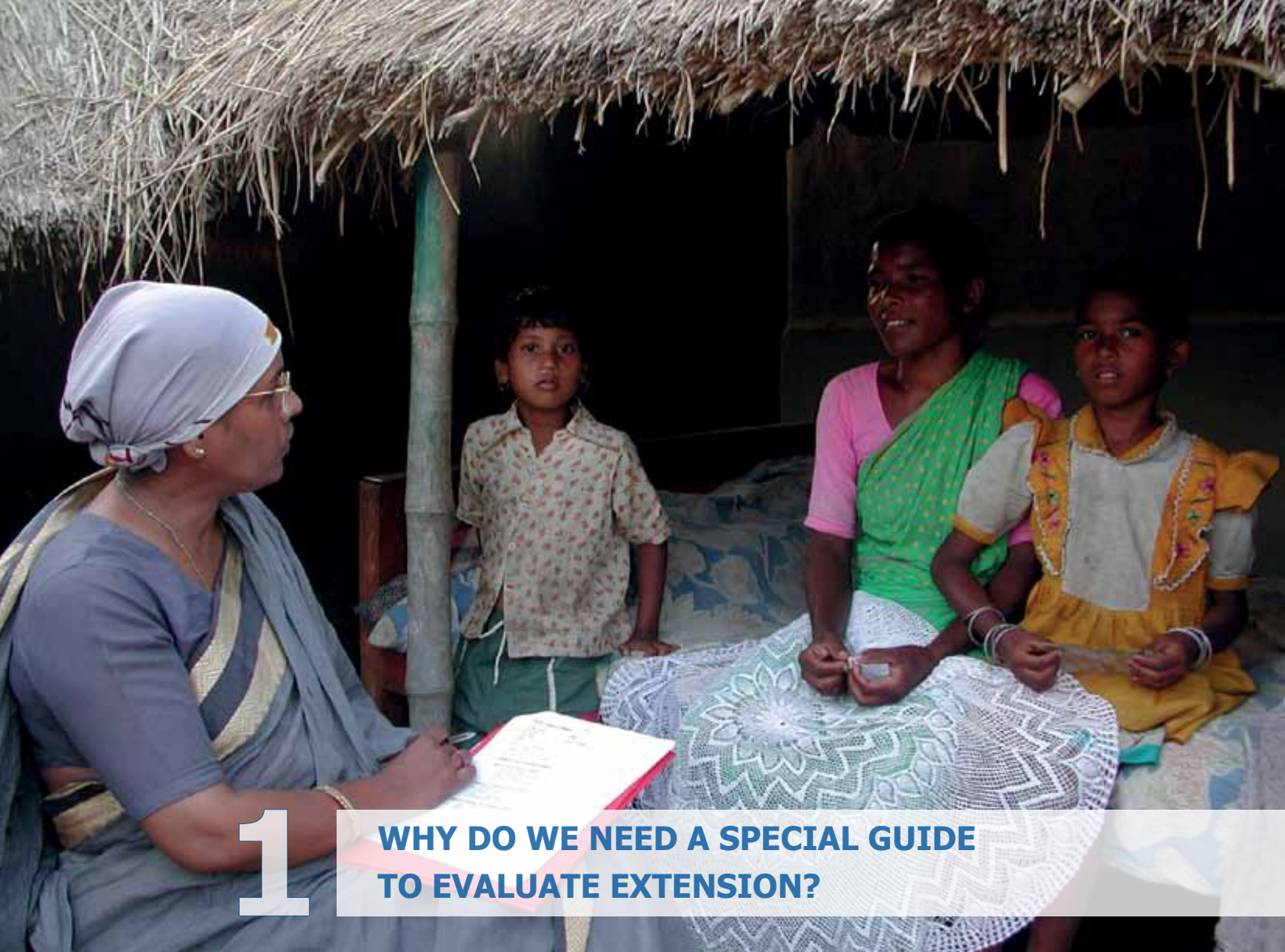
Ian Christoplos, Glemminge Development Research
Sanne Chipeta, Knowledge Centre for Agriculture, Danish Agricultural Advisory Service
Torben Huus-Bruun, Knowledge Centre for Agriculture, Danish Agricultural Advisory Service

COVER

X. Fonseca/CIMMYT

April 2012

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Why do we need a special guide to evaluate extension? | 2 |
| What is extension? | 3 |
| Why extension is important (and why it needs to be evaluated) | 4 |
| 'Value for money' and 'results' in extension | 5 |
| What is evaluation? | 6 |
| Monitoring and baselines | 7 |
| Results frameworks and theories of change | 10 |
| 2. Designing extension evaluation | 12 |
| Evaluating for whom? Utilisation focused evaluation | 12 |
| Why evaluate? Accountability and learning | 15 |
| Evaluation criteria | 17 |
| Choosing evaluation approaches and methods | 19 |
| Evaluation costs | 21 |
| 3. Challenges in evaluating extension interventions | 23 |
| Attributing impacts of extension within complex systems | 26 |
| Evaluating extension in a volatile world | 27 |
| 4. Evaluating best-fit of extension interventions | 29 |
| Best-fit in relation to different extension clients | 30 |
| Best-fit in relation to methodological options | 34 |
| Best-fit in relation to financial sustainability | 35 |
| 5. Evaluating pluralism | 37 |
| Is the intervention focused appropriately within the value chain? | 39 |
| 6. Evaluating accountability to clients | 41 |
| 7. Assessing human resource challenges in extension evaluations | 44 |
| 8. Evaluating the sustainability of extension interventions | 48 |
| Can evaluations judge sustainability? | 48 |
| Adaptability to changes | 48 |
| Sustainability and ownership | 49 |
| Evaluating sustainability in embedded systems | 50 |
| 9. Looking forward: Enhancing and ensuring the utility of extension evaluation | 51 |



1

WHY DO WE NEED A SPECIAL GUIDE TO EVALUATE EXTENSION?

The purpose is to support those involved in extension evaluation to choose how to conduct more comprehensive, rigorous, credible and useful evaluations. The Guide supports readers to understand different types of evaluation, to make decisions on what is most appropriate for their circumstances, and to access further sources of theoretical and practical information.

This Guide has been developed by the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS¹). As background to the Guide, a meta-evaluation of extension² evaluations and a meta-review of methods were conducted³. These concluded that the evaluations of extension so far have not supported learning and capacity building in the organisations – which would have been the foundation for using the evaluations for improving extension services and also that there is a strong need for guidance particularly in terms of selecting evaluation approaches for extension that can handle the complex situations that extension systems and programmes exist in and also feature. It was moreover found that several general evaluation tools and approaches are available that can be adapted to evaluation of extension. This Guide for evaluating rural extension is therefore not an additional evaluation toolbox but rather provides ideas and con-

cepts and principles – based on GFRAS' principles for extension⁴. The purpose is to support those involved in extension evaluation to choose how to conduct more comprehensive, rigorous, credible and useful evaluations. The Guide supports readers to understand different types of evaluation, to make decisions on what is most appropriate for their circumstances, and to access further sources of theoretical and practical information. The Guide is intended primarily to be used by four sets of evaluation stakeholders:

- Those commissioning and managing evaluations
- Professional evaluators and staff responsible for monitoring systems
- Professionals involved in training and educating evaluators
- Researchers looking for ways to synergise their efforts with evaluation initiatives.

The evaluations that this Guide is intended to inform can be used by an even broader range of stakeholders, including policy makers in ministries of agriculture, environment and finance, and international development agencies.

The Guide begins by outlining what 'extension' means today and why it is especially important to use evaluation to improve these services. This is followed by a summary of how 'evaluation' is defined for the purposes of the Guide. Some core issues are presented that are particularly important for evaluating extension.

The latter sections of the Guide provide a normative framework for evaluation of extension that is structured in accordance with five key areas to extension reform identified by GFRAS⁴:

- Focusing on best-fit approaches
- Embracing pluralism
- Increasing accountability to rural clients
- Developing human resources
- Ensuring sustainability.

These areas are analysed with respect to how to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of extension interventions within a given policy and socio-economic context. By 'intervention', this Guide refers to projects, programmes, reform efforts and other activities intended to improve impacts of extension services provision.

Extension monitoring and evaluation need to reflect the diversity of extension systems, which are driven by a mix of goals of farmers, governments, private firms, researchers, and others in the innovation system and within broader rural development. The advice provided here consists of a menu of approaches, evaluation questions, conceptual frameworks, and signposts for issues that are particularly relevant when monitoring and evaluating extension.

The criteria for what is assumed to be 'good extension' in this Guide are strongly linked to areas that GFRAS has identified as important for the development of effective and sustainable extension systems. Many interventions will be striving for change in only some of these areas. Evaluation should recognise that some areas of reform will inevitably be emphasised more than others but help stakeholders to

reconsider whether these priorities are appropriate. For this reason readers should identify the aspects that are relevant in the particular interventions they are assessing and make their own choice from among the various suggestions in this Guide.

What is extension?

Farmers and other actors in rural development need better access to information, knowledge and advice, and must link with other actors in agri-food markets and value chains. This is a precondition if rural poverty is to be alleviated, livelihoods improved, and natural resources more sustainably managed. GFRAS was created to support the improvement of extension services to live up to these challenges and has identified improved evaluation of extension as a crucial element of such efforts.

The scope of the Guide is rather broad in terms of the range of 'extension services' to be assessed. The days when extension was synonymous with the work of public sector agencies are over. The extension services that are being evaluated today may consist of an input vendor advising a farmer about what seed to plant, a television station broadcasting a weather forecast, a supermarket advising traders about what standards are required for the vegetables they purchase, or a farmer organisation lobbying for research that reflects the demands of its members for new technologies. The varied extension systems that exist in different countries are the result of historical and political factors that have shaped local ideas about the responsibilities of the state, civil society, and private sector in serving different groups of farmers.

Extension may include services within three areas:

Technology and information sharing

- Dissemination and sharing of knowledge about technologies, new research, markets, input and financial services, and climate and weather
- On-farm testing and practical adaptation of new technologies and practices
- Linking farmers and their organisations to research and other technology generating institutions

Extension monitoring and evaluation need to reflect the diversity of extension systems, which are driven by a mix of goals of farmers, governments, private firms, researchers, and others in the innovation system and within broader rural development interventions.

The days when extension was synonymous with the work of public sector agencies are over. The extension services that are being evaluated today may consist of an input vendor advising a farmer about what seed to plant, a television station broadcasting a weather forecast, a supermarket advising traders about what standards are required for the vegetables they purchase, or a farmer organisation lobbying for research that reflects the demands of its members for new technologies.

- Support to implementing government policies and programmes through information, awareness and advice on technological options, including land stewardship, food safety, and animal welfare
- Increasing awareness of new opportunities for certification of 'green,' fair trade, and other production methods
- Nutrition education and home sciences.

Evaluation of these services will often look at technology and knowledge transfer and assess the results in terms of technology adaptation and the level of knowledge among the users.

Advice related to farm, organisational, and business management

- Advice for individual farmers, groups of farmers, farmer organisations, co-operatives, and other agribusinesses regarding how to reach markets
- Development of business management skills among smallholder farmers and other local entrepreneurs
- Support to institutional development processes and to social, institutional, and organisational innovations
- Development of informal and formal farmer organisations, and rural youth organisations, and helping them to articulate their demands
- Legal and fiscal advice.

When evaluating this kind of advice, the focus will be on organisational and business development and the outcomes to be assessed will be organisational and consist of business changes and new forms of networks.

Facilitation and brokerage in rural development and value chains

- Brokering collaboration and promoting social learning among market actors
- Linking smallholder farmers, rural entrepreneurs, and other members of the agricultural community with institutions offering training and education in fields relevant to the agricultural sector
- Facilitation of linkages between farmers, their organisations, and the public and private sector
- Contributing to the development of more appropriate policies and pro-

grammes by facilitating feedback from farmers, local entrepreneurs and advisors

- Facilitating access to non-extension rural services such as insurance, phytosanitary and certification services, and public subsidy programmes, including payment for environmental services and other schemes related to carbon credits
- Facilitating access to credit from rural finance institutions for farmers and local entrepreneurs
- Mediating in conflicts over natural resources.

Evaluation of these kinds of services will focus on outcomes in the form of changes in relations between actors in the market and value chains, and will assess the empowerment and success of farmers and local entrepreneurs in linking with the market.

This Guide is structured to provide orientation to ensure that evaluation approaches reflect these three types of services and increase understanding of how extension fits into rural development.

Often evaluations are designed to simply hold extension agencies to account for how well farmers have adopted new technologies. This may indeed be well worth exploring in order to judge the performance of many extension services. But it is also important to recognise that this is just one of the tasks that today's extension systems perform.

Together, the above categories of extension services may lead to greater empowerment of clients in their ability to make informed decisions about technologies, their understanding of how to engage with markets, and in finding effective ways to deal with public authorities and private firms. A 'meta-question' for evaluators is therefore whether these goals have been achieved or not, i.e., are clients in more control of their farms, businesses, and livelihoods?

Why extension is important (and why it needs to be evaluated)

There is a growing realisation that many of the urgently needed reforms in addressing food security, market development,

Often evaluations are designed to simply hold extension agencies to account for how well farmers have adopted new technologies. This may indeed be well worth exploring in order to judge the performance of many extension services. But it is also important to recognise that this is just one of the tasks that today's extension systems perform.

and climate change will only be effective if strong advisory institutions are in place to provide support to rural populations.

To improve and optimise extension's contribution to rural livelihoods it is essential to monitor and evaluate its achievements. High quality monitoring and evaluation based on reliable information about the outcomes and impacts of services are a foundation for structured learning from experience. Monitoring and evaluation are also essential to ensure that those supporting and undertaking interventions to improve advisory services are accountable to the direct clients of these services as well as to governments, farmer organisations, and others investing in improving extension.

International, national and private investments in extension are growing fast. Citizens and their elected representatives are demanding increased financial allocations to extension in their own countries and as part of development cooperation to alleviate hunger and increase production and thereby reduce volatility in food prices, deal with extreme weather events and impending climate change, mitigate future climate change, and help the rural poor maintain their livelihoods amid dramatic changes in agri-food systems. The increased will to invest is good, but it should be noted that some extension plans and packages that have been quickly assembled in response to these crises have involved approaches that have proven ineffective or unsustainable in the past. This further underscores how efforts to use and learn from past and current evaluations are important to avoid repeating past mistakes.

'Value for money' and 'results' in extension

Demands are increasing for evidence of 'value for money' and 'results', both at national levels and among international organisations and bilateral agencies. GFRAS has commissioned this Guide because it is assumed that better documentation of the value of extension will lead to greater and more appropriate investments.

Some of the value generated by extension, such as improved productivity and incomes, can and should be quantified as part of evaluations. However, exten-



Extension may include advice for individual farmers, groups of farmers or farmer organisations regarding how to market their produce.

sion is also about knowledge and learning which generate values in terms of 'quality' and sustainability of rural livelihoods. These are outcomes that are often hard to measure quantitatively in the short term. Moreover, some are related to what is valued by extension clients, whereas others relate to public interests. Farmers and the general public may, for example, have different goals in relation to environmental protection. Investments in extension aim at complex transformations in how people live and how they manage their natural resources. These transformations can be rigorously evaluated, but require mixed methods. Assessment of their value needs qualitative and quantitative data, as well as the acknowledgement that the change processes resulting from extension are non-linear, dynamic, and multidimensional. Undertaking such complex evaluations requires time and highly skilled evaluators, and the most important aspects of change may not be possible to measure at the end of a project. In donor funded interventions sustainability can only be verifiably assessed sometime after external funding has been discontinued.

Value for money should reflect results that are 'valued' by farmers as users of the extension services. There are also values that need to be assessed in relation to broader public interest goals related to national food security, biodiversity and en-

Evaluations should assess how well extension agencies have assisted farmers to achieve their own goals and to look after the public interest. It is important therefore to transcend the implicit assumption that 'value' should simply be measured in terms of production increase that is very common in many current evaluations of extension interventions.

Environmental sustainability. There may or may not be an overlap between the values that farmers, governments and the wider public are striving to attain. Evaluations should assess how well extension agencies have assisted farmers to achieve their own goals and to look after the public interest. It is important therefore to transcend the implicit assumption that 'value' should simply be measured in terms of production increase that is very common in many current evaluations of extension interventions.

What is evaluation?

The term 'evaluation' is used in many ways. It can refer to a broad variety of activities directed towards a range of different uses. This Guide focuses on evaluation in the sense of a structured process of collecting, analysing, and making judgements on a given system or intervention. One of the most commonly used definitions of evaluation is that applied by OECD/DAC⁵:

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors. Evaluation also refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of an activity, policy or program.

The major objective of this Guide is to provide support for evaluating overall extension systems. It is also intended to be useful for those evaluating extension projects. Within development cooperation most extension evaluations focus on specific projects. However, actual extension service provision is normally part of on-going extension service systems. It is essential to (a) ensure that project evaluations contribute to broader knowledge about how to improve extension systems and even overall innovation systems and value chains, and (b) focus on the implications of the context for accurate assessment of the sustainability and impact of projects.

This aim is in line with the shift that is currently underway in development cooperation away from project modalities and towards interventions to improve on-going programmes and policy formation and implementation. Interventions financed by aid donors are becoming aligned with national systems and priorities. This Guide is intended to contribute to this process and assumes that these new modalities, endorsed in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, will continue to become the norm in development efforts.

Finally, the difference between evaluation and research into extension systems is not always clear. This Guide is primarily directed at those undertaking commissioned evaluations of specific interventions. The Guide, however, presents key issues for consideration when planning research assessments of extension systems and also for research on extension-farmer interactions. Larger research programmes into how farmers interact with extension

COMPLEMENTARY ROLES FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION⁶

Monitoring

- Routine collection of information
- Tracking project implementation progress
- Measuring efficiency

Question: Is the project doing things right?

Evaluation

- Analyzing information
- Assessing effectiveness and impact
- Confirming project expectations
- Measuring impacts

Question: Is the project doing the right things?

require somewhat different methodological approaches. Here again, the Guide aims to provide some useful advice, but more in-depth methodologies are likely to be required for research initiatives.

Monitoring and baselines

The roles of monitoring and evaluation are complementary. Monitoring is usually a pre-condition for good evaluations. Data need to be systematically collected for tracking the progress and improving on this during the course of an intervention and it is needed if evaluation teams are to be able to subsequently make a rigorous and verifiable assessment of the progress that has been made.

Evaluations are often criticised for not having a sufficient evidence base. This is often due to an absence of monitoring data, information that is impossible to collect during the evaluation itself. Many evaluations are designed based on assumptions that a reasonable quantity and quality of data are available, only to find that these do not exist.

OECD/DAC⁶ defines monitoring as:

A continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an on-going development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds.

Monitoring can be more than a way to produce information about performance. Particularly if participatory monitoring methods are applied, it can generate ownership for a learning process among actors engaged in the intervention. Participatory monitoring can be a way to encourage actors to think critically about their work and look for ways to improve it. This can moreover provide a basis for evaluations being welcomed by the actors as part of an on-going learning process.

The usefulness of monitoring in generating ownership for a learning process depends partly on the involvement of partners, staff and extension users in selecting the indicators. Indicators for monitoring extension performance may include, for example, (a) frequency of

extension staff visits, (b) participation of clients (perhaps disaggregated according to gender, wealth, farming system, or ethnicity), or (c) extent to which clients have been satisfied with services, or adoption rates of extension recommendations. It is also often important to monitor the extent to which extension staff are accessing and acquiring relevant knowledge to serve their clients. Some of these aspects are relatively easily recorded as part of management routines. Others, such as satisfaction of clients, may require regular surveys.

Decisions about what to monitor and how it should contribute to evaluation should be part of the design of an intervention or extension system. The programme's results framework or theory of change (discussed in next section) should define the intended outputs, and outcomes, which can help define the kind of monitoring information that is useful to collect during the intervention. The collection of information should be kept to a minimum. Complicated monitoring systems are rarely implemented and may even lead to reduced stakeholder commitment to monitoring and evaluation. Overly elaborate systems can also lead staff to concentrate entirely on the data collection itself, and lose sight of the need to use monitoring to learn and improve their performance.

Extension takes place in contexts that are both complex and unpredictable. Monitoring is a valuable way of tracking changes of the context and testing whether the programme's theory of change remains relevant to shifting conditions⁷. Many of the assumptions made when the intervention began (about market forces, consumer preferences, climate, etc.) may in time no longer apply or have changed. Monitoring systems need to track both the expected and the unexpected. The anticipated outcomes of extension interventions often include a range of changes in productivity, organisations, policies, social and economic situations as well as knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. The diverse interplay of different extension actors and variables makes prediction difficult. This implies that the programme's approach must be continually adapted to be effective and remain relevant.

Monitoring can be more than a way to produce information about performance. Particularly if participatory monitoring methods are applied, it can generate ownership for a learning process among actors engaged in the intervention.

Many of the assumptions made when the intervention began (about market forces, consumer preferences, climate, etc.) may in time no longer apply or have changed. Monitoring systems need to track both the expected and the unexpected.

FACTORS WHEN CHOOSING MONITORING INDICATORS

A FAO guide⁸ suggests the following basis for choosing indicators for monitoring extension efforts:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| SIMPLICITY | Understandable by non-specialists |
| UNAMBIGUOUS | Clearly defined |
| READY DETERMINATION | Obtainable without undue difficulty |
| ACCURATE MEASUREMENT | Possible to be measured with precision |
| VALIDITY | Should actually measure the intended indicator |
| RELEVANCE | Related to the specific needs of decision makers and project objectives |
| SPECIFICITY | Related to the issues that the intervention intends to influence |
| CONSISTENCY | The value of indicators should be consistent if collected in identical conditions |
| SENSITIVITY | Adaptable if the conditions for the intervention change |
| PRIORITISATION | Make clear what data is most important to collect |

Monitoring can support the ability to experiment with different approaches, reassess the theory of change and enable learning to be directly applied whilst the programme is being implemented. The systems should be flexible tools for learning that help stakeholders systematically pay attention to context as they provide dynamic feedback loops that can enable managers to keep the intervention relevant by adapting the approaches in response to wider changes.

An important step in designing a system for monitoring is to establish a baseline for assessing changes. This should be undertaken as part of designing the monitoring and evaluation system for the intervention. It is not as straightforward as it might seem given the multifaceted nature of pluralistic extension. The meta-evaluation of extension evaluations that was conducted as part of producing this Guide looked at 17 case studies of extension

evaluations³ and found that a large majority of the evaluations either had no baseline to work from or the available baseline information was irrelevant for evaluation.

If there is no explicit or relevant baseline data available at the time of the evaluation or when the monitoring system is being designed, it may be necessary to use secondary information about the status before the intervention. Sometimes national statistical data can be helpful, alternatively, an evaluator or person responsible for monitoring may discuss with stakeholders how they view changes and thereby extrapolate a sort of baseline for the intervention. This method is not objective, but may be used as part of a process to build ownership around using the evaluation since this subjective baseline represents what stakeholders themselves expect and hope to change through the intervention.

The following example of monitoring indicators from the Agricultural Support Programme in Zambia is an example of how indicators can be linked to a results framework reflecting a range of objectives.

EXAMPLE OF MONITORING INDICATORS FROM THE AGRICULTURE SUPPORT PROGRAMME ZAMBIA 2003-2008⁹

| Component | Objective | Performance indicators |
|---|---|---|
| Entrepreneurship and Business Development | A critical mass of self-confident and emerging entrepreneurs with adequate female headed household representation has developed who identify and sustainably exploit business opportunities mainly on their farms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households with Action Plans • Households belonging to savings groups • Value of current savings • Households belonging to investment groups • Value of households' current investments • Households linked to a financial institution • Households aware of and knowledgeable about insurance • Households with registered businesses • Households that established new or improved existing businesses • Households that obtained credit • Value of loans obtained • Households that repaid loans • Households that received services from Support Entities • Households that found services were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevant - Timely - Adequate - Affordable |
| Land, Crop, Seed and Livestock Development | Increased and sustained production and productivity from crop, livestock and non-traditional enterprises are based on environmentally sound management of the natural resource base | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households with crop diversification in business plans • Households diversifying crops • Households growing high value crops • Size of land under high value crops • Household seed growers registered • Household seed growers linked to private seed companies • Household seed growers who accessed foundation seed • Households applying to formalise land tenure • Households with land titles • Households with agreements for services provided by support entities • Households rearing livestock • Households recording increase in number of livestock • Households using labour saving techniques |



Participatory evaluation practised in Bangladesh.

Extension evaluation should focus strongly on collecting the views and experience of field level staff, as extension staff are usually at the 'frontline' of efforts to implement plans and therefore may be highly conscious of whether such plans are in sync with the realities that they face.

Results frameworks and theories of change

Results frameworks¹⁰ and theories of change are the obvious starting point for evaluating outcomes and impacts of a given intervention. These frameworks describe how chosen activities and investments are expected to lead to intended results. Results frameworks and theories of change can take many different forms; from logical frameworks¹¹ with predefined outputs and indicators; to actor-oriented techniques which 'vision' and map out the intended changes in the behaviour of innovation systems actors and organisations (e.g., Outcome Mapping and Appreciative Inquiry). There are increasing efforts to find ways that combine different frameworks.¹²

Most results frameworks attempt to define the relationships between the activities and outputs of a programme and the intended outcomes¹³ and impacts¹⁴, and include indicators for monitoring and evaluating these relationships. In general, monitoring focuses on keeping track of activities and outputs, whereas evaluation focuses more on outcomes and impacts, but the exact level of focus may vary. Results-based management encourages organisations to focus on outcomes and impacts even in day-to-day monitoring.

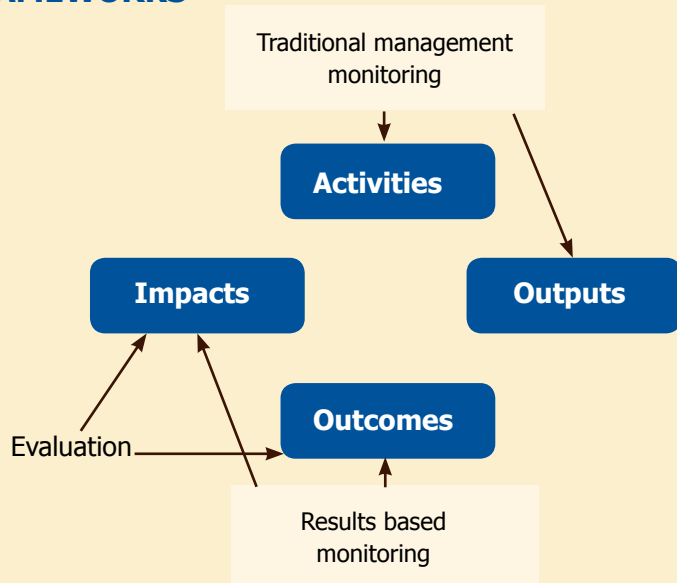
The meta-evaluation mentioned above found that the large majority of the reviewed evaluations paid virtually no attention to the results frameworks of the projects and programmes that were evaluated. Part of the reason for this could be that results frameworks for broader rural development programmes often include implicit assumptions about the role of extension that are not based on clear analysis of the prevailing extension system and how it might need to change to fulfil new and expanded tasks.

The evaluator nonetheless has an obvious responsibility to relate the outcomes of the intervention to the claims presented in the results frameworks. If the focus is on learning, it may be necessary to reconstruct what those implementing the intervention 'really wanted to do' as a basis for more constructive dialogue. In recent years both programmes and evaluations often include an inception phase, which can be used to take up discrepancies between formal plans and the assumptions that have actually steered the intervention. This can be used to find a basis for a constructive evaluation process.

A crucial aspect is whether the framework recognises the dynamic change processes that characterise extension interventions, which always include surprises. Extension evaluation should focus strongly on collecting the views and experience of field level staff, as they are usually at the 'frontline' of efforts to implement plans and therefore may be highly conscious of whether such plans are in sync with the realities that they face.

Prevailing 'myths' about what extension can actually accomplish often lead to unrealistic statements in results frameworks about the intervention's contribution to alleviating poverty or other national goals. An important role for evaluation is to bring these to light and facilitate critical reflection on these aims by different users of the evaluation. An example of such a reality gap can be found in some NGO interventions in Bangladesh where it has been assumed that a modest agricultural training and extension project would 'empower' landless women, despite them having no access to land for cultivation and where gender- and power relations make empowerment of poor women extremely dif-

RESULTS FRAMEWORKS



ficult. Other examples are projects where in an extension agency that has provided predetermined packages of technological information is expected to shift to facilitating community organisations and leading participatory assessments after receiving a brief re-orientation course and a new motorbike. The examples may sound cynical, but such assumptions are commonly embedded in rural development programmes with extension components.

Participatory evaluation methods often involve facilitating stakeholders to reflect upon their assumptions about how the intervention would lead to the desired changes. Even where an explicit framework and objectives have not been developed as part of the design of an intervention, it is usually possible to extrapolate assumptions about the theory of change through systematic review of programme documents and discussions with staff.



Extension may sometimes suffer under overly optimistic assumptions about what it can actually accomplish.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

¹ www.g-fras.org

² For GFRAS, 'extension' is used interchangeably with rural or agricultural advisory services. The terms are defined in the next section.

³ Martin, A. and Essie Apenteng; 2011; Review of Literature on Evaluation, Methods Relevant to Extension; GFRAS Pound, B.; Gündel, S.; Martin, A. and Essie Apenteng; 2011; Meta-Evaluation of Extension Evaluation; GFRAS

⁴ GFRAS; 2010; Five Key Areas for Mobilising the Potential of Rural Advisory Services; GFRAS Brief #1, October 2010.

⁵ OECD/DAC; 2010; Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management.

⁶ Rajalahti R.; Woelcke, J.; Pehu, E.; 2005; Monitoring and Evaluation for World Bank Agricultural Research and Extension Projects: A Good Practice Note; The World Bank; Agriculture and Rural Development Discussion Paper 20.

⁷ A theory of change defines the building blocks of interventions, outcomes and impact required to bring about a given long-term goal. It forms the basis for strategic planning, ongoing decision making and evaluation (www.theoryofchange.org).

⁸ Based on: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/w5830e/w5830e0j.htm#chapter%2017%20%20%20monitoring%20exten->

www.g-fras.org

⁹ See an example at: <http://asp.ramboll.se/Docs/progdoc.pdf>; also see The logframe handbook : a logical framework approach to project cycle management. http://imagebank.worldbank.org/servlet/WDS_IBank_Servlet?pcont=details&menuPK=64154159&searchMenuPK=64154240&theSitePK=501889&eid=000160016_20050607122225&siteName=IMAGEBANK

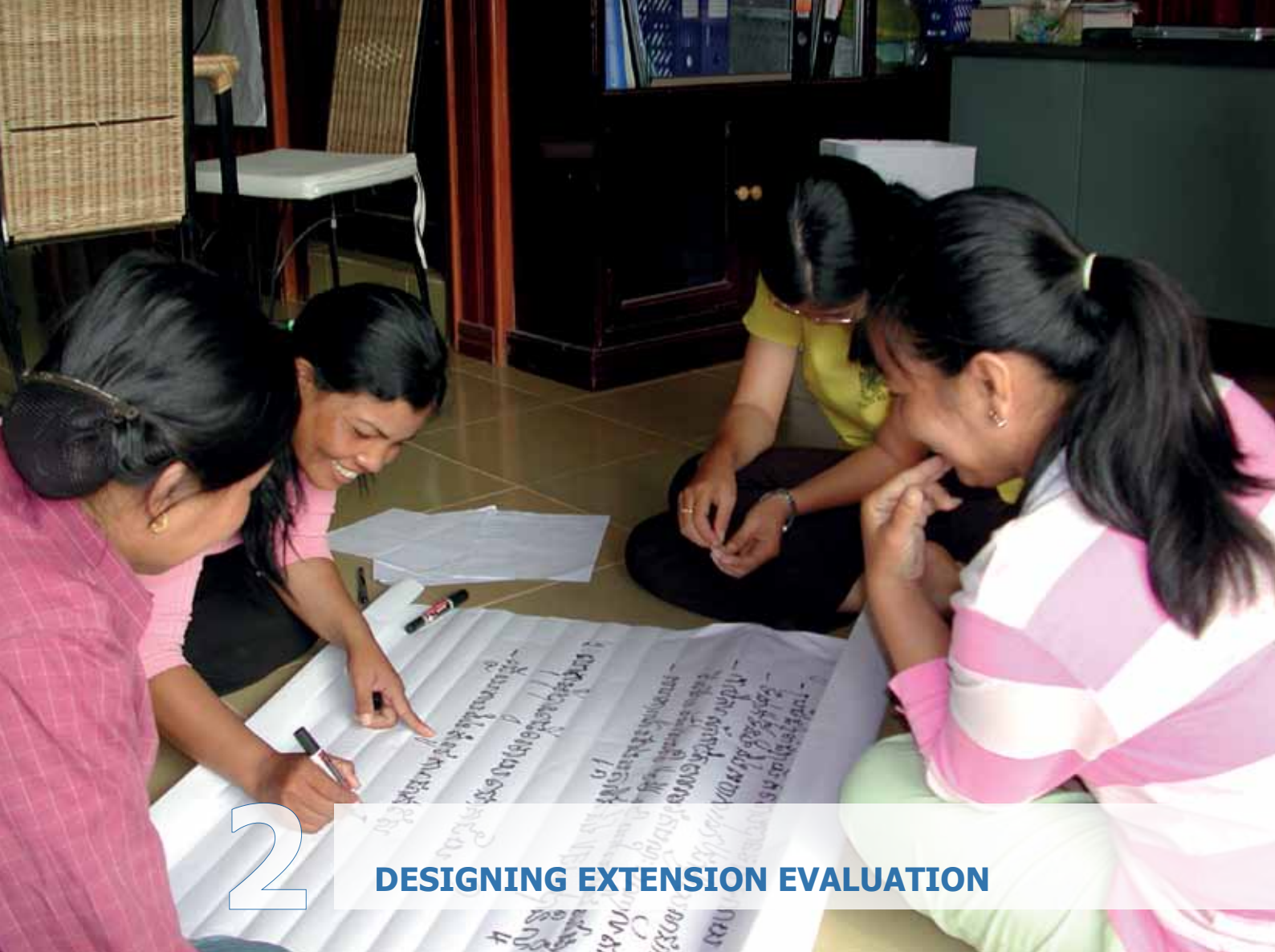
¹⁰ 'The program logic that explains how the development objective is to be achieved, including causal relationships and underlying assumptions' OECD/DAC 2010:33

¹¹ http://www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDS-ContentServer/WDSP/IB/2005/06/07/000160016_20050607122225/Rendered/PDF/31240b0LFhandbook.pdf

¹² http://www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDS-ContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/08/27/000160016_20040827154900/Rendered/PDF/296720PAPER0100steps.pdf

¹³ 'The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs' OECD/DAC 2010:28

¹⁴ 'Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended' OECD/DAC 2010:24



2

DESIGNING EXTENSION EVALUATION

Evaluating for whom? Utilisation focused evaluation

Evaluations will rarely have impact if they are undertaken simply because they are required by the ministry or donor or listed as an activity in the project plans. They should be fit for the purposes of those who will ultimately use them¹⁵. Many evaluations have little impact on the programmes, organisations, and people they are supposed to serve. Various factors can promote or undermine the utilisation of an evaluation. Chief amongst them are:

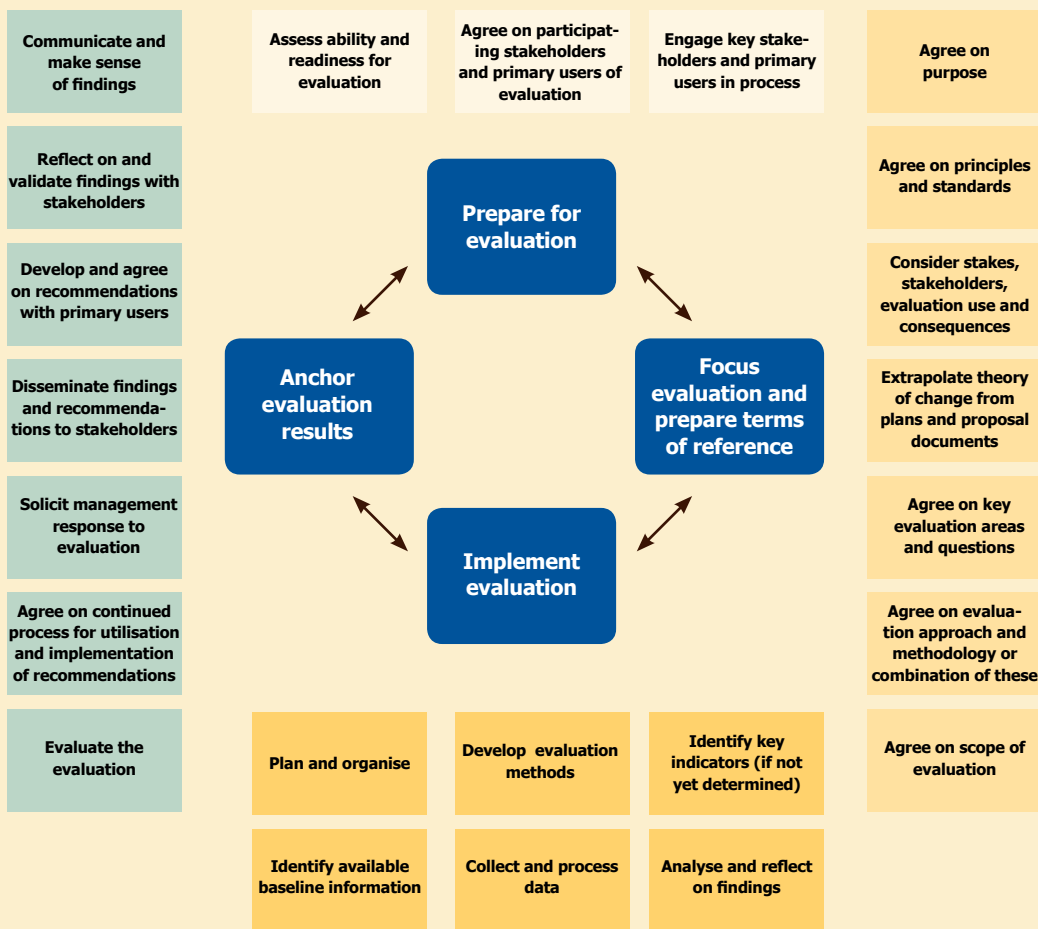
- The organisation's culture and structure
- External influences such as political and media pressures
- The design and quality of the evaluation itself.

Utility stems from the nature of the user organisation. Organisations that create

a culture of learning, establish management structures that base decisions on evidence and create information systems that ensure the dissemination of knowledge are more likely to act on the findings of an evaluation. At the same time, well managed evaluations that have generated credible evidence and valid conclusions should reasonably stand a better chance of being used than poor quality products based on dubious data.

The defining goal of utilisation-focused evaluation is its usefulness to its users. Ensuring the utilisation of any evaluation relies on designing and facilitating the evaluation process according to the evaluation's purpose, how it will be used and, specifically, by whom. This Guide emphasises that the evaluation process should be designed to optimise intended use by intended users. The figure below shows what the evaluation process can look like and what the elements will be.

DESIGN AND FACILITATION OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS¹⁶



Preparing for evaluation

Much of the process of ensuring the utility of the evaluation lies in the preparation. To get the right stakeholders involved in the process of drafting the terms of reference is part of making the evaluation meaningful to intended users and also for preparing for the success of the last step – the anchoring of the results of the evaluation with the right stakeholders¹⁷. Those who are responsible for acting on an evaluation’s findings must be central participants in the design of any utilisation-focused evaluation. The evaluation must address the questions they need answers to in order to make decisions and learn. The process of their participation is itself a key outcome of the evaluation, generating greater ownership of the findings and increasing the perceived credibility of the findings and relevance of the recommendations. Participants can improve their critical thinking and knowledge of evaluation and promote a more sustained culture and practice of learning within their organisations.

Engaging the right stakeholders

Any evaluation should start with the identification of key users and their different expectations and requirements of the evaluation. Findings from the meta review³ show that many evaluations do not carry out a detailed stakeholder analysis, nor are potential users differentiated in the reports. Recommendations are often aimed at broader audiences (such as an organisation), rather than specific decision-makers. The detailed stakeholder analysis should ensure that the evaluation questions respond to the needs of the stakeholders within the extension system and other users who need to act on the findings.

Too often, evaluations are designed by stakeholders who are not the individuals with the responsibility, influence and interest to make the changes recommended by the evaluation. This is particularly challenging with evaluations of pluralistic extension systems because it may not be clear who has sufficient control or influence over practices of the different service providers.

The process of clarifying the primary purpose and primary users is itself an opportunity for the evaluator to encourage and enhance enthusiasm and engagement – potential primary users may not initially value the evaluation. Facilitating and maintaining primary users' engagement throughout the process is, in part, the responsibility of the evaluator.

There are likely to be a large number of stakeholders involved in extension evaluation. They may include the following:

- Extension agencies and other service providers
- Ministries of agriculture (and perhaps environment, science/technology, private sector development)
- Farmer organisations
- Other civil society groups
- Private agribusiness firms
- Aid agencies (programme sponsors)
- Farmers/users.

The diverse needs of different stakeholders need to be addressed, but it is the decision-making needs of the primary evaluation users that should be clearly prioritised and which inform the evaluation questions and the methodology adopted. Their decision-making affects planning. For example, if the primary users are policy makers in a ministry, then the timing of the evaluation should coincide with key opportunities in the ministry for policy review. As will be described below, some evaluations are primarily oriented towards accountability, whereas others are intended to facilitate learning. The different goals may be further unpacked by the evaluator and key stakeholders to clarify the priority purpose and hence primary users. This should occur before any decisions are made about approach, methodology and outputs, all of which should be tailored to meet the needs of the users.

The complexity of innovation systems implies that it is essential to keep an open mind about who the users of an evaluation might be, be it the extension service provider itself, the clients, or other actors from research or market development that depend on synergies with extension. Where decentralisation has shifted responsibility for extension to municipal or district levels, local politicians may be im-

portant users. Where farmer organisations are advocating for better services, evaluation may be a tool to press their case for improvements in the extension system.

Stakeholder analysis is a process of identifying the individuals who have or may have an interest in the evaluation by listing and prioritising them according to their role, levels of interest, and influence. An example of a tool for this is Power Mapping¹⁸. For example, an evaluation of a government-run national extension programme would likely list individuals in the ministry of agriculture, extension agents, major donors, and farmer organisations as the main stakeholders. Others, such as the agricultural research community, may also be stakeholders as they may use the findings in the future, but they may have little direct interest or influence. Some individuals in the same organisation or group will be primary and others secondary stakeholders¹⁹.

The primary stakeholders can be further assessed according to their potential to use the evaluation. An evaluation with an accountability purpose (see below) may list the individuals responsible for making funding decisions and specific individuals in the ministries of agriculture or environment as the primary users. A learning evaluation may prioritise certain leaders of farmer organisations and extension agents as primary users. The identification of primary users is an interactive process carried out between the evaluator or those commissioning the evaluation and potential participants. This can be combined with processes to clarify the purpose, using the same techniques listed above. Not all primary stakeholders will be primary users – some individuals actively seek or need an evaluation's findings to support particular decisions, gain knowledge, advocate for new approaches or policy, or to legitimate their position on a particular issue. Others may regard the evaluation as a box-ticking exercise, or as a threat to their position.

Evaluations are always political. Stakeholder analysis can also assess the degree to which a primary stakeholder is likely to be supportive or antagonistic towards the evaluation, depending upon whether the findings may benefit or disadvantage them (e.g., farmers may anticipate that

Evaluations are always political. Stakeholder analysis can also assess the degree to which a primary stakeholder is likely to be supportive or antagonistic towards the evaluation, depending upon whether the findings may benefit or disadvantage them.

an evaluation will either improve the service from extension agents or lead to the loss of the service altogether if it leads to funding cuts).

Why evaluate?

Accountability and learning

As mentioned above, the different stakeholders in the evaluation – those commissioning an evaluation, evaluators themselves and those being evaluated – may have different interests and needs from the evaluation. This should be discussed openly and they should find a common ground and decide on the main purpose(s) of the evaluation. Such transparency can provide a better degree of trust as a starting point for the evaluation process.

Accountability and learning are the most common reasons for evaluating extension. It is important to clarify what the terms mean. Though often combined in the same evaluation, either accountability or learning will typically be the main purpose, and will significantly affect who uses the evaluation and how it is carried out.

Accountability is typically in focus when the evaluation is commissioned by a policy maker or donor to establish how well a programme performed – does the programme achieve what it set out to achieve? Is it effective? Does it meet certain standards? Does it provide 'value for money'? Does it provide value for the farmers? In extension this can be at various levels, from impact on the nutritional status of rural households, to the financial sustainability of the extension provider. Often referred to as a 'summative' evaluation, accountability focused evaluations are often carried out when a programme has ended, or is about to end. Sometimes they are even conducted 'ex post', i.e., after the end of the intervention when actual sustainability has become apparent²⁰. The findings of the evaluation may be used to inform decisions about future funding, whether a programme should be expanded or contracted, whether policies should be modified or as a method of quality control. It may also help decision makers determine if it is worth investing in extension at all.

Learning is typically in focus²¹ when

the intention is to improve the approach. Stakeholders learn from the strengths and weaknesses of the existing programme and reassess how the intervention is impacting on the overall innovation system. Evaluation findings are expected to support changes in practice in terms of programme design, approach, individual behaviour and knowledge.

There can be tensions between these objectives in the evaluation process. Whereas an accountability focus often requires an objective and therefore independent evaluation, a learning focus requires that the evaluation becomes a more subjective process where the participants create a common understanding and meaning around their practice. Learning approaches to evaluation therefore require an atmosphere of partnership. This is difficult to establish in an atmosphere of fear, which can arise when an evaluation team is sent from the 'outside' to judge an organisation or individuals.

Nonetheless, sometimes the objectives of learning and accountability can be combined. If actors know that they are to be held to account for the quality of their work, this can be a stimulus to learning about how to perform better. Some evaluations measure how well organisations learn, i.e., they are held to account for their capacity to learn. An example of this is when an evaluation measures how well an extension agency is able to adapt services to help farmers adapt to changing weather conditions or market opportunities.

Evaluations are usually conducted in a sensitive atmosphere regardless of the principles applied. Transparency is important to ensure that the different or even conflicting interests are brought out into the open and discussed. Techniques for bringing stakeholders together to clarify and prioritise the purpose of an evaluation include group discussions with extension service providers and different constellations of actors in the innovation system, brainstorming, focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews²². The evaluator can facilitate this process, but it should be remembered that although these methods can improve transparency, the conflicting interests of different actors are likely to remain.

Whereas an accountability focus often requires an objective and therefore independent evaluation, a learning focus requires that the evaluation becomes a more subjective process where the participants create a common understanding and meaning around their practice.

ALTERNATIVE EVALUATION GOALS AND PURPOSES

There are other ways to disaggregate evaluation goals that may serve to draw greater attention to the knowledge generation or 'cognitive' processes that evaluation is a part of. Berriet-Sollic, et al²³ suggest three categories:

- To learn: the evaluation is primarily designed as a collective learning process;
- To measure: the evaluation is designed to assess programme performance and impact;
- To understand: the evaluation identifies and analyses the mechanisms by which the programme under evaluation can produce the expected outcomes or may create adverse effects.

A FAO manual²⁴ takes a more critical view of the purposes that really drive the desire to evaluate extension:

Pseudo Self-Serving Purposes

Since organisations, including extension systems, have a self-serving tendency, it is not unreasonable to expect that some staff members, especially those in the highest places, may want a pseudo evaluation that will postpone, buy time, or avoid threatening change. In these cases, evaluators are not taken seriously, and the evaluation becomes a meaningless political diversion. In other cases, some members of organisations want evaluations as excuses for evading or avoiding administrative responsibility or to provide a scapegoat for criticism. Evaluations that are undertaken only to make the programme look good ('whitewash job') or to make someone or some aspect of a programme look bad ('hatchet job') are pseudo and illegitimate.

Enhance Accountability Purposes

It is quite common for external donors to expect that evaluation will provide accountability through evidence of impact, or to document cost-benefits, or to measure efficiency-effectiveness. In some cases, this evaluative evidence is considered in decisions to continue the programme; or to propose change, expansion, or reduction of a programme; or to change a policy, organisational structure, philosophy, or design. The potential for negative findings and the threat of discontinuing funding has led to 'hiding the mistake,' a dysfunctional practice. However, evaluations rarely provide a single basis for political decisions. They often are used by funders, administrators, or policy makers to justify their decisions even when the evidence of benefits is weak.

Improve Performance Purposes

This purpose of evaluation is sometimes called 'formative' because the results are intended to help improve the programme during its formative stages. This is in contrast to 'summative evaluations' when the purpose is to sum up or summarize the accomplishments at a point in time. When evaluations are to improve programmes, lessons learned about strengths and limitations of the programme are mined from the data so that changes can be made immediately. Sometimes the intent is to discover new approaches and alternatives or to adjust the programme to changing situations or client groups. Evaluation also is used to understand multiple reasons for apparent failure or to improve the management or operation of a programme.

Social Learning and Communication Purposes

Sometimes evaluations are intended to stimulate political dialogue or to resolve political conflicts intelligently. For example, an evaluation of extension in a country could provide an opportunity to debate the need to hire more women agents to respond to an increase of women in small-scale agriculture or to extend the extension network to subsistence farmers not being served. Often the most significant contribution of an evaluation is the creation of new expectations, new organisational arrangements, new linkages, and new purposes and goals. Evaluation may give visibility to a good idea and new language that can communicate new ways of viewing extension to others who also may want to share an experiment.

Clarifying the main purpose will help determine the main users and where they stand in the 'continuum' between accountability and learning. Who is expected to be accountable to whom? Or who exactly is expected to learn and what topics might they be motivated to learn about? An accountability purpose is likely to be demanded and principally used by those external to the programme (e.g., donors, policy makers). In development cooperation it is often assumed that accountability primarily refers to accountability to donors. This is an inappropriate and often damaging perspective. Evaluations should promote accountability to the governments or farmer organisations that have mandated the intervention. Perhaps most importantly, evaluations should directly or indirectly ensure that the interventions are held accountable for their work in the eyes of the clients and beneficiaries of extension services.

In an ideal world, evaluations would thus even be a way for the clients of extension services to hold their service providers to account. Farmers would demand that extension agencies act on evaluation findings and carry out recommended actions. In practice it is very difficult to use evaluation to directly establish such 'downward accountability'. Nonetheless, evaluations can and should assess whether this downward accountability is being encouraged and supported by the intervention. Guidance for this aspect of evaluation is presented in section six below.

Evaluation criteria

Many aspects of the performance of an intervention can be assessed. The specific questions to be asked in an evaluation should be structured so as to highlight the overall criteria for what constitutes good performance. Five criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability), as defined by the OECD/DAC⁶, are the most commonly applied criteria for evaluating aid interventions. These criteria and illustrative examples of possible questions and indicators related to these criteria are presented in the box overleaf.



The evaluation process should be used to train local staff and consultants in evaluation concepts and methods. This will contribute to the capabilities of the staff of the extension programme to monitor their work in the future.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

| Criteria ²⁵ | Possible evaluation questions | Possible indicators |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Relevance “The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries’ requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners’ and donors’ policies.”</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are extension priorities appropriate from the perspective of the clients? • Are the intervention’s priorities relevant to national and local agricultural policy goals? • Are intervention plans been adapted to changing market and climate conditions? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of extension elements that respond to the targeted clients’ articulated demands • Number of intervention elements that explicitly respond to agricultural policy goals • Recorded instances where the intervention and/or the extension provider has adapted services to changing weather or market conditions |
| <p>Efficiency “A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results.”</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the target groups of clients received the services that were planned for at an ‘appropriate’ cost? • Have the capacity of extension service providers to reach intended clients changed and at what cost? • What are the alternative systems for providing (quality) services or capacity development? • How do the costs of services compare with the alternatives? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of farmers from different target groups utilising advice received • Costs of services per extension visit/client • Comparative costs for different service providers of similar services |
| <p>Effectiveness “The extent to which the development intervention’s objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance.”</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the intervention improved access to services and inputs? • Has the intervention facilitated market access and marketing methods? • Has the intervention facilitated formation of sustainable farmer groups? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of farmers from different target groups with increased access to services and inputs • Volume of marketed produce and number of marketed products • Recorded changes in marketing methods • Number of farmer groups engaged in sustainable activities |
| <p>Impact “Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.”</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has been the result of the intervention in terms of greater food security, better nutrition or improved profitability for different groups of extension clients? • Has the intervention had unintended negative impacts on the environment, on the workload of women, or increased the risks that smallholders face? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in nutritional status of different groups of client households before and after the intervention (taking into account other factors such as market and climatic conditions) • Changes in profitability for production areas where extension services have been provided • Changes in environmental conditions that can be related to the intervention • Changes in work patterns for men and women related to the intervention • Number of extension clients that have dropped out because of too high risks in applying advice |
| <p>Sustainability “The continuation of benefits from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed. The probability of continued long-term benefits. The resilience to risk of the net benefit flows over time.”</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have (or will) extension service providers be able to cover the recurrent costs of the intervention’s approach after external funding is phased out? • What are the long-term impacts on soil fertility, access to water and maintenance of common property natural resources resulting from the technologies being promoted? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of visits to clients before and after external funding has been discontinued • Levels of land degradation before and after the intervention • Changes of land use patterns – e.g., deforestation or reduction of grazing areas |

| Type/level of intervention | Examples of particular focus required |
|--|---|
| A national extension programme or system | Thorough contextual analysis of national policy frameworks; political commitments to supporting extension; the role of extension in relation to research and trends in markets; etc. |
| A territorial extension project or organisation | Thorough institutional analysis of local public, private, and civil society stakeholders; review of project documents to identify the theory of change by which the project is expected to be replicated and/or influence broader institutional change. |
| An extension component within a broader rural development programme | Whether existing extension service providers are part of a wider strategy to develop sustainable service provision capacities. |

Choosing evaluation approaches and methods

The choice of approach and methodology of extension evaluations should suit the purpose, primary users, the evaluation ar-

reas and key evaluation questions. Careful consideration of the context and components of an innovation system enables the evaluator to select from a menu of tools and approaches, often in combination.

Methods that explore relationships within networks and multiple stakeholder perspectives are particularly useful for extension evaluation. The following approaches are increasingly used in evaluations that seek to explore institutional relations, capacities and outcomes.

- **Outcome Mapping** can be used to identify extension’s contribution to changes in behaviour and relationships between different actors and organisations, rather than evaluating a programme’s ‘tangible’ products (such as increased productivity)²⁶.
- **Most Significant Change** collects and assesses stakeholders’ stories about the changes of most significance to them; the technique is used for both monitoring and evaluation purposes and helps focus stakeholders on impact²⁷.
- **Appreciative Inquiry** is a related set of methods for evaluating interventions which is well suited for organisational learning purposes and as it focuses on what worked and why and how to take these best practices forward by building consensus for change among the participants in the evaluation²⁸.
- **Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems (RAAKS)** is a methodology designed to explore the networks and relationships between stakeholders within the innovation system, facilitate participants to examine problems from multiple and alternative perspectives, and to promote joint learning²⁹.
- **Goal Free Evaluation** is a less common approach that may in some cases suit extension goals. It evaluates the effect-in-practice of the programme on clients, irrespective of the intervention’s planned results³⁰.
- **Developmental Evaluation** (discussed further below) is particularly oriented to evaluating an intervention’s ability to design for and respond to a volatile context and emerging needs. It may be appropriate for evaluations with a strong learning focus and a commitment to ongoing programme development, where the evaluator is involved throughout the life of an intervention.

INNOVATIVE METHODS FOR EXPLORING RELATIONS, CAPACITIES AND OUTCOMES

Moreover, evaluation methods may need to be adjusted significantly depending on the type of extension intervention being evaluated, see box above.

The particular focus of the evaluation will naturally determine which combination of methods is most appropriate. The pluralistic nature of extension favours the use of more than one approach and a selection of tools, both qualitative and quantitative. There are too many different approaches to monitoring and evaluation to review here. The web-based sources below provide a starting point to gain an overview of different approaches, methods and tools including an indication of strengths and weaknesses for each of them.

Some approaches, such as Developmental Evaluation and Outcome Mapping, are oriented towards an on-going relationship between the evaluator and those involved in the intervention over an extended period of time. They bring together monitoring and evaluation. These methods have their own approaches for systematically collecting data, analysing it and engaging in critical reflection³¹. While an integrated approach to systematically managing monitoring and evaluation is almost always desirable, requests for evaluations

are not entirely predictable and many evaluations still need to be designed as a separate activity from monitoring.

Impact evaluation: the 'gold standard'?

Impact evaluation (IE, also often referred to as impact assessment)³² may be used to assess specific cause and effect relationships and to determine if certain impacts have occurred. Evaluations are often criticised for failing to provide adequate evidence of the impact of an intervention. IE aims to address this weakness by empirically assessing cause and effect relationships between the intervention and impact-level changes in people's lives. Rigorous quantitative methods such as random control trials³³ and qualitative methods, such as participatory rural appraisal³⁴, can be used, preferably in combination, to gather evidence. Quantitative data often answers questions about what happened and the qualitative data can provide the answers to why or why not it happened. An essential component of Theory Based IE is analysing the context. This can be used to determine the impacts, identify the wider factors that affect the chain of cause and effect and answer questions regarding why impact has occurred – or not occurred.

A common problem with IE in extension is that it is often automatically presumed that adoption of new technologies will result in positive impacts on the well-being and food security of farmers, or nutrition and health of consumers. Such assumptions are highly questionable due to the range of other factors that influence these impacts, from the appropriateness of the technologies being promoted to access to the required inputs or market for the produce. These issues of attribution are particularly challenging considering the pluralistic, complex nature of extension. The feasibility of isolating the effects of extension needs careful consideration.

Furthermore, impacts are not always positive, which may be overlooked if attention is focused on whether technologies were adopted and whether they resulted in greater production. For example, production increase may carry with it detrimental impacts on environmental sustainability that may ultimately under-



One difficulty in comparing results, when dealing with technology adoption is that farmers adopting new technologies are normally wealthier and more progressive than farmers not adopting, they may therefore not be comparable with average farmer groups of the same area or community.

mine food production systems after the intervention is over. Increased production may flood markets, resulting in negative impacts on farmer livelihoods. IE should be designed so as to 'notice' these unintended impacts.

Whether IE is an appropriate approach depends on the intended use of the results. Some IE methods may suit contexts where the intention is to test or compare single-strand interventions, such as the impact of extending a new seed variety where a direct cause-effect relationship is anticipated. Results may be compared between randomly selected groups of farmers in highly comparable contexts, some of whom use the new variety and others who do not. One difficulty in comparing results, when dealing with technology adoption is that not all contexts will permit the establishment of a true counterfactual or control group. For example, farmers adopting new technologies may be more 'progressive' because they are better educated and wealthier than farmers not adopting.

Evaluation costs

The meta-evaluation that was conducted to inform this study³ showed that ultimately one of the most important factors influencing the choice of methods is cost. For example IE is often particularly time consuming and costly³⁵. Cost considerations relate to the generation of credible evaluation data, and therefore need to be addressed together with careful consideration of purpose and use and a transparent analysis of what level of rigour and which types of methods are required to ensure credibility among intended users. If a 'cheap evaluation' is all that can be afforded but is not considered credible by intended users it may be best not to conduct an evaluation at all.

An important aspect of choosing a cost-effective method is to see what approach can build on existing baseline data and monitoring. Even if the choice of indicators related to this information may not always be ideal, finding ways to measure changes using other readily available data may provide a starting point to consider how to complement what the actors in the programme are already collecting. This can also serve to increase trust, as

the evaluator is then seen as contributing to the learning process that is already underway.

Furthermore, evaluations also incur non-financial costs, such as participants' time, capacity demands on staff, and overall stress and strain on the organisations being evaluated. Different methods require different human resource capacities in the evaluation team. Skilled enumerators may or may not be available. Small teams may not have the language skills to communicate with all the relevant client groups. It is therefore important to be realistic and perhaps choose methods that can be implemented by the available team members and support staff. It is furthermore important, wherever possible, to look for ways to use the evaluation process to train local staff and consultants in evaluation concepts and methods. This can contribute to the resource pool of potential evaluators in a given country, and perhaps also contribute to the capabilities of the staff of the extension organisation to monitor their work in the future. Development of local evaluation capacities is generally a modest investment that can also significantly lower the costs of future monitoring and evaluation.

Cost considerations relate to the generation of credible evaluation data, and therefore need to be addressed together with careful consideration of purpose and use and a transparent analysis of what level of rigour and which types of methods are required to ensure credibility among intended users.

www.BetterEvaluation.org

For more in-depth guidance of how to choose, combine and apply different evaluation approaches and methodologies, BetterEvaluation may be helpful.

BetterEvaluation is an international collaboration to improve evaluation and it is designed to support practitioners to share their knowledge and experiences and develop fresh, innovative and novel approaches to evaluation.

The website provides an interactive platform that can assist you to identify useful methods for evaluation. It provides information and advice, link to more detailed guidance and provide examples of methods in use.

BetterEvaluation is being developed by Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Pact, Institutional Learning and Change Initiative (ILAC) and RMIT University.

EVALUATION MANUALS FOR DIFFERENT SECTORS AND THEMES OF RELEVANCE TO EXTENSION

EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT METHODS FOR EVALUATING AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMMES

World Bank M&E manual: Some tools, methods and approaches³⁶

- Performance indicators
- The logical framework (logframe) approach
- Theory-based evaluation
- Formal surveys
- Rapid appraisal methods
- Participatory methods³⁸
- Public expenditure tracking surveys
- Impact evaluation
- Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis.

IFAD Manual for M&E³⁷

34 methods useful for specific M&E tasks grouped in seven categories:

- Sampling-related methods
- Core M&E methods
- Discussion methods (for groups)
- Methods for spatially-distributed information
- Methods for time-based patterns of change
- Methods for analysing linkages and relationships
- Methods for ranking and prioritising.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

¹⁵ Patton, M.Q. 1997. Utilization-Focused Evaluation. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks

¹⁶ Adapted from: Kusters, C.S.L. et al. 2011. Making evaluations matter: A practical guide for evaluators. Centre for development Innovation, Wageningen University & Research Centre, Wageningen, The Netherlands

¹⁷ The list of stakeholders in extension below in this section can be used as a checklist to define the stakeholders to be involved in the preparation of an evaluation

¹⁸ An example of a tool for this can be found at: <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/tracing-power-and-influence-networks>

¹⁹ See <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/2010-training.pdf> page 28.

²⁰ An example of an ex poste extension evaluation is Folke, Steen (2003) Farm Women in Development, Danida. <http://www.um.dk/Publikationer/Danida/English/Evaluations/FarmWomenInDevelopment/index.asp>

²¹ An example of evaluation with an overall learning focus is Chipeta et al.; 2008; Extension as a tool for farming as a business Learning from 5 years of project experience; ASP Zambia

²² For some methods see: <http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/guide/annexd/d.htm>.

²³ Berriet-Sollicie, M.; Labarthe, P.; Laurent, C.; Baudry, J.; 2011; Empirical validity of the evaluation of public policies: models of evaluation and quality of evidence; CESAER, Working Paper 2011/4

²⁴ Quoted from <http://www.fao.org/docrep/w5830e/w5830e0d.htm#chapter%2011%20%20%20%20evaluation%20extension%20programmes>

²⁵ www.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/21/39119068.pdf; Definitions used here are all from Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management, 2002, OECD/DAC

²⁶ For more information on Outcome Mapping see <http://publicwebsite.idrc.ca/EN/Programs/Evaluation/Pages/IDRC-BookDetails.aspx?PublicationID=121>

²⁷ The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique. A Guide to Its Use by Rick Davies and Jess Dart <http://www.mandeco.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf>

²⁸ Preskill, H. and , Catsambas, T. T.; 2006; Reframing Evaluation Through Appreciative Inquiry; <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/bookReviewDetail.cfm?coid=9479>

²⁹ Engel, P. and Salomon, M. 1997. Facilitating Innovation for Development: a RAAKS Resource Box. Amsterdam, Royal Tropical Institute.

³⁰ Scriven, Michael (1991). Pros and Cons about Goal-Free Evaluation. American Journal of Evaluation February 1991 vol. 12 no. 1 55-62

³¹ Patton, M.Q.; 2011; Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Earl, S.; Carden, F.; Smutylo, F.; 2001; Outcome Mapping, Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs; International Development Research Centre.

³² Sources for more information on impact evaluation include:

Network of Networks on Impact Evaluation (NONIE). Nonie 2009 Nonie Guidance on Impact Evaluation http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTOED/Resources/nonie_guidance.pdf

3iE International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, <http://www.3ieimpact.org>

Roche, C (1999) Impact Assessment for Development Agencies. Oxford: Oxfam GB.

IEG, Impact Evaluation - The Experience of the Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank Evaluating the impact of development projects on poverty : a handbook for practitioners. http://imagebank.worldbank.org/servelet/WDS_IBank_Servlet?pcont=details&menuPK=64154159&searchMenuPK=64154240&theSitePK=501889&eid=000094946_00080705302127&siteName=IMAGEBANK

³³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Randomized_controlled_trial

³⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participatory_rural_appraisal

³⁵ For advice on how to find ways to reduce the costs of impact evaluations see, http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTOED/EXTEVACAPDEV/0,,contentMDK:22293670~menuPK:4585754~pagePK:64829573~piPK:64829550~theSitePK:4585673_00.html

³⁶ http://www.worldbank.org/ieg/ecd/me_tools_and_approaches.html

³⁷ <http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/guide/annexd/d.htm>

³⁸ Participatory monitoring and evaluation. http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIAL-DEVELOPMENT/EXTPCENG/0,,contentMDK:20509352~menuPK:1278203~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:410306_00.html



CHALLENGES IN EVALUATING EXTENSION INTERVENTIONS

3

Viewing extension as part of the innovation system

Monitoring and evaluation are important entry points to learn about the nature of the innovation system in a given area. The challenge is to monitor and evaluate with a new perspective on the relationships between extension and other partners in the innovation system, acknowledge the broader roles of extension and view extension not only as a delivery function for research driven technologies but as an integrated part of the innovation system.

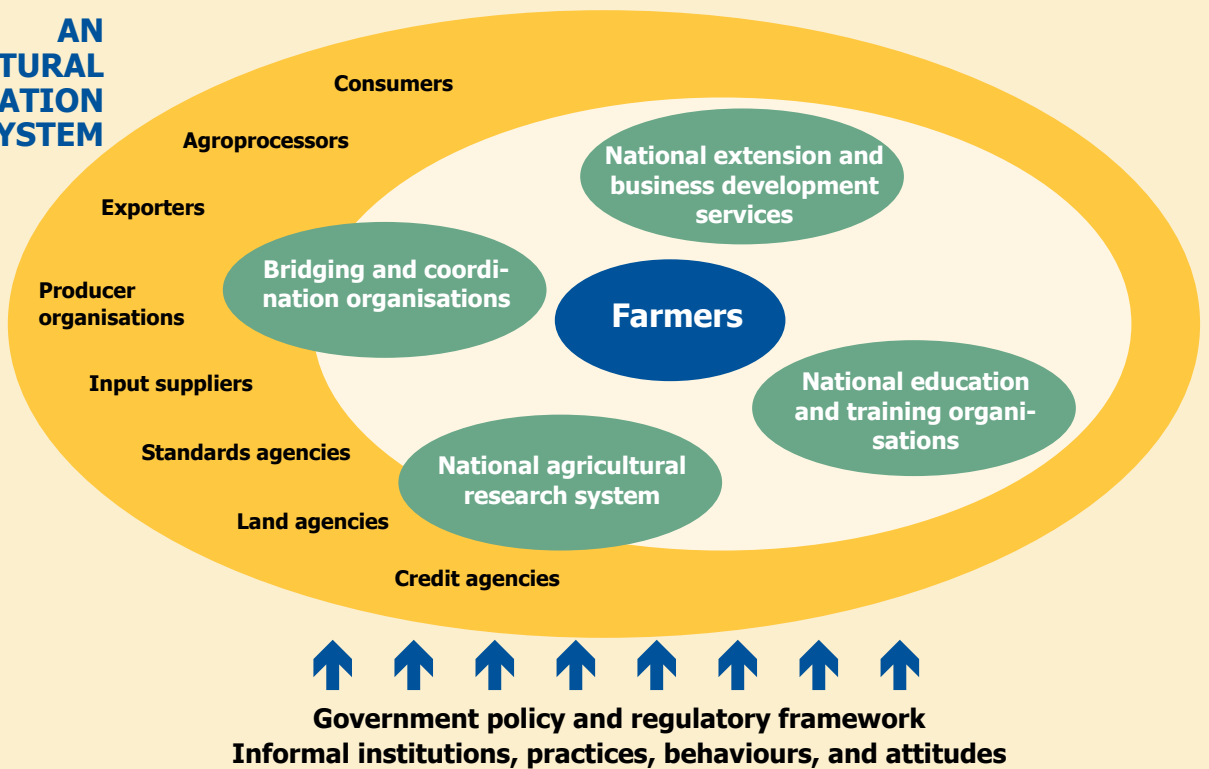
The concept of the innovation system draws attention to the need to understand flows of technology and information among people, enterprises and institutions to recognise how innovations occur. This involves the interaction between the actors who together turn an idea into a process, product or service. Innovation systems are often driven by market factors, but may also be spurred by the need to adapt to changing climate or political conditions.

Evaluation of innovation systems means looking at outcomes in terms of both technological and institutional change processes, and recognising that impacts are likely to be related to both economic and social change. It also involves asking critical questions about how well the theory of change or results frameworks (see section one above) reflects the nature of the prevailing innovation systems.

Innovation systems approaches recognise that the transfer of technologies requires advisory services that also facilitate access to markets and services, and which include advice on diverse issues that rural people need to deal with in order to improve their production methods, natural resource management and livelihoods. Evaluations should look critically at whether an intervention has overlooked some of the most valuable aspects of extension, and where farmers need other forms of extension services than just access to information and production instructions.

The concept of the innovation system draws attention to the need to understand flows of technology and information among people, enterprises and institutions in order to recognise how innovations occur.

AN AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION SYSTEM



Source: Modified from Rivera, Alex, Hanson and Birner (unpublished).

The value of extension in stimulating the adoption and diffusion of new technologies is related to if and how extension has worked with research, the private sector, and farmer organisations to analyse, test, validate and adapt new technologies to farmers' needs and market demands. This may involve roles to facilitate, coordinate, and advocate so that the challenges of smallholders and poor farmers are not overlooked.

Evaluating extension's contribution to technology transfer may require a new perspective on how extension relates to sources of technical information in general and research in particular. Evaluations should thus look at the partnerships that exist between extension, research and other partners (e.g., private input suppliers) that are sources of information and new technologies. In the past it was commonly assumed that extension was part of a linear process of delivering research findings to farmers. Today it is recognised that, although research institutions are an important source of knowledge, there are several other sources and many ways that information about new technologies reaches farmers. Relevant, effective and sustainable services rely on a collaborative relationship between research, extension and other actors. In this relationship, extension should play an important part in prioritising research topics and designing research programmes in order to ensure that research is relevant and beneficial to real needs and demands from farmers. Often extension also actively collaborates as an equal partner in research implementation.

The search for a new collaborative research-extension relationship will require

a different approach to evaluation than just measuring the degree to which extension is contributing to new technologies being adopted by farmers. The value of extension in stimulating the adoption and diffusion of new technologies is related to if and how extension has worked with research, the private sector, and farmer organisations to analyse, test, validate and adapt new technologies to farmers' needs and market demands. This may involve roles to facilitate, coordinate, and advocate so that the challenges of smallholders and poor farmers are not overlooked.

To understand this multidimensional relationship among extension, research, private actors and farmers it is important for evaluations to look critically at the incentives that exist for these different actors to work together. Research institutions are often rewarded more for academic publication than for their impact on farmer livelihoods and food security and may therefore have little motivation to collaborate with extension. Innovations of private companies are generally more focused on the companies' own profits than the farmers'. The relevance of public investment in extension therefore needs to be assessed based on how well it ensures that

new technologies are tested and adapted based on their positive impact for farmers.

The drivers behind the different institutional relationships should be assessed. Evaluation should assess the effectiveness of strategies that are expected to create new incentives to vitalise these linkages. This will usually be best addressed as part of evaluating broader programmes and policy reform initiatives, rather than evaluation of a single extension project. Nonetheless, even evaluations of extension projects may contribute to learning about these factors by asking about the nature of the extension organisations' linkages, information exchange, and collaboration with different actors. It may even be possible to assess how these linkages look from the 'other side of the fence', i.e., the perspectives of researchers or private agro-industrial firms. Outcome Mapping may be useful for this as it focuses on so-called 'boundary partners'. There may also be findings from social science research that can help in understanding 'the big picture' of innovation and technological

change in a given country and thereby contextualise the role of extension within these processes.

Extension will be most effective if other innovation related services are in place, if research is participatory and demand-driven, if markets and land are accessible, and if there is sufficient social, political, and economic security in place to create an enabling environment for rural development. This implies that extension deserves neither all the credit nor the blame for the shortcomings in these systems. Extension systems need to be held to account for whether or not they provide optimal and appropriate support within broader rural development. Evaluations can help extension actors to reconsider their roles within these systems and understand the implications of different policies. Extension is an important 'messenger' but extension agencies often lack the capacity to eloquently explain their position in complex rural development processes. Extension actors are often not in position to point out that the messages

Looking critically at results frameworks and theories of change is a useful starting point to ensure that the evaluation takes a balanced approach to analysing the roles of the different actors in the innovation system. The questions may include the following:

- Is the intervention designed based on the recognition that extension may have a range of task priorities that are unrelated to goals of the intervention?
- Is support included for the role of other non-extension actors in providing information?
- Are structures in place that critically assess whether the technologies promoted are relevant and appropriate for the farmers e.g. systematic independent testing?
- Does the intervention include the other components that may be required to achieve the intended results, such as interactive learning, market development, finance, infrastructure, input supply, etc., or at least include a comprehensive analysis of how extension is expected to contribute given the prevailing state of these other components of the innovation system?
- Is due attention paid to the incentives for other actors in the innovation to collaborate with extension?

Some ways to approach this include:

- Analysing the stakeholders in the innovation system, their roles and relationships regarding identification of needs, technology innovation, testing, adaptation, dissemination and provision of feed-back loops
- Assessing how extension actors are positioned and function in the relationship, including how extension may link technological change to market relationships, natural resource management, and other factors in the innovation system
- Identifying eventual gaps or dysfunctions in the system and plausible causes

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RESULTS FRAMEWORKS

coming from research are not relevant to the farmers. For these reasons evaluations sometimes 'shoot the messenger' (extension) rather than question whether a broader intervention is appropriate as a whole. This can be aggravated by overly optimistic assumptions in results frameworks about what extension can accomplish, as noted above in section one.

In recent years increasing attention has been paid to questions related to putting research into use³⁹. Extension evaluations can complement these analyses with perspectives from 'the other side of the fence'.

Attributing impacts of extension within complex systems

Extension is not an end in itself, but is in many ways the 'missing middle' in rural development efforts. This often makes attribution of impacts directly to extension difficult. Extension is often a low-key intermediary institution that does not directly produce tangible outputs, but which, if it is absent or ineffective, can result in systemic failures. Evaluations need to highlight this 'missing middle' by keeping in mind that the objectives of extension interventions are usually multiple and include outcomes which are not easily quantifiable, such as changes in behaviour and attitude, learning and ownership.

Three characteristics of extension make attribution particularly challenging:

- The changes that extension promotes are sometimes relatively intangible, as they may be related to attitudes towards risk and innovation as much as actual changes in farming practices.
- The diversity of farms and the fact that farmers have very different levels and types of motivation for drawing on extension services make it difficult to draw general conclusions from findings about impacts on 'average' farmers.
- It is difficult to draw conclusions from surveys comparing those receiving services with those who do not since a primary goal of extension is to stimulate wider diffusion of knowledge beyond those who actually receive the service.

There is a tendency in evaluation of extension interventions of falling into false

assumptions about what outcomes and impacts can be causally attributed to a relatively narrow intervention in a complex and dynamically changing context. It is usually more important to look for evidence of more modest contributions, rather than overall attribution of a given result to an extension intervention.

Some methods do not even attempt to determine linear cause-effect relations but look instead at how interventions are perceived in a wider perspective. The focus of participatory impact assessment⁴⁰ and other approaches such as the Listening Project⁴¹ shift away from the attribution of changes to particular projects towards looking at more system-wide effects. Complex causes are acknowledged; but the evaluation focuses on contributions, rather than claiming to provide proof of attribution. This is a controversial way to look at impact because participants may be less concerned with, or able to identify the specific interventions that led to the changes. It is nonetheless useful to identify what, from the clients/beneficiaries' point of view, has changed, to assess wider and unintended impacts and to understand the changes that they deem to be significant.

Attribution is particularly difficult when evaluating development interventions intended to enhance institutional and organisations capacities, such as those that are intended to strengthen extension systems. One guide to evaluating capacity development⁴² points out that evaluations of institutional development tend to be either 'naive', in assuming that a short-term intervention can really change deep-set institutional structures, or they are 'cynical' in interpreting the complexity of these change processes as being inherently impervious to time-bound reform initiatives. Close and realistic analyses of attribution challenges can help in manoeuvring between naivety and cynicism. Evaluations can compare places that have received extension services with those that lack access to extension, and also compare areas receiving services that have been included in the intervention with those receiving services untouched by the intervention. It is often best to make such comparisons based on comparable areas rather than on different sets of clients in a single location. The more entre-

Extension is often a low-key intermediary institution that does not directly produce tangible outputs, but which, if it is absent or ineffective, can result in systemic failures. Evaluations need to highlight this 'missing middle' by keeping in mind that the objectives of extension interventions are usually multiple and include outcomes which are not easily quantifiable, such as changes in behaviour and attitude, learning and ownership.

It is usually more important to look for evidence of more modest contributions, rather than overall attribution of a given result to an extension intervention.

preneurial, literate, or wealthy farmers are generally the most active in pursuing extension services or in finding information on their own. What would seem to be impacts of extension may therefore be more related to the nature of the clients than the quality of the services. This type of false attribution is a very common weakness in evaluations of extension.

Evaluating extension in a volatile world

The demands being placed on extension today are different to those in the past. Extension actors must operate in rapidly changing contexts that are constantly generating new demands, opportunities, and challenges. The challenges are characterised by uncertainty, unpredictability, and uncontrollability. Extension needs to focus on up-to-the-minute shifts in markets, technologies, and institutional relationships when:

- Commodity prices change rapidly
- Consumer preferences suddenly shift
- Standards for products become stricter
- New investors in land, processing and trade radically change the agri-food landscape
- Extreme climate events increasingly become the norm, rather than the exception
- The capacity and commitment of the state to provide rural services shifts
- Conflicts make it difficult or impossible for some extension actors to work, while bringing in new actors with very different ideas and potentially large amounts of resources.

In light of these volatile changes, fixed service provision packages are being replaced by acknowledgement of the need for working within complex and flexible innovation systems. This suggests the need for evaluations to ask whether the intervention is contributing to the development of capacities to manage uncertainty in rural development. Another question is if the intervention supports information, dialogue and advice regarding probabilities, and trends in the light of uncertainty regarding markets, climate, and technological change.

Evaluations need to explore the extent to which interventions have been designed to respond to change and unpredictability. Interventions should be ready to reprioritise to support extension to help clients live with risk and take advantage of new opportunities. But are they? If a results framework is seen as a tool for critical reflection, it can be a tool to discuss necessary changes. But if it is seen to be 'written in stone', then those implementing the intervention may fear drawing attention to the need to shift priorities. Therefore, monitoring and evaluation can help ensure that results frameworks are used to facilitate learning about how to adapt to a changing context and develop capacities to respond appropriately.

The realisations about uncertainty, unpredictability, and volatility in extension parallel new conceptual approaches to evaluation. In the past, it was assumed that evaluation was primarily about measuring the extent to which plans had been followed. Sometimes this included 'formative' elements, which involved suggestions for changing plans in the future. An alternative approach referred to as 'developmental evaluation'⁴² takes a step further. Developmental evaluations are primarily intended to provide data and a basis for critical reflection in order to better adapt initiatives to a rapidly changing environment. This involves using the evaluation process to critically assess plans and models as to how well they respond to changing needs and opportunities. As such, these methods see evaluation as a permanent part of on-going learning processes, and also as a way to hold actors to account for how well they are responding to their changing environment, even if this means departing from plans and models.

Evaluating demand driven extension efforts by nature includes a measure of such 'developmental evaluation' as farmers' demands are difficult to predict and a market opportunity/collapse, a drought or a conflict may generate demands for different tools, priorities, and institutions.

An important starting point for assessing the flexibility, rigour, and viability of an extension intervention in a volatile world is to look critically at the risks and assumptions in the results frameworks and other programme documents to see if the inter-

Interventions should be ready to reprioritise to support extension to help clients live with risk and take advantage of new opportunities. But are they? If a results framework is seen as a tool for critical reflection, it can be a tool to discuss necessary changes. But if it is seen to be 'written in stone', then those implementing the intervention may fear drawing attention to the need to shift priorities.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS FOR ASSESSING RESPONSIVE- NESS IN A VOLATILE WORLD

To reveal whether the intervention plans and implementation processes take volatility into account, the following questions can be asked:

- How adaptable have the services been in the face of demonstrated frequency of disruptions in relation to extreme climate events, political pressures or changing market demands?
- Are services linked to systems for collecting and disseminating information on climatic changes?
- Are skills and methods in place for projecting and disseminating seasonal forecasts and information about future climatic trends?
- Are skills and methods in place for building scenarios and providing decision tools to producers and their organisations regarding relevant options for dealing with market volatility?
- Are services linked to systems for collecting and disseminating information about changes in markets, prices and projecting and disseminating future trends?
- Are training and information provided to farmers and their organisations that increase their ability to interpret the market and adapt accordingly?
- Are training and advice priorities continually reassessed to provide a variety of options to fit prevailing and predicted changes?

vention assumes an unrealistically high level of stability in markets, climate, etc.; or if it includes proactive mechanisms to respond to volatility.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

³⁹ www.researchintouse.com

⁴⁰ <http://sites.tufts.edu/feinstein/2008/participatory-impact-assessment>

⁴¹ http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/project_profile.php?pid=LISTEN&name=ListeningProject

⁴² Patton, M.Q.; 2011; Developmental Evaluation; Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.



EVALUATING BEST-FIT OF EXTENSION INTERVENTIONS

4

Extension evaluation should pragmatically assess how the models, goals and objectives of the intervention fit with the day-to-day practices of extension organisations and staff in relation to their intended clients, their engagement with markets and their potential sources of financial sustainability. The main conclusion of virtually all extension evaluations is that there is no perfect system or method. Evaluations should support stakeholders to understand what may fit best within their given context. This can contribute to learning how to make the system fit better; or for accountability based on a realistic assessment of what the intervention should have and could have achieved given prevailing conditions.

When evaluating the level of fit, it is important to recall that some service providers being supported may not 'fit' at all for achieving the aims of the intervention. Some extension projects are based on im-

PLICIT or explicit assumptions that the service providers that are receiving support from the intervention have the motivation, incentives and ability to rise to new challenges with a limited package of assistance. An evaluation should look critically at whether or not this is the case, as some extension agencies are moribund and others have very fixed roles that are highly unlikely to change due to a 'project'. This may involve looking at the following:

- The basic mandate of the organisation: If the intervention is intended to support market or natural resource management advice, is the agency allowed to take on such roles or does it have a strict technology transfer mandate?
- The human resource base of the organisation: Do the skills levels of the advisors match the tasks they are expected to perform, and if not, is there

Some extension projects are based on implicit or explicit assumptions that the service providers that are receiving support from the intervention have the motivation, incentives and ability to rise to new challenges with a limited package of assistance. An evaluation should look critically at whether this is the case.

a realistic and sustainable system proposed to address these skills gaps?

- The organisational culture: If the intervention is intended to encourage farmers to engage in their own group learning processes, does this 'fit' with the prevailing perception of the role of the advisors – perhaps as 'experts' – and if not are there realistic and sustainable measures planned to change deep-set cultural factors?

Best-fit in relation to different extension clients

Different types of extension services may serve different extension clients more or less well. An evaluation needs to assess this in an objective and rigorous manner and avoid preconceived notions. Examples of these notions are beliefs that the poor can only benefit from free services or that women are virtually always subsistence producers and do not need market oriented advisory services. There may be assumptions that the main clients of a service are always individual farmers, when it may be more effective to support farmer organisations, input vendors, or other actors, from whom farmers can then access the knowledge and advice that they need. It is important that evaluations question such prevailing assumptions and contribute to improving understanding of who accesses different services and why, so that the services can become clearer in their targeting.

Evaluations should pay particular attention to whether, how, and why the extension agencies, and indeed the individual agents, actually serve their chosen target group. Target groups can be disaggregated according to gender, wealth, market orientation, and educational background. This may include either farmers or the orientation of the organisations upon which they depend. Without a conscious design for targeting, extension staff will naturally have a preference for serving clients with whom they easily communicate and therefore also reach maximum results. These clients are likely to be the more progressive entrepreneurs who are normally male, well off, have good market access, and are better skilled or educated. Evaluations can gain an overall perspective on such tendencies by reviewing research

into how certain groups are included or excluded from development trajectories in a given geographical region, culture or political system.

Best client fit should be related to the objectives of the intervention. If market orientation or increasing aggregate national food production is the main focus, and direct poverty alleviation is not a major priority, some measure of elite bias may be acceptable or even desirable. If the emphasis is on household food security, these biases should be a primary topic of concern in the evaluation.

Gender

It is important that evaluators recognise that gender inequalities in the agricultural sector are deeply rooted in gender inequalities in the society as a whole. Depending on the context this may include gender relations at household level in relation to land and property rights, access to agricultural inputs, credit and financial services, and business development services. For extension interventions to be effective in terms of increasing gender equality in service provision it is therefore imperative that this is explicitly integrated in the design (results framework) of the intervention and that specific gender equality targets and indicators are defined – and monitored. As this is rarely the case, evaluators usually have great challenges in assessing how the extension intervention is progressing in this area and experiences show clearly⁴³ that when this is not the case, any progress in terms of gender equality is likely to be scant. A recent evaluation of Farmer Field Schools in Bangladesh gave an important example of this. As gender equality had no significant place in the project design and there were no specific targets related to this, gender and social cultural issues became insignificant add-ons to the programme and it was not possible to track substantial outcomes in this area⁴⁴.

To be effective, the intervention must explicitly and directly confront gender inequality factors. Evaluation of an extension system's or organisation's ability to reach both men and women must observe the specific context and assess the actors' practices in terms of being proactive in challenging key constraints to gender eq-

Evaluations should pay particular attention to whether, how, and why the extension agencies, and indeed the individual agents, actually serve their chosen target group.

Evaluation of an extension system's or organisation's ability to reach both men and women must observe the specific context and assess the actors' practices in terms of being proactive in challenging key constraints to gender equity.

uity. This could involve questions such as the ones described in the box below.

Disaggregating data on how extension services reach and affect men and women is often problematic since services are mostly directed towards households rather than individuals. For this reason it is difficult for an evaluation and even for most monitoring systems to assess how men and women within the households are served by extension. In some cases, extension initiatives approach this challenge by disaggregating their gender targeting according to male and female-headed households. Although this can provide some useful information, it should of course not be assumed that the only women who access services are in female-headed households. It is equally important to assess how the extension services influence intra-household relations and married women's options in particular. In communities where polygamous marriages are common, the differentiation between male and female headed households becomes extremely complicated and therefore easily distorts the collected data.

If the aim is to reach women with services, it is crucial to analyse the extent to which female staff are involved in delivering the services. This is particularly important in contexts where there are cultural obstacles for women to move and to communicate with men outside their homes and/or where women culturally are particularly subordinate to men. In such situations it is moreover crucial that the evaluation also takes this into account in the evaluation practice and makes sure that the evaluation team also includes women who can communicate with female clients. Otherwise the views of women participants or the effect on women will remain hidden.

Wealth

There are commonly preconceptions regarding which types of actors, methods and structures are effective in reaching different wealth groups of clients. The question of which wealth groups extension services reach is related to the actual content of the services, as well as procedures, incentives, and attitudes of the service providers. This also relates very much



to farm size, as many services are only relevant for farms that are large enough to undertake the proposed innovations. Even services directed at supporting farmer organisations may have an inherent bias if these organisations do not welcome poor or subsistence producers.

Wealth means different things in different contexts. In farming communities, factors that are likely to relate to access to extension are usually: (a) ownership of productive assets such as land and livestock; (b) income (on-farm and non-farm), (c) market orientation and access to markets; and (d) educational level. These factors are important because they strongly frame the opportunities to engage in agricultural activities and also the demands for extension services. In some contexts wealthier actors are leaving farming for more profitable pursuits and may therefore have less interest in extension, or they may be accessing the information they need through the internet. It is therefore important to look closely at

Female extension staff are crucial for extension to have direct impact with women in areas of strong gender segregation.

DISAGGREGATING ACCORDING TO GENDER, WEALTH AND MARKET ORIENTATION/ACCESS

| | Possible evaluation questions | Possible indicators |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Gender | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do both men and women participate in/access extension services? • Does the intervention respond to and/or confront particular key constraints for women's agricultural activities • How does extension address cultural restrictions and issues of workload for women to participate in and access services? • Do the extension messages respond to strategic agricultural needs of men and women farmers? • Are there a sufficient number of women extension agents with appropriate skills to serve female clients? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of men and women participating in/ accessing/using extension services • Whether key constraints for women such as e.g. land ownership are acknowledged and addressed in the intervention • Time series analysis of gendered workload before and after the intervention • Extension activities aimed at addressing eventual restrictions for women to participate • Women farmers indicating changes in their ability to participate • Numbers of female extension staff at different levels of the organisation |
| Wealth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who demands/uses/has access to services among intended target groups in terms of wealth? • When extension aims to target particularly poor and vulnerable groups, are there procedures and incentives for extension staff to take into account the needs and views of the poor clients? • Are the promoted technologies appropriate and accessible for the targeted producers e.g. the poor and do extension services have a role in ensuring that there is an appropriate choice of technologies? • Does extension take into consideration the level of risks that poor producers are able to deal with – and/or deal with mitigation of such risks? • Does extension take into consideration the market options that are accessible for poor producers? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of participating farmers from different wealth groups • Existence of incentives for extension staff to reach the target group, e.g., poor producers • Adoption and adaptation of promoted technologies by different wealth groups • Investment costs of using different technologies • Comparison of financial /production/market risks of different production options in relation to household income |
| Market orientation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How big a proportion of the clients' produce is marketed and is there a correlation between this factor and demands for extension? • How does the content of the extension services respond to market opportunities of the clients? • Are there services to facilitate access to markets for the clients? • How strong are the market relations of the extension client? – do they receive advice through market channels? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketed proportion of clients' produce • Comparison of secondary data on market demand with extension priorities • Existence of services to facilitate access to markets, e.g., market information • Types of market relations and sources of advice • Client satisfaction in relation to provision of necessary services to access markets |

what these factors really mean in each situation. It may be necessary to take this disaggregation a step further by exploring other potentially important wealth indicators. Sometimes this can be uncovered through a baseline survey. There are several tools available for conducting participatory wealth ranking among a sample of clients or client communities⁴⁵.

Market orientation

Almost all farmers are more or less connected to some kind of market, but the degree to which they engage in markets varies enormously. Access to markets has proven to be an important factor for successful extension as the demand for extension services usually increases in relation to the level of market orientation. Farmers demand more services when they are exploring new markets since they recognise that they are entering unknown territory in terms of, for example, standards, and perhaps also need to develop collaboration with other farmers and value chain actors in order to access these markets. Other market related factors, such as infrastructure, may determine the prospects for success of an extension intervention.

It is important for evaluations to recognise that extension cannot create markets, but these services can influence the 'playing field' so as to help markets to function more effectively and to be more pro-poor. Extension is a potentially important tool to address 'market failures' related to 'asymmetrical' (uneven or unequal) access to information about prices, market opportunities and risks. On the other hand, well-functioning markets are also important for extension to perform effectively. There are many examples of evaluations discovering that the technological package being promoted by extension was not adopted as there was no market for the goods that the farmers produced. The 'chicken or the egg' relationship between markets and extension needs to be unpacked in an evaluation in order to understand the functioning of the innovation system.

Evaluations may need to look at how well the intervention has explored ways to tailor services to potential commercial



farmers. Some small-scale farmers first and foremost produce for their own consumption and then sell a small amount of produce – either they sell the excess or sell an amount of produce to cover immediate cash needs. The incentives for these farmers to demand extension services may be limited unless they aspire to commercialise their farming enterprise and believe that access to extension can help to connect them to new market opportunities.

A large scale of production is often perceived as a precondition for market orientation and with it demand for market-oriented extension. This is another assumption that requires critical analysis. Many small-scale farms take advantage of different types of market opportunities and they often make up for their size disadvantages by building associations to strengthen their competitiveness on the market. It is therefore appropriate to look at the proportion of marketed produce in relation to the household's total production. It may then be important to look at whether producers have contractual or out-grower arrangements with the buyers of produce, if they market their produce through commodity associations, or if they sell directly to a local market or traders. There are often hidden, but effective, extension services 'embedded' in these arrangements when the promoter of a contracting arrangement advises farmers what and how to farm in order to live up to the terms of their contracts. It may also be useful to look at the cli-

Extension will have limited impact when other factors hinder market access for farmers.

ent's access to local, regional or international markets and if extension is able to serve the particular needs of these types of markets – for example by assisting with certification and quality control or legal advice on contracts.

Best fit in relation to methodological options⁴⁶

Evaluation should focus on assessing the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the intervention's methods in relation to the prevailing contexts, and for differ-

EVALUATING METHODOLOGICAL OPTIONS

The following are examples of common methodologies and examples for how they could be evaluated:

Services directed towards individual producers

Many traditional extension services focus on one-to-one contacts between advisors and their clients. This is also common in providing business and farm management advice that needs to be tailored to each client and may involve taking up sensitive issues that cannot be discussed in an open forum. Methods include individual field visits and telephone consultations. IT and mobile phone-based services are expanding rapidly as well to provide market or weather information. Services for individual producers can be evaluated by, for example, random sample household interviews or questionnaires regarding their satisfaction with and benefits from the services they receive.

Small group methods

Farmer Field Schools involve season-long practical training in crop or livestock production and other topics of interest to participants in groups of 20 to 25 farmers with a trained facilitator⁴⁷. Farmer Study Circles in the extension context are a farmer-to-farmer extension method that is often combined with literacy training as a group of farmers study booklets on different topics on agriculture of their own choice and work together on implementing the content. A study circle is small group of 5-15 people who hold regular meetings to carry out their study plan. Study circles aim at developing capacity and competence through interactive exchange of scientific and indigenous knowledge within the study group and during field visits⁴⁸. Other types of participatory approaches to extension have been developed that are implemented with groups of farmers and include participatory needs assessments for extension content. Examples include Farming as a business – Facilitation Circle, developed in Zambia for development of entrepreneurial skills of farmers including facilitation of action planning towards commercialisation in interest groups, followed up by individual extension at household level.

Small group methods can be evaluated by, for example, focus group interviews or groups undertaking their own self-evaluation using participatory monitoring and evaluation tools⁴⁹.

Large group and mass media methods

Large group methods include agricultural demonstration fields, agricultural shows, and field days. Mass media, such as TV and radio programmes, internet and mobile services are important for many farmers and can be a relatively cost effective way to reach a large number of producers. Currently some of these methodologies, particularly ICT related services, are expanding rapidly. Farmer Information Centres can make these services available to small scale farmers in even remote rural areas. They represent promising prospects for contributing to empowerment of large groups of farmers as they make it possible for producers and other actors in the agricultural value chains to interact and exchange information freely. Given this potential and the fact that these methods are new and unproven it is therefore particularly important that evaluations explore this potential and how these methods are being integrated with more traditional extension methods, for example if synergies are being found between these methods and other advisory services tailored to specific target groups.

Large group and mass media methods can be evaluated by questionnaire surveys directed to rather large samples of participants. Usually it is important to pay careful attention to disaggregation in these surveys so as to assess different levels of access to different media and capacity/willingness to participate in large events for different categories of farmers.



Small groups methods can be evaluated through focus group discussions.

ent purposes and target groups. A large number of extension methods exist. Some are suited to extension for small groups of farmers; others for advice to individual farmers or farming households; others such as mass media and information technologies are suited for cheaply spreading extension messages to huge numbers of producers at a time. Methodologies are appropriate for certain purposes, but less so for others. There is, however, no one method that works as a 'magic bullet' for all farmers in all contexts.

If an extension service is expected to serve a range of goals and target groups, it is important for evaluations to assess whether alternative methodologies would better suit the different purposes and objectives of the service. There is a tendency for extension projects to focus on one particular extension method, for which the staff is trained. This can limit the flexibility of the service to respond effectively to different needs and challenges.

Evaluations should also assess whether the choice of methods fits the prevailing human resources. The quality of services relies on a match between the methods used and the service providers' skills, capacity and attitudes. A common complaint within extension organisations is that new methodologies are introduced without the staff being adequately trained in applying these. Some methodologies, especially those requiring strong facilitation skills, can be very good tools when properly implemented, but are totally inappropriate when the capacity to implement them is lacking or cannot be maintained after the intervention ends. Furthermore, facilitation without a facilitative attitude can result in manipulation rather than participation. Many extension staff perceive themselves as 'experts', due to their entire education and incentive system. Evaluations should look critically at whether the intervention has viable approaches if it intends to reverse such deep-seated attitudes. Findings may question whether any method could produce the often far-reaching cultural changes described in results frameworks.

In general, the suitability of methodologies should be assessed by taking into account the following questions:

- Does the extension system/organisation offer a variety of services and use a range of methodologies that match the strategies for the client group?
- Do the methodologies support the goals and objectives of those responsible for leadership in the extension system (politicians, farmer organisations, aid agencies)?
- Do the staff have the capacity to master and maintain the methodologies used?

Best-fit in relation to financial sustainability

To draw conclusions about sustainability, evaluations need to judge the relevance of the mechanism by which extension services are financed during and, especially, after the intervention. This includes both the models for financing and the ways these models are put into practice. Financing is also extremely important for the effectiveness of the services in reaching and stimulating demand from different client groups. The mechanism will determine whether funds can flow adequately and according to the needs of the clients/beneficiaries and has strong influence on the quality and timeliness of the services. Evaluation of this area therefore needs to analyse all the elements making up the financing mechanism. These are:

- **Involved actors:** Different systems involve different sets of stakeholders, including funding sources, extension service providers, clients, and indirect beneficiaries, e.g., consumers. The innovation system is in many respects often be aligned with the financing system as it determines who will pay for what. The nature of these actors as well as the roles they play in the financing should be analysed.
- **Flows of finance and services:** Funds are moving between the actors in exchange for services. The mechanisms for collection and allocation of funds are key to the effectiveness of the extension services.
- **Conditions of funding:** Rules and conditions govern how funding can be obtained, how funds can be used, and how the actors relate to one another. The conditions can either facilitate or

Evaluation should assess how the financing mechanism addresses the objectives of financial sustainability and how it creates incentives for achieving a range of objectives.

create obstacles for the flow of services.

- **Policy environment:** Every set-up is embedded in a wider environment shaped by politics, policies, socio-economic relationships, and agrarian conditions. Often campaign statements by politicians offering free services or inflexible civil service traditions may stand in the way of financing reform.

Evaluations should not just see financing mechanisms as a tool for promoting financial sustainability since financing is in many instances the main factor determining who is accountable to whom. Analyses of financial flows can be a way of measuring power relations in the extension system and whether or not there are financial incentives for achieving policy aims. Related questions for assessing how financing mechanisms contribute to (appropriate) accountabilities include asking whether or not they:

- Facilitate demand-oriented services and empower clients in relation to service providers and policy makers (e.g., by putting purchasing power in the hands of clients)

- Ensure that public investment promotes public interests
- Support the emergence of a market of diverse extension service providers.

These objectives relate to who has the 'power of the purse' in demanding extension services, and whether extension services are being held financially accountable for providing services to a range of clients and promoting broader societal goals. An extension service may have all of these objectives enshrined in its mandate, but an evaluator should look more deeply into what happens to their financing if service providers fail to live up to these aims.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

⁴³ E.g. Farnworth, C. R.; 2010; Gender Aware Approaches in Agricultural Programmes; A study of Sida-supported Agricultural programmes; Sida Evaluation 2010:3

⁴⁴ Danida; 2011; Evaluation of the Farmer Field School Approach in the Agricultural sector Programme Support Phase II, Bangladesh

⁴⁵ <http://www.microfinancegateway.org/p/site/m/template.rc/1.11.48260/1.26.9234/p/site/m/template.rc/1.11.48260/1.26.10538/>

⁴⁶ Section two above looked at evaluation methods. This section provides an overview of how to evaluate the met-

hods that the extension intervention has introduced. Given that both evaluation and extension involve learning about what farmers are doing, some of the methods that are introduced in extension interventions are similar to those used by evaluators.

⁴⁷ see www.farmerfieldschool.net

⁴⁸ see <http://www.sccportal.org/publications/Study-Circle-Material.aspx>

⁴⁹ see <http://go.worldbank.org/G966Z73P30>



EVALUATING PLURALISM

5

Innovation systems thinking and broadened perspectives on what constitutes 'extension' imply that the emphasis of evaluation needs to be expanded to reflect 'pluralism', i.e., the range of actors that might be, should be or could be providing quality extension services for different target groups to deal with innovation challenges. Pluralistic extension systems are by definition highly complex, which makes evaluation challenging since few interventions aim to support the entire system. Pluralism is moreover not easy to monitor and measure since it involves keeping track of the activities of a variety of actors providing a range of services, many of which will only receive modest direct support from a given intervention. Programme aims may refer to the importance of outcomes in terms of a well-functioning and pluralistic overall innovation system, but the actual scope of the intervention may be considerably narrower, usually

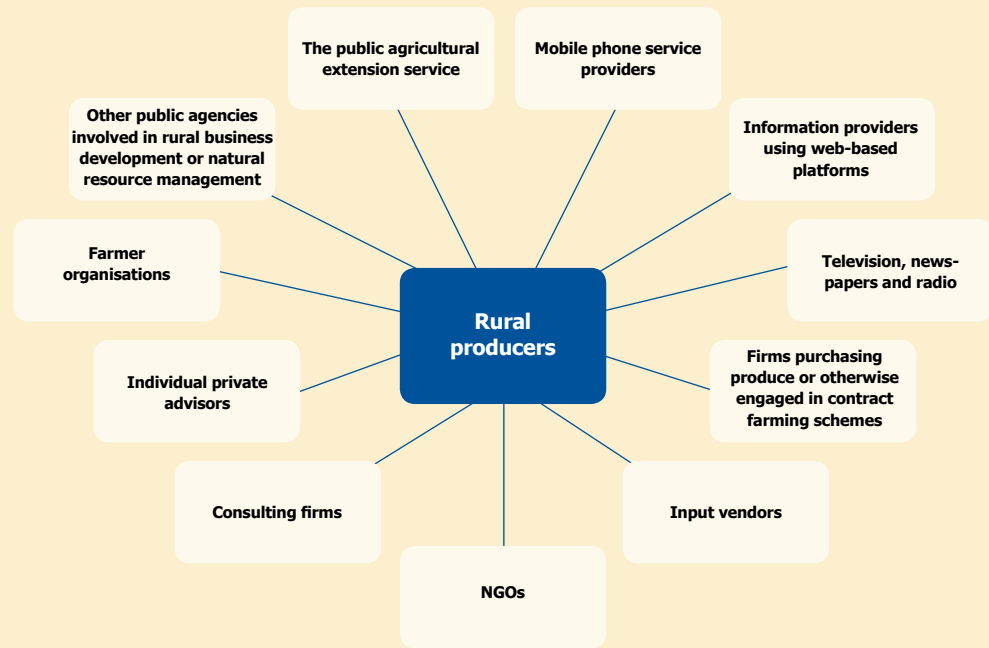
focusing on one service provider and a limited array of target groups and methods. An evaluation of an intervention that claims to support pluralism often needs to make inductive judgements about how these specific activities have led to wider systemic outcomes. It may, for example, mean looking at how well different actors have engaged with agricultural research or market traders, even if these other actors are not 'part of the project'.

The range of service providers that could be investigated include (but are not restricted to) the figure overleaf.

In order to understand the pluralistic outcomes of an intervention it may also be important to look at how the intervention has contributed to bringing a range of stakeholders in the innovation system together to consider options for reform and collaboration. Pluralistic interventions are often based on a 'platform approach'⁵⁰ where the goal is to create an enabling

Pluralism is moreover not easy to monitor and measure since it involves keeping track of the activities of a variety of actors providing a range of services, many of which will only receive modest direct support from a given intervention.

SERVICE PROVIDERS



Evaluation of field trials in Vietnam. Extension's role in testing new technologies.

Evaluations should also investigate whether the intervention may have actually undermined pluralism. Sometimes an intervention provides de facto subsidies for a single service provider that can make it impossible for other service providers to compete in the service provision marketplace.

environment for actors to choose their own way forward. Evaluating pluralism involves recognition that innovation systems include actors with varied and frequently even conflicting goals. Different actors choose their actions based on their own social, political and economic motivations and incentives. Some are oriented towards market development. Some are oriented towards directly responding to farmer demands. Some are committed to more sustainable natural resource management. Public sector agencies presumably try to respond to government policies and bureaucratic incentives. All of these actors can be influenced by an intervention, and the way this has happened can be assessed through evaluation.

New methods are being developed that are designed to help in looking beyond institutional and organisational boundaries to understand how an intervention is influencing wider systems. Outcome Mapping is an example of such a method as it recognises the importance of the actions of a range of stakeholders outside the direct control or influence of the intervention, and thus highlights the outcomes of the intervention in terms of changes in the 'boundary partners', i.e., organisations that are not the direct focus of the intervention but which are part of the innova-

tion system that is expected to change.

An evaluation should, at a minimum, draw attention to alternative service providers, even if the resources available to the evaluator may not be sufficient to collect data for a comprehensive comparison of these alternatives. Evaluators can also ask critical questions about whether the design of the intervention (a) took into account alternatives, and (b) provided opportunities to redirect resources to those actors that could perhaps provide better and more sustainable services. Evaluations should also investigate whether the intervention may have actually undermined pluralism. Sometimes an intervention provides de facto subsidies for a single service provider that can make it impossible for other service providers to compete in the service provision marketplace.

An evaluator thus needs to keep an open mind about the elements of the 'extension system' that lie outside of the intervention as it was originally planned. It should neither be taken for granted that the chosen intervention partners are the main sources of information and advice for farmers, nor that they are necessarily the best source of information and advice. An evaluation of pluralistic approaches may involve looking first at the ways that farmers have ac-

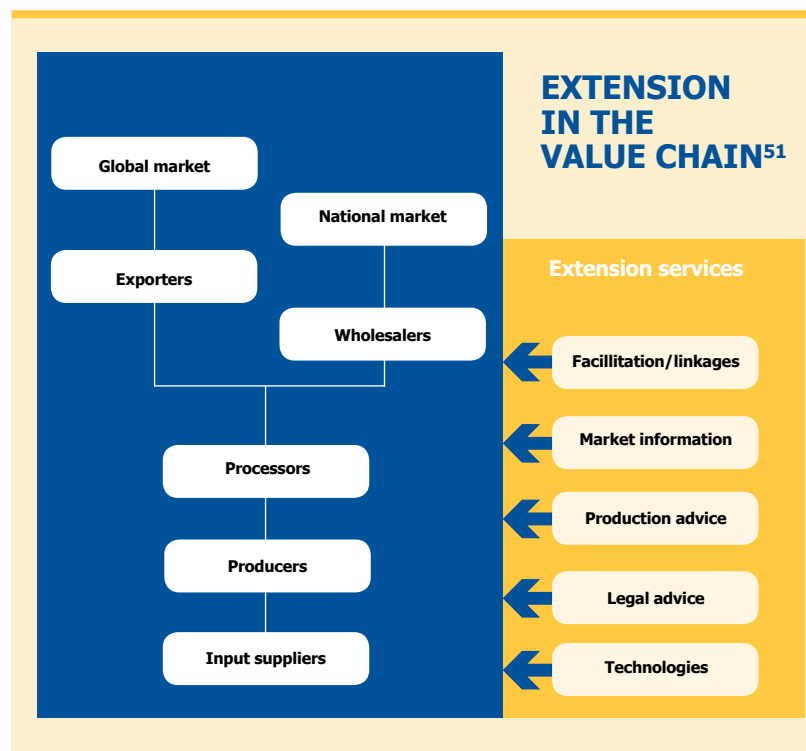
cessed these services in the past; then with the support of the intervention; and finally how they are likely to access these services in the future. This demands an open mind about the relevance of the intervention in relation to alternative service provision channels.

In addition, when the intervention deals with specialised information, it is particularly important to ask whether these services are best provided by specialised agencies, e.g., market information may be provided through existing market information services and weather/climate information may come through meteorological services. Potential synergies may also exist if more conventional extension services develop new collaborative arrangements together with such specialised service providers rather than 'reinventing the wheel'.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention in the innovation system involves assessing how it contributes to strengthening knowledge sharing, and developing new ideas in the pluralistic networks of organisations, enterprises, and individuals that focus on innovation of new production methods, processes, and/or market activities as well as of achieving greater sustainability in natural resource use and managing risks. In serving the needs of small-scale men and women farmers, most innovations are not new technologies, but related to new ways of adapting to market demand and changing agro-ecological conditions. Besides strong and effective organisations and actors, the ability of small-scale farmers to innovate, is often related to collective action and knowledge exchange among diverse actors. A pluralistic perspective is therefore needed when assessing if and how extension contributes to stimulating social and institutional innovations that can respond to the above needs for collaboration.

Is the intervention focused appropriately within the value chain?

The demand for extension is in many cases directly related to if and how clients access markets. It is therefore crucial for an extension intervention to be focused appropriately in the value chain. This means that evaluations should look at whether the intervention design and implementa-



tion have been based on solid value chain analyses, i.e., that the intervention reflects and responds to the gaps and weaknesses in the functioning of the chain.

Extension services should thus be assessed on how well they (a) respond to market related knowledge gaps and weaknesses and, (b) provide services at an appropriate level and in such a way that the effectiveness of the value chain is enhanced. This means that the services may have other clients than small-scale farmers, perhaps including processors and traders. There are numerous areas where evaluations can assess whether value chain development has been supported and market failures addressed:

- Development of local capacity for facilitating and brokering linkages in the value chain
- Mitigation of risks for small scale producers and other rural entrepreneurs of market orientation through knowledge and information
- Promotion of trust and transparency, for example by providing legal and other advice to enhance transparency regarding market 'rules of the game'
- Facilitation of development of policies and regulations enabling the market.

Extension services should thus be assessed on how well they (a) respond to market related knowledge gaps and weaknesses and, (b) provide services at an appropriate level and in such a way that the effectiveness of the value chain is enhanced. This means that the services may have other clients than small-scale farmers, perhaps including processors and traders.

QUESTIONS AND INDICATORS FOR EVALUATING EXTENSION IN A VALUE CHAIN AND INNOVATION SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

| Evaluation area | Possible evaluation questions | Possible indicators |
|--|---|--|
| Outcomes on value chains | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a functional market for the commodities to which the services are directed? • How does the intervention address potential market failures and how does this affect the target group? • How does the intervention support the emergence of a range of services that improve the performance of the relevant value chains? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of production successfully marketed • Increase in successfully marketed produce • Increase of income of target-group • Increase in access to different services relevant for effective value chains |
| Outcomes in the innovation system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the intervention created opportunities for a range of service providers to engage in extension services? • Has the intervention included analyses of which service providers have appropriate resources to meet the needs and demands of different groups of clients? • Has the intervention considered which service providers are better at different types of services, such as technology transfer, facilitation of market linkages, etc.? • If support is concentrated on a single service provider, have efforts been made to avoid that such support undermines a 'level playing field' in the market for extension services? • Has capacity development support been provided to alternative service providers? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of different types of extension service providers supported by the intervention • Concerns raised by different service providers regarding whether they are competing on a 'level playing field' in service provision markets • Satisfaction levels of clients with regard to whether they are receiving support from the 'right' service provider |



Evaluations need to assess whether value chain development has been supported and market failures addressed.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

⁵⁰ Röling N. and Wagemaker M. (Eds.), 1998. *Facilitating Sustainable Agriculture: Participatory Learning and Adaptive Management in Times of Environmental Uncertainty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵¹ Adapted from World report Fall 2006: *The value chain approach*



EVALUATING ACCOUNTABILITY TO CLIENTS⁵²

6

For extension services to be effective in responding to demands of their clients in the long run, it is essential that the service providers are accountable to the users of the services. The extent to which this is the case is therefore an important factor for evaluation of the system. Many good extension methodologies are available that are based on participatory approaches that should encourage services to respond to the demands of their clients. Experience however, clearly shows that use of participatory approaches does not automatically lead to accountability. Other factors, not the least factors related to the power of different groups of men and women and wealthy and poor clients strongly affect accountability. A crucial question in many evaluations is whether systems have been put into place which ensure that services are oriented towards the priorities and demands of the targeted clients.

Beyond participatory methods, two factors in particular determine accountability: Governance and flow of funds. This section describes some main characteristics of different types of service actors and areas where evaluators can analyse the likely outcomes of their different governance and financial flow structures in terms of accountability.

A central challenge to demand orientation and accountability of services is to match the demand with the supply of services. Many service providers are well qualified in their areas of specialisation, which is often technical. This does not necessarily match the demand from the clients, which may be more focused on improving farm management, obtaining marketing advice and information, enterprise development and legal support. An evaluation can assess how this challenge is addressed.

EVALUATING ACCOUNTABILITY IN EXTENSION

| Possible evaluation questions | Possible indicators |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are the services responding to farmers' demands for content and quality? • What are the methods used for increasing participation and stimulating demand? • What are the methods used to make the service providers and their services known to the clients? • Are there incentives for matching demand and supply – for example by providing funds to client groups to purchase services that they need? • Does the system have strategies for training and building competencies that are in demand? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures for planning that incorporate the views of farmers • Farmers' knowledge of available service providers • Willingness by farmers to pay for services • Mechanisms to incorporate feedback from farmers into extension workplans on an ongoing basis • Methods that include concrete requirements and measures for response to concerns raised by clients • Availability of alternative service providers if clients are dissatisfied with the quality of the services they receive |

Another challenge regarding accountability is quality assurance. An evaluation should look at quality through the perspective of the farmers. If farmers have a choice, they will use the extension providers that they trust and which deliver services according to the farmers' own criteria for quality. These are usually factors such as: timeliness, efficient and innovative advice, respectful attitudes, and strong links within the value chain. It may be possible to identify farmers' criteria for quality through interviews and then use these as indicators to assess the extent to which these are met by the services supported through the intervention.

As noted in section two above, stakeholder analyses are important as a basis for determining who will use the evaluation and how. In an extension evaluation it is also important to assess the quality and dynamics of interactions between different stakeholders in order to understand the incentives that should exist for making extension more accountable to its clients. For example, farmer organisations frequently provide services to their members, either employing their own staff or contracting private professionals to deliver various services. Farmer organisations are normally governed by elected representatives of the farmers and the service providers are thus accountable to these constituencies. The income of the providers also usually depends on either the cli-

ents or the organisation. The chances for accountability to the users are therefore presumably good. A core question is how well the elected representatives represent the interests of the target clientele. Some farmers' organisations are dominated by wealthy producers or those with political connections and therefore may not be fully accountable to all their members.

Due to their common emphasis on participatory methods, NGOs are sometimes assumed to be relatively accountable to rural people. In order to evaluate their accountability it is important to look at their governance and financing structures. NGOs are often accountable to representatives from civil society outside of the farming community. They are also frequently financed by outside donors to provide services in rural areas. Since their funding is usually external, their accountability downwards to their clients is not automatic, but depends on consistency between the professed values, policies and practices of the organisation. Very often NGOs see farmers as 'beneficiaries' rather than 'clients' of their services, which has profound implications for how the organisations perceive their accountability.

Marketing and input supply companies often deliver 'free' services along with the marketing or supply of inputs. They get their income from farmers, but the cost of the extension is generally included

In an extension evaluation it is also important to assess the quality and dynamics of interactions between different stakeholders in order to understand the incentives that should exist for making extension more accountable to its clients.

(‘embedded’) in the price of the inputs or the product. The service providers are responsible upwards to the company management and their main interest is sale of inputs or marketing, not independent advice to farmers. On the other hand, if there is a competitive market for their services, they need to retain the loyalty and trust of their customers, which can create a measure of downward accountability. To assess whether such ‘market driven’ accountability exists it is important to analyse the extent to which farmers have a genuine choice of products and service providers.

Independent private service providers are normally directly accountable to farmers and get their income from them. However, projects sometimes directly finance these providers in order to promote pluralism, which may inadvertently weaken these accountability links. This is an important area where evaluations should question the claims made in results frameworks about how privatisation is expected to strengthen accountability.

Community based and farmer-to-farmer services often target subsistence and small-scale farmers in rural areas. They are usually governed by community leaders and, depending on the quality of this leadership, they can be presumed to be directly accountable to the clients, who are often their fellow community members. Here again, the quality of governance is often an important indicator of whether this proves true.

Public services delivered by government agencies are often inherently weak with respect to downward accountability. They may use participatory methods, but the fact that they primarily respond to the demands of their ministry and not the clients, discourages accountability to the clients. A decentralised system, where the staff are accountable to local government or committees representing small and medium scale farmers may improve their accountability. The accountability

of public services is generally related to the quality of the local or national democratic institutions in the country. As such, evaluations may be able to analyse public sector accountability by drawing on secondary sources, such as evaluations and reviews of public administration reform in the country of the intervention.

Ultimately, accountability is about power. Many extension interventions claim to ‘empower’ the clients of these services. Evaluation of accountability should look critically at whether these claims have been fulfilled, but also at whether such claims are realistic in the prevailing economic, political, and cultural environment. If for example independent and democratic farmer organisations are not allowed to operate due to political restrictions, then farmers will have little capacity to use such organisations to press their demands. If input supply markets are not competitive, there will be little incentive for input suppliers to provide high quality services to their clients. In all these instances, an extension service may not be genuinely accountable to clients, but an evaluation should recognise that these limitations may be related to prevailing power relations that are beyond the scope of the extension intervention itself.

There are, however, methods that have proven effective to promote empowerment. One of these is the use of financing mechanisms by which clients pay for the services they receive, either with their own money or with public funds that are put at their disposal, sometimes in the form of vouchers⁵³. Early evaluations of these programmes showed dangers of misuse and corruption, but as refinements are made of these mechanisms this is an area where more evaluation is needed to draw more evidence-based conclusions about whether or not the ‘power of the purse’ has really led to ‘empowerment’⁵⁴.



Farmers will give their views on the quality of the services.

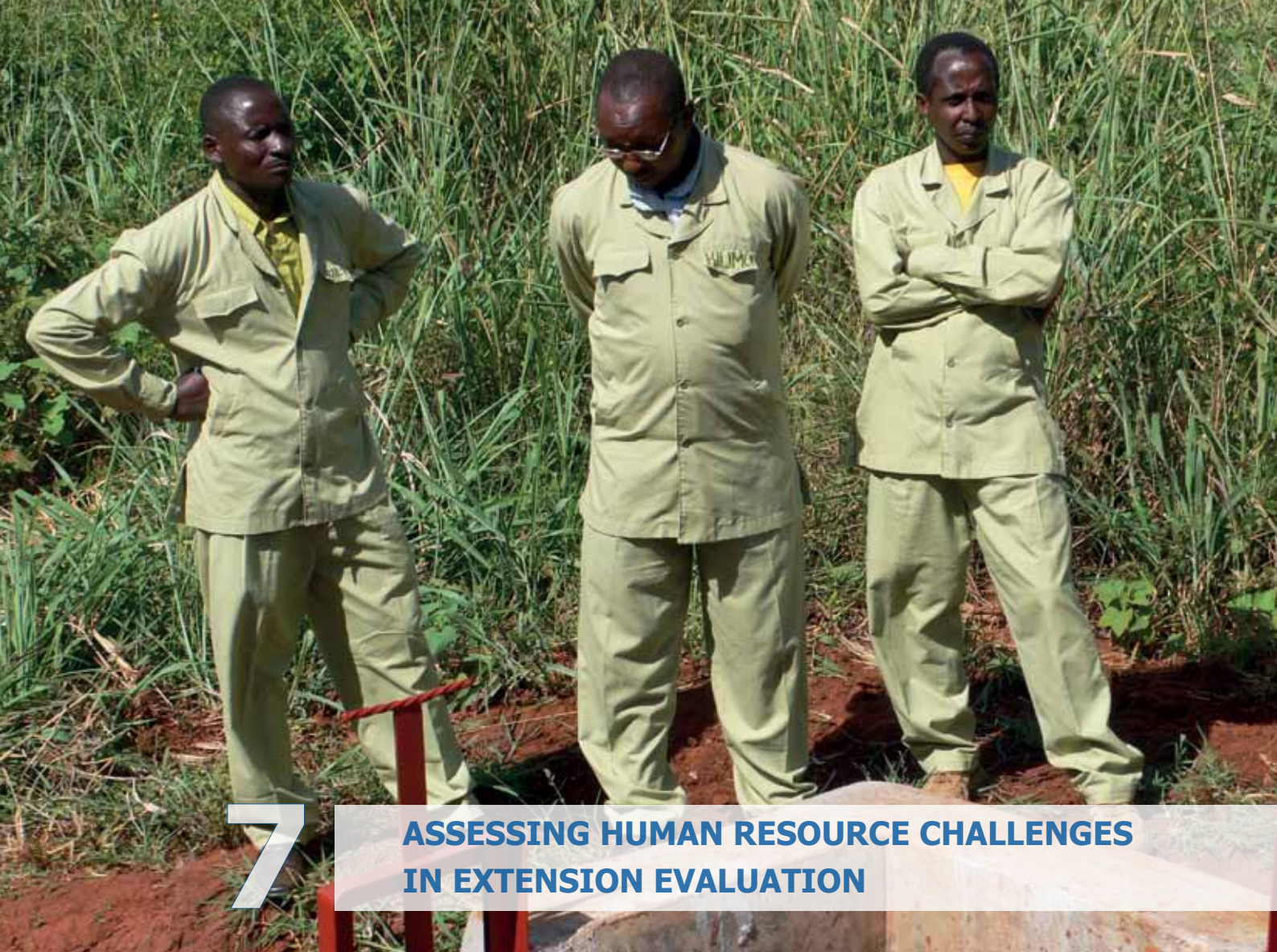
Many extension interventions claim to ‘empower’ the clients of these services. Evaluation of accountability should look critically at whether these claims have been fulfilled, but also at whether such claims are realistic in the prevailing economic, political, and cultural environment.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

⁵² Section two above discusses how evaluations themselves contribute to accountability. This section looks at how evaluations themselves assess accountability relationships within extension systems, this being an important aspect of the quality of any extension service.

⁵³ Neuchatel Initiative; 2003; Financing Extension Services

⁵⁴ An example of new financing methods was evaluated in: República del Perú: Proyecto de Desarrollo del Corredor Puno-Cusco; 2006; Evaluación intermedia.



7

ASSESSING HUMAN RESOURCE CHALLENGES IN EXTENSION EVALUATION

In broad terms, an extension organisation should be assessed on how well it has developed the capacities to:

- Coordinate, guide, and facilitate advisory work within its specific sectors of agricultural extension services
- Plan, implement, and monitor extension, training, and advisory activities
- Apply appropriate extension methodologies and approaches in accordance with the prevailing tasks of the extension staff.

Farmers' expectations of what they should receive from their advisors have changed dramatically in recent years. The transition of extension services to become more demand and market oriented requires building the competencies of extension institutions, managers, and field staff to meet the new challenges attached to this. Evaluations should assess whether capacities have kept pace with these changes. Apart from improving their technical ca-

pabilities, they must improve their facilitative and communicative skills so that they will be able to catalyse the transition and ensure that services match farmers' demands. These demands are now often strongly oriented towards markets, enterprise, and value chain development – areas in which the traditional extension staff's competencies are usually weak. It is moreover challenging for the extension organisations to respond to the changing institutional and policy environment surrounding knowledge in agriculture, and it is a great challenge to upgrade the human resources available with the speed that is required.

The range of skills that corresponds the new roles of extension services may include:

- Facilitation and communications skills
- Technical skills
- Production management skills and tools

The transition of extension services to become more demand and market oriented requires building the competencies of extension institutions, managers, and field staff to meet the new challenges attached to this. Evaluations should assess whether capacities have kept pace with these changes.

CHANGING TASKS AND SKILLS REQUIREMENTS IN EXTENSION REFORM IN KENYA

The following matrix shows an example of how the tasks and corresponding skills required in a transition scenario can be analysed⁵⁵. This is an example where the focus of the intervention was on the transition in Kenya from conventional extension to a market and demand-oriented extension system. The focus was therefore not on technical skills but on the particular skills required for the transition.

| Tasks | Skills required |
|---|--|
| Plan and manage effective advisory services – for extension managers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make strategic plans that respond to clients’ needs and demands • Make business plans for extension services • Outline structure and staffing plan • Implement and monitor activities • Establish networks and linkages to market actors, research institutions and other partners • Provide leadership and supervision of staff in times of transition (change management) |
| Advise and communicate effectively with farmers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate contact and build trust with farmers through good advice • Understand principles and process of good communication • Selection and application of appropriate communication aids • Use written and oral communication • Select and apply appropriate extension methodologies • Establish and maintain constructive dialogue with different types of farmers |
| Facilitate farmer empowerment and organisational development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate mobilisation of farmers groups and their development into democratic organisations • Train and advise farmer leaders on organisational development, lobbying and advocacy • Provide basic advice on legal aspects of organisational development • Facilitate linkages to higher level organisations |
| Take new knowledge and technology to practice on farms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the current innovation system • Facilitate formulation of research demand and explain this to relevant institutions • Network among actors • Appraise technology suitability • Transfer research findings and results to practice through effective dissemination strategies |

QUESTIONS AND INDICATORS RELATED TO HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

| Possible evaluation questions | Possible indicators |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills and competencies does the implementation of the intervention require and are there adequate human resources available that match these requirements – what are the gaps? • What strategies are included in the intervention to address these gaps? • Does the intervention contribute to human resource capacity development and maintenance in a sustainable manner, or does it rely on 'quick fixes' in the form of one-off training courses or individual scholarships? • Does the intervention include viable approaches to strengthen the capacities of farmer organisations/groups? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required skills and competencies fulfilled • Numbers of staff trained (and retained) • Extent to which staff state that they have been able to use the skills they have gained • Relationship of training topics to client demands • Levels of support to sustainable training arrangements and institutions • Levels of support to capacity development of farmer organisations/groups |

- Agricultural business and marketing skills
- Quality service management and partnership
- Market orientation
- Organisational development
- 'Soft skills': Gender awareness, understanding of poverty and vulnerability aspects and HIV/AIDS
- Conflict management
- Ability to understand and communicate probabilities in relation to climate information and markets.

Evaluations need to consider whether these skills exist, or if they are being developed with support from the intervention. The priorities among these different skills will differ for different types of interventions and capacity development can be pursued in a variety of ways.

Many years of neglect of developing capacity and competencies in extension means that there is in most countries a vast unmet need for investment in these areas. In assessing the sustainability of any extension intervention it is crucial that development and maintenance of human resource capacity is appropriately considered. It will therefore often be relevant for evaluation to assess how the intervention reflects and addresses the existing human resource capacities and constraints among various service providers and within the overall system. This includes first, taking

a close look at the goals and objectives of the intervention in terms of the human capacities and competencies needed, i.e., what is required from the organisations, from the extension managers, and from the extension staff. Second, assessment should be made of how these demands match the actual available human resource capacities and if and how eventual shortcomings are addressed through the intervention.

Unfortunately, some short-term interventions just 'poach' staff or 'vacuum' a national or regional market for its limited human resources through attractive salary policies. The implications of such short-sighted solutions in terms of sustainability deserve notable attention in evaluations. In some programmes, it is argued that capacity building of staff is too expensive, as trained and educated personnel tend to seek alternative employment if they get a chance. The broader positive effect of capacity building in the form of these people's contribution elsewhere in society should however be considered. Evaluations could contribute much to encouraging a broader perspective on this issue by tracking the fate of educated staff members after they have left the programme and thereby including an assessment of their contribution to rural development in general.

A particular challenge in terms of human resource development concerns the



Evaluators can observe advisory situations and assess whether the advisers have the right skills for the task.

capacity of farmer organisations to lobby and advocate for effective extension services. Established farmer organisations realise that their members have strong interest in getting increased access to effective training and advisory services. They also realise that they need to engage in policy dialogues on these issues in order to sustainably respond to their members' interests. But many are currently weak in this area because they lack capacity

and knowledge regarding the core issues related to extension. This means that in some cases it may be important to assess the extension intervention with respect to how well it has strengthened human resources within farmer organisations.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

⁵⁵ Example taken from the development of a training programme: Capacity Development for Agricultural Advisers in demand Driven Extension Services, developed for the Agricultural Sector Coordination Unit in Kenya 2009 by DAAS



8

EVALUATING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF EXTENSION INTERVENTIONS

Extension interventions have a poor reputation for sustainability. For many reasons, not the least of which is weak ownership, local partners frequently fail to maintain and build upon organisational reforms after outside funding ends. Most evaluations fail to reveal this because they are conducted during or at the end of the intervention.

Can evaluations judge sustainability?

Extension interventions have a poor reputation for sustainability. For many reasons, not the least of which is weak ownership, local partners frequently fail to maintain and build upon organisational reforms after outside funding ends. Most evaluations fail to reveal this because they are conducted during or at the end of the intervention. When the intervention is still underway the evaluator is left to speculate, based on inductive reasoning, about what may happen after the intervention is over. Those funding programmes are rarely willing to invest in ex post studies to find out what actually proved sustainable as this may require returning to looking at what has happened years after an intervention has been completed and budget lines have closed. Evaluators themselves may not be able to solve this conundrum, but should at least be transparent about the extent to which they can verifiably judge sustainability.

Sustainability of extension has different aspects but will mainly depend on three factors:

- Adaptability to changes (weather, institutional structures, security, policies, markets, land ownership etc.)
- Clear and strong ownership
- Sustainable financing.

Adaptability to changes

Extension interventions are carried out in a volatile world. Sustainability is sometimes best served by the creations of structures that are prepared to discontinue approaches that have outlived their usefulness and 'recreate' themselves to meet new demands. This creates challenges for evaluations in judging what 'sustainability' means, for example:

- Technologies that are appropriate in 'normal' weather conditions may not prove sustainable in the face of increasing occurrence of storms, floods, and droughts. What then are the implications of this for extension agencies

in terms of providing recommendations and advice?

- Under restructuring processes, for example major decentralisation, where the structure of the 'system' being developed remains unclear, what can then be assumed to be a sustainable system of responsibilities and financing for extension?
- If, due to conflict, the government has uncertain control over the administration of part of the country and if humanitarian 'seeds and tools' projects dominate agricultural services, what paths should be sought towards future sustainability?
- When land ownership is becoming concentrated in the hands of large commercial actors, is it then more 'sustainable' to abandon extension services for smallholders or to identify new and clearer niches for public investment?

Evaluations will rarely be able to provide clear answers to these questions, but a developmental evaluation process can help the users of the evaluation to critically reflect upon how well they are maintaining a modicum of sustainability amid volatility and upheaval. Even if answers are not in place, it is important to make sure that past indicators of sustainability are not applied when they are clearly no longer relevant.

Sustainability and ownership

One of the greatest challenges in achieving sustainable extension reform is that of ensuring ownership. This is particularly problematic in extension projects of limited duration and with initiatives introducing complicated methods, both of which are widely acknowledged as having a poor track record in contributing to sustained improvement in services reaching farmers.

| Level | Possible questions |
|--|--|
| Level of field level extension agents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do extension agents see the new approaches as part of their normal work or just something that they are assigned to carry out as long as a project provides them with travel allowances or other incentives? |
| Level of management systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have extension managers integrated new approaches into their management systems, and the ways that they assess the performance of their staff, etc.? |
| Level of rural development programming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have decision-makers in the rural sector found the intervention useful within their overall agriculture, natural resource management, market development, and other programming efforts and has this been reflected in budgetary priorities (are they covering the recurrent costs of extension services through their own resources)? |
| Level of policy alignment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have policy-makers found coherence between the new extension approaches and policies and the overall rural development policy and political environment in which they work? |
| Level of funding harmonisation and commitments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have funders of these new extension approaches found the interventions to be sufficiently relevant and important to give priority to continued budgetary commitments after outside financing has been discontinued? |

FIVE LEVELS OF EXTENSION OWNERSHIP

Despite the relatively high importance of and the potential for sustainability of embedded services, there is little evidence-based knowledge about either the potential or the consequences of these services for poor farmers. It is therefore very important that evaluations focus on these contracting arrangements and assess their results.

Evaluating sustainability in embedded systems

Perhaps the greatest upheaval underway in agri-food systems today is in increasing investments in land and production by large international and national actors. This is changing what kinds of advice farmers need and how they access extension services. One of the most rapidly growing types of extension today is the services that are embedded in other types of business arrangements, such as out-grower schemes and contract production. These involve an agreement between a promoter – typically a processor and/or exporter of a commodity and a number of smallholder farmers for delivery of raw material. The promoter typically provides different kinds of support for their production, such as inputs, credit, quality certification, training, advice, and purchase of the harvested produce – in return for being guaranteed the supply of produce. These types of arrangements are currently the most important avenue for commercialisation among smallholders in many countries.

Such systems have sustainability inbuilt as part of the concept. The costs involved in providing the services are usually hidden in the prices of the input package or the price paid for the commodity (not always though – sometimes it is fully transparent and the farmers are well aware of how much they pay for the extension services). The aim of the promoter is first and foremost to secure a reliable and sizeable supply of raw material of the right quality at the right time. Extension services are often provided within these schemes in places where small-scale farmers dominate production of a given commodity, but where their crops are not of marketable quality and their knowledge of the demands of the market is limited. These are specialised commodity oriented services, and

they cannot be expected to give priority to farmers' interests. Nonetheless, depending on how these arrangements are implemented, they can create win-win situations between the agro-industry and small-scale producers, especially if they are complemented with extension from other institutions that provide more independent and farm management oriented services that can strengthen the voice of the farmers in these commercial arrangements.

Despite the relatively high importance of and the potential for sustainability of embedded services, there is little evidence-based knowledge about either the potential or the consequences of these services for poor farmers. It is therefore very important that evaluations focus on these contracting arrangements and assess their results. A problem is that out-grower schemes and contract farming are commonly managed entirely by private sector actors, and are therefore in some respects not subject to evaluation by public agencies, farmer organisations, NGOs or development agencies. However, governments, donors and farmer organisations are increasingly looking for ways to create appropriate public-private partnership policies and support institutions to both encourage and regulate these new arrangements. This can be a significant entry point for evaluation.



LOOKING FORWARD: ENHANCING AND ENSURING THE UTILITY OF EXTENSION EVALUATION

9

// Tom and I began conducting training on evaluation ... and we always began with an exercise comparing extension and evaluation challenges, trying to help extension staff and program participants connect with this alien and often fear-inducing notion of evaluation. Basically, this exercise established that extension educators work to get people to use information – and so do evaluators. Extension educators spend a lot of time considering how to overcome resistance to change. So do evaluators. Extension educators worry about communicating knowledge in a form people can understand and use. So do evaluators.” (Patton 2011:59)


The complexity of evaluating extension can seem daunting, but the most important conclusion of this Guide is that decisions need to be made based on an analysis of users’ needs, available resources, and awareness of what is credible among

different stakeholders. No evaluation is likely to provide a ‘gold standard’ for addressing all the issues raised in this Guide, but evaluations can be structured to avoid the common mistakes and misperceptions that exist about what extension evaluation is all about.

Through openness to varied perspectives of the diverse configurations of stakeholders involved in extension it is possible (though perhaps not easy) to maintain trust and engagement among those who need to use evaluations. As highlighted in the quote above, both evaluators and extensionists have much in common. It is hoped that this Guide has provided some assistance in finding these commonalities along the road to understanding how to assess and improve extension performance.

Finally, when deciding if and how to evaluate an extension intervention it is important to step back and recall that extension

Most evaluations of extension today concentrate on asking if ‘we are doing things right’ in terms of the quality and impact of the given intervention in relation to ‘business as usual’ or alternative extension approaches. It is nonetheless important to recognise that there is also a need to demonstrate whether extension is needed at all, if it should be part of investment portfolios, or if money is better spent elsewhere – ‘whether we are doing the right thing’.



is never an end in itself, but rather one of many possible means to achieve food security, sustainable livelihoods, cheaper food, or better natural resource management. This may seem self-evident, but evaluations do not always assess whether or not farmers would be more capable of accessing the knowledge, advice, and facilitation they need if the money being spent on extension was instead invested in basic education, infrastructure, or input provision. Most evaluations of extension today concentrate on asking if 'we are do-

ing things right' in terms of the quality and impact of the given intervention in relation to 'business as usual' or alternative extension approaches. It is nonetheless important to recognise that there is also a need to demonstrate whether extension is needed at all, if it should be part of investment portfolios, or if money is better spent elsewhere – 'whether we are doing the right thing'.



This Guide can be downloaded from
www.g-fras.org

ISBN: 978-3-9523901-3-9

Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS)
c/o Agridea Eschikon 28
8315 Lindau
Switzerland
Tel. 0041-(0)52 354 97 64
info@g-fras.org
www.g-fras.org

This Guide to Evaluating Rural Extension has been developed by the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS). The purpose is to support those involved in extension evaluation to choose how to conduct more comprehensive, rigorous, credible and useful evaluations. The Guide supports readers to understand different types of evaluation, to make decisions on what is most appropriate for their circumstances, and to access further sources of theoretical and practical information. The Guide is intended to primarily be used by four sets of evaluation stakeholders:

- Those commissioning and managing evaluations
- Professional evaluators and staff responsible for monitoring systems
- Professionals involved in training and educating evaluators
- Researchers looking for ways to synergise their efforts with evaluation initiatives

The process of preparing this Guide began in 2010 with the production of a Review of Literature on Evaluation Methods Relevant to Extension and a Meta-evaluation of Extension Case Studies. These materials, combined with extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders, were then used to as background for the development of a draft version of this Guide. During 2011 the Guide was finalised based on feedback received.