

Pluralistic Extension Systems

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SYNOPSIS

Pluralistic extension recognizes the inherent diversity of farmers and farming systems and the need to address challenges in rural development with different services and approaches. It is characterized by the coexistence of multiple public, private, and mixed extension systems and approaches; multiple providers and types of services; diverse funding streams; and multiple sources of information—all of which benefit from some degree of coordination and regulation that facilitates interaction and learning. Ideally, the outcome of pluralistic extension services is that different client groups in different contexts are satisfied with their access to services that they have demanded. Although pluralism in advisory services makes it possible to capitalize on the competitive advantages of different actors, one of pluralism's greatest challenges is to coordinate organizations that have vastly different mindsets and worldviews. A key message is that the public sector's primary role is to ensure that this mix of providers achieves jointly developed objectives. Public coordination and management of pluralistic extension services should be based on a program for action developed jointly by multiple stakeholders and service providers. The action program should reflect stakeholders' agreement on the roles for the different service providers and on who is best suited to perform each function under the program. The variety in services demanded is then matched with the existing variety of service providers. The emphasis is on coordination, which can lead to regulation and performance-based contracts for additional services, all based on complementarity.

WHY PLURALISTIC SERVICE SYSTEMS?

Many types of advisory service providers and approaches exist side by side. This situation is good, as the diversity of

rural life and needs should be matched by diversity in services, approaches, and providers. Differences between the poor and resource-poor farmers; crop, livestock, and fisheries systems; production and conservation objectives; and local and export value chains—to name only a few—will affect which organizations can best provide services and by which methods. These differences are a major reason for encouraging pluralistic systems.

Farmers, often impelled by market opportunities but also by environmental, labor, and land productivity challenges, look for information and knowledge to strengthen their production systems. Trends such as market liberalization and development, as well as democratization and the communications revolution, drive farmers to obtain agricultural information through a wider range of means and from a wider range of sources than ever before. Even traditional mass media such as (community) radio,¹ television, and newspapers can reach quite different audiences. For farmers, public extension services are just one source of information, often the one focusing purely on production issues (Spielman et al. 2011). Farmers procure other, more business-related services in the private sector and access facilitation services (for group processes, as well as interaction with input and market actors) through NGOs and farmer organizations. Technology and information are no longer transferred through a linear system (Wennink and Heemskerk 2006), leaving national extension and advisory systems in many parts of the developing world struggling to meet new demands from farmers and other actors in the innovation system.

A useful alternative is the coordination and management of pluralistic extension services based on a program for action developed jointly by multiple stakeholders and service providers. The action program reflects stakeholders' agreement on the roles for the different service providers and on who is best suited to perform each function required

by the program. The variety in services demanded is then matched with the existing variety of service providers. The emphasis is on coordination, which can lead to regulation and performance-based contracts for additional services, all based on complementarity. Some systems are self-organized (value chains driven by the private sector) and do not require this public role in coordinating service provision.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR INVESTMENT

Aside from the trends mentioned earlier, the provision of advisory services to smallholders in developing economies is influenced by the decentralization of governments and governance as well as by the deconcentration of public service delivery processes. In such dynamic environments national agricultural extension services are starting to play new roles, based largely on principles of demand-driven planning, management, facilitation, and learning through interaction.

All of the newly recognized actors in advisory services can equally bring about new ideas and innovations in agricultural extension, contributing to a system in which the different roles can lead to synergy. National agricultural advisory service systems are attempting to capture these institutional innovations by contracting-in different services at the district, provincial, and sometimes national levels. Advisory services are growing more varied; rather than being limited to technology services, they are offering more general information and brokering services (see TN 4). They also facilitate access to other services, such as financial and market information services, through different means, including the mass media and social media.

Advisory service providers increasingly vary as well. Traditionally, the private sector provided the more market-oriented and business development services (TN 2), and the public sector provided services focused on using technology to enhance agricultural productivity. In pluralistic extension systems, the services in demand are supplied by the right mix of providers. Certain service providers often perform specific advisory functions (as shown by the “x” in table 3.3). The matrix in table 3.3 will differ in every situation and context. It can be used to develop the best mix of services required and can ultimately lead to pluralistic extension, as described in box 3.12.

Under pluralistic systems, different types of agricultural and agribusiness advisory services or different providers

work together to provide extension services. Services can be provided by:

1. **Subsectoral bodies** representing private, market-oriented farmers, such as a coffee board or national commodity association. This practice often occurs in cash crop subsectors such as coffee in Colombia, cotton in Benin, cashews in Tanzania, or the Kenya Tea Development Agency (see box 1.22 in TN 4 of module 1).
2. **Producer/farmer organizations and cooperatives**, not on the national level but at the meso level—for example, when a farmer association provides services through volunteer members, as in Mozambique’s National Union of Smallholders or Mexico’s Produce Foundation (see module 1, IAP 2)—and on the individual level (for example, a milk producer cooperative or a vegetable producer association).
3. **Local NGOs** usually working with farmer groups and community-based organizations, mostly in subsectors that do not involve cash commodities but increasingly in market-oriented services.
4. **International NGOs (mostly donor-funded)** usually working with farmers’ groups and community organizations in subsectors for cash and noncash commodities, which may at times overlap, but also **agri-agencies of developed country farmer organizations**.
5. **Governments** that support activities under 1, 2, 3, and sometimes 4 in a sort of “joint venture” at the national, provincial/regional, or local/district level; or **public agencies** working with civil servants. In the public sector, different extension systems (for example, for crops, livestock, and forestry) can exist side by side within the same or different ministries. Many countries have taken a step forward in coordinating this multiplicity of public extension programs by adopting a unified (public) extension system.
6. **Input suppliers** and **agrodealers** supplying agrochemicals and veterinary products and **buyers of products** (such as buyers of flowers and fresh vegetables) (see IAP 1).
7. **Private business contacts** and relationships that provide informal advisory services, like playing a brokering role (TN 4). Increasingly, local business development services are also provided by **financial services** (microcredit organizations and banks), **actors in the value chain**, and **other private actors** (TN 2).
8. **Village/community extension workers**, often connected to input supply programs (such as cashew spraying services or chicken vaccination). **Lead farmers** and local

Table 3.3 Extension Service Functions and Service Provider Categories
(the number of “x’s” indicates the general prevalence of specific services)

Functions versus providers	Sectoral bodies	Producer organizations	Local NGOs	International NGOs	Governments	Input suppliers	Private business sector	Community extension workers
Information	Sector-specific		Only general			Market	Market info	
Training and advice	x Quality		xx	xx	x		Quality	xxx
Technology testing	Cash crops	x		x	xx	Demos		xx
Business development	x	x	x	xx		xx	xxx	
AIS linkage facilitation/ brokerage	x		xx		Only w/ research		x	
Institutional development		Bonding, bridging, linkage social capital*	xx Bonding	xx Bridging	Bonding		Market links	Research linking
Legal advice			Land rights group registration				Outgrower contracts	
Green services		Ecosystem services	xx	x			Certification	

Source: Authors.

* Bonding social capital through strengthening the group, bridging social capital through federation and unionizing, and linking social capital through developing the capacity of groups to interact with other stakeholders (Heemskerck and Wennink 2004).

Box 3.12 Pluralism in Action: Government-Funded Public, Nongovernmental, and Privately Managed Extension Systems in Mozambique

Mozambique became independent in 1975, but civil strife prevented the government from establishing public extension services for its farmers until 1987. The government used (international) public funds to contract several local and international NGOs to organize and provide extension services to farmers in selected regions. Over the years, the size of the public and NGO extension systems has fluctuated from around 600 to 800 extension workers each. The government has also outsourced some extension services. For example, it contracted several private, large-scale farmers, companies, and NGOs and hired an additional 200 extension workers under short-term contracts to focus on specific assignments. These combined actions have resulted in an average of 10–14 extension workers in each rural district, who reach between 10 and 20 percent of farm households.

The interplay of NGOs, the private sector, farmers, and their organizations in extension has led over time to a new, pluralistic extension system in Mozambique. The public sector concentrates on strengthening and gradually expanding the size and improving the quality, accountability, and relevance of its public extension services,

Sources: DNEA 2007; Swanson and Rajalahti 2010.

because the public sector remains the cornerstone of Mozambique's pluralistic extension system. Extension activities are coordinated at the district level by local government officials. They coordinate NGOs, farmer organizations, and private service providers, whereas provinces (and also districts) may also outsource specific assignments complementary to the public extension system. Long-term public financing for extension is crucial, as it will be difficult, if not impossible, for low-income men and women farmers to pay for extension services themselves. Poor farmers will pay for specific services, such as cashew spraying and veterinary services, as these are embedded extension services, but they are generally unwilling and unable to pay for advisory services that deal with "public" knowledge and information.

The current publicly financed extension system has three main programs laid out until 2015. First, it will strengthen service provision in the public sector, the private/NGO sector, and farmer-to-farmer extension. Second, it will empower farmer associations in planning, pursuing economic activities, and providing services. Lastly, it will emphasize the coordinated management of service provision at the district level.

facilitators such as those working with FFSs are also providing such services.

The brokering and facilitation function can be performed by any of the entities listed above. This function in particular has become more important with the growing realization that catalyzing innovation involves more than transferring knowledge and requires strong interaction between a variety of actors (Klerkx, Hall, and Leeuwis 2010; TN 4). Such interaction responds to a key concern within AIS (TN 4).

INVESTMENT NEEDED FOR INNOVATIVE AND PLURALISTIC EXTENSION SERVICES

The principles discussed in the following list are central to pluralistic extension systems:

- **Deconcentration.** The public sector has an important but differentiated role at the local, meso (provincial,

regional), and national levels, particularly in providing coordination, technical backstopping, and knowledge management. The public sector should facilitate learning and scaling up, as well as ensure quality assurance and oversight. Advisory service systems supported by public funds are increasingly planned, financed, implemented, and coordinated at the district level. The meso level coordinates and implements crosscutting services (mostly on contracts), such as seed services, environmental management services, food security services, and other services that extend beyond district boundaries. The public sector at the national level plays a supportive and backstopping role for all service providers and provides the enabling environment—conducive policies, strategies, and regulations.

- **Decentralization.** As local governments are empowered to run their own affairs, it is becoming common (notably in Anglophone and Lusophone Africa) for district governments and administrations to operate a budget obtained from the treasury and allocated on the basis of

an integrated district development plan. Agricultural planning priority is shifting from sectorwide agricultural planning to higher-quality district agricultural development plans.

- **A system for providing multiple services.** Extension managers and partners recognize that the quality of service provision can be improved through performance-based contracts and that the choice of provider must be based on the comparative advantages of the public sector, private sector, and civil society. The best mix of services can be identified for every situation, depending on the demand for and availability of services.
- **Farmer empowerment.** Farmer organizations represent the voice of their clients, but they are also partners in extension when it comes to planning, allocating resources, M&E, and providing services. Empowerment is twofold, consisting of economic empowerment as well as involvement in decision making. As farmers' economic empowerment in value chains and local economic development grows, farmers gain a more forceful role in setting priorities, planning, and providing services. In pluralistic systems, downward accountability and user involvement make quality control possible only at the local level. Downward accountability of service providers to farmers becomes more important for quality control than upward accountability to financiers (see also module 1).
- **Outsourcing services.** Local governments (districts, communes, and so forth) are contracting-in the services directly demanded by farmers in district agricultural development plans, based on the comparative and competitive advantages of the various service providers. This trend should improve synergy and complementarity in service provision.
- **Partnerships.** Example of partnerships and linkages between agricultural advisory services and other actors in the innovation system and services include partnerships between advisory service providers and agricultural research agencies, agricultural chambers of commerce, microfinance organizations, and agroprocessing services.
- **Extension approaches.** A major challenge is to continue shifting extension from a top-down approach offering blanket, production-oriented recommendations toward a more interactive learning approach. The interactive approach provides room to differentiate among categories of clients, messages, and approaches. Extension officers play more of a facilitating role; based on their technical expertise, they stimulate learning among farmers (as in FFSs) and with other actors, particularly market

actors. District extension systems need to be supported by provincial and national services and knowledge centers in case demand for knowledge services extends beyond the district level, as this is part of the new extension.

Depending on the needs identified in a given situation, investments can be made to support the conditions that will enable extension to become more pluralistic and meet those needs. As indicated in table 3.4 and the discussion that follows, capacity strengthening is a major area for investment, and investment is needed at all levels.

Capacity development: A major area of investment

In general, capacity can be considered with respect to institutions, organizations, and individuals. In supporting extension services that enhance innovation dynamics, there is in general a shift from strengthening organizations to strengthening extension systems. System or organizational learning requires five core capabilities: (1) to commit and engage; (2) to carry out the mandate and deliver results; (3) to link with, attract, and mobilize resources; (4) to adapt and self-renew; and (5) to balance coherence and diversity (ECDPM 2008). Capacity development is the external facilitation of this internal learning process. System or organizational learning processes can be effective and lead to innovation only if the actors involved have adequate capacity to participate, to actively engage, and to potentially facilitate innovation processes. They also require the mindset and flexibility to allow others to participate.

In different contexts (under various governance structures, for example), investments in developing capacity will require adjustments, including a move away from agricultural sector programs and a link to more local economic development programs. Programs will need to focus not only on the public sector but also on community extension workers and private agencies. Two particular opportunities for investment, described in greater detail in the next section, are (1) to develop national capacity (independent agencies, universities, and other mediums) and higher education courses for a new type of advisory service provider in the public and private sector and (2) to develop capacity at the district level to coordinate and manage pluralistic extension systems.

Specific areas of capacity strengthening

The capacity of new extensionists is central to the success of pluralistic extension systems. They must master highly

Table 3.4 Investment Opportunities to Foster Pluralistic Extension Systems

Mechanisms and principles	Examples of investment	Cases and references*
Deconcentration	<p>Programs to develop capacity in managing and implementing extension at the local level, including planning, monitoring, and evaluation.</p> <p>Differentiation of the public sector's roles at the local, meso, and central level in technical backstopping, coordination, and quality assurance.</p>	National Agricultural Extension Program (PRONEA), Mozambique (DNEA 2005, 2007)
Decentralization	Develop integrated local government planning skills, as well as local governance skills and mechanisms, including skills to deal with downward accountability.	Agricultural Sector Development Program, Tanzania
Multiple service provision	<p>Develop the capacity among service providers to coordinate and use learning mechanisms and skills.</p> <p>Support the development of local private service provision through capacity development and local matching investment funds for service providers.</p> <p>Develop farmer advisory service providers.</p>	PRONEA, Mozambique (box 3.12)
Farmer empowerment	<p>Develop associations and cooperatives to articulate clients' demands, empower them economically, and improve service delivery.</p> <p>Develop the triangle of (1) entrepreneurship, (2) access to (cooperative) credit, and (3) higher-level farmer lobby organizations.</p>	Many international NGO programs and the Farmers Fighting Poverty Program (www.agricord.org); see also module 1
Outsourcing services	<p>Develop capacity in the local government to contract for services based on principles of complementarity, synergy, and subsidiarity.</p> <p>Provide matching fund to contract local services based on cost-sharing and cost-recovery arrangements.</p>	NAADS, Uganda (box 3.7 in overview) and the Agricultural Service and Producer Organization Support Project (PASAOP, Programme d'Appui aux Services Agricoles et aux Organisations Paysannes), Mali (www.maliagriculture.org)
Partnerships	<p>Develop public-private partnerships to deliver services.</p> <p>Develop the capacity for coaching and facilitation.</p>	PRONEA, Mozambique (see above)
Extension approaches	<p>Strengthen facilitation skills and capacities to use learning approaches such as the Farmer Field Schools.</p> <p>Strengthen the market orientation of services at the national and district levels.</p> <p>Strengthen the targeting and differentiation of services for different categories of farmers and households, based on demand.</p>	Farmer Field School program and marketing extension (http://www.farmerfieldschool.info/) African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS–FARA 2009, TN 2); many (mostly international) NGO programs

Source: Adapted from DNEA 2007.

Note: See also table 3.1 in the overview for definitions and needs.

* The seven principles and/or a mix of them are applied in a number of national programs with support from organizations such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank.

technical information and skills as well as sophisticated facilitation and process skills (Blewett et al. 2008). More specifically, extension workers and their clients require:

- **Specific skills for planning and collaboration.** Stronger capacity is needed at the local level for planning, management, and coordination. As noted, major attention must be given to enhancing facilitation skills. These skills are instrumental in the multistakeholder platforms and processes that foster capacity development across stakeholders in innovation systems. Skills for communication with male and female farmers as well as differ-

ent kinds of stakeholders in the value chain or innovation system are needed.

- **Extension management skills.** As emphasized previously, the presence of multiple actors and approaches in pluralistic systems means that there is a strong need for coordination to avoid duplication of effort and wasted resources. Managing pluralistic extension systems at the local level requires individuals to develop new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Management of synergetic services for local economic development, outsourcing, M&E, and quality assurance must take place in a satisfactory manner. New performance plans and indicators

must be established. Management for performance and outcomes must be a focus.

- **Skills related to understanding and improving accountability.** Clients must gain the capacity to participate in, monitor, and evaluate extension. They must be equipped to express their perceptions of the performance of advisory services, both in an upward (local, provincial, and national government) and downward (farmer groups, farmer forums, district councils) direction.
- **Technical knowledge** and skills are required for relevant actors in the value chain (production, processing, and marketing), including knowledge about access to all assets of the livelihood system.
- **Other skills that improve the quality of service provision.** At the local level, the variety of demand for services and the supply of services will present challenges not only for coordination but also for supervision and quality control. Service providers need to be registered and certified using established criteria and conditions in a transparent manner, mostly at the meso level. To a large extent, the actual quality of service providers' performance must be controlled by users themselves.

Other investment needs

This sourcebook presents other examples of investments to support pluralistic extension services. Examples in this module include enhancing facilitation and coaching skills (TN 4), capacity development in extension management and the development of agribusiness services (TN 2), and green services (TN 2).

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF PLURALISTIC EXTENSION

To recapitulate, the need for pluralistic extension arises from the perception that specific services are needed for specific contexts, economic enterprises, livelihood functions, and above all different farmer categories, based on differences in entrepreneurship, poverty and gender. The development of pluralistic extension systems should enhance the competitiveness of local agricultural production within the context of local economic development, enhance local livelihoods, and ultimately reduce rural poverty, improve food security, and promote greater gender equality. Ideally, the outcome of pluralistic extension services is that different client groups in different contexts are satisfied with their access to services that they have

demanded. Pluralistic extension systems provide services on demand as identified in the joint planning process, and based on the services available for each demand.

Models and lessons of pluralistic advisory services include Mozambique's PRONEA (box 3.12), Uganda's NAADS (box 3.7 in the module overview), and the programs in Mali (PASAOP) and Tanzania (Agricultural Sector Development Program) cited in table 3.4.

POLICY ISSUES OF PLURALISTIC ADVISORY SERVICES

The policy issues pertaining to pluralistic advisory services are correspondingly diverse. As discussed below, some of the more pressing issues involve ensuring the sustainability of pluralistic advisory services and preventing them from exhausting public resources; ensuring that services are provided in a more equitable way; promoting the institutional development of advisory systems; attending to the growing demand for advice on a host of environmental issues; and clarifying the changing roles and contributions of the public sector, private sector, and civil society within a pluralistic extension system.

Sustainability

Pluralistic extension systems are in principle more effective than other kinds of extension, but the outsourcing of public services will act as a major drain on public resources if not properly implemented. Outsourcing whole systems and creating parallel structures is costly and not very effective, as shown by the experience with NAADS and pilot activities in Mozambique (Heemskerk, Nederlof, and Wennink 2008). Instead it has proven more effective and cost-efficient to outsource specific functions, such as the development of bankable business plans. Enhanced coordination between public and private services at the local level will also make the system more efficient, while quality control of service provision will make it more effective. The best mix of public and private service provision and the level of public financing of such pluralistic systems will be subject to national and local policies. These policies in turn will be determined by the broad national vision for rural development, by locally empowered smallholders, the level of focus of local development plans, and the relative strength of public and private service provision. Other services can be provided in a better, or at least a more cost-effective, way by community extension workers. In local development plans, coordination is planned and financial sustainability can be pursued.

Social considerations: Equity, gender

Agricultural production is one of the main economic and income-generating activities for rural people, yet not all rural households have the same objectives in economic development, and they can place wide-ranging demands on advisory services. Local agricultural development plans can clarify the priorities for different categories of farmers (small-scale commercial, emerging and subsistence, food-security-focused, or part-time farmers, for example) and between male and female farmers. Services for local economic development need to differentiate among many categories of clients (households based on their different objectives, for example, and clients based on gender, age, and physical abilities). The emphasis on market-oriented services, cost-sharing arrangements, and the increasing role of community extension workers will influence access to services among different categories of clients. In users' assessments of service providers' performance, as well as in the downward accountability of service providers and extension managers, the consideration of equity issues remains important (Nederlof, Wennink, and Heemskerk 2008).

Institutional considerations

Pluralistic extension systems are expected to better address the wide variety of demands and at the same time make better use of the variety of service providers available. Although eventually the right mix of services is determined by the client and through payment for services, in the foreseeable future the public sector will still finance many of the required services (also based on cost-sharing arrangements but adjusted for different categories of farmers).

Pluralistic extension systems aim to develop better service provision for all, based on the complementarity and synergy of the public and private sectors. This public sector (at the local, meso, and national levels) will need to play a strong role in managing and coordinating extension activities in such a way that demand is adequately addressed, service providers are accountable, quality is assured, and lessons are learned among service providers, who are in competition at the same time. Eventually this coordination and accountability role will gradually shift to farmers and their organizations, once they will finance these services themselves.

Environmental implications

Demand for services related to wider environmental issues is increasing, owing to such factors as increasing

pressure on land, questions of access to land, market demands for sustainably produced products, and climate change. Public sector coordination of environmental and/or green services is needed to ensure that services are provided synergistically by the array of actors involved, such as:

- Farmers themselves, providing ecosystem services with and without incentives. Examples include maintaining biodiversity or soil fertility or receiving premium prices for using sustainable production methods.
- The private sector, dealing in CO₂ emission rights or the certification of sustainable and/or organic production.
- The public sector, engaging in climate change mitigation, erosion control, watershed management, and similar public good activities in environmental management.

In local development planning, an integrated approach to environmental management and the role of different service providers is needed.

Public and private sector roles

Private extension service provision, although publicly funded, contributes to the development of a new incentive system in which the quality and content of extension provision is more responsive to farmers' priorities. The transition to a system with privatized extension modalities and improved incentives takes time, public investment, and appropriate long-term plans. Private extension provision requires well-trained service providers and a certain level of capacity among farmers and local governments. Farmers' organizations must increase their capacity to contract, manage, and evaluate private extension provision. Decentralized political structures need the capacity to manage such systems.

An evolution toward private extension modalities should begin with themes that are most likely to elicit farmer demand and investment and are rarely provided by the public sector, such as the demand for agribusiness development services, particularly at the local level. Farmers in Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique, and Kenya have all identified the need for agribusiness development services (see TN 2). The public sector is likely to retain its responsibility for financing extension on themes such as environmental protection, although private delivery modalities may prove useful (Chapman and Tripp 2003).

LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons summarized here draw on several sources that have recently examined innovations and experiences with advisory services. The clusters of challenges identified include the management of pluralistic advisory service systems; the quality of the demand for advisory services, the quality of the supply, and the quality of the enabling environment (Nederlof et al. 2008).

Management of pluralistic advisory service systems

The decentralization of advisory service systems to the provincial or district level provides a major opportunity to improve the coordination of services at the local level. In most cases, to deliver a mix of public and private services effectively, local governments and authorities will need to improve their capacity to coordinate, manage, and direct services and service systems. Areas such as the facilitation of joint planning, the facilitation of learning among stakeholders, the regulation and certification of service providers, and quality control all need strengthening. It may be necessary to begin by building capacity in the institutions responsible for training administrators.

Capacities of the rural poor as service users

Investments are also needed for farmers and farmer organizations to strengthen their capacity to articulate their demands. To identify and address opportunities, smallholders need information about production, markets, and financial services. The more vulnerable farmers need specific services related to household food security. Farmer organizations must be able to: (1) lobby for an enabling policy and institutional environment; (2) give the rural poor a voice; (3) influence the adoption of socially inclusive research and advisory service agendas; and (4) become involved in the implementation of research, advisory, and business development services.

Provision of relevant, sustainable, and high-quality services

Extension services need to be relevant, sustainable, and of good quality. Service providers need to differentiate their offerings depending on the intended clients and their demands—for example, some services may focus specifically on vulnerable groups to enhance social inclusion, whereas others focus on value chain empowerment. Service

providers also need to design, in close participation with the rural poor, services that respond effectively to poor people's needs. Offering diverse services for different groups of clients will require different financing strategies. Some services for the very poor will have more of a social nature and be supported by the public sector, community, or farmer organizations. Business development services, in contrast, will evolve gradually from cost sharing to full payment (direct or indirect) by clients. The deployment and financing of service providers and services at the local government level must be managed and coordinated to enhance the coherence and synergy of services, increase the efficient use of services by the rural poor, and stimulate interaction and learning between service providers. The public sector also has an important responsibility to control the quality of service provision (through registration and certification, for example) and prevent bias (among agrodealers providing embedded services, for example).

To provide services that are relevant and of high quality in a financially sustainable way, effective linkages are needed between (1) productive investment and technological innovation and (2) financial services, risk management, and the reduction of vulnerability. Intermediary and facilitation services (not just the dissemination of information) are needed to secure those links (Nederlof, Wennink, and Heemskerk 2008; Wennink and Heemskerk 2006) (see also TN 4).

Enabling policies and institutional arrangements for pro-poor services

For pluralistic extension systems to grow and thrive, they will need to draw on evidence from the experiences of their wide stakeholder base to influence policy. Policy changes are likely to be needed to promote innovation, decentralization, and public-private partnerships and to empower rural people. Institutional innovations are also likely to be needed to foster interaction between farmer organizations and the private sector as well as research and advisory organizations. Examples include platforms for interaction, funding mechanisms, regulations, and certification mechanisms. Access to rural services will not improve without continuous interaction and flows of information between rural service providers and the rural poor to prevent information asymmetry. Policies that support the strengthening of social capital and farmer networks will create additional institutional pathways for improving interaction among stakeholders and enhancing the performance of the AIS.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

The experience with pilot and larger programs for pluralistic extension systems offers a number of recommendations for practitioners. Practical, step-by-step recommendations include:

- Sensitize and get agreement among actors at all levels on the need to: (1) strengthen interaction and learning between public and private service providers; (2) involve public and private service providers on the basis of comparative and competitive advantage; (3) make an inventory of existing service providers (public, private, and embedded services); and (4) strengthen coordination at the local level between service providers by enhancing downward accountability (for example, to farmer organizations).
- Make sure that an enabling environment is in place for a pluralistic extension service system to develop. Specifically, develop a sectoral or local government policy that supports public-private interaction in service delivery.
- Open up the public service delivery system by introducing downward accountability mechanisms and performance contracts, and involving farmer organizations in service procurement (see IAP 3 for examples).
- Make provisions for local authorities to manage the coordination of service provision, contract services locally, and handle integrated budget management. For example, local authorities (such as farmer groups) may to acquire a legal identity.
- Empower farmer groups and organizations to articulate demand (for example, in planning and M&E).
- Develop local capacity for small-scale service providers.
- Develop capacity to use new extension approaches based on participatory action learning, such as the FFSs, Farm Business Schools, and so on.
- Develop the capacity of local smallholders' private service providers.
- Develop, use, and manage local performance contract and outsourcing mechanisms.
- Develop local extension management capacity, including capacity in planning, M&E, and downward accountability and transparency.