

Extension Services in Tanzania: Better Reaching Remote Areas

Tanzanian agriculture sector is mostly made up by smallholder and medium size farmers who employ rudimentary technologies leading to low productivity. They have little capacity to hire field officers to solve problems requiring technical assistance. While provision of extension services in Tanzania is diverse, remote areas remain unattractive to private sector extension providers, hence the need for the government to upscale its efforts.

Extension services include a wide range of assistance to farmers in helping them identify opportunities, tackle problems, assess capabilities, and provide needed advice, such as on crop diseases, coping with droughts etc. By enhancing farmers' technical knowledge, they can increase agricultural productivity and rural income. Unlike large scale farmers, smallholders in remote areas cannot hire qualified field officers and are not attractive to the private sector.

As part of the Tanzanian government's efforts to improve access of small-scale farmers to research and extension, the decentralisation policy has helped increase the relevance of extension services for farmers through shifting planning to Local Governmental Authorities (LGA). This led to the creation of 6,700 Farmer Field Schools, training of 70,000 farmers, and the provision of fertilizer subsidies to 2 million farmers among other improvements. Yet, many farmers still lack access to extensions or the supplied services fall short in diagnosing farmers' problems and transferring practical knowledge due to low capacity and limited understanding of these issues by the field officers. Extension provision has not always led to increased production, many farmers still lack technical knowledge, and the number of extension staff is inadequate in most districts. Therefore, it is pivotal that the governments, including at the local level, continuously focus on:

- ❶ Preparing a master plan for extension services provision, which should include better coordination of agricultural development initiatives in local governments (LGAs); better linking of farmers; leveraging IT; farmer's training to articulate their needs to extension services; and gender sensitive considerations.
- ❷ Continuing training and retraining of field officers to ensure adequate advice and assessment to farmers, making sure that extension services are need-driven. Eventually, every village should be able to rely on one extension officer.
- ❸ Further encouraging NGO and private sector involvement in inputs and credit provision through government subsidies to their services oriented to small-scale farmers in remote areas.

← QUICK FACTS

» In Tanzania, the government is the main provider of extension services.

» The decentralized extension service at field level suffers from lack of operational budget. Current expenditure on agricultural research as a proportion of agricultural GDP is only 0.3 percent.

» In 2009/10, 75 private Agricultural Service Providers (ASPs) and 118 Local Government Authorities staff were trained on contracting out provision of extension services delivery to farmers. It was noted that most agricultural service providers have inadequate capacity for service provision.

» IFPRI found that Farmer Field Schools (FFS) are a popular extension approach in Tanzania. Participation in FFS can increase income by more than 100%.

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What are extension services?

Agriculture extension services in developing countries were designed to facilitate technology transfer from agricultural research institutes to the farmers. Extension services consist of advice, know-how and technology transfer as well as input provision directly to farmers. Main inputs provided include seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides.

In the beginning most extension services were placed under the Ministry of Agriculture, followed by extension services in livestock, plant protection, and marketing by other departments and Ministries. The diversity of services combined with lack of coordination created confusion and inefficiencies. These free governmental services have often been criticised for their lack of operational funds, low salaries, inadequate facilities, and accountability issues to the farmers. These shortcomings account for the often negative perception of extension services by farmers in developing countries.

To overcome the problem, semi-governmental autonomous authorities, including Coffee Boards and Tea Boards, have sometimes been created and endowed with their own mini-extension services. Extension services in developing countries are being increasingly privatized to address the inefficiencies and complement the insufficient government spending. However, these services generally focus on large scale commercial farmers, leaving the rural smallholder farmers with the governmental alternative. Civil society organizations are increasingly getting engaged, but their involvement is still in an experimental phase.

What is the importance of extension services?

It is important to recognize that extension services can be a great help in coping with the menace of hunger and rural poverty. Extension services and rural information enhance the productivity and sustainability of production systems. The absence or inefficiencies of extension services in developing countries can however leave the agriculture sector underdeveloped and the rural farmers in chronic poverty.

What reforms for effective extension services?

There is a renewed interest in extension services, as major donors are supportive of alleviating poverty and hunger through enhancing sustainable rural agriculture development in developing countries. However, to bring about reform, some old truths as well as new approaches need to be considered, including: (i) In national development policies, extension services need to be regarded as

pivotal. The liberalised, privatised, and democratised global markets require that policy-makers in developing countries revise extension services regulations and make them more coherent with the global demands; (ii) It is crucial to firmly link research with extension services. While R&D produces innovative technologies, extension services take them to the farmers; (iii) Further promote pluralistic approaches in extension services involving private sector and civil society; and (iv) Facilitating farmer participation in decision-making, joint planning and implementation has become crucial in good governance contexts. Participation in decision-making has empowered farmers and better assisted them with access to issue specific, gender-related, research-extension-farmer connected assistance. There need to be continuous enabling conditions for motivated farmers to participate and work together, such as those exemplified by the Participatory Farmer Group in Tanzania.

USEFUL RESOURCES

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-  Davis, Kristin et al. Impact of Farmer Field Schools on Agricultural Productivity and Poverty in East Africa. IFPRI Discussion paper, 2010
-  Modernizing National Agricultural Extension Systems: A practical guide for policy-makers of developing countries. FAO, 2005.
-  Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Cooperatives Development
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