

## Elements of agricultural extension policy in Kenya: Challenges and opportunities

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**Abstract** Agricultural extension is important in agricultural development. It was established in Kenya after the second world war. The extension services were provided by the government. Variations in the system have included: a) the integrated approach under the special rural integrated development project, 1970s, b) training and visit system, 1982, c) district focus for rural development, 1984 and d) national agricultural and livestock extension programme, 2000. The government is implementing the National Extension policy which advocates demand-driven extension and participation of other players. Agriculture training is provided in farmer's colleges and tertiary institutions. Shifts in extension policy in Kenya have been due to perceived low impact of agricultural extension. Factors attributed to this scenario include weak operational framework and poor linkages between research, extension and the farmer. To strengthen the agricultural extension system, the government has opted to support non-governmental actors. The merits and demerits of this approach are discussed.

**Key words:** agricultural policy, Kenya government, national agricultural extension, non-governmental organizations, policy challenges and opportunities

**Résumé** La vulgarisation de l'agriculture est importante dans le développement agricole. Il a été établi au Kenya après la seconde guerre mondiale. Le service d'extension était fourni par le gouvernement. Les variations dans le système ont inclus : a) une approche intégrée sous le projet spécial de développement rurale intégrée, 1970 ; b) formation et système des visites ; c) le district focal pour le développement rural, 1984 et d) agriculture nationale et le programme d'extension du bétail, 2000. Le gouvernement est entrain d'implanter la politique nationale de l'extension qui préconise une vulgarisation propulsée par la demande et la participation des autres acteurs. La formation agricole est donnée dans les collèges des fermiers et les institutions tertiaires. Le changement dans la politique de vulgarisation au Kenya a été du a la faible impact de la vulgarisation agricole perçue. Les facteurs attribués à ce scénario inclus la faiblesse du cadre opérationnel et des liens entre chercheurs, la vulgarisation et les paysans. Pour renforcer le système de vulgarisation agricole, le gouvernement a opté pour supporter les acteurs no gouvernement. Les mérites et les démérites de cette approche sont discutés.

**Mots clés:** Politique agricole, Gouvernement Kenyan, La vulgarisation agricole nationale, organisation no gouvernement, défi politique et opportunité

### Introduction

Agricultural extension is considered to be an important service in increasing agricultural productivity and attaining sustainable development. Its role is to help people identify and address their needs and problems. In some cases, agriculture ministries use extension to achieve government goals which may or may not coincide with farmers' objectives. If applied successfully, agricultural extension should result in outcomes which include observable changes in attitudes and adoption of new technologies, and improved quality of life based on indicators such as health, education and housing. In both developed and developing countries, benefits from investment in extension and research have been reported to range from 30-60% (Pinstrup, 1982). It has been recognized that agricultural extension accelerates development in the presence of other factors such as markets, agricultural technology, availability of supplies, production incentives, and transport (van Den Band and Hawkins, 1988).

As a formal institution, agricultural extension is young worldwide. It has been reported that 50 percent of the

agricultural extension organizations that operated in 1987 were organized in the 60s and 70s (Rivera, 1991). Axinn (1987) has grouped the different types of agricultural extension systems operating in various countries into two categories namely the delivery and the acquisition types of extension. The delivery type of system has been criticized for not doing well and being irrelevant while the acquisition system which sometimes enjoys cost sharing with government units or outside sponsors has questionable performance (Rivera, 1991; Wilson, 1991). Current patterns of agricultural extension also include variations based on who controls the system or who is the intended beneficiary (Axinn and Thorat, 1972).

In Kenya, agricultural extension was established after the Second World War to assist farmers with plans and new technologies for agricultural production. The extension services were provided by the government through the ministry of agriculture with or without the participation of research and training institutions. Initially, these services were very effective in assisting the majority of small-scale farmers in improving their agricultural productivity. This approach was characterized by

duplication of work and sending contradictory messages, and was perceived to have low impact. In order to revitalize the extension system in the country, extension scientists emphasize the need to reassess the successes and failures of the past policies so as to develop a new approach (Engel, 1995).

Currently, the Kenya Government is implementing the National Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP) which was put in place in 2001 and advocates demand-driven extension services and participation of other players in the delivery system (Republic of Kenya, 2004a). The NAEP has served as the instrument by which the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and Fisheries is facilitating extension under the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme (NALEP) and the NALEP Implementation Framework (Republic of Kenya, 2004b). The National extension programmes in Kenya are increasingly feeling the heat of market oriented development policies that challenge the government funding and cause questions to be asked regarding their effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. This paper examines the old approaches, policies and paradigms of extension system; and highlights the challenges and opportunities inherent in the Kenyan agricultural extension policy.

**Agricultural extension policy worldwide.** As a formation institution, agricultural extension is quite young worldwide. In an FAO survey of 207 agricultural extension organizations in 115 countries, Axinn, (1987), reported that fifty percent of these organizations were established in the 60 or 70's (Riviera, 1991). Over the years, many countries have developed different types of agricultural education systems. These have been categorized as the agricultural delivery and the agricultural extension acquisition systems (Axinn, 1987).

**Agricultural extension delivery system.** The delivery system of agricultural extension is premised on existence of a body of information that farmers need. The extension system or organization either has this information or can get it, and the purpose of the organization is to deliver the information to the farmer (Axinn, 1987). Examples of the delivery system include those operated in India, Pakistan Bangladesh and Thailand. In most cases, the system is part of the Ministry of Agriculture with staff who are government employees. In this system, program targets, goals, objectives and aspects of implementation tend to be fixed by the government. The delivery system has been criticized for not doing enough, not doing well, and not being relevant (Rivera, 1991). For example, the United States Extension System (SES) was criticized for lack of relevance (Dillman, 1986). As a result, the SES was reviewed and a new set of issues-oriented initiatives designed to revitalize the relevance of the system (Gustafson, 1991).

Other systems have embraced partial privatization. The Netherlands, for instance, decided to privatize half of its public extension agents, while the other half were assigned various responsibilities such as linking research and privatized extension services (Le Groise, 1991). When

challenged to go commercial in 1986 (Hercus, 1991), New Zealand Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries started operating under a potentially controversial user-pay, commercial system. Other public extension approaches moved towards cost-recovery approaches. Mexico, for instance planned for a fee based system for both large-scale and the small scale farmers (Wilson, 1991).

**Agricultural extension acquisition system.** The main idea in the agricultural acquisition extension system is one where organized groups of farmers can reach out beyond their villages and acquire the information they need (Axinn, 1987). In some countries like Malaysia and Nepal, farmers groups operate alongside the Ministry of Agriculture Extension System. Indonesia has experimented with several different types. The communes and Brigades of the people Republic of China are representative of the acquisition system (Axinn and Thora, 1972).

Unlike in the delivery systems, staff of acquisition systems is employed by local organization that sometimes enjoy the cost-sharing arrangement with larger government units or other outside sponsors. Programme targets, goals and objectives are fixed by members of the group themselves while strategies, tactics and other aspects of implementation are different from one village to the next and from region to region (Axinn, 1987).

**Other variations in agricultural extension.** Current patterns of agricultural extension include also variations in who controls the agricultural extension system such as governments, community groups, or rural people. They also include variations in intended beneficiaries of agricultural extensions such as consumers, producers, industry, or even broader national interests (Axinn and Thora, 1972).

**Agricultural extension policy in Kenya.** Agricultural extension was established in Kenya after the second world war, mainly to assist large scale white farmers, who needed farm plans and new technologies for crop and livestock production (Mwangi, 1999). The extension system for African reserves focused on community development and factors such as soil and water conservation, and cash crops. Additional concerns included introduction of dairy, poultry and pig production among smallholder farmers. The system operated independent of research or teaching institutions within the Ministry of Agriculture. This model had limited means of managing mid-level and upper level staff members. An agent performed both regulatory and educational functions, while control and direction of extension activities moved from the top to the bottom (Boone, 1989). The system was criticized for duplication of work and for contradictory messages from extension agencies. This necessitated review resulting in an integrated approach.

**The intergrated approach and district projects.** The integrated approach to extension, under the special Rural Development Project (SRDP) funded by the world Bank, was introduced in the early 1970's to cover various aspects of rural development (Mwangi, 1999). The approach relied

on an interdisciplinary group of professionals who were expected to work in assisting farmers carry out development projects. Other projects at district level included the Machakos Integrated Development Programme (MIDP) funded by the European Union (EU). The integrated policy failed due to ineffective management, poor co-ordination, poor communication skills and lack of community involvement. Programme planners assumed that people from various technical sections and disciplines would readily co-operate in development (Mwangi, 1999). Additionally, planners tried to bypass and displace the local elite and enterprise owners who then mobilized their resources against them.

**District focus for rural development.** In 1984, the strategy shifted from a centralized focus, to a more decentralized system where most of the work was done at the district level (1987). This District Focus for Rural Development was based on a complimentary relationship between districts with the aim of encouraging local initiative in order to improve problem identification, resource mobilization and project implementation (Republic of Kenya, 1984a).

Several problems affected the implementation this extension. These include:

- Local leaders inability to effectively articulate the need of their communities
- Project selection tended to be dominated by preferences of the elite or politicians
- Development committees tended to be dominated by government representatives with only a token representation of beneficiaries committee members; and;
- Community representatives were often dominated by elite rather than people elected by the people elected by the community (Mwangi, 1999).

**Training and visit system.** The Training and visit (T & V) system of agricultural extension was introduced in Kenya in 1982. Its basic goal was to built professional extension service that was capable of assisting farmers in raising agricultural production and/or income and providing appropriate support to agricultural development (Benor, 1987). In the T & V system, extension agents were regularly trained to improve their technical skills which they were supposed to pass on to farmers. Intensive training in specific agricultural practices was combined with visits to farmers fields. Village extension workers were trained, guided and supervised in small groups by extension officers or subject matter specialists who were linked to research specialists (Mwangi, 1999).

After several years of T and V, technology adoption remained very low mainly due to the system's top-down management structure and inadequate technical capacity. The system was also not well suited to transferring location specific recommendations; solving complex problems; and disseminating system-specific

technologies, particularly those associated with heterogeneous systems in rain fed areas (Swanson, 1997).

**Current extension approaches and The National Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP).** Kenya's experience of using unsuccessful approaches to deliver services to farmers has taught policy makers that in order to be effective; extension agents should avoid top-down planning and implementation of intervention to farmers' problems in favour of demand-driven and farmer led, participatory approaches. These include Farming Systems Approach, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Approach (PRA), Focal Area Development Approach (FADA) and Farmers Field Schools (Mwangi, 1999, Carey and Ething, 1997).

The government is currently implementing the National Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP) that aims to guide and harmonize management and delivery of extension services in the country (Republic of Kenya, 2004a). The policy advocates demand-driven extension services and preparation of other players in the delivery of extension services. Infact it recognizes the need to diversify, decentralize and strengthen the provision of extra services with a view to increase sustainability and relevance to farms. Under National Agricultural Extension Programme (NALEP), agricultural training is provided by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and ministry of Livestock and Fisheries (MOLFD) though tertiary training colleges and farmers training centers. Training in agriculture and related fields is also provided at degree levels by public and private universities. Farmers are trained in farmers training centers. Agricultural knowledge, information and technology are provided at the Agricultural Information Center and through agricultural shows.

**Problems and challenges associated with NAEP.** The main problems that have faced agricultural extension in Kenya include weak operational framework and poor linkage with research institutions. Weakness in the public extension system has precipitated existence of many extension agents such as non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and private sector groups. Additionally, commodity-based organizations have and still provide extension services for specific commodities. Since 2000, NAEP has operated through the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)-supported National Agricultural and Livestock Programme (NALEP) approach (Republic of Kenya, 2004b). The key pillars of the NALEP approach are i) participation extension; ii) demand-driven extension; iii) pluralism in provision of extension; and iv) transparency and accountability in the management of resources. Phase I of the project succeeded in promoting demand-driven extension, staff training in the NALEP concept, and the Focal Area approach and implementation. The project has also built capacity in gender mainstreaming skills. Phase II is intended to scale up activities achieved in the first phase and to realize other pillars of NALEP.

Schwartz and Kampen (1992) in their review of agricultural extension in East African countries including Kenya identified factors to be addressed to strengthen

the system. These factors identified included unclear national objectives, unsustainable financing, and lack of co-ordination between institutions implementing extension programmes. Other factors were weak management and support of human resources, minimal farmer participation, lack of attention to the needs of women, inadequate link between extension staff and research and poor co-ordination between extension services including supply of inputs, and market access. The success of the NAEP policy will be judged by the extent to which it addresses these challenges.

**Opportunities and suggestions for improved agricultural extension.** The relationship between extension and farmers must be improved if extension has to achieve the desired goals. It is especially important to increase extension's accountability to its client. Emphasis needs to be placed on extension's capacity to mobilize and support farmers groups and organization with regard to access to inputs and provision of marketing advice. The issue of gender should be brought into the mainstream of design and implementation of research projects. Hence, the recruitment of female extension agents should be increased just as pastoralists should be provided extension advice in livestock and crop production and in maintenance and conservation of their fragile environment. To achieve demand driven extension system in Kenya, it is essential to incorporate flexibility, participation and sustainability. The main areas for policy makers to target for implementation include needs assessment, setting objectives, organization and management; and the linkage between extension, farmers and other organizations involved in research, education, agribusiness, and the donor community.

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