**Transforming Agricultural Extension System and Accelerating Agricultural Productivity Growth in the Democratic Republic of Congo**

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This note provides a summary of the current state of agricultural extension in the DRC and identifies important opportunities to address the many challenges agricultural extension in DRC faces in terms of institutional set-up, funding mechanism, capacity strengthening of extension service providers, and delivery method and tools.

**INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP**

**Current Situation and challenges**

The legal framework as described in the decrees of 1989 and 1993 grants the DRC government through the National Extension Service (SNV) the responsibility to ensure the coordination of extension activities in DRC. Unfortunately, extension activities within the SNV ceased operating since 1997 due to donors’ fund constraints and the lack of funding support from government.

The government has maintained some level of extension intervention through (1) the decentralized services of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and (2) its technical support agencies including the National Institute of Agronomic Research (INERA), the National Service of Seeds (SENASEM), the National Service of Agricultural Mechanization (SENAMA), the National Service of Fertilizers and Related Inputs (SENAFIC). However, lack of vision and orientation, unclear mandates of the extension services led to drastic underfunding of the public extension service provision causing severe human and physical resources management problems.

Much of extension priorities have been devolved to private sectors, NGOs, church-based organizations or producer organizations that have been trying to fill the gaps mostly from ad-hoc and donor-funded projects. Thus, decision-making about extension agenda was distorted toward short-term goals of the projects that are often out of alignment with national and regional priorities.

**Recommendations**

Reforms of the institutional and legal framework with the objective of making extension service delivery more effective and efficient are crucial. The reforms should focus on promotion of demand driven extension service and be intended to promote and reinforce the public-private partnership already present in the agricultural extension service delivery in the DRC. This partnership will have on one side the government and its agencies that will be in charge of policy orientations and planning, decisions about funding modalities and allocation, regulation, and monitoring and evaluation. On the other side the organizations of farmers’ supervision (peasant organizations, church-based organizations, NGO, local development committees, private sector, and others) will be responsible for the policy implementation. The partnership will also include the CARG in between the two groups of partners; the CARG will play its intended role as platform for the consultations on policy designs and implementation, and on monitoring and evaluation.

The institutional reform should be based on enhanced assessment of extension through an organization of decentralized fora involving consultation with stakeholders in public, private and the civil society in the extension system at subnational levels. This will allow reinstating a new vision based on public-private partnership in the context of decentralization, which in turn will stimulate various relating extension strategies. In addition, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system and measurable targets are needed to effectively track the progress of extension reform over time.

Extension should be viewed in an integrated and holistic approach, and therefore extension reform should be done with complementary investments and policy reforms in the research and seed system and strengthening of the input and output markets.

The institutional reforms should also emphasize the need for the policy to make it more encompassing in terms of ownership by all key actors.

**FUNDING MECHANISM**

**Current Situation and challenges**

As previously mentioned, due to drastic underfunding from government budgets (less than 2% over the past decades), extension service provided by the public sector has notably suffered from lack of human and physical resources which in turn affects the performance of extension personnel.

A high proportion of the extension activities have been donor-funded through short-term projects which raises questions about sustainability of the interventions once funding ends. Moreover, the lack of coordination of extension activities has been found causing overlap or incoherence of interventions.

While small-scale farmers grouped in peasant organizations (FBO) have been developed to facilitate farmers’ access to extension service, the weak financial contributions of their members limited their interventions. Financial institutions for agricultural credit supposed to overcome the lack of public agricultural funds do not exist.

**Recommendations**

*P****ublic financed extension requires mobilization of greater government support***

National budget allocated to agriculture should address adequate funding of agricultural sector activities covering salaries of its agents, operating costs, and capital investments over the long term. Assessment of the performance of extension personnel is needed to make national agricultural extension more effective. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) process offers the government a mechanism for structuring its investments at both national and regional levels.

***Build public-private partnerships aimed at promoting market-oriented and farmer-driven production***

Extension systems need different providers for different clienteles and types of services. Public service provision and funding need to focus more on smaller-scale and less commercial farmers as well as on public good type of service. The public sector may need to provide some regulatory oversight of private-sector extension activities. The FBO may involve making extension services more relevant to the needs of farmers.

***Coordinate donor support with national programs*.**

Private sector provision through donor support needs to be addressed from a more programmatic approach. A new framework is needed whereby governments put forward strategic planning and donors contribute to budgetary support to those programs; this could potentially be worked out through CARG.

***Mobilize internal savings for complementary resources***

The operationalization of the National Agricultural Development Fund through the Agricultural Law recently promulgated is a major step toward adequate financing of the agricultural sector in DRC. In addition to continuing and increased financial support by governments and donor organizations’ contributions, proceeds of tax on imported agricultural and food products, portion of mining sector revenue will be another financing resources for this fund.

**CAPACITY STRENGTHENING OF EXTENSION SERVICE PROVIDERS**

**Current Situation and challenges**

Well-trained extension personnel are essential to produce high-quality agricultural extension.

Public extension staffing in DRC is characterized by an aging pool of extension staff who do not receive up-to-date training and skills development. Thus, the main problem is on the very low and declining technical, organizational, and managerial capacities of human resource to respond to the market needs and national priorities in extension, noting that the farmers-to-agent ratio is estimated at 1 to 535.

The absence of linkage between education and extension limits the impact of the agricultural education, the University, the Faculty of Agronomy and the institutes of agronomic studies (ISEAs) and rural development studies (ISDRs) on the extension system whose mission is to contribute to a sustainable education and socio-economic development of the agricultural sector.

In addition, factors affecting performance of extension staff such as salary levels, conditions of service, and facilities and equipment, continue to be poor, prompting them to pursue more attractive opportunities in the private sector or doing other activities while staying officially as public extension providers. Lack of performance targets, mission-orientation, and accountability measures, unclear vision, mandate and strategic planning, lack of communication about ongoing reforms are also well recognized as capacity constraints to agricultural extension in the DRC.

**Recommendations**

***Strengthen institutional capacity to create an enabling environment***

Human resource reform is a priority: Strategy involving retiring those who are above 60 and hiring new well-qualified staff is important. Institutionalized training and strengthening of the extension personnel must be consisted in skills upgrading, incentives and enabling environment for both trainees and teachers, curriculum development that respond to market needs and national priorities.

***Strengthen institutional capacity to create linkage between extension, education and research***

Capacity development focused on individual professionals must be supported by strengthening institution-level capacity (INERA, SENASEM, SENAFIC, CARG, peasant organizations, church-based organizations, NGO, etc...) while pursuing program implementation, national priorities, and regional development initiatives.

Reforming the agricultural education and training institutes, such as the ISDR and ISEA is needed. This will require updating of their curriculum and promoting greater linkages among extension, research and universities.

***Increase financial support***

All of the above can only happen with long-term and increased financial support by governments and donor organizations. To this end, the CAADP process is attempting to develop investment plans for agricultural tertiary education as part of integrated strategies for human resource development of rural development.

**DELIVERY METHOD AND TOOLS**

**Current Situation and challenges**

The performance of an extension system depends, in large part, on the appropriateness of methods and tools to transfer extension message. The results of the extension survey conducted in Bandundu, Bas-Congo, and Kinshasa revealed that travel and visit to farms, training or demonstration farms as well as information-sharing at FBO level have been used to deliver extension services to farmers. Moreover, according to the extension workshop participants, mass media have been also among the various channels through which extension services were provided.

Given that agriculture in DRC is dominated by low literacy capacity and small scale farmers, some of the tools currently used in the extension may not be adequate. As for extension methods, it is understandable that without financial means and clear mission of extension, not all the methods used considered the needs, skills, and means of the target farmers.

**Recommendations:**

***Appropriateness of methods and tools is context driven***.

The approach selected should reflect the prescribed extension mission of a country as articulated in its extension policy. The type of approach being used should depend primarily on policy considerations, including the farmers to be served, the mission of extension, and financial considerations.

Problem-solving approach, where farmers participate in defining their problem and building on local knowledge, allows for the development of more appropriate content. Although these approaches use techno-economic information, the socioeconomic considerations of the farmers are important. The training and visit, community development extension, and “animation rurale” approaches fall into this category. Thus, the presence of CARG would facilitate the choice of tools and methods of agricultural extension adapted to each local context for achieving the set objectives. Experiences of other developing countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and India would also be an asset.