

Extension Methods

It is in the nature of extension and its manifold functions (see the concept note on “Participatory Extension Today”) that there are many different extension approaches, methods and tools. Box 1 gives a short definition of the three. An approach forms the umbrella and can include various methods, e.g. a participatory extension approach can make use of field days and posters as specific extension methods; an extension tool is the smallest unit, e.g. the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) method makes use of different tools such as resource mapping. For a diagram, refer to Annex 1.

Box 1: Approaches, methods and tools – a definition

Approach: A way of dealing with a situation or problem.

Methodology: A system of methods used in a particular area of study or activity.

Method: A particular procedure for accomplishing or approaching something, especially a systematic or established one.

Tool: A thing used to help perform a job.

Source: Oxford Dictionary, 2015

This concept note deals with selected extension **methods** that are in common use worldwide. The “star model” shown in Figure 1 offers a set of possible dimensions for distinguishing between extension methods. It is not meant to be exhaustive, but helps to classify extension methods in the following aspects:

- Individual counselling (e.g. facilitation of a business contact) versus group approaches (e.g. support to a farmer cooperative, trainings);
- Classroom training (e.g. “winter school”) versus field-based approaches (demonstration, field days);
- Face-to-face versus virtual approaches (ICT: mobile phone services, web-based services);
- One-way communication (e.g. radio, TV) versus two-way communication.

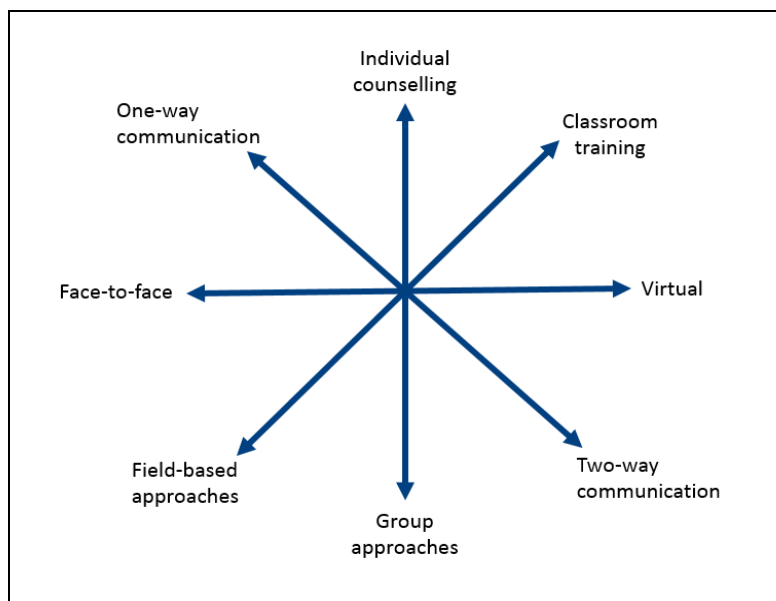


Figure 1: Four dimensions for categorising extension methods (HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, 2015)

Note: One particular extension method can cover various aspects, e.g. winter school is often a group-based approach in a classroom, and face-to-face can involve two-way communication. Thus the extension star model helps to identify differences and commonalities among extension methods with the aim of selecting the most suitable extension method.

There is no “right” or “wrong” extension method. The choice of a method depends on the context (e.g. Central Highlands of Afghanistan), the target group (e.g. women farmers growing vegetables), the objective (e.g. increased income from the sale of vegetables on the market) and the organisational form (e.g. extension services provided by the Ministry of Agriculture) (see also the concept note on “Extension Needs Analysis”).

Extension methods must necessarily be adapted to context, culture and gender. The following selection of extension methods and their combinations seem to be most appropriate in the context of sustainable agricultural practices in rural Afghanistan (non-exhaustive list, see Figure 2). Annex 2 describes the extension **approach** known as “Farmer Field Schools”, which combines several of these methods.

<p>Individual counselling</p> <p>Training events for groups, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstration - Field day - Winter school <p>Visual aids</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Posters - Slide-shows - Films 	<p>Written aids</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Handouts / "How to Notes" - Brochures - Newspapers <p>Demonstration plots</p> <p>Participatory Innovation Development</p> <p>Exhibition / fairs / competitions</p>	<p>Mass media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newspapers - Radio - TV <p>ICT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mobile phones - Internet
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Figure 2: Selection of extension methods (HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, 2014)

When advisers are asked to coach farmers in decision-making, farmers' first choice is generally **individual counselling**. This method's main limitation is its restricted outreach and hence its comparatively high cost per farmer. This is why **group-based approaches** such as demonstration, field days and winter schools are common in extension. Both individual and group counselling also include facilitation of links to all

sorts of stakeholders (input suppliers, transporters, processors, traders, legal service providers, etc.).

Farmers' understanding can be enhanced by written and, whenever possible, visual extension aids (posters, pictures, films). **Mass media** – in particular (local) radio – is one of the most important channels for disseminating information in rural areas. Its main advantage is the large number of clients that can be reached at a comparatively low cost. Based on the spread of mobile phones and computers, newer **Information and Communication Technologies** (ICT) have increasing potential as extension methods.

Individual counselling

Individual counselling is used to help individuals to cope with challenges and/or to seize opportunities. During counselling, the advisor/extensionist/counsellor establishes a warm, supportive relationship with the client using a variety of skills. Depending on the strength of this relationship, the extensionist helps the farmer to explore problem areas, set goals and work through problems in order to establish a more meaningful and productive life. Individual counselling aims to enable the client to learn how to identify and pursue realistic and satisfying solutions to his/her problems and/or to make best use of identified opportunities. The extensionist needs to be aware that it is ultimately always the client who decides and eventually bears the risks inherent in his/her decision.

Box 2: Definition "counselling"

Counselling is the means by which one person helps another through purposeful conversation. Counselling is a method of identifying practical solutions to an identified problem (also called "problem-solving assistance").

Training events for groups

In contrast to individual counselling, training can be provided to groups. There are different approaches of training events for groups, such as a single training session, demonstrations, field days and winter schools. When talking about training events, one may distinguish between classroom training and field-based approaches. Training events ideally take place directly in farmers' fields, whereas winter schools are held indoors. For more information on working with groups in extension, refer to the concept note "Working with Groups".

Box 3: Field-based training events for groups

- **Seeing is believing:** An "outdoor classroom" allows participants to experience the reality.
- **Learning by doing:** Useful method for introducing a new production technology because participants can be personally involved in practice (e.g. in pruning a fruit tree).
- **Learning from peers:** Training for a group allows people to learn from one another and is relatively cost-efficient.

Demonstrations and field days gather a group of farmers together in the sense of "learning by doing", but also for sharing experiences among and to foster mutual learning of women and men farmers. Different terms such as "field day", "farmer's day", "agricultural show" and "open farm" have been used to describe a situation of field demonstrations (Richardson, 2003). Demonstrations and field days can be hosted either by the extension service provider or directly in the field(s) of farmers.

Demonstration plots

Demonstrations are used to introduce a proven technology that is, however, new to the area or the client group. In a typical demonstration different technologies are compared side by side in order to show the advantages of the new technology. Demonstrations are often made at specific extension events (e.g. agricultural fairs or field days). Typical examples of demonstrations include the comparison of plant varieties, fertiliser regimes, cropping patterns and also the use of agricultural machinery. A demonstration plot is ideally situated at a well-frequented location (e.g. at the entrance to a village, next to a road). Signboards also explain the different treatments to visitors who pass by chance. Demonstration plots are ideal “outdoor classrooms”, sites for training events and places to arrange farmer-to-farmer exchanges.



Figure 3: Demonstration plot in Afghanistan (HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation)

Participatory Innovation Development (PID)

PID, formerly known as “Participatory Technology Development” (PTD) is known by several names: “farmer-participatory research”, “farmer-led research”, “participatory action research” or “action research and participatory on-farm research”. The main emphasis is on combining local and scientific knowledge in experimentation by linking farmers, extensionists, researchers and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. private sector input suppliers or traders). The objective of PID is to enable local communities with their valuable knowledge and skills to find new “things and ways that work” – innovations. Unlike demonstrations, where a technology is already proven, PID is about identifying and trying out useful new practices, which contribute to improving the livelihoods of rural people. “Practices” may include agricultural production technologies and interventions related to value chains (input supply, processing, marketing) or social aspects (e.g. organising a seed bank). PID fosters a spirit of experimentation and exploration among the involved villagers, and this is very helpful for adapting to an increasingly complex and changing context. The villagers’ competence to identify needs, opportunities and development strategies for themselves is strengthened, and local control over - and equal participation in - the development process is enhanced (Scheuermeier, 2004). Extensionists typically take on a facilitation role to bring the different stakeholders together. Many Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools (see the concept note on “Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)”) are well suited to PID too. For more information refer to the PID Manual by Scheuermeier et al., 2004.

Written aids

Written aids such as hand-outs, leaflets, brochures, etc. are helpful extension tools, as key information can be transmitted in a condensed way and with a high outreach. Written aids must always properly address the audience with regards to language, technical level and layout. As a rule of thumb, keep text to a minimum, use simple language and visualise your key message.

Visual aids

There is a saying that “a picture is worth a thousand words”. Visualisation is an effective way of communicating, especially in societies with a low literacy rate (often lower for women than for men). Visual communication tools include posters, flash cards, pictures and charts. Their level of detail, language, way of visualisation and so on needs to be adapted to the audience and situation and must first be tested. In rural Afghanistan, where there is a high incidence of illiteracy among women and men farmers, it is crucial to use visuals in extension visual aids that need no explanation in words. Box 4 on the next page explains the benefits of visual aids.

Posters

A poster consists of pictures and a few words and/or numbers drawn on a large sheet of paper, cloth or card. It should be as big as possible with clear illustrations that convey one key message. Posters are useful for communicating simple, clear information to individuals and groups, and they can be used effectively in extension activities.

Slides

PowerPoint slides are a strong tool for literate people, as you can combine text, graphics and multi-media content to create dynamic presentations. However, slides are often too densely packed and a presentation will contain too many slides. As a rule of thumb, calculate two minutes to explain each slide! An effective slide contains only illustrations and a few key words.

Video

A video can be a great visual aid and attention grabber that allows you to show stimulating visual information. Always make sure that the clip is as short as possible and directly relevant to the content. Tell the audience what to look for. Avoid showing more videos than necessary. Careful: producing a quality video is time-consuming and needs a particular set of professional skills. Bear in mind that showing a video requires the proper equipment; this means that videos are better suited to indoor events than to field days.

Box 4: Visualisation

- Facilitates thoughtful engagement with, and better assimilation of, the subject matter
- Improves focus on the point under discussion
- Provides an overview and makes the context, structures and processes more easily recognisable
- Makes the content easier to remember
- Requires more thorough preparation
- Forces the speaker to use precise and concrete arguments
- Reduces emotional involvement/ implications
- Serves as documentation by recording statements, ideas, results and to-do lists

Source: Bolliger, 2007, p. 41 ff

Mass media

Mass media have always played an important role in educating a society and spreading information, even to remote communities. In most countries, the mass media are one of the key means of spreading information to the rural population too. Some examples are specific newspapers/journals addressing farmers, specific radio broadcasts, and special TV programmes directed to rural communities. In many countries, there is a growing number of local radio (and TV) channels that broadcast in local languages.

ICT

The continuing rapid development of telecommunications and computer-based information and communication technology (ICT) is one of the biggest factors of change in extension, as it will facilitate and reinforce other changes. ICT brings new information services to rural areas and farmers as users, particularly in view of the rapid spread of mobile phones, even in remote areas of Afghanistan.

In other countries, Short Message Service (SMS)-based rural extension services are already in use. They offer farmers access to weather information, pest and disease occurrence, and, most importantly, prices for agricultural products on different markets. SMS-based services are often combined with web-based information services such as on-line access to databases e.g. on production-related issues (pests, diseases, production guidelines). Mobile phones can be used to access these databases. Another promising combination is the use of mobile phones to send questions to live TV or radio programmes, where a panel of specialists provide instant answers.

Web portals such as <http://afghanag.ucdavis.edu/> offer a wealth of relevant information about agriculture in Afghanistan to anyone with access to the Internet.

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of mass media

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating public awareness • Giving the basic facts • Giving information a sense of importance and legitimacy • Creating a bandwagon effect that can encourage people to join in a programme/project • Providing time-sensitive information • Reaching many people simultaneously • Reaching rural communities • Reaching village extension workers, and urban and semi-urban audiences (radio and TV) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No interactions possible • Detailed explanations cannot be provided • Responding to individual questions or concerns is not easily possible • Messages may not easily be understood by all • Mass media channels are expensive to produce, and broadcast time may be a huge expense

Further reading and references

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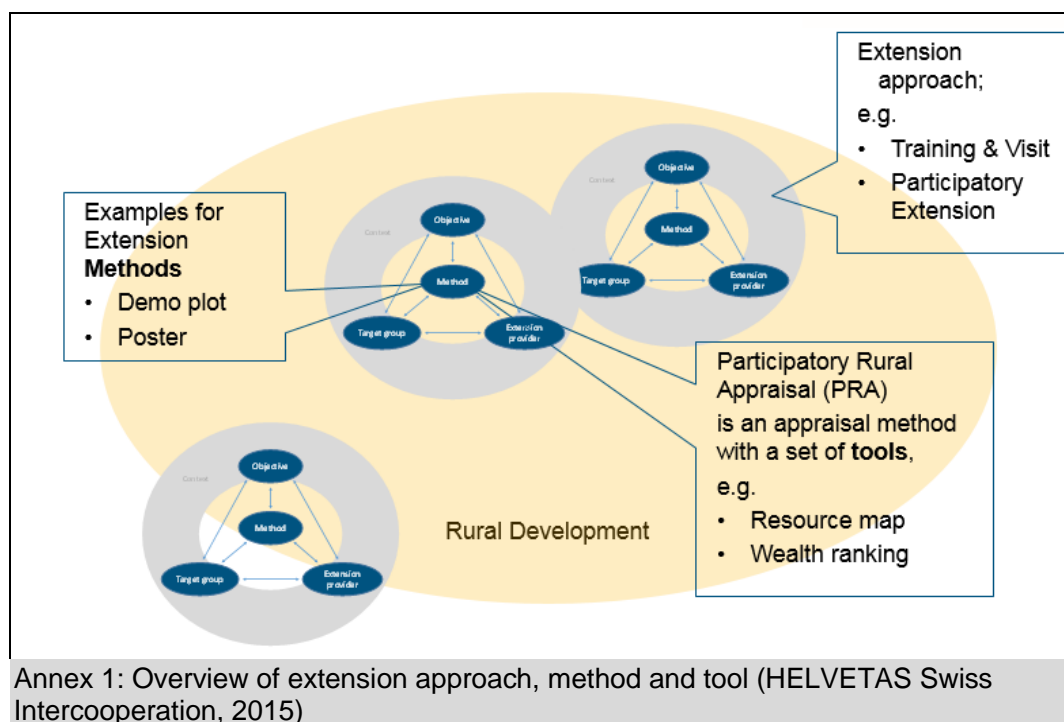
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Annex 1: Extension approach, method and tool



Annex 1: Overview of extension approach, method and tool (HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, 2015)

Annex 2: Farmer Field Schools

One of the most widely used approaches in participatory extension is “Farmer Field Schools”, which are also applied in Afghanistan. The Farmer Field School (FFS) is a group-based learning process that has been used by a number of governments, NGOs and international agencies to promote Integrated Pest Management (IPM). The first FFSs were designed and managed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in Indonesia in 1989. Since then, more than two million farmers across Asia have participated in this type of learning.

Box 1: The principles of FFS

- 1) Experiential learning
- 2) Agro-eco systems analysis
- 3) Community Development

The Farmer Field School brings together concepts and methods from agro-ecology, experiential education and community development (see Box 1). As a result, hundreds of thousands of rice farmers in countries such as China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam have been able to reduce pesticide use and improve the sustainability of crop yields. FFS has produced other developmental benefits that are broadly described as “empowerment”, and FFS alumni in a number of countries are involved in a wide range of self-directed activities including research, training, marketing and advocacy.

Box 2: The basic features of a typical Farmer Field School

- The FFS is field-based and lasts for a full cropping season.
- A FFS meets once a week during the growing season.
- The primary learning material at a FFS is the field with its crop(s) or the livestock.
- The FFS meeting place is close to the learning plots, often in a farmer’s home or another convenient place.
- The FFS educational methods are experiential, participatory and learner-centred.
- Each FFS meeting includes at least three activities: agro-ecosystem analysis, a “special topic” and a group-dynamics activity.
- In every FFS, participants conduct a study comparing a conventional practice with an improved practice, e.g. IPM.
- A FFS often includes several additional field studies depending on local field problems.
- Between 25 and 30 farmers participate in a FFS. Participants learn together in small groups of five to maximise participation.
- All FFSs include a field day in which farmers make presentations about the results of their studies to fellow farmers.
- Preparatory meetings precede a FFS to determine needs, recruit participants and develop a learning contract.

Source: adapted from Wikipedia

The Farmer Field School is a group-based learning process. During the FFS farmers carry out experiential learning activities that help them understand the ecology of their rice fields. These activities involve simple experiments, regular field observations and group analysis. The knowledge gained from these activities enables participants to make their own locally specific decisions about crop management practices. This approach represents a radical departure from earlier agricultural extension programmes, in which farmers were expected to adopt generalised recommendations that had been formulated by specialists from outside the community (the Transfer of Technology model of extension).

Although Farmer Field Schools were designed to promote IPM, empowerment has been an essential feature from the beginning. The FFS curriculum was built on the assumption that farmers could only implement IPM once they had acquired the ability to carry out their own analysis, make their own decisions and organise their own activities. The empowerment process, rather than the adoption of specific IPM techniques, is what produces many of the developmental benefits of the FFS. Thus, the extensionist adopts a coaching role rather than one of imparting knowledge.

This original model of rice Farmer Field Schools has been further developed, copied and adapted to other crops, agro-ecological

systems and livestock farming. What must remain unchanged is the focus on agro-ecology, experiential learning and community development. The role of the FFS facilitator is challenging, since it unites facilitation skills, knowledge on the agro-ecology of the crop/livestock in question, skills in community development and social mobilisation, experience of participatory innovation development, and more. In the original model, FFS facilitators underwent season-long on-campus training, which included the real facilitation of a FFS (learning by doing). This required substantial investment, both in terms of human resources and finances, which is not feasible in every situation.