

Farmer-to-Farmer Extension

Box 1: Key principles of F2F extension

- **Accountability:** Farmers (women and men) and local organisations/village elders play a key role in selecting, monitoring and evaluating lead farmers.
- **Lead farmers are “from the community”:** Lead farmers communicate in the local language and are sensitive to the local context and farmers’ needs.
- **Support by facilitating organisations:** Extensionists provide backstopping and training to lead farmers. They make simple and appropriate reference materials available.
- **Gender equity:** Facilitating organisations ensure that women and men become lead-trainers and that F2F extension reaches women and men equitably.

Source: GFRAS, 2015

Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) extension systems have become increasingly important in many countries worldwide. As a community-based approach, F2F extension systems encourage community participation and represent a farmer-centred extension approach. F2F extension can be defined as the provision of extension services by farmers (called; lead farmer, farmer-trainer, etc.) to other farmers. (GFRAS, 2015)

F2F extension systems do not aim to substitute other extension systems (e.g. public extension services), but rather to complement extension provision to women and men farmers, in particular in rural and remote areas. As a participatory model of extension, F2F extension can help to address the needs and demands of disadvantaged groups (including women) in particular, and to empower communities. (GFRAS, 2015)

Moreover, F2F extension systems can be a cost-effective and potentially sustainable service delivery mechanism to rural farmers (Shrestha, S.K.). F2F extension approaches can also address the gender gap in extension service delivery. In many places, F2F extension has shown itself capable of recruiting high proportions of women lead farmers and increasing women’s access to extension services. (GFRAS, 2015)

From neighbour support to an effective F2F extension system

Farmer-to-farmer extension – in the sense of neighbourly support - has been practised for generations and will continue to make important contributions. Farmers (both women and men) can learn a lot from their more innovative neighbour(s) and adopt promising innovations. F2F extension systems, however, go a step further through by establishing a “structured” support to farmers:

The community – organised in farmer groups - selects an experienced and innovative farmer to be a “lead farmer”. Those farmers selected as “lead farmers” are also often called “model/master farmers”, or “farmer-trainer”, etc. and are chosen for their agricultural expertise and their ability to share information. In other initiatives, they are called “farmer promoters”, which emphasises their networking or training skills. An additional variant is the “community knowledge worker”, sometimes equipped with a smart phone to improve farmers’ access to information and advisory services. (MEAS, 2015)

These “lead farmers” provide necessary extension services to their fellow farmers in their community, e.g. training, advice, demonstration, etc. Unlike neighbourly support, these “lead farmers” are rewarded for their services through “payments” from the farmer beneficiaries or farmer group(s). Thus, lead farmers do not provide free support to neighbours of choice, but to all interested farmers in their community or farmer group(s). This “payment” for services is a serious obstacle to implementing F2F extension systems in many regions – and thus challenges their sustainability.

For F2F extension to run effectively in the long term, it needs to be locally embedded, e.g. linked to the smallest governmental unit (e.g. CDCs in Afghanistan). These “local committees” receive support (and often funding) from the facilitating organisations to help the farmer groups and lead farmers to implement a F2F extension system. Their ownership by a local committee is key to ensuring institutional sustainability. Institutionally embeddedness is a major precondition for receiving public funding.

The role of the facilitating organisation, whether public, NGO or private, is to support the establishment and running of the F2F extension system. Firstly, farmers groups often require support to mobilise and operate, (see the “Working with Groups” concept note). Secondly, the facilitating organisation is often responsible for providing capacity-building to the “lead farmers” to ensure high-quality service delivery. This often translates into providing training to lead farmers, both on agricultural aspects and communication. Periodic training sessions, field backstopping and on-the-job training are important to ensure that “lead farmers” remain motivated and provide good-quality services (GFRAS, 2015). Figure 1 describes a F2F extension system run according to Swiss Intercooperation guidelines in Nepal.

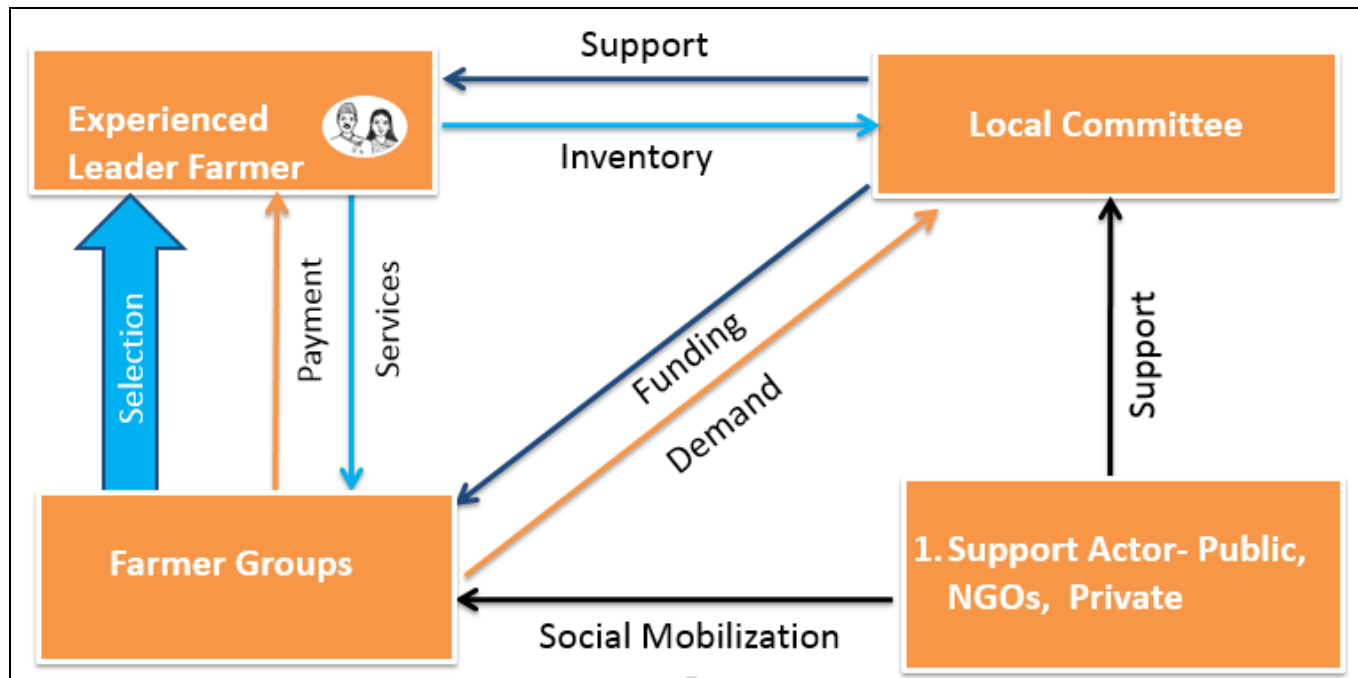


Figure 1: Model of farmer-to-farmer extension (Source: Adapted from HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Nepal)

Experiences from Nepal show that F2F extension can complement public extension services and provide effective and efficient services; it can, in particular, reach out to disadvantaged groups or provide training to women farmers. Experienced farmers were mobilised and trained to work as extension agents (known as “Experienced Leader Farmers”). These experienced lead farmers are based in the community and share the same language and background. Through the institutionalisation of the local committees and their funding by public agricultural block grants, it paved the way for a decentralisation of extension services and institutional sustainability (Kägi, 2015).

The *campesino a campesino* (farmer-to-farmer) movement in Central America is one of the most famous examples of F2F extension. It showed clearly that farmers are capable of pursuing their own sustainable development (Holt-Gimenez, 2001). *Campesino a campesino* is a movement that goes beyond pure service delivery. Farmers learn from each other by sharing wisdom, creativity and knowledge, not just information and techniques. Rather than simply transferring technologies, farmers promote an entire culture and way of farming, namely sustainable agriculture (Holt-Giménez, 2001).

Table 1 summaries the opportunities and limitations of F2F extension systems. F2F extension systems are often challenging to set up; they can be slow and are sometimes confined to a particular region, which makes it difficult to scale them up. It also appears that F2F extension works best when farmers are already organised in “farmer groups” (GFRAS, 2015). But F2F extension systems stimulate a socially equitable extension service that is more responsive to local needs, promotes bottom-up planning with local participation, and ensures their ownership by the farming communities. They also help to enhance farmers’ learning and empowerment, thereby increasing their capacity to innovate, train other farmers and improve their livelihoods (GFRAS, 2012).

Table 1: Opportunities and challenges of F2F extension systems (adapted from GFRAS, 2015 and Holt-Giménez, 2001):

Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand outreach • Low-cost respectively cost-effective • Downward accountability • Promote adoption of practices, “learning from peers” • Promotes increased participation of local communities • Empowers communities, particularly the disadvantaged (women!) • Addresses the gap of female professionals in extension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality assurance of services • Integration in national extension systems • Remuneration of the lead farmers; readiness of fellow farmers to pay for services; competing economic interests of the lead farmers • Financial and institutional sustainability • Continuous coaching and technical backstopping • Drop out of “lead farmers” • Capability of the system to influence decision-makers • Maintaining a proper documentation • Establishing and maintaining links to research

The role of extensionists in F2F extension systems

Extensionists are often the initiators and supporters of F2F extension systems. On the other hand, extensionists often supervise and build capacities of “lead farmers” to assure the quality of their services. The following inquiries are key for supporting communities in the implementation of F2F extension systems (MEAS, 2015):

1. How are lead farmers selected to participate, what criteria are used, and who actually selects them?
2. What is their tenure, how is their performance assessed, by whom and, if necessary, how are they replaced?
3. What tasks do they perform? How are they trained and supported, what are their responsibilities? Are they better at conducting some extension functions than others?
4. What motivates farmers to become involved as extensionists, e.g., demonstrating new practices and training other farmers? What incentives do extension services provide, and are the incentives sufficient to sustain lead farmers’ involvement?
5. What lessons have organisations learned about how to effectively implement F2F extension?

Further reading and references

- GFRAS, 2015: Note 7: Farmer-to-Farmer Extension, GFRAS Good Practice Note for Extension and Advisory Services. Available at: <http://www.g-fras.org/en/ggp-notes/farmer-to-farmer-extension.html>
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- Holt-Giménez, 2001: Scaling up sustainable agriculture - Lessons from the Campesino a Campesino movement. Available at: <http://www.agriculturesnetwork.org/magazines/global/lessons-in-scaling-up/scaling-up-sustainable-agriculture>
- Kägi, S., 2015: Capitalisation of Experiences: Sustainable Soil Management Programme (SSMP), Nepal: 1999 – 2014, SDC
- MEAS, 2015: Farmer to Farmer Extension Approaches. Information available at: <http://www.meas-extension.org/meas-offers/program-evaluation/farmer-to-farmer>
- Shrestha, S.K: Decentralizing the ‘Farmer to Farmer Extension Approach to the Local Level’ Paper to CAPSA for Policy Dialogue.



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