

# **THE TRAINING OF EXTENSION WORKERS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

At the time I was appointed to my post at the Center, I had been an extension worker in the field for some 30 years. I knew from my own experience the problems involved in extension work, and knew that it is a difficult job to do at all, let alone do well. I have welcomed the considerable efforts made by the Center to help extension workers in the Asian and Pacific region, and should like to offer a few comments on what I believe to be a vitally important aspect of extension work - the training of extension workers. This article is based on the discussions and papers given at an international workshop I attended on this topic, jointly organized and sponsored by the Center and the Southeast Asia Rural Social Living Institute (SEARSOLIN) (Philippines). Participants at the workshop were all experienced extension workers, many of who were responsible for training students in this field. Several points were raised at the seminar which were generally considered to be of primary importance.

1. In many countries, extension workers are so poorly paid it is almost impossible for them to become dedicated and enthusiastic workers. It is relatively rare to see extension workers paid a salary anywhere near as high as that of researchers.
2. If the rewards of extension workers are to be improved, their work should receive a great deal more recognition and publicity than at present.
3. The value of practical training was emphasized by several speakers. In some countries, good experienced farmers are encouraged to embark on a career in extension work.
4. Inter-disciplinary jealousies are frequently a factor contributing to the low salaries of extension workers. In many cases, researchers and planners/administrators tend to under-value and denigrate farm advisors.

5. Extension work must place paramount importance on human values and beliefs. In some training institutes, such as Xavier University in the Philippines, the students selected for extension work are those who are the most motivated during their course of studies.
6. If an extension program is to be effective, it must have an efficient support program (e.g. necessary inputs must be available when needed). Regional programs seem to be more effective than national programs, probably because of concentration of effort.
7. Before they advocate a new type of production, extension agents must be sure there are satisfactory markets.
8. Extension workers must realize they are not the only source of information to farmers. In many cases, farmers may learn from skilled fellow-farmers.
9. A problem in organizing extension courses is that planners wish to include the maximum amount of technical information and leave no time available to discuss extension aspects.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUITABLE CURRICULA FOR EXTENSION WORKERS**

In these days of advanced technology, it is very easy for us to forget how dependent we are upon the farmer. Although the Bible tells us that man cannot live by bread alone, neither can he live without it, and the more high quality food he has available to him, the more able is he to cope with the many problems he has to face in living in the 20th century. Despite our complete dependence on food, the farmer is very often the least appreciated part of the community, particularly in many developing countries. He is expected to work long hours to produce his crops and livestock, for which he receives the lowest possible prices. In many cases, little heed is given to his hopes and fears, his aspirations and beliefs, his standing in the community and

his value as a human being. In many ways, the only secular person to whom he can call on for help and understanding is his local farm extension worker.

It is impossible to define the role of the extension worker in a few words, as he has to be all things to all men. However, he is expected to perform the following functions:

- a. To help farmers improve their living standards;
- b. Help farmers achieve their long and short term objectives;
- c. Make practical suggestions which will enable farmers to attain their goals;
- d. Act as a link between farmers, researchers and planners;
- e. Help farmers to devise methods of overcoming their problems. This is an innovative function, and is also problem-oriented;
- f. Assist with the implementation of national policies;
- g. Assist with the organization of farming structures.

If he is to accomplish his work satisfactorily, he must have great skill and judgment, a deep understanding of people and a high level of technological expertise. He must show scientific competence and social responsibility. In point of fact, what do we actually find in many countries of the third world? Extension work is often carried out by the lowest paid and most poorly educated members of the government service. Despite our increasing demand for better quality food and the need to introduce new technology to farmers, the task is often entrusted to high school graduates, who are expected to have the teaching ability of a schoolmaster, the skills of a successful farmer, the persuasiveness of a politician and the patience and understanding of a social worker. It is little wonder that agriculture is developing so slowly in many areas.

### **AIMS OF A TRAINING COURSE**

This paper is a plea for the extension worker - an effort to obtain for him a greater appreciation and recognition for his services. If we wish agriculture to expand, and farmers to become more prosperous and be living fuller and happier lives, it will be necessary to completely recast the training programs of most

of our universities and training centers, so that students are provided with a course specifically designed to equip them for the work they will have to do. What, then should be the ultimate aim of such a course?

- a. To produce extension workers who are professional officers, technically equipped to give farmers accurate advice on matters of plant and animal production, and mentally equipped to understand their farmers and their families so that they can motivate them wisely and sympathetically.
- b. To produce officers who have a status in the community comparable with that of other professional people such as doctors, lawyers or school teachers. In other words, the extension worker must be a respected member of his society.
- c. Planners and politicians must be made to recognize the importance of well-trained extension officers and of the work they do, and pay them accordingly. At the present time, many extension workers are struggling to live on a salary which is far too low by any standards. When challenged about this, the politicians and employers point to the often low educational qualifications of these workers, and their relative lack of specific expertise, and say they cannot pay more under these conditions. If, however, training standards are raised and workers are much better qualified, they must be rewarded accordingly.
- d. A well-trained professional extension officer needs adequate facilities if he is to do his work satisfactorily. Among those is the provision of adequate transport. While it may be unrealistic to expect every developing country to provide cars for its extension workers, they should at least provide light motor cycles.
- e. A fully-trained extension officer must have job security. It is foolish to expect that young people will embark on a long and arduous course to qualify themselves, unless they can see permanent and rewarding employment as an end result. At present, many Asian extension workers are employed on a temporary basis - under these conditions, they cannot be expected to give a

dedicated and efficient service.

- f. Until now, it has usually been considered that agricultural extension work is a male function and women in extension services have largely confined their efforts to helping farm women with matters such as hygiene, cooking, etc. The introduction of new crop varieties will demand that women folk be shown how to store, prepare and serve rather new foods. Therefore, extension should also have a 'home economics' function, with women as both clients and instructors.
- g. In many countries, most of the work involved with food production is done by women, who do all the cultivation and harvesting and who deal with any financial details associated with their cropping activities. Since women are usually better than men in dealing with farmers' wives, there is obviously a need for women extension workers who have been trained in crop and animal husbandry technologies. It is, of course, essential that such officers be available in countries where women are forbidden to speak to strange men.

When one thinks about formulating a training syllabus for students wishing to become extension workers, it soon becomes obvious that it is impossible to draw up any training schedule suitable for every condition. There is such wide variation in the needs of different countries, with their differing stages of development, varying soil and climatic conditions and diverse methods of farming, that the most that can be done here is to state certain principles which should be the basis of every course for embryo extension workers.

### **Motivation**

Under this heading, the extension trainee must be given the incentive to work and study for the purpose of helping farmers. Not only must he be motivated - he must be taught how to motivate others. Two subject matter areas would be involved under this heading.

### ***Extension and development***

There is evidence that students and field staff, are better motivated if, from the early stages of

training, they understand the development processes within rural society. Today, integrated rural development places full emphasis on the human factor, primarily all members of farm families.

### ***Human and social relationships and characteristics***

In their paper 'Professional Requirements of the Extension Worker' Schwab and Alloi make the following statements, which illustrate the philosophy behind this thinking:

'Farmers are members of societies in which they are linked to other members and groups by rights and duties, expectations and obligations. Each society has a structure which includes such institutions as the family, religion and some form of economic system. An individual member has a clearly established status and role in each institution. His behavior and actions will be governed by the society's rules, or its culture, and by his own psychological nature. Values, attitudes, aspirations and motives all stem from the complex interplay of these various factors... An extension officer must be more than just aware of these human aspects within the farming society he is to serve. He must be able to encourage his clients, and explain complex matters in ways that will be understood and lead to their acceptance. He should be able to fire his clients to some degree of enthusiasm. He must be able to manipulate values and motivations in ways that will lead to better social welfare among his farmers. He must be able to communicate effectively with them.'

If he is to achieve these objectives, he must be adequately trained in communication processes in and with communities. He must receive thorough tuition in the nature and structure of farm communities and farm families, and have an understanding of the leadership roles within the farming community, with special emphasis on the part played by farmers' wives and families. He must know how the various sectors of the farm community (subsistence farmers, commercial producers, etc.) influence extension activities. The principles of leadership must be expressed, and

trainees taught how to identify and encourage natural leaders. They must be taught how to recognize the needs of a farming community. They must be taught the basics of rural sociology, and study the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of human development, and know how to help farmers to help themselves. The extension workers must appreciate the importance of rural socio-economic organizations such as cooperatives and peasant associations. They should be able to identify, encourage and teach the leaders and members of these rural groups to efficiently manage these affairs for their own economic and social well-being.

### **Extension**

Agricultural extension involves a great deal more than simply walking onto a farm and telling a farmer about a new technology. Extension is a highly sophisticated technique which demands a considerable range of skills. These must be fostered during the extension course. This section can be handled under the following three categories:

#### ***Extension methods***

This should cover all the strategies available to extension workers in approaching their farmer clients. They must be taught how farmers learn and what pitfalls they must avoid. This could all be covered under the general term of communication strategies. Above all, it must be emphasized to them that farmers are not foolish, and that subsistence farmers are very good farmers, utilizing what resources are available to them in the best way they know.

#### ***Extension organization***

Although this section will need to be covered in greater depth during in-service training, students should be advised of any extension services operating within their country and of the opportunities of employment. Other matters under this heading would be the organization of an extension service and its administration - the principles and procedures of planning projects, etc.

### ***Research and its relationship to extension***

Although extension workers should be discouraged from embarking on research projects, they should know the basic principles of field research. These would include knowledge on how to lay down and manage an experiment, how to assess results and how to understand research results. They should be made to lay down simple field trials so that they know how to do this work. This will be important when they establish demonstration plots or if they are stationed in isolated areas and have to find the answer to a certain problem. They should also understand social research results, and be able to conduct surveys with rural people.

### **Technology**

Since the major function of extension workers is to help farmers to improve their living standards by using the best available techniques, it follows that the major component of any agriculture training course must be a thorough grounding in all aspects of crop and livestock production. The major matters to be considered should be:

#### ***Environment and ecology***

This is a vitally important component of the whole extension course. It covers the study of soils, climate and natural biota of the regions within the country in which the course is being conducted. There must also be information on water resources and their conservation. The natural resources of a country are of supreme importance, as they comprise one of the major capital assets of the people. Students must be taught their importance and of the need for their wise utilization under honest and competent supervision. They should study environmental hazards (use of agricultural chemicals, etc.) and the ill-effects of exploiting natural resources. They must be taught to differentiate between the needs of individuals and those of society and to study renewable energy resources.

### ***Husbandry and technology of production***

Under this heading would come the study of all the major field crops and the production of animal products, including meat, fish and eggs. Horticultural and tree crops must also be studied, together with the importance of quality control. All crops of economic importance within the country must be dealt with, although the major crops will, of course, be dealt with in greatest depth.

### ***Farm management and economics***

This section must be studied according to the stage of development of the country in which the students are being trained. Tuition should be given in cost/benefit studies and the preparation of budgets both for farms and development projects. Farm management must be related to specific crops and livestock enterprises. Students should be taught how to compile a farm balance sheet and the use of gross margin analyses. A thorough grounding in market procedures is essential, together with expertise in the assessment of production costs. Students should be informed of the formation and management of farmers' organizations.

### ***Agricultural engineering***

This sector will basically deal with appropriate technology, and will be geared to the standard of development of the particular country. In cases where there is little mechanization, the course will be relatively simple, becoming more detailed as mechanization increases. Basically, the course will deal with farm machinery, building construction, roads and bridges, etc.

### **Field experience**

In many countries, an extension worker can graduate from his academic course with no knowledge of practical work. In other cases, extension workers believe it is undignified to do menial tasks in the field. A well-organized training course for prospective extension workers should emphasize the necessity for these people to have adequate practical skills. Farmers are acutely observant and can soon see whether or not an advisor has practical experience. He must be able to show farmers

how to do a particular job, and be prepared to get his hands dirty. Practical experience is essential if he is to put down demonstration areas - farmers will be watching him closely as he does this work, and will at once notice if he cannot do the job properly.

It is unfortunate that a great many extension workers, particularly in developing countries are people who have been forced into extension because they have been unable to join the staff of a research organization. In many cases they are resentful and do not provide a good service. Extension must never be regarded as a career for weaker or less able persons. On the contrary, the teaching personnel should insist that everyone graduating from the extension course be well suited for this class of work. Examination must never become the sole criteria in assessing the merits of students. The progress of students must be continually checked, and those who show deficiencies or persistent lack of confidence must be encouraged to overcome these handicaps. The training of any unsuitable student should be terminated.

The ability to memorize data has no importance compared with the ability to understand and apply technical data, and to know where and how to obtain this. All phases of the course must emphasize the need for student to critically examine and evaluate facts. Students must never be judged solely on their examination results. Before their final examination, all prospective extension workers should be evaluated by the staff of the faculty in which they have studied for their aptitude for extension work. Only those who measure up to a high standard should be permitted to graduate.

It is not possible to give firm figures for the time that should be spent in each of the sections in the training course, as this will obviously depend upon the needs of an area in terms of its development. However, it is considered that the following allocation of time may assist planners when they are designing a course for extension workers.

- a. Motivation - 20% of the total time.
- b. Extension - 20% of the total time.
- c. Technology - 40% of the total time.
- d. Practical work - 20% of the total time.

It is again emphasized that these figures are only guidelines, and must not be regarded

as being inflexible recommendations.

It has already been stated that a great many extension workers throughout the third world have poor qualifications for the work they are doing, often little more than a high school diploma. These people may be greatly helped if they are enabled to attend regular training courses. The content of these in-service courses should be along the lines suggested for the course for students wishing to embark on an extension career, although the apportionment of timing for each section may differ according to circumstances.

It is also suggested that an indoctrination course be held for new recruits entering an extension service. This course need not necessarily be of lengthy duration, but it will serve to introduce them to some of the people with whom they will be working and enable them to feel that they are part of a team helping farmers. Further courses can be held at a later stage, if their controllers find that their knowledge is weak in certain subjects. Supervising officers must make sure that young extension workers are competent in all phases of their work - special training must be given to strengthen any weaknesses.

### CONCLUSION

To conclude, the following points are to be emphasized:

1. Agricultural extension deals with people and trainees must be taught how to approach farmers with sympathetic understanding.
2. The role of women in extension must be recognized. Throughout Asia, women are

deeply involved in the agricultural pursuits on the farm, in many cases to a greater extent than their menfolk. It follows that, in such cases, they are the ones to whom extension services should be given. Therefore, there is a place for women in extension work, not only in rural sociology and its correlated subjects, but also in giving agricultural advice to farmers' wives.

3. Extension workers must be professionals, and have a professional approach to their work. This entails thorough training, adherence to high ethical standards and regular refresher courses to keep them abreast of new developments.
4. Planners must be made to realize that highly trained extension workers are capable of developing unexploited resources for the benefit of the whole country. Because of their training, they will also be able to assist in preserving natural resources which may otherwise be plundered by selfish individuals.

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