

Digitization of technical assistance and agricultural extension services in the Southern Cone (D1460)

Description:

Digital and mobile technologies are redefining education and training, including rural extension programs across the globe. Access to technologies and availability of digital contents gained even more momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic. Early in the lockdown, CEPAL had already identified a 62% increase in on-line education when comparing website visits and use of applications in the first and second trimesters of 2020 in a sample of five Latin-American countries, including Argentina, Brazil, and Chile.

In isolated efforts, many extension agencies in the region have started to include digital components in their rural extension programs. However, there are still no clear strategies and tools in place to design, implement, and evaluate hybrid extension services that combine both in-person and digital interactions. This may be because there are not many experiences and they are very recent, thus the available empirical evidence is thin. For instance, in 2021, the Chilean institution in charge of rural extension (INDAP), forced by COVID-related restrictions, had to design and implement for the first time a nation-wide digital program to train farmers. This was a challenge for the institution both in terms of having the necessary internal skills to design and implement it, as well as reaching farmers in remote areas with weak connectivity.

Existing empirical evidence shows that digital extension (in general through mobile phones) generally has positive impacts on farmer knowledge, correct fertilizer use and crop selection. This literature is mostly focused on basic mobile phones that only allow for SMS communication. Very few studies have evaluated the impact of alternative digital technologies requiring smartphones, which are being rapidly adopted in rural areas in the region. Many of these studies also show low levels of farmer engagement with digital agricultural extension technologies and fail to find sustained impacts on adoption of recommended agricultural practices and yields. Furthermore, the evidence of the impact of hybrid extension models (in-person and digital) is basically nonexistent. This thin evidence demonstrates the large potential of contributing to enlarge the experience and knowledge of the public agencies in charge of extension in the Southern Cone, where public extension services are still strong and could gain a lot from exploiting the advantages that digital tools bring, in particular as a complement to in-person services that may allow for more farmers to be reached and more sophisticated services to be offered.

The **general objective** of this proposed Technical Cooperation is to strengthen the capacity of Southern Cone countries to develop digitalized strategies of intervention in agricultural technical assistance and rural extension.

The **specific objectives** are:

1. To analyze the status of digitalization of agricultural technical assistance and rural extension in the Southern Cone.
2. To propose updated and implementable strategies on the digitalization of agricultural technical assistance and rural extension.
3. To strengthen the international collaboration of agricultural technical assistance and rural extension agencies in the Southern Cone.
4. To allow for innovative, focalized strategies in technical assistance and extension that target specific population groups, in particular women.

Submitted by:

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Status:

Under Evaluation

Category:

Client Support

Tags:

Team Leader Name

Paolo De Salvo

Has the proposal been discussed and authorized by the responsible sector or country department/division, as applicable?

Yes

Team Leader Responsible Department

CSD

Are there specific countries that will directly benefit from your proposal?

Yes

Mark the specific countries that will be directly benefited from your proposal?

Argentina

Brazil

Chile

Paraguay

Uruguay

Where applicable, describe how the proposal aligns with the respective country strategy (for each country selected)

The proposed initiative is aligned with Paraguay's country strategy in its area Adequate insertion of the country in the world: Promote the international commercial insertion of companies.

It is also aligned with the Country Strategy of the IDB with Argentina, as it contributes to three of its four priority areas: (i) poverty reduction and social protection for the most vulnerable, (ii) economic recovery and productive development 4.0, and (iv) digital transformation as a crosscutting contributor to development.

As for the Country Strategy of the IDB with Brazil, the proposal is aligned with the following priority issues: Promote international and national integration to boost productive capacity; Build a more effective public sector that promotes fiscal sustainability; and (iv) Reduce social inequality and inequality of opportunity by enhancing public policy efficiency.

Moreover, the proposal is aligned with the three strategic areas of the IDB Country Strategy with Uruguay: (i) public resource management; (ii) sustainable productive development; and (iii) equity and social inclusion.

Finally, the proposed TC is aligned with the first pillar of the strategic approach of the IDB Country Strategy with Chile: stronger investment and enhanced productivity.

Does the proposal align to one or more sector frameworks?

Yes, the proposal aligns with at least one sector framework

Identify and describe how the proposal aligns to the sector framework(s)

This proposal is aligned with the Agricultural Sector Framework Document (GN-2709-10) in all of its four challenge areas. The first challenge is to boost production to feed a growing population. The products of this TC will help governments develop effective and efficient tools to improve farmers productivity. The second challenge is to reduce the impact of agriculture on the environment. Agriculture and land-use change (which is primarily driven by agriculture) account for 42% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in LAC (3.5% of global GHG emissions). The proposed initiative will reduce the emissions related to agricultural technical assistance by enhancing digital, remote tools that will reduce the need for physical displacements. The third challenge consists of reducing poverty and inequality in the sector. Addressing poverty for agricultural producers requires boosting their productivity and reducing their vulnerability. Digital technical assistance tools to improve their productivity and income are therefore directly related to this challenge.

Select the regional challenges and cross-cutting issues to which the proposal aligns to

Productivity and Innovation

Economic Integration

Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

Gender Equality

Diversity

Justify the alignment to each selection above

The TC is aligned with the following development challenges:

- (i) Productivity and Innovation, by strengthening public capacity to provide effective agricultural technical assistance that contributes to increased productivity and adoption of innovative technologies and practices by smallholder farmers in Southern Cone countries, while optimizing public investment in assistance that addresses common needs; and
- (ii) Economic Integration, by strengthening international collaboration between Southern Cone countries regarding the provision of effective technical assistance and sharing knowledge and experience over the development and delivery of digitalized assistance and extension.

The TC is also aligned with the following cross-cutting themes:

- (i) Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability, by promoting the use of digital tools for technical assistance that are considered more environmentally friendly by reducing transportation costs and encouraging the adoption of climate-smart agricultural technologies.
- (ii) Gender Equality, by developing digital technical assistance tools designed for female smallholder farmers that can disproportionately benefit from this means of delivering agricultural information and assistance.
- (iii) Diversity, by developing digital technical assistance tools designed for indigenous smallholder farmers.

What is the estimated funding that you need in order to implement this proposal?

500.000

Select the expected outputs of this proposal

Upstream strategies, action plans, etc.)

Policy Dialogues

Events (other than policy dialogues)

Knowledge Products

Pilot Interventions

Please provide a brief description of the output(s) selected above (The number of units planned, and the estimated cost). If you selected others, please specify.

Products and Estimated Cost (US\$)

1. A (1) mapping of existing technical assistance and agricultural extension initiatives that include digital tools in the countries of the Southern Cone, identifying those that have evaluations. \$60,000
2. At least three (3) diagnostics (one per country) that identify the needs and demands of the target population of producers, in a context of digital transformation of technical assistance and rural extension, with a particular focus on female and indigenous farmers. These will include the design of tools for collecting information from beneficiaries. \$200,000
3. At least two (2) plans for hybrid extension models and the design and implementation of at least two digitalization projects for technical assistance and rural extension and their evaluation. \$200,000
4. Five (5) virtual workshops (one per country) and one (1) face-to-face international event for the exchange of information and activities for sharing findings and coordination between technical assistance and agricultural extension agencies of the Southern Cone with an interest in promoting the use of digital tools. \$40,000

Outcomes: If the outputs are delivered successfully, what is the change expected (in capacity, knowledge, behavior, etc.)

In at least two of the countries of the Southern Cone, updated and implementable planes on hybrid agricultural technical assistance and rural extension are approved by the respective authorities.

(1) Attachments

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0 Comments