



RELASER

Red Latinoamericana para Servicios de Extensión Rural



THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF RURAL EXTENSION AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE RELATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA¹

* By Enrique Alarcon²

- Given the importance of agriculture and the rural medium for countries' growth and development, policy makers must strengthen the institutional structure of rural extension and increase public and private investment.
- Abundant natural resources, knowledge, technology, and extensionists are not enough. Countries also need policies, institutional frameworks, and solid management that link the local to the national and vice versa for the development of extension.
- The classical function of extension of "extending" knowledge and technologies and mainly working on aspects of production and education is being complemented by other needs and functions that go beyond the agricultural sector. The presence of these inter-sectoral functions merits the development of new institutional structures and skills.
- Institutional innovations for extension in a context of agricultural and rural innovation should consider the micro, meso, and macro levels. Failing to recognize them will lead to incomplete and unsustainable models and innovations.
- Technological innovation as a "new paradigm," grounding chains and territories, is an area for focusing effectively and comprehensively processes of research, technology transfer, and extension services which in the past, have been linear and disconnected.
- The public sector must return to its role as the entity responsible for promoting technological change through extension as a public good. However, public-private efforts must be deployed that can result in semi-public and private goods.
- The differences between countries and situations mean that no single model of extension can be applied to every context, even within a single country. It is, however, important for decentralization to reach the territorial level and for producers to participate in the configuration of services and take control over their selection.

(1) This Policy Note benefitted from the collaboration of Emilio Ruz and the coordination of Francisco Aguirre, researcher at Rimisp, the Latin American Center for Rural Development, and Executive Secretary of the Latin American Network of Rural Extension Services (RELASER).

(2) Alarcon, of Colombia, is an Agricultural Engineer who holds a M.S. and a Ph.D. from Cornell University (U.S.A.) in genetic improvement and agricultural production. His areas of focus include policies, planning, organization, and management of research, technology transfer, and technological innovation at the regional and national levels in the Americas. He is the former Director of Research and Technology Transfer of the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA) and has served as a professor and Country Project Coordinator with the World Bank. Alarcón has authored and co-authored 110 articles related to his fields of work.



The Issue, Opportunities, and Policy Options



Photograph: © Flickr - Rimisp

The current context, which is characterized by global economic recessions, food security problems, an energy crisis, and drastic climate change as well as other problems, has a significant impact on developing nations such as those of Latin America. **Though agriculture and rural territories are also affected by these changes, they have an enormous potential to confront the crisis. It has been shown that agriculture is a sector that makes an important contribution to the economy, and in many Latin American countries, it is the main employer.** In spite of this, there are important challenges to be faced. The main ones are associated with the contribution of agriculture to improving the availability and diversity of food with adequate quality and safety levels and nutrition; increased productivity; better positioning of producers and products in the markets, particularly small-scale producers and family businesses; facing the effects of climate change; and developing productive systems based on friendlier patterns in terms of the environment and access to natural resources.

There are routes to facing the challenges imposed by the situations described above. One of the most important is through technological change derived from research, extension, and innovation, variables that are becoming more important and strategic for growth and development. There is a new interest in repositioning and strengthening rural extension, which has become considerably weakened and has nearly disappeared over the past few decades. The Ministers of Agriculture of 34 countries in the Americas issued a statement during their October 2011 meeting in Costa Rica in order to promote agricultural innovation. They also made a commitment to promote investment in order to generate new knowledge and strengthen extension systems.

In the past, the main purpose of extension was to “extend” knowledge from research towards the countryside. **Today, the practice includes new demands and roles in view of the changes that have taken place in the national and global context and inter-sectoral development goals.** There is a need for groups interested in rural extension to jointly develop new visions, **new policies, and institutions empower producers through their technical services.**

The current institutional structure is weak, as is funding for extension with few exceptions. The options for change must be based on a clear political will expressed in plans and development programs that go beyond short-term governmental periods in which agriculture appears on a first level, along with rural life and services for the most vulnerable and needy sectors, such as Small-Scale and Family Farming (SSFF). Rural extension becomes particularly important in this context. The need to strengthen it must be addressed by high-level policy decision makers and other stakeholders linked to financing, national legislation, and normative frameworks that will be applied to the new institutional structure.

In order for this to occur, in addition to the results of the impact of extension, lobbying strategies must be



designed along with ongoing **lobbying, awareness raising and social communication actions by those who are responsible for designing policies and implementing them.** This implies conceiving of a new institutional structure that:

1. Promotes the development of a new paradigm based on technological innovation and, in that context, focuses extension and encourages innovative leadership at all levels and in all agencies;
2. Develops extension services as public goods without excluding the option of semi-public and private goods;
3. Comprehensively coordinates and develops research, development, extension, and innovation processes that usually appear as fragmented in the countries;
4. Facilitates innovation processes with a territorial focus, understood as formal and informal systems of rules that condition organizations' actions;
5. Promotes network processes for the organization and management of chains of value, agro-ecosystems, and territories;
6. Integrates stakeholders and capacities of non-public organizations and civil societies. Privileges strategies that are cooperative in nature and that create or strengthen spaces for exchange and decision-making that include stakeholders in the territory who are committed to the issues of the rural sphere (councils, committees);
7. Establishes national and international platforms that facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge generated based on collective public policy design processes, among other aspects. The challenge is also how to introduce those changes and policies and

instruments that bring about effective and efficient management of new institutional arrangements and the resulting processes.

The Road Traveled and the Road Ahead

In the 1950s, public agricultural extension was mainly handled by units of the Ministries of Agriculture. During the first decade of the 21st century, prices and volatility have increased in the food market around the world, and countries have experienced serious economic crises and devastating natural disasters. Specifically, **problems of food security, the volatility of the prices of agricultural products, and climate change have caused agriculture to once again position itself as a motor of development. A new interest has developed in repositioning research and rural extension and paying attention to Small-Scale and Family Farming (SSFF).**

The challenges of agriculture and the rural medium are not limited to issues of production. The solution to the issues that affect them is not only related to agriculture, but to various other sectors. **As a result, the classic function of extension –that of working mainly on aspects of production and education- is being complemented by other demands. These include mitigation of environmental impacts, sustainable management of natural resources, management issues for farms and agricultural businesses, new forms of associations among producers, the search for added value to primary production, handling the new demands of new markets in terms of product quality and safety, and positioning SSFF in the markets.**

The design of new policies and institutional innovations at the micro level within organizations; the meso level among stakeholders, and the macro level at the level external to institutions, policies, roles and incentives in which extension performs, is an urgent need.



Extension must be developed under the paradigm of technological innovation, and it must be understood that this occurs when there is social appropriation of knowledge and/or they are carried into the market. **This implies that extension focus on responding to demands, increasing the participation of producers at the epicenter of decisions, and ensuring the empowerment of extension services.** Responding to this complex context requires that extensionists and farmers develop new skills, handle institutional plurality, and build a social fabric based on networks of stakeholders.

Extensionists can act as agents, promoters, or managers of innovation and learning. In short, extension should be an instrument that promotes collective action through platforms of knowledge and coordination that facilitate innovation in the territories. Latin America and the Caribbean is a laboratory of experiences with rural extension and technical assistance models and programs. The work upon which this policy note is based references the main modes of extension in the region and includes the analysis of four experiences from Mexico, Peru, and Argentina from the institutional perspective (see insert). The experiences reviewed point to the need for improved design of policies related to extension and the development of a new institutional structure for it and its management.

Some of the proposals are related to the following:

- 1.** The design of institutional structures that provide an environment for the joining of public and private forces rather than only including public ones;
- 2.** The adoption of the paradigm of technological innovation, bringing it to territories and value chains, as we have seen in the case of INTA for the development of apiculture that also facilitated the coordination of research and extension, processes that are also highly segregated in most countries;
- 3.** The organization of clusters of agricultural services in the rural context, including financing, in order to complement extension efforts and improve the

impact of extension;

4. Inclusion of policies and instruments for institutionalizing the evaluation of multi-dimensional impact (economic, environmental, social and institutional, and policy) in national systems, programs or extension projects. There is a huge vacuum in the region, and they provide important inputs for decision-making processes including the continuity, closure or opening of programs.

5. Procuring the institutionalization of extension and technical advising services oriented towards the creation of national extension services with broad local coverage, as is observed in the experiences implemented in Mexico over the years.

6. Increased investment in extension. If extension programs are implemented using external resources from multilateral agencies, the State must provide institutional sustainability once said funds are no longer available;

7. Policies and instruments that promote markets for extension and technical advising services with the active participation and empowerment of producers, as has been the case with INCAGRO-Peru.

8. Latin America and the Caribbean have a wide range of extension services. National and regional policies aimed at strengthening extension services should include reciprocal cooperation from countries in order to promote better international relations, interaction with other regions in the world, and the mobilization of international technical and financial cooperation resources.



Photograph: © Flickr - Rimisp, Apiculture



Rural Extension and Institutional Structure: The Analysis of Four Experiences

- 1.-** Review of Extensionism in Mexico by Rafael Zabala, Specialist in Rural Development and Territorial Management for IICA in Mexico

Accumulated experience based on the evolution of rural development policies. The country as a generator of extension models. Private services with public payment. Towards a national extension and innovation system. Promoting university extension. Diverse national strategies and programs.

- 2.-** The Experience of INTA in Argentina in the Construction of Institutional Structure by Julio Catullo, National Director of Transfer and Extension, INTA

Over 50 years of history. Research and extension under the same roof. Strategic contexts of extension: Sustainable rural development and technological innovation for competitiveness. Grounding in rural territories.

- 3.-** Promoting Markets of Innovation Services: The Experience of INCAGRO-Peru by Hugo Wiener, former Technical Director of INCAGRO and Professor at the Universidad Católica del Peru

A new approach. Public-private links. Orientation towards demand. Competitive financing. Introduction to the concept of innovation in the country's agrarian agenda. Plans for services and businesses. Small-scale production. Institutional fragility.

- 4.-** Strengthening Apiculture as a Tool for Development in Argentina by Enrique Bedascarrasbure, Center for Agro-Industry Research (INTA)

Chain of value that contributes to development. Chain-territory coordination. Technological innovation approach. Extension research and innovation links. Capacity building under the network of territorial technicians. Links to markets, positive multidimensional impacts.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Agriculture is a sector that impacts nearly one third of countries' GDP and has recovered its importance in Latin America. The problems and opportunities on which research and extension must focus have changed and involve various sectors. With very few exceptions, rural extension continues to be weak, lacking in institutional strength, and under-funded. This has created a need to develop a new institutional structure for rural extension while avoiding the trap of attempting to apply a single extension model in spaces that present diverse conditions.

Several recommendations have been developed for strengthening the institutional structure. These include:

- The development of a shared vision of agriculture and the rural medium from the perspective of rural extension with the participation of different public and private interest groups from the areas of science, technology and innovation, education, rural development, non-governmental organizations, agro-business, producers' associations, agricultural promotion foundations, and others. This vision is shared in fora and discussions and is a basic input for the design of institutional policies and innovations and strategic alliances under larger common purposes.
- Developing rural extension in accordance with a technological innovation approach that is grounded

in value chains and territories in order to respond to producers' technological demands, particularly those of SSFF and their links to the markets and the promotion of the connection between research and extension.

- Promoting and creating an environment that is conducive to agricultural and rural innovation and the development of national and local technological innovation systems in order to allow rural extension services to become a key facilitating element.
- Establishing a strategy for "selling" rural extension and advocacy of policy decision makers regarding the importance and impact of rural extension as part of management actions based on social communications strategies and instruments and a wide variety of mechanisms and media.
- Overcoming the lack of evaluations of the multidimensional impact (economic, social, environmental, and institutional) of rural extension as a basis for reforms and improvements.
- Allowing the countries to serve as organized spokespeople on the concerns and needs of agriculture and the rural medium from the perspective of rural extension and technical advising services in the context of international initiatives such as GFRAS, GFAR, CGIAR, the World Bank, IFAD and the IADB as well as multilateral technical cooperation and financial agencies with a presence in the region, among others.



Photograph: © Flickr - Rimisp



RELASER

Red Latinoamericana para Servicios de Extensión Rural



Recommended Reading

- Alarcon, E.; Ardila, J.; Jaffe, W.; Gutierrez, M.; Linares, T.; Solleiro, J.; Salles, S.; Lindarte, E.; Villegas, M. 2000. (Technological Innovation for Technical Change in Agriculture: Frame of Reference for Action). San Jose, CR. IICA. Serie Documentos Técnicos. 35p. (Available in Spanish and English).
- Catullo, J. 2011. (The Institutional Aspect of Rural Extension in Southern Latin America- Spanish language document.). Seminario Internacional INTA-PROCISUR. Institucionalidad y Dimensión Ambiental de la Extensión Rural en Latinoamérica. 7 p.
- Christoplos, I., Sandison, P., y Chipeta, S. 2011. Guide to Extension Evaluation. GFRAS. 48 p.
- Gonzalez, H. 2003. (Situation and Perspectives of Rural Extension Programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. Some Recommendations for Policy Formulation-Spanish language document.). Proyecto ESAS/LAC
- Rivera, W., Qamar, M.K., y Crowder, L. 2001. Agricultural and Rural Extension Worldwide: Options for Institutional Reform in Developing Countries. FAO. Rome. 49p.
- Swanson, B. 2008. Global review of good agricultural extension and advisory practices. R&E Division, NRME Department and PARM Division. FAO-Rome. 64 p.
- Salles, F. 2007. (Concepts, Policy Elements, and Regional Strategies for the Development of Institutional Innovation). San Jose, CR. IICA, FORAGRO, GFAR. ISBN 92-90-39-778-0. 79 p. (Available in English and Spanish.)
- Wiener, H. 2010. Promoting the Market for Agrarian Extension Services in Peru. Research and Extension Project- Spanish language document). INCAGRO. 111 p.
- World Bank. 2006. Institutional Innovation in Agricultural Research and Extension Systems in Latin America and the Caribbean. 57 p.

RELASER – Latin American Network for Rural Extension Services, contributes to improving the competitiveness, sustainability, and equity of agricultural and agro-food sectors and the rural territories that surround them through the strengthening of rural extension as a part of an innovation system. Its purpose is to create mechanisms for collaboration and spaces for dialogue and learning that allow for the strengthening of rural extension systems in Latin America through cooperation and the exchange of information and knowledge.

Executive Secretariat
Francisco Aguirre
secretariared@rimisp.org

For more information:
Monica Maureira M.
mmaureira@rimisp.org
Communications Coordinator
Rimisp – Latin American Center for Rural Development



Cita / Citation:

Policy Notes- The Institutional Structure of Rural Extension and Public-Private Relations in Latin America / Notas de Políticas – Institucionalidad de la Extensión Rural y las relaciones público-privadas en América Latina
RELASER – Latin American Network for Rural Extension Services
Rimisp – Latin American Center for Rural Development
February 2012
Santiago, Chile

© **Rimisp- Latin American Center for Rural Development**
Casilla 228-22
Santiago, Chile
Tel + (56-2) 236 45 57
www.rimisp.org