

IFA International Workshop on Effective Last-Mile Delivery 10-12 February 2010, New Delhi, India

Transcript of the discussions during the Panel and Closing Sessions

Discussions during Session 4

Q1: Why extension systems have not performed as expected?

- Not enough qualified people.
- Lack of motivation.
- Product-based/sales-driven approach rather than a service-oriented one.
- Lack of resources.
- Inconsistent messages between public and private sectors.

Q2: How are expectations established for specific extension systems? How does one determine what needs to be transferred for a specific region/location?

- Recommendations at the farm level require a lot of interpretation.
- Chemical and physical analysis of the soil is not necessarily a key component of precision farming because soil testing is not precise in many cases. Other means than soil testing can provide better information.
- How to measure efficiency of an extension approach? Very hard to measure progress in extension and development (many activities result in responses that are not tangible). Tendency to use business processes to try measure public good changes, but very difficult to achieve. Many extension services have disappeared in developed countries because they could not justify themselves in times of budget cuts.
- Governmental extension often measures success through the number of meeting conducted and the number of farmers attending these meetings rather than looking at true impact/adoption.
- In some cases, farmers receive questionnaires to assess the performance of extensionists.
- Much work in extension is qualitative and difficult to measure. Target achievements can be quantified however. Farmers' adoption can also be measured.
- Some benefit shall be seen. Extension cannot be seen as only a cost to the company. It is as much an input to improve business from a company perspective. Companies need specific targets, and specific purpose why to do it. This gives automatically the measurement we are looking for.
- There is a need for measurable targets and clear indicators, but these may differ between the public and private sectors.

Q3: What can be done differently to improve delivery performance?

- Why things need to be different in Africa? And what needs to be done differently compared to Asia? Public extension staff is well trained but poorly motivated. Agro-dealers fill the gap (they are more motivated). The Green Revolution in Asia was driven by government interest. Possible in Africa, e.g. Malawi. Much more variable and complex cropping systems in Africa than in Asia.
- Contract farming works in Africa not because delivery of knowledge is so much better but because a series of services are kept in one hand (knowledge, inputs, credit, guaranteed market). This is much more than providing extension services.
- In Malawi, there was guaranteed access to inputs, and a guaranteed output market.

- Linkages in Africa (between farmers and the markets) are much weaker than in Asia. The challenge is more about creating these linkages than delivering best management practices.
- The agro-dealer should be the person every farmer would like to go to to get all the services (inputs, advice, credit...).
- Poor motivation, corruption, lack of trained staff, absence of market are constraints in Uganda and many other African countries.
- The Green Revolution in Asia was in favourable environment (no water constraint). In Asia, there are also large rainfed areas, which have not benefited from the Green Revolution. Difficult challenge for unfavourable environments. If the private sector comes in a big way, things will move.
- The massive scale of investment in irrigation infrastructures made a huge difference in Asia.
- The free flow of innovation in Asia is also a major difference vs. Africa. There were no boundaries at the time of the Green Revolution in Asia. Things are moving much more slowly in Africa.
- Farmers' organization models can work well if linked to the market, and can perform as well as contract farming.
- What is the role of the government? Provide massive extension, or complement what can be provided by other stakeholders?

Q4: What are the key issues to pay attention to improve last-mile delivery (LMD)?

- Develop qualified much larger work force on the ground.
- Use local languages to disseminate knowledge.
- Address agricultural and social needs.
- Identify the partners from different sectors.
- Maintain two-way communication with the farmers.
- Need to be accessible to the farmers: simple language and simple messages.
- How to reach successfully the farmers without much investment.
- Dedicated/motivated extension workers.
- Current extension models have to change to create motivated, dedicated and qualified workers. The need is clear, but how to do it?
- Need more interaction between the partners (research, extension, farmers).
- Extension should respond to the needs/requirements of the farmers.
- Might need form of subsidy at the beginning to finance the mechanism, but it shall be progressively phased out.
- Solution is site-specific (depends on the typology of farmers).
- A lot of information is available, but lack of synchronization between the partners → divergent messages to the farmers.
- In some countries with large commercial farms, farmers fund the extension workers. Farmers drive the agenda and become owners of the system. Might be worth to try such system in Asia. But how to do it with one-hectare farms?
- Better train few motivated farmers than many little motivated: prefer quality to quantity.
- Little hope to improve governmental extension because of lack of incentives.
- Many farmers' organizations in Africa vs. Asia.
- Should move from the mentality of free services. If there is a value for an entrepreneur farmer, he will pay for the service. Quality of service is the critical point. There must be accountability if the service is charged. In public systems, there is no accountability for services on the ground.

Q5: How to scale up successful models?

- What level of interaction an extension worker can do? 500 to 1000 farmers per worker depending on the areas in Asia. In horticultural crops, it is much less: 50-60 farmers per worker.

- The number of people we need on the ground is not that big. In India, one needs to reach ~100 million farmers → 500,000 workers needed if one assumes that a worker reaches 200 farmers. 500,000 workers is not much for a country like India.
- The issue is more about effectiveness than the number of farmers reached.
- Harmonizing information/data among the many agencies/organizations involved in extension is critical. It must be avoided that farmers receive different advices. How to create a common pool of information for a specific region and specific crop (basic agronomy)
- Does the private sector in India contact the public sector to join hands? There is no consultation process, while there would be major benefits in complementing each other.
- Can we use the input dealers to scale up the process of knowledge delivery? Yes, but knowledge must be validated through some form of certification.
- Input dealers have usually a low knowledge in Africa. The shop keepers are more in contact with the farmers than the agro-dealers themselves (they are doing business in town).
- In Ghana, a standard curriculum has been developed for the shopkeepers and the input dealers. Those who have successfully followed the training receive a certificate. Very effective model.
- Agro-dealer certification has to be mandatory.
- Scalability is only possible if we develop entrepreneur farmers.

Q6: How to take benefit of new technology platforms?

- Information and communications technologies (ICT) platforms are to supplement, not supplant physical extension systems. Cannot replace direct interaction with the clients.
- Can we develop a common platform rather than multiple platforms?
- In Africa, the main problem is access to hardware (inputs) rather than using ICT. It is still an issue in some areas in India.
- Only way to deliver real-time information to millions of farmers.
- Main issue is the quality of the content.
- Will need some consolidation between communication providers and content providers.
- Can a 'wiki' approach be a model for keeping up-to-date relevant site-specific information?
- Future ICT will facilitate social networking among farmers. Could develop a model based on social networking that would generate site-specific information, but questions of trust are involved. Could be used also among farmers to exchange views on products. It is a good way to get feedback from the farmers. Could be used to eliminate some of the adulterated products sold in Africa.
- The peer behaviour is the most effective in changing farmers' behaviour. Social networking could also play a very powerful role.
- Social networking is also very useful for sharing local real-time prices among farmers.
- Promotes democratization of information.

Recommendations of the Working Group on Asia

- **Essentials of LMD:**
 - 2-way communication
 - Engagement has to be long term
 - Our message needs to be targeted
 - Use peer learning/experience concept to multiply the usage
 - ID partners who can work together
 - Combining agricultural advice with social issues in the farming community
 - Solutions have to be customized
 - Participatory approach – including farmers from the beginning

- Broad **policy level interventions** which could impact on LMD: a) broad policy level with multiple partners; b) IFA initiative; c) member initiatives
 - **Pools of knowledge** – how do we gather a common message for a region/locality so that we have quality information which is consistent. Upgrading/updating information – harmonized message. Also provides a sharing of information.
 - **Consortium of stakeholders (including farmers, input suppliers, etc)** – Framework for coming to a common consensus on an issue by all interested stakeholders.
 - **Capacity building** – input dealers and certification programs (CCA program) for both agronomists and field assistants. Also “progressive” farmers who can act as an effective change agent in their community. Organized farmer groups to spread messages.
 - Digital mapping of land resources
 - Common platform for using ICT to influence both farmers, as well as policy makers
- **Method of gathering information** on what farm clients are asking for. Is there a way for us to gather this rural appraisal information (felt needs)? Where do we get this information? Who has this information?
 How do we create a successful model for gathering farmers’ needs? After a technology has been launched, how is it being used, received? Use of good ICT systems currently working in communities?
 How do we pilot some of these projects?
- **IFA document a set of success stories** (case studies) on how LMD was effectively implemented. Include steps to success for others to consider. To develop a set of suitable public-private partnership models which have been successful.
- IFA consider collecting information and documenting **successful demonstration programs** in agricultural communities. This would include not only the project, but how the outcome is communicated to the local farmers. Scale factors need to be addressed.
- **Modernization and mechanization** – how can these be used to help with the LMD?
- **Agri-Wikipedia**
- Using **students to educate farm families**, improving the appreciation of agriculture, as well as build a future workforce. This could play an important role in building support for the industry in rural communities.
- **Women farmers** – how effectively are we communicating with this major group of farmers? Improving the knowledge of your audience.
- **Producer company/organization** – a special interest group (crop, water, inputs, etc) who can be targeted with information.

Discussion:

- Case studies: Why should it be IFA that would document the success stories instead of the individual organizations themselves? Basic information on the IFA website with links towards websites with more detailed information. The objective is to have one spot with multiple examples.
- Agri-Wikipedia: For the same area, we can have multiple advices, sometimes contradictory, from different agencies. IPNI, IPI, extension agencies... are all doing something, and communicate through their websites. Is it possible to create a common pool of information for extension workers? It is a huge task but needed for consistency of messages.
- There will always be competition at the micro (local) level in terms of products (even if the range of fertilizer products offered to the farmers is limited), but knowledge should be common.

Recommendations of the Working Group on Africa

- **What works**
 - Technologies are often available – other factors limiting (Malawi subsidy model)

- Strengthening farmer cooperatives (technical / managerial)
- Large scale demonstrations (seeds, fertilizers, ISFM)
- Small packs (seeds, fertilizers) – lower entry points for farmers
- Agro-dealer development – ‘the last mile is done by the farmer’
- Bring other actors into the system (transporters)
- Adding value (grading, packaging, processing)
- Multiple investments are needed simultaneously
 - extension improvement
 - PO strengthening
 - input market linkages, dealer development
 - access to finance
 - access to output markets
- A blanket approach will often not work – better to go for 1000's of pockets of excellence
- Don't expect change to happen overnight
- **Drivers**
 - Market has to pull the change
 - Governments fully committed, favorable policies (Malawi)
- **Commonalities**
 - There has to be an urge (famine, market etc)
 - Technologies have to be available (and often are)
 - Infrastructure (roads, warehouses, physical markets)
 - Policies need to be conducive
 - There has to be money – financial sector

Discussion:

- Need to define sub-region-specific priorities for LMD in Africa vis-à-vis the size and heterogeneity of the region (different levels of infrastructures, different crops...).
- For private sector involvement, focus on trans-boundary agricultural development corridors rather than on individual countries. In the rest of the region, governmental intervention is needed to link the farmers to the market.
- Role of NGOs in LMD in Africa: Myriad of NGOs operates in Africa; many of them have little technical expertise, and coordination among NGOs is weak. What to do to prevent confusion? Research organizations and extension agencies disseminate different messages sometimes within uniform areas (within or across countries). Too many actors in Africa with poor coordination is a major concern. If the farmers receive many divergent messages, they are unlikely to change their practices. Coordination is urgently needed.
- In many places, NGOs are the only organizations involved in extension. NGOs should be encouraged to contribute, but minimum criteria should be defined (e.g. certification scheme, similarly to crop advisors and agro-dealers).

Priorities for action

David Bergvinson:

- Keep messages simple and focused: If there are too many messages, then farmers may get confused about what is relevant for them.
- Right knowledge at the right time, through the right source of information, with the right feedback.
- Recommendations have to be location-specific (e.g. using postal codes like Nokia system).
- Broad partnerships and consistent messages are required.

J.K. Ladha

- Quickly replicate and scale up successful delivery models, while ensuring the quality of content.
- Develop vision/business model to quickly move to next level of public/private partnership.
- Prepare new generation of agriculture work force (future extension people and agro dealers).
- Develop new irrigation/water management practices: no breakthrough can be achieved without better water management.
- Integrated crop and resource management/conservation agriculture to manage labor shortage and resource deterioration.

Bernard Vanlauwe

- A lot of things have to happen simultaneously in Africa (e.g. lack of infrastructures in many places, even for the first 100 miles).
- Aggregate N use efficiency is low in most countries (need right seed with right fertilizer, right management).
- Don't forget neglected crops; they also respond to fertilizer.
- Need to be site-specific to avoid total failure due to input misuse.
- Last-mile delivery is not only about knowledge; it has to take into account access to the hardware (seed, fertilizer...). If farmers don't have access to inputs, better don't talk about them.
- Need proper information packaging so that farmer can easily understand messages.
- Capacity building of the LMD people (agro-dealers, NGOs, extension staff).
- Need cost:benefit of the different LMD approaches. Which ones are the most cost-effective?

Georges Dimithe

- Build agro-dealer network: They should be able to link the farmers to inputs importers/suppliers. Because they are closer to farmers, they can also provide technical services. They would complement 'traditional' extension services.
- Bringing the market equation: Be able to link farmers to the market.
- Use ICT to disseminate information/knowledge.
- Need to improve coordination between the different stakeholders (including NGOs and donors) as nobody can succeed in isolation. Public-private partnerships to scale up successful initiatives.
- Need to find a way to attract the young generation in farming (aging farming population).
- Success is highly dependent on government commitment (security, peace, good governance, appropriate policy, reduced fiscal burden, infrastructures...).

B.B. Singh

- Need to have similar kind of discussions within companies or national associations.
- Need to define who the farmer customers are: Know the farmers whom we sell inputs and services (segmentation).
- What are we delivering? When delivering products, the knowledge and responsibility in delivering the product are imbedded. When delivering services, it goes one step beyond: knowledge plus responsibility plus accountability. It is why the degree of difficulty in delivering services is higher than in selling a product.
- Mechanization (even small-scale mechanization for small farms) is a big necessity. Need to find solutions for small farms.
- Need to customize the products and services: If the farmers find the customized solutions convenient, they will no doubt ask for them.
- Need to form farmers' interest groups (associations, cooperatives...). Creating clusters of farmers is very important to improve LMD in case of millions of farmers.

- Any ICT device (internet, mobile) should be used. Anything that is internet-connected, that is wireless will work in rural India. This is future.

Discussion:

- There is a need to customize both products and knowledge. If the level of awareness of the farmers is high, customization of the product shall take place at the farmer's level.
- Is a multi-stakeholder approach contradictory with customized solutions? If the farmer has a certain level of awareness, he can buy the service and the knowledge; if not, he can only buy the product.
- If services and knowledge are provided in a customized and timely manner, farmers are ready to pay for it since there is an economic return with a positive cost:benefit ratio.
- The ICT is making a quantum leap in terms of possibility of services. But the Syngenta approach shows that simple tools can also achieve a lot provided there are massive investments.
- The Asia and Africa packages are very different. Infrastructures and market are clear differences, but the main one is probably water.

Closing remarks by Rajiv Sinha

- Getting this diverse audience around the table was a challenge, and is a milestone in itself.
- No such forum exists in India, and there has not been much debate about it.
- Need to transform the manner in which extension services and knowledge has been reaching farmers. There is a scope for doing that.
- There is a need for massive scale-up, for much better training, for customized approaches, for understanding how ICT can help better disseminate knowledge.
- There is a need for accountability in delivery of the last mile. There is also a need for accountability in what the IFA task force will deliver.
- Try not to attempt too much because it is a first initiative. Need to limit our specific expectations. We need to work together to define, prioritize, lay on timeframe for implementation.
- We need actions that can come on ground, and not only stick at the level of a nice set of ideas.
- Problem in Africa goes well beyond extension → need to distinguish the two regions.
- Many models will evolve in this process. We have to work together, including with the farmers. How do we create this partnership? How to bring ICT companies together in order to avoid a multitude of platforms?
- The workshop is a commencement, not an end. There is a need for a follow-up, and the follow-up has to come quickly.