

Stakeholder Processes for Reviewing Extension Systems: comparative analysis of three country experiences

May Hani, Magdalena Blum, Abdoulaye Mbaye, Aliou Diop

Office of Knowledge Exchange, Research and Extension (OEK)

Research and Extension Branch

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Tel: +39 06 570 56178, Fax: +39 06 570 56178

Email: may.hani@fao.org;

Email: magdalena.blum@fao.org

Abstract:

National extension systems in many developing countries have declined over the last couple of decades due to lack of political and financial support, reduced investment, attrition of human resources and physical infrastructure, and lack of clarity on the roles of the public extension institution *visa vis* other stakeholders and service providers. Challenges facing the food and agriculture sector, and recent recognition of the vital role of small producers in achieving food security, are urging governments and their development partners to reassess extension and rural advisory services and support their reform and renewal, while recognizing the roles of multiple service providers and various stakeholders. FAO designed stakeholder processes for the assessment and review of national extension systems, which involve the multiple actors in reviewing the existing system and developing a new design and proposal for its renewal. The process puts emphasis on stakeholder dialogue and participation, and farmers' involvement, considering factors of pluralism and demand-driven services. The paper describes experiences from three different countries: Lebanon, Mauritania and Niger. It examines the country-specific processes applied, the roles of the various stakeholders involved, including FAO's role, and the conditions which influenced the process in the different countries. It provides a comparative analysis of the 3 cases, the methodologies applied and results achieved, as well as future prospects. The paper concludes with lessons learned and success factors for change towards renewal of national extension systems.

Key words: Extension reform; stakeholder dialogue; policy advice; pluralism; demand-driven services; change strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

National extension systems in many developing countries have declined over the last couple of decades due to lack of political and financial support. Public investments in agricultural extension has fallen radically over the years, along with low priority attributed to agriculture in the development agenda by governments and donors. This resulted in a deterioration of the former public systems, including shortage of operational budgets, lack of programmes benefitting smallholders, attrition of trained human resources and crumbling physical infrastructure. On the other hand a plethora of actors emerged, from the civil society and the private sector, providing advisory services to farmers; with sometimes lack of clarity on their roles *visa vis* the public advisory institutions. In addition, in many countries, producer organizations (POs) developed which increasingly influence agricultural policy, including research and extension, and which themselves provide services to their fellow farmers.

Challenges facing the global economy and recurrent food crises have revived interest and support to agriculture as a key driver in the battle against hunger and poverty. This renewed interest in agriculture for development, and recognition of the vital role of small producers in achieving food security are urging governments and their development partners to reassess extension systems and their agricultural and rural advisory services and support their reform and renewal. In doing so, a number of questions emerge.

- How to avoid mistakes of copying ready models from outside that prevailed in the past and ensure that advisory services respond to the needs and demands of smallholders?
- How to enable farmers to participate in assessing the existing system and contribute to the design of a new system that matches their needs and aspirations?
- Who are the key players in today's rural advisory services?
- What are the roles of the various stakeholders and service provider, public and non-public, in future extension systems?
- How can accountability to smallholders and their organizations be achieved?
- How can POs be involved in governance and decision making of the new extension systems?

The paper aims to answer these questions by looking at experiences from three different countries, Lebanon, Mauritania and Niger, where FAO has facilitated the review of the existing extension systems and the development of proposals for their renewal.

2. MATERIALS, METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

To assist countries in developing sustainable advisory systems, FAO designed stakeholder processes for the review of national extension systems, which involve the multiple actors in assessing the existing system and developing a new design and proposal for its renewal. The process, developed and modified according to the context of each country, puts emphasis on stakeholder dialogue and participation, and farmers' involvement, considering factors of pluralism and demand-driven services. The objective was to develop country-specific systems that build on existing stakeholders' capacities, and ensures farmers participation in the review/design process and give farmers a voice and a decision making role in the future advisory system. National strategy documents, statistical data and former evaluations of extension informed the process and provided general guidance in all countries. FAO provided first hand support to the methodology and implementation of the stakeholder processes in the three countries.

This study undertook a comparative analysis of the 3 cases, examining the country-specific stakeholder processes applied, the roles of the various stakeholders involved, including FAO's role, and the conditions which influenced the process in the different countries. The paper describes the processes applied in each country, roles of the various stakeholders, similarities among the 3 cases, specificities, difficulties encountered and mitigation actions. It identifies strengths and weaknesses, and draws lessons learned as well as implications for the future/ future processes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The national extension systems in the countries under study have declined over the years for varying reasons. Weakness of the public extension services and socio-political changes prompted the involvement of multiple actors in providing advisory services to farmers. However, more often than not their efforts were fragmented, with little coordination among them and limited effectiveness. The respective governments have recognized the negative impact on small producers who constitute the majority of farmers in those countries. Farmers and their organizations, as well as other civil society actors advocated for support to smallholders and better advisory services. As a result, recent National strategy documents gave the priority to reorient and strengthen advisory services and called for immediate action.

3.1 The starting point

The public extension system in **Lebanon** has diminished as a result of the long civil war (1975-1991), while multiple non-public service providers have made proactive yet fragmented efforts to fill the gap. Lebanon's Agricultural Development Strategy (Strategie de Developpement Agricole du Liban, Janvier, 2004) identified priority areas for renewing the extension system, focusing on building partnerships with public and private sector actors towards a decentralized and pluralistic approach in the delivery of services. Accordingly, the Government of Lebanon requested FAO assistance in reviewing its existing system and developing a viable new system.

In contrast, **Niger**'s agricultural extension system has declined following the end of the "Training and Visit" Programme funded by the World Bank up to 1998. The review and implementation of an integrated advisory system for rural development was identified as a priority area for public action within the framework of the Rural Development Strategy (Stratégie de Développement Rural, 2006). In response, the Government of Niger requested FAO to assist in this task in collaboration with a national steering committee set up for this purpose.

Likewise, in Mauritania the national extension system has gradually deteriorated in the late 1990s with the end of the T&V system. Today, the system is characterized by the coexistence of different approaches developed by the local projects without any significant impact. The national paper on the Status and Prospects of the Agricultural and Rural Sector in Mauritania (2007), and the Rural Development Strategy 2015, identified several strategic directions aimed at strengthening the agro-pastoral production and productivity. As part of the strategy implementation, and following a series of study tours to Mali and Senegal, farmers recognized the need for, and requested FAO to assist in renewal of the extension system as well as the formulation and implementation of a new advisory system.

3.2 The process

In all three countries, FAO reviewed the requests received from the governments, which mostly focused on the public sector, and introduced an integrated approach that includes all stakeholders and advisory service providers from public, private, NGOs and particularly farmers and their organizations. This integrated approach recognized the reality of multiple service providers being active in extension and influenced substantially the outcome of the process as this ensured that they were considered in the new design of the advisory system. The core process of reviewing the extension system has mainly three parts: 1) analysis and assessment of the present extension system; 2) designing a new advisory system, and 3) developing a proposal, including resources requirement. Measures were taken to ensure active participation of all stakeholders concerned throughout the process.

In **Niger**, all three phases and their methodology had been developed from the very beginning and had been approved by the National Steering Committee (NSC), which was composed of representatives of all stakeholders (including POs and donors). This allowed more effective planning and avoided questioning of next steps. The reports of each phase were reviewed by all stakeholders and approved by the NSC, before continuing the process. A parallel process of strengthening farmers' organizations was introduced to enable them to understand their roles and responsibilities in an advisory system and to contribute fully to the stakeholder process and the future demand-led advisory system (Blum and Mbaye, 2009). Consultants from the public sector, NGOs and POs were trained to gather the required data and statistics, to facilitate the core process and to apply the tools developed. This core process involved intensive stakeholder consultations and particularly regional workshops with farmers for the analysis and gathering of new elements required for the new system. A farmer leader accompanied the parallel process with the producer organizations in support of their participation in the core process.

In **Lebanon**, a step-wise process was designed at the start and implemented to analyze the situation and advise the design of the new system. The designed methodology was discussed with and validated by all stakeholders at the inception workshop. Steps undertaken were: review of the existing public extension system through desk study and structured interviews; field studies to assess farmers' needs, interests and expectations, and a survey of key stakeholders and service providers; analysis of various scenarios for the future system; and development of the reform proposal. Stakeholders were involved from the first steps through consultation workshops, national forums and individual meetings. Representatives of NGOs, farmers' organizations, private firms and foundations participated in consultation workshops to discuss the design of the process, validate the results of field studies and survey, examine the various scenarios and contribute to the development of the proposal for the future system. Despite the repeated and long interruptions of the process due to the 2006 war and following events, the stakeholders' interest, support and engagement in the process were maintained.

In **Mauritania**, the process builds on the Niger experience and consisted of two parts: participatory diagnosis which allowed identifying main farmers' organizations and their satisfaction with present services as well as a description of their demands and vision of the new system. It also helped to analyze the historical course of the various advisory systems in the country, identify and assess the various public and non-public structures and the human and physical resources available. This step is followed by the development of a proposal for a new advisory system that takes into account farmers' demands and the pluralistic nature of the supply side. The process is still ongoing, and the proposal will be validated with the stakeholders at central and regional level soon.

3.3 The role of the various stakeholders in the review process

Despite specificities of the 3 cases, the roles of the various stakeholders had many similarities. For this reason, an overall description of these roles will be provided, highlighting only specificities related to individual countries where applicable.

Governments: provided broad policy guidance through their national strategies for agricultural development, requested technical assistance for developing a new advisory system and ensured

participation and contribution of relevant officials throughout the process and an enabling environment by supporting the involvement of public and non-public stakeholders.

In **Lebanon**, the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) set up a project task group involving several departments to supervise and facilitate the process. The head of the extension department served as the project coordinator. Likewise, **Mauritania** set up a monitoring committee involving several branches of its MoA; whereas in **Niger** the government supervised the process through the Secretariat of the Rural Development Strategy. In addition, the National Steering Committee, composed of representatives from each stakeholder group, gave the final approval of each phase in the process. The Government will ensure support in the future for the implementation of the developed proposal starting with a testing phase.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): participated in the design and validation of the future advisory system, participated in the stakeholders' workshops/meeting and actively contributed to the consultation process. They partake in delivering advisory services and have expressed their active engagement in a pluralistic system. In **Niger**, NGOs participated in the consultations and in the National Steering Committee; whereas in **Lebanon**, over 30 NGOs participated in the stakeholders' survey and expressed their interest in collaborating with the public extension department in delivering advisory services in areas of their expertise. In Mauritania, NGOs were involved in the analysis and design of the new system supporting pluralistic advisory services. Their role is envisaged to be progressively more important.

The private sector: the role of the private sector varied in the 3 countries, despite some basic similarities. The private sector actors are mainly input suppliers, whose main role is in the commercialization of inputs and agricultural equipment. In **Niger**, the role of the private sector was weak. Private service providers engaged in development projects participated fully in the process. Only very few input supply companies exist in the country because there is little profitable market as subsidized fertilizer is provided by government. Hence, private firms serve only a few sectors. Their role in the future advisory system in Niger is foreseen mainly in water-related services, farm management and commercialization of agricultural products and processing.

On the other hand, input supply companies and private foundations in **Lebanon** are actively involved in providing advisory services to small producers through their technical staff/salespersons. Representatives of private foundations and input supply companies participated in the process, and expressed their interest and openness to new partnerships within the future advisory system. In **Mauritania**, private companies are the main suppliers of inputs and agricultural equipment and they are seen as the backbone of development and modernization of agriculture in the county. However, their involvement in the review process was limited.

The donor community: As with the private sector, the role of the donor community varied. In **Niger**, the donor community participated in all steps of the core process in the framework of the SDR and the National Steering Committee, and provided support to the process approach along the lines proposed by FAO, although with some bias towards the Chambers of Agriculture over the FOs. Likewise in **Mauritania**, donors participated in the validation workshops and related studies and were interested in the process and its results. On the other hand, in **Lebanon**, donor support to extension was generally fragmented into components related to subject matter training of extension staff under specialized projects, with little attention to developing institutional capacities or renewal of the advisory system.

National consultants: their roles were to facilitate and inform the process, collect and analyze data, organize the consultative workshops, and assist in developing the proposal. In **Niger**, the national consultants represented the various stakeholders. 5 consultants were designated by their respective Ministries, while the 2 consultants working on the NGOs and the POs side were selected based on their qualifications, yet in agreement with the NGOs and POs. In **Lebanon** and **Mauritania** the national consultants were independent, selected by FAO through an open competitive process.

3.4 The role and inputs of FAO in support of the process

FAO support started with revising the requests received from the respective governments, which mainly focused on the public extension system. FAO reoriented the process towards an integrated approach that includes public and non-public stakeholders and advisory service providers within a pluralistic framework. Features of demand-driven, market-orientated advisory system were introduced. It sensitized senior government officials, national project taskforce or national steering committees and national consultants to the new vision of pluralistic and demand led advisory system. In **Niger** and **Mauritania**, FAO provided stepwise training to the national consultants with regards to the new vision as well as on the methodology and their facilitation role and tasks along the process; while in **Lebanon**, the international consultant recruited by FAO provided hands-on support to the national consultants at critical intervals during their assignments.

In all cases, FAO guided the methodology and implementation of the process, and provided the technical and financial support. It provided technical and methodological backing to the project consultants and committees, clarified roles and responsibilities, and supported the development of assessment tools for field investigations. The core process that FAO developed and implemented in the 3 countries emphasized the participatory and consultative approach that involves all stakeholders throughout the process as well as the crucial role that producer organizations play in the process as clients as well as service providers. The draft reports and proposals were relayed to all stakeholders and their views and inputs were incorporated in the final proposal. In **Lebanon**, FAO designed and conducted a field assessment that covered all agro-ecological zones and different production systems, in order to further ensure that views and needs of different types of farmers were reflected in the new proposal. FAO organized a national forum involving representatives of all stakeholders and service providers, farmers' organizations and individual farmers to validate the findings of the field assessments, identify the roles of stakeholders in the future system, and reflect on the main elements of the proposal. In **Niger**, beside stakeholder consultations with each category of service providers, workshops were held at regional level with farmers in which they articulated their assessment of the present and their expectations of the new system. In addition, FAO introduced a process to reinforce the capacities of POs so that they can better articulate their priorities and understand their future role in the new system with respect to decision making, service provision as well as monitoring and evaluation.

3.5 The role and inputs of the Producer Organizations

The role of the POs greatly varied among the three cases. In **Mauritania**, the POs (men's, women's or mixed) were the first to point out the inefficiency of the existing advisory system and demand fundamental changes. Following study tours and exposure to experiences in Mali and Senegal, they aspired for a participatory approach and renewal of advisory services. The POs advocated for change at all levels, and asked for FAO assistance in designing and implementing a new advisory system in Mauritania. They actively participated in the validation workshops and formulation of the new proposal. POs also took part in various meetings to design the advisory units according to agro-ecological and administrative zones.

Likewise, in **Niger** the POs' representatives participated in all steps through their membership in the National Steering Committee and their own workshops. They also put pressure to establish a demand driven system and contributed to its development. In 2008 during a POs audience with the President of the Republic, they expressed their vision for an advisory system based on farmers' demands. This has changed the attitude of the government officials and their openness to a central, empowered role for POs in the advisory system. Farmers and their organizations participated in a series of workshops that resulted in developing a bottom-up approach through which producers and their organizations can express their priorities and in foreseeing a development fund that will be entirely managed by the POs and their federations (Blum, M. and Mbaye, M. 2009).

In **Lebanon**, individual farmers and representatives of POs participated in all steps of the process. They participated in all workshops and national forums and contributed to the assessment of the advisory system and validation of the new proposal. However, it was noted that the majority of POs in Lebanon were reportedly weak or ineffective and did not have a representative body/federation at national or regional level. The new system puts emphasis on working with POs to develop their capacities for articulating their demands for services and undertaking a prominent role in the implementation and monitoring of the new system through membership in joint extension committees at local and regional level.

3.6 Data favouring/informing the proposal development

The national policy papers and strategy documents, mentioned under section 3 above, provided overall guidance and a sound basis for renewal of the advisory system in the respective countries. In addition, a number of national studies and policy documents have informed the discussions and stakeholders' consultations and workshops and provided insights on national priorities and policy directions. **Mauritania's** sector policy documents (livestock, irrigation) elaborated sector constraints, needs, priorities and strategies at short and medium terms; whereas **Niger's** National Census of Agriculture and Livestock of 2007 provided information on the typology of production in the different regions, size of the population involved in the production of different commodities, data about the POs and the NGOs involved in the agricultural sector and their distribution in the country, and the production and yields of the different commodities. This provided a frame for the advisory services based on the agro-economic activities in the different zones.

Similarly, the Agricultural Atlas of **Lebanon** provided vital information on the size of holdings, agricultural production, farming systems, population active in agriculture, infrastructure and other, according to the agro-ecological zones and administrative boundaries. Building on this

information, a mapping exercise was undertaken at Caza level (smallest administrative unit) to complement the new proposal and facilitate the design of location-specific advisory services based on the common production and farming system, existing infrastructure and size of holdings.

4. EXPERIENCE AND PROCESS EVALUATION

The country-specific processes responded to different contexts in the respective countries. The process encountered varying difficulties, and demonstrated specific strengths and weaknesses in each country. The table below provides a brief comparison of the difficulties encountered, strengths and weaknesses of the process implemented in the three countries.

	Niger	Mauritania	Lebanon
4.1 Difficulties occurring in the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservatism and resistance to open up and consider a pluralistic demand-driven advisory system. • Delay of the process due to the secretariat of SDR leading the process being overloaded with political and administrative responsibilities. • Weakness of national federations of POs and rivalry among them. • Weak analytical level of national consultants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of data for diagnosing the initial situation. • Shortage of time prevented the three consultants from each visiting the three project regions. • Geographic coverage limited to three agro-ecological zones and each covering 4 neighboring regions. • Only the most representative POs were selected for participation in the national workshop, while all the central administrations from the public sector were represented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • War in 2006 and events that followed disrupted and delayed the process causing repeated interruptions and several changes in project consultants. • Several ministerial changes during the lifetime of the project. • Weakness of the majority of POs and lack of federations of POs that would represent farmers at national level.
4.2 Strengths of the processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firm commitment of the national government and SDR secretariat. • Representation of all relevant stakeholders groups in the NSC. • Implementation of specific capacity development process for strengthening farmer organizations in articulating their position and defining their role in the future advisory system. • Implementation of the process in the framework of SDR which regroups all sectoral ministries, NGOs and POs. • Strong participatory process involving NGOs and POs, • Strong commitment of POs and their federations in the process including contributions to financing it. • Presence of NGOs in areas affected by food crises allowed to foresee them as future advisory services providers in these regions. • The legal framework in Niger allowed a pluralistic advisory system as extension services are not described as a public good and are open to all providers. • Regular consultations with and feedback to the donor community in the country under the umbrella of the SDR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment of the Government to support advisory services and to involve civil society (NGOs, POs, etc). • Strong involvement of the POs in the process, the request for the new system comes directly from them; • Agreement between the PO's request and the Government / MoA, to improve the situation of the rural advisory service in Mauritania • Participatory process involving the participation of NGOs and PO's • Involvement of NGOs and POs in advisory services and POs in local development plans. • Existence of a vibrant network of NGOs, some of which have a proven track record of business and advisory services. • Existence of a network of microfinance institutions, specifically geared towards supporting Income Generating Activities (IGA) for women. • The inclusion in the proposed new system of Capacity development for PO's. • The existence of several umbrella programmes in agriculture and livestock. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment of the Government to strengthening extension services in the country focusing on small farmers. • The process started in response to felt needs and a participatory dialogue initiated by the MoA. • Participatory process involving the participation of civil society • Existence of a dynamic network of NGOs and private firms that have long experience in advisory services. • Presence of NGOs and private firms and foundations in all vulnerable areas. • The participatory process and national consultations were complemented with detailed field studies, needs assessment of farmers, and a survey of service providers. • The inclusion in the proposed system of capacity development plan for all stakeholders, including POs and advisory services providers.

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">4.3 Weaknesses of the process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The assessment of farmers' needs and priorities was based on consultations and workshops with farmers, but not on a systematic assessment. ● The request focused on the advisory system, but did not consider the research and the rural education systems that need also be reviewed. ● The participation of POs in the process needed support, often lacking the capacity to follow up complex issues and not being informed about new developments in advisory services. ● Insufficient experience of most NGOs in agricultural and rural advisory service, as most of them are specialized in emergency and remuneration activities. ● The different roles of POs and the Chambers of Agriculture are not perceived by most stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The needs assessment was based on interviews and discussions with farmers and POs and not on a systematic analysis. ● Lack of experience of most NGOs in specific activities of advisory services (training, awareness, facilitation, etc.). ● Weak linkages and consultation among the different national federations ● Weak management capacity and organization of the POs and federations. ● The structures of agricultural education and research systems need to be reviewed and strengthened to support a sustainable and effective advisory system. ● Design of the new advisory system still to be approved in a stakeholder meeting. ● Funding a pilot phase of the new system not yet secured. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited budget for the process which was provided through a FAO TCP modality, exacerbated by the need to overstretch it over a longer period of time due to the repeated interruptions mentioned above. ● Fragmented donor support to the extension system in the form of short term technical training for extension staff under projects rather than long term support to institutional strengthening. ● No donor identified yet to fund the pilot phase for the new system. ● Weak organizational status and severe understaffing of the public extension department ● Weak involvement and contribution of the national research system in the process.
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Results/outputs of the process (including elements of the future advisory system)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Design of a pluralistic and demand-led advisory system. ● Development of a proposal for the new advisory system with focus on smallholders in the various agro-ecological zones, including budget and plan for implementation. ● Coordination mechanisms at all levels. ● Development of a mechanism for defining POs' priorities and for expressing and negotiating their demand for services. ● Establishment of a development fund plan which is managed by POs to finance their activities. ● The review of the research system in the country was included in the proposal. ● The pilot phase is already under way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Design of a pluralistic and demand-led advisory system. ● Adjustment of the scale, organization, and the profiles of the advisory services to the different agro-ecological contexts in the country. ● Creation of a coordination platform. ● Introduction of a participatory bottom-up process which includes the formulation of POs priorities and demands for services and small projects. ● Management of these small projects by the POs; creation of committees for the selection and approval of these projects and its funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Development of a proposal for a pluralistic, demand-driven advisory system. ● Development of a legal framework to facilitate implementation of the proposal. ● Preparation of elaborate cost calculations and proposals for short and long term funding of the new system. ● Development of maps at Caza level detailing infrastructure, agricultural activity, crop diversity, farming population and other, to facilitate the design of area-specific advisory services. ● Establishment of an extension database at the MoA, collating detailed information on the existing extension system, ongoing projects, and service providers.

5. CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Development of new advisory systems that are effective and sustainable should take into consideration the specific context of each country, including the level of structuring and organizational capacities of POs; the capacities of public, private and civil society advisory services to respond to their demands, lessons learned from the past as well as the specific agro-ecological and socio-economic conditions. The different and changing roles of stakeholders, external and internal influencing factors, and distinct strengths and weaknesses of the process implemented in each country demonstrate the fundamental need for country-specific processes that respond to the actual challenges smallholders are facing and to their priority needs, while observing common guidelines of good practice. Stakeholder participation and involvement of smallholder farmers and their organizations in the design and implementation of the process were crucial factors for ensuring ownership and commitment to results and relevance of the new system to the farmers' needs and demands.

The importance of the national government's commitment and its catalytic role in creating an enabling environment and its openness to new governance modalities and pluralistic approaches cannot be overstated. Consistent support to the stakeholder process is critical for its effective implementation and for reorienting the existing extension system towards a pluralistic, demand led and market oriented advisory system. National leadership of the process, and adequate delegation of authority are equally important factors for the smooth implementation of the process and ensuring commitment to its results and setting up of the new system. Unfortunately, change of government often constrains the continuation of such processes. Maintaining a balance between high level representation and executive and technical capacity on the government side is critical for leadership in the review process.

Farmers' participation in the process of reviewing the existing system and their contribution to, and influence on the design of the new system is often limited by their weak organization, low capacity of POs, and ineffectiveness or complete absence of national federations of POs. Measures to address this limitation should be incorporated in the design of the process. These measures should include capacity development of POs to enable them to articulate their vision of the new extension system, express their demands and undertake their role in the future system. Different venues should be sought to enhance smallholders and POs participation in the process, including formal and informal consultations, group interviews, and participatory assessments to identify priority needs of male and female producers, their interests and expectations of the new system.

Despite basic and contextual differences, the active presence of multiple players in the provision of rural advisory services along the value chain was evident in all countries under study. NGOs, POs, input supply companies, private firms and foundations are increasingly involved in the provision of agricultural and rural advisory services with varying degrees of effectiveness. Gone are the days of the public extension institution as the sole provider of extension services, and a marked move towards pluralistic advisory systems is evident in the 3 countries. With this shift towards pluralistic systems, the roles of the public and non-public service providers are changing. The public extension institution is required to play more the role of facilitating the interaction of various actors, of creating an enabling environment and supporting the development of stakeholders capacities, especially for POs. The broader framework of agricultural innovation catalyzes content and approaches and emphasizes the need to collaborate among a wide range of stakeholders.

Possibilities for increased investment in extension and different funding modalities were explored and examined in the review processes depending on the country-specific context, including government sub-contracting, co-funding and cost sharing of advisory services as well as specific funds for POs. Sustainability of funding resources is crucial to be looked at during the process in order to develop local institutions with lasting impact instead of projects with little continuity. New modalities for funding and provision of advisory services need to be developed to maximize the potential and contribution of the various stakeholders in the new system. When developing funding modalities that empower small farmers and their organizations, POs need to take a lead role, but need also to contribute financially. While it is clear that public resources are needed for non-profitable advisory services related to achieving poverty alleviation and food security, investments made in innovation systems should no longer be done without participation of the POs in decision making on how these funds should be spent. POs need to be directly involved in monitoring the implementation and evaluation of effectiveness of the advisory services, thus ensuring accountability of service providers and enhancing the quality of services.

The proposals for the new advisory systems developed in the respective countries has taken into consideration the existence of multiple players, their new roles, and the changing needs and demands of small producers. To ensure a sustainable, pluralistic, demand-driven and market-oriented advisory system, implementation of these proposals should be accompanied by an organizational development and change management approach to support the service providers and the POs to overcome difficulties, and to enhance their capacities to meet the new challenges. An elaborate process is also needed to discuss and clarify new roles of the different service providers and POs in the new system. The role and capacity of the research system and its linkages with extension and advisory services need to be examined and integrated in the process from the start.

With the emphasis on improving market access for small producers, and calls for demand-led services, the roles of producers' organizations and federative structures also need to be elaborated and strengthened. Substantial efforts are needed for organizing small producers and developing the capacity of POs to empower them and maximize their potential in the new system. Technical and financial support to POs and their federations along the way to improve their representation capacity and empower them to influence the design of the new system, advocate for its setup, and undertake their role in the new advisory system as clients and increasingly also as service providers, contributes greatly to sustainability of the advisory system and its accountability to farmers.

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