

*Commentary*

## Overview on agricultural extension

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### DESCRIPTION

Agricultural extension is the application of new information and scientific research to agricultural operations through farmer education. The term “extension” currently refers to a broader variety of communication and learning activities for rural people conducted by educators from many disciplines such as agriculture, agricultural marketing, health, and business studies. Extension practitioners may be found all around the world, most of whom work for government agencies. Several professional organisations, networks, and extension publications represent them. International development institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization provide significant funding to agricultural extension agencies in poor nations.

#### The beginnings of agricultural extension

The location and date of the initial extension efforts are unknown. However, it is known that Chinese authorities were developing agricultural policy, recording practical knowledge, and advising farmers at least 2,000 years ago. For example, in 800 BC, the minister in charge of agriculture under one of the Zhou dynasties’ rulers organised the teaching of crop rotation and drainage to farmers. In addition, the minister leased equipment to farmers, established grain storage facilities, and provided free food during times of famine. The contemporary extension service may be traced back to events in Ireland in the middle of the nineteenth century. Between 1845 and 1851, fungal infections decimated the Irish potato harvest, resulting in a catastrophic famine. The government organised for “practical teachers” to visit rural regions and train small farmers how to grow alternate crops. This concept piqued the interest of German government authorities, who established their own system of travelling professors. The concept had expanded by the end of the nineteenth century to Denmark, the Netherlands,

Italy, and France.

#### Asia has four generations of expansion

The evolution of extension services in contemporary Asia has varied per nation. Despite the differences, a broad pattern of four periods or “generations” may be identified:

**Colonial agriculture:** The colonial powers created experimental stations in various Asian nations. Typically, the focus of effort was on export crops such as rubber, tea, cotton, and sugar. Plantation managers and major landowners were given technical guidance. Except in times of crisis, assistance to small farmers growing subsistence crops was unusual.

Commodity-based extension services arose from the leftovers of the colonial system after independence, with output objectives established as part of five-year development plans. In addition, with the help of foreign donors, numerous schemes were launched to satisfy the requirements of small farmers.

**Unified top-down extension:** The World Bank launched the Training and Visit system (T&V) in the 1970s and 1980s. Existing groups were combined to form a single national service. Messages were sent to farmer organisations on a regular basis, urging them to adopt “Green Revolution” technology. Diverse bottom-up extension: When World Bank financing ended, several nations’ T&V systems disintegrated, leaving behind a patchwork of programmes and initiatives sponsored by many other sources. The fall of central planning, along with a growing concern for sustainability and equality, has led to the progressive replacement of top-down systems with participatory alternatives.

**Extensive top-down extension:** Commodity-based extension services developed from the ruins of the colonial system after independence, with output objectives established

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as part of five-year development plans. In addition, with the help of foreign donors, numerous schemes were launched to satisfy the requirements of small farmers.

**Diverse bottom-up extension:** When World Bank funding ended, the T&V system in many countries disintegrated, leaving a patchwork of programmes and projects sponsored by different other sources. The fall of central planning, along with a growing concern for sustainability and equality, has led to the progressive replacement of top-down systems with participatory alternatives.

In certain nations, the fourth generation is firmly established, whilst in others, it has only recently begun. While it appears that participatory techniques will continue to increase in the coming years, the long-term future of extension is hard to determine. Donor agencies are currently providing significantly less funding for agricultural extension. Some researchers in this sector have lately stated that agricultural extension as a professional activity needs to be redesigned.