



From Disseminating Knowledge to Promoting Innovation:

Challenges in reforming agricultural extension

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Structure

- Agricultural Extension services- What? Why? Current status
- Changing needs of rural producers and new expectations from policy (knowledge to innovation)
- Why extension need a new framework to address the new challenges?
- Potential for using the “Innovation Systems Framework” to reform extension as an agency for promoting innovation

Agricultural Extension services?

- Organisations established for communicating useful information and advising farmers (mainly public sector, DoA)
- Emerged as an agency for communicating new new knowledge/technology
 - set up during the 60s and 70s,
 - further strengthened during the 80s as part of T&V system.
- 1990's onwards- decline in funding and manpower, several reforms in extension funding and delivery
 - cost recovery, decentralisation, privatisation, partnerships
 - Group approaches, gender, linking farmer to markets, price information
 - New mechanisms for interdepartmental co-ordination
 - New organisations in extension delivery (NGOs, input agencies, agro-processing companies, farmer associations, consultants, media)
 - **ICTs- internet (knowledge centres), mobiles (price, weather)**

Current status

- Public extension considerably weakened- Limited capacity- human resources, funding, leadership and direction
 - Private and NGO sector providing much wider range of services, but only in few pockets where they are present
 - Realisation that knowledge dissemination is necessary but not sufficient to bring about innovation
 - Better realisation on the need for a stronger and improved extension to meet the increasingly complex challenges- calls for “more extension”
 - No consensus on how the extension should be organised and what roles it should play in the evolving situation
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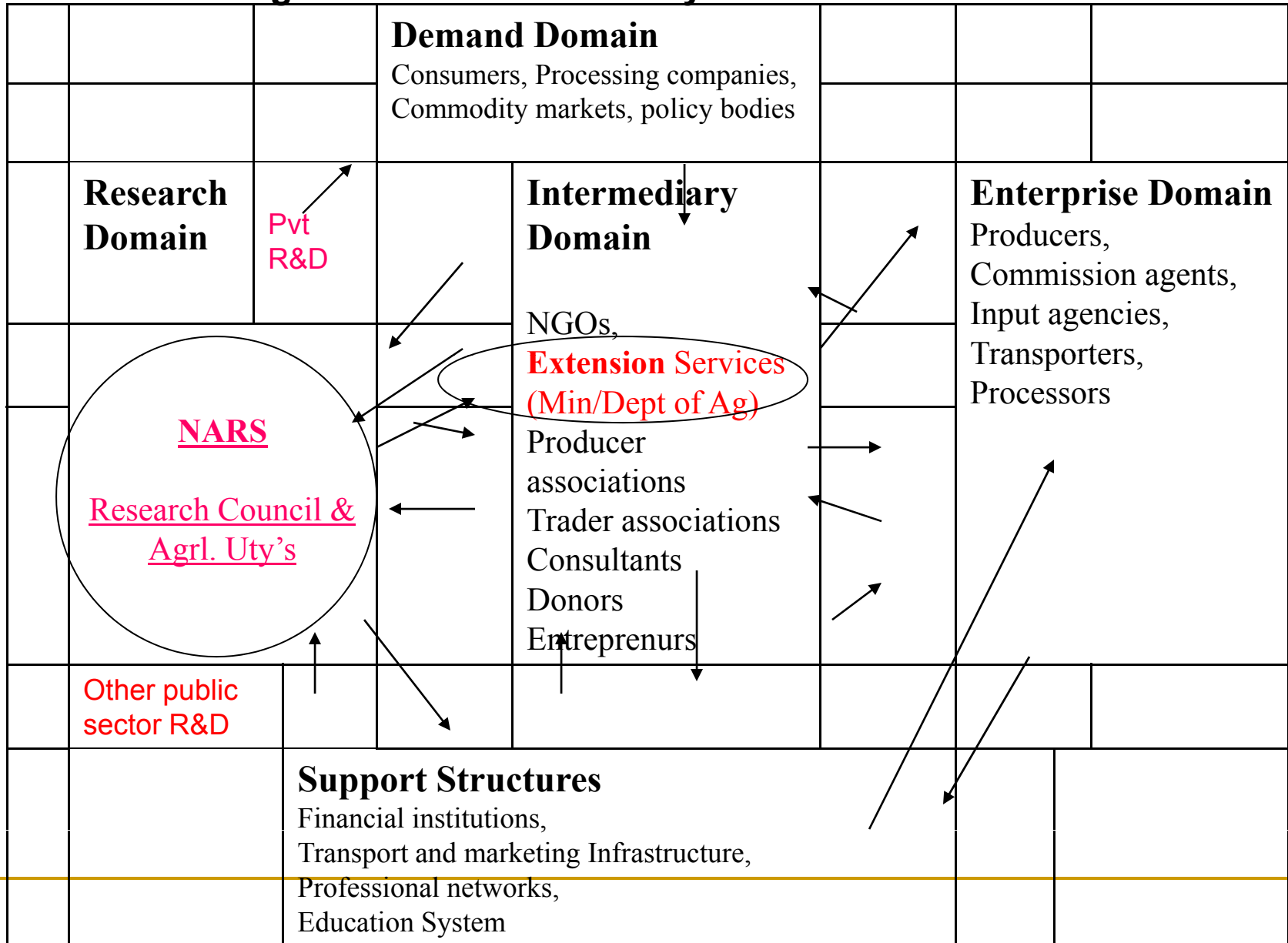
Changing need for support (producers and policy)

- New challenges- sustainability, managing CPRs, quality and standards, value addition, competitiveness, organic farming, pesticides and health)
 - Addressing these would require new forms of interaction, organisation and agreement between multiple actors
- Policy demands extension to play a much broader role—beyond technology dissemination, price information and group formation
 - Address vulnerability and poverty, environmental issues, dealing with markets, building relations with other actors [in the wider Innovation System]

Existing conceptual framework

- Diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1962)
 - Innovation- a new technology developed by research
 - Role of extension- Dissemination of new knowledge (technical knowledge) developed at the research stations
 - The linear framework (Research-Extension-Farmer)
 - Though the scope of innovation was enlarged in subsequent decades, it hasn't really affected the dominance of the linear paradigm
 - Research-Extension-farmer links only got attention, whereas extension's relationships with other actors (in the AIS) was ignored
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Agricultural Innovation System-actors



Implications of the linear approach

- Reforms often only target extension and its internal management mechanisms, whereas reforms were also due in other organisations
- Extension models were centrally introduced, stifling evolution of locally relevant extension arrangements and constraining local capacity for designing new and relevant programmes.
- Extension continues to be evaluated in terms of activities organised for knowledge dissemination
- Tradition of working independently and also mistrust of other agencies such as NGOs and private sector

Extension needs a new framework

- Beyond “invention” and “transfer” to “innovation”
 - “the process by which new knowledge is also adapted and used
 - better relate it to the increasing range of actors and understand interactions among them
 - address the institutions (habits, practices, and ways of working) that shape these interactions
 - facilitate designing new arrangements relevant to local contexts
- “Innovation systems” provides a framework that address this
 - It is increasingly being applied in agriculture in recent years

Innovation Systems framework

Main attractions

- It recognises innovation as a process of generating, accessing and putting knowledge into use
 - it is no longer a research-driven process that simply relies on technology transfer)
- Interaction and knowledge flows among different actors
- Institutions matter-shape the nature of these interactions
- Learning- as a means of evolving new arrangements specific to local contexts

IS perspectives and Extension?

- It provides a framework to identify a more relevant role for extension.
 - Extension as a “Bridging organisation”
 - Setting the innovation agenda, organising producers and the rural poor, linking the groups to different bits of knowledge, promoting platforms for knowledge sharing, building coalitions of different actors to deal with new challenges, experiment with and learning from new approaches
 - Need to partner with a wide range of organisations and also need a broader range of expertise
 - Reforms need to address some of these institutional issues that prevent it from embracing this new role

IS perspectives and Extension

- It offers insights on how to improve the capacity of extension organisations to design new and locally relevant arrangements
 - Learning based strategies to design and improve programmes
 - Enhance the capacity of the staff at the middle and lower levels to design, experiment, learn and improve locally relevant approaches
 - Broader expertise,
 - implementing a single model across a region or a country is not the way to reform extension

Implications for research and policy

- Start with a diagnosis of innovation system
 - (shift from S&T benchmarking to capacity benchmarking)
- Different innovation trajectories are potentially relevant, need more experimentation and empirical evidence on ways of strengthening the capacity for innovation in different settings
- Long term support for extension to build its capacity (10-15 years commitment)
- Support not linked to promotion of one model or approach- promote diversity and partnerships



Thanks

www.innovationstudies.org

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