Reshaping Rural Extension: Emphasizing Social Learning Processes and Stakeholder Dialogue

Innovations in Extension and Advisory Services
Nairobi 15-18.11.2011

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Reshaping Rural Extension
Learning for Sustainability (LforS)

An Integrative and Learning Based Advisory Approach for Rural Extension with Small-Scale Farmers

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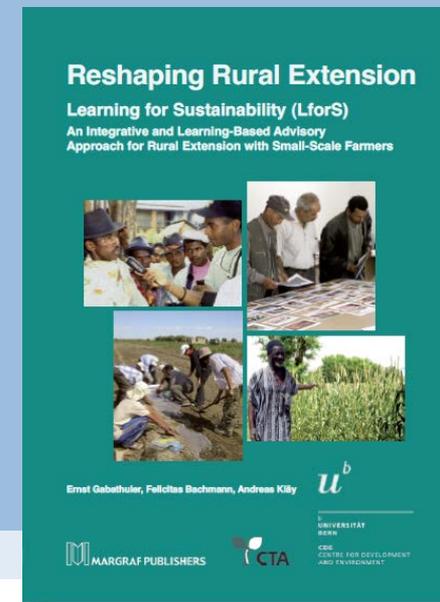
Key challenges for the design of an extension approach (1)

> Many small-scale farmer still not in position to take advantage of opportunities (market participation, access to infomration, freedom of opinion, participation in decision-making)

> Increasing marginalisation of many small-scale farmers vis-à-vis industrial scale production

> Lack of communication between different levels of stakeholders (famers, extensionists, planning authorities, sectorial agencies, NGOs)

> Barriers by difference in culture, status, hierarchies, and perceptions (local knowlege and world-view; «scientific» and external knowlege)

Key challenges for the design of an extension approach (2)

> **Stakeholder dialogue is a possible alternative** to the prevalent top-down and bottom-up approaches. It allows endogenous and exogenous problem-solving approaches as well as options for using existing potentials and new opportunities to be discussed, decided upon and coordinated with local actors.

> **Social learning processes** that build on the knowledge and experience of those doing the learning strengthen mutual trust and cooperation between involved actors as well as group competence. The role of the extensionist as a facilitator of autonomous learning processes and a transmitter of new knowledge must be adapted to the new challenges.

The Learning for Sustainability (LforS) advisory approach sets new priorities:

> Market orientation, yes – but more emphasis on subsistence-oriented production is needed.

> A livelihood approach is crucial, as farms, households and communities closely interact and investments at either level will have effects on the other.

> Striking a balance between productive and reproductive extension themes.

> As decision-makers, small-scale farmers need to be oriented towards complex and changing framework conditions.

> Promotion of social and collaborative learning processes and strengthening of group competences of local actors.

Principles of the LforS approach

> Social and collaborative learning in multi-stakeholder learning groups

> Active and situated learning

> Consideration of community and farm level

> Enabling self-determined acting

> Developing problem-solving approaches at the local level

> Creating extension client's ownership of extension themes and organisations

Goals in LforS learning process

> Making the points of view and specific interests of involved actors transparent and thereby strengthening mutual understanding and trust

> Promoting common understanding of problems and developing common problem-solving approaches

> Learning from mistakes and using them as a motivation for making improvements

> Anchoring ownership and accountability for implemented measures among the actors involved

> Strengthening independent and accountable action taken by involved actors

Learning for Sustainability (LforS)

LforS is an integrative, learning-oriented extension approach using

> *Stakeholder dialogue,*

> *Knowledge management,*
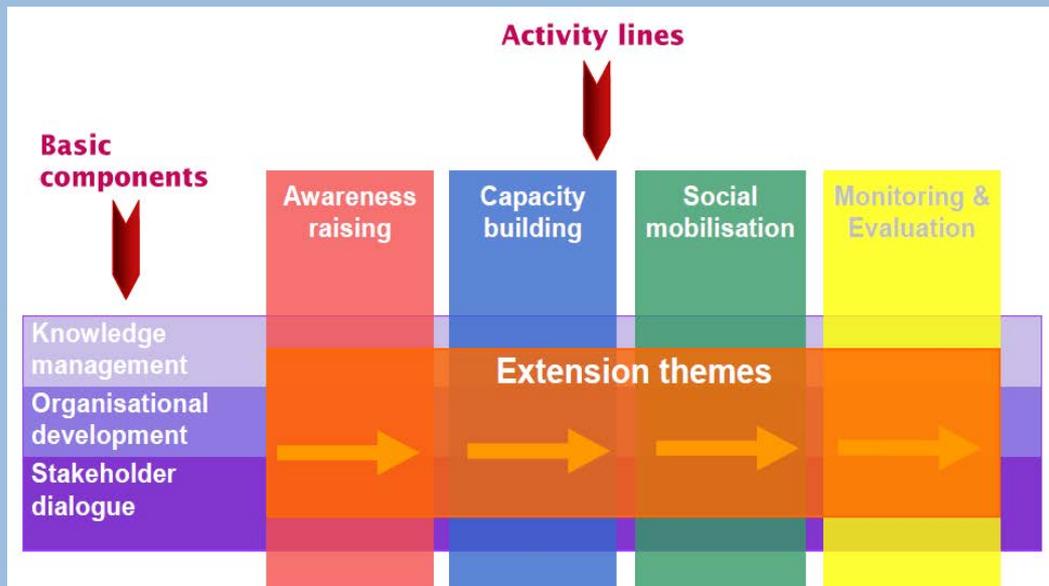
> *Organizational development*

→ Basic components
Activities persued during entire extension cycle, independent of specific themes

as a basis on which specific activities for:

> *Awareness raising*

> *Capacity building,*

> *Social mobilization*

> *Monitoring & Evaluation*

→ Activity lines
are developed.

ACTIVITY LINE 1

Awareness raising

Goals

- Develop common visions

- Foster common understanding of problems

- Discover interconnections and dynamics

- Develop common problem-solving approaches

Tools and methods

- Simulation and learning games

- Diagnosis of cycles (e.g. water cycle)

- Vision mapping

Simulation games – a tool in LforS

- CONMICOM – Conflict Mitigation in Communities
- Local Natural Disaster Risk Management
- Livelihood Strategies & Community Development
- Sustainable Pasture and Livestock Management

Simulation games …

➢ … develop social and communicative skills; problem-solving & decision-making capacity;

➢ … make different perspectives tangible;

➢ … trigger decision-making and negotiation processes;

➢ … stimulate lively and interesting discussions

In capacity building, games are used …

- ➤ … to introduce a new topic;
- ➤ … to identify key aspects for subsequent training;
- ➤ … to create a common reference framework for discussions;
- ➤ … to test knowledge newly acquired in a training.

How the games work

- ✓ Simulation of complex realities that have to be dealt with in teams
- ✓ Duration: playing 3-4 h; debriefing 1-2 h
- ✓ Moderator facilitates playing and debriefing
- ✓ Played by up to 15 people (3 teams); each team represents an actor, e.g. household, community or rescue team
- ✓ Linking different levels of decision-making: household – community - administration / government
- ✓ Framework conditions (e.g. market, climate, policy, etc.)
- ✓ Negotiation & harmonisation of perceptions and interests - within own and between different teams
- ✓ Balance between competition and cooperation

- ✓ Debriefing session → learning transfer, internalisation

Vision Mapping

Background
project to combating desertification in Mongolia,

Objectives
develop joint visions, support organisational development, to anchor ownership and develop commonly agreed solutions

Steps
- Representation of communal areas
- Identification of possible measures and solutions
- Creation of regional map in communal hall
- Technical refinement and validation by experts
- Final agreed product as basis for planning for extension activities

Vision Mapping

Vision Mapping

Experiences and shortcomings

A rich experience and practical tools are available
Learning processes and stakeholder dialogue have increasingly caught attention of researchers and development practictioners in the field of sustainable development

However, mainstreaming encounters difficulties:
- Little room in established institutions for fostering multi-stakeholder learning processes
- Practical difficulties, lack of time, funds, differences in status between stakeholders
- Learning approaches question the dominant logic of power, expertise and «scientific» knowledge

Thank you for your attention

A limited number of copies are available free of charge at the GFRAS booth

The book can be downloaded for free at:

http://www.cde.unibe.ch/CDE/pdf/ReshapingRural Extension.pdf