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Extension Policies, Policy Types, Policy Formulation and Goals

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Agricultural extension is one of the policy instruments which a government can use to stimulate agricultural development. The question is: for which purposes is this the most suitable policy instrument, and how can it be combined with other policy instruments, such as agricultural research, vocational agricultural education, the provision of credit and supplies, marketing, the organization and mobilization of farmers, and infrastructural works (such as roads or irrigation)?

GOALS

Most extension organizations try to achieve several goals. However, the emphasis on the various goals differs from country to country. An indication of this variation are the words used for extension in different languages.

The goals of extension organizations include:

- the *transfer of knowledge* from agricultural research to the farmers. This is stressed in the French word *vulgarisation* and in the term 'extension';
- *advising* farmers on the decisions they have to make, sometimes by recommending a certain decision to be taken, sometimes by helping them to acquire sufficient insight into the consequences of the alternatives from among which they can choose in order that they can make their own decision. In the UK, Germany and the Scandinavian countries one speaks of 'advisory work'; in the

Netherlands and in Indonesia we speak of *voorlichting* and *penyuluhan*, which indicate keeping a light in front of the farmer;

- *education*, helping farmers to make a decision in such a way that they are able to make similar decisions themselves in the future. This is implied in the US term 'extension education';
- *enabling* farmers to find their own way by helping them to clarify their goals and the possibilities which they have, together with other farmers, to realize these goals. The French word *animation* and the Spanish word *capitación* point in this direction;
- *stimulating* desirable agricultural *developments* as is implied by the Austrian word *Förderung* (furthering) and the Korean expression 'rural guidance'.

Which of these goals receives most emphasis depends partly on the views of the farmers on which the extension policy is based. In industrial psychology we have seen a change from McGregor's theory X towards theory Y and to some degree back again; theory X implies that workers will only work if they are forced to do so, whereas theory Y maintains that people are mainly motivated by their desire to do their job well. How much confidence do we have that farmers are able and willing to become good farmers? Farmers might react to a lack of confidence which extension workers have in them by a lack of confidence in the extension workers.

The choice of the goals of an extension service also depends on the reasons why one believes that the desired kind of modern agriculture has not yet been achieved. To what extent is this due to a lack of knowledge among farmers of the results of agricultural research? To what extent is it because agricultural research has not yet produced findings which are applicable in the situation of most farmers? To what extent are other elements of the agricultural development mix (inputs, credit, transport, markets, etc.) lacking in the villages? If they are lacking, can they be provided most effectively by the government, by farmers' organizations, or by private business?

If farmers' organizations and co-operatives should play a role in bringing part of this development mix to the farmers, then farmers should learn how to organize themselves effectively. These farmers' organizations could also play a useful role in reducing the urban bias which exists in development policies in many countries. Is it the task of the extension service to help farmers to learn how to organize themselves

effectively, or should this be a function of some other governmental or non-governmental organizations? This is a politically sensitive question, but in my opinion it is also an important question. In many industrialized countries we see that farmers' organizations, run by the farmers themselves, are playing a very important role in the economic and political life of the country. I am convinced that without these organizations the present level of agricultural development could never have been reached.

STIMULATING DESIRABLE DEVELOPMENTS

My impression is that most directors of agricultural extension in developing countries see the stimulation of desirable developments as the main goal of their extension work. To use extension as a policy instrument to stimulate these developments raises several questions:

- (1) Which developments are desirable? In industrialized countries, only about 4 per cent of the population is now employed in agriculture, and this small minority produces enough food for the whole population. Of course, it requires the use of considerable capital and chemical inputs. Should the developing countries move in the same direction? If so, how can they provide employment for those people who are pushed out of agriculture through this development?
- (2) In many countries there are large differences among the farmers in their access to resources and in education. Are the same developments desirable for all farmers? If not, which group should the extension service try to help most? This last question is often not answered by the policy makers, but it is by those farmers who ask the extension workers to help them.
- (3) Farmers are free to follow or not to follow the advice offered to them by their extension workers. They will only follow advice if they are convinced that this is in their interest. At the same time the government will only pay for the extension service from the taxpayers' money if this service contributes to changes which are in the national interest. In which circumstances does this national interest coincide with the interest of the farmers? Only in those circumstances does extension education seem to be the correct policy instrument to realize the desired changes. It can,

- for instance, be in the interest of the farmers as well as in the national interest to increase crop yields by the use of better seeds. If it is in the national interest to increase the production of export crops, but at current price levels not in the interest of the farmers, this goal cannot be realized by extension education. In several countries the extension services have been expected by the politicians to realize changes which were not in the interest of the farmers. Usually this has resulted not only in a failure, but also in a loss of confidence by farmers in their extension workers.
- (4) To what extent are the policy makers an important target group for the extension service? In order to design realistic policies, policy makers need a good understanding of the situation of the farmers and of the reasons why they do what they do. Good extension workers have much of this information, but not all policy makers are interested in learning from them.

SHOULD THE TAXPAYER PAY FOR AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION?

In many countries, governments are paying for large extension services for agriculture, but only for small extension services for small businesses. In industrialized countries we see that commercial companies, farmers' organizations and private consultants are responsible for a large proportion of the extension advice to farmers. It is therefore reasonable to wonder whether tax revenue should be used to finance an agricultural extension service.

One reason for a government extension service is the international competition which exists in agriculture, which is not present for many kinds of small businesses. Suppose that the extension service is increasing the efficiency of production, then a good extension service enables farmers to compete better with farmers in other countries. This is probably one of the reasons why the decrease in the agricultural labour force in recent years is considerably less in the Netherlands than in other EEC countries or in the US. Agricultural extension and other support services for agricultural development have enabled Dutch farmers to compete well with farmers in other countries.

Another reason why a government pays for agricultural extension is that the main effect of increased efficiency in agricultural production is not increased farm incomes, but rather decreased consumer prices for

agricultural products and less chance of food shortages or a famine. In this situation it is fair that consumers should also pay for the extension service which helps to increase the efficiency of agricultural production. The story becomes different, however, if the agricultural policy prevents this decrease in consumer food prices.

In industrialized countries the trend is for governments to supplement the extension work done commercially. This supplementation is especially needed where the interests of the commercial organizations and the interests of the farmers do not coincide. It can, for example, enable farmers to check whether they have received correct advice from a commercial company. Also, the educational role of increasing the managerial abilities of the farmers remains an important task for the government.

In many less industrialized countries, poverty alleviation is nowadays an important goal of the agricultural development policy. Commercial extension organizations are not interested in helping poor subsistence farmers. This can only be done by the government, but it requires that extension workers are rewarded for working with these farmers, who are often hard to reach. An extension service can be a means of increasing the capabilities of small farmers to compete with plantations and other large, modern farms.

STATUS OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

In many countries, agricultural extension work has a relatively low status. This makes it difficult to attract really capable staff. Agricultural faculties do not attract many of the best students, while agricultural graduates prefer to work in research, in the ministry, or with private companies rather than in the rural areas as part of the extension service.

The low status also means that the agricultural extension service finds itself in a weak position in the fight between different government agencies for an adequate budget. However, the status of the agricultural extension service is not low everywhere. In some countries the linkage of the farmers with agricultural research through the extension service is seen as an example of effective research utilization which should be followed in other branches of the economy in order to stimulate economic growth.

The status of an extension service probably depends on:

- (1) the extent to which it is seen to contribute to important societal goals. In many African countries the contribution to an increased food production is now considered to be more important than it was ten years ago;
- (2) the extent to which it fulfils this role in a professional way by using capabilities which are not available outside the extension service. This can be professionalism in agriculture, which might stimulate the service to focus on the modern rather than on the subsistence farmer. It can also be professionalism in communication strategies by which it is possible to change the behaviour of traditional farmers;
- (3) the extent to which it is well regarded by people with a high status in the society, for example, by large-scale farmers.

Research by Evenson has shown that investments in agricultural research and extension often produce a higher rate of return than investments in infrastructural works. The amounts invested in these works are, however, much larger than the amounts invested in extension and research. I am convinced that a small decrease in infrastructural investments works (e.g. in irrigation works), if used for what would be a large increase in investments in extension and research, could increase the rate of agricultural development. However, this would be the case only if agricultural extension and research are organized in an efficient way. That is not the case everywhere. Recently, we have seen that many countries have considerably increased their investments in agricultural extension by adopting the Training & Visit system. Through this system they have also tried to increase the efficiency of their agricultural extension service. Investments in infrastructural works, however, remain politically more attractive because they are more visible.

THE COMBINATION OF EXTENSION WITH OTHER POLICY INSTRUMENTS

It is clear that agricultural extension should be combined with other policy instruments to achieve agricultural development. Often, extension workers are also responsible for some of these other policy instruments, such as input supply and credit. This is now usually discouraged, because the result is that extension education is invariably neglected. It

can be delayed much easier than, for example, the supply of inputs. Moreover, extension workers can easily lose the confidence of farmers if the input supply is not well organized or if they have to force farmers to repay their debts.

However, it is relevant to ask who else can take the responsibility for input supply, credit and marketing in the early stages of agricultural development? The demand for these services is so small at this stage that it is not sufficiently attractive to expect commercial companies to provide them. Can the extension organization teach groups of farmers to organize these services for themselves? If so, how can some powerful farmers be prevented from using these organizations to exploit their colleagues? Or, can we afford to organize separate government agencies to provide these services? In either case, can we coordinate agricultural extension with the other policy instruments to stimulate agricultural development? In many countries, serious bottlenecks to agricultural developments have arisen due to issues such as these being neglected or unresolved.

In discussing the relationships between policy and goals in extension work, this paper has been able to offer few answers to the questions raised. But, it is important to bring the questions into open debate as a basis for considering the validity and value of extension activities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In preparing this paper I have profited from comments by Mr B. Huizinga and Mr M. J. Rolls on an earlier draft.