RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR STRENGTHENING LOCAL EXTENSION & ADVISORY SERVICES CAPACITY

SUMMARY OF FIVE YEARS OF EVIDENCE

During its five years of implementation (May 2016-June 2021), the Feed the Future Developing Local Extension Capacity (DLEC) project produced diagnostic studies and other knowledge products about extension and advisory services (EAS) around the globe. DLEC used an adapted version of the best-fit framework\(^1\) to guide our analyses of a country’s EAS system, compare across countries and connect country-specific cases to broader learning on EAS and apply this to other donor and government programs and priorities. The best-fit framework suggests an impact chain approach, where extension components (governance structures, capacity, management and methods) affect their performance. The performance of the services then determines household level outcomes such as changes in behavior and attitudes, which ultimately bring about impact, i.e. yields, income, environmental effects, etc. By using this adapted framework, DLEC focused its diagnostic studies on governance structures and policy environment, organization and management capacities and culture, advisory methods, market engagement, livelihood strategies and community engagement. DLEC revisited 19 of its EAS reports (available [here](#)) and summarized the key learnings and recommendations on how EAS stakeholders can continue to strengthen extension components, performance and impact beyond the life of DLEC.


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For more of DLEC’s accomplishments & recommendations, see our project in review page.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Pluralism in Extension
Pluralistic EAS, which include government, donors, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector, are more effective when all partners collaborate to achieve desired outcomes. Coordination is key to ensure synergy, avoid duplication and ultimately support agricultural development. There is a trend toward privatization of sustainable business models, which requires service bundling given the poor track record of fee-for-extension models. Governments play a key role in coordinating EAS activities.

Enabling Environment
Governments play an important role in creating the right enabling environment for pluralistic EAS to flourish. National agricultural extension policies are needed to promote collaboration, define roles and responsibilities and better coordinate the activities of public and private extension and of nongovernmental organizations and donors.

Curriculum Reform and Tailoring to Local Context
EAS training curricula must be overhauled to be market-oriented, relevant and inclusive of youth and women. Extension staff should be professionalized through in-service and continuing education as well as incentive systems. Curricula should include soft skills, business and market skills and gender, youth and nutrition-sensitive approaches. The New Extensionist Learning Kit, developed by GFRAS and used by DLEC, contains 13+ modules that can be used as a starting point to tailor curricula to the local context.

Women in EAS
According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, if women farmers had the same access to resources as men, 150 million people could be lifted out of poverty. Women should be included

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in training sessions and provided with opportunities to become extension agents. For this, training sessions and activities should be held at times when women are able to attend. Targeting women within the household (as opposed to only the male co-head) with extension information has a positive effect on different domains of empowerment. These include women's knowledge of agronomic practices, their participation in agricultural decision-making and their adoption of recommended practices and inputs.

Studies focusing on localized and specific ways (incentives, opportunities) for ensuring women's participation in EAS are needed. Featuring women as role models in information campaigns can create opportunities for greater involvement of women and in campaigns targeted at women can stimulate women's individual decision-making and action. Include women in leadership positions and involve them in the EAS governance structures.

**Youth in EAS**

Engaging youth in EAS is critical for livelihoods in rural areas where youth are unemployed and face barriers to entry into agriculture. The design of youth interventions should take youth heterogeneity (level of education, urban vs. rural, access to digital tools, etc.) into account. Interventions should include digital tools, given that youth tend to be familiar with these technologies. DLEC conducted four studies focusing on specific needs and strategies for including youth in EAS, both as recipients and providers of services, yet more in-depth, studies are needed to identify the right incentives and opportunities to include youth into agriculture and EAS.

**Digital Extension and ICTs**

As mobile phone access and internet penetration grows, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in agriculture is becoming more prevalent. Local context, including levels of digital literacy, smartphone use, internet penetration and cost of data plans are critical to digital extension interventions. The use of ICTs should be inclusive and not prohibit those with poor access to digital tools or who lack digital literacy; for instance, gaps in women's access to digital tools may also mean less access to extension, which needs to be mitigated. Digital channels such as video, radio, SMS, interactive voice response, etc. should not be seen as competing; rather, use multiple channels to reinforce messaging to farmers and motivate behavior change. Quality data can help deliver demand-driven extension. Secure digital data exchange can help EAS better target and tailor advisories for farmers.
Integration of Climate Change Programming in Extension
Increased incidences of drought, floods, pest outbreaks and natural disasters can be attributed to climate change; these pose severe risks to agriculture and the livelihoods of farmers. EAS should use climate-sensitive approaches and ensure that approaches build resiliency and mitigate climate change, e.g. through diversification of incomes, disaster preparedness, practices that reduce water use and emission of methane and greenhouse gases and ability to cope with shocks. More in-depth studies on how to incorporate climate change considerations and resilience into curricula would benefit farmers and extension agents.

Nutrition-sensitive Extension Approaches
While many smallholder and subsistence farmers are producing food crops, they may not necessarily have access to a diverse and nutritious diet. Extension can be an entry point to support nutrition outcomes. There is need to provide extension agents with skills on nutrition-sensitive extension to support farmers who face food and nutrition insecurity. Nutrition-sensitive approaches should be built into extension agent training curricula. The GFRAS module on nutrition-sensitive extension can be adapted for this.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning in Extension
Monitoring and evaluation systems and the capacities to use them are important to track targets and understand the impact of EAS activities. In particular, metrics should be set for tracking extension impacts among marginalized populations, women and youth. Developing standardized metrics for extension is important but difficult because of the many contextual needs. Creating a dashboard or suite of options to choose from based on local context, rather than a subset of standardized metrics, could be effective.