

ARDI Extension Program Overview

Background

Extension activities in the past have largely relied on demonstration plots, formal farmer training courses in classrooms, and mass media in the form of TV, radio, and leaflets. These methods have in part been forced on the extension service by limited resources, including staff numbers.

The mass media approach, while giving farmers information, often fails to persuade them to change practices or attitudes. The usual reason for this is that the information is research / centrally generated with little consideration of the farmer's actual needs, social and financial situation, experience, or local conditions, and provides no incentive for the farmer to be innovative or to take risks.

Demonstration plots and training courses have used instructional teaching methodology, and have reached only a small proportion of the total number of farmers. This approach is also not widely successful in changing farmers' practices as again the messages and recommendations are centrally developed with little consideration of the farmer's actual situation. Although discussion between the trainer and the farmer can take place, this is usually limited to ensuring that the subject recommendation is known by the farmer.

Demonstration plots and training courses are also relatively inefficient in use of resources, as farmers have to be transported to the training site (and sometimes fed and accommodated for courses). Furthermore, with demonstration plot field days, farmers at the most may visit the plot twice in a season, so they are not involved in the actual crop operations, only being shown the results of applying the centrally-decided 'correct' recommendations.

Farmers' practices need to change and improved methods must be adopted if Iraqi agriculture is to develop. This fact is also accepted by many farmers. However, based on past results, the existing extension methods are unlikely to achieve this objective. To assist farmers to change their practices and adopt improved methods, therefore, the extension service must first change its practices and adopt new methods.

Participatory Extension

Adults learn in a different way than children. Adults learn best in a realistic environment, putting what they are learning into practice and evaluating it against their existing knowledge and experience. Adults also seek information which is relevant to their situation, they have a need to understand the 'why' of the information, and they place great importance on the knowledge and experience of their friends and peers.

Participatory extension adopts these principles for farmer education. Farmers are 'taught' in small groups of 10-15, supported by an extension facilitator. Groups run for a full crop season, so that all crop operations can be covered and discussed in group activities. Farmers

learn by discussing topics among themselves, putting agreed operations into practice, and evaluating the results. Part of one of the fields of a group member is used as a learning and evaluation tool. The role of the extension agent is to facilitate these group activities, and to help farmers to solve their production problems using their own group knowledge, supported where necessary by his own knowledge base.

With participatory extension, therefore, the role of the extension agent is changed from one of giving centrally derived recommendations and instructions to farmers, to one of assisting farmers solve their own production problems through practical discussions and activities in their own villages and on their own fields. To be able to fulfill this new role, extension agents must change their practices and attitudes, and be trained in the necessary skills to manage farmer groups and assist farmers to adopt and adapt crop recommendations to suit their own situations.

Support from the Ministry of Agriculture

To provide a responsive and participatory extension service for farmers, the MoA will need to introduce the new methodologies, and to expand activities to enable all farmers to join the farmer group program. The first can be achieved by staff education and training. The second will require that additional staff are recruited so that there are sufficient extension agents to cover all villages.

While ARDI can assist with the training and start-up costs, it is essential that the Ministry of Agriculture accepts, and makes allowances for, the additional staff numbers and associated costs in order that the future extension program can be sustained from its own resources, both personnel and financial.

In terms of personnel, the MoA must become capable of implementing its own training programs, and not be dependent on external sources. Although primary training will be given by external trainers, this will be to train a core group of Iraqi trainers who will then be responsible for training field staff, and who will later be further developed as Master Trainers.

Staff Training Program and Extension Activities

Training of Trainers: September – November 2005

- To be given in Erbil by external providers
- 20 trainees, one from each governorate, one from MoA Baghdad, one from ARDI
- Course contents will include:
 - Approaches to agricultural extension
 - Adult learning theory
 - The concept of communication
 - Communication, listening and facilitation skills
 - Dealing with different personality types
 - The learning/action cycle
 - The role of the extension agent in the farmer's learning/action cycle
 - Design of farmer meetings based on the learning/action cycle
 - Teamwork and leadership

Training of First Group of Extension Field Staff: December 2005 – January 2006

- To be given in Erbil by trainee trainers as part of ToT course, supervised and coached by external trainers.
- 3 Trainees to give each course
- 6 courses of 15 field staff = 90 in total, from all governorates.
- 2 weeks per course
- Field staff to be from crop production, crop protection and livestock.
- Course topics similar to ToT course, but in less depth.

Extension Activities: First group of trained field staff

- Starting in February 2006 for the spring / summer cropping season.
- Field staff return to own governorates.
- Use MoA and ARDI demonstration plots as participatory teaching tools, with more regular visits by the same groups of farmers.
- Establish season-long farmer groups in farmers own villages. Actual crop/livestock activities yet to be decided.
- Activities with farmer groups supervised and coached by trainers.

Training of Second Group of Extension Field Staff: April - May 2006

- To be given by the 20 Trainers.
- Depending on performance in first round of field staff training, overseas trainers may or may not be required to supervise and coach.
- If overseas trainers required to supervise and coach, training in Erbil.
 - 3 Trainees to give each course
 - 6 courses of 15 field staff = 90 in total, from all governorates.
 - 2 weeks per course
- If overseas trainers not required, training throughout Iraq as appropriate.
 - 2 Trainees to give each course
 - 9 courses of 15 field staff = 135 in total, from all governorates.
 - 2 weeks per course
- Course topics similar to ToT course, but in less depth.
- Field staff to be from women and youth (and livestock) as training at this time does not match the start of cropping seasons.

Extension Activities: Second group of trained field staff

- Starting in June 2006.
- Field staff return to their own governorates.
- Establish women, youth and livestock groups in villages. Actual group activities yet to be decided.
- Activities with groups supervised and coached by trainers.

Extension Activities: First group of trained field staff

- Starting in September 2006 for winter cropping season.
- Establish season-long farmer groups in farmers own villages. Actual crop/livestock activities yet to be decided.
- Activities with groups supervised and coached by trainers.

Training of Master Trainers

Depending on the previous performance of trainers in training courses, and supervision and monitoring of field staff, the selection and training of Master Trainers in August-September 2006.