The Role of Agricultural Extension Services in Supporting a Multisectoral Approach to Improving Nutrition
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Multi-sectoral approach to improving nutrition: An orchestra of top performers?

The AGRICULTURAL sector, with many players, including EXTENSION?
What Nutrition and Health should know about Agriculture

Farmers are beholden to:

• Markets
• Agro-ecological constraints, opportunities
• Climate
• Pests and diseases (crops, livestock)
• Risk: *Household welfare depends on minimizing risk*
• Gender-defined division of labor
What Nutrition and Health should know about Agriculture

Other considerations:

- **Homestead food production** (for home consumption, not primarily for market) is a part of the answer, but typically has limited impact on food systems compared to market-oriented agriculture which affects larger supply, market prices, availability/access etc. This arena is dominated by women.

- **Trade-offs**: e.g. introducing a new crop has implications for existing patterns of production and land use, labor (division of roles and time burden), cash flow, etc.

- **Reinvesting/planning for the future** (ag is not a one-time endeavor, it builds on previous year’s successes & failures)
WHO provides agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (EAS)?

| **Government** | • Ministries of agriculture or the like  
|               | • Hire extension agents and conduct extension activities |
| **NGO (without fee-for-service)** | • International, national, local  
|               | • Provide innovative EAS, often with holistic approach |
| **Private Sector (commodity model)** | • Agribusinesses provide EAS for contracted purchase of outputs (e.g., poultry, cotton, tobacco) |
| **Private Sector (Sales or fee for service)** | • Give advice for a fee or in conjunction with sale of inputs |
| **Farmer Organizations** | • Coordinate forums to provide EAS to member farmers  
|               | • Contract consultants |
| **Universities, Research** | • Develop and – to some extent – disseminate new practices and technologies  
|               | • Cooperative EAS in the U.S. |
WHAT do EAS providers do?

• Give advice

• Train, teach, demonstrate, engage

• Transfer technology and better practices

• Facilitate interaction with other players

• Assist in developing technical, organizational, managerial skills
WHAT are the topics?

• Agronomy, horticulture, animal husbandry, fisheries
  • Inputs, practices, mechanization, …

• Natural resource management, soils, water

• Weather; climate change adaptation

• Post harvest storage and processing

• Market access, information

• Farm management, business planning
STRENGTHS of EAS in a multi-sectoral approach to improving nutrition:

• Established infrastructure
• Reach
• Community trust
• Cultural awareness
• Empathy, understanding
• Methodological skill set
• Building on what EAS is already doing to improve food security
Food Based Approaches promoted by EAS:

- Train on **GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES** (IPM, safe use of chemicals, safe irrigation)

- Promote **DIVERSIFICATION** of crop production & consumption (incl. indigenous and biofortified varieties) and livelihoods for better nutrient mix and to reduce seasonality of food-insecurity

- Support production & consumption of **ASF** (fisheries/poultry/livestock; sanitation)

- Advise on how to **REDUCE POST HARVEST LOSSES** and improve storage. Plan for hunger periods
Furthermore

- Advise on income generation and budgeting.
- Strengthen linkages of producers to **MARKETS** to sell/buy nutritious foods
- Provide **women** with the tools and technology to improve their own livelihoods and reduce their work and time burden, thus addressing (some aspects of) women’s empowerment
- Advise on **better utilization of foods** (produced/purchased: cooking practices, recipes, food safety)
- Educate on **good nutrition and care practices**
WEAKNESS of Ag Extension in Supporting Nutrition Agenda

- Nutrition: **yet one more item on the long “to do” list** for extension!
- **Limited knowledge/understanding of nutrition.** EAS staff lack training in even the basics of nutrition.
- The AG and nutrition sectors use **different language, priorities, and terms**, which **constrains integration.** (“Dominance of MCHN, SUN and ENHA”)
- Lack of joint planning and dialogue at all levels. **Coordination of planning and dialogue among the relevant agriculture, nutrition and health actors** does not happen. → identify and leverage existing mechanisms and avenues for collaboration. What are the **“super messages”** and how to adapt them locally?
- Even if role of EAS were clear, **lack** of commitment to provide **resources** for capacity development, operational funding, excellent management to implement? [Consider real mandates of pluralistic set of actors]
Weaknesses of HEALTH and NUTRITION EDUCATORS in terms of AG and EAS

- Not deeply familiar with farming systems, crop and livestock production, post harvest handling, processing, marketing

- Not deeply familiar with economic dimension of decision making in farming

  Diversification may make sense from nutrition standpoint, but not from economic standpoint: no market, economies of scale, more nutritious crops and indigenous varieties may not fetch good prices, risk minimization may be more important than “good nutrition”

- Diversification of production may mean need for more diverse inputs (e.g., seeds, plantings, livestock) and require specific knowledge of production of those crops, animal husbandry

  → Are actors in place to provide inputs, EAS, and is there a demand beyond the household?
All actors need to address gender and hold themselves accountable for improving gender equity.
Gender Relations Framework

- Division of Labor
- Norms and Values
- Access to / control over resources
- Intra-household decision making

Consider Women’s and Men’s perspectives

Adapted from Verhart et al, 2015
Key Takeaways

• Need a better understanding of who does what well and on how actors from different sectors can complement each other.

• Don’t impose expectations

• All need to get better at providing gender equitable services

• Good plans and resource allocation must align