

# Dossier “Access to agricultural services”

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## Scope

This dossier focuses on enhancing the poorest farmers' access to agricultural services such as research, training, advice and finance.

Services can contribute to strengthening the poor's assets and to sustaining and enhancing their livelihoods. To do so, they need to be accessible, that is (1) available (ready for use when needed), (2) affordable (effective at low costs), and (3) socially inclusive: accessible to the most vulnerable groups in rural areas.

Services need to be demand-driven and locally specific and aim at empowering farmers, building their capacities and involving them in service demand and delivery.

It is essential is that services are considered within their context and their complexity. Using a systems perspective instead of focusing on technical aspects will ensure that such complexities are better understood. The innovation systems perspective for agricultural services underlines the policy and

institutional context including governance of the system, the functional relationships, the services and stakeholders, and their capacities.

This dossier employs the innovation systems perspective to assess the challenges facing agricultural services, and to identify how farmers and service providers have responded to these challenges and what the most likely success factors have been to make these responses effective.

## In-Depth

- Agricultural services
- Access to services by the poor
- Trends in the rural environment and implications for agricultural services
- Challenges
- Successful responses and success factors

### 1. Agricultural services

Rural services are the services provided to families, individuals and households that live or work in rural areas. They include research, advice, training and the intermediate services that facilitate access to knowledge, information and finance. Rural services, in particular agricultural services, are extremely heterogeneous. They primarily address crop and animal production and natural resource management, but also include the preparation of crop and animal production, the post-harvest handling of agricultural produce and the marketing of products.

### 2. Access to services by the poor

Access to services is important for the rural poor living in areas with inadequate infrastructure and far away from basic social services and health centres. The poor often tend to be trapped in poverty because of less favourable location-specific characteristics; their meagre assets that do not allow them to invest in education; their lack of access to credit and productive labour; and the exclusion from access to resources and markets.

Services can contribute to strengthening the poor's assets and to sustaining and enhancing their livelihoods. To do so, they need to be accessible, that is (1) available (ready for use when needed), (2) affordable (effective at low costs), and (3) socially inclusive, (accessible to the most vulnerable groups in rural areas).

Whether agricultural research and advisory services are accessible to the rural poor, are responsive to their needs and are complementary to other support services depends on the interaction between policies, institutions and organizations.

Provision of (information on) agricultural technologies therefore is not sufficient. Agricultural services have to be facilitators of knowledge management and mindset changes of stakeholders operating in the rural environment, and broker improved interaction between them. Services need to be demand-driven and locally specific and aim at empowering farmers, building their capacities and involving them in service demand and delivery.

### 3. Trends in the rural environment and implications for agricultural services

The rural environment, however, is continuously and rapidly changing due to a range of global and national processes that impact on agricultural markets. These changes include demographic trends such as urbanisation, overall economic growth, increased liberalisation of agricultural trade and the integration of markets, increasing commodity prices, national policy and institutional developments, climate change and emerging diseases of zoonotic origin.

Not only rural livelihoods are affected by this changing context. It also impacts the type and the ways rural services are provided. The changing architecture of aid and the developments in information and communication technology increase the need for flexibility and innovative capacity of services both in terms of service contents and delivery methods.

It is essential that services are considered within their context and their complexity. Using a systems perspective instead of focusing on technical aspects will ensure that such complexities are better understood. The innovation systems perspective for agricultural services underlines the institutional context and policy including governance of the system, the functional relationships, the services and stakeholders with their capacities. The innovation system perspective is based on the premise that improved, innovative practices that enhance access to rural services and hence improved livelihoods require interaction and interactive learning among the stakeholders.

### 4. Challenges

With the innovation systems perspective as a point of departure, rural services in general and agricultural services in particular, are faced with a series of challenges. These entail the capacities of the rural poor as service users, the capacities of service providers to deliver sustainable, relevant and quality services to the poor and the enabling policies and institutional arrangements for pro-poor services. Key questions include:

- How may the rural poor be empowered to voice their needs for services?
- How may innovative capacities of the rural poor be enhanced, so they will be better able to formulate effective demands for services?
- How to enhance interaction between smallholder farmers and other stakeholders?
- How to design services that help farmers respond to a changing context including new regulations and standards?
- In what way should services be designed and implemented in order for them to reach the poor and most vulnerable among them? How may the rural poor become actively involved in this process?
- What do service providers need to enhance their accountability to their clients and how may the rural poor be stimulated to engage in the M&E of services?
- What is needed to ensure sustainability of service provision, specifically to the poorest?
- How to make use of Information and Communication Technology?
- What is needed for rural financial services to contribute effectively to smallholder farmers' activities and protect the poor from risks such as climatic hazards, price variations and credit supply?
- How to facilitate complementarities and effective synergy between different types of services and service providers? How to link these to those operating and offered at national and local levels? What institutional arrangements are needed to enhance social inclusion of services? How can they be designed and implemented?
- How should policies be designed that increase the opportunities for facilitation services and mediation?

## 5. Successful responses and success factors

In recent years, studies have been undertaken to identify how farmers and service providers have responded to these challenges and what the most likely success factors have been to make these responses effective. Key lessons from these studies include the following:

- It is essential to link financial services that are adapted to the specific situations of the rural poor and provide opportunities to enhance innovative capacities, with other services, in particular for the most vulnerable
- Farmers' organizations can play various roles in the pro-poor orientation of services. They can lobby for an enabling policy and institutional environment, facilitate the voice of the rural poor, influence advancing socially inclusive research and advisory service agendas and become involved in the implementation of research and advisory services
- The capacities of farmers' organizations need strengthening to ensure that they are able to articulate inclusive demands
- Service providers need to:
  - *Differentiate services in accordance with intended beneficiaries, in particular focusing on vulnerable groups to enhance social inclusion,*
  - *Design, in close participation with the rural poor, appropriate methods for pro-poor services that effectively respond to the needs of the rural poor,*
  - *Coordinate services at the local level to enhance coherence and synergy of services, a more efficient use of services by the rural poor, and to stimulate interaction and learning between service providers,*
  - *Take up new roles as intermediary and facilitator services - rather than as disseminators of information- and ensure effective links between productive investments, technological and financial service innovation, risk management and vulnerability reduction*
- In terms of enabling policies and institutional arrangements for pro-poor services the following are needed:
  - *Multi-stakeholder driven evidence (through local knowledge institutes) for effective policy context change in terms of innovation, decentralization, public-private partnerships and rural empowerment,*
  - *Policies and mechanisms that enable interaction between farmers', private sector and research and advisory organizations through institutional innovations (platforms, funding mechanisms, regulation and certification etc.),*
  - *Continuous interaction between rural service providers and the rural poor and information of service users,*
  - *Building social capital for improved interaction amongst stakeholders and enhanced performance of the Agricultural Information System,*
  - *Capacity enhancement among local governments and authorities to steer and coordinate services and service systems for effective service delivery.*

Reference:

[Nederlof, E.S., B. Wennink and W. Heemskerk. Access to agricultural services - Background paper for the IFAD Rural Poverty Report 2010](#)

## KIT's Involvement

Improving agricultural productivity, profitability and sustainability requires innovation. For many years, support for innovation tended to focus mainly on strengthening agricultural research. Innovation, however, is the result of interaction among stakeholders rather than a result of research. It is therefore important to involve farmers' organizations, the private sector, and even policy-makers, as full-fledged partners for enhancing rural innovation.

The challenge is to ensure that agricultural knowledge services, such as research, advisory and training services, directly address the economic development needs of rural actors, and that smallholder farmers in particular become empowered within the rural innovation system, in such way that interactive learning develops.

KIT has over 30 years of experience in agricultural service delivery using innovative, client-oriented approaches. Currently, KIT's Development Policy & Practice department is working with farmer organizations to see how knowledge service providers can better reach the poor. Securing quality services and sustainable financing mechanisms are an important aspect of this work.

The department develops methods and tools, adapted to the African context in particular, that increase the effectiveness of all parties - agricultural service providers, farmer organizations, local governments and the private sector - to take part in the innovation process.

## Resources

The following list of electronic resources provides rapid access to key references on the main topics of the dossier:

- [Agricultural advisory services - Background paper for the World development Report 2008](#)  
Anderson, J.R. (2007)  
There is clearly much yet to be done in bringing needed extension services to the poor around the world.
- [Changing incentives for agricultural extension - A review of privatized extension in practice](#)  
Chapman, R.; R. Tripp (2003)  
An email discussion on privatised extension is summarised. It illustrates a range of experience regarding the adequacy of private providers, the ability of farmers to take advantage of a privatised system, and the capacity of governments to manage the transition.
- [Mobilizing the potential of rural and agricultural extension](#)  
Christoplos, I. (2010)  
Extension is defined here as systems that should facilitate the access of farmers, their organizations and other market actors to knowledge, information and technologies; facilitate their interaction with partners in research, education, agri-business, and other relevant institutions; and assist them to develop their own technical, organizational and management skills and practices.
- [Impact of farmer field schools on agricultural productivity and poverty in East Africa](#)  
Davis, K. et al. (2010)  
Farmer field schools (FFS) are a popular education and extension approach worldwide. The study provides evidence on participation in FFS and the effects of FFS on various outcomes.

- [Inventory of innovative farmer advisory services using ICTs](#)  
Gakuru, M.; Winters, K.; Stepman, F. (2009)  
This inventory of farmer advisory services using ICT (Information & Communication Technology) covers farmer advisory services or systems, currently in design, in existence or recently completed in Africa.
- [Innovations in rural and agriculture finance](#)  
IFPRI - International Food Policy Research Institute (2010)  
Most rural households lack access to reliable and affordable finance for agriculture and other livelihood activities. New and innovative institutions are required to reach small farmers.
- [Gender and governance in agricultural extension services: insights from India, Ghana, and Ethiopia](#)  
Madhvani, S.; E. Pehu; R. Birner (2010)  
This note aims to generate policy-relevant knowledge on strategies for improving agricultural service delivery, with a focus on providing more equitable access to these services, especially for women.
- [Animal health service delivery systems in Kenya's marginal areas under market liberalization: a case for community-based animal health workers](#)  
Mugunieri, L.G.; J.M. Omiti; P. Irungu (2002)  
A case study was conducted in Makueni, Kenya, to generate information that would guide policy debate about integrating community-based animal health workers into formal health delivery systems.
- [Decentralization and access to agricultural extension services in Kenya](#)  
Nambiro, E.; J. Omiti; L. Mugunieri (2005)  
The authors explore the effect of decentralization of agricultural extension on access, accountability and empowerment, and efficiency of delivering services to farmers.
- [Access to agricultural services - Background paper for the IFAD Rural Poverty Report 2010](#)  
Nederlof, E.S.; B. Wennink; W. Heemskerk (2008)  
A background paper for the identification of key messages that guide access to services of the rural poor.
- [Extension reform for rural development](#)  
Rivera, W.M. and Alex, G. (2004) [Vol. 1-5: Case studies of international initiatives. World Bank and USAID, Washington, D.C.]  
Five volumes are presented: (1) Decentralized Systems; (2) Privatization of Extension Systems; (3) Demand-Driven Approaches to Agriculture Extension; (4) Revitalization within Public Sector Services; (5) National Strategy and Reform Process.
- [Assessing micro-finance services in agricultural sector development: A case study of semi-formal financial institutions in Tanzania](#)  
Rweyemamu, D.C.; M.P. Kimaro; O.M. Urassa (2003)  
Specific constraints facing institutions delivering credit to smallholder farmers, and problems encountered by the farmers in the procurement and use of such credit, are highlighted.
- [Strengthening agricultural extension and advisory systems: procedures for assessing, transforming, and evaluating extension systems](#)  
Swanson, B.E. & R. Rajalahti (2010)  
The focus of this book is primarily on the technical knowledge, management skills, and information services that small-scale farm households will need to improve their livelihoods.
- [Access of the poor to agricultural services: the role of farmers' organizations in social inclusion](#)  
Wennink, B.; E.S. Nederlof; W. Heemskerk (2007)  
The bulletin focuses on the role of rural producers' organizations in enhancing the poorest farmers' access to agricultural advisory services such as research, training, advice and extension.

- [Agriculture investment sourcebook, Module 2 - Investments in agricultural science and technology](#)

World Bank (2006)

The module summarizes principles and good practice for investments in agricultural S&T.

- [Agriculture investment sourcebook, Module 3 - Investments in agricultural extension and information services](#)

World Bank (2006)

The module summarizes principles and good practice for investments in building effective and sustainable extension systems.