

Equity implications for reforms in the financing and delivery of agricultural extension services-Ghana Case study

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Abstract

In the past decade considerable attention has been paid to the provision of agricultural extension services, primarily because of the high recurrent costs they entail. Recent reforms in the delivery and financing of extension services in developing countries have addressed issues of efficiency and effectiveness, but there is concern that these reforms have led to little improvement in, or in some cases may have reduced, access by resource poor and disadvantaged households to agricultural support services and therefore to improved rural livelihoods. Farmers should no longer be passive recipients of 'technology transfer' information. Current models of extension attempt to be more innovative, participatory and demand-driven. They attempt to devolve responsibility to regional levels and make extension agents more accountable to farmers, but this may be at the expense of equity in access to services. The public sector's role in extension is being challenged, but it can be justified for a number of reasons, including the public good nature of some extension information, the risk attached to agricultural production, and in controlling the quality of basic agricultural inputs. Reassessment of the public sector's role may be called for where there is a fiscal crisis, the performance of extension is poor or unknown, and the service is unresponsive to farmers' changing needs. The use of groups for the delivery of extension messages is widespread. Where groups and contact farmers are used to disseminate messages, some parts of the community may not be reached as they tend to focus on the more innovative farmers. Groups increase coverage of services but sometimes at the expense of equity and the quality of services. In some cases the use of groups may include farmers who would not otherwise receive extension services because of resource and socio-cultural constraints. Overall, reforms have increased access to extension, though the improvement is less for resource poor women farmers than for others. Farmers are more likely to face problems of quality and relevance of information than of access per se.