

Study of Extension Roles: What Kaset Tambon Does: A Case Study in Nakhon Ratchasima, Northeast, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this survey research is to gain insights into strength and weakness of extension organization in the province. A total of seventy Kaset Tambon (KT) in Nakhon Ratchasima, Northeastern province of Thailand have been tested on their perception related to level of importance and level of implementation of their roles, and organization management aspects. The relationships between their level of importance and level of implementation were studied through a correlation test. The findings of this research show that, perception of KT in sum are positive on both level of importance and level of implementation of their roles with the total mean scores of 3.92 and 3.55 respectively. The correlation test showed statistical relationship among three studied items.

The test of perception of KT on organization and management aspects however has carried different reflection. The level of implementation of requisite management aspects measured at average mean score 2.83, being at moderate level pointing to the need to revamp, improve certain features of extension organization. This has been confirmed by observation of weak relationships between level of importance and level of adequacy on majority of the items. The study has reflected the inadequacy of extension organization management in sum in various practices.

Major recommended practices from this study include the need for extension to draw clear mission statement, set clearer directions and policies, raise educational background and qualification level of staff members, emphasize importance of applied research, build management information system, strengthen network and information technology operations in the field, and integrate approaches towards advising, counseling amongst the government agencies.

Key words: extension roles, Kaset Tambon, roles of Kaset Tambon, functions and skills, organization and management aspects

INTRODUCTION

Given the critical role of extension agents, it remains essential that their strength and weakness are understood. This calling is further raised due to growing concern that extension in the less industrialized world is not performing well or is unsatisfactory.

Extension in Thailand is portrayed as being weak and unsatisfactory. The poor performance of extension is accounted according to several factors, including speculation, that extension agents are not performing as desired or that organization management is not set right. Only one thing however remains conclusive from the past studies that further study is worthwhile. It is in this direction that this study is being set.

The roles of the extension agents are viewed from the broad perspectives of national goals, policies, directives and their job functions apart from the statement of theories. The framework of this study includes the learning of related organization and management aspects of extension performance. The focus is on understanding the perception of Kaset Tambon on their roles and organization management aspects.

Clearer perspectives of Kaset Tambon are expected as a result of this quest. Nakhon Ratchasima, Northeast province of Thailand is chosen as the samples of this study since it constitutes both rural and urban elements.

The survey research has been conducted during October, November 2003 and March 2004.

Statement of the problem

Leonard (1977), in his study in Kenya (what

he relates as common to all the developing world), has rated extension performance in the developing world as unsatisfactory and poor.

He related the cause to the poor organization and management of the extension services, 'inadequate or unintelligent attention to structural problems in the ministry of agriculture'. He points out to the inadequate attention paid to the whole range of problems concerning the motivation and management of the field staff. The need to measure the performance of junior extension staff is well stressed in his study. He recommends the study on the line of improving day to day functions, incentives, motivation, and management rather than what he yet calls as overrated and redundant restructuring exercises of the developing world.

Boonruang (1980) points out some problems which resulting confusion and over lapses to many departments in the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives in Thailand. The problems were such as lack of clear definition, division of work and control as major handicaps along with the shortage of skilled manpower, limited positions, low pay of extension and other Government officials. The problems warrant urgent solutions in achieving sustained and effective agricultural development. Mission of the International Bank for reconstruction and development has reported similarly on the shortage of skilled manpower in the kingdom.

Thailand's case of extension service is further defined by FAO (Swanson and Clair, 1984) as broadly diffused, generally uncoordinated, inadequately supported by well trained staff and high facilities. FAO recommends coordination, critical mass of personnel, regional director taking charge of

all, up gradation of applied research, decentralization of planning and decision making.

Quite understandable, past studies have attuned to impinge on a wide range of continuing concern in regard to Kaset Tambon (KT) functions, organizational and managerial problems. Mahavisessip (1982) reports some farmers leveling KT as unfriendly and poor performers, while Suabjakdea (1997) leveling it as only moderate level. Rakhong (1982) and Raksakul (1982) reports the problem as unqualified subject matter specialist while Suttinarakorn (1986) defines the subject matter supervision only as fault finding. Raksakul (1982) claims of insufficient travelling allowances to the agents and appeals reconsideration of the roles and functions of KT. Surattikul (1985) identifies number of Kaset Tambon in carrying out the effective roles as insufficient. Studies in 1992 showed that 2/3rd of KT responsible for more than 1000 families. Increasing more personnel were suggested to reduce burdens of the Kaset Tambon and communication in the villages improved. Banthumanvin (1989) raises their concerns on the lack of continuity in job functions, inadequate supplies of materials and budgets, lack of firm support from higher authorities, inadequate monitoring and evaluation. Yet, most notably, Punpinij (2001) observes DOAE, Thailand has had no direct identified philosophy though the policies are cited to be consistent.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into strength and weakness of extension services in the province.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are attempted to:

1. study the perception of Kaset Tambon on level of importance and level of implementation of:

1.1 their roles;

1.2 organization and management aspects.

2. study the relationships between perception of Kaset Tambon on level of importance and level of implementation of:

2.1 their roles;

2.2 organization and management aspects.

Operational definition

1. “Extension roles” refers to the roles and performance of agricultural extension, both in theories and in practice.

2. “Kaset Tambon” refers to in-field extension staff responsible for all villages and hamlets of the specified sub districts in doing extension work that span the gamut of local concern.

3. “Field staff” refers to the staff members, extension workers serving mostly in villages and sub districts.

4. “Roles of Kaset Tambon” refers to the roles according to theories of extension, definition, philosophy and principles of extension. They primarily refer to the principle roles of extension. The term also refers to the roles according to the national policies, extension directives, guidelines and job functions of the Kaset Tambon in the study.

5. “Organization and management aspects” refers to administrative, functions and management features of Extension Department, Ministry of Agriculture.

6. “Policies, guidelines, directives” refer to policies, guidelines, directives of government related to extension. They refer to the national policies, policies of the Ministry of Agriculture and Extension Department

7. “Incentives” refer to features of encouraging the staff by way of giving awards, promotion, benefits, recognition, and etc.

8. “Promotion” refers to the up gradation of status, level, rank of the staff from lower to higher level. They refer to up gradation through change in cadres, grades, classification of job functions, and

etc.

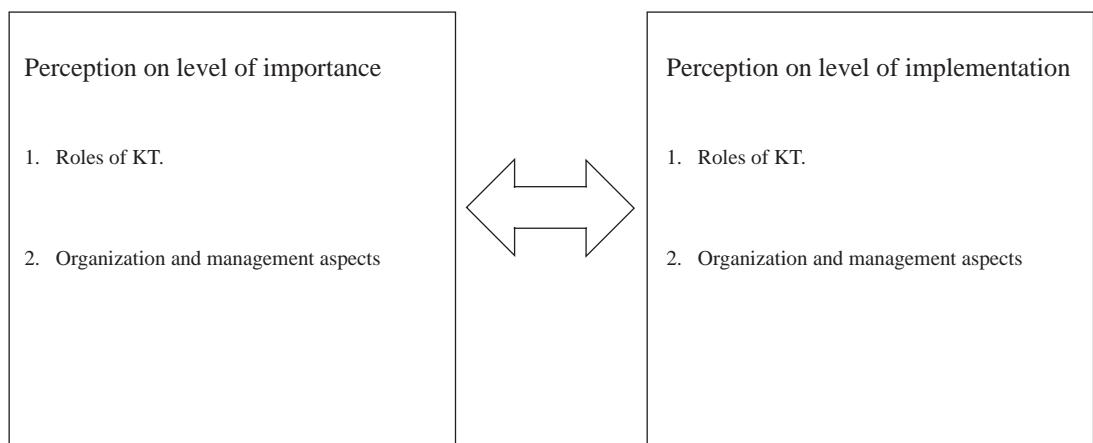
9. “Motivation” refers to encouragement of staff performance through provision of incentives, recognition, awards, benefits, promotion, and etc.

10. “Level of importance” refers to the scale of importance KT attached to their roles and organization and management attributes.

11. “Level of implementation” refers to the scale of implementation KT attached to their roles.

12. “Level of adequacy” refers to the scale of adequacy KT attached to the organization and management attributes.

Schematic framework for analysis of KT perception on level of importance and level of implementation



An additional conclusion in the nature of a hypothesis is to set the conditions necessary for their formation of the interpersonal network as follows: There are relationships between perception of KT on level of importance and level of implementation of their roles.

There are relationships between perception of KT on level of importance and level of adequacy of organization and management aspects.

Measurement of variables

(1) Level of importance on roles of KT is

measured by using likert scale to measure the scale of importance KT attached to the roles.

(2) Level of implementation of the roles is measured by using likert scale to measure the scale of implementation KT attached to the roles.

(3) Level of adequacy of organization and management aspects is measured by using likert scale to measure the scale of adequacy KT attached to the organization and management attributes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was a survey research with case study method carried out in Nakhon Ratchasima province, Northeast of Thailand. Participant observations, key informant, interviews, focused group discussions were also applied. A mail questionnaire set was used for data collection from a total of 70 Kaset Tambon staff under the 3rd region, Nakhon Ratchasima province to study differences of perception among respondents.

Descriptive analysis of arithmetic mean was employed. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to test the relationship between perception of KT on level of importance and level of implementation of their roles and level of adequacy of organization management aspects.

Interpretation of mean scores

Mean scores	Interpretation
4.21 – 5.00	most importance / implementation / adequacy
3.41 – 4.20	more importance / implementation / adequacy
2.61 – 3.40	moderate importance / implementation / adequacy

1.81 – 2.60 less importance / implementation / adequacy

1.00 – 1.80 least importance / implementation / adequacy

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Perception of KT on level of importance and level of implementation of their roles:

The average mean scores of both the level of importance and implementation stood at “more level of importance” at 3.92, and “more level of implementation” at 3.55 respectively.

The highest scores on level of importance is shown on the role of teaching and training and on level of implementation on the item of advising and counseling. The lowest rating on both level of importance and level of implementation was on item of delivery of farm input.

Majority of the items were uniformly rated as “more” scale on both level of importance and level of implementation. Eleven items on level of importance were rated as “more importance” and “most importance” and nine items “more implementation” on level of implementation. Only one item is perceived as “moderate importance” on level of importance and three items “moderate implementation” on level of implementation. Explanations sought through discussions in the field on the variations of these scores were as follows: The highest rating on item of role of teaching and training on level of importance and on advising and counseling on level of implementation are being invariably linked to the importance attached to these roles.

Table 1 Perception of KT towards level of importance and level of implementation of their roles.

N =70

Level of importance						KT Roles	Level of implementation					
5	4	3	2	1	\bar{X}		5	4	3	2	1	\bar{X}
29	28	13	-	-	4.22	1. Teaching, training, personnel development	11	20	37	2	-	3.57
15	37	18	-	-	3.95	2. Information passing, communicator.	9	38	22	1	-	3.79
28	31	9	2	-	4.21	3. Linking role, system linkage.	7	31	27	5	-	3.57
17	35	18	-	-	3.98	4. Coordinator, facilitator.	12	38	19	1	-	3.87
5	22	37	5	1	3.35	5. Counseling, advising-advisor.	15	40	12	3	-	3.96
28	29	13	-	-	4.21	6. Managing extension programs, manager.	3	22	41	3	1	3.33
17	35	18	-	-	3.98	7. Promote agricultural production. Production enhance.	8	22	34	6	-	3.46
15	35	17	3	-	3.88	8. Planning extension programs, planner.	8	21	36	5	-	3.46
5	22	37	5	1	3.35	9. Deliver farm input, service agent.	4	12	37	16	1	3.03
22	22	20	5	1	3.84	10. Implement Government acts, Laws, and Government agent.	14	26	19	8	3	3.57
28	29	13	-	-	4.21	11. Transfer technology, mediator.	16	35	18	1	-	3.94
20	24	21	4	1	3.82	12. Help decision making, Opinion leader.	3	5	62	-	-	3.16
mean = 3.92							mean = 3.55					

The least of the scores on both level of importance and level of implementation on item of delivery of farm input is linked to the lesser involvement of extension on their privatized role. It is said that the input supply, delivery of farm input is already a privatized role and more business of private enterprises.

The above results testified that respondents perceived positively on both level of importance and level of implementation. Their perception of high importance as well as high implementation was at fairly uniform level as shown by the scores on the majority of the items. The differences on the items of scores of highest and lowest ratings however

indicate that what was perceived as highest importance or lowest importance was not necessarily what was being implemented the most or the least.

The highest rating on item of role of teaching and training on level of importance and on advising and counseling on level of implementation however indicated out of question their strength and potential for better performances. The central objective of extension indeed holds development of the people through teaching and learning process.

The lower importance perceived on the role of delivery of farm input however demands attention. The significance of extension involvement may still be emphasized from the need to encourage competition

with private enterprises to imbibe farmers and maintain influences. Extension must still monitor delivery of farm input to the farmers on account of fair prices, appropriate time, form, adequacy and needed supplies. Higher significance may thus be perceived by respondents on this role.

The role on management and decision making may similarly be encouraged. Extension role is evermore changing in support of managerial functioning worldwide and no longer stand as just service agent. The dynamics and diversity of nature of extension roles today demand unparalleled managerial capability. KT today stands as Secretary, TTC and tomorrow may be CEO, Tambon. Relatively, the role of the individual staff as an opinion leader, helping decision making only widens. Decentralization and empowerment of people in fact only affect to bring process of decision making closer to farmers' door in which extension support is most crucial. Out of question, emphasis may thus be laid on the managerial and decision making role.

2. Test the relationship between level of importance and level of implementation of KT roles

Statistical significance is at .01 level between level of importance and level of implementation on two items and at .05 on one item. The remaining nine items however affect non statistical significance and largely rejecting the hypothesis.

Items with non significance are as follows:

1. Teaching, training, personnel development.
2. Information passing, communicator.
3. Linking role, system linkage.
4. Coordinator, facilitator.
- 5.

Counseling, advising, advisor. 6. Managing extension programs, manager. 7. Promote agricultural production, production enhancer. 8. Transfer technology, mediator. and 9. Help decision making, opinion leader

The other two items of lower implementation in accordance with extension program management and in support of decision making can be explained as follows. The lower scores on the item of role of management is linked to the reality of the lesser involvement of the respondents in managing role, their role basically said to constitute as service agent functions. The lower implementation on the role of opinion leader, helping decision making is being linked to their perception of lesser involvement of extension in decision making in the light of decentralization and empowerment of people. Respondents related decentralization and empowerment of farmers to that of lesser involvement of extension in support of decision making.

Discussions in the field linked the lack of significance in the relationship between level of importance and level of implementation to as representation of certain practical constraints, shortfall in implementation of the roles as perceived important. The involvement of extension in implementing government acts and laws, serving as government agent, supporting input supply delivery in particular is stated to make much of their accountable time. They are stated to be still not free from the larger task of regulatory services besides the above roles. It may also be linked to the fact that they may be perceived as not items of lesser priorities as compared to the other roles.

Table 2 Correlation between perception of KT on level of importance and level of implementation of their roles.

N = 70

Roles	r
1. Teaching, training, personnel development.	0.070
2. Information passing, communicator.	0.166
3. Linking role, system linkage.	0.059
4. Coordinator, facilitator.	0.171
5. Counseling, advising, advisor.	0.051
6. Managing extension programs, manager.	0.058
7. Promote agricultural production, production enhancer.	0.187
8. Planning extension programs, planner.	0.316**
9. Deliver farm inputs, service agent.	0.251*
10. Implement Government acts, law and government agent.	0.423**
11. Transfer technology, mediator.	0.234
12. Help decision making, opinion leader	-.036

Note:

* refers to the significant level at .05

**refers to the significant level at .01

3. Perception of KT towards organization and management aspects of the existing extension system

Level of importance. The average mean scores of “more importance” performed category is being 3.6 that is between average mean scores of 2.97 and 3.96. Only two items were rated at “moderate importance” and the rest at major twenty items at “more importance”. The highest scores on level of importance were observed on communication and information system at mean 3.96, “more importance”. The lowest of the score was observed on participation and cooperation of NGOs at mean 2.97, “moderate importance”.

Level of adequacy. The average mean scores on level of adequacy at 2.83, is “moderate adequacy” indicated by mean scores between 1.94 and 3.66. Only three items are rated “more adequacy” indicated by the mean scores 3.59 and 3.66 on the following items: 1. Management has flexibility, 2. Force of motivation, 3. Clientele participation. The lowest level of adequacy was rated on cooperation and participation of NGO at the mean scores of 1.94.

The result indicates high level of importance attached by the respondents on all the items uniformly. Discussions in the field linked the high rating on the items of communication and information

Table 3 Perception of KT towards organization and management aspects of the existing extension system.

N =70

Level of importance						Organization and management aspects	Level of adequacy					
5	4	3	2	1	\bar{X}		5	4	3	2	1	\bar{X}
22	24	23	1		3.96	1. Communication and information system.	3	10	50	6	1	3.11
19	25	23	3		3.86	2. Force of motivation.	7	36	20	5	2	3.59
14	32	22	2		3.83	3. Extension management flexibility.	2	45	20	3		3.66
6	28	33	3		3.53	4. linkage with research organizations.	9	54	7			3.03
17	35	14	4		3.93	5. Statutory basis and mission.	8	8	51	2	1	3.29
17	17	26	9	1	3.57	6. Financial support for extension.	3	4	17	41	5	2.41
17	19	23	10	1	3.59	7. Field offices, equipment, transportation and communications systems.	6	18	40	6		2.34
13	19	32	6		3.56	8. Freedom from regulatory services.	10	19	36	5		2.49
21	22	24	3		3.87	9. Farmers input to guide program priorities.	2	10	56	2		3.17
21	20	21	6	2	3.74	10. Salary and incentive system.	2	6	47	9	6	2.84
20	26	23	1		3.93	11. Government policies support extension.	2	11	49	6	2	3.07
16	23	29	2		3.76	12. Mission statement of extension organization ad, specific and clear.	1	7	55	4	3	2.99
13	22	30	5		3.61	13. The goals and objectives of the mission are clear and appropriate.	3	8	50	8	1	3.06
11	24	31	2	2	3.57	14. Delegation of authority is appropriate.	6	41	20	3		2.71
10	28	29	2	1	3.63	15. Lines of authority are short, direct and feasible.	1	4	44	17	4	2.73
16	21	26	5	2	3.63	16. Each staff member has only one administrator.	4	6	45	9	6	2.90
14	33	21	2		3.84	17. Clientele participation, cooperation is adequate	3	42	18	7		3.59
8	28	30	2	2	3.54	18. There is gender balance in the clientele participation.	3	8	47	8	4	2.97
15	17	29	6	3	3.5	19. Participation of land less and poor sections is adequate.	1	2	41	18	8	2.57
19	15	27	7	2	3.6	20. Input supply service support is appropriate.	3	28	28	11		2.33
13	19	29	7	2	3.49	21. Research center backstopping and support is adequate.	3	16	42	9		2.19
6	14	31	10	9	2.97	22. There is adequate participation and cooperation of NGOs.	1	3	9	35	22	1.94
7	19	25	14	5	3.13	23. There is adequate participation and cooperation of private organizations.	4	11	44	11		2.11

Mean = 3.6

mean = 2.83

system to the importance they attached on the role in reality. Perception in relation to their basic role as communicator, information agent is indicated by the fact of lower level of importance recognized by observation, participation, and cooperation. Typically, this is linked to the lesser involvement of NGOs in the region. Very few NGOs or such organizations are said to exist in the region. Also, the participation and cooperation of private organizations are perceived in lower level of importance.

The findings indicate low level of adequacy of only "moderate adequacy". Discussions with in-field staff have confirmed the link of low level of adequacy in regard to the reflection of shortfall and constraints in organization and management of the system. As a result, certain features of organization and management aspects are stated being inadequate demanding solicited considerations. Respondents however have agreed on extension organization to constitute management flexibility to be largely adequate. There is however no consensus on relatively high scores on level of adequacy of force of motivation. Discussions and interviews of the respondents rate low level of adequacy on force of motivation

4. Test the relationship between perception of KT towards organization and management aspects

There is statistical significance on three items, the remaining twenty items show no significance in their relationship. Fourteen of the items affect positive relationship and six items affect negative relationship but all without statistical significance. Some significant items that showed comparatively weaker and later identified through discussions in the

field are as follows:

1. Field offices, equipment and tools are adequate.
2. freedom from regulatory and input supply responsibilities
3. Government policies support extension,
4. Mission statement of extension is clear.

The result in sum is being found weak relationship. The major twenty items failed to show significance in their relationships. Explanation has been sought, through individual interviews and separated discussions, on the items of comparatively weaker relationship, selectively in this study on items showing negative relationship though with non-statistical significant difference. The purpose has been to gain insights and the feel of the causes of weakness in relationship. Following items are discussed. It is recognized during discussions with the staff that the level of adequacy on above items do stand as weak and inadequate in nature in practice.

According to the above discussion, it is found that the mission statement of extension is being unclear, in the light of which, the field staff expressed confusion and lack of direction of their work. Structurally the earlier research similarly provides sufficient basis for specifying what is unique and crucial about the need for Extension Department to identify the philosophy directly. It certainly takes precedence in all discussions and interviews. Here the important need for extension is to set clearer direction and policies. Extension in the first place must identify its philosophy and mission statement or rather term it as making clearer. There is an agreement that government policies support extension but that some of the policies fall inappropriate and need rethinking. Policies such as One Tambon

Table 4 Correlation between perception of KT towards organization and management aspects.

N = 70

Organization and management aspects	r
1. Extension has effective communication and information system	.060
2. There is strong force of motivation.	.206
3. Extension management has flexibility.	.179
4. There exists satisfactory and proper linkage with research organizations.	-.002
5. Extension has statutory basis and mission.	.102
6. There is stable financial support for extension performances	-.120
7. Field offices, equipment, transportation and communications systems are adequate	.001
8. Extension has freedom from regulatory and input supply responsibilities	-.116
9. There is continuous farmers input to guide program priorities	.203
10. Extension has competitive salary and incentive system.	.053
11. Current Government policies support extension	-.093
12. Mission statement of extension organization is broad, specific and clear	-.199
13. The goals and objectives of the mission are clear and appropriate	.038
14. Delegation of authority is appropriate.	.010
15. Lines of authority are short, direct and feasible.	.048
16. Each staff member has only one administrator	.233
17. Clientele participation, cooperation is adequate.	.318**
18. There is gender balance in the clientele participation.	.410**
19. There is adequate participation of the land less and poor sections.	.069
20. Input supply service support is appropriate	-.098
21. Research center backstopping and support is adequate and appropriate.	.014
22. There is adequate participation and cooperation of NGOs	.120
23. There is adequate participation and cooperation of private organizations	.238*

Note:

* refers to the significant level at .05

**refers to the significant level at .01

One Farm, visit of 25 farmers/day by the staff are required for review and considerations. Office equipment and tools particularly computer and software supplies are stated to fall short as earlier discussed. Freedom accorded regulatory services are stated being still limited on account of staff holding responsibilities to numerous heads and agencies. Much of their time is stated being occupied on meeting regulatory functions such as implementing laws and acts, census, data, reports among others.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings show that respondents perceive positively on both level of importance and level of implementation of their roles and that the highest level of importance is perceived on role of teaching and training and on role of advising and counseling. The least importance is concluded to be perceived on roles of delivery of farm input, managing extension program and in support of decision making. The study of relation between level of importance and level of implementation indicates that there exists positive, moderate but relatively weak relationships between them. The low level of implementation is linked to the involvement in various regulatory functions and performances.

Higher importance of performed level may therefore be attached to the role of extension on delivery of farm input, input supply, extension management and in support of decision making. It is worth testing that the gap between level of importance and level of implementation of their roles that could be bridged possibly by drawing

professionalism, specialization, raising managerial capabilities of the staff and by reducing involvement of staff in the regulatory functions.

Toward the organization and management aspects, their level of adequacy is being at moderately adequate. The relationship test between their level of importance apparently point to the existence of only weak relationships on the items. Highest importance is observed being attached on communication and information system and the least of importance attached on cooperation and participation of NGOs. Management flexibility is concluded to be observed largely adequate both through the test and field discussions. The findings indicate that mission statement of extension, directions and policies are unclear, government policies support are not appropriate, office equipment and tools particularly computer and software supplies inadequate, freedom from regulatory services are being still limited.

Organization and management in general may be encouraged to raise the level of adequacy, involvement of NGOs in extension in the region in particular may be encouraged. Early experiences of the west and industrialized nations have confirmed involvement of NGOs in extension as crucial. As features of privatization, cost sharing, bottom up approach, decentralization, and partnerships creep into extension role, the involvement of NGOs would gain significance. The involvement of NGOs in extension and in the region as such may be encouraged.

Extension may be recommended to draw its mission statement clearer and set clearer directions and policies. The first effort of any organization as it may be agreed is to draw its mission and vision.

Earlier writings and research have similarly pointed to the need for the Department of Agricultural Extension to identify the central guiding philosophy in attempt to resolve the goal diversity including a fundamental operational one.

Government policies may be set to draw more consultations in the field to tune to the need of appropriateness of applications and members ensured with more freedom from regulatory services.

Extension may finally be recommended to strengthen information technology and network services in the field. Extension must realize the significance of electronic and information technology revolution at any faster rate.

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