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## AN OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK IN THE AREA OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

P.I. Gomes

(Head, Dept. of Agricultural Extension, University of the West Indies, Trinidad)

The following comments and questions are meant to give an overview of recent work in the area of Agricultural Extension by the Faculty and thereby set the stage for deliberations in the Workshop so as to improve both the conceptualisation and effectiveness of our programmes.

It seems fair to say that extension services in the Region and, perhaps, marketing, remain the most frequently flogged whipping-horses and topics of adverse criticisms within the agricultural sector. If in the last two decades, major thrusts for economic growth have been explicitly favourable to a semi-industrialisation of screw-driver type manufacturing and spurts of tourism expansion, the result has been to make extension the most neglected bastard of the bastard agricultural sector of Caribbean economies.

The general picture of the extension services in the Region reveals a situation of gross neglect, acute understaffing, inadequately trained and ill-equipped with personnel of low status and professional morale, and with woefully unrealistic budgetary allocations. The tradition seems to have developed that one was relegated to work in extension when one was not considered fit for or capable of doing anything better! It is both naive and self-delusive to be apparently surprised at the pervasive low level of improved technology among farming communities, when one realises that the least trained agricultural technicians are the most exposed to farmers. Given this sad state of affairs, a glimmer of hope is emerging through recent work by the Faculty's Caribbean Agricultural Extension Project (CAEP). Very briefly, the main features of that project, what has been done so far over the last two years, and what is intended (over the coming three years), will be discussed.

The Project was conceived as covering two phases. The first was for the purpose of planning a programme development during which an institutional analysis of the national agricultural extension system in each project country was conducted and this was to be used in designing a national extension improvement plan for 3-year period. At the moment, these plans from seven of the eight countries participating in the Project have been approved by their respective governments. The countries with approved plans are Belize, Antigua and Barbuda, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We are awaiting the approval of Grenada's plan.

Phase 2 of the Project will consist mainly of UWI's and collaborating US universities' technical support in the implementation of the national plans. In addition, other features of the Project are of special significance:

- (i) the establishment of a Regional Extension Communications Unit as an upgrading of communication activities by the Department of Agricultural Extension; and
- (ii) the introduction of a post-graduate diploma course in Extension as part of the Faculty's Higher Degrees programmes.

For the purposes of discussion, a few remarks can be made with regard to the following:

(a) *Conceptualising the Extension Process -*

In our view, it is essential to see extension as a dynamic process through which farmer education is pursued by means of the dissemination of new knowledge, the imparting of skills and the stimulation of appropriate motives so that the livelihood of the farming community is improved. In this process, it is important that traditional practices and problem-areas encountered by farmers are also fed back to the researcher and policy-making agencies in the agricultural sector. Extension presupposes appropriate and relevant knowledge (technology) to be communicated, but it is not merely information-dissemination. It is certainly not a regulatory arm of an agency in which a great proportion of the extension worker's time is spent collecting taxes, shooting cows, or running-down farm debts.

To agronomic researchers one may pose the question, over the last five year what can be considered major new technologies which Caribbean communities might do well to adopt? On what grounds (evidence) can you say these technologies, if adopted, will improve the livelihood of farmers?

(b) *A Regional Agricultural Extension Coordinating Committee -*

The first major activity of CAEP's Phase 1 was the convening of RAECC in November 1980. Representatives came from project territories, government ministries, commodity associations, farming groups and marketing boards. One of the main results was to clarify for the Project the importance of national extension planning so as to enable specific work plans, target groups, organisational changes and training needs to be set up both for the Region as a whole, and for specific territories.

Will it be useful for such a Coordinating Committee to become a permanent aspect of the Region's agriculture beyond the life of the Project?

(c) *A Technical Joint Action Committee -*

There is a great need to coordinate and establish formal linkages between research, administrative mechanisms and extension. As part of Phase 2, it is proposed that a formal mechanism be established to link CAEP with representatives of CARDI, CARDATS and the Faculty's Research Advisory Committee. The main objectives of the Committee will be to:

- (i) review and coordinate agricultural extension, communications, and information dissemination efforts and programmes;
- (ii) identify and share information about major agricultural technological developments and/or recommendations that have emerged during the past year that are especially deserving of special extension attention;
- (iii) review and share publications and publication plans;
- (iv) review and share training opportunities and plans;

- (v) identify major technical areas needing research attention; and
- (vi) make recommendations to their respective organizations for joint or collaborative activity.

Again the question may be in order as to the usefulness of ensuring more formal and effective linkages between research and extension in other territories of the Region.

(d) *Professional Post-graduate Training in Extension*

As part of Phase 2, a special one-year diploma in Extension is being introduced by the Faculty of Agriculture beginning hopefully with the academic year, 1983/84. The diploma will primarily address the need for upgrading the professional training of agricultural extension officers who now occupy top and middle-level administrative and supervisory posts.

While primarily for persons with technical agricultural backgrounds at the Bachelor's or a Diploma level with several years practical experience, the kind of training to be provided will go beyond ministries of agriculture and will be beneficial to middle-level professionals in developmental fields related to the rural sector as a whole, such as public health, nutrition fisheries, community development and adult education. Such persons can become effective animators in programmes for integrated and integral rural development. It is intended that the course will enable an understanding of extension which in the transformation of the full spectrum of Caribbean rural life is the real center-piece of development. To assist in this, appropriate courses will be placed on the curriculum.

It might be useful to discuss how such training can be adequately tailored to long-term needs of the Region.

In regard to the above topics, further information and discussion can be provided, for interested participants.