The Integration of Nutrition into Extension and Advisory Services: A Synthesis of Experiences, Lessons, and Recommendations

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Extension and Advisory Services: A Vital Component of Ag Development

- EAS are the different activities and sets of organizations that provide the information and services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in rural settings.
- EAS are important to ensure that the smallholder farmers’ needs are being met, while enabling them to achieve food security in the face of risk and uncertainty.
- There are an estimated 800,000 official extension agents worldwide with more than 90% located in the developing world.
Extension for nutrition sensitive agriculture?

- Extension agents are often mentioned as a promising platform for the delivery of nutrition knowledge and practices to rural communities.
- Why? Because they reach and interact closely with farmers.
- However, the context and mechanisms for delivery on the ground have been less clear or under-evaluated.
Purpose

To assess current integration of nutrition in EAS, document training provided to EAS agents, and identify challenges and opportunities for the integration of nutrition.
Methods for Data Collection & Analysis

- A mixed methodology
- An extensive literature review covering the following databases: PubMed, ISI Web of Science, Agris, Google Scholar, Econlit, and IBSS
- Online surveys and semi-structured key informant interviews with stakeholders
- Data were collected between December 2012 and June 2013
Status of Inclusion of Nutrition in EAS

- Countries have approached integration of nutrition into EAS differently at the national, provincial, district, and community levels.
- The approach is strongly dependent on the capacities of the national governments to coordinate multi-sectoral strategies and resource constraints faced by individual countries.
Nutrition Training of Extension Agents

• There is extensive pre- and in-service training on nutrition taking place within EAS at different levels: within projects, within vocational training, and within the formal education system.

• Mainly receive training on crop production for improving nutrition, and on food preparation, preservation, and hygiene.

• Peer to peer engagement, positive deviance, and model farmers, are all avenues that have been tried.
EAS with Nutrition Skills

Respondents who think extension workers should have specialized nutrition skills

- Yes: 43%
- No: 22%
- Don't Know: 35%
Recommendations on Training from Stakeholders

1. Trainings should be on-going, reinforced, and mentored, in order for the addition of nutrition as a topic to be sustainable.
2. The field itself can be used as a classroom for training on nutrition agronomy by using field plots, greenhouses, and local biodiversity and ecosystems.
3. Soft skills are key: Facilitation and negotiation skills.
4. Promote nutrition as a topic at the two-year post-secondary or vocational schools where agriculture extension agents are trained, so that it is recognized and accepted as a discipline.
5. Historically, the topic of nutrition was equated with food preparation, which falls to the female in many cultures. Training materials should present nutrition in a social context, accessible to both men and women.
Nutrition Training of Extension Agents

We’ve come a long way baby…or have we?

Survey respondents who think female extension agents have different roles compared to male agents

- No: 50%
- Yes: 33%
- Don't Know: 17%
Types of Extension Workers and Other Rural Workers

• Nutrition often falls through the cracks for both extension workers and health workers at the community level.

• There is little duplication of duties at the community level with regard to nutrition.

• There are a number of EAS models that also apply to nutrition.
Distinct EAS Types

- Generalists
- Nutrition specialists
- Generalists with access to Specialists
- Home economic agents
- Lead farmers/community volunteers
- Farmer field school facilitators
- Community health workers
- Educators
Challenges of EAS in Integrating Nutrition

• **Challenge 1**: Ineffective nutrition training and lack of awareness.

• **Challenge 2**: Unclear organizational mandates.

• **Challenge 3**: Women’s inclusion in EAS.

• **Challenge 4**: Reduced mobility and poor access to the materials that extension agents need to carry out their duties.
Systemic Challenges

- **Challenge 1:** Agriculture and nutrition sectors speak different “languages.”
- **Challenge 2:** Importance of coordinate planning and dialogue among the relevant agriculture, nutrition, and health actors.
- **Challenge 3:** Resources.
Survey responses regarding the challenges and requirements for integrating nutrition:

- “...Training and time. They need to be well prepared and time-allocated - extension agents are already over-burdened with tasks.” [Development Practitioner]

- “...Cost of additional human resources, training for communication skills as well as logistics and equipment for information collection and dissemination.” [Government agent, Ministry of Agriculture, Liberia]

- “Conventional extension agents require refresher courses for them to give professional focus to nutritional messages and that is quite costly. Lobbying with organizations to mainstream nutrition is also costly.” [Government Agent, Malawi]

- “They will also need a means of transport (preferably a motorcycle) and monthly pay/allowance to fuel and service the motorcycle.” [Professor, Uganda]
The Opportunities of EAS Integrating Nutrition

• The vast majority of online survey respondents in this study—64 out of 68—believed that agricultural EAS are a valid mechanism by which to deliver nutrition information to households.

• Reasons Include:
  – Established infrastructures.
  – Reach.
  – Community trust.
  – Cultural awareness.
  – Empathy and understanding.
Opportunities for EAS and Nutrition

• Establishing an enabling environment: multi-sectoral coordination and skilled human resource development.

• Creating demand for better nutrition, and for increased nutrition education and options.

• Leveraging community leaders and champions, utilizing technology to effectively communicate, and the creative use of human resources, can all help to elevate nutrition within EAS.
Harnessing Technology

- WeFarm
- *Rapid SMS* to register female farmers in Rwanda
- *Digital Green* using participatory videos to promote sustainable agricultural practices in India
What is needed to integrate nutrition into EAS?

- Well, a lot...
- Political will
- Financial commitment
- Motorbikes, cell phones, top ups
- Mechanism to assess performance
- Reinvigorate training – linking landscapes to consumption; BCC; value chains, bundled income generation
- Utilize different modes of rural communication
- New technologies
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A Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) and the World Bank Secure Nutrition Knowledge Platform Collaboration

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Abstract
Background: The need for nutrition-sensitive agriculture is well recognized and of growing interest to global development players. Extension and advisory services (EAS), with their established infrastructure, provide a unique opportunity for nutrition interventions to be implemented at scale with significant reach.
Objectives: To assess current integration of nutrition in EAS, document training provided to EAS agents, and identify challenges and opportunities for the integration of nutrition.
Methods: A mixed-methodology was used, which included a systematic literature review covering the following databases: PubMed, ISI Web of Science, Agris, Google Scholar, Econlit, and IBSS. In addition, online surveys and semi-structured key informant interviews with stakeholders were performed. Data were collected between December 2012 and June 2013.
Results: Based on this study, the most common integration of nutrition into EAS is through efforts to increase the availability of nutritious food. The nutrition training of extension agents is often inadequate, particularly in the realm beyond technical agricultural skill. Additionally, a lack of career

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