

STAKEHOLDER PROCESSES FOR ASSESSMENT OF EXTENSION SYSTEMS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE COUNTRY EXPERIENCES

M. Blum¹, A. Diop¹, M. Hani¹ and A. Mbaye¹

ABSTRACT

National extension systems and rural advisory services have declined over the last two decades in many developing countries, due to lack of political and financial support, reduced investment, attrition of human resources and physical infrastructure and a lack of clarity on the roles of public extension institutions *vis a vis* other stakeholders and service providers. Challenges facing the food and agriculture sector, and the recent recognition of the vital role of small producers in achieving food security, are urging governments and their development partners to reassess extension and rural advisory services and support their reform and renewal, recognising the roles of multiple service providers and various stakeholders. FAO has designed stakeholder

processes for assessing national extension systems; these processes involve multiple actors in reviewing the existing systems and developing a new design and proposal for renewing them. The process emphasises stakeholder participation. The paper describes experiences from Lebanon, Mauritania and Niger. It examines the specific processes applied in the three countries to assess national extension services, the roles of the various stakeholders involved and the conditions that influenced the processes in the different countries. The paper provides a comparative analysis of the three cases, the methodologies used and results achieved and a discussion of future prospects. The paper concludes with lessons learned from, and success factors for, the renewal of national extension systems.

KEY WORDS: *DIALOGUE, LESSONS LEARNED, MULTIPLE, REFORM, RENEWAL*

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 00153, Rome, Italy.

The views expressed in this information product are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of FAO.



INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

National extension systems in many developing countries have declined over the last couple of decades due to lack of political and financial support. Public investment in agricultural extension has fallen radically over the years, along with the low priority attributed to agriculture in the development agenda by governments and donors. This has caused deterioration in public systems, including shortage of operational budgets, lack of programmes benefitting smallholders, attrition of trained human resources and crumbling physical infrastructure.

In recent years, a plethora of actors have emerged from civil society and the private sector, providing advisory services to farmers, often with a lack of clarity on their roles in relation to the public advisory institutions. In addition, in many countries, producer organisations (POs) developed which increasingly influenced agricultural policy, including research and extension, and which themselves provided services to their fellow farmers.

Challenges facing the global economy and recurrent food crises have revived interest in, and support to, agriculture as a key driver in the battle against hunger and poverty. This renewed interest in agriculture for development and the recognition of the vital role of small producers in achieving food security are urging governments and their development partners to reassess extension systems and their agricultural and rural advisory

services and support their reform and renewal. In doing so, a number of questions emerge:

- How do we avoid copying models from outside that prevailed in the past and ensure that advisory services respond to the needs and demands of smallholders?
- How do we enable farmers to participate in assessing the existing system and contribute to the design of a new system that meets their needs and aspirations?
- Who are the key players in today's rural advisory services?
- What are the roles of the various stakeholders and service providers, (public and non-public) in future extension systems?
- How can accountability to smallholders and their organisations be achieved?
- How can POs be involved in governance and decision-making in relation to new extension systems?

The paper aims to answer these questions by looking at experiences from Lebanon, Mauritania and Niger, where FAO has facilitated the review of the existing extension systems and the development of proposals for their renewal.

MATERIALS, METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

To assist countries in developing sustainable advisory systems, FAO designed stakeholder processes for the review of national extension systems, which involve multiple actors in assessing

the existing system and developing a new design and proposal for its renewal. The process, which was developed and modified according to the context of each country, focuses on stakeholder dialogue and participation and farmers' involvement and includes pluralism and demand-driven services.

The objective was to develop country-specific systems that build on existing stakeholders' capacities and ensure farmers' participation in the design process which gives farmers a voice and a decision-making role in the future advisory system. National strategy documents, statistical data and former evaluations of extension systems informed the process and provided general guidance in all countries. FAO provided first-hand support to the methodology and implementation of the stakeholder processes in the three countries.

This study undertook a comparative analysis of the three cases, examining the country-specific stakeholder processes used, the roles of the various stakeholders involved (including FAO's role) and the conditions that influenced the process in the different countries. The paper describes the processes used in each country, the roles of the various stakeholders, similarities among the three cases, specificities, difficulties encountered and mitigation actions. It identifies strengths and weaknesses and discusses lessons learned and implications for the future.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The national extension systems in the countries under study have declined over the years for varying reasons. Weakness of the public extension services and socio-political changes prompted the involvement of multiple actors in providing advisory services to farmers. Their efforts were ineffective and fragmented, often having little co-ordination among them. The respective governments have recognised the negative impact on small producers who constitute the majority of farmers in those countries. Farmers and their organisations, and other civil society actors, advocated for support and better advisory services to smallholder farmers. As a result, recent national strategy documents called for immediate action to strengthen advisory services.

The starting point

The public extension system in **Lebanon** deteriorated due to the long civil war (1975–1991) while multiple non-public service providers have made proactive yet fragmented efforts to fill the gap. Lebanon's agricultural development strategy (*Stratégie de Développement Agricole du Liban*, 2004) identified priority areas for renewing the extension system, focusing on building partnerships with public and private sector actors towards a decentralised and pluralistic approach in the delivery of services. The Government of Lebanon requested FAO assistance in reviewing its existing system and

developing a viable new system.

In contrast, **Niger's** agricultural extension system declined after the Training and Visit (T & V) Programme funded by the World Bank in 1998. The review and implementation of an integrated advisory system for rural development was identified as a priority area for public action within the framework of the rural development strategy (*Stratégie de Développement Rural*, 2006). In response, the Government of Niger requested FAO to assist in this task, in collaboration with a national steering committee that was set up for this purpose.

In **Mauritania** the national extension system had gradually deteriorated in the late 1990s with the end of the T&V programme. The system is now characterised by the coexistence of different approaches developed by local projects. Several strategic directions aimed at strengthening agro-pastoral production and productivity have been identified in various national documents since 2007. As part of the strategy implementation, and following a series of study tours to Mali and Senegal, farmers requested FAO to assist in renewal of the extension system and the formulation and implementation of a new advisory system.

The process

In all three countries, FAO reviewed the requests received from the governments, which focused mainly on the public sector and introduced an integrated approach that included all stakeholders

and advisory service providers from public, private, NGOs, farmers and their organisations. This approach recognised the reality of multiple service providers in extension and ensured that they were considered in the new advisory system design. The core process of reviewing the extension system involved: analysis and assessment of the present extension system, designing a new advisory system and developing a proposal, including resources required. Measures were taken to ensure active participation of all stakeholders concerned throughout the process.

In **Niger**, all three phases were developed at the beginning and approved by the national steering committee (NSC), which was composed of representatives of all stakeholders (including POs and donors). This allowed more effective planning and avoided questioning of next steps. The reports of each phase were reviewed by all stakeholders and approved by the NSC, before continuing to the next phase of the process. A parallel process of strengthening of farmers' organisations was introduced to enable them to understand their roles and responsibilities in an advisory system and to contribute fully to the stakeholder process and the future demand-led advisory system (Blum and Mbaye, 2009). Consultants from the public sector, NGOs and POs were trained to: gather the required data, facilitate the core process and use the tools developed. This involved intensive stakeholder



consultations and regional workshops with farmers for the analysis and gathering of elements for the new system. A farmer leader accompanied the parallel process with the producer organisations to support their participation in the core process.

In **Lebanon**, a step-wise process was implemented to analyse the situation and advise the design of a new system. The methodology was discussed with all stakeholders at the inception workshop. Steps undertaken were: review of the existing public extension system through a desk study and structured interviews, field studies to assess farmers' needs, interests and expectations and a survey of key stakeholders and service providers, analysis of various scenarios for the future system and development of the reform proposal. Stakeholders were involved from the beginning through consultation workshops, national forums and individual meetings. Representatives of NGOs, farmers' organisations, private firms and foundations participated in consultation workshops to discuss the design of the process, validate the results of the field studies and survey, examine the various scenarios and contribute to the development of the proposal for the future system. Despite the repeated and long interruptions of the process due to the 2006 war and following events, stakeholders' interest, support and engagement in the process were maintained.

In **Mauritania**, the process was based on the Niger experience and consisted of two parts:

participatory diagnosis for identifying the main farmers' organisations and their rating of present services, and a description of their demands and vision for the new system. It also helped to analyse the historical course of various advisory systems in the country and to identify and assess the public and non-public structures and human and physical resources available. This was followed by the development of a proposal for a new advisory system that considered farmers' demands and the pluralistic nature of the supply side. The process is still ongoing and the proposal will be validated with the stakeholders at central and regional level.

The role of the various stakeholders in the review process

Despite the specificities of each of the three cases, the roles of the various stakeholders had many similarities. For this reason, an overall description of these roles is provided, highlighting only specificities related to individual countries where applicable.

Governments: provided broad policy guidance through their national strategies for agricultural development, requested technical assistance for developing a new advisory system and ensured participation and contribution of relevant officials throughout the process and an enabling environment by supporting the involvement of public and non-public stakeholders.

In **Lebanon**, the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) set up a project task group involving several

departments to supervise and facilitate the process. The head of the extension department served as the project co-ordinator. Mauritania set up a monitoring committee involving several branches of its MoA, whereas in Niger the government supervised the process through the secretariat of the rural development strategy. In addition, the national steering committee, composed of representatives from each stakeholder group, gave the final approval of each phase in the process. The government will ensure support in the future for the implementation of the developed proposal, starting with a testing phase.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs):

participated in the design and validation of the future advisory system and in stakeholders' workshops and contributed to the consultation process. They delivered advisory services and have shown interest in participating in a pluralistic system. In Niger, NGOs participated in the consultations and in the national steering committee, whereas in Lebanon, over 30 NGOs participated in the stakeholders' survey and expressed their interest in collaborating with the public extension department in delivering advisory services in areas of their expertise. In Mauritania, NGOs were involved in the analysis and design of the new system supporting pluralistic advisory services. Their role is envisaged to become progressively more important in the future.

The private sector: its role varied in the three



countries, despite some basic similarities. Private sector actors are mainly input suppliers, whose role is to commercialise inputs and agricultural equipment. In Niger, the role of the private sector was weak. Private service providers working in development projects participated fully in the process. There are a limited number of input supply companies in the country because subsidised fertiliser is provided by government. Private firms serve only a few sectors. Their role in a future advisory system in Niger will be mainly in water-related services, farm management and commercialisation of agricultural products and processing.

Input supply companies and private foundations in Lebanon are actively involved in providing advisory services to small producers. Representatives of private foundations and input supply companies participated in the process, and expressed their interest in forming new partnerships within the future new advisory system. In Mauritania, private companies are the main suppliers of inputs and agricultural equipment and they are seen as the backbone of development and modernisation of agriculture in the county. However, their involvement in the review process was limited.

The donor community: in Niger, the donor community participated in all steps of the core process in the framework of the Rural Development Strategy (SDR) and the national

steering committee and provided support to the process approach as proposed by FAO. In Mauritania, donors participated in the validation workshops and related studies and were interested in the process and its results. In Lebanon, donor support to extension was generally fragmented into components related to subject matter training of extension staff under specialised projects, with little attention paid to developing institutional capacities or renewal of the advisory system.

National consultants: roles were to facilitate and inform the process, collect and analyse data, organise the consultative workshops and assist in developing the proposal. In Niger, the national consultants represented the various stakeholders. Five consultants were nominated by their respective ministries, while the two consultants working for the NGOs and the POs were selected based on their qualifications and in agreement with the NGOs and POs. In Lebanon and Mauritania, the national consultants were independent, selected by FAO through an open competitive process.

The role and inputs of FAO

FAO support started with revision of the requests received from the respective governments, which mainly focused on the public extension system. FAO reoriented the process towards an integrated approach that included public and non-public stakeholders and advisory service providers within a pluralistic framework. Features of demand-

driven, market-orientated advisory systems were introduced. This sensitised senior government officials, national project task force or national steering committees and national consultants to a new vision of a pluralistic and demand-led advisory system. In Niger and Mauritania, FAO provided stepwise training to the national consultants on the new vision and methodology, and their role and tasks in the process. In Lebanon the international consultant recruited by FAO provided hands-on support to the national consultants at critical intervals during their assignments.

In all cases, FAO guided the methodology and implementation of the process and provided technical and financial support. It provided technical and methodological backing to the project consultants and committees, clarified roles and responsibilities, and supported the development of assessment tools for field investigations. The core process that FAO developed and implemented in the three countries emphasised the participatory and consultative approach that involves all stakeholders throughout the process and the crucial role that producer organisations play as clients, and as service providers. The draft reports and proposals were relayed to all stakeholders and their views and inputs were incorporated into the final proposal. In Lebanon, FAO designed and conducted a field assessment that covered all agro-ecological zones and different production systems, in order to



further ensure that views and needs of different types of farmers were reflected in the new proposal. FAO organised a national forum involving representatives of all stakeholders and service providers, farmers' organisations and individual farmers to validate the findings of the field assessments, identify the roles of stakeholders in the future system and reflect on the main elements of the proposal. In Niger, apart from stakeholder consultations with each category of service providers, workshops were held at regional level with farmers in which they articulated their assessment of the present and their expectations of the new system. In addition, FAO introduced a process to reinforce the capacities of POs so that they could better articulate their priorities and understand their future role in the new system with respect to decision-making, service provision as well as monitoring and evaluation.

The role and inputs of the producer organisations

The role of the POs varied greatly among the three cases. In **Mauritania**, the POs (men, women or mixed) were the first to point out the inefficiency of the existing advisory system and demanded fundamental changes. Following study tours and exposure to experiences in Mali and Senegal, they aspired to a participatory approach and a new advisory service. The POs advocated for change at all levels and asked for FAO assistance in

designing and implementing a new advisory system in Mauritania. They actively participated in the validation workshops and formulation of the new proposal. POs also took part in various meetings to design the advisory units according to agro-ecological and administrative zones.

In **Niger** the POs' representatives participated through their membership of the national steering committee and through their own workshops. They also lobbied to establish a demand-driven system. In 2008 during a POs audience with the President of the country, they expressed their vision for an advisory system based on farmers' demands. This initiative has made government officials more amenable to a central, empowered role for POs in the advisory system. Farmers and their organisations participated in a series of workshops to develop a bottom-up approach for producers and their organisations to express their priorities and to foresee a development fund that will be entirely managed by POs and their organisations (Blum and Mbaye, 2009).

In **Lebanon**, individual farmers and representatives of POs participated in the process. They participated in all workshops and national forums and contributed to the assessment of the advisory system and validation of the new proposal. However, it was noted that the majority of POs in Lebanon were reportedly weak or ineffective and did not have a representative body at national or regional level. The new system places emphasis on

developing POs' capacities for articulating their demands for services and taking a prominent role in the implementation and monitoring of the new system through membership of joint extension committees at local and regional level.

Data informing proposal development

The national policy papers and strategy documents, mentioned above, provided overall guidance and a sound basis for renewal of the advisory system in the respective countries. In addition, a number of national studies and policy documents have informed the discussions and stakeholders' consultations and workshops and provided insights on national priorities and policy directions. Mauritania's sector policy documents (livestock, irrigation) elaborated sectoral constraints, needs, priorities and strategies in the short and medium-terms. Niger's national census of agriculture and livestock provided information on the type of production in the different regions, size of the population involved by commodity, data about the POs and the NGOs and their distribution and the production and yields of the different commodities (République du Niger, 2006). This provided a frame for determining the advisory services based on the agro-economic activities in the different zones.

Similarly, the agricultural atlas of Lebanon provided vital information about land holding size, agricultural production, farming systems,



population active in agriculture, infrastructure based on the agro-ecological zones and administrative boundaries. Building on this information, a mapping exercise was undertaken at Caza level (smallest administrative unit) to complement the new proposal and facilitate the design of location-specific advisory services, based on the common production and farming system, existing infrastructure and size of holdings.

Experience and process evaluation

The country-specific processes encountered varying difficulties and demonstrated specific strengths and weaknesses in each country. The following table provides a brief comparison of the difficulties encountered, strengths and weaknesses of the process implemented in the three countries.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Development of effective and sustainable new advisory systems should consider the specific context of each country, including: the level of structuring and organisational capacities of POs, the capacities of public, private and civil society advisory services to respond to their demands, lessons learned from the past, and the specific agro-ecological and socio-economic conditions. The different and changing roles of stakeholders, external and internal influencing factors and distinct

	Niger	Mauritania	Lebanon
Difficulties occurring in the process	Conservatism and resistance to open up and consider a pluralistic demand-driven advisory system. Delay in the process due to the secretariat of SDR leading the process being overloaded with political and administrative responsibilities. Weakness of national federations of POs and rivalry among them. Weak analytical level of national consultants.	Lack of data for diagnosing the initial situation. Limited time allocation prevented the three consultants from each visiting the three project regions. Geographic coverage limited to three agro-ecological zones and each covering four neighbouring regions. Only the most representative POs were selected for participation in the national workshop, while all the central administrations from the public sector were represented.	War in 2006 and events that followed disrupted and delayed the process, causing repeated interruptions and several changes in project consultants. Several ministerial changes during the lifetime of the project. Weakness of the majority of POs and lack of federations of POs to represent farmers at national level.
Strengths of the processes	Firm commitment of the national government and SDR secretariat. Representation of all relevant stakeholders groups in the NSC. Implementation of specific capacity development process for strengthening farmer organisations in articulating their position and defining their role in the future advisory system. Implementation of the process in the framework of SDR that regroups all sectoral ministries, NGOs and POs. Strong participatory process involving NGOs and POs. Strong commitment of POs and their federations to the process including contributions to financing it. NGOs present in areas affected by food crises became future advisory services providers in these regions. The legal framework in Niger allowed a pluralistic advisory system as extension services are not described as a public good and are open to all providers. Regular consultations with and feedback to the donor community in the country under the umbrella of the SDR.	Commitment of the government to support advisory services and to involve civil society (NGOs, POs, etc.). Strong involvement of the POs in the process, the request for the new system comes directly from them. Agreement between the POs and the government / MoA to improve the situation of the rural advisory service in Mauritania. Participatory process involving the participation of NGOs and POs. Involvement of NGOs and POs in advisory services and POs in local development plans. Existence of a vibrant network of NGOs, some of which have a proven track record of business and advisory services. Existence of a network of microfinance institutions, specifically geared towards supporting income-generating activities (IGA) for women. The inclusion in the proposed new system of capacity development for POs. The existence of several umbrella programmes in agriculture and livestock development.	Commitment of the government to strengthening extension services in the country focusing on small farmers. The process started in response to felt needs and a participatory dialogue initiated by the MoA. Participatory process involving the participation of civil society. Existence of a dynamic network of NGOs and private firms that have experience in advisory services. Presence of NGOs and private firms and foundations in all vulnerable areas. The participatory process and national consultations were complemented with detailed field studies, needs assessment of farmers and a survey of service providers. The inclusion in the proposed system of capacity-development plan for all stakeholders, including POs and advisory services providers.



strengths and weaknesses of the process implemented in each country demonstrate the fundamental need for country-specific processes that respond to the challenges smallholders face and to their priority needs, while observing common guidelines of good practice. Stakeholder participation and involvement of smallholder farmers and their organisations in the design and implementation of the process were crucial factors for ensuring ownership and commitment to results and relevance of the new system to the farmers' needs and demands.

The importance of the national government's commitment and its catalytic role in creating an enabling environment and its openness to new governance modalities and pluralistic approaches cannot be overstated. Consistent support to the stakeholder process is critical for its effective implementation and for reorienting the existing extension system towards a pluralistic, demand-led and market-oriented advisory system. National leadership of the process and adequate delegation of authority are equally important factors for its smooth implementation and to ensure commitment to its results and to the establishment of the new system. Unfortunately, a change of government often constrains the continuation of such processes. Maintaining a balance between high level representation and executive and technical capacity on the government side is critical for leadership in the review process.

Weaknesses of the process

The assessment of farmers' needs and priorities was based on consultations and workshops with farmers, but not on a systematic assessment. The request focused on the advisory system, but did not consider the research and the rural education systems that needed to be reviewed. The participation of POs in the process needed support, often lacking the capacity to follow-up complex issues and lacking information about new developments in advisory services. Insufficient experience of most NGOs in agricultural and rural advisory service, as most of them are specialised in emergency and remuneration activities. The different roles of POs and the Chambers of Agriculture are not understood by most stakeholders.

The needs assessment was based on interviews and discussions with farmers and POs and not on a systematic analysis. Lack of experience of most NGOs in specific activities of advisory services (training, awareness, facilitation, etc.). Weak linkages and consultation among the different national federations. Weak management capacity and organisation of the POs and federations. The structures of agricultural education and research systems need to be reviewed and strengthened to support a sustainable and effective advisory system. Design of the new advisory system yet to be approved in a stakeholder meeting. Funding a pilot phase of the new system not yet secured.

Limited budget for the process which was provided through a FAO-TCP programme, exacerbated by the need to stretch it over a longer period of time due to the repeated interruptions mentioned above. Fragmented donor support of the extension system in the form of short-term technical training for extension staff under projects rather than long-term support to institutional strengthening. No donor identified yet to fund the pilot phase for the new system. Weak organisational status and severe understaffing of the public extension department. Weak involvement and contribution of the national research system in the process.

Results/ outputs of the process (including elements of the future advisory system)

Design of a pluralistic and demand-led advisory system. Development of a proposal for the new advisory system with focus on smallholders in the various agro-ecological zones, including budget and plan for implementation. Co-ordination mechanisms at all levels. Development of a mechanism for defining POs' priorities and for expressing and negotiating their demand for services. Establishment of a development fund plan managed by POs to finance their activities. The review of the research system in the country was included in the proposal. The pilot phase is already under way.

Design of a pluralistic and demand-led advisory system. Adjustment of the scale, organisation and the profiles of the advisory services to the different agro-ecological contexts in the country. Creation of a co-ordination platform. Introduction of a participatory bottom-up process, which includes the formulation of POs' priorities and demands for services and small projects. Management of small projects by the POs, creation of committees for the selection and approval of projects and their funding.

Development of a proposal for a pluralistic, demand-driven advisory system. Development of a legal framework to facilitate implementation of the proposal. Preparation of elaborate cost calculations and proposals for short and long-term funding of the new system. Development of maps at Caza level detailing infrastructure, agricultural activity, crop diversity, farming population etc., to facilitate the design of area-specific advisory services. Establishment of an extension database at the MoA, collating detailed information on the existing extension system, ongoing projects and service providers.



Farmers' participation in the process of reviewing the existing system and their contribution to, and influence on the design of the new system is often limited by their weak organisation, low capacity of POs and ineffectiveness or complete absence of national federations of POs. Measures to address this limitation should be incorporated in the design of the process. These measures should include capacity development of POs to enable them to articulate their vision of the new extension system, express their demands and undertake their role in the future system. Different venues should be sought to enhance smallholders' and POs' participation in the process, including formal and informal consultations, group interviews and participatory assessments to identify priority needs of male and female producers, their interests and expectations of the new system.

Despite basic and contextual differences, the presence of multiple players in the provision of rural advisory services along the value chain was evident in all of the countries studied. NGOs, POs, input supply companies, private firms and foundations are increasingly involved in the provision of agricultural and rural advisory services, with varying degrees of effectiveness. The public extension institution is no longer the sole provider of extension services and there is a marked move towards pluralistic advisory systems in all three countries. With this shift towards pluralistic systems, the roles of the public

and non-public service providers are changing. The public extension institution now has the role of facilitating the interaction of various actors, of creating an enabling environment and supporting the development of stakeholders' capacities, especially for POs. The broader framework of agricultural innovation catalyses approaches and emphasises the need to collaborate among a wide range of stakeholders.

Possibilities for increased investment in extension and different funding modalities were explored in the review processes depending on the country-specific context, including government sub-contracting, co-funding and cost sharing of advisory services, as well as specific funds for POs. Sustainability of funding resources should be examined during the process to develop local institutions with lasting impact, instead of projects with little continuity. New modalities for funding and provision of advisory services must develop to maximise the potential and contribution of the various stakeholders in the new system. When developing funding modalities that empower small farmers and their organisations, POs need to take a leading role, but also need to contribute financially. While it is clear that public resources are needed for non-profitable advisory services related to achieving poverty alleviation and food security, investments made in innovation systems should no longer be done without the participation of the POs in decision-making on how these funds should be

spent. POs must be directly involved in monitoring the implementation and evaluation of effectiveness of the advisory services, thus ensuring accountability of service providers and enhancing the quality of services.

The proposals for the new advisory systems developed in the respective countries have considered the existence of multiple players, their new roles and the changing needs and demands of small producers. To ensure a sustainable, pluralistic, demand-driven and market-oriented advisory system, implementation of these proposals should be accompanied by an organisational development and change management approach to support the service providers and the POs to overcome difficulties and to enhance their capacities to meet the new challenges. An elaborate process is also needed to discuss and clarify new roles of the different service providers and POs in the new system. The role and capacity of the research system and its linkages with extension and advisory services need to be examined and integrated in the process from the start.

With the emphasis on improving market access for small producers and calls for demand-led services, the roles of producers' organisations and unifying governance structures must also be elaborated and strengthened. Substantial efforts are needed to organise small producers and to empower and maximise the potential of POs in the



new system. Technical and financial support to POs and their federations – to improve their representation capacity and empower them to influence the design of the new system, advocate for its set-up, and undertake their role in the new advisory system as clients and as service providers – will greatly contribute to the sustainability of the advisory system and its accountability to farmers.

LITERATURE CITED

Blum, M. and Mbaye, A. 2009. 'A participatory process approach for developing a pluralistic, demand led and market oriented advisory system: Case study from Niger.' *Proceedings of XIX European Seminar on Extension Education*. Assisi, Italy, 15–19 September 2009.

République du Niger, 2006. Stratégie de Développement Rural, Plan d'Action, Le secteur rural, Principal moteur de la croissance économique. République du Niger, Niamey.

République Libanaise, 2004. Stratégie de Développement Agricole du Liban. Ministère de l'Agriculture, Direction des Etudes et de la Coordination, Beirut.