

After "Taking a New Look" – Taking a New Step

An Approach for Demand Driven Extension

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A common agreement states that extension should orient their services according to the demand of farming families. Although everybody agrees, few are the examples where this approach is put into practice. In 2000 PASOLAC started a pilot action with 12 communities/organisations in Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador. Here they present their experience after a first phase of three years.

1. How the new approach got started

In the nineties many government funded extension services were abolished. The Donors began to channel their funds through NGOs thinking that these were operating closer to the farming families and would therefore take up their demands. In 1997 LBL analysed the extension activities of 25 NGOs in Central America. The main finding was: As long as the providers offer extension service or technical assistance for free, the farmers have no say neither in the content nor in the quality of the service.

The analysis also showed clearly that the providers were trying to satisfy the source of their funds (the donors) and much less the receivers of their services. As a result PASOLAC published its findings in „Taking a new Look“² (span. „Invertir al mirada“) where they opted for a completely new approach.

Theory is fine but practice is better. The first actions following the new approach were implemented in Honduras in 1998 by PROASEL. After the programmes of PROASEL and PASOLAC had merged it redefined its approach and in 2000 it started 12 pilot actions with local organisations (informal associations, co-ops and farming organisations).

After three years of closely observed actions, PASOLAC has acquired valuable experience and is able to analyse critically the results and the lessons learnt. Their experience represents an important contribution when looking for a way to provide services that correspond to the demand of the farming family.

2. The approach: Reversing the flow of funds (Invertir la mirada)

A couple of principles rule the new approach:

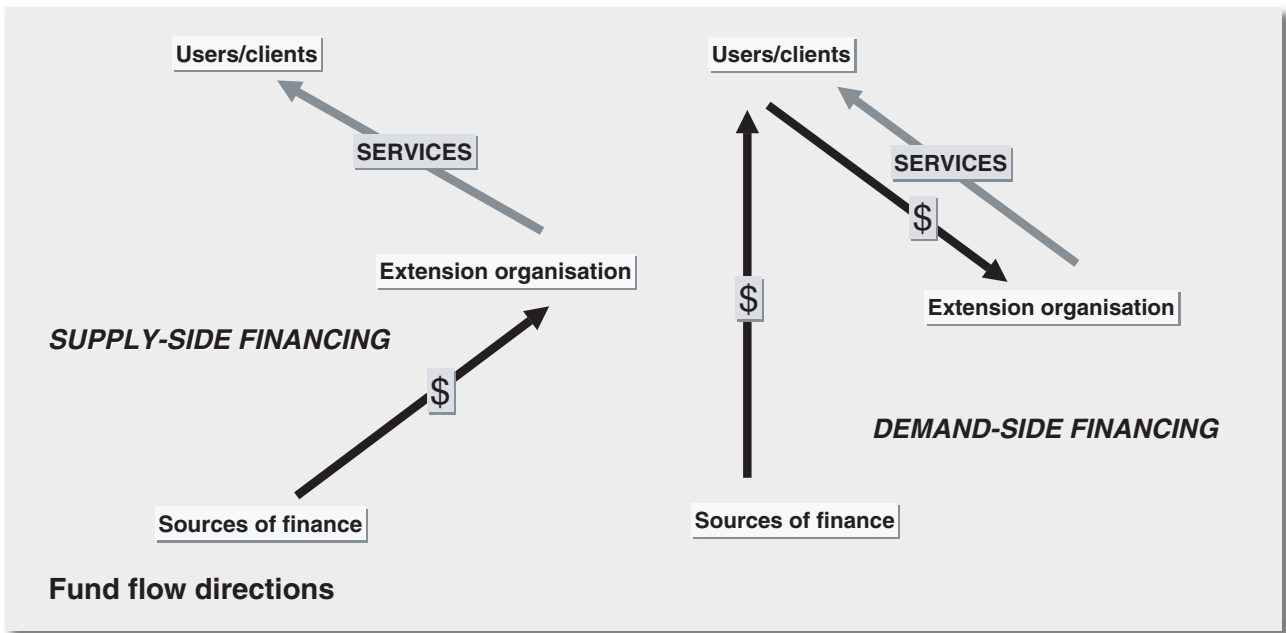
- the clients of the service contribute financially (in cash) to the service delivery. This contribution empowers them in their relationship with the providers; they can ask for quality and for punctuality.
- the fact that the producers are managing the funds and hiring the providers results in a new orientation of the providers' accountability towards the farming families and not towards the donors.
- there is a relationship of offer and demand (as opposed to a set of offers by the providers only) for technical assistance between providers and interested groups of farmers.

¹ LBL: Centro de Extensión Agrícola Lindau, Suiza

PASOLAC: Programa para la Agricultura Sostenible en América Central

PROASEL: Programa Suizo con Organizaciones Privadas para la Agricultura en Laderas

² by Tonino Zellweger, Benjamin Bustamente, Ueli Stürzinger, LBL and Intercooperation 1998



- the services are considered as a product and no longer as a favour and so it is only logical that the interested people are assuming at least part of the costs.

It is important to state that the approach entails the same amount of financial support but the funds are channelled differently. (See also “Sustainable Support – Sustainable Development”, page 5)

3. Pilot actions in three countries of Central-america

The experience of PASOLAC is based on the results gathered in 11 pilot actions which were implemented in Honduras, El Salvador and in Nicaragua. Three of them have been analysed more thoroughly and systematically and the results have been published. PASOLAC was interested in looking more closely at three quite different groups with differing organisational set-ups so as to broaden their insights.

- APAS is an association of nine co-operatives of agricultural producers in Honduras. In their case technical assistance was provided within a credit programme.
- COOMUJABAM is a co-operative formed by farmer extensionists (promotores) operating in a

programme of farmer to farmer extension (PCaC) who wanted to negotiate the support directly with the providers.

- LAS LAGUNAS is a rather loose grass-root organisation of farming families who manage their settlement by several development committees.



4. Funding Procedures

Two forms of funding the technical assistance have been used in the pilot actions (but not yet further analysed):

Funding of farmers' groups (Las Lagunas, Coomujabam and others)	Funding through a provider (APAS, SERTEDESO and others)
1 The producers draw up a proposal that states the improvements they want to get and they identify suitable providers of technical assistance.	1 Based on the demand of producers, a provider of technical assistance draws up a proposal.
2 The financing agency signs an agreement with the interested producer group and hands the funds over to them (less than 100 % of the costs, since the group is supposed to join in with their contribution).	2 The financing agency signs an agreement with the provider and hands the funds over to them (less than 100 % of the costs, since the producers are supposed to join in with their contribution).
3 The producer group contracts one or several providers for technical assistance.	3 The provider signs an agreement with its client specifying the services to be delivered and the contribution required.
4 The service provider implements the technical assistance.	4 The service provider implements the technical assistance.
5 The producers pay the provider with the external and their own funds.	5 The producers pay the provider their contribution.
6 The producers evaluate the quality of the technical assistance they got.	6 The producers evaluate the quality of the technical assistance they got.

5. Different ways of paying the contribution

In the pilot actions several forms of paying the contributions were used:

- The producers pay individually at the very moment of receiving the technical assistance.
- Payment is made with collective funds of the COOP.
- A certain amount of cash is taken from the payroll (profits to be distributed to the affiliates).
- The producers' contribution is part of a credit programme (APAS – no credit without participating in the extension programme).



6. The hypotheses PASOLAC wanted to check

When PASOLAC started their pilot actions they had identified six hypothesis they wanted to check in practice.

Hypotheses	Findings
<p>Hypothesis 1: The producers are willing to pay part of the costs for technical assistance and their contribution allows them to ask for technical assistance which suits their demand.</p>	<p>The producers are ready to pay part of the costs for technical assistance if the contribution allows them to ask for the assistance they need. They clearly relate their contribution with what they get for it. The advice or training must be profitable.</p>
<p>Hypothesis 2: If the technical assistance is based on the demand of producers the providers will broaden their offer and improve the quality of their service.</p>	<p>Only in one case of 11 the offer was broadened. The quality of the service, however, improved in all cases. The mentioned criteria were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The punctuality of the advisor • The way the advisor managed the topic • The form the topic was presented • The terminology used • The ability to explain the content
<p>Hypothesis 3: If the technical assistance is based on the demand contents of sustainable agriculture are more readily adopted by the producers and integrated in their farming system.</p>	<p>It was observed that producers did adopt measures of sustainable agriculture if the results were profitable to them.</p>
<p>Hypothesis 4: If producers' groups are allowed to manage their system of technical assistance themselves their management capacity increases.</p>	<p>In seven of eleven cases the management capacities of the producers improved and in particular when they managed the funds themselves. The main observations were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • successful management of funds • looking for adequate technical assistance • growing understanding for organisational structures and their need for organisational development <p>At the outset a minimal level of organisational structure of the producers is necessary.</p>
<p>Hypothesis 5: A system of technical assistance based on the demand sets the process of acquiring and diffusion of knowledge going.</p>	<p>In nine out of eleven cases there is a clear evidence that producers were readily acquiring the presented knowledge. However, there were no signs of a better diffusion to neighbouring producers.</p>
<p>Hypothesis 6: If knowledge is acquired in a process based on the demand it is more sustainable than based on an offer.</p>	<p>In most cases this hypothesis has been confirmed. Producers are already planning how to continue this form of technical assistance. In one case the producer group started negotiating with an NGO in the sense that they offered imparting their knowledge and getting another training from the NGO.</p>

7. Lessons learnt

Conditions favouring the introduction of a demand driven approach:

- It is helpful for the appropriation of the action that the organisation presents its proposal directly to the funding agency.
- The demanding clients should either be well organised so as to be able to present their demand and to guarantee the follow-up or dispose of a leader who is capable to formulate and negotiate the demand.
- Signing a contract with the funding agency empowers the involved stakeholders. Thus each stakeholder is able to deal with its counterpart.
- A sound level of institutional development is necessary. It helps to identify the needs for support, to choose appropriate and capable providers and to manage the funds.

What the farmers say:

"Before, they almost pulled us by force to the training since we didn't consider it important." (Ramón Gaitán)

"If an advisor wants to impart technical assistance, he has to prove first on his own farm that it works." (Moisés Sandoval)

"A couple of months ago it has been said, that the producers had to contribute and that this measure would wake them up and that their self-esteem would increase. I wasn't so sure about that. Now I realise, that it holds true: it is profitable if the producer contributes." (Manuel Hernández)

- The contribution of the clients (farmers) must be paid by each individual farmer and identified as such and go directly to the provider if empowerment should take place.
- All stakeholders must understand the approach at the outset of its implementation.
- The nature of the approach (demand driven) entails the producers to present a wide range of topics for technical assistance that might go beyond the limited scope of the supporting agency and the topics very often are linked with marketing issues. If marketing issues form part of the supported topics, the approach is more easily accepted.

- If a provider acts with a vision to empower the clients, he will be more inclined to promote a demand driven approach successfully.

Conditions *hindering* the introduction of a demand driven approach:

- If the local organisation has been created by and depends on an intermediate agency (NGO) they have more difficulties to define its real needs for technical assistance.
- In cases where a provider of technical assistance asks for funding it is likely that the offered services will rather follow the topics its collaborators are familiar with than the topics the clients are demanding.
- A poorly organised group will have difficulties in defining clearly their demand and to get the technical assistance managed by themselves. On the other hand, in one case the group got aware by the difficulties met, that they needed training to have a better access to the market.
- If the contribution for the technical assistance is collected indirectly (fees) or deducted from credits the farmers don't link their contribution to the service received and the effect of empowerment is lost.
- Technical assistance given free by other organisations (mainly well intentioned NGOs) working in the area make it difficult for producers why they should pay.

Additional observations

- Contributions varied from 0 to 32% in the pilot actions.

What the farmers say:

"At first, we meet, women and men, to identify the topics we should like to know, so we get the workshops we want to have."

"Now we can better control the training and we can demand quality in the support we get from the advisors."

"If the community controls the funds we dare to ask the advisor to explain, what we didn't understand."

"If we don't like the training, we don't pay."

- Producers are ready to go to distant places when looking for a suitable provider.
- Depending on the organisational capacities of the group it requires the support of a facilitator. This facilitator, however, should neither be related to the service provider nor to the financing agency.

Open questions

- In many areas of Central America, especially those where poor people live, there is either no or at best only one service provider. How can farming families in this case negotiate a fair agreement? Large distances which makes looking for a suitable provider very difficult and the technical assistance expensive.
- How is the approach to be spread and its advantages made use of if financing agencies, donors and NGOs all agree that a free offer is best for the “poor” farmers?

8. Conclusions

Neither a funding agency nor a provider should act at the same time act as a facilitator assisting the producer group in the formulation of its demand. However, under actual circumstances most producer groups need the support of a facilitator to identify clearly their needs and to formulate a demand to a funding agency. PASOLAC estimates the additional cost for the facilitator/broker to represent 10 % of the total amount.

The more the producers negotiate there projects themselves, manage the funds, control the services offered and ask for quality from the service provider, the more also increases their capacity to take decisions and to actually assume leadership.

The present experience shows clearly that **the farmers’ groups are willing to contribute**, just as any sensible person does, **if they get something useful**. Experience showed that the best way of empowering people is giving them the opportunity to take their own decisions. By channelling the funds directly to the users, PASOLAC could prove that this measure is a very effective way towards the empowerment of farming families.

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