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Working with farmers for better agriculture in Timor Leste

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Abstract
Agricultural production in Timor Leste is of vital importance, both for the majority of the population who rely primarily on agricultural production for their livelihoods, but also in the broader development agenda of this new nation. The post independence lack of public agricultural extension and the destruction of much the resource base led to the current situation whereby the NGO sector is the primary provider of advice, extension and access to resources for agricultural production. The very recent move to invest once more in public agricultural extension services provides a timely point to assess the role, approach, issues and opportunities faced by NGOs. This research is based on discussions with a number of NGO personnel, both local, national and international and raises a number of questions regarding how the wide variety of organisations engage with communities, their objectives, inputs, coverage, and impacts. The discussion is framed by an analysis of the changing practices in agricultural extension and the associated role of NGOs, and questions how best the agricultural sector might move forward in providing appropriate support to the farmers of Timor Leste.

Introduction
Agricultural extension is back on the agenda! As somebody whose first professional job was as a farm adviser in the west coast of Ireland in the 1980s I’d have to say I’m pretty pleased about that. Particularly since agricultural extension, or at least, the public investment in agricultural advisory services, became so out of favour through the 1990s, often for good reason, that I think we were in serious danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water.

One of the core activities invested in by the current government is support for agriculture. Since independence there has been substantial investment in improving agricultural productivity, both through multilateral programmes, bilateral aid, and the work of NGOs. In terms of provision of support and advice to the farmers themselves, across Timor Leste, NGOs both international and local have played a key role to date. The recent moves to expand the existing Ministry of Agriculture extension programme through investment in staff for the districts provide an excellent point to assess the role, approach, issues and opportunities faced by NGOs in this role. This discussion is framed by an analysis of the changing practices in agricultural extension and the associated role of NGOs. These experiences should provide fertile ground to reflect on the role of agricultural extension in Timor Leste and how experiences to date both in TL, and internationally can be used to provide the most appropriate support systems for the farmers of TL.

Farmers of Timor Leste have dealt with unprecedented change, both in the last ten years but also prior to independence changes from differing systems from Portuguese
rule, through Indonesian occupation. Agricultural production in Timor Leste has had to come to terms with the massive disruptions caused by the violent withdrawal of Indonesia in 1999. This included the immense damage to the physical infrastructure, disruption to all levels of society through violence, displacement, relocation, and changing of land rights and land tenure. However, the withdrawal of Indonesian rule also withdrew the highly subsidised and supported environment in which farmers of Timor Leste had worked for the previous 24 years, and the move to farming within a broader free market system. The farming environment prior to 1999 included guaranteed purchases at subsidised prices of staple food crops, highly subsidised inputs, and access to a well resourced public sector agricultural support programme (World Bank 2009).

Post independence Timor Leste has, and will require a strong focus on agricultural productivity (Xavier Irz, Thrillz et al. 2001; World Bank 2009). The rural population comprises 74% of the population, and 86% of the poverty. 80% of the population is dependent on agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and agriculture provides 30% of the non petroleum GDP (World Bank 2009). Government policy for agriculture includes a strong focus on increasing food security, and food self sufficiency, as well as increasing income and employment in rural areas (World Bank 2009). Food security at the current time is a major concern, although estimates of food insecurity vary amongst sources. The WFP nationwide baseline survey on food security in 2006 identified 20 percent of the population (approx 213,000 people) as food insecure and a further 23 percent (approx 244,000) highly vulnerable to becoming food insecure (WFP 2006). Other figures suggest that 70% of households identified as moderately food insecure in a 2007 survey (Oxfam 2007). There are regional differences in food security.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to analyse, in light of the increased expenditure on agricultural extension, what role NGOs in Timor have played, can play, and what contribution they can make to the future agricultural development in Timor Leste. This is a small piece of research, and where further work would be of benefit is highlighted in appropriate places!

**Agricultural extension and advisory services.**

To understand the role of NGOs to the development of agriculture in Timor Leste we first need to explore agricultural extension or agricultural advisory services, more broadly. What are they, why had they fallen so out of favour through the 1990s, why are they back on the agenda, and what lessons can be learned for TL.

Agricultural extension has evolved, devolved, changed, adapted, been discarded and rediscovered, recreated, criticised and promoted over at least 2 centuries. It is worth briefly highlighting what exactly I am referring to when I use the term agricultural extension. The Neuchâtel Group ¹ defines agricultural advisory services as “services that make new knowledge available to farmers and assist the farmers to develop their

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¹ The Neuchâtel Group was originally an informal donor consultation group on agricultural advisory services, and which has evolved to be an informal community of practice, although still strongly donor oriented, which aims to develop common understandings around contemporary issues in agricultural extension.
farming and management skills (Neuchatal Group 2006 p 3). Birner et al (2006) define it similarly as “the entire set of organizations that support and facilitate people engaged in agricultural production to solve problems and to obtain information, skills, and technologies to improve their livelihoods and well-being” (p17)

However Birner et al (2006) also point to the positioning of advisory services within the broader system of knowledge generation, exchange and use, providing one of the three pillars of the FAO/World Bank Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems for Rural Development (AKIS/RD) of which the other two pillars are agricultural research, and education and training. Although more recently agricultural advisory services is used more frequently, agricultural extension is used interchangeably in this paper.

![Diagram]

Figure 1: Agricultural Advisory Services as a Component of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (SOURCE?)

Its earliest roots were “extending” relevant literary and social information to the broader public. This paper aims to highlight key directions in agricultural extension, contradictions, or issues faced in the design and delivery of agricultural extension or advisory services and the corresponding issues that may be faced in the context of Timor Leste in moving forward and working with farmers for better agricultural outcomes.

Background

Extension in terms of dissemination of advice to farmers dates back at least to Mesopotamia. However more realistically modern agricultural extension came into being as a result of the food crises in Ireland during the potato famine in 1845 (Jones and Garforth 1997). Traditional agricultural extension focused very much on a top down transfer of technology approach driven by the scientific or modernisation paradigm, funded, driven and managed by public sector institutions, primarily Ministries of Agriculture. However the 1980s saw heated debate across the spectrum of development, and turned the spotlight on agricultural extension – principally from sub Saharan Africa driven by the failures of agricultural development projects over the preceding century! Critiques of agricultural extension, and the broader effectiveness of agricultural development of the time are many, including but not limited to inadequate relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, coverage and in
some cases lack of equality of extension, excessive state domination of rural service provision, centralised systems T&V (all leading to the initial critiques) and so on (Jones and Garforth 1997; Kydd and Dorward 2001; Rivera and Qamar 2003). Jones and Garforth (1997) highlight one of the key issues, the need to reach and benefit the small subsistence farmers—essentially pro poor agricultural development, and the associated requirement to extend agricultural extension from a technical process to take account of social, and increasingly environmental issues. Some of the fault of these failures can also be placed on the actual methodologies employed in extension, with a fair amount of blame placed at the feet of the Training and Visit System heavily promoted by the World Bank for over 20 years until 1995.

Some of the key changes that occurred as a result of these failures included a move away from public provision of extension, and the associated implication of subsidy involved in the provision of public goods (Neuchatal Group 2003). This so called reform of agricultural extension, within the context of what Kydd and Dorward refer to as the Washington Consensus on Agriculture (Kydd and Dorward 2001), occurred in a similar vein to the overall move to market based approaches, emphasizing efficiencies over welfare (Rivera and Qamar 2003). These new approaches of providing and financing extension (this does not include methods or types of extension provision) are summarised by Anderson (2007) as including "decentralization to lower levels of government, involving farmers' associations and non-governmental organizations, contracting-out of extension services, public-private partnerships, privatization, embedding advisory services in other types of contracts" (p 3). Rivera and Qamar argue that in response to these range of issues many governments chose to move away from, or ignore entirely, extension (Rivera and Qamar 2003). The raft of reforms of agricultural extension in the last 20 years are summarised by Rivera and Qamar in table 1.

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Reforms involved a move from the top right (public funding public provision, to any of the sectors. In the move away from public provision of extension in the context of small scale subsistence farmers who are unlikely to benefit from reduced provision of extension as a public good, the most likely scenario is then for NGOs to pick up the slack, or for government to fund community driven development, through private enterprise. This is the specific context that we are concerned with in Timor. Of course, to date the funding has come primarily from donors, through NGOs and depending on the resources available to the new extension agents in the field there is also the possibility of NGOs funding or supporting them, which falls a little outside the neat boxes above.

Methodologically there have also been substantial changes, and differing approaches have evolved. Perhaps the most widely used and promoted approach to delivering agricultural extension has been the Training and Visit (T&V) system, mentioned earlier. The key features of the T&V system are: reliance on contact farmers to disseminate information; a single line of command with several levels of supervision of field agents; provision of training and technical advice to field staff from specialists; major focus on technical information; a set schedule of visits every two weeks, focusing on training the contact farmers; and provision of reasonable resources (transport and payment for field staff) (Anderson 2007). This system tried to alleviate some of the major critiques, through focusing on contact farmers and with a strong system of line accountability. However the reality of the system in practice required higher numbers of agents, and a reliance on contact farmers (and contact groups), amongst other issues, proving to be financially unsustainable over the long term, with little demonstrated impact (Anderson and Feder 2004). Other methods include decentralisation – in this case referring to the still public funding, and public provision of extension, but the implementation (and accountability) lies with local government units. The issue of financial sustainability may however be transferred to the local level. Privatisation of extension services tackles both the issue of accountability, and of financial sustainability, but most likely will exclude the poorer farmers for whom the cost of the service outweighs the benefits. There are a huge variety of other methods that have been tried and tested over the years, some with better outcomes than others. There has of course been intense interest in diverse, innovative approaches to reaching, engaging farmers through participatory approaches, an area in which NGOs have played a major role in both innovating, and implementation of farmer focused methods.

More recently the whole area of agricultural extension has revived renewed attention with much more attention on the broader political, and theoretical changes, as well as more of the perceived failures of the privatization of extension. Issues raised include the need for pro poor extension models, a requirement to take account the changing aims of ODA, and so on. The Neuchatel Initiative states that the aims of official development assistance are becoming more focused, changes are afoot in the sub-Saharan States (where much of the debate surrounding agricultural extension has focused: decentralization, liberalization, and privatization and democratization; and that new actors are becoming involved in extension activities, as well as public spending on extension being currently under debate (Neuchatel Group 1999).
The New Pluralism in Agricultural Extension
This re-emergence of agricultural extension occurs amid acknowledgement of the challenges inherent in providing agricultural extension – well summarised by Birner et al (2006: p13):

- the scale, scope, and complexity of advisory activities caused by the nature of agricultural production;
- the associated problems of monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment;
- the complexity of interactions between advisory services and national and international agricultural research systems;
- the challenge to promote learning processes and establish feedback linkages;
- the need to address public concerns, such as environmental concerns, which go beyond agricultural knowledge and information transfer;
- the problem to ensure political commitment and fiscal accountability; and the influence of the wider policy environment and political economy
- the financing and delivery of advisory services that are best suited to country-specific frame conditions, product- or commodity-specific needs, and political or economic priorities.

The response to this has been the emergence of “pluralistic” systems of agricultural extension. This so called pluralism refers primarily according to most as multiple actors in agricultural (research, education and) extension or what Crowder and Anderson (1996) refer to as “multi-organisational partnerships including non-governmental actors in the broadest sense”. The IFPRI defines pluralistic extension as “extension systems based on multiple service providers, including public, private, and civil society, where the focus is often on demand-driven, participatory approaches”. Pluralism responds to some of the earlier shortcomings identified, by providing a flexible, responsive and complimentary environment through the differing capacities and approaches of different actors. This comparative advantage does require that actors that are able to meet the widely varying requirements of a range of people engaged in agricultural activities, from the commercial end of the scale to the marginalised subsistence farmers, the female, elderly and so on. This is in more than just outreach, but also in methods used. The implications for this new pluralism in extension provision are essentially recognition of the importance of diverse actors, and the flexibility this can bring. This does however make one large assumption – that there is a sufficient degree of cooperation, communication and collaboration (and coordination) between the varying actors to realise these benefits.

New thinking by many authors aims to “disentangle” (Regina Birner, Kristin Davis et al. 2006) some of the major characteristics of agricultural extension as a basis for designing, implementing and reflecting on what good practice agricultural extension may be in a variety of contexts. Qamar (2005) notes the disconnect between the organisation of extension versus the function of extension. Birner et al (2006) have developed a framework for analysis of pluralistic extension services that reflects this complexity. This framework is shown in Figure 2.

Agricultural Extension in Timor Leste
The following section broadly uses the framework developed by Birner and Davis (2006). Although not intending to be a comprehensive evaluation of agricultural
extension, this primarily aims to evaluate the current role of NGOs in agricultural extension. To this end the main areas to be explored, through semi structured interviews with a variety of NGO personnel, both local, national and international, include relevant background or frame conditions. The two main areas of focus are the policy environment in brief and the characteristics of the advisory services, given the frame conditions, including governance structures, capacity and management, and advisory methods (See Figure 2).
Figure 2. Framework for Designing and Analysing Agricultural Advisory Services

- Policy environment
  - Political system
  - Agricultural policy/development strategy/objections of advisory services

- Capacity of potential service providers and partners
  - State capacity
  - NGO capacity
  - Private sector capacity

- Farming systems and market access
  - Agroclimatic potential
  - Types of crops and livestock produced
  - Access to input and output markets and other services

- Community aspects
  - Lead size/distribution
  - Education/level
  - Gender role
  - Capacity to cooperate

- Governance structures
  - Role of public–private–farmer sector in:
    - Financing
    - Marketing
    - Level of decentralization
    - Partnerships/Linkages

- Capacity & Management
  - Capacity/Staff
  - Motivation/mission orientation
  - Management approach
  - Organizational culture

- Advisory methods
  - No. of clients
  - Specificity of content
  - Technology used
  - Orientation (adult education, etc.)

- Ability to exercise voice/demand

- Performance
  - Quality of service provided
    - Content (needs and opportunities-driven)
    - Targeting
    - Feedback
    - Timeliness
    - Relevance
    - Effectiveness
    - Efficiency

- Farm Household
  - Capacity
  - Decision-making
  - Adoption of innovation
  - Change of practices (process, management, marketing, etc.)

- Impact:
  - Yield
  - Productivity
  - Income
  - Employment
  - Innovation
  - Distributional effects
  - Environmental effects
  - Empowerment
  - Gender-specific impact
  - Emergence/strengthening of value chains
Background or Frame conditions
An evaluation of the background or frame conditions in Timor follow briefly and are intended to outline some of the key issues in the frame conditions which may either need to be addressed, if possible, or at least acknowledged in the design and implementation of the reinvigorated extension services.

- Policy environment
- Capacity of potential service providers and partners
- Farming systems and market access
- Community aspects

Policy Environment
The policy environment includes the agricultural policy and development strategy, and the support for, and objectives of the advisory services. Agricultural Policy in Timor Leste is closely tied to the issue of food security, recognising the importance of agricultural production as part of the multi-sectoral approach to tackling food security. Among the differing aspects of the policy, increasing agricultural production, through the provision of support and services is promoted (Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries 2006).

The goal of any agricultural extension is by nature a challenging issue. Is the goal of extension to serve the interests of the farmers, in terms of technologies, price, production, reaching the poorest and most marginalised, or is it more focused on the urban consumer (in terms of keeping prices low), does it secure production of staples, or focus on cash cropping for export, does it meet the needs of specific groups (mung bean producers, coffee farmers etc) or does it meet the needs of the masses, does it meet the needs of the high potential farmers (the innovators and early adopters) or does it meet the needs of the a majority. As a public service of course it should do all of the above.

Axinn (1988 p 135) argues that “the success of an agricultural extension programme tends to be directly related to the extent to which its approach fits the programme goals for which it was established” The overall aim of agricultural development projects seems often to be rather muddy waters. Food security, nutrition, increasing agricultural production, diversified livelihoods, income generation, cash crop production, empowerment, gender equality, environmental protection, and so on have appeared singularly or in companionship, at some level in discussions around various programmes. Of course any given programme can have multiple aims and goals as long as these are clearly articulated, and the programme designed to address each of these. The alternatives to organizing extension demand choices on various levels (Naged 1997):

- Public versus private
- Government versus nongovernment
- Top-down (bureaucratic) versus bottom-up (participatory)
- Profit versus nonprofit
- Free versus cost-recovery
- General versus sector
- Multipurpose versus single purpose
Technology driven versus need oriented

Perhaps a bigger question is what is the impact of any given programme - intended or unintended, and the notion of impact monitoring has arisen a number of times.

Capacity of potential service providers and partners

This of course is an issue of extreme relevance in Timor. As a new country, the building of a new nation, politically, economically, socially is a core challenge. The capacity of potential service providers within Timor Leste seems to vary widely, across the entire spectrum of what may fall under the guide of “capacity” (human resources, managerial skills, institutional structures and processes and so on) (Box 1). Capacity building appears in so many of the project documents in TL. Perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of capacity building of national NGOs is discussed later but the capacity of the Government departments dealing with agricultural production and rural livelihoods is growing, but still appears to have a long way to go. In terms of absolute numbers, field extension agents have grown from around 5 per district last year to close to 400 at the current time, with the aim of one extension agent per village (Suco or aldeia??). However physical numbers show little of the actual capacity of the extension agents, in terms of their own knowledge, skills, training and so on, and also more broadly in the capacity of the Ministry to support them, financially in terms of training, linkages to research and education, and otherwise. Without sufficient funding from the Government the capacity of these extension agents is unlikely to prove sufficient for the challenge. As a very new programme the answers to this remain to be seen. The weaknesses of the public sector (Kaufmann, Kraay et al. 2008) reduces their comparative advantage in providing extension, and therefore, in the absence of any realistic incentives for the private sector to intervene, has placed, and may well continue to place a high reliance on NGOs (Regina Birner, Kristin Davis et al. 2006).

Capacity of NGOs in providing support and services to the farming community of course varies enormously, particularly between smaller local NGOs and more established larger NGOs, national and international. The issue of capacity, and the related topic of capacity building for local NGOs, often the implementing partner, is of course problematic. For smaller local NGOs, to operate effectively, either as implementing partners, or to compete effectively for funding requires a minimum level of capacity, both organisational to meet often stringent donor requirements, and operational, particularly in the areas of community engagement and participatory development. How this occurs has raised a number of concerns regarding the partnerships between larger and smaller NGOs, as well as the

"I think capacity is something that is... in 99% everybody is aware, because the long struggle in Timor has a big impact on the human resource. They are saying truth is in human resource. Actually we have people that know but it is not enough." 

National NGO worker

"It's getting better yeah (capacity at government level) because MAF has got an extension worker now and they are wonderful (INDO)." 

"I think the problem we are having is getting national NGOs in here clearly. But I think their capacity often flounders and they turn over - we have tried but a lot of them are led by charismatic individuals and if that person isn't around you are kind of screwed." 

NGO worker
responsibility for and types of capacity building, offered or needed. (ref wigglesworth). Even the capacity of staff in larger NGOs and INGOs can struggle in the ever changing development environment in Timor Leste. Most NGOs were heavily involved in the emergency relief efforts, and moving from emergency relief to development requires a whole new set of skills and expertise, particularly around community engagement and participatory development, which may not always be present – so even in the larger, better resourced NGOs there can be an ongoing requirement to address staff capacity to ensure that organisational goals and philosophies are represented at all levels.

This broad reliance on the NGO sector, and the implications are discussed later but again, the notion of pluralism would suggest that there may and should be an ongoing role for the third sector, but would also highlight that the capacity of the government to coordinate the process will need to be in place. Also the capacity of national and local NGOs, needs to be acknowledged, and addressed.

Community aspects

Heterogeneity in terms of land holdings and assets, ethnicity, education and other factors influences the capacity of farm households to cooperate and to form organisations. This organizational capacity, also referred to as social capital, is an important frame condition for the choice of advisory methods. Socially determined gender roles influence the strategies that advisory services systems need to apply in order to reach women farmers. Likewise, the prevalence of social hierarchies and social exclusion influence the strategies required to reach disadvantaged groups (Regina Birner, Kristin Davis et al. 2006)

Briner and Davis argue that various aspects of communities, essentially the local context, are extremely important frame conditions to understand, with the potential for these to change over time in response to agricultural support.

In discussing some of the key characteristics of communities with which the various NGOs were working the following broad points came through.

1. Diversity of communities across the country,
2. Impact of fundamental changes in government, policy and agricultural practices
3. Role of women in society, and agricultural production,
4. Impact of long conflict on social, and physical structure,
5. Fragility of farming environment (environment risks)
6. Lack of resources for basic inputs
7. Strength and role of traditional governance structures
8. Strength and impact of traditional practices, and beliefs.
9. Dependency

The experiences of the various NGOs in dealing with each of the above issues provide a really good foundation for moving forward in working with farming communities.
Of course there needs to be a sharing of information, and experiences for the lessons learned to date to be incorporated into future programmes.

The issue of dependency was raised repeatedly, in a variety of ways and deserves a little more attention. The basis of this dependency received several opinions. The impact of the pre 1999 period where inputs were bulked onto the land, and outputs were shipped off to Java was an initial mindset, followed by the emergency period where aid was shipped out. (deliver deliver deliver ... Peter, pers comm.) The move from emergency relief to development was an oft cited issue.

However a further related issue was the differing approaches to engaging community with different organisations and agencies providing a different amount of inputs, support and resources.

In the past you asked to do voluntary work (Gitam rope) when community comes together work together to clean something for free. But now is no longer they say because NGOs come and give money and everybody already get ... This is the idea. last night it was raining and the streets are dirty and they will make it clean. But now they say, when you talk to the Chief of Suco, when you talk people don't listen any more. They say why, because now NGOs come and they come and UN people come and they give money and they get it in mind already. Even to clean in front of the house they want money.

Characteristics of Advisory Services

Governance Structures

In the previous section I identified the issues with the capacity of various actors, the reliance on NGOs for service delivery, and the current (although apparently increasing) role of MAF. The private sector currently does not have much impact, outside of published deals for privatization of Timorese land for commercial crops – biofuel, sugarcane Jatropha, by international corporations, a point of dissertation. So currently, broadly speaking, the funding for agricultural advisory services comes from a broad array of sources, donors both bilateral and multilateral, and NGO, mainly under specific projects such as the EU food security program, as well as government provided services, which are on the increase through MAF. Provision of services comes primarily International and Local NGOs (often funded by INGOS and implemented by local NGOs) and now from MAF. There are also the cooperatives – CCT and so on which appear to be going strong. In terms of service provision, the expansion of the extension services provides a large input of human resource out into the field, which can only be a good thing. The actual support and resourcing of these personnel probably needs to be high on the agenda. However alongside the need for support and resourcing of the new extension agents,

Right now we are complimenting, we are providing extension services and complimenting the government and we are not the permanent agencies so the government should be there so we had to link our farmers groups to the government extension agents.”

I think it come from Indonesia as well. Indonesia set things up like that ... this community will receive this and this will be the outcome. Then the emergency period ... more ... this community will receive this... Now we are saying “this community will put a contribution towards something, you know ... and the outcome will be this and will be improved” Different mindset (Peter)
Level of decentralisation.
This is of course a core question at the moment. The pilot programme for decentralisation has the capacity to have a large impact on agricultural services delivery, with a key strategy of the decentralisation process of both “Citizen participation and active involvement in decision-making, service delivery and monitoring;” and “Focus on improved local service delivery as a means to alleviate poverty;” (GoTL, 2008:2).

"When you go to the DA office for something, it is very difficult to find them and also when you find them they also say OK we can get you permission but we cannot decide in anything" (Noares, Pers Comm)

The essential outcome of decentralisation is twofold, the first is in developing an accountable system of local government. The second is in providing a local government structure with sufficient authority to make decisions, and provide services outside Dili. The main reason that decentralisation has failed in the past is that agricultural development relates entirely to the role, and operation of existing district administration. The capacity of the existing system of district administration was questioned seriously across the board.

The relationship between the DA and the community often determines how effective approaching the DA will be. However, despite problems encountered with the current structure there are also positive aspects of DAs. As seems logical, it was pointed out by many that good personnel at any level make the process work, despite the structure. Bad personnel will have the direct opposite effect – they will make the process difficult no matter how effective the structures.

"But it was the first time I was sitting with a person of the department and he was giving me ideas, not me giving him ideas. So I thought this guy is going to be great" (Sylvia).

"if the government at the district level would work properly we shouldn’t be here. They should be the ones. But they say …… but we don’t have money and that’s what I don’t understand. There’s a lot of money in this country so why it is always at the national level and very small amounts to the district level…. They are in the district and they know, they are part of the communities. It would be so easy" (Sylvia).

An issue then becomes what role should local government play? The setting up of the municipalities next year will provide a possible base for decentralisation of agricultural services delivery but the realities of whether there is political will to do this, or indeed whether it should happen are not yet clear.

Overall then the role of local government as it stands is perceived at best as the way to ensure citizen participation, improve accountability to communities, and the most appropriate source of local knowledge. However, currently district level administration is roundly perceived as being very problematic, although the actual role of the DA was likely never designed to be what it has become which is why perhaps the whole process of decentralisation is both happening, and so vital.

Partnerships and Linkages.
This section discusses differing approaches, both to accessing and engaging a community.
Different NGOs have widely differing priorities in terms of both WHO and HOW they engage throughout the process. For example Concern has a very strong focus and priority on existing government structures, working in partnership with MAF, focusing their approach and engagement with the community through the lens of the existing District Administration, and working very closely with the Suco leaders, in capacity building and governance training. However they do not really engage particularly with CBOs, or local NGOs. At the other end of the spectrum is Caritas who have a very strong focus on local partners, local NGOs and CBOs, and who are continuously reviewing their relationship and activities at a community level to improve their impact. However they acknowledge that their relationship with is government weak, for a number of reasons (Green). Within the two extremes are a range of differing relationships and approaches between the major actors. Of course different programmes and project teams within agencies can have quite different relationships - as the role of the individual and interpersonal relationships seems to be a core feature of working here in Timor Leste. The implication of this is that local level information is the best approach to accurately target need, and it could also be argued that local level coordination is critical to implementing programmes in the most needy places.

One outcome of mapping these differing relationships and actors is to turn it around and understand from the farmers perspective how they are most likely to be included in development processes operating in this rather complex landscape. It may be that for agricultural development projects a farmer may need to have, or evolve a relationship with a powerful local person, or group (other family clan), with people from a local NGO, with people from a CBO, the Suco leaders, or representatives from
the DAs office (or in the future with agricultural extension officers from MAF). If your existing relationship with any particular point of contact that the NGO is using is not good then you need to hope that a better alternative comes along.

However it would be hard to know whether this is likely to happen or not, as there is a very complex web of co-ordination, or lack of co-ordination which means that your district, Suco or Aldera may or may not benefit from development interventions in agriculture or food security anyway.

The same complexity seems likely to be present in other sectors as well .... Possibly requiring a whole different set of relationships. I referred briefly earlier to the differing approaches, and related provision of resources. The impact of this in the field can be problematic with one INGO worker noting that "if we are not all on the same page - we will get played financially. We will also be played developmentally too in that the community will naturally choose the one that's going to give them more handouts" (Green, pers comm.). Of course cooperation does not require NGOs to change their philosophies, but what it does require to avoid causing these kind of issues is co-ordination.

In terms of governance structures and the post independence reliance on the third sector for much of the relief and development activities. As the government matures and begins to take responsibility ongoing role of the NGO sector becomes an issue of relevance. to provide Role of the public, the private and the third sector in providing and financing the service; decentralization to lower levels of government.

subsidiarity and synergy Kydd et al

This of course raises a number of issues about the capacity, effectiveness and evolving and dynamic role of the third sector in service provision. The breadth of third sector organisations includes international NGOs, national or local NGOs CBOs farmers groups etc. This of course raises the potentially major issue of coordination (again). (Regina Birner, Kristin Davis et al. 2006) note that NGOs can be highly effective on small scales but on a larger scale these issues of coordination can be problematic.

Advisory Methods

Without trying to go into too much detail, one of the most interesting outcomes of various discussions with NGO personnel was the variety of different, and primarily based on participatory development models and methods. In terms of engaging with communities group based extension methods appeared to be the most usual, although how the groups were formed and the actual relationship with the groups differed, between having community activators, community animators, or community organisers, or just promoting and supporting group formation without the key contact approach. An important issue raised was the composition of the group, with familial ties providing a good outcome for some. The methods of extension are equally interesting with several variations on the dem plot model, but also some frustrations and abandoning of dem plots as an effective method. One particular approach that
The government can also … can gain by sharing the experiences from the organisations also working there. We are saying you know we should build on whatever experience is learned from the community. So the government should not come in and do a different approach so you know there are already organisations working so we build from there. That would be best (Buddha)

Agricultural Extension Today – Issues, Contradictions and Opportunities

Modern extension is summarised by Jones and Garforth (1997) as a mixture of organisational and legislative backing, from primarily government (central and local) funding and organisation, through to the work of the private sector, and a variety of non-government organisations. Extension organisations have tended to become more and more bureaucratic as they have grown, and therefore have a distinctly top down flavour to them. A second feature of extension is the requirement to become more and more diversified in response to changing environments (environmental, social, pro-poor). The Training and Visit Systems (T&V) responds to this. The international political and economic environment (the so called Washington Consensus) reduced levels of public spending, both reducing publicly funded agricultural extension services in a lot of places, and putting pressure on privately funded extension, or more realistically in countries where increasing food production remains a very high priority, and the majority of the population are rural subsistence farmers, putting pressure on NGOs to increase their service delivery function in agricultural extension (Jones and Garforth 1997). As part of this Jones and Garforth conclude that there is a much greater emphasis on client oriented extension services, and much more emphasis on the quality of the interaction rather than the transmission of messages (p10)

They make an interesting point that new extension contexts require a better understanding of the clients need, not in terms of adopter status but in terms of market access, degree of commercialisation, and relative importance of agriculture in income and welfare (livelihoods).

Conclusions on Agricultural Extension – Changes and contemporary issues that must be faced by Timor.

Agricultural extension has moved away from a top down government funded exercise in technology transfer, through a variety of guises, and driven by a wide array of
forces, economic, political and social, to a new agenda of diversified, pluralistic systems.

The FAO identified the following conditions for agricultural extension to occur, some or all of which have been present in all forms of modern agricultural extension;
- Availability of relevant, systematic, locally relevant, proven (however basically) information.
- The information made available to professional agriculturalists for dissemination and refinement as required.
- An enabling environment in particular organisational and administrative structures for dissemination to occur,
- A supportive broader policy or legislative framework to promote and support agricultural extension,
- A variety of antecedents or prototypes of advice dissemination!

A final immediate cause of promoting agricultural extension (but whether it is a sufficient or necessary condition remains to be seen) is the presence of some level of crisis – drought, soil exhaustion, economic, or political change (Jones and Garforth 1997)

Each of the actors engaged in supporting the farmers of Timor Leste have particular strengths and weaknesses, and all of them operate in the particular environment that is currently Timor Leste – past actions cannot be changed and must be acknowledged. However future agricultural development is vital to the economy and society of Timor Leste, and has particular importance for poverty alleviation, and food security in rural Timor Leste. Agricultural extension as a focus for agricultural development is pretty much under the spotlight – and pluralism in design, delivery and analysis of agricultural development programmes seems to be both a logical and appropriate position for Timor Leste – this is currently the case whether intentional or not!

The context, background and existing conditions for design and delivery of agricultural programmes are particularly important. This refers to not just the immense change since 1999 but of course from an agricultural perspective, includes policy and support for agriculture over the lifetime of the farming communities, as well as traditions handed down over generations. However more recent experiences from Indonesian times, as well as through the emergency, and through to more recent moves to longer term development, is of course vitally to acknowledge. Some of this also relates to the work that has already been done, and the legacy of this. For example there have also been a number of small and large projects and programmes in agriculture that have left a legacy, which should be built on, for example the AMCAP programme in Ainaro and Manatuto, which although it finished in 2007, I think, there remains a number of farmer groups who formed through this project that are still active, although not necessarily supported by external programmes.

The broad array of agricultural development programmes currently running, also provide excellent experience, both of what does work, and perhaps more importantly, what does not work so well. NGOs provide a range of comparative advantages in addressing agricultural development. This covers both approaches, capacity to engage with the most marginalised, local relevant knowledge and contextual information, and the building of relationships, and trust with communities. Some of this of course requires an active and capable range of local NGOs. A problem with
NGO activity can be lack of capacity to scale up. The actual relat – so lack of coverage (although perhaps it should be argue that this is in fact a benefit and should be treated as such).

However perhaps the greatest issue to be dealt with it seems at the current time is the issue of communication, co-ordination, between differing agencies. This issue of communication, collaboration, and coordination seems to be a key requirement at all levels. Between communities and various agencies, between local and international NGOs, between government and civil society more broadly. There may be a need for more formal, bureaucratic linkages, but there may also be benefit in more flexible semi formal linkages (Crowder and Anderson 1996), and networking, building on existing networks and linkages already in place. To take advantage of the benefits of the diverse actors currently operating here in Timor this must be a key priority – it is an area that should be coordinated by the Government of Timor Leste, rather than left to individual personalities to engage with each other, or not, as the case case may be.

"Flexible, semi-formal networking might be encouraged instead of creating formal, bureaucratic linkages" (Crowder and Anderson 1996)

Much of the literature on agricultural extension treats NGOs as quite a homogenous group (although recognising their heterogeneity!). They use participatory methods – for example! I think there are substantial lessons to be learned in terms of the role and influence of local, national and international NGOs. This also relates to capacity building – what this means in practice.

The issue of dependency is one that perhaps must be addressed head on. The actual issue was raised by pretty much everybody that I have spoken to. There are distinct positive steps, but it must be asked, how are issues such as dependency best addressed. Who has had particular successes in overcoming reluctant to be engaged in anything without payment; essentially who is making headway against a decade of handouts? How are they doing this? Method, approach, impact? How are they measuring this?

“To improve linkages, and thereby improve the effectiveness of agricultural technology systems, several elements seem to stand out as particularly important:

- Despite institutional divisions, which are likely to remain, it helps to view REE as an integrated agricultural knowledge and technology system;
- A focus on REE functions, instead of just organizational structures, might broaden the dialogue to include other partners and improved integration;
- A pluralistic approach is likely to have advantages, but to be effective linkages must be formed and strengthened. Policy and mandate changes, as well as changes in "organizational attitudes", may be needed;
- Linkages may be best improved through the promotion of informal networking at many levels with an incentive system that rewards collaboration,
- Strengthening and empowering "client groups", especially typically hard to reach groups (e.g., women farmers) can result in more demand-driven REE services and put pressure on the system to improve linkages."

(Crowder and Anderson 1996)
There is an increasing complexity of actors engaged in the provision of extension, including, and of key concern to this paper, NGOs, as well as CBOs and farmer or producer organisations.

"Non-governmental organizations act in a variety of ways, fulfilling a key role, not least through pilot projects and as mediators. They operate in spheres of activity and regions where neither the State, private operators, nor farmer organizations can deliver appropriate services. The independence and initiative of NGOs has benefits for other actors" (Neuchâtel Group 1999)

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<td>player in most pluralistic REE systems is the NGO community. Recent years, non-profit NGOs received support from donors as mutual exclusive alternative to government research and extension institutions. Less attention has been paid, however, to linking NGOs to public-sector REE institutions so that there is complementarity between their efforts. While NGOs often focus on small, resource-poor farmers, their reach is limited and they often lack a solid technical base (Francis et al., 1995). Pluralistic approaches to REE should stress the importance of improved collaboration between NGOs and government agencies. (Crowder and Anderson 1994)</td>
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References


Crowder, L. V. and J. Anderson (1996) "Integrating Agricultural Research, Education and Extension in Developing Countries."


