

## ***Summary of Discussions RAS: First Round (5-19 April 2010)***

The first round of discussion started with two broad questions:

**Question 1. The need and role of a public advisory system in the backdrop of their mixed performance in the past and farmers' own propensity to innovate.**

**Question 2. The role of alternate service delivery mechanisms such as farmer to farmer extension, PTD etc.**

**Pierre – Yves Sutter** set us off on a good start by saying 'lumping together' all farmers can lead to a generalised analysis which does not reflect the reality marked by different land holding, cropping patterns, access to markets and infrastructure, social status, ability to pay etc. He says the most effective system is the one that farmers can understand. He further cautions us that PTD and FFS are still couched in scientific terms and do not employ the language farmers use or understand. Farmer to Farmer extension is therefore, more effective as it is easily understood.

**Willi Graf** mentions that a publicly financed, complementary system clearly generates additional public value. Especially in developing countries there are some factors that make complementary public investments in advisory services important: vital interest in providing food security, maintaining the natural resource base, importance of rural development for poverty alleviation, and maintaining cultural identity.

**Hans Schaltenbrand** shared experience from Vietnam of the dual extension system where the responsible central body for extension services established one system for remote areas and another for close-to-market areas. The project appears to have ended too early to harvest adequate results. He shares that with greater focus on decentralization, extension agencies are also using many farmer led extension approaches. It is important that the donors are patient and consistent in their support to such approaches. Experience with LSPs in Pakistan shows that it takes time to generate demand, develop a culture for a fee based service system and to experience the impacts.

**Muhammad Anwar Bhatti** shared concerns of accountability of public RAS where, due to historical reasons, most services are provided free, the users ascribe little value to it and demand little accountability from the service providers. The private sector on the other hand has clear incentive structures and provides 'tangible benefits' in the form of services and inputs. He shares the experience of the Livelihood Programme in Pakistan where Local Service Providers (LSPs) are trained to provide a range of services and are linked to line departments for backup support and access to new information. Being local, these services providers are able to reach women and other marginalized sections and offer services in a timely manner.

**Thierry Pleines** emphasizes that it is in public interest to provide cheap and good services to food producing farmers in the backdrop of the recent "food crisis".

[Arshad Gill](#) also highlights that farmer led approaches are more successful in reaching out to women who play an important role in agriculture.

[K R Vishwanathan](#) cites the specific example of livestock service provision in India where services are provided practically free of cost and are financed by the government. However, the bulk of resources go towards salary costs of staff with very little left for equipment or other inputs. In this background an SDC and World Bank supported study found that majority of farmers, even in the poorest states of the country, are willing to pay for services if they were provided at their doorstep and they meet the needs of the farmers. Such findings are forcing the govt to re-look at its service delivery system and move to a user-fee based regime in areas where there is a capacity to pay while moving subsidized service delivery systems to less developed areas. A free service delivery system does not put any 'pressures to perform' on the service providers and there are vested interests on the supply side that perpetuate their existence.

Vishwanathan also made a distinction between paid services for a private direct benefit and subsidized services for a public good such as disease prevention should be provided free of cost in the interest of the whole economy.

At the end of the discussions in Week 1, we reached a conclusion that there is a strong rationale for public investments in RAS, especially in developing countries with low levels of education, economic development, food insecurity as also the new challenges posed the need of agriculture to adapt to climate change.

Members identified that there is a huge gap between the need for RAS and the capacity to provide these services both in the public and private sectors.

The following two questions were then added for discussion:

**Question 3: Who pays (or should pay) for what type of services?**

**Question 4: Should poor farmers pay, or is it true that they cannot pay at all?**

[Frank Hartwich](#) stresses the point that innovations for farmers should be developed in the interaction of supply-push (from research and technology providers, among those farmers themselves) and demand-pull (by the farmers) and any type of advisory services become irrelevant if it is not able to deal simultaneously with those two aspects. He further indicates that in innovation, the public good as such does not exist since there are always additional costs involved for the innovator.

[Max Streit](#) mentions that experience from Latin America show that existing power structures often impede small farmers' access/demand for good advisory services. He agrees that farmer-led services can promote innovation at local level but only if there is an established system that links with national and even global innovative experiences.

[Dimka Stantchev](#) argues that markets for advisory services do not emerge naturally as a result of demand or needs of farmers without sufficient coordination to make “markets happen”. Farmers must have sufficient information and be organised to be able exert the right pressure for service providers to deliver high quality services. She also mentions examples where farmers would be willing to pay for services but NGOs provide free services which are detrimental for the development of a service market.

[Pierre-Yves](#) says farmers are willing to pay for services if they see a tangible benefit (increased profit). It is important to demonstrate – ideally upfront – visible results.

While [Thierry Pleines](#) in his response during the first week questions the ability and willingness of small scale subsistence farmers, particularly women, to pay for services, he also questions the ethics of insisting on this in a context where export oriented agribusinesses in developed countries have access to highly subsidized extension services. He shares outcomes from a recent study in Togo and Benin that point to the fact that most of the work in small scale farms is done by hired labour and women, who have no access to advisory services. Such systems further complicate targeting of RAS.

[K R Vishwanathan](#) shared an example of a private company in Indian providing a range of services through a system of information kiosks and says there is a need and space for many actors in this domain.

[Frank Hartwich](#) indicated that while in principle there are four sources of funding for extension/advisory services (Gov., Dev. agencies, private sector, farmers themselves) the question of who should pay depends on the public sector and development agencies' interest to support development among specific group of farmers, the private sector's opportunities to internalize benefits from introducing innovations among farmers and the farmer's own perception of the benefits derived from the extension services.

[Andrew Bartlett](#) argues that even if farmers do not pay in monetary terms for advisory services it does not mean they receive them for free as they often pay in different ways: in kind (food for extensionists, voting for political parties, opportunity cost of attending meetings, etc.). He puts forward an example from Laos where extension agents are also in charge of collecting taxes from farmers, and therefore they think that this is enough payment!

[Mahamat Guihini Dadi and Djibril Diani](#) both mention that farmers' organizations are often weak and dependent on external funding or subsidies, and therefore the poor farmers in particular have little means to pay for advisory services. Hence the need to strengthen these organizations such that they reach a “critical mass” enabling them to demand and pay for good services. This will also lead to increased accountability of service providers towards farmers' organizations.

[Pascal Rouamba](#) mentions that clear criteria are needed to define who will get free or subsidized services. The attitude of the Government towards the farmers and their real

recognition determine whether favorable policies are put in place or not. Like other sectors that are important for the sovereignty of a state (defense, education, justice etc.) the training of farmers should also be considered for public financing.

[Benjamin Bustamante](#) indicates that in the context of Honduras, farmers still lack the capacity to ask for high quality services and to pay for it. This means that they get what is offered. He mentions that FFS is an approach that promotes innovation systems and sustainability.

[Hans Schaltenbrand](#) felt that public funds should be used for organizing farmers without which it is difficult to bring them together. After they are organized a simplified farmer to farmer methodology for RAS could be effective.

[Djibril Diani](#) stresses the importance of 'refocusing' public extension services on the important domains while at the same time strengthening farmer organizations. He also mentions that farmer innovations give best results when audiovisual tools are used. These tools seem to be easily managed by the majority of farmers.

Finally, [Markus Bürli](#), [Frank Hartwich](#) and Martin Fischler had a short exchange on the Model farmer and Model herder approach (in the context of Mongolia) indicating some shortfalls. This experience indicated that it cannot be assumed that neighboring farmers necessarily pick up new technologies just by looking at the Model farmer's field or animals.

In this background the potential areas of further sharing in Round 2 could be:

Week 1:

1. Experiences of good FFS, Farmer to Farmer methods.
2. How to work with moving populations?

Week 2:

3. How to go beyond 'projects' for good practices in RAS to institutionalizing them – that is setting up structures, defining the roles of different actors, coordinating mechanisms, financing strategies etc. Experiences of moving from "Projects" on RAS to mainstreaming good approaches.
4. What about the gender dimensions in RAS?

Thank you for such a vibrant discussion, have a good weekend and see you soon on this discussion forum!

*Rupa Mukerji & Martin Fischler*