



Promoting Inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems: What are the priorities for action?

FAO Side Event, 3 October 2016
7th GFRAS Annual Meeting, 3–7 October 2016,
Limbé, Cameroon

Background

A growing variety of public and private rural advisory services are available today, leading to increasingly “pluralistic service systems” (PSS), in which advisory services are provided by different actors and funded from different sources. However, these PSS and the way they operate are still poorly understood. In particular, how PSS can effectively respond to demands of heterogeneous farmers in contexts where small-scale agriculture increasingly needs to exploit value addition and adapt to market requirements.

In this context, FAO organized a Side Event on Promoting Inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems during the 7th GFRAS Annual Meeting “The Role of Rural Advisory Services for Inclusive Agripreneurship”. The Side Event aimed to explore current thinking on PSS and facilitate a debate around the main themes of inclusiveness, coordination, accountability and scaling up pluralistic rural advisory services. This is a synthesis of discussions and outcome that was submitted to the GFRAS Steering Committee on 7 October 2016.

Communiqué from FAO Side Event

We, members and affiliates of GFRAS who participated at the FAO Side Event on Promoting Inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems, held on 3 October 2016 in Limbé, Cameroon, are concerned that millions of **small-scale farmers continue to be with low or no access to adequate rural advisory services** (RAS), while duplication, overlaps, gaps, working in isolation, and lack of coordination among multiple RAS providers undermine the efforts to reach those farmers, and result in wasted resources and loss of economic and livelihood opportunities. We welcome the recognition of the diversity of RAS providers within pluralistic service systems (PSS)¹ as an important step forwards to overcome constraints related to funding, staffing and expertise, and to make services more demand-driven.

Yet, given that poor access to services continues to be a reality in many countries, regions and areas, we call for increased attention to the inclusive character of PSS.

We emphasize that **RAS services are considered inclusive if they are:**

- responsive to resource-poor and vulnerable farmers, especially women and youth;
- tailored to the multiple capacities, needs and demands of the different groups of men and women farmers (commercial, subsistence, specialized, diversified livelihoods etc.);
- characterized by continuous dialogue and learning between farmers and service providers; and
- complementary to the services of other providers, to optimize advice and enable farmers to reap meaningful results.

¹ The term “pluralistic service systems” (PSS) refers to diverse RAS systems where a wide range of services are provided by different actors, including public, private, civil society and producer organizations, and funded from different sources.

With reference to the above, we call for action to be taken on the following aspects.

FIRST, we recognize that competition, working in silos, overlapping areas of coverage, power relations, and conflicting priorities are often a reality that constrain **coordination**. In consequence, to improve coordination in PSS, we emphasize the following:

- Coordination should not only be considered a task exclusively for the public sector. Different actors may play a coordination role in pluralistic service systems, including local governments and public extension officers, private entrepreneurs as well as producer organizations.
- Producer organizations, when enabled with the right skills and conditions, play an important role to coordinate access to services among their members and negotiate service delivery with providers.
- Government and donor-funded programmes should incorporate appropriate coordination mechanisms and address the capacity needs of different actors to undertake coordination functions.

SECOND, accountability to producers (“downward accountability”) is crucial to ensure relevance, service quality and demand-drive of PSS. We therefore consider critical the following:

- GFRAS country fora need to take up an active role in lobbying for and promoting awareness of accountability to producers. The country fora have a unique position to lobby for and ensure that accountability to producers/users is recognized as a critical issue in service provision, that plans are made for institutionalizing mechanisms for downward accountability, and that progress is measured at country level.
- Producers and their organizations need to be empowered to hold service providers accountable. This includes capacity development and institution building of producer organizations to participate in policy formulation, lobby for improved and diverse

RAS, facilitate demand articulation, and enable farmers to have a stronger say on the types of services provided to them.

- Farmers and their organizations need to be recognized in the governance structure of rural service systems so that they actively take part in planning, design, implementation and monitoring of services provided.

THIRD, we underline the imperative of moving from project to **systemic interventions**, moving away from piecemeal approaches towards long-term institution building. To facilitate scaling up, we argue the following:

- Evidence and learning needs to be generated on who are the service providers, and what types of service provision, approaches and scaling mechanisms work best, where, and for whom.
- Pathways and mechanisms for scaling should be identified and incorporated at an early stage of planning and programming, while recognizing that context and dynamics change at scale.
- Long-term and flexible financing mechanisms from multiple sources need to be ensured and geared towards empowerment of farmers and their organizations, to promote relevant and inclusive services at increased scale.

We recognize that inclusive **PSS start with ourselves** – here at the GFRAS Community. We therefore call for more inclusive GFRAS annual meetings and country fora, in which more diverse RAS providers participate, in particular producer organizations.

TO CONCLUDE, we call for convergence of actors, coalitions and initiatives to make PSS more inclusive and responsive to demands of heterogeneous farmers, men and women agripreneurs and other value-chain actors, in contexts where small-scale agriculture increasingly needs to exploit value addition and adapt to market requirements for improving their livelihoods.

We recognize that the GFRAS Country Fora are well positioned to catalyse such convergence, and we call for strengthening their capacity to undertake this role.

Further info:

Bitzer, V., Wongschowski, M., Hani, M., Blum, M., & Flink, I. 2016. Towards inclusive pluralistic service systems: insights for innovative thinking. FAO.

FAO. 2016. New Directions for Inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems. Report of FAO Expert Consultation. 11-13 May 2016. Rome, FAO.

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