



This GTZ reader describes the Participatory Extension Approach (PEA) developed by PICOTEAM members.

Reader: Extension and Research Approaches for Rural Development

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2. Participatory Extension Approaches

According to a Participatory Extension Approach (PEA), the role of the extension worker is to facilitate an in-depth situation analysis by the farmers themselves at the beginning of their working relation. Once farmers have become aware of the causes of their problems and have identified the most pressing ones, the extension workers provide technical knowledge and technologies, which may be useful to resolve the problems identified. To perform well in a PEA, extension workers need not only agricultural expertise, but also good analytical, pedagogical, and facilitating skills. The "participatory" part of a PEA means that farmers are the principal decision-makers in defining goals, planning, implementing, and evaluating development activities. PEA puts emphasis on strengthening farmers' problem-solving capacities from the start. The principal instrument for practising problem-solving skills is the PEA learning cycle. The learning cycle makes flexible use of a variety of participatory methods and tools (e.g. Participatory Rapid Appraisal, Participatory Technology Development, or participatory action learning). The philosophy of PEA is strongly influenced by the Partner-Centred Approach, described above, and by the much-acclaimed work on "Training for Transformation" (Hope/Timmel 1984). The Department of Technical and Extension Services (AGRITEX) developed PEA in Zimbabwe in cooperation with two GTZ-assisted projects during the 1990s. Since then, the approach has been developed further in GTZ-assisted projects / programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In many cases projects have succeeded slowly in adapting to more client- and demand-led modes of operation. This may be a painful process, advancing by trial and error. Crucial elements are shared

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decision-making, flexible, and process-oriented management cycles that have built-in mechanisms for reflecting one's attitudes and behaviour. Participatory extension approaches require excellent facilitation skills - a factor which becomes all too apparent in relation to sustainable natural resources management. The facilitator has to be mediator of conflicting interests. Facilitation in participatory processes often builds on tools like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), the GRAAP method, LePSA, SWAT/SWAP, or Training for Transformation.

Agricultural extension and participatory technology development projects had already started to apply parts of the toolbox by the 1980s. In relation to community development, the existence of a local government and a decentralised administration is a precondition. If the local government is not dominated by elites, then the accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency of local services can be substantially improved. Many governments nowadays stress the importance of popular participation.

Reality still looks different, but too much political pressure from donors could mean that solutions are imposed, running the risk of being rejected, and subsequently degenerating into a mechanistic application of the instruments. Experiences with PEA indicate that innovations or acceptable solutions for the problems of farmers or rural communities are best developed together with research and extension agencies to form an innovative system. Moreover, participatory approaches depend strongly on a conducive political and administrative environment. Many current approaches include elements of the Farmer Field School concept.