Farmers' Needs Propel Change and Institutional Reform in Agricultural Extension

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1. Introduction

New extension messages to reduce soil erosion in smallholder farming were to be developed by the conservation tillage project (ConTill), a joint venture of the Zimbabwean Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services (AGRITEX) and GTZ, initiated in 1988. The goal was to be achieved through scientific research at two different agro-ecological sites, one in the subhumid areas close to Harare, the other in the semi-arid areas near Masvingo in Southern Zimbabwe.

ConTill began with a focus on research stations, but later shifted its attention towards working with farmers. In the Masvingo branch of the project, the acknowledgement of the farmers' reality as the determining factor for land management was a learning process which caused a drastic re-direction of the project focus towards farmer-led research and extension. Conventional concepts of mandated research and extension proved to be incompatible with the farmers' reality. Out of the need for new directions, a different concept for participatory research, innovation and extension was developed. This, in turn, clashed with the old institutional set-up and culture and necessitated active efforts to institutionalise the participatory approach at AGRITEX.

At this point, allies with similar interests were found. The "Food Security Project" of the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), an NGO, successfully practised a similar approach but also faced problems in scaling up through the institutions. Another ally was found in the GTZ supported CARD programme (Coordinated Agricultural and Rural Development Programme, later renamed "Integrated Rural Development Programme", IRDEP). CARD had started pilot activities on "community-level planning and development" (CLP&D) and faced conceptual and institutional challenges with the multi-faceted focuses of community projects. The common interest was to shift the perspectives of rural extension towards farmer participation and to scale-up the activities through the service institutions.

The objective of this paper is to analyse the experiences in Masvingo in terms of the key factors and strategic elements of institutionalising participatory approaches in a government bureaucracy like AGRITEX. This paper first describes the learning path of the ConTill project and continues with an analysis of the experiences the three "allied" projects made with the institutionalisation of participatory approaches.

2. From Research to Action Learning for Approach Development

In this chapter, the evolution of the ConTill project in Masvingo will be described. It concentrates on the learning process and its phases with several cycles of action and reflection. These revealed a number of important technical and institutional aspects which, in turn, propelled continual re-adjustments and re-orientations of the project focus.

Phase 1 (1988-1990): On-station research

At field level, the project started with two research stations where scientific research on soil erosion and conservation was carried out. Although the need to involve farmers into the development of conservation tillage techniques was soon realised, a long negotiation process was needed to convince the Zimbabwean partners to embark on adaptive on-farm trials.

At institutional level, the project was based at the Institute of Agricultural Engineering (IAE), a branch of AGRITEX headquarters, which was mandated to carry out tillage research. All other agricultural research was mandated to the Department of Research and Specialist Services (DR&SS). The strong institutional mandates made it almost impossible to carry out non-linear research in a systems perspective, without trespassing the mandates.

High staff turnover at IAE led to a situation in which the project de-facto did not have a Zimbabwean manager. In Masvingo Province, the relationship to AGRITEX was weak as research projects were perceived as having little direct relevance to the local extension service.

Phase 2 (end of 1990-1992): Adaptive on-farm trials

At field level, adaptive on-farm trials, complementary to the on-station research component, were implemented at both project sites. Intensive interaction between project staff and smallholder farmers enabled an insight into the life-world of communal farmers with all their problems and constraints. The multitude and the complexity of the farmers' problems clearly showed that conservation tillage as a single technique had very limited potential to solve either the land management crisis or the farmers' problems. It also revealed that the farmers' participation developed very slowly. Despite encouragement, farmers were hesitant to make their own decisions on the trials and tended to wait for the researchers to tell them what to do. Rather than making their own decisions, it was obviously part of the "culture" of research and extension to wait for instructions from the extension workers. We concluded that other means were required to achieve active farmer participation in the experimentation and adaptation process. We therefore had to move beyond the concept of adaptive trials.

At institutional level, the project was shifted to the soil and water conservation branch within AGRITEX headquarters, and the Zimbabwean project manager became head of the branch. In Masvingo, a new German advisor tried to improve the relationship to AGRITEX at provincial level through exchanging the field experiences with the provincial officers.

Phase 3 (1992-1994): Farmer participatory research

At field level, the focus was redirected towards catalysing active farmer participation. Workshops with farmers, extension workers and researchers initiated this phase. Elements of Paolo Freire's "pedagogy of liberation" in the form of "Training for Transformation" (Hope and Timmel 1984) were utilised to raise farmers' awareness of self-reliant development. An assessment of the farmers' visions and problems was taken as the basis for further activities. The workshops were also used to motivate experi-

mentation in finding their own solutions to problems (methodology described in Hagmann 1993). After the workshops, the farmers engaged more actively in participation and decision-making and concentrated their activities on dialogue, farmer experimentation and sharing of knowledge gained. The collaboration with extension workers, however, became increasingly difficult as they felt threatened by the farmers' confidence and their claim to new roles.

The intensive interaction with farmers in ConTill Masvingo allowed us to gain a deep insight and to analyse the situation (see Box 1). We increasingly questioned the basic assumption of the project's development goal: that development of an extension message would result in an impact at farmers' level. Rather than focusing on project results, we began to concentrate on the development goal and, despite the limitations set by the mandates, adapted our approach iteratively (see Hagmann et al 1997). This process of adaptation was not conflict-free, but the fact that the rationale for the changes was based on facts and experiences supported our position in negotiations.

At institutional level, our observations and analysis of the interaction between farmers and extension workers was regularly shared with extension officers at provincial level. This, combined with encouraging extension officers to meet their clients in the field (field-exposure), became an important factor in raising awareness for change. The farmers had gained enough confidence to express themselves openly and confront the extension staff with their grievances. By the end of 1993, we felt that, as an individual project, our influence on the extension department would be insufficient to generate change at institutional level. Therefore, we searched for allies and started networking. Together with two other projects, we tried to create awareness through personal discussions and workshops with extension personnel.

Box 1: A need for changing the extension approach

The analysis of this phase revealed the necessity to move activities from an individual to a community level. Individual innovators tended to be become victims rather than examples for other farmers. This limited an effective dissemination of new knowledge. Besides new technologies, social innovations which encourage dissemination proved to be crucial for success. This insight, as well as the behaviour of the extension workers, forced us to increasingly question the conventional approach to agricultural extension as followed by AGRITEX. The outreach of extension was largely limited to ca. 10% of so called "master farmers", and their success in terms of adoption of techniques was generally low (Madondo 1995). Agronomic results nourished these doubts as performance of standardised techniques (recommended by AGRITEX) depended highly on the site, soil and specific situation of each farmer, or even of each field. A certain technique might be a success with one farmer but a failure with another. Therefore, "blanket recommendations" could only be of limited value. Instead, a basket of options and knowledge of technologies was required for an optimal use of the available resources. Farmers needed to learn how to choose the most suitable option, combine it with their knowledge and adapt it to their conditions and circumstances. Therefore, rather than focusing on the adoption of certain techniques, the anticipated goal of the process became the raising of farmers' capacities through learning and understanding, and through sharing of knowledge and experiences among themselves.

Phase 4 (1994-1995): Testing of a new concept for extension

At field level, the insights of the previous phases were utilised to build a new concept for community-based, participatory innovation development and extension. This was tested in seven intervention areas (Hagmann et al. 1996b). Testing the operationalisation of a new extension approach became the main research focus in ConTill Masvingo. Results of the process are shown in Box 2.

At institutional level, the exposure to facts in the field increasingly convinced AGRITEX Masvingo's higher management of the need for change. They organised an all-staff workshop (with more than 300 participants) where participatory approaches to extension were discussed as a means to improve the department's performance in the field. This commitment of the higher management became a benchmark for the organisational development programme which the provincial head of AGRITEX Masvingo was launching at about the same time.

Parallel to these activities, we collaborated with the other two projects in initiating training of extension workers in participatory approaches and methods.

Box 2: Achievements from 1991 to 1995 at farmers' level

By 1995, the participatory approach to innovation development and extension had yielded more than 20 innovations in the field of land husbandry, and the spread of innovations at community level in the seven intervention areas was very encouraging. In the ITDG project, where a similar approach with a focus on extension was practised, up to 80% of the households in one Ward (ca. 1,000 households) were involved in soil and water conservation activities. Male and female headed households were found to be equally active. These achievements were closely monitored and evaluated during the action learning process between 1991 and 1995. Impacts related to human development were more difficult to measure. For example, during a project evaluation in April 1995, one of the evaluators regarded the farmers' confidence and pride in presenting their innovations and achievements as the key success of the participatory approach. Farmers were able to articulate themselves in a way which is unusual in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Compared to the output of conventional research and extension, participatory innovation development and extension have proven their high performance and potential. This applies, however, to an implementation under a well-resourced project. When operationalised through the extension department, its output still has to be assessed.

The technical research on conservation tillage started in 1991 and was carried out until 1995. By then however, it comprised only about a quarter of the project activities in Masvingo. All other activities, which were felt necessary in order to make an impact at the level of the development goal, were added without revision of the project planning. Otherwise, a change of the offer to BMZ would have been required almost every year. The additional work could be managed because the financial resources involved were relatively low and the increasing motivation of the project staff compensated for the higher workload.

Towards the end of 1995, ConTill's field activities were scaled down and the project's results (in terms of approach and technologies) were integrated into the organisational

development (OD) programme supported by IRDEP. The GTZ advisor to ConTill continued supporting the OD process through short-term consultancies for IRDEP.

3.   Initial Setting for Scaling Up Participatory Approaches

The previous chapter highlighted the learning process which led to the development of a participatory approach to extension in the ConTill project. Some activities geared towards raising awareness for change at institutional level were also described. In this chapter, more background on the terminology and the original situation is required to understand the strategies applied by the three projects. The term "participatory extension approaches" will be abbreviated as PEA throughout the text.

3.1   The understanding of participation, institutionalisation and scaling up

Participation as understood by the project goes far beyond a functional participation of farmers which views participatory methods as instrumental to improve outside-driven programmes. Our understanding emphasises interactive participation (Pretty 1995) where people participate in joint analysis and develop action plans leading to learning processes, and where they take control over local decisions. The ultimate goal of participation is a strong articulation of rural people, and the creation of a demand structure and an effective representation, all of which is leading to a self-mobilisation of people independent from external institutions. In innovation development and extension, interactive participation forms the foundation for the desired social learning process.

The terms **"institutionalisation"** and **"scaling up"** required considerable clarification during the process. Successful pilot activities in the field were to be expanded. Scaling up meant to us that similar processes should be initiated in most communities of the wards and districts within Masvingo Province. Two levels of institutionalisation have to be distinguished:
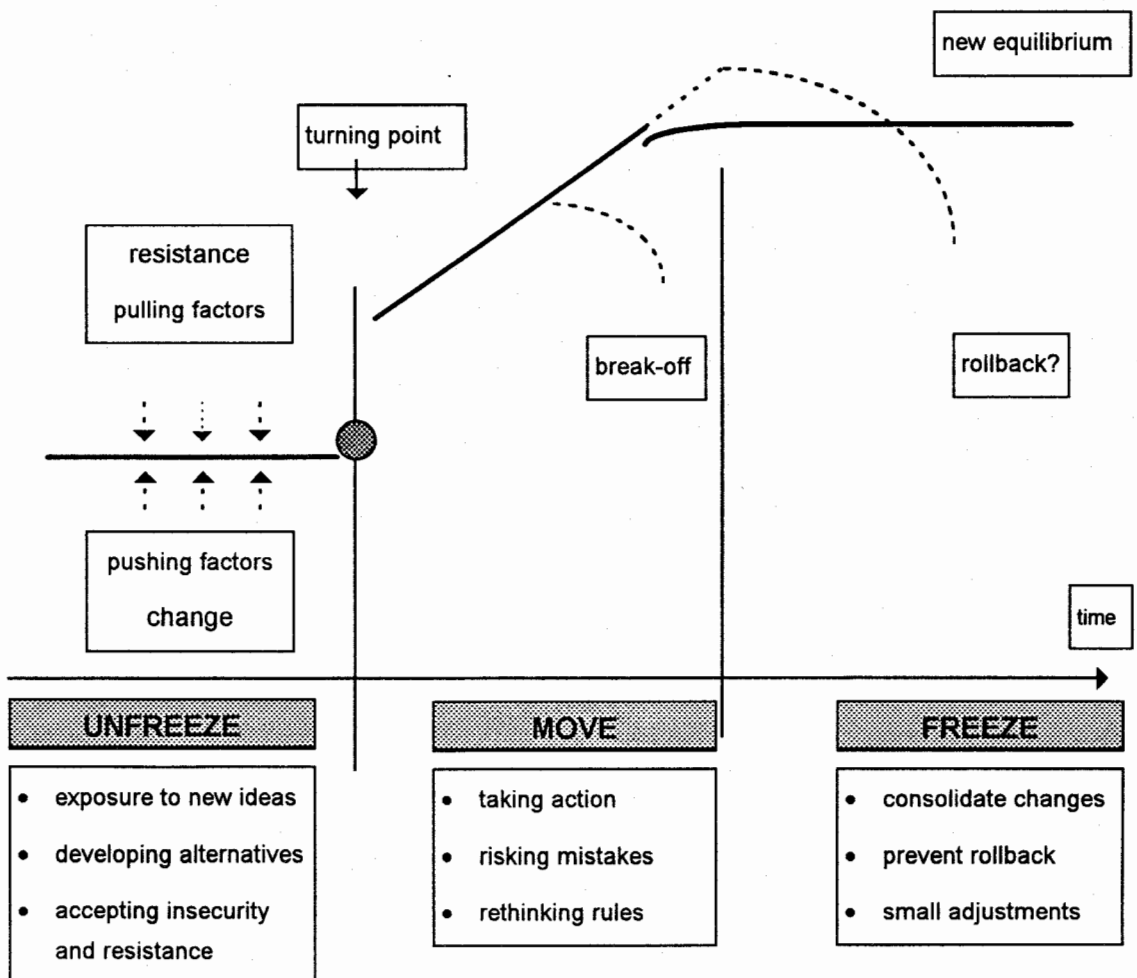
- Institutionalisation of participatory development within local/community institutions.
- Institutionalisation of participatory approaches in government extension services.

To achieve sustainability, participatory development will ultimately have to be institutionalised within local/community institutions and organisations. A strong emphasis on leadership and the strengthening of local institutions is thus a priority. This, however, requires an intermediary as an agent of change who facilitates the spread of this process. In our case, extension workers and facilitators working in the field are the most appropriate agents of change. A pre-condition for their assumption of this role is the institutionalisation of PEA within the organisation of AGRITEX.

Institutionalisation can be interpreted in different ways. In 1994, when the directorate of AGRITEX formulated the need for participatory approaches in a new mission statement, many officers perceived participatory approaches as being institutionalised since they linked 'institutionalisation' to the policy level. De facto, however, this did not imply any changes in the daily operations. Therefore, the head of AGRITEX Masvingo insisted that the actual implementation of PEA, with all the required changes within

the organisation, should be called **operationalisation**. This distinction is important as the organisational change starts with institutionalisation and later enters an operationalisation phase. Institutionalisation is an *"unfreeze phase"* during which the main focus are the re-orientation of staff and the raising of their awareness for and commitment to the changes required. Operationalisation is equivalent to the *"move phase"* during which the actual changes take place (Figure 1). In the case of AGRITEX Masvingo, the framework for operationalisation is the organisational development programme.

Figure 1: The three phases of changes in socio-technical systems
        (adapted from Sülzer and Zimmermann 1996)

new equilibrium

turning point

resistance

pulling factors

break-off

rollback?

pushing factors

change

time

UNFREEZE	MOVE	FREEZE
• exposure to new ideas	• taking action	• consolidate changes
• developing alternatives	• risking mistakes	• prevent rollback
• accepting insecurity and resistance	• rethinking rules	• small adjustments

3.2 The setting at the start of the process

Status quo at AGRITEX: orientation on structure rather than on process

AGRITEX Masvingo employs a staff of about 400. At provincial level, all staff is well qualified with formal degrees in their specific disciplines. At district level (seven districts in Masvingo), the formal qualifications are lower but staff is still qualified in formal terms. Staff turnover is high at the management and officer level, but low among

field staff (ca. 300 field extension workers). All staff are civil servants with salaries which allow them to concentrate on their job, and most of them are mobile (access to motorbikes).

The organisational structure and the technical disciplines hardly fulfil the criteria of interdisciplinarity as a basis for systems-oriented extension approaches. The general line of thinking - as in most government bureaucracies - is of a structural, linear nature and, thus, rather rigid. Process-oriented approaches do not readily fit into rigid structures, and scepticism towards them is widespread. On the clients' side, however, the situation is very different: the farmers live in a complex socio-technical system which is under severe pressure through socio-cultural change, population pressure and dwindling resources. Such a situation requires process-oriented support and development - the exact opposite of the rigidity followed by AGRITEX.

Client and demand orientation as a starting point for change

Our work (ConTill, ITDG and IRDEP) puts the needs and demand of the clients, the farmers, at the centre. An intensive interaction with the farmers allowed us to gain detailed knowledge about the clients, their needs, problems and potential and their decision-making rationales. This knowledge, combined with the shortcomings of AGRITEX in addressing the farmer's needs, became a very powerful tool for creating awareness for change. Arguments for change were always linked to the performance of AGRITEX as an organisation. The fieldwork in the case studies showed that the clients' needs and expectations were not met by the service AGRITEX offered. If AGRITEX was to fulfil its mission, different approaches were needed to increase its performance. It seems as if its limited performance had already put pressure on the institution, as a high official mentioned in 1992: "If we do not change now, the department might not exist any more in ten years time". Steps towards a client-orientation were greatly hindered by AGRITEX's hierarchical, one-way communication and the low esteem of peasant farmers in the society, a particularly wide-spread view amongst university educated bureaucrats.

Initiation of change: from top or bottom?

The point of departure proved to be a fundamental issue. Should one first try to convince the top management of AGRITEX and then rely on it to give the go-ahead for implementing the changes? Or should one start small and rather conventionally at field level and then iteratively develop an alternative which can be justified with the clients' needs? In Masvingo, the second option was chosen: It proved much easier to convince senior staff through on-going activities with concrete positive examples and alternatives than with intellectual discussions on "what is wrong". If participatory approaches are to be taken seriously, they need to be developed from the bottom-up. Unencumbered by organisational hierarchies, NGOs can play an important role in this process, provided the case studies are utilised as awareness-raising tools for officials.

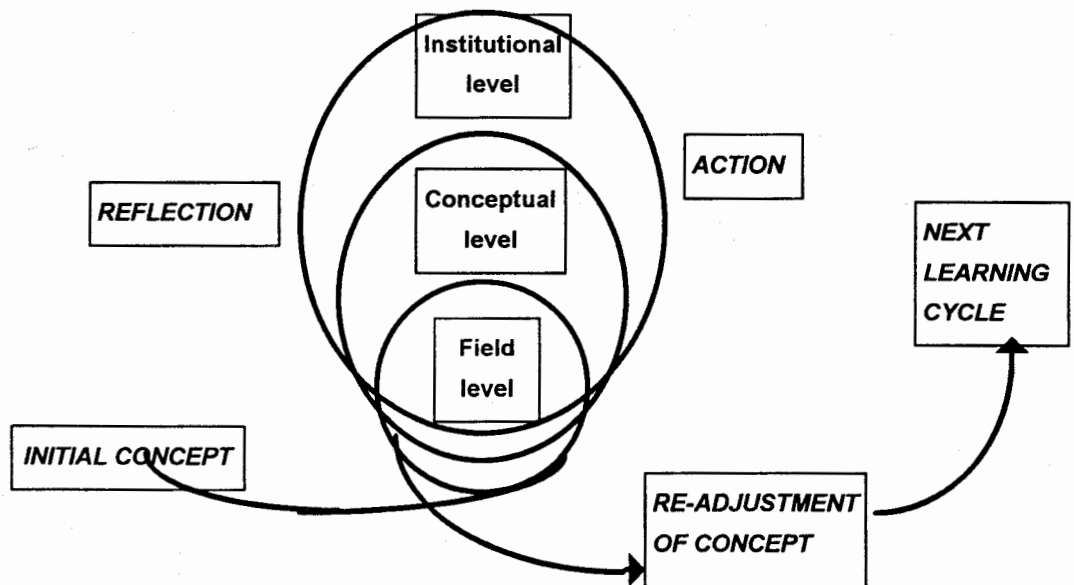### 3.3   The concept for institutionalisation of participatory extension

The concept and the strategy for institutionalising PEA were developed iteratively during the implementation of the ConTill, IRDEP and ITDG projects in collaboration

with AGRITEX. The process consisted of three main steps which were largely over-lapping or implemented in parallel. Throughout their chronological sequence, the steps were continuously supported by the three projects:

1. Development and implementation of case studies (pilot activities) of communities in which participatory approaches were practised as show cases and "learning cases" for approach development (as from 1991).

2. Raising awareness for change and familiarisation with alternatives through expo-sure of AGRITEX staff to the case studies (field visits and presentations in work-shops etc., networking and initial training activities by the three projects, 1993-1995).

3. Initiation of institutional learning about implementation of participatory extension through development of field-level capacities within AGRITEX (as from 1994). This was to bring about a shift in attitudes, concept and skills.

This strategy involved action learning at different levels (Figure 2Figure 2). At field level, actions took place in the villages. Their results were analysed and integrated into the process of approach/concept development. The analysis of the outputs at field level and conceptual level entered the process of institutional change. Thus, each phase had three simultaneous learning and action loops. The main strategic elements utilised are outlined in the following chapter.

Figure 2: Action learning at three different levels ("triple loop learning")

4.   Enhancing Commitment for Change: Institutionalisation

The objective of this chapter is to analyse the experiences gained in institutionalising PEA at AGRITEX Masvingo.

4.1 Strategic elements to institutionalise participatory approaches

Success in initiation of change can be attributed to several key elements:

Case studies/learning cases as the foundation of change

The case studies or "learning cases" as pilot activities were mainly exogenous interventions outside the normal extension procedures. The case studies provided the space for a detailed situation and actor analysis and for an iterative learning process. As this was an intervention from the outside, with an approach and paradigm substantially different from conventional departmental activities, friction between field-level staff and the facilitators of the three projects were pre-programmed and common in everyday work. It was clear that such interventions would make the system react by defending its conventional practice. Once this defensive phase was over, the next step was to study the activities and acknowledge the differences which normally result in learning about and adopting/adapting to such approaches. These reactions to the friction between our activities and the conventional practice gave us a valuable insight into the problems of the extension system.

The case studies' results of the first three years were used to justify the demand for institutional and organisational changes. The main function of the pilot activities in this phase was to raise awareness through field exposure and the presentation of results. Once senior staff had developed a commitment for change, the case studies could be used as show cases for training staff and general learning processes. They were crucial factors for institutionalising ideas and approaches at the level of extension staff, since they served firstly as concrete examples of improved output and secondly as examples of "how to implement".

To summarise, only the analysis of experiences gained through working at field-level for several years enabled the three projects to understand extension and develop new approaches beyond the conventional paradigm of "transfer of technology". Without field work, this analysis, and the approach based upon it, could not have been as "grounded" and convincing as it turned out to be. Our knowledge of the extension output at field level gave us the credibility to demand client-orientation.

Developing ideas and options through exposure/familiarisation at all levels of staff

These observations and the analysis were fed back to the higher staff levels of AGRITEX. It was realised that the flow of information at AGRITEX generally had one direction: downwards along the six hierarchy levels. Therefore, it was difficult for top-level management to obtain information about the real problems at field level.

Once AGRITEX showed interest, familiarisation at all levels of extension staff became a priority in order to stimulate discussions. Besides the provision of literature and reports, a series of workshops organised and/or supported by the three cooperating projects were held from 1993 to 1995. These workshops included the presentation of participatory approaches, the discussion of experiences and field visits to the case study areas. Particularly convincing in this respect was the exposure to results and to

farmers who analysed the differences between the conventional and the participatory approach. This enabled higher-level staff to get involved in the process and to adopt the new ideas without loosing face. In addition to these formal activities, informal discussions and field visits were important for the process of familiarisation.

Searching for allies within the organisation to facilitate change from inside

The processes of exposure and familiarisation required a strategy which we called "searching for allies". In informal discussions, we got to know a number of managers, officers and extension workers who were receptive to the new ideas. These "allies" or "benign viruses" were to bring about change from inside the system through convincing other staff, and they needed arguments and support to strengthen their position. The support was provided through intensive personal communication, a strong informal involvement in the learning process of the case studies, through provision of background material and through the writing of joint papers and reports.

Technical competence and socio-cultural empathy to convince technical staff

It is a principle of pedagogy to develop capacities through empathy for a person's situation and to support her or him in their development within this context. It is self-explanatory that technical staff can be convinced most easily if addressed at a technical level, and that their respect can best be obtained through technical competence. Our sound knowledge of the situation in the field made it possible to pursue a strategy along these lines while acting as advocates for the clients' demands. Once we were respected at a technical level, it was easier to be taken seriously in discussions about sociological, socio-cultural and even philosophical issues. Practical examples from field work and concrete suggestions on the nature and the mode of the new approach contributed greatly to the acceptance of the new ideas. Interest in and empathy for socio-cultural issues as well as good personal relationships to key persons within the organisation were an important condition for creating an atmosphere conducive to the adoption of new ideas.

"Mainstreaming" of participatory approaches through networking

The close cooperation of ConTill, ITDG and IRDEP in an informal "lobby group" allowed us to coordinate our activities in the process of institutionalising the new approach at AGRITEX. This informal networking and joint lobbying involved a general exchange of experiences and the preparation of joint papers and workshops. The awareness of technical staff was raised through the similarity of conclusions form different interventions in different areas. It proved to be crucial to obtain this "critical mass", since it enabled us to draw attention to participatory approaches and to bring these approaches into mainstream thinking.

Trespassing and provoking action to initiate change and institutional innovations

Project personnel who have specific funds and do not operate in a line-function have a particular advantage: They are free to interact with all hierarchy levels within an or-

ganisation. This and the "outsider" function provided a good opportunity to obtain information on the problems, the needs and the attitudes at the different levels. AGRITEX management was poorly informed about the shortcomings in the field, since the intervening hierarchy levels tended to filter any information going upwards. In this situation, we played the delicate role of "informant" and bypassed the middle hierarchy levels. Again, it was expected that the middle levels would fear this intervention and react accordingly. Therefore, this provocation required a constant gauging of the support from higher levels. Depending on the support from "above", the provocation had to be kept in a balance. Thus, when reporting too many negative examples from the field, there was a real danger of falling into a "deficit trap". This entailed the possibility of being discredited through a withdrawal of support by the higher levels. They conceived the criticism (the reality in the field) as a threat which became apparent only through the provocation of the project. It was therefore more opportune to talk about potentials in order to overcome weaknesses.

The project's trespassing with regard to roles and mandates was an important strategy to inspire institutional innovations. If, in the case of the ConTill project, we had asked the risk-avoiding bureaucratic hierarchy to approve any additional activity, the project might never have developed beyond the first two phases. In fact, this might be true for any process-oriented action: It involves considerable risks and its outcome is unpredictable. Once the action proves to be a success, bureaucrats tend to strongly identify with it and claim ownership, but very few would ever take the initial innovator's risk. A project seems ideally placed to assume the role of innovator. Here, the challenge lay in motivating the staff to cooperate while keeping the management informed of the ongoing incremental action.

4.2   The situation at the end of the institutionalisation phase

Towards the end of the institutionalisation phase in 1995, the AGRITEX management in Masvingo Province had developed a commitment to PEA, as evidenced, for example, by the above mentioned all-staff workshop. There was now an awareness that a move towards participatory extension required fundamental changes within the organisations, and an organisational development programme was launched accordingly. Successful learning cases of different projects on PEA were available too. Now, the main issue became the actual operationalisation of participatory extension by AGRITEX in the context of its resource constraints, staff capacity and bureaucratic administration.

5.   Starting the Reform: Operationalisation of Participatory Extension

5.1   The challenges in operationalisation of participatory extension

Changing the attitude and behaviour of AGRITEX staff towards their clients emerged as a major challenge. It was unlikely that PEA could work in an environment where staff felt superior and perceived farmers as empty vessels which had to be filled with knowledge and needed to be told "what to do". This attitude, and a mediocre motiva-

tion, were deeply entrenched among field staff. Its origins are partly to be found in the colonial "socialisation" of the organisation, since AGRITEX's predecessor was a very powerful agency for exerting state control on farmers under the colonial regime.

The experiences with PEA at AGRITEX had shown that these approaches are a challenge to an organisational culture in which rigid and hierarchical structures of communication predominate. Other factors hindering participatory approaches were unclear roles and responsibilities, control- rather than performance-oriented management and supply-driven staff training. An extension delivery based on rigid recommendations was another stumbling block to a successful implementation of PEA, since it promotes an adoption of blueprint solutions rather than learning about technologies. In addition, the organisation's limited funding would have made it impossible to make additional resources available for the implementation of PEA. These constraints revealed that operationalisation of PEA requires more than mere staff training. To address this situation, the head of AGRITEX Masvingo initiated an organisational development programme.

5.2 The framework of organisational development (OD)

The OD programme as a framework for institutional reform will be presented below. However, it would be premature to evaluate outcomes other than the PEA component, with which the three projects have had considerable experience. The AGRITEX OD programme itself is supported by IRDEP. ConTill (which has come to an end) and ITDG have no role in the internal reform but still contribute their experience to developing the field-level capacity necessary for operationalisation.

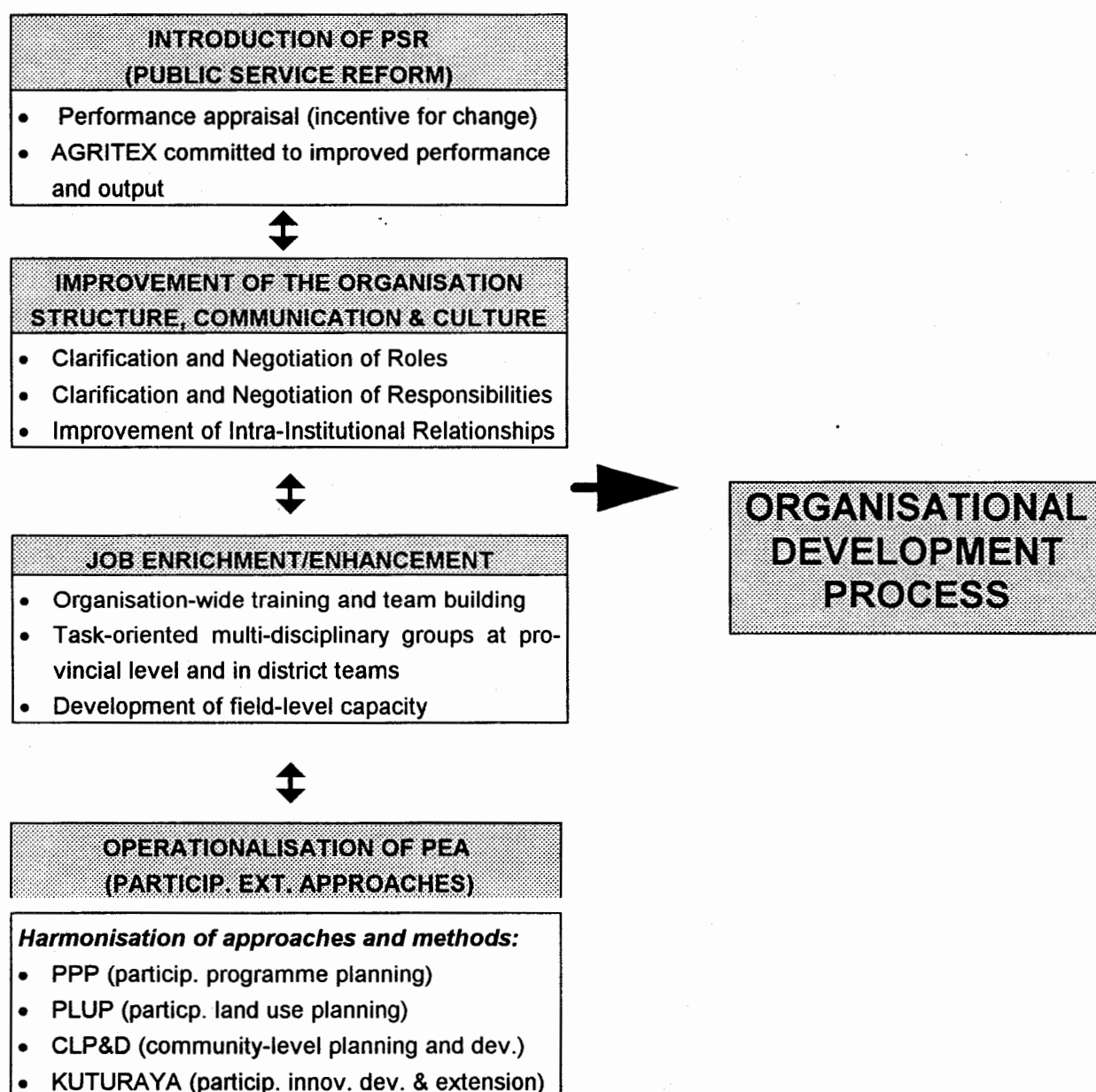### 5.2.1 Goal and objective of the OD programme

After an extensive review and analysis of its activities, AGRITEX organised an internal workshop in May 1994 to review three different systems within the department: extension management, extension support and extension delivery. The objective oriented project planning method (ZOPP) was used to carry out a problem analysis and to plan activities to be undertaken in the different systems. The workshop clearly showed the necessity to improve the performance of individual staff as well as the aggregate output of all staff.

The workshop results then became the basis for the OD programme, launched in 1995. Reflecting AGRITEX's mission, the goal of the OD programme was formulated accordingly: *"Farmers in Masvingo Province optimally use their production resources in a sustainable way"*. The programme purpose was therefore to improve the department's output in order to achieve the above stated goal. It was formulated as follows: *"Relevant aggregate output at all levels of AGRITEX staff in Masvingo Province improved"* (AGRITEX 1995). Besides improvements in managerial skills and capacities of staff, one of the major tools (the "software" of the OD) to improve extension delivery was PEA.

5.2.2 Main components of the OD process

As an institutional learning process, the outline of the OD programme is not static. At present, about 18 months after the official launching, the stakeholders perceive the OD process as being based on the following components (Figure 3):

Figure 3: Components of the OD process in AGRITEX Masvingo Province

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┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
│      INTRODUCTION OF PSR                    │
│      (PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM)                │
├──────────────────────────────────────────┤
│ • Performance appraisal (incentive for change) │
│ • AGRITEX committed to improved performance │
│   and output                                │
└──────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    ↕
┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
│   IMPROVEMENT OF THE ORGANISATION           │
│ STRUCTURE, COMMUNICATION & CULTURE          │
├──────────────────────────────────────────┤
│ • Clarification and Negotiation of Roles    │
│ • Clarification and Negotiation of Responsibilities │
│ • Improvement of Intra-Institutional Relationships │
└──────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    ↕                  ➡    ┌─────────────────────┐
┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐ │ ORGANISATIONAL       │
│      JOB ENRICHMENT/ENHANCEMENT             │ │ DEVELOPMENT          │
├──────────────────────────────────────────┤ │ PROCESS              │
│ • Organisation-wide training and team building │ └─────────────────────┘
│ • Task-oriented multi-disciplinary groups at pro- │
│   vincial level and in district teams       │
│ • Development of field-level capacity       │
└──────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    ↕
┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
│      OPERATIONALISATION OF PEA              │
│      (PARTICIP. EXT. APPROACHES)            │
├──────────────────────────────────────────┤
│ *Harmonisation of approaches and methods:*  │
│ • PPP (particip. programme planning)        │
│ • PLUP (particp. land use planning)         │
│ • CLP&D (community-level planning and dev.) │
│ • KUTURAYA (particip. innov. dev. & extension) │
└──────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Public Service Reform (PSR)

A reform of the public service sector in Zimbabwe was recently introduced at national level. It is intended to increase the performance of public services through perform-ance appraisal and related performance-based remuneration and incentives. The re-form provides a favourable framework for the OD programme in Masvingo which is

very much in line with the goal of improved staff performance. It also gives management more freedom to offer incentives to staff who improve their performance. However, performance appraisals can only be as good as existing job descriptions and performance criteria. Therefore, improvements in the organisational structure are a precondition for an effective implementation of PSR.

Improvement of organisational structure and communication

Improving organisational structures requires attention to the "3 Rs": the roles, the responsibilities and the relationships among people in an organisation. Roles and responsibilities can be addressed through re-negotiation of job descriptions. At present, the AGRITEX management revises all job descriptions within the institution in consultation with postholders. The revised job descriptions reflect the new thrust of AGRITEX's programme as well as the associated tasks and responsibilities of its staff.

Another important element in this process are the communication structures of an organisation. This applies to the management level, where team building and management supervision workshops are used as a tool to improve relationships and communication between managers. One objective is to encourage a management style and an institutional culture which are based more on performance criteria than on the tight control of individuals or groups. In performance-oriented organisational cultures, achievement and productivity become the prime motivators at group and individual level, while leadership and management assume pro-active rather than re-active modes of supervision. The development of mutual trust and, in particular, behavioural changes in terms of attitudes towards people and subordinates are essential elements in improving the crucial informal communication structure.

Job enrichment/enhancement

Activities on job enrichment are differentiated according to the provincial, the district and the field level. At the provincial level, they mainly involve the extension support system consisting of the Agricultural Extension Specialists and Agricultural Extension Officers in the districts. Their capacities, in terms of consulting and advisory knowledge and skills, are to be enhanced through counselling, appraisal and relevant training. In addition, several task groups at provincial level have been formed to develop a stronger interdisciplinary task orientation and to reduce the focus on single subject specialists. One of the task groups is concerned with training, a stronghold during the OD process. The development of field-level capacities to implement PEA is emphasised.

Operationalisation of participatory extension approaches

PEA are an integral and harmonious part of the OD process which aims at an improvement the department's output. Operationalisation of PEA at field level requires several conditions: firstly, a clear mode of operation (steps) had to be designed as a guideline for extension workers. Secondly, the capacities required (knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations) had to be enhanced and thirdly, organisational support to the field staff as service providers had to be secured. The last condition makes it necessary for the organisational structure to become conducive and supportive to the

implementation of a dialogue-oriented extension. The details of the operationalisation of PEA at field level will be discussed in the following section.

5.3   Strategy and methods to operationalise PEA

With the strong commitment to PEA by the AGRITEX management, the focus was now placed on the issues of "how to do it" and "how to train staff to be able to do it". Some strategies based on the experiences of ConTill, ITDG and IRDEP will be highlighted.

The sandwich-model: incentives for lower and middle-level staff to implement PEA?

Training alone was not sufficient to motivate extension workers to change their entrenched working style. From a systems perspective, structural incentives are required to facilitate this change. The most effective strategy proved to be one which forced extension workers to face an active demand from the farmers at the bottom as well as from the management level at the top (sandwich). To strengthen the demand for change by farmers, a collaboration was sought with the Zimbabwe Farmers' Union who were engaged in "democratising" their farmer-clubs. The incentive from the management level was created through policy statements, through the possibility of performance-oriented bonuses and advancements, and through staff appraisal by the clients, the farmers. To our surprise, this courageous suggestion by the head of AGRITEX Masvingo was also voiced by some of the extension workers. One "transformed" extension worker even asked farmers to make a secret assessment of how much they would pay for the service she provided. Other performance indicators, like the extension workers' documentation of indigenous knowledge, also created an incentive to become interested in the farmers' lives and to break down the communication barrier between the "modern" and the "local" (farmers) knowledge systems.

A personal incentive: gaining cultural identity through working with farmers

It was observed that the acceptance of the farmers' reality and knowledge as something to be valued had a huge impact on staff motivation. Most of the extension workers grew up in farming families, but their formal education and the low value of farmers in the society made them look down on farmers and thus on their own roots and origins. The experience of working together with farmers as equals increased their own cultural identity and pride. Once this happened, extension workers developed an enormous intrinsic motivation and dedication which proved to be the most important trigger for change.

What to implement - harmonisation of approaches

Several participatory approaches with different focuses were used in Masvingo. In the eyes of extension staff, these approaches were connected to certain persons or projects. Thus, for the implementation of participatory extension at AGRITEX, a single approach was required which would integrate the different existing approaches. There were workshops in which high-level officers had tried to fuse various conceptual elements. A more concrete advance was made in a workshop with the implementers

and extension workers. Initially, various approaches and methods were presented. Then, experienced extension workers were asked to synthesise a workable approach encompassing all steps of the process, to identify the required tools and methods for each step, and to formulate indicators for success. The result was an implementable approach with a clear sequence of steps. Initially, this created suspicion at the higher levels, but the fact that it was a straightforward approach, moulded by the implementers themselves, made them accept it as their participatory approach to extension.

Creating discomfort through training from bottom-up

New methods and approaches are usually first introduced through training specialists and officers, who would then train supervisors and extension workers. Often, however, the cascade ends at the officers' level, and extension workers are left to work in the old style. In this situation, new approaches remain constructs in the heads of managers and officers and are implemented to a low degree. We therefore felt that PEA training of field staff should be given priority and initiated courses for farmers and extension workers. Higher levels felt a certain "discomfort" with this "upside-down" situation (cf. Scoones and Hakutangwi 1996) in which extension workers suddenly knew more than their superiors. This situation had two consequences: On one hand, senior staff noticed a situation of conflict and became eager to be trained as soon as possible. Thus, the training assumed a value and was in demand. On the other hand, the situation opened a path for negotiating roles and relationships and for re-thinking the deeply entrenched hierarchy. The conflict line thus moved upwards in the hierarchy, and, at present, officers are being trained to assume a coordinating role in the training of field staff.

A strategy to facilitate changes of attitude

Implementing PEA is more than a mere application of a new method. It means working under a new paradigm which implies behavioural and attitude changes. Such changes require medium-term processes of interaction, confrontation, and negotiation of roles, as well as a philosophic frame of reference in which a learning process can take place. Training for Transformation (Hope and Timmel 1984) provided such a framework for change at the paradigmatic level. The confrontation and negotiation of roles and functions can only take place through the interaction of extension workers and farmers in the field. Therefore, an action-oriented training and learning cycle with a duration of one to two years was started in 1995. It comprises alternating short training/review workshops and a long field implementation (six months) with a pilot group of about 25 extension workers (Hagmann et al. 1995a, 1996a). Many members of staff had already participated in isolated elements of this sequence, but this had proved to be of limited effectiveness.

Development of a training strategy and a curriculum in an action research process

The same pilot group of 25 extension workers was involved in an action research process. While they were learning about implementation by themselves, a training

strategy and a curriculum was developed with them. Having gained field experience with the new approach, they were in a position to clearly identify their training needs and could thus select and develop the contents of the training for other extension workers. The members of this group were also designated to become support trainers in the district training programmes.

Table 1: Development of knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations

KNOWLEDGE	ATTITUDES	SKILLS	ASPIRATIONS
• learning workshops • review/follow-up work-shops • exposure • provision of resource/ reference material • learning groups in dis-tricts	• Training for Transfor-mation courses • interaction with farmers • learning in the process and building confidence	• learning workshops • facilitation course • exposure • practical exercise/ application • provision of resource material • learning groups in districts	• intrinsic moti-vation through increasing cultural iden-tity and confi-dence during the process • extrinsic moti-vation through incentives, performance appraisal, staff counsel-ling

The results of this systematic training are encouraging. Participants showed high motivation in the implementation of action plans which revealed further constraints and opportunities. Based on this experience, a large-scale training programme is presently being set up.

5.4 Present state of the OD process

All components of the OD process have to be developed simultaneously to be effective as a whole. However, OD is an action learning process: It cannot be rigidly planned and its outcome or effects in given situations are difficult to predict. Furthermore, OD is not a quick fix or panacea for organisational ills since its success depends largely on the collective volitional responses of groups and individuals. It deals with behavioural changes which require flexible interventions and guidance in the course of the process and which continuously lead to new ideas and changes in the planned activities. This makes it difficult, just as with any other process-oriented approach, to formulate a particular local outcome or experience with OD as a blueprint for other provinces. The central emphasis is on the process and its inputs, and it will require at least one to two years to gauge initial impacts and results in Masvingo. No assumption can be made on the extrapolation of the process to other provinces. The outcome at AGRITEX Masvingo will stand alone as a pilot project which may have lessons or potential applications elsewhere. Actual experience *in situ* will be the ulti-

mate test of its usefulness for the AGRITEX organisation in Masvingo. Therefore, the analysis of the critical factors of the process is of great importance.

6.   Major Lessons Learned

Many of the strategic elements described in the previous chapters were a result of our own learning process and therefore represent lessons learned. These will not be repeated and neither will the success of the participatory extension approach at field level be assessed. This has been documented elsewhere (Hagmann et al 1996; 1997). It is too early to assess the outcome of the OD process in Masvingo Province. The following assessments can be made, however, with the experiences we have gained in development, institutionalisation and operationalisation so far.

1. Process-learning approaches are a precondition for institutional innovation projects

If clients' needs and development goals are taken as a basis, the initial design parameter and focus of rural development, research or extension projects do not necessarily result in a predetermined output. An open approach which is responsive to farmers' needs and cognisant of the problems and limitations of support institutions is a precondition for effective action learning, within a project and within institutions. This requires project staff to assume a very broad professional orientation, commitment and flexibility as they enter into new, unknown and unpredictable territories.

2. The risk of process orientation versus the risk avoidance of bureaucracy

The commitment to process learning approaches like OD implies a high risk as the outcome is open-ended and unpredictable. The opposite is true, however, for conventions within bureaucracies: Individuals do not gain form taking risks, and failures are usually sanctioned. This poses questions on how the risk of institutional innovations can be buffered. Could that be a major role for projects?

3.   Provoking action is crucial for institutional innovation

Bawden (1994) sees the key to institutional reform in the *"judicious combination of a gently provoking practice with a comprehensive and multi-dimensional and systemic model of learning"*. This is an apt characterisation of the process in Masvingo. Rather than considering the existing institutional set-up as an unchangeable constraint, it was taken as a starting point. Introducing innovations in a well-established, rigid bureaucratic system is obviously a provocation which forces the system to react. The resulting conflicts have to be resolved and negotiated. Furthermore, the focus on behavioural changes during interventions of this kind involves the emotional level. This is a very delicate intervention for the outside initiators of the provocation, and one which requires both, a good insight into an organisation and the ability to deal with conflicts. It also takes persistent provocation and resilience until changes have been negotiated among the actors and operationalised in the organisation. Failing that, the system might return to its original shape.

4. The process of institutionalising PEA is a complex and demanding venture

With each phase, the process of developing, institutionalising and operationalising participatory approaches in Masvingo became increasingly complex and demanding - comparable to increasing the number of balls when juggling. None of the new challenges could have been ignored or dropped without risking the failure of the whole venture. All elements had to be developed simultaneously with sound strategies and flexible methodologies. This has implications for the replicability of the process in other areas and institutions.

5. Networking and lobbying is crucial but requires favourable conditions

Considering the three collaborating projects and AGRITEX Masvingo, following factors can be identified as facilitating institutionalisation:

- The staff of the three projects were highly motivated and committed to promote the vision of participatory development.
- The willingness to take risks in provoking change. Often, this resulted in intense emotional stress for project personnel and could easily have led to serious conflicts. Therefore, the staff had to display high degrees of empathy and sensitivity.
- Despite a firm commitment to cooperate, a considerable effort was required to co-ordinate the concerted action. This depended on trust and the good personal relationships between the projects' staff, and the willingness of certain actors to play the role of "networker".
- There was no personnel change from 1991 to 1995, neither at ConTill and IRDEP, nor at ITDG. This proved crucial, as most key factors for success were dependent on personality.

Many of these conditions were favourable in Masvingo. In a general assessment, this would have to be regarded as an exception rather than a rule. Therefore, a certain amount of scepticism is warranted when replicating such a process elsewhere.

6. The process within the organisation depends on one person

In our case, the OD process has depended heavily on one person: the head of AGRITEX Masvingo Province. Without his commitment to pursue a far-reaching reform, and his courage to face the risks of an open-ended process, the present progress would have been slower, if not impossible. This situation can be considered as unusually favourable to institutional reform, but it also bears a great risk.

7. The general political framework is conducive to change

Ever since the devastating drought in 1992, an opening of the rigid, post-colonial structures of thought can be observed in Zimbabwe. This trend received a further stimulus through the economic structural adjustment programme: Decentralisation has become policy in most government departments, and participation is seen as one way of coping with reduced government services and expenditures. As a government agency, AGRITEX has been influenced to a certain degree by this openness. The

freedom to experiment with new approaches like OD in one province has to be seen in this perspective as well. If OD works, it will be a challenge and a threat to the national level. At present, the national level of AGRITEX takes an observer role, leaving the risk to Masvingo.

8. The biggest challenge for PEA and for OD is the change in attitudes

Both, participatory approaches and OD demand behavioural and attitude changes of all actors involved, including farmers and bureaucrats. This affects the relationship between farmers and extension workers as much as the relationship between superiors and subordinates in the organisation. Such changes take place at a personal level. They can therefore only be facilitated through creating a conducive atmosphere in which it is possible to reduce fears of a loss of power and control, and in which new relationships can be negotiated. It seems vital to possess a philosophical framework (e.g. Training for Transformation) for such extensive changes of an organisational culture, which, in the end, can be regarded as an effort to redress some of the roles imposed during colonial times.

9. The ultimate impact of the operationalisation process is unpredictable

The implementation of participatory extension by the projects was highly successful. Whether the same will hold true for a "diluted" implementation by the extension service remains to be seen. A uniform impact cannot be expected since the process depends heavily on the skills and attitudes of the extension workers who implement it. It also depends on an effective strengthening of the social organisation and farmer representation - a challenging task. Qualitative and quantitative indicators and the whole methodology of participatory impact monitoring still need to be developed further. The major bottleneck at present is a lack of capacities to maintain a systematic training and follow-up by experienced trainers.

10. Participatory extension can be implemented in a cost-neutral way

An assessment by extension workers showed that, except for the additional stationery required, PEA can be implemented with available resources. The general impact would have been higher if more resources had been available, but this was not found to be a pre-condition. The main costs were thus incurred through training and the purchase of resource material and could be sourced through re-arranging existing programmes.

11. Case studies and pilot activities are not the centres for spreading/scaling up of PEA

A certain prejudice towards outside driven interventions will always remain (e.g. "You have invested much more resources, much more monitoring than we can do..., highly qualified staff..."). Spreading PEA through these pilot activities also appeared unrealistic as institutional staff did not have the initial ownership and thus generally identified themselves with the process half-heartedly. A rapid withdrawal of outside support might even have resulted in its collapse. It is important to stress this factor, since a

rapid adoption of the new ideas is often assumed, and thus external support is withdrawn at that stage. The time span humans and organisations need to internalise new ideas and approaches, in particular if behavioural changes are implied, has to be accounted for in long-term activities. A new understanding of pilot activities is suggested: they should be learning cases for client-oriented institutional innovations which do not necessarily have to be sustainable (in most cases this will even be unlikely). It should be accepted that an approach can only be called operationalised once the institution and its staff have, without external support, established their own show cases and committed themselves to spread them. Intensive training of field-level staff to develop their own show case is the ultimate requirement and has to be given high priority. Until these internal show cases are established (ca. two - three years), it is important to continue the externally established pilot activities for training purposes, for further observations and as exemplary show cases to demonstrate that the approaches work.

12. A sustainable operationalisation of participatory approaches requires a broader consideration of institutional arrangements

Operationalisation of PEA through AGRITEX might be successful if conditions remain favourable and the commitment of all actors, including the donors, does not flag. However, there are certain contradictions which could prevent a wide-spread participatory development:

- AGRITEX extension workers are to be agents of change who raise farmers' awareness and who facilitate the creation of a demand structure by farmers. This demand might challenge their own role and performance and would thus become a contradictory task. Therefore, if participatory development is perceived as a process of negotiating power between actors, other forces and pressures in the institutional set-up have to be added.

- Through the support it obtains, AGRITEX can strengthen its position in the institutional set-up. Jealous reactions from other institutions and ministries are likely. Therefore, capacity building in other institutions has to be given equal consideration.

- AGRITEX is not the only service provider in agriculture. Increasingly, agricultural firms (e.g. seed companies) are strengthening their services to smallholder farmers, while AGRITEX's budget is reduced. In fact, nobody knows for how long the Zimbabwean government will be able to afford such a big and expensive extension service.

This implies the necessity to look at the institutional arrangements from an AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Information System) perspective. For example, the separation of research and extension must be reviewed in view of innovation and learning systems which include all actors and service providers (incl. private sector). Other means of intervention, like new models for financing agricultural service activities, might be required. An assessment from a holistic perspective of this kind might come to the conclusion that the focus on AGRITEX is extremely narrow and not sustainable. In the end, it should not be the OD in AGRITEX that is sustainable, but the idea of participatory development in a highly diverse network of actors. This outlook can been regarded as an indication of where the learning process might lead us next.

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