



## **Tailoring Agricultural Extension Services for Family Farmers**

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National agriculture research and extension systems are facing many challenges and opportunities, today, particularly in the developing world. Serious limitations in planning and organization and management of research and extension institutions as well as in technology transfer and extension and rural advisory strategies have been identified through several analyses and assessments, including the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR)<sup>1</sup> and the more recently established Global Forum on Rural and Advisory Services (GFRAS). These systems also are often under-resourced and use outdated ways of providing services to small-scale family farmers.

The majority of the world's 500 million family farmers need to expand their understanding of markets and economic opportunities to achieve success in managing their farms as sustainable and profitable businesses. Many farmers will need to move from a sole focus on production for home consumption to producing for their neighbors and urban dwellers. And while farmers tend to be innovative and entrepreneurial, they often lack the know-how to reach markets and improve incomes on their own. They need advice and services tailored to their specific needs. A new reality is that in some countries there are smallholder women farmers -who de facto or de jure are responsible for the decisions made on farm or there are women who represent the majority of on-farm workers.

Extension can be an important link to ensure that small farmers' demands are the focus of rural development initiatives and to improve productivity and food security sustainably. But a sound agricultural innovation system for farmers requires a combination of diverse extension services schemes that mobilize a variety of methods to reach, advise, educate and provide other social services for capacity building of smallholders.

Increasingly, extension and rural advisory services are offered by both public and private initiatives. Support to producer organizations is also required so they can play a central and active role in shaping extension and research institutions – and are a provider of services themselves at times.

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<sup>1</sup> GCARD Roadmap. 2010