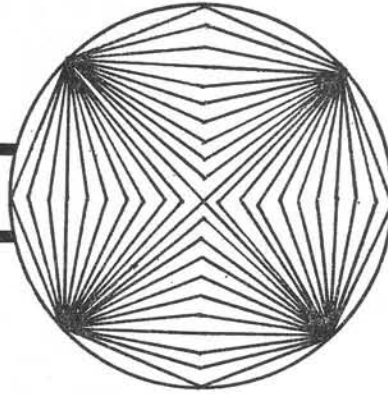


Points of View



Extension Education with a Native Character

Since Extension was introduced to the Near East Region around 1953, it remained an imported system and basically alien to its rural communities. It didn't emanate from farmers' needs and desires but was introduced to them without the proper adaptation in its philosophy, principles, and methods to satisfy local taste.

One may accept this inadequate state of affairs at the early stage of extension work because of the lack of time and research facilities at the disposal of developing countries to introduce the necessary adaptation in extension methodology to meet national needs and desires. Now, after two decades, I believe that we need to have an extension education with a "native character."

The first step is to carry out in-depth socioeconomic research studies with a view to finding out the behavior and attitude of farmers, as individuals and groups. What are their desires, aspirations, aptitudes, and needs? Does the farmer really want a change in his way of life, or is he doing what we ask him to do to satisfy us? If so, we should seriously try to find out why he lacks initiative for self-improvement.

Research studies may prove that economic incentives aren't sufficiently accepted if they disturb the social and cultural aspects of the community too much. In a remote area in Afghanistan, the best extension results were obtained by making better use of religious beliefs and social traditions. Quotations from the Koran holy book were more convincing and meaningful to the average farmer than the common extension slogan of "self-help" used by Western standards.

The second step needed is to design extension methods that meet local conditions. So far, very little has been done in this direction. We're still using the same Western methods with very little adaptation to national taste.

The use of films in certain rural areas in the Near East Region proved to be a distracting element in extension. After seeing the film, the farmers weren't interested in listening to the extension worker and many elders left the meeting. By going to the mosque for prayers on Friday, the extension officer was able to talk to the farmers, who listened with anxiety and respect to what he was telling them about their crops.

Perhaps research studies in extension may lead us into a much short-

er and quicker way to improve the living conditions of our rural communities.

It might, for example, prove that it's necessary to introduce a certain element of compulsion into the extension approach when persuasion fails. Several countries in the Near East Region are practicing more direct and indirect measures to control agricultural production and marketing.

Farmers must use the certified seeds distributed by the Ministry of Agriculture and must spray against plant pests and diseases according to a field schedule that's supervised by the district agricultural officers. The farmers are no longer free to plant whatever they wish. More and more "guidance in agriculture" or "controlled agriculture" is being practiced.

The argument in favor of this extension philosophy is that developing

countries can't afford to wait until the farmer feels the need to produce more. Therefore, the right action in the right direction is justifiable in all sectors of national economy including agricultural production.

Egypt was able to accomplish a great deal in increasing yields of major crops such as wheat, corn, and rice by what is called "consolidation of agricultural production" and using the co-operative societies to implement this policy.

In the past we have tried to have the farmer adapt to accept extension. It's high time we adapt extension to the farmer's mentality, desires, attitudes, and needs, as well as to economic requirement, so he'll be more receptive to change and progress.

S. T. FAROUKY
Cairo, Egypt