

# Development and Rural Extension



University of Tehran Press  
2188  
5th Edition



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ISBN 978-964-03-5072-0



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# A Historical Review of the Agriculture Extension- Educational Service in Iran

*"Education is the Cornerstone of Development and, Extension is the School to realize Rural Education. Therefore, Education through Extension School, is the Foundation of Rural Development."*

By: Dr. Ismail Shahbazi,  
The Father of the Iranian Extension Science

September 2019

*Development*  
*And*  
*Rural Extension*

*FIFTH Edition (Revised)*

*By:*

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*Tehran, Iran*

September 2019

## *Development and Rural Extension*

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## A Historical Review of the Agriculture Extension- Educational Service in Iran

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### **Introduction**

Extension Service is fundamentally an educational activity. Its philosophy is based on the principle of education in action, and also, on the self - help and grass-roots principle which emphasizes the participation and cooperation of the local people in the process of agricultural and rural development. The Extension School originally aims at bringing about the desired educational changes in the attitude and behavior of the rural people, and this in turns will improve their standards of living.

Because of such a nature, this school of education for action had been adopted, and in some cases adjusted, as an approach to rural development in many countries all over the world, including Iran.

According to the magnitude of the present and potential natural resources and labor force engaged in rural sector, Iran is considered as an agricultural country. The life of the majority of the population depends, directly and indirectly, on agriculture. The country is large, and the potential arable land for cultivation is more than 51 million hectares,

of which, about 19 million hectares are under cultivation. In the meantime, the basic agricultural resources such as irrigating water and capital are scarce and in most cases, the appropriate technologies and the new farm management practices, have not yet been adequately adopted by the rural people.

In such an environment, the Extension School, as an appropriate educational system for action, could play a major role, primarily in agriculture and rural development and as a result, in the cultural, social and economic development of the country.

It is so, because the past and present experiences in different rural communities all over the world have proved that the Extension School, as an out-of-classroom system of education, is the most effective and efficient approach to diffuse the highlights of the new knowledge and disseminate the most appropriate technologies and applicable methods and technical skills among the rural people. Applying such a system on a continuous basis, will result in changes in the attitude and behavior of the rural people, and in turn, will gradually develop the quality of the manpower needed in the process of rural and agricultural development. This was the basis for the adoption of the Agricultural Extension Service as an educational system in Iran in the past, and is certainly the main purpose of its continuation at the present time.

### **The Historical Review**

The fate of the Iranian Extension Service, as an educational agency for rural and agricultural development, can be basically classified into five main stages, as follows:



The Stage of Establishment,  
The Stage of Educational Involvement,  
The Stage of Social Involvement,  
The Stage of Technical Involvement, and  
The Stage of Reorganization and Unification.

As such, the objective of this section is to analyze briefly, these historical stages.

### **1 . The Establishment Stage**

The idea of establishing an agency responsible to transfer the new findings from the agricultural research stations to the rural farmers raised in 1948, when the First National Developmental Plan was prepared in Iran. Accordingly, agricultural development was considered as one of the main sectors of the First National Developmental Plan.

As such, a new administrative unit entitled "Agricultural Extension Office" was established within the National Department of Agronomy in the Ministry of Agriculture. This office was assigned to manage the Agricultural Stations in the Provinces and regulate distribution of the improved seed and plant varieties released by the Research Stations and Institutes, among the farmers in different regions of the country. Whereas, these activities were not considered educational in nature and therefore, the need to possess a real extension service still existed and was deeply felt by the developmental program planners.

For this reason, and in order to establish such a needed agency, the Iranian agricultural experts managed and participated in the first

conference on the Agricultural Extension Service, held in Iran in the summer of 1951 with the help of FAO. In this conference, the ways and means to establish a real agricultural extension service on an educational basis was studied and discussed. Following that, in order to activate the existing extension unit (office) in the administration of the Ministry of Agriculture, the FAO assigned an extension expert to Iran in 1952. After a year of studying the situation in Iran, the FAO expert with the help of the other experts, proposed a new organization for the extension service in Iran. Beginning with this organization, four Iranian agricultural experts were sent to the USA and some European countries to get acquainted with the principles and philosophy of the extension education activities overseas.

In 1953, a team of the Iranian experts from the Ministry of Agriculture participated in the FAO Regional Conference on Agricultural Extension Education in Beirut (Lebanon), where the ways and means to improve the agricultural extension activities in Iran were studied and discussed. Because of this, early in 1954 an agreement was signed between Iran and the US - AID to Iran to develop, finally, a new organization for the Iranian agricultural extension service.

In the meantime, plans were prepared to train the officers and agricultural experts and technicians in areas such as extension philosophy, objectives and extension teaching methods. So in this regard, late in 1953 and early in 1954, twenty six Iranian agricultural experts and one-hundred fifty technical employees of the Ministry of Agriculture were trained in a three-months training course, in order to make them prepared to assume their new functions as Provincial Extension Officers, District Extension Supervisors and, as Rural

### Extension Agents.

In this first stage of the development of the agricultural extension service in Iran, attention was mainly paid on the training of the newly appointed extension workers, selection of the areas of activities and localities, applying different teaching methods and specially, experimenting the effectiveness of the result and method demonstrations. Moreover, there was a need to acquire the acceptance of both: the local rural powers and authorities, and the national administrators, with regard to the efficiency and effectiveness of the extension approach, since there still existed some people who believed in some approaches, other than the extension approach, in process of rural and agricultural development in Iran. Therefore, attempts were continuously made to orient the people concerned, attract the public attention and acquaint the rural people with extension, through different orientation programs, of which the demonstration methods were the most effective ones in this first stage of the development of the agricultural extension service in Iran.

## 2 . The Educational Involvement Stage

Early in 1954, the proposed organizational structure for the Iranian Extension Service was approved by the Ministry of Agriculture, and after some years of experiences, it was amended in 1958, and once again in 1959.

These amendments were necessary, because the need to extent the scope, as well as the contents of the programs was continuously rising. In 1956, an agreement was signed between the Ministry of Agriculture

(Department of Extension Service) and the Ministry of Education (Varamin Agricultural Teacher Training School) to annually train 30 students at high - school level as extension trainees. The graduates of this school (of whom, the author had been one) then joined the Extension Department at the beginning of 1957. They started their career in Extension Department with a 3 - months of theoretical orientation program. This was followed by an additional 3 -months practical training course in the villages. In this latter course, each trainee was assigned to work with an experienced-extension agent in rural areas.

After passing these training courses successfully, the young graduates were appointed as rural extension agents to different localities all over the country. At the same time, the agricultural university graduates too, participated in the advanced theoretical and practical courses and were then, appointed as extension subject matter specialists in the provincial extension offices, to help the extension agents perform their technical duties.

Such training programs, in order to increase the number of the educated trained manpower for the Agricultural Extension Department continued until 1960, when the number of the rural extension agents rose up to more than 2000 (2, P. 313). At this stage, all of the extension agents were legally and practically stationed in the villages or in rural areas, and were all involved in agricultural educational activities. The areas of extension activities at this stage mainly included:

- agricultural education for the rural farmers,
- home - economics for the rural women, and
- agricultural trainings for the rural youth.

At this stage, the use of audio - visual aids for teaching and, extension radio-broadcasting programs and publications for diffusion of new methods and ideas, were adopted on a large-scale by the extension workers. Experimental plots and farms, as well as demonstration teaching methods were widely applied, and the resulted appropriate research findings and recommendations were eagerly adopted by the rural farmers. Therefore, considering the extension endeavours at this stage, it can be said that most of the resources allocated to the Department of Extension, and the time and energy spent by the extension workers at this stage, were mainly devoted to the educational activities in rural areas And, that is why, this stage could be called the educational involvement of the extension service in Iran.

In addition, regarding the scope of the programs at this stage, it should be mentioned that the overall programs were based on the improvement of the farm practices, and also the use of the improved inputs. These, practically resulted in the increment of the quantity and quality of the farm products. Such measures in turn, resulted in high farm incomes which promoted the relative betterment of the rural life, as well as the increased knowledge and skills of the rural extension clientele.

These, consequently brought about a wide reputation for the Iranian Extension Service, after a decade of efforts and experiences of the rural extension agents since the formal establishment of the Agricultural Extension Department in Iran in 1953.

### 3 . The Social Involvement Stage

This third historical stage of the extension life in Iran is called so, because there was an unwanted gradual change in the objectives of the extension service in Iran at this stage. The social involvement of the extension service began in 1962, when the so-called land reform program was launched at a large scale throughout the country. As a result, the large estates started to break up. So, because of redistribution of the great land-holdings, most of the rural farmers became the owners of the individual small plots of land, which they had been farming for a long period of time, as farm laborers.

As a consequence of such a drastic measure, the administrative needs of the rural people began to increase and with that, the number of public and private agencies operating at the village level sharply increased, all in order to response to the rising needs of the rural people. However, no single agency was responsible to manage the village in absence of the old landlord(s).

Therefore, numerous plans were formulated by the newly established developmental agencies and, although all of them ultimately aimed at the welfare of the rural people, their approaches toward achieving their common goal were somehow different, with little tendency for coordination. This, in most of the cases created either administrative conflicts, or overlap of the responsibilities and duplication of functions.

Of these newly established agencies, the Rural Cooperatives were assumed to replace the old landlord systems for village management.

But because of the lack of:

- adequate prior trainings,
- leadership in management,
- experience in management,

and moreover, because of the presence of local disputes and calims over local common resources (land, water and rangeland) among the rural families from one side, and between the rural people and the old landowners from the other side, the newly established rural cooperatives rarely succeeded to adopt a new system for the management of the villages. So disputes followed by crisis, began to result in some drops in the total national agricultural production, in the years following the implementation of the land reform program.

On the other hand, as mentioned before, since the Agricultural Extension Department had gradually gained a sort of social reputation, and the extension workers were, by that time well recognized and famous for their loyalty and the friendly relations they had with the rural people, therefore, the government authorities thought of the extension field workers as an alternative to the undertaking of the execution of the land reform program at the village level.

With this in mind, when the crisis arised in different rural areas all over the country, the Ministry of Agriculture became compelled to ask the extension workers, not only to continue their basic assignments in agricultural extension and in the performance of different phases of the land reform program, but also to mediate and act in settling down the local rural differences. This in fact, was an authoritative function which was actually against the educational nature of the extension work.

These, as a whole, put the extension workers in such a situation to

be involved in two challenges at the same time. One, to fight against the political plots of the former landlords and the other, to deal, - soft and /or hard - with the rural people over settling down their local differences. And as such, the extension workers not only were obliged to give up their educational functions in relation to the rural people, but in some conditions they had to act as a legal authority against the rural people, too. This obviously presented the extension workers to be possessing two types of functional personalities: to act as an educational leader (their original function) and to execute at the same time, the rules and regulations in trying to redistribute the land holdings and to settle down the rural disputes and differences, as a local governmental authority.

This type of dual functioning, gradually ruined the educational status of the extension workers, and probably this was the main cause of the tendency for most of the extension workers to leave the Extension Department and join the Land Reform Organization. As a result, the National Extension Department lost many of their experienced, active and knowledgeable staff and field workers over the years 1962 to 1968.

In the meantime, the establishment of the Extension and Development Corps in 1964, could be considered as another drastic measure which took place within the organization of the Extension Service in Iran. Amongst many developmental agencies which were established since the beginning of the land reform program (Such as knowledge Corps, Health Corps, Rural Cooperatives and some others) one was Extension and Development corps, as well.

This Corps consisted of the young high-school and college graduates who were conventionally supposed to pass their 2-years of



obligatory service in the army. According to the new regulation, such graduates were assigned to serve in the Agricultural Extension Organization. They used to pass a six - months course in military exercises, as well as a pre-service training course in extension philosophy, principles, objectives and teaching methods. After these pre - service training courses, the high-school graduates used to be stationed in the villages and act as Rural Extension Corpsmen, and the college graduates act as District Extension Experts and / or Supervisors for the remaining 18 - months, instead of the 2 - years obligatory service in the army.

This, clearly was an interesting opportunity for the young graduates who gained the chance to pass their obligatory service in the villages and work with the rural people in peace, rather than to be in the army centers and work as, the soldiers. But for the rural people, this was not so interesting as it was for the Corpsmen, since they had lost their old experienced extension agents and instead, were supposed to cope with the young army-dressed corpsmen, most of whom were originally urban people and naturally lacked the agricultural knowledge and rural life experiences. This kind of judgement was specifically evident, where there was an experienced old extension agent, in the vicinity of whom a corpman was newly appointed, although exceptions were presented in both parties, anyway.

So, having a combination of both parties (regular agents and corpsmen), the total number of the field extension workers raised to 3023 in 1967 (1, pp. 58 - 61). In this stage, the extension workers, in addition to their involvements in different phases of the execution of the land reform program, were involved in the execution of the general

pest control and veterinary programs, too. Some other activities, such as involvement in birth-control projects, rural cooperative activities, provision of production inputs, credit distribution and loan recollection, census and statistics collection, and a few other activities were included amongst the regular duties that the field extension workers were supposed to undertake. These, as a whole and over time, caused the Extension Organization to bear a drastic deviation from its main original objective which was based on rural education. And that is why this stage could be called the social involvement stage in the history of the Extension Service in Iran.

#### **4 . The Stage of Technical Involvement**

Gradual decrease in the investment by the government in rural development, lack of social security and incentives for the private sector to invest in agricultural development, accompanied with technical and financial inabilities of the rural farmers (small new landowners) to increase yields and total production, and so many other factors totally caused a decrease in the national agricultural production, and consequently an increase in rural migration.

The government, in order to overcome such a situation, and in order to accomplish the redistribution phase of the land reform program, took many measures, one of which, and probably the most important one, was the provision of the agricultural credit, inputs and machineries for the rural farmers. This activity as a whole, was entitled as "production increment projects", and was managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, in order to compensate for the shortcomings of the rural

cooperatives which after some years of experiences, still were not able to fully help the farmers in providing their needed credit, inputs and machineries.

The so called "Production Increment Projects" began in 1967 as an independent agency within the Ministry of Agriculture. But, six years of experiences practically proved that the provision of credit and accessibility to the inputs and farm machineries alone, could not promote the farm production. In other words, without education and training, the agricultural credit, inputs, machineries and the related facilities could not be used properly and profitably. And so, these should had been priorly coupled with sufficient education and practical training to the rural people.

Therefore, because of the past experiences, the government at this stage realized that the inputs along with the necessary on-farm trainings, should be provided to the rural farmers by the Agricultural Extension Workers. So, the new idea of integrating the "Production Increment Projects" with the Agricultural Extension Service was recommended. This approach, then, was called the "Integration of Technic and Credit" for the sake of the agricultural development at this stage. And as such, the Production increment Projects Authority was amalgamated in the Agricultural Extension Organization in 1973 and from this time on, a new stage started in the life of the agricultural extension service in Iran. The extension workers then, were assigned to train the rural farmers on specified subject matters related to the production increment projects, and to distribute among them, credit and inputs on a contract basis and for specific production projects. Moreover, the extension workers were also assigned to recollect the

loans from the farmer-contractors in accordance to the terms of the contract.

Such executive semi-educational functions of the extension workers, once again deviated the extension service from its original philosophy and objectives. It was so because the extension workers were practically obliged to apply a sort of administrative authority in the process of selecting the potential farmer-contractors for the specific training programs, and also in the process of distributing and recollecting the loans. This, from the very beginning was a handicap before the field workers (old agents and the corpsmen) to proceed with their educational activities. Necessary to mention that after the Islamic Revolution, the Extension and Development Corps, as well as the other Corps were legally dissolved early in 1979 (5, pp. 82 - 94).

However, implementation of the production increment projects continued as the major activity of the Extension Organization until 1980, when the Ministry of Agriculture arrived to the conclusion that the Extension Organization could no more continue on the basis of its conventional organizational system. So the idea of establishing the "Rural Agricultural Service Centers", was introduced in order to undertake a variety of educational and developmental activities needed to be provided for the rural farmers.

Accordingly, about 1000 young technicians were recruited and trained in agricultural and extension subject matters, and were assigned to the Rural Agricultural Service Centers to work as extension technicians, along with the old extension workers and the other technical employees. These, all together formed a technical team who were responsible to undertake all of the rural and agricultural

development projects, and also the rural infrastructural projects, in addition to the affairs related to the trainings and the execution of the production increment projects.

As such, the extension workers were practically involved in the execution of a variety of non-educational activities, such as land leveling, road construction, irrigation and drainage network systems, watershed management, and many other activities which were non - educational in nature. Moreover, they were also busy with the distribution of inputs, machineries, and accessories and fuel for the machineries.

These technical involvements, once again deviated the extension workers from their educational objectives and consequently satisfied neither the rural people, nor the government authorities. So, this forced the administration for another move in this regard, late in 1980's (2, pp. 295 - 336).

## **5 . The Reorganization and Unification Stage**

At this stage, an extensive need was seriously felt, both by the government authorities and the rural people. They all felt that the extension educational activities were necessary not only in the cases of crop and animal production, but also in cases of forest and range management, soil conservation, fishery and watershed management, and even handicrafts manufacturing and rural development. Different government agencies then, eagerly expected the Extension Organization to educate the rural people in these fields, while the Organization was basically involved and interested in crop and animal production.

Because of this and some other factors, the Ministry of Jihad

Sazandegi was formed to take part, in one way or the other, in the management and administration of rural development and also training the rural people in the fields other than agricultural production. In other words, to pay more attention to the "producers", rather than the sole production.

So, after the formation of the new Ministry of Jihad Sazandegi, an Under-Secretary for Extension and Rural Participation with several specialized departments on different subject matters, was formed in this new Ministry. After the legal approval of the proposed reorganizational plan by the Majlis (parliament) in 1989, the Ministry of Agriculture in turns, was assigned by the National Supreme Administrative Council to amalgamate the three existing organizations of Agricultural Research, Education and Extension early in 1990. This, in fact could be called the unification phase of the reorganizational plan. Under this unification movement, the new Agricultural Research, Education and Extension Organization was formed. This movement was some how based on the experiences gained since 1987, when the extension and research workers began a sort of cooperation in undertaking the so called Research - Extension Joint Projects (5, pp. 271 - 281).

To brief the movements in this stage, it could be said that the Ministry of Agriculture was divided into two ministries: (1) the Ministry of Agriculture which is now responsible for crop and horticultural production and soil and water management, and (2) the Ministry of Jihad Sazandegi, which is in charge of animal production, fisheries, forest and range management, rural industries and rural development.

The segregation of the agricultural general functions, and their allocation to different ministries, the establishment of several

departments for extension educational activities in different ministries, the formation of the Agricultural Research, Education and Extension Organization within the Ministry of Agriculture, accompanied with the establishment of an independent Agricultural organization, as well as an independent Jihad Organization at each province throughout the country, are all the examples of the new movements which were adopted during the implementation of the First 5 - Year Plan for Development (1988 - 1993). Thus, time is needed to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of such developments taken place so far. Accordingly, the fate of the extension service, as an educational school certainly depends, not only on the applicability of these developments, but also on the ways and means the extension education, as an approach, is thought of and looked at, by different agencies involved in these processes.

And now, after a decade of segregation of the functions and at least after a five year of studies along with disputes, chats and challenges, finally a law was passed by the Majlis (parliament) early in the year of 2001 and legally put an end to the past segregated administration and thus, integrated all of the agricultural and rural development functions under a single management and named it as the "Ministry of Agricultural Jihad".

As a consequence of this integration, some reorganizations were made in the administrative structure of the newly formed ministry, and the extension branches of the two former ministries were integrated and named as the "Under-Secretary for Extension and Farming Systems". While, the other under-secretary giving over its former extension branch, remained with its owned "Agricultural Reserch and Education",

branches only.

As such, once again, time is needed to see how this newly formed organizational arrangement works at the villages and farm levels, and to what extent could meet the needs and desires of the rural farmers.

Under such a situation in this historical review, the author could finally suggest that the Agricultural Extension Service in Iran is still in its reorganizational and unification stage.

### **Conclusion**

The Extension Service is fundamentally an educational activity, based on training, self-help and cooperation through the participation of the people involved.

This school of education was originally adopted in the process of agricultural development in Iran. In the first stages of its development, this school proved its efficiency and effectiveness in disseminating the new applicable knowledge and skills among rural farmers throughout the country. Because of such positive and successful consequences, the government authorities gradually began to make use of the extension service in non-educational activities. This could be thought of, as the basic source of the deviation of the extension service from its original goal, which in fact was planned to be centralized on education for action. Because of such a deviation, the extension service in Iran has burdened serious social and technical involvements with negative consequences in its past 50 years of its life.

Meanwhile, because of the trial-and-error experiences, the authorities have come to realize that the Extension Education School



could be considered as the most appropriate approach, not only to the agricultural development, but also to the development of the other fields, and especially in the field of rural development. Thus, at the present decade, the extension education service in Iran, in addition to agriculture, has been taken as an approach for the development of forests and ranges, watershed and fisheries management and also in rural handicrafts, rural and urban cooperatives and rural development. As such, laws and regulations have been made to establish the extension service branches in the related ministries and institutes and recently, in some non - governmental organizations for rural development, too.

But, the Extension Educational School, as a vital approach to the national development, has nowadays reached a crossroads of the formal conventional government extension system (as mentioned so far) and the informal participatory system which has been practiced in recent years by the old Ministry of Jihad Sazandegi. Time and efforts are needed to evaluate and recognize the efficiency and effectiveness of the two systems, i. e., the formal reorganized - unified conventional system, and the informal participatory system of Extension Education.

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