**Principles of extension:**

Extension activities are widespread throughout the developing world and most governments have set up formally structured extension services to implement extension programmes and projects. The practice of extension is supported by budget, offices, personnel and other resources. Before examining extension in detail in later chapters, however, it will be useful to consider the principles which should guide it.

**Extension works with people, not for them**

Extension works with rural people. Only the people themselves can make decisions about the way they will farm or live and an extension agent does not try to take these decisions for them. Rural people can and do make wise decisions about their problems if they are given full information including possible alternative solutions. By making decisions, people gain self-confidence. Extension, therefore, presents facts, helps people to solve problems and encourages farmers to make decisions. People have more confidence in programmes and decisions which they have made themselves than in those which are imposed upon them.

**Extension is accountable to its clients**

Extension services and agents have two sets of masters. On the one hand, they are accountable to their senior officers and to the government departments that determine rural development policies. Agents are expected to follow official policies and guidelines in their work.

On the other hand, extension is the servant of the rural people and it has the responsibility to fulfil the needs of the people in its area. This means that the rural poor should have a say in deciding how effective extension actually is. One measure of effectiveness is to see how well policies and plans have been carried out. An equally important measure is the extent to which incomes and living standards of the rural people have increased as a result of extension work.

Extension programmes, therefore, are based on people's needs, as well as on technical and national economic needs. The extension agent's task is to bring these needs together. For example, an important part of government policy may be to increase the amount of food grown and sold in the country. By choosing to encourage the mass of small farmers to increase their output by improving their farming methods, national needs and farmers' needs can be satisfied together.

**Extension is a two-way link**

Extension is not a one-way process in which the extension agent transfers knowledge and ideas to farmers and their families. Such advice, which is often based upon the findings of agricultural and other research stations, is certainly important but the flow of information from farmers to extension and research workers is equally important. Extension should be ready to receive farmers' ideas, suggestions or advice, as well as to give them. This two-way flow of ideas can occur at different stages.

*When the problem is being defined.* Being in regular contact with the farmers, the extension agent can help research workers to understand the farming problems of the area and the limitations under which farmers have to work. It is even better if the agent can bring researchers into direct contact with farmers in order to ensure that research recommendations are relevant to farmers' needs.

[**Extension links farmers with research**](http://www.fao.org/3/t0060e/T0060E02.GIF)

*When recommendations are being tested in the field*. A new farm practice or crop variety might produce good results at a research station but not do so well on a farmer's field. Trials on farmers' fields are an opportunity to test research recommendations and provide feedback for research staff.

*When farmers put recommendations into practice.* Sometimes farmers discover problems with a recommendation which the research station failed to note. With the feedback the recommendations can be adjusted accordingly.

The two-way link between research, extension and the farmer is fundamental to sound extension practice and should be a basic principle of extension activity.

**Extension cooperates with other rural development organizations**

Within rural areas, extension services and agents should work closely with the other organizations that provide essential services to farmers and their families. Extension is only one aspect of the many economic, social and political activities that seek to produce change for the better in rural society. Extension, therefore, must be prepared to collaborate with all other such organizations, both government and non-government, and to take them into account when preparing to implement extension policies. The kinds of organizations with which extension services should cooperate include:

***Political institutions*** and local political leaders whose active local support will help the extension agent, who may thereby be brought into closer touch with local farmers.  
***Support organizations*** such as those which supply agricultural or other inputs, credit facilities or marketing services. Such inputs must be available in sufficient quantity, in the right place and at the right time if they are to be of any use.  
***Health services***, so that the extension agent is kept aware of local health problems, particularly nuritional levels. Agricultural development and nutrition are closely related and the agent must keep closely in touch with health programmes and projects and adapt his programme to conform to local health requirements.  
***Local school***s, so that the agent can have early access to the farmers of the future, and begin to equip them with the knowledge and skills required for farming.  
***Community development,*** whose objectives will be very similar to the educational work of extension. Extension agents often work very closely with community development workers to break down local social and cultural barriers to change, and to encourage community action programmes.

It is essential that the extension agent in the field know what his colleagues in other services and government departments are doing, and that they understand what he is doing. Close cooperation not only avoids duplication but provides opportunities for integrated farm programmes.

**Extension works with different target groups**

Extension recognizes that not all farmers in any one area will have the same problems. Some will have more land than others and will be keen to try out new ideas. Others, with fewer resources, will probably be more cautious. Extension cannot offer a single "package" of advice, suitable to all farmers. Different groups need to be identified and the agent will have to develop programmes appropriate to each group.

In the past, much extension effort was concentrated on the progressive farmer who was expected to spread new ideas to others. It has been seen, however, that this does not always work, because progressive farmers often have different problems. They have more land, more education and are usually more involved in the marketing of their produce.

Extension must, therefore, be aware of the existence of different farming groups and plan its programmes accordingly. The smallest and poorest farmers will need particular attention, as they may lack the basic resources needed to become involved in extension activities. The point to stress, therefore, is the existence of farmer groups with different resources and skills in any one community, and the need for extension to respond to these groups accordingly.