CONVERGENCE - THE KEY FOR ORGANIZING EXTENSION FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Bhagya Lakshmi & K.S. Purnima
Assistant Professor
Extension Education Institute, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad-30.

ABSTRACT

Extension is taking a new dimension because of global movement for reforming national extension systems in developing countries for enhancing the livelihoods of the rural people. The central and state governments are spending enormous amounts for the development of rural areas and improving living conditions through livelihood promotion. A livelihood is a means of making a living. It encompasses people’s capabilities, assets, income and activities required to secure the necessities of life. A livelihood is sustainable when it enables people to cope with and recover from shocks and stresses (such as natural disasters and economic or social upheavals) and enhance their well-being and that of future generations without undermining the natural environment or resource base. Several programmes have been launched to promote and strengthen rural agro based livelihoods. Many of the programmes planned and executed by the various ministries/departments/agencies have almost similar objectives and targeting same groups/areas. This plethora of efforts has been resulting in wastage of resources and failure to achieve synergies. In order to use the resources efficiently and involve the local governments actively, coexistence of horizontal coordination and vertical consolidation are instrumental, where people and development departments work and plan together. Convergence planning at various levels can achieve multiple goals such as maximization of returns from the investment, promotion of public private-community partnerships, sustainable development, productivity enhancement, empowering the people and emergence of good governance. The convergence planning will result in pooling of resources, both human and capital, transfer of technologies and value addition through provision of backward and forward linkages.

1. Introduction

Extension is the essential pillar for sustainable development in rural society. Extension services can and could play an important role in addressing many of these challenges related to rural development. Extension in today’s Indian context, includes all those agencies in the public, private, NGO and community based initiatives that provide a range of agricultural advisory services and facilitate technology application, transfer and management. Extension services comprises the entire set of organizations that support and facilitate people to solve problems; link to markets and obtain information, skills, and technologies to improve their livelihood. People in the rural areas need various types of facilitation and support services to promote their livelihoods. Considering the evolving challenges, rural people currently need a wider range of support, including organizational, marketing, technological, financial and entrepreneurial. Perhaps, there is no single agency can provide all types of facilitation for rural people to strengthen their institutions as well as enterprises.
Convergence – The Mantra for Development

While a production led strategy was the sole focus of extension earlier, this needs to be expanded to include a market led strategy to deal with the new challenges. While transfer of technology still has relevance, extension is now seen as playing a wider role by developing human and social capital, enhancing skills and knowledge for production and processing, facilitating access to markets and trade, organizing farmers and producer groups. But to play this role effectively, extension should expand its mandate beyond disseminating information on technologies so that it can better respond to the evolving demands for support and services of farmers. An integrated, multi-disciplinary and multi-agency approach through convergence is the key for sustaining rural agro-based livelihoods. This paper discusses about the importance of convergence of activities of various extension organizations to bring about synergy by pooling the various resources to empower rural people.

A multi-pronged developmental strategy though convergence of various developmental departments is the key for promoting economic growth and addressing needs of the rural people. Different ministries of the government of India have a number of programmes for rural development, creating employment opportunities, providing basic minimum services, building infrastructure and managing land and water resources for sustainable development and there by achieving food and nutritional security in the country.

Though various central sector and centrally sponsored schemes in the rural development, the government has been addressing the needs of the rural poor over the years with beneficial efforts, there is a scope for improvement in interaction between the various organizations who are responsible for the implementation of schemes and programmes for the benefit of the people. Convergence of activities of various development departments at various levels will bring synergy in their efforts to achieve sustainable development.

In order to use the resources efficiently and involve the local governments effectively, coexistence of horizontal coordination and vertical consolidation are instrumental, where local governments and planning entities work and plan together. With sector wise thrusts in development, the respective departments are issuing guidelines for preparation of sector development plans, increase incidence of the preparation of such plans. The departments implementing various rural development programmes through a set of guidelines and by separate set of administrative and institutional mechanisms. In order to facilitate the horizontal planning process at various local government’s level, there is a need to identify the overlapping activities to coordination and convergence. Convergence at the grassroots implies integrated grassroots planning and implementation. A pluralistic extension pattern demands that programmes be jointly planned, implemented and evaluated by all service providers, in active collaboration with farmers. Extension agents, no matter whether they belong to government departments, NGOs, private institutions, community based organizations or semi government organizations could constitute formidable force to provide integrated extension services for promotion of sustainable livelihoods for people.

Roles of convergence for sustainable social development

Livelihood promotion is the bottom line definition for sustainable development which ultimately leads to the empowerment of the people. To bring sustainable development in rural areas the extension system has to play following five important roles.
Community-Organization or Institutionalization

Community Based Organisations refer to all kinds of peoples organizations which are largely owned and managed by them. Formal CBOs are registered under different legal forms as societies, trusts, cooperatives and companies. Groups formed to serve the interests of families or stakeholders in communities. Extension personnel must learn the principles of community-organizing and group management skills in order to empower the communities, especially the poor or weaker sections, to organize themselves as community based organizations (CBOs) to access different kinds of support services like knowledge facilitation, input facilitation, technology facilitation, storage facilitation, marketing facilitation etc., provided by various organizations. Mobilizing rural people and institutionalizing them into at various levels is essential step for promotion of rural livelihoods.

Capacity building

Capacity building is nothing but creating an enabling environment for income generation and empowerment the rural people through development of skill and providing various support services. Development of technical capabilities must be combined with management capability. The entire philosophy of human capacity building is to encourage rural communities to understand their personal and group styles of managing themselves and to improve their planning, implementation, and monitoring skills. Capacity building is the essential pillar in the process of empowerment of the people in the rural areas.

Development of linkages

Establishing linkages with other CBOs, government organizations, NGOs, Private organizations are crucial for the successful functioning of any enterprise. Educating the farmers regarding need for strengthening of backward and forward linkages is essential to perform entrepreneurial activities effectively.

Livelihood promotion

Promotion of agro-based livelihoods is necessary to strengthen the rural economy. Unless the rural livelihoods are promoted and sustained through adapting various extension strategies economic development of people in the rural areas cannot be ensured.

Farmers need various types of facilitation to strengthen their enterprises in the rural areas. No single extension organization can able to perform all the above roles effectively to address the issue of poverty alleviation, there is a need to optimize efforts through inter-sectoral convergence of various organizations working for the development of rural people. This convergence will bring in synergies between different developmental initiatives/programmes/schemes in terms of planning, process and implementation. The convergence of different development departments could facilitate sustainable development through rural livelihood promotion.

Empowerment of people

The term empower means to enable, to allow, or to permit, to make powerful and which can be self-initiated and initiated by others. The empowerment role can be a cornerstone of the new approach to
Extension personnel need to develop a new philosophy where their role is to help farmers and rural communities organize themselves and take charge (empowerment) of their growth and development. Empowering people in the rural areas is an act of helping communities to build, develop, and increase their power through cooperation, sharing, and mutual help.

Convergence of funds from other sources can help in creation of durable assets. A multi-pronged extension strategy (market led, farmer led, Group-led, convergence, Public Private Partnerships, ICT and gender mainstreaming) with coordinated efforts by multiple extension agencies can build the livelihood assets like human capital, social capital, natural capital, financial capital and physical capital to sustain rural based enterprises.

Why convergence?

Substantial public investments are being made for strengthening of rural economy and livelihood base of the poor, especially the marginalised groups like SC/STs and women. To effectively address the issue of poverty alleviation, there is a need to optimise efforts through inter-sectoral approaches. The convergence of different programmes like, poverty alleviation programmes, livelihood promotion programmes, Watershed Programmes, Agriculture Development Programme, horticulture development programmes, Mission will enable better planning and effective investments in rural areas. This convergence will bring in synergies between different government programmes/schemes in terms of planning, process and implementation.

Convergence of funds from other sources can help in creation of durable assets. For instance, funds available through various sources can be dovetailed with other rural development funds for the construction of durable community assets under the works permissible.

Scope for convergence of development activities

At national, state and district level various development organizations like government, non-governement, semi–government and private organizations and community development organizations are striving for the development of the people in the rural areas. If the departments with the similar objectives work together the cost of implementation of the programme will be reduced and quality will be improved. The extension services in India are tremendously pluralized. several organizations are providing extension services in varied nature through different approaches. Extension service providers in India can be broadly classified into three categories ,viz., public extension system, private extension system and community based extension system. While the first two systems are more organized than the remaining. The following are agencies could plan the activities in convergence.

- Public sector(Central/State departments, agricultural universities, Research institutes and mass media)
- Private sector (Private companies, Non-government organizations(NGOs),mass media)
- Community based (Progressive farmers, Self Help Groups, Farmers organizations, Women Interest groups, Agri-prenuers ,para workers)

 Extension system with the involvement of Public sector, private sector and community based organizations is going to be more effective and dynamic. The extension system will have to transform itself to meet the challenges. Transfer of technology system is likely to undergo radical reforms as farmers need a wider range of services on the aspects like marketing, credit insurance, infrastructure, entrepreneurship etc. It is possible only through changes in the institutional and organsational set up of
extension system. The extension system should work on system mode than merely on transfer of technology mode, since the goal of extension has to make a shift from technology dissemination to system management mode. Many of the government initiatives are planned and independently by different development departments and hence there is a possibility of dilution. All the programmes should be planned in an integrated way as to bring sustainable development.

Benefits of convergence:

The major benefits that are expected in the convergence work of the rural development agencies are: optimization and maximization of precious government resources, and complementation of national agency programs in partnership with local governments, civil society together with the private sector.

Collaboration and networking enable organizations to extend, and thereby improve, their outreach abilities in order to serve as many target groups and individual beneficiaries as possible. Lack of collaboration entails the duplication and repetition of projects that have already failed. For virtually all public-funded providers of extension services, collaboration is a strategic alliance that ensures their financial survival, especially given the current socio-economic environment and dwindling operating budgets. Thus, involvement in donor-funded projects could be a major source of operational funds for government departments. Given the present worldwide scarcity of resources and the resultant need for organizations to limit their spending, joint projects and programmes entail the sharing and more effective use of available resources. Collaboration is therefore important for ensuring more efficient use of resources and more effective intervention programmes. For example, organizations can share transport during joint field days or for field visits. Organisations can use their common facilities like training centres, equipment and human resources to maximize the efficiency of the organization and improve the quality of extension services.

A unified and well-coordinated agricultural extension service also enables various stakeholders' resources, skills, expertise and experience to be utilized, thereby ensuring the more effective use of resources. On the other hand, lack of coordination can confuse farmers and result in the failure of interventions.

Limitations or constraints in convergence

Factors such as technical, political and organizational factors cause problems in the interfaces where collaboration is supposed to take place. In addition to these, there are various constraints to collaboration at both the administrative and the operational levels. Following are the some of the constraints in convergence.

- Some implemented programmes tend to be too short-lived to have an impact, both on the ground and in terms of collaboration efforts. Some programmes are also too narrow, i.e. too sector-focused, to have much of an impact. Examples in this regard are NGO-implemented rural development programmes, which focus on specific geographic locations and run on the basis of three- or five-year projects whose time frames are not usually extended. Collaboration with other permanent establishments, such as government agencies or long-term programmes, then becomes difficult, ineffective and unsustainable. Success of any coordinated effort solely dependent is upon the dedication of the project staff, time period, quality of the programme and resources available.
• According to various stakeholders, institutional coordination and networking is very expensive. This is because every organization has its own core business to represent in shared activities. Thus, budgeting for coordination platforms, such as field days, may have to include the costs for collaborating organizations that have no or few financial resources of their own.

• The shortage of resources is leading some organizations to shift their attention from shared activities to concentrate on their core activities, and this presents a threat to established linkages/networks. For example, Officers within line ministries claimed travel and subsistence allowances from rural mandals. When such expenses were not met, collaborating line ministries were unwilling to continue the established linkages. There is also a tendency for people to choose where to go depending on the daily allowances given by the funding organization. While conducting convergence meetings, PPA exercises and field visits separate budgetary arrangements should be made to meet the expenses.

• A more serious criticism is that collaboration efforts have been more supply-led (donor- and dollar-driven) than demand-driven (in response to the efforts of the organizations involved). Different organizations have also tended to use different field extension approaches and strategies. Examples of this include the use of top-down versus participatory approaches and the use or non-use of subsidized inputs earmarked for collaborating farmers in intervention programmes. Such differences in approaches and on-the-ground strategies have also tended to make collaboration difficult. For conducting activities in convergent mode all the stakeholders involved in the programme should be involved at all stages.

• Organisational work environment, management, nature of work and working style differ with the organization to organization. Personal interests, egos, administrative styles also play major role in success of any programme with collaborative approach.

• Misutilisation and mismanagement of funds is a serious constraint in the implementation of the programmes.

However, development through convergence is a time consuming process and not without challenges. It calls for mutual cooperation, active participation and sharing of insights by each of the programmes. It is important to have a vision and a holistic design which is flexible, before planning activities with various departments. This design should be continuously revisited to accommodate changes as and when required.

Stages in the implementation of convergence activities

1. Planning: Convergence planning can achieve multiple goals such as maximization of returns from the investment, promotion of public private-community partnerships, sustainable development, meeting the unmet needs of the community and emergence of good governance. The instruments include pooling of resources, both human and capital, transfer of productive and eco-friendly technologies and value addition through provision of backward and forward linkages through goal congruence among the stakeholders, bottom up approach, identifying potential areas/activities/schemes for convergence, role clarity and capacity building of the stakeholders.

2. Implementation: implementation of the activities with coordination of other departments will bring synergy and facilitate effective implementation of the development programmes by pooling of the resources and by optimum utilization of the facilities available with various organizations.
3. Evaluation: Many of the convergent activities will be winded up abruptly without proper maintenance and evaluation by either of the agencies or third party. After implementation of the activities in convergence mode, these activities need to be evaluated.

Areas of convergence for effective implementation of the development programmes

Convergence of man power: There should be full convergence of extension related work being carried out under different schemes/programmes. The availability of subject matter specialist at district level is very less, if the experts working in the different departments work in conjunction with the dedicated manpower could work under one umbrella the extension efforts can bring sustainable development.

Convergence of facilities: Institutions working for the common objective can utilize the facilities available with other organizations. Infrastructure facilities like common resource centres and training facilities can be utilized effectively through coordination among various departments.

Convergence of funds: Funds available for implementation of development programmes could be pooled collectively to improve the quality of the training programmes and other capacity building activities.

Types of convergence

Based upon the need and objective the project implementing agency should select the duration for conducting convergence activities.

- Short term convergence
- Medium term convergence
- Long term convergence

Various extension activities like conducting training programmes, exposure visits, front line demonstrations, on farm trails, field days, exhibitions, farmer scientist interactions, establishing demonstration units, providing common facilities centres etc can be done through short, medium and long term convergence.

Steps for convergence of development activities

1. Elicit people’s participation

Farmer participation is very important to the development process, and especially participation in planning, whereby all farmers are completely involved in all aspects of decision-making related to their own socio-economic development and its planning. People’s participation is essential in the following areas:

- Decision-making, identification of difficulties, planning and resource delivery.
- Implementation, management tasks, sharing benefits or services.
- Economic, social, political and cultural interests and others, of individuals or of a group of people.
- Monitoring and evaluation of implementation and performance.

Farmer participation ensures the sustainability of activities and is crucial to the success of the rural development process. This is because participation gives responsibility and rights to farmers, building
the capacity of beneficiaries to influence the performance of the process. And finally, farmer participation will promote cost recovery since farmers and communities will contribute their own resources to the project too.

2. Identification of the agencies/departments

At district level different departments are implementing various programmes with similar objectives to improve the living conditions of the rural people. Prior to the implementation of any development programme, it is imperative for Project implementing agency (PIA) to look for the other allied departments or other departments working for the similar objectives. Once the departments to be coordinated with are indentified, then PIA should build linkages with other organizations through frequent workshops for identification of the common areas for convergence. The organizations can also enter into Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for establishing norms and procedures to be followed while implementation.

3. Social mobilisation:

Mobilization of people at the gross root level is the vital step to build capacities, leadership and confidence. Village level workshops and meetings need be conducted to facilitate people to create their own vision for the future. Unless the ultimate beneficiaries are not mobilized to participate in the implementation, development programmes cannot address the real problems of the people. Social Mobilization, as defined by UNICEF, is a broad scale movement to engage people's participation in achieving a specific development goal through self-reliant efforts. It involves all relevant segments of society: decision and policy makers, opinion leaders, bureaucrats and technocrats, professional groups, religious associations, commerce and industry, communities and individuals. It is a planned decentralized process that seeks to facilitate change for development through a range of players engaged in interrelated and complementary efforts. It takes into account the felt needs of the people, embraces the critical principle of community involvement, and seeks to empower individuals and groups for action.

Mobilizing the necessary resources, disseminating information tailored to targeted audiences, generating inter sectoral support and fostering cross-professional alliances are also part of the process. While the components of the process may be everyday practice in many development programs, they tend to be taken up in isolation of each other. Social mobilization in total aims at a continuum of activities in a broad strategic framework. The process encompasses dialogue and partnership with a wide spectrum of societal elements. At the policy level, the outcomes should be a supportive framework for decision making and resource allocation to empower communities to act at the grassroots level. The outcomes should be people's active involvement ranging from identifying a need to implementation in achieving the development objective and evaluation effort. The solidarity of bureaucrats and technocrats and a broad alliance of partners among various non-governmental groups are equally critical for the attainment of any change-oriented development goal. Simply stated, social mobilization calls for a journey among partners and results in the successful transformation of development goals into societal action. Mobilization and capacity building of local animators is another vital step in the social mobilization. These animators become the spark plugs for local action. organize people into self-help groups to gain a stronger voice. Success builds on success.
Identification of problems:

Extension programmes need to be demand driven than supply driven. To make the extension programmes demand driven, people in the rural areas need to be involved in every stage of programme implementation. Development rests on the premise that successful rural development calls for the conscious and active participation of stakeholders at every stage of the development process. Extension methods like Participatory Rural Appraisal, Focused group discussions and observation techniques should be used for involving the people to identify their needs and resources. The departments that are identified for convergence should be involved in the process from planning to evaluation. This allows local people to present their own priorities for development and get them incorporated into development plans. The risks of outside planners “imposing” their ideas as the solutions and then discovering that local people are not really interested or committed to its development can be significantly reduced.

An important goal of convergence is to encourage self-reliant development with as much of the responsibility for the management and implementation of development activities devolved to local people themselves. This can greatly improve the efficiency of development work and eliminate many of the problems regarding proprietorship of development activities at the community level. Participation in PRA by local development workers, whether from NGOs, government or other agencies can greatly increase the motivation and level of mobilization in support of the project or programme of which it is part.

Where changes in development approaches are being introduced, such as a shift to a more integrated development planning mechanism, a PRA-type activity which illustrates how these new mechanisms will work on the ground can help to ensure better understanding and commitment by local workers. This is one reason why involvement of people from different administrative and organisational levels can be vital so that commitment is built up right through the chain. PRAs involve intensive interaction between communities and outsiders which can have lasting effects in breaking down the barriers of reticence and suspicion which often characterise these relationships. Where local people have had more say in the design of projects they are also more likely to design activities which make full use of existing resources. Greater commitment from the community can also mean greater mobilization of community resources for development and less reliance on outside inputs. This can take the form of labour inputs, savings or time devoted to management functions. This combination of effects will generally lead to more sustainable development activities which are less reliant on support from outside agencies and is technically, environmentally and socially appropriate to local conditions.

Implementation of the programmes

In many of the convergence initiatives all the organizations will not be involved in the all stages of the project implementation, so it is important that all the stakeholders in the project should be involved from planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and follow –up stages.

Conducting convergence meetings and workshops

To review the progress and process of convergence activities conducting regular convergence meetings and workshops are very important. Failing to have proper agenda for convergence meetings will obstruct the progress of coordination.


**Monitoring and evaluation**

Effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E), vital for tracking and measuring results and throwing light on the impact of development interventions, remain challenging the programmes implemented in convergence need to be monitored by project implementing organizations as well as the third party organization. Stages of convergence, involvement of the organization, processes involved, progress of activities should be monitored periodically.

**Follow up:**

After completion of the project cycle the follow up is the major step for further improvement of the project for future convergence activities.

**The Key - an Integrated Approach**

Any single organization cannot perform all roles of extension. Hence there is need to identify the visualise, plan, implement and monitor and evaluate the services of various players in extension to provide integrated services for the rural people. For integrating the extension services the following steps need to be considered.

1. **Build platform for convergence**: Build platform to promote dialogue and cooperation among relevant institutions and programmes in all sectors to develop a network for food security, livelihood promotion, income-generation and sustainable development in the rural areas.
2. **Create multi-disciplinary teams**: agricultural and rural development teams to respond to rural community-expressed needs. Creating multidisciplinary teams will strengthen the quality of extension services at field level. build technical and operational capacity of public and private service providers as well as recipients;
3. **Establishing linkages**: establish and maintain links between policy-makers, support services, small farmers and markets is the potential means for providing various services by the farmers.
4. **Using innovative methodologies**: explore multiple programme methodologies for quick dissemination of technologies and promoting livelihoods.
5. **Institutionalising the community based organisations** create participatory mechanism to upscale proven best practices in rural development.

**4. Conclusion**

Thus convergence of the activities of various development departments at various levels will bring synergy in their efforts to achieve sustainable development. Integration of services for maximising the utilisation of resources at various levels through active participation of rural people is the key for sustainable rural development.