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Glen C. Shinn

GCS-Global Consulting Solutions / Texas A&M University

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Conversations about Building Extension Capacity in Post-Conflict: A Review of Building Agricultural Extension Capacity in Post-Conflict Settings

Abstract

McNamara and Moore (2017) have chosen to examine post-conflict environments—a significant and timely topic—and strategies for building extension capacity. As editors, McNamara and Moore provide an opportunity to engage in a roundtable with 20 authors. The composition deals with a dozen cases drawn from 11 countries on three continents—Africa, Asia, and North America. Based in North America, Europe, and Africa, the author team is well qualified. Christoplos closes with a Danish view of “what we know about the recovery process” and about “rebuilding extension from a political economy perspective” (p. 228). Christoplos’ call for ethics and evidence “... built on principles of participation, transparency, accountability and non-discrimination” (p. 241) position extension well in a turbulent world.

Keywords

Africa, Agriculture, Asia, Capacity-Building, Case Study, Extension, North America, Post-conflict, Poverty

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McNamara, P., & Moore, A. (2017). *Building agricultural extension capacity in post-conflict settings*. Boston, MA: CABI International. ISBN 978 1 78639 059 2

McNamara and Moore (2017) have chosen to examine post-conflict environments—a significant and timely topic—and strategies for building extension capacity. As editors, McNamara and Moore provide an opportunity to engage in a roundtable with 20 authors. The composition deals with a dozen cases drawn from 11 countries on three continents—Africa, Asia, and North America. Based in North America, Europe, and Africa, the author team is well qualified. Christoplos closes with a Danish view of “what we know about the recovery process” and about “rebuilding extension from a political economy perspective” (p. 228). Christoplos’ call for ethics and evidence “... built on principles of participation, transparency, accountability and non-discrimination” (p. 241) position extension well in a turbulent world.

McNamara begins by describing the intersection and dimensions of conflict, agriculture, poverty, and hunger. He cites 29 sources to explain cycles of conflict, strategies for development, extension as an organizational form, and a rationale for the paradigm. In chapter 1, Moore puts post-conflict in a Liberian context and couples extension with development. Issues include policies, pluralism, and coverage. Approaches recognize economic and institutional capacity building.

Sierra Leone provides a 40-year context for extension patterns, politics, and partners. In turbulence, McNamara provides recommendations and lessons learned that include time, social inclusion, and professional development that “deserve more rigorous testing” (p. 33). In chapter 3, the DRC provides a challenging environment for structure, staff, and farm workers. Ragasa and Ulimwengu provide a visual of the policies affecting an extension system over five decades along with projects attempting post-conflict development. The authors share seven lessons and conclude

with strategies and priorities but emphasize the “... need for bold and firm commitment from the government” (p. 57).

In chapter 4, Strong, Edney, and Hanagriff recognize on-going tribal/cultural conflict as a deterrent to food security. The authors discuss the roles of government, military, NGOs, and universities and recognize challenges to sustainability. Given the prerequisites of safety and security, the authors reason that extension-modeled training coupled with coordination and collaboration holds promise for a “food secure and peaceful nation” (p. 72). Gêmo provides an insider view of Mozambique’s agricultural and extension public and private systems and augments his position with 60 citations. Two decades provide a backdrop for rebuilding and the challenges linking research and extension. Gêmo concludes with a hope for stability and a medium-term extension master plan.

Jayatilaka describes six-decades of conflict in Sri Lanka and its effects on agriculture and extension. Successes and challenges in rebuilding are grounded in planning and policies, coordination, social relations, resources, market-driven models, professionalism, and targeted programming. In chapter 7, Myanmar provides the backdrop for effects of conflict on families, farmers, food security, food aid, research, and education. Universally, conflict results in displacement while stability demands resilience and innovation. Ringer discusses the contextual factors along with post-conflict extension strategies by diverse actors. Three strategies and 11 promising practices shape coordination, equity, and pluralism guided by relevant research.

In chapter 8, Price, King, and Whitney bring both a historical and modern perspective of Iraqi extension and conflict. In a complex political and social environment, the authors describe challenges and offer three strategies for

cooperation among diverse constituents. Recognizing six extension-system restraints, six opportunities and limitations call for “more effective cooperation between civilian and military agencies” (p. 149). Madden, Pankuk, and Klein provide insights into America’s longest war and challenges in rebuilding Afghanistan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL). Opposing influences by the Taliban government is conflicted with Afghan extension, military provincial reconstruction teams (PRT), and civilian NGO systems. The authors describe efforts of two USAID projects to strengthen and stabilize agriculture, irrigation, and livestock. Three-quarters of the Afghan population’s livelihood hangs on sound agricultural policies and programs. The authors offer seven recommendations.

In chapter 10, Van Atta provides a background of Tajikistan’s agricultural research and education and the serious implications of making “large investments in infrastructure or curriculum development” (p. 173). Efforts by international donors are described and 12 specific extension projects are presented and analyzed. Van Atta caps the lessons learned with experience-based 10 commandments. Canadian author Shtaltovna shares a perspective to help us understand better the development of extension in the post-Soviet, post-conflict Republic of Georgia. Agriculture is similar among post-conflict countries—land, labor, and capital. However, the structural characteristics of extension are dissimilar—public, *kolkhoz* (collective farm), and *sovkhoz* (state farm). Shtaltovna describes the emerging roles and warns wisely that the transformation from socialism to capitalism requires time, and that a market-driven extension strategy should expect to “complement rather than substitute for governmental agricultural services” (p. 201).

Sigman, in chapter 12, features a new Guatemalan national extension system (SNER) trailing a 36-year conflict. The cause of conflict is instructive. The re-establishment strategy of Ministerio de Agricultura Ganaderia y Alimentacion charts inputs, organizations, and outputs, along with a municipal-level approach of nine components. The research effort includes 10 entities and projects. Sigman identifies nine challenges along with recommendations.

Certainly, the strength of this roundtable comes from diversity across a spectrum of cultural, economic, geographic, social, and political constraints. More than 600 citations carry an academic tone. The tone, however, portends an academic style of formality and structure. Cases, likely shaped by contract policies, are rendered as American-style post-conflict projects with brief engagements, quick withdrawals, *ex-ante* evaluations, and a limited assessment of impacts.

As a reader, I searched for the fundamental and powerful principles of extension and capacity building. U.S. extension began as a problem-based structure distributing research-based knowledge that focused on felt needs of individuals, families, and communities in a democratic society. Some authors interconnected some principles, but, in total, they left loose connections for archetypes for fragile states and communities. Reliance on interlocked donors and NGOs was not part of the Smith-Lever charter for Cooperative Extension in the United States. Five authors address the realities and consequences of public-private extension schemes. Christoplos warns: “When extension is a concept that has been entirely introduced by donors [it] creates profound obstacles to moving beyond a donor-driven agenda” (p. 229). Thorny problems require local ownership along with trusted,

cooperative partners. Anything less will be less principled.

McNamara, Moore and 18 specialists provide a valuable multi-purpose tool for three market segments. For the student-scholar, the book provides insights into conditions—common, unique, and disparate—under which extension systems operate. The professional practitioner has the opportunity to gain diverse perspectives for adapting extension in difficult environments. The policy and project officer has the opportunity to listen judiciously to field experiences and to consider the consequences and sometimes-unintended consequences of distant policy and project decisions. With a list price of £85.00 / €110.00 / \$140.00, the book is a smart investment to acquire the shared wisdom of and collective insights of an experienced author team. My copy is on the top shelf.