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## Role of Agricultural Extension Agents (AEAs) in Syrian Drylands

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### Abstract

In Syria, extension is an important agency and depending on its research studies farmers can run their own farm in an efficient way. Majority of the farmers are influenced by their knowledge and access to the extension in the area and therefore, any deficiencies in the present system of agriculture extension would largely affect farmers' productivity of agriculture and hence their income leading to negative impacts on livelihoods. In this direction, the agricultural extension agents are potentially important links between the farmers and other more distant sources of information. Accordingly, this paper aims to explore level of attending for training courses by Agricultural Extension Agents (AEAs) and presents the perceptions of AEAs about the roles undertaken by them and factors affecting the performance of extension service in Syrian Drylands (Salamieh District). Primary data were collected from 20 AEAs by means of structural questionnaire during January 2010. The results reveal that 35 % of AEAs did not attend any courses in the last year. AEAs' perceptions of their roles indicated that they were satisfied with the roles: Conduct on-farm demonstration plots, and implementing the agricultural production plan. While the AEAs were neutral to the roles of programme planning and dissatisfied with the roles: Cooperation with agricultural scientific stations and assisting farmers to define their problems. Moreover, the results showed that lack of transportation facilities, low salary and lack of rewards and concentrating on controlling agricultural legislation were major hindering factors for extension agents in implementing the extension programmes. It is recommended that emphasis on education, training and skill building of extension staff should be increase. Additionally, there is need to coordinate work between research activities and extension service with the objective of adopting extension programmes dedicated to tackle farmers' problems. Increasing transportation facilities for the AEAs will improve their abilities to reach farmers' sites in time as well as they could bring farmers' technical problems to the extension unit.

**Keywords:** Extension agents, hindering factors, Syria, training