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Roles and practices of agricultural extension agents in transforming the extension system in Ethiopia

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Abstract

There are many ways to envision and approach rural innovation and extension processes. Knowledge and skills of extension agents on transferring technologies and innovation systems are essential for a successful practice. These skills enable extension agents to effectively support individuals and groups engaged in agriculture-related activities. A flexible delivery method is also necessary for a smooth extension system. Extension agents who promote various agricultural extension approaches assume they know what is best for farmers. However, information about the roles and practices of extension agents in the country (Ethiopia) is required, especially when considering technology transfer and innovation systems. These improve the performance of agricultural extension agents. The study aims to identify extension agents' roles and practices in transforming the extension system from the transfer of technology (ToT) to the agricultural innovation system (AIS) in northwest Ethiopia. A qualitative research approach was deployed to analyse 22 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 23 focus group discussions (FGDs) with both men and women. The data were analysed using NVivo, version 12, for a thematic, deductive approach. The research shows that extension agents serve as facilitators, extension propagandists, fake reporters, model farmers selectors, persuaders, innovators, suppliers, go-betweens for researchers and farmers, trainers, technology disseminators, and resource linkers. Hence, extension agents must fully understand AIS techniques; ToT systems are still in use. As a result, it is essential to expand the institutional capacities of agricultural organisations that would enable the AIS to become more client-focused and responsive to the needs of smallholder farmers and extension agents.

Keywords: Extension agents, innovation system, transfer of technology