

History and Philosophy of Agricultural Extension

The meaning of the term ‘extension’ has evolved over time, and has different connotations in different countries.

Throughout history, and across the world, there have existed patterns of agricultural knowledge exchange, with some people (e.g. religious leaders, traders, elders, etc.) often playing special ‘advisory’ roles in this respect. According to Jones and Garforth (1997), more or less institutionalized forms of agricultural extension existed already in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Phoenicia. The term ‘extension’ itself is more recent; it originates from academia, and its common use was first recorded in Britain in the 1840s, in the context of ‘university extension’ or ‘extension of the university’. By the 1880s the work was being referred to as the ‘extension movement’.

In this movement the university extended its work beyond the campus. In a similar vein, the term ‘extension education’ has been used in the USA since the early 1900s to indicate that the target group for university teaching should not be restricted to students on campus but should be extended to people living anywhere in the state. Here extension is seen as a form of adult education in which the teachers are staff members of the university.

Most English-speaking countries now use the American term ‘extension’. In other languages different words exist to describe similar phenomena. The Dutch use the word *voorlichting*, which means ‘lighting the pathway ahead to help people find their way’. Indonesia follows the Dutch example and speaks of lighting the way ahead with a torch (*penyuluhan*), whereas in Malaysia, where a very similar language is spoken, the English and American word for extension translates as *perkembangan*.

The British and the Germans talk of *advisory work* or *Beratung*, which has connotations of an expert giving advice but leaving the final responsibility for selecting the way forward with the client. The Germans also use the word *Aufklärung* (enlightenment) in health education to highlight the importance of learning the values underlying good health, and to emphasize the

need for arriving at more clarity on where to go. They also speak of *Erziehung* (education), as in the USA where it is stressed that the goal of extension is to teach people to solve problems themselves. The Austrians speak of *Förderung* (furthering) meaning something like ‘stimulating one to go in a desirable direction’, which again is rather similar to the Korean term for ‘rural guidance’. Finally, the French speak of *vulgarisation*, which stresses the need to simplify the message for the common man, while the Spanish sometimes use the word *capacitacion*, which indicates the intention to improve people’s skills, although normally it is used to mean ‘training’.

The term extension was derived from the practice of British universities of having one educational programme within the premises of the university and another away from the university buildings. The programme conducted outside the university was described as ‘extension education’. The expression connoted an extension of knowledge from the university to places and people far beyond.

The term ‘Extension Education’ was first introduced in 1873 by Cambridge University in England to describe a particular system dedicated to the dissemination of knowledge to rural people where they lived and worked. Within a short time, the idea had spread to other parts of Britain, Europe and North America.

Extension work is an out of school system of education in which adults and young people learn by doing. It is a partnership between the government, the land-grant institutions, and the people, which provides services and education designed to meet the needs of the people (Kelsey and Hearne, 1966).

The term ‘Agricultural Extension’ was only adopted in 1914 when the United States Federal Smith-Lever Act of 1914 formalized a nationwide cooperative federal-state-county programme and gave operational responsibility for this to the land grant colleges and Universities.

In the beginning, agricultural extension was concerned primarily with the improvement of agriculture, using conventional teaching methods.

As time went on, home economics, youth programmes and rural community resource development were included. Agricultural extension spread to tropical Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and Latin America following the involvement of the United States of America (USA) in bilateral AID programmes after the Second World War.