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Evaluating Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services through a Governance Lens

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Abstract

Demand-driven extension services have been promoted as a potential mechanism to improve governance quality and lead to better-served farmers. In this paper, we evaluate i) the extent to which demand-driven elements are present in extension services in developing countries, and ii) whether governance problems persist and why. We accomplish so by performing a qualitative analysis of the Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services (MEAS) country assessments, and find that, despite the adoption of demand-driven features, extension services are not fully participatory, transparent, accountable, equitable and responsive to needed farmers.

Keywords: extension and advisory services; demand-driven, good governance

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Introduction and Review of Literature

According to international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations, governance refers to the process by which state and non-state actors interact to design and implement (or not implement) policies (United Nations, 2009; World Bank, 2017). Moreover, good governance exists when these processes are "participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follow the rule of law" (United Nations, 2009, p. 1). In other words, when the interaction between state and non-state actors presents these characteristics, we have good governance.

Agricultural extension services, nonetheless, typically face numerous governance challenges, especially in developing countries. Feder, Willet, and Zijp (2001), Anderson and Feder (2004), and Birner and Anderson (2007) claim that extension is frequently characterized by low political support, persistent funding difficulties, political capture by influential farmers and extension workers' involvement in non-agricultural activities that hardly benefit farmers. Similarly, Birner and Anderson (2007) emphasize failures at the community level, which relate to farmers' lack of collective action as well as to Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGOs) accountable relations to funding organizations as opposed to farmers. These works, therefore, reflect that extension services are plagued with instances of weak accountability, lack of transparency on funding allocations, unequal treatment of all types of farmers and, generally, poor governance. Put differently, the interaction between state and non-state actors in extension services typically lacks good governance. As a result, a mismatch often exists between what many farmers need to feed their families and what extension services deliver.

The reasons behind poor governance in extension services are multiple and largely related to the inherent characteristics of extension service provision, the incentives of decision makers and the absence of farmers' coordination. For example, the scale and complexity of reaching numerous farmers with varying agricultural needs and across a wide territory explain in part the lack of responsiveness and effectiveness in service provision (Feder, Willet, & Zijp, 2001; Anderson & Feder, 2004). Of course, this high dimensionality of extension services also raises issues around how to monitor and evaluate the performance of extension workers and establish accountable relationships between these workers and their farmers (Feder et al., 2001; Anderson & Feder, 2004). Additionally, the difficulty of connecting extension input (cause) with agricultural productivity and outcomes (effect) also hinders the emergence of political support and funding commitment towards these services (Feder et al., 2001; Anderson & Feder, 2004). Instead, politicians looking for electorally profitable activities often invest in more tangible goods such as seeds and fertilizer (Anderson & Feder, 2004; Chinsinga & Poulton, 2014).

Relatedly, the fact that extension services frequently fail to be equitable and inclusive to all kinds of farmers relies not only on the preferential treatment given sometimes to rural elites and wealthier farmers, but also on the challenge of smallholders to act collectively to demand these services. This reasoning is present in Bates' (1981) seminal piece where he explains that, after independence, African politicians implemented policies (for example, distorted exchange rates, low prices for agricultural products) that favored urban dwellers and rural elites at the

expense of demobilized rural workers. Moreover, as Olson (1965, 1985) explains, because smallholder farmers spread across large areas, the costs of coordination, coalition formation and communication are hard to overcome. Consequently, smallholder farmers often lack bargaining power and the capacity to advocate for much-needed policies, while large-scale and influential farmers end up benefiting from policy interventions and extension service provision.

In response to some of these challenges, scholars, development practitioners and policymakers have advocated for making extension services more bottom-up and demand-driven. Demand-driven extension services are those that respond to the expressed needs of various stakeholders and different farmers, including those who typically receive little attention such as women, poor and marginalized farmers (Rivera & Alex, 2005; Neuchatel Group, 2006; Birner & Anderson, 2007). More precisely, according to the Neuchatel Initiative (an international donor community for extension services), demand in the context of agricultural extension can be defined as: "what people ask for, need and value so much that they are willing to invest their resources, such as time and money, in order to receive the services" (Neuchatel Group, 2006, p. 3). Furthermore, the defenders of this approach expect that by becoming more demand-driven and participatory and by giving "clients" a voice, extension services can improve governance aspects such as responsiveness, accountability and transparency and hence lead to better-served farmers (Rivera & Alex, 2005; Neuchatel Group, 2006; Birner & Anderson, 2007).

Purpose and Objectives

This study aims to understand how the demand-driven concept has impacted agricultural extension in developing countries. More specifically, we evaluate i) the extent to which demand-driven elements are present in extension services in developing countries, and ii) whether or not governance problems still persist. Then, we explore *why*, despite the adoption of demand-driven elements, extension services are still facing governance challenges. We set these goals because international donors and organizations have promoted the adoption of demand-driven approaches as a potential solution to improve governance and bring better extension services to farmers.

Conceptual Framework

We rely on Birner et al. (2006, 2009) to build our conceptual framework. These authors propose a framework for analyzing the performance and impact of pluralistic agricultural advisory services by distinguishing between contextual factors and the characteristics of extension services. Contextual factors are those that are beyond the direct influence of policymakers and extension managers (frame conditions) such as the political environment, community aspects and the agricultural system, while the characteristics of extension services are those factors that policymakers and extension managers can directly influenced (choice variables) and include: institutional structures, capacity and management, and advisory methods.

Institutional structures refer to the set-up for extension service provision and financing and relate to the level of decentralization and partnerships. The

capacity and management of extension services include human and financial resources (e.g., staff, training, skills), infrastructure, and organizational style (e.g., planning processes, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms). Advisory methods pertain to how extension services interact with farmers such as the number of clients (e.g., individuals, groups), the type of engagement (e.g., top-down vs. participatory), the content specificity (e.g., specific crop), and the technologies used (e.g., ICTs).

Other authors have previously used this conceptual framework. Faure, Rebuffel, and Violas (2011), for instance, analyze Advisory Services for Family Farms (ASFFs) in West Africa and conclude that the interaction of the different components is essential to understanding the functioning of ASFFs. Prager, Creaney, and Lorenzo-Arribas (2017) use the framework to establish evaluation criteria for functional advisory services and then assess these services in the UK. Although we follow a similar approach, our paper differs because we use this framework to identify elements that help make extension services demand-driven. As the previous studies, we focus on the characteristics of advisory services (choice variables), but acknowledge that contextual factors are also relevant and thus discuss some of them in the findings section.

With respect to the institutional set-up, we identify decentralization as the condition to give farmers the opportunity to express their voices and demands. That is, decentralization, or "the transfer of power and resources from higher tiers to lower tiers of government" (Jutting et al., 2005, p. 629), could be an important element in making extension services demand-driven by bringing the government closer to the people. Moreover, decentralized approaches can increase the capacity to serve local farmers and improve management and financial performance (Swanson & Samy, 2003; Swanson & Rajalahti, 2010). By transferring the decision-making process to the local level, farmers can have a say in the planning, priority setting and monitoring of services. This potentially leads to not only extension messages that adapt to local agro-ecological conditions, but also to a closer inspection in the use of funds (Swanson & Samy, 2003; Swanson & Rajalahti, 2010). Furthermore, decentralization can increase political commitment toward extension because of the higher proximity between the users and the decision-makers (Anderson & Feder, 2004). Certainly, this is not to say that decentralizion delivers all these benefits, but that at least the possibility for them to materialize exists.

We define the capacity and management of demand-driven extension services in terms of i) these services reaching farmers and being responsive to farmers, and ii) farmers being able to articulate their demands (Biner et al., 2006; 2009; Neuchatel Group, 2006). We argue that for extension services to be demand-driven it is necessary to have not only extension services capable of reaching farmers, but also farmers capable of requesting needed advice and training. Moreover, while extension services need to manage requests responsively, farmers should effectively organize and aggregate varied demands. Importantly, understanding this capacity and management requires looking into funding streams and farmer organizations.

Funding affects the number of extension workers available as well as the number of farmers reached by these workers. For example, resources to cover transportation costs are key to serve farmers across the territory. Funding for farmer organizations also plays a crucial role in these groups' formation as well as in their capacity to negotiate better services. Farmer

organizations give farmers a voice, increase their bargaining power and decrease the costs of communicating extension agents their needs (Neuchatel Group, 2006; Poulton, Kydd, & Dorward, 2006; Kruijssen, Keizes, & Giuliani, 2009; Thompson, Teshome, Hughes, Chirwa, & Omiti, 2009). That is, acting collectively helps farmers co-ordinate their demands and perform an advocacy role that facilitates influencing extension processes and improving service quality.

We capture the last characteristic of extension, advisory methods, by looking at the adoption of bottom-up approaches that incorporate farmers' voice, input and feedback into extension service provision. We refer not only to methodologies that use farmers' participation such as Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) and Farmer Field Schools (FFSs), but also to the presence of other approaches that get farmers involved in decision-making processes such as participatory committees, stakeholder panels, and extension platforms. As the Neuchatel Group (2006, p. 4) claims when referring to PRAs and FFS: "the tools in themselves do not solve the major constraints that farmers face in becoming the 'drivers' of these services." Hence, the need to consider a broader notion of bottom-up extension approaches.

Through the adoption of participatory frameworks, farmers can comment on extension workers' performance and question the use of public funds and service quality, which potentially improves responsiveness and accountability (Speer, 2012). Put differently, bottom-up mechanisms can create empowerment from below and serve as a forum for farmers to talk to extension workers and other stakeholders about agricultural priorities, changing needs, market access and actions plans for the different agricultural seasons. Within a pluralistic extension environment, participatory committees can help farmers find the best provider (e.g., NGO, public, private) to satisfy certain needs, encourage coordination in service provision and identify unattended geographic areas. Table 1 provides a summary of our conceptual network.

Methodology

We rely on the Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services (MEAS) country assessments to conduct this paper's analysis since they provide thorough descriptions on how pluralistic extension services operated in a variety of developing countries between 2010 and 2014. Briefly, the USAID-funded MEAS project ran between 2010 and 2016 and aimed to define and disseminate good extension management strategies as well as to establish efficient, effective and financially sustainable extension systems in developing countries (for more information: www.meas.illinois.edu). As part of this project, the MEAS reports analyzed pluralistic extension systems in the following 11 diverse countries: Bangladesh, Egypt, Ghana, India, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Rwanda, Tajikistan and Zambia.

In each assessed country, the MEAS teams evaluated the roles and capacities of extension service institutions and examined the strengths and weaknesses of the pluralistic system. While the composition varied slightly by country, international development and extension specialists such as academics from different disciplines, consultants and NGOs' professionals formed the assessment teams. These experts met with, for example, ministries and departments of agriculture, extension education institutions, major international and national NGOs and private firms to discuss topics that ranged from funding,

extension models and training to the use of ICTs and the relevance of nutrition and women farmers. Subsequently, these teams presented their findings to relevant stakeholders and recommended measures to address main deficiencies.

Table 1.
Conceptual Framework for the analysis of Demand-Driven Services

Characteristics of Extension Services	Demand-Driven Elements	Brief Justification
Institutional Set-up	Decentralization	Brings extension services closer to farmers
Capacity and Management of Extension Services	Extension workers reach and are responsive to farmers	Based on funding and farmer organization, responsiveness to and articulation of demands are essential for demand-driven extension.
Capacity and Management of Farmers	Farmers are able to formulate and aggregate demands	
Advisory Methods	Bottom-up approaches and methods	Via these methods, farmers' voice, input and feedback is part of extension service provision

Note: Authors' contribution based on the framework of Birner et al. (2006; 2009).

Although these assessments provide valuable information, some shortcomings are worth mentioning. First, they reflect the reality of extension in a given country at a particular time. Thus, some aspects of these services could be different now due to, for example, the MEAS recommendations or other changes in that country. Second, these data do not provide a representative sample. That is, the MEAS teams assessed those countries, in most cases, upon requests by the USAID missions, and so, given this self-selection, these sources share insights that might not apply across the developing world. Finally, although the MEAS teams shared the same objectives, the fact that their members varied led to personal influences on the writing and the emphasis on different extension aspects. Varying circumstances in the assessed countries also added disparities in terms of the interviewed stakeholders and the topics described. Consequently, it is difficult to analyze the same factors in every country and perform systematic cross-country comparisons that would lead to, for example, a typology of extension services or a ranking of countries in terms of demand-driven characteristics and governance quality.

Nonetheless, none of these concerns presents a major drawback for this paper's objectives. Our methodology consisted in, first, analyzing the content of the MEAS assessments to identify the extent to which demand-driven elements existed in the assessed countries. Across the reports, we did so by narrowing down the information to those themes that refer to elements of our conceptual framework, including decentralization (institutional set-up),

responsiveness to farmers, articulation of demands, farmer organization/s (capacity and management) and bottom-up approaches (extension methods). Related terms and concepts for these elements were also considered such as local government institutions, capacity to reach farmers, farmer involvement, and participatory processes. Second, we followed the same approach to identify governance challenges. Building on the definition of good governance described in the introduction, we analyzed the content of MEAS assessments to find instances where the elements of our conceptual framework illustrated, were connected or explained aspect of poor governance (e.g., lack of transparency, no accountability, and irresponsiveness to farmers' needs). The process of analyzing the content was repeated multiple times to guarantee that no important part was missing as well as to ensure meaning, fit to key themes, relevance and accuracy of results and conclusions drawn. Throughout the findings section, we also present quotations from the MEAS reports in order to give voice to the authors. Presenting verbatim quotations from research participants is common in qualitative research about agricultural issues (see, for example, Nyantakyi-Frimpong, 2017). Moreover, this approach brings transparency and credibility to the data analysis since it allows the readers not only to follow the authors' interpretations of the data (Morrow, 2005), but also to make their own judgements on the presented findings.

Undoubtedly, this analysis does not exhaust all the potential demand-driven features nor addresses all the possible governance issues that might emerge in extension. Yet, guided by our framework, we underscore those present in our data. Additionally, although our study could be subject to bias via the influence of the reports' authors. We anticipate this bias to be minimal and not affect our evaluations. These authors were extension and development professionals who shared the common interest of conducting an assessment that would help improve extension in the analyzed countries. Providing an accurate and truthful analysis was the best way to accomplish so. The objective of such reports was also different from this paper's purpose, which makes it difficult for the authors to exert influence on this paper's evaluations.

Findings: Demand-Driven Elements and Governance Challenges

Institutional Set-Up: Decentralization

The adoption of decentralized services that incorporate farmers' input is not widespread. At the time of the MEAS assessments, extension systems in, for instance, Bangladesh, Liberia and Tajikistan were dominantly top-down (McNamara, Swanson, & Simpson, 2011; Swanson, 2011; Swanson, Meyer, & Weperen, 2011b). Yet, some countries such as Ghana, Nepal and Rwanda have taken steps toward decentralization. In Ghana, the goal of increasing accountability between the government and local residents led to decentralization and the allocation of funding to district offices (McNamara, Dale, Keane, & Fergurson, 2014). According to this report:

> The Government of Ghana (GoG) is in the middle of a drive to decentralize government services and channel funds directly through District Assemblies and link staff directly to Districts. The overall goal of this program is to create a greater level of accountability of

> government officers in line roles to the local people they serve. (p. 5)

Similarly, the Rwandan government decentralized extension activities to the local government to better address diverging farmers' needs and make these services "more participatory and farmer-driven" (Swanson, Mutimba, Remington, Adedze, & Hixson, 2011a, p. 20). In addition, Nepal's decentralization measures included the planning and implementation of development programs at the local government level by Village Development Committees and District Development Committees (Suvedi & McNamara, 2012)

While decentralization could make extension more responsive to farmers' needs, the MEAS assessments find significant deficiencies in some of the decentralized countries. In Ghana, although decentralization aimed to increase accountability, the promised funds for extension had difficulties reaching the districts and farmers (McNamara et al., 2014). That is:

> in District Offices we spoke with in the Northern Region, MoFA [Ministry of Food and Agriculture] staff reported that while their salaries had been paid and were current, funds that were supposed to have been received at the District level to support transportation and programmatic costs had not been received. (p. 3)

In Rwanda, despite the move toward decentralization and the emphasis on addressing farmers' needs, local extension workers lacked adequate training and needed operating expenses and some of these district agronomists also had to perform non-agricultural assignments (Swanson et al. 2011a), which limited their interaction with farmers and their responsiveness to local agricultural priorities.

These findings are not surprising given that decentralized extension could still be subject to political influences (Anderson & Feder, 2004, Birner et al. 2007) and fit with the motivation of controlling power. That is, governments might transfer power and resources to lower levels when it is in their best interest (Crook, 2003). Put differently, decision-makers invest in decentralization if they benefit from empowering local extension agents and farmers. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. In Africa, decentralization has often been a mechanism to challenge political competitors and extend the power of the ruling groups to widespread localities (Cabral, 2011). Electoral reasons also affect fund distribution from the central government to other offices by favoring key voters and certain ethnicities (Crook, 2003; Devas & Grant, 2003; Ahmad, Devarajan, Stuti, & Shekhar, 2005). As a result, and as the MEAS assessments illustrate, despite decentralizing measures, extension services still lack transparency (in terms of where resources go) and effectiveness in addressing varying farmers' needs.

Capacity and Management: Extension Services

Although reaching and responding to farmers' needs is crucial for demand-driven extension, the MEAS reports indicate numerous instances of limited capacity and deficient management. In other words, the data show low demand-driven aspects in this dimension of our framework. In connection with funding, the MEAS reports find extension services having low operational funds, high vacancy rates, and high farmer-to-extension officer ratios in, for example, India (Bihar state), Malawi, Mali and Zambia (Simpson & Singh, 2013; Simpson

et al., 2012; Simpson & Dembélé, 2011; Tucker, Dolly, Phiri, & Chisi, 2015). In Malawi, for instance:

> Staffing levels within DAES [Department of Agricultural Extension Services], across all levels, were reported to be approximately 70 percent of the established positions, or a 30 percent vacancy rate (Simpson et al, 2012, p. 5)
>
> The high vacancy rates at the EPA [Extension Planning Area] level of DAES result in reporting of skewed staff/farmer ratios - in some cases, more than 2,700 per frontline worker. (Simpson et al, 2012, p. 20)

In relation to management, the MEAS reports point out how the absence of performance measures (quality audits, reward schemes, evaluations) leads to unmotivated and non-committed extension agents that undermine responsiveness to farmers in, for example, Ghana, Nepal and Zambia (McNamara et al., 2014; Suvedi & McNamara, 2012; Tucker et al., 2015). In Nepal: "33% of the JTs [Junior Technicians] and JTAs [Junior Technical Assistants] work hard and are well motivated, while the rest are low productivity employees who are protected by political allies within the agricultural bureaucracy" (Suvedi & McNamara, 2012, p. 26).

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that extension fails to reach different types of farmers and respond to diverse agricultural needs in a demand-driven fashion. Moreover, it is possible to claim that these services present poor governance around the lack of accountability, responsiveness and inclusiveness of varying farmers' needs. Of course, the lack of political commitment could be one reason behind this poor governance. Either because of an underestimation of extension's development impact or the desire to invest in more electorally profitable activities such as seed and fertilizer (Chinsinga & Poulton, 2014), the reality is that funding extension services and investing in performance measures are frequently not top priorities for decision-makers in developing countries, which then results in poor governance.

Capacity and Management: Farmers

Farmers' capacity and management ability to aggregate demands and request needed advise is a critical component of demand-driven services, yet the presence of well-functioning farmer organization and groups is not a given. In fact, the MEAS assessments show not only substantial variation on the extent to which organized farmers exist, but also on the reasons behind the presence of this demand-driven component. For example, the factors that facilitate group formation are sometimes inherent to group members and internal to organizations such as individual leadership in Egypt (Christiansen, Swelam, Hill, Gasteyer, & Swanson, 2011) and traditional authorities in Malawi (Simpson, Heinrich, & Malindi, 2012). For instance, in Egypt:

> While the associations do provide technical assistance for agriculture and rural development, delivery is variable, fragmented and inconsistent … We often found that a key component in association success was the leadership of a strong individual. In some cases, this person was an extension agent, a recently retired extension agent, an accountant or a teacher. The association provided a venue for that person to genuinely help farmers and others in the community. The key

> was that this person had capacity and connections that s/he built upon in delivering services. (p. 7-8)

Other farmers start cooperating because of the external influence of governments, NGOs and donors. That is, funding for farmer organizations plays a crucial role in the existence of groups and in their capacity to advocate for better services. According to the MEAS reports, in Bangladesh, the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) organized Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Integrated Crop Management (ICM) clubs (Swanson, 2011), and in Nepal and Bangladesh, NGOs were the driving force behind the various groups representing farmers' interests (Swanson, 2011; Suvedi & McNamara, 2012). In Malawi, the National Small Holder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM) emerged out of an initially USAID-funded project and later benefited from multiple donor-financed projects (Simpson et al., 2012).

Nonetheless, funding sources raise questions about governance since the involvement of governments, NGOs and donors to promote and finance farmer groups can limit these groups' advocacy impact, political relevance, and ultimately the establishment of accountable extension services. Governments' motivation to create these groups can range from the sincere attempt to improve farmers' lives to the more self-interest reasons of pushing their agendas and serving influential people through these organizations (Agrawal & Gupta, 2005; Poulton et al., 2006). This second option is a reality in contexts where farmer associations are useful to connect with rural elites, exert political control across the territory and silence critical opinions toward the government. When farmer groups become sufficiently large, politicians might also use these associations for electoral purposes and voter mobilization (Birner & Anderson, 2007). In such cases, farmer associations serve primarily a political purpose, while helping poor farmers becomes mostly secondary. Also, when farmer groups depend on governmental resources, they might be reluctant to raise criticism about how extension is run and public finances used. The MEAS team actually emphasized that, in Malawi, the funds for farmer organizations' attendance to stakeholder panels had to be separated from the government so that these farmers could have a "truly independent voice" (Simpson et al., 2012, p. 18). That is, expressing an independent opinion is key to holding politicians accountable for the provision of quality extension services.

Similarly, donors and NGOs' interventions to make extension more responsive to farmers' needs via the financing of farmer groups can also be detrimental to establishing accountable services. Essentially, the fact that NGOs and donors are primarily responding to their funding agencies weakens overall accountability (Feder et al., 2001, Birner & Anderson, 2007). For example, the MEAS assessment from Bangladesh indicates the incentives of working with progressive farmers because of the easiness of showing impact (Swanson, 2011):

> There was limited time … to actually assess the effectiveness and impact of the different USAID projects … However, based on conversations with the leaders of each project and after making limited observations in the field, there seemed to be more focus on small and medium-scale progressive farmers who are already marketing their products, rather than focusing on the rural poor (i.e. the small and marginal men and women

> farmers with <0.5 acres). The obvious reason is that these USAID projects must empirically document specific outputs and impacts of these projects; therefore, they are able to achieve and measure more rapid and significant impacts by focusing on these more progressive farmers, most of whom seem to be male farmers. (p. 8)

Relatedly, the geographic focus and timing of projects also follow donors and NGOs' goals and do not incorporate farmers' input. The MEAS team in fact identified Ghana as a clear example of this so-called 'projectization' (McNamara et al., 2014). Consequently, if farmers have limited input in designing and evaluating projects, extension remains irresponsive and unaccountable to their primary users and thus subject to poor governance characteristics.

Advisory Methods: Bottom-up Approaches

When looking at bottom-up approaches that incorporate farmers' voice, input and feedback, the MEAS reports find the use of PRAs and FFSs (with a greater or lesser success) in a multitude of countries. Interestingly, these assessments also suggest that the adoption of participatory committees is not a common practice and signal that governance issues are present in the few cases that have ventured into such forms of participation from below.

Malawi and Zambia are two examples of countries adopting participatory committees. In Malawi, the Department of Agricultural Extension Services created local stakeholder panels (or extension platforms) to enable collaboration between farmers and front line extension staff (Simpson et al., 2012; Sigman, Rhoe, & Peters, 2014). In Zambia, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, with the initial support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), adopted Camp Agricultural Committees as a strategy for local coordination, planning and monitoring of camp activities (Tucker et al., 2015).

Importantly, this evidence does not mean that extension services in Malawi and Zambia have local ownership and are fully responsive to farmers' needs since, for example, participatory committees might exist in paper but not in practice and poor farmers might lack the time, funds and transport necessary to attend. Furthermore, *elite capture* is another reason why participatory approaches might not always promote everyone's interests. Simply, elite capture means that the interests of the overall community are secondary to those of a powerful group. For example, politicians might fill meetings with supporters and set policies based on their own priorities (Sheely, 2015). In extension, while participatory committees can help farmers have their needs heard, these panels can be subject to elite capture and political influences. In Malawi, the MEAS report indicated that "for the panels to fully serve their purpose, smallholder participation in these panels needs to be financially separated from government to establish a truly independent voice" (Simpson et al., 2012, p.18). In Mali, the MEAS report points toward some farmers being more relevant than others in certain participatory processes (Simpson & Dembélé, 2011), which preserves existing hierarchies and discourages open participation from below. Specifically:

> The DNA [Direction Nationale de l'Agriculture] maintains that it collaborates with the *Institut d'Economie Rurale* (IER) through an annual bottom-up planning process

> starting at the commune level (*annual plan de commune*), which involves representative farmers. Interviews with the IER, on the other hand, provided a contrary view that extension representatives do not participate in these bottom-up planning sessions, and that the "representative farmers" involved tend to represent their own interests in these sessions. (p. 3)

In addition to elite capture and political influences affecting governance quality, donors and NGOs' promotion of bottom-up approaches can also hinder the emergence of transparent, participatory and accountable extension services. First, if NGOs and donors become the main extension providers (as in many needed countries), farmers might not demand these services from elected representatives. Yet, having high expectations about public services is essential for organizing relevant elections and establishing well-functioning democracies. In other words, good quality institutions rely on taxpayers that hold politicians accountable for providing valuable public services. When this connection is missing, political development is at risk.

Second, NGOs occasionally take extension workers away from their public jobs to employ them in their projects, as observed by the Liberian MEAS team (McNamara et al., 2011). In contexts with limited funding and deficient staffing, this practice has a significant impact on public extension quality since it takes away the most experienced and capable agents. Thus, farmers might develop low expectations about public extension quality relative to those of NGOs. Yet again, holding public extension to high standards is the essence behind farmers' mobilization to demand robust extension systems.

Finally, donors and NGOs sometimes give away attendance handouts (e.g., free inputs and tools) to farmers, as the MEAS teams reported in Liberia and Nepal (McNamara et al., 2011; Suvedi & McNamara, 2012). These practices, driven by donors and NGOs' incentives to accomplish key goals, foster an environment where farmers' participation is conditional on receiving something in return, which is something that public finances in most developing countries can barely afford. Most importantly, promoting a culture and expectations of 'free gifts' hinders an active civil society that mobilizes to demand good quality public extension services and builds governance processes around participation and transparency.

Conclusion, Recommendations and Implications

This paper has identified that control for power, elite capture, low political commitment, varying external funding sources, deficient farmers' advocacy, and inadequate expectations hinder the emergence of good governance in extension services. As a result, extension services in developing countries are characterized for not being fully participatory, transparent, accountable, equitable and responsive to all farmers, including marginalized ones. Thus, this paper emphasizes the relevance of using governance lens to understand extension services quality.

Nonetheless, further research is necessary. To start, while the MEAS reports provide valuable information, analyzing the connection between demand-driven elements and governance quality would benefit from more detailed measures of the key elements in our conceptual framework. In other words, exploring different features around decentralization, capacity to reach farmers and participatory processes could explain what works and does not work to

improve governance. For instance, future research could explore how the design of participatory committees (e.g., location, participation rules and funding rules) influences farmers' attendance and affects transparency and accountability in extension service provision.

Similarly, when exploring *why* governance challenges persist, it is necessary to conceptualize key ideas such as elite capture, lack of political commitment, and farmers' advocacy. Once these concepts are clearly operationalized, research could, for example, explore how politicians, wealthier farmers or even the connection between the two cause elite capture in participatory platforms. Importantly, these key concepts might vary from country to country and be subject to context-specific attributes. Moreover, the context might influence certain demand-driven elements being successful in bringing good governance to extension services. Hence, exploring cross-country variation would be an important contribution to this research agenda. Undoubtedly, future research also requires identification strategies able to establish causal relationships that relate the presence of demand-driven features with improvements in the identified governance outcomes. This research agenda will eventually help draw lessons on how to strengthen extension services worldwide. This strengthening work is necessary to improving food security and reducing rural poverty across the developing world.

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