

129 Support systemic food systems change in rural communities through nutrition-sensitive agricultural extension services

Note: Multiple stakeholders have been working on developing solutions for the Summit related to nutrition-sensitive agricultural extension; this solution is a placeholder for an integrated solution from all of them, which is to be developed.

The Solution: The solution aims to bring about systemic food systems change for rural communities through nutrition-sensitive agriculture services implemented by agricultural extension staff, advisors, and lead farmers ('frontline staff'). We understand nutrition-sensitive agriculture services to mean that nutrition is integrated into broader agricultural programmes that, for instance, help farmers produce more efficiently or get products to market. Thus, these programmes provide farmers with options for better nutrition while still making a living.

The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services ([GFRAS](#)) has developed a nutrition-sensitive extension training module and other modules to teach functional skills, such as gender-sensitive extension, to frontline staff. However, training staff on nutrition-sensitive agriculture is not enough. Since extension services face challenges, the solution will simultaneously strengthen extension systems governance, management, and operations. Extension staff are a key provider of education and support to smallholder farmers but lack the tools and incentives to do so effectively. Through this solution, frontline staff will have not only the tools and knowledge but also the incentives to support rural communities to produce, process, and consume more nutritious food.

The solution will deliver nutrition-sensitive agriculture programmes through extension services supported by existing GFRAS networks and local platforms to (a) train frontline staff on nutrition-sensitive agriculture using a cadre of master trainers and (b) work with national partners to set up a system of incentives for frontline staff through certificates and recognition while working through existing extension mechanisms like demonstrations or farmer field schools.

Source(s) of the Solution: This solution emerged from a 10-year process by GFRAS to enhance functional capacities of extension staff and to advocate for better quality advisory services globally. GFRAS brings together a network of public, private, and civil society extension actors at the global, national, and regional levels. The national 'country forums' provide a platform for diverse actors to train, exchange information, identify capacity gaps, advocate for extension, and coordinate service provision in a country, as well as an entry point for regional and international initiatives working on rural advisory services.

Problem addressed within food systems: This solution will ensure sustainable access and affordability of nutritious safe foods to rural people, helping to address hunger and malnutrition, including micronutrient deficiencies.

How this solution will address that problem: Extension services play a critical role in addressing these challenges, as they are in close proximity to farmers and have an established infrastructure and technical knowledge to provide information on food security, food production, and food preparation and consumption (Fanzo et al., 2015; FAO, 2021; Hawkes et al. 2020). However, extension services are also challenged, being under-resourced, with insufficient incentives for staff and limitations in outreach and technical and functional capacities. In particular, many staff lack knowledge of and experience with practical applications of nutrition and crop and livestock choices and production methods that impact the nutritional value of rural communities' diets.

The solution will reduce hunger and malnutrition through transforming food systems at the community level by supporting extension systems and staff to educate farmers and community

members about nutrition-sensitive agriculture. Working through the GFRAS network and training modules, thousands of staff can be equipped in dozens of countries. The GFRAS national platforms will be used to support extension systems transformation. Supporting frontline staff through training and incentives will result in better quality services that provide communities with the practical knowledge and motivation for nutrition-sensitive agriculture, resulting in increased availability, accessibility, and affordability of nutritious foods. This will reduce hunger and malnutrition among small-scale farmers and other rural community members (its ultimate impact).

Solution's alignment to the 'game changing and systemic solution' criteria: This solution has potential for impact at scale because it uses the GFRAS country forums and regional networks, supported by master trainers who backstop frontline staff. Scaling up will occur by offering digital learning approaches for staff training and community engagement, where appropriate. The solution is actionable because the training materials already exist; the GFRAS network structure is in place, reaching from global level through 18 regional networks to some 50+ national extension platforms; and the modality of master trainers and country forums to back up the training is in place. Incentives for extension staff to take on additional tasks will help ensure sustainability, as will the integration of nutrition-sensitive agriculture into extension services and training. Incentives will include certificates for modules completed and community recognition (e.g., a signpost indicating their role as a community nutrition advisor). Trained advisors can provide services to programmes on nutrition-sensitive agriculture, thus generating income as a further incentive. Sustainability is also ensured through local institutional support (using the GFRAS country platforms) and technical backstopping (using the master trainers) (Kiptot and Franzel, 2020).

Existing evidence: New Extensionist Learning Kit modules have been used in over 35 countries, and an estimated 5,000 people have attended trainings (GFRAS, 2020; PIM, 2021). The modules have also been mainstreamed into undergraduate and postgraduate curricula at several universities worldwide (PIM, 2021). A study led by the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets is currently underway to better document evidence on effectiveness of the learning kit.

Current/likely political support: Rwanda is customising New Extensionist Learning Kit modules, including the nutrition module. India, Brazil, and the European Union are possible countries/regions of interest, as are GFRAS country forums in Bangladesh, Kenya, Guinea, Colombia, Guatemala, Philippines, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Africa, and Malawi. FAO is very interested in this topic and supported the recent global learning needs assessment for nutrition-sensitive agriculture (FAO, 2021). The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation is strengthening its focus on nutrition but more broadly than extension. Moreover, GIZ has been involved with developing a similar solution for the Summit, and it is planned to integrate the two ideas.

Contexts where this is well/not well suited: This solution is best suited for situations where there is a local enabling environment and will work best in countries with extension systems that provide motivation, awards, and institutional support. It will initially focus on countries where GFRAS has strong national platforms to undergird the work.