A History of Extension at USAID

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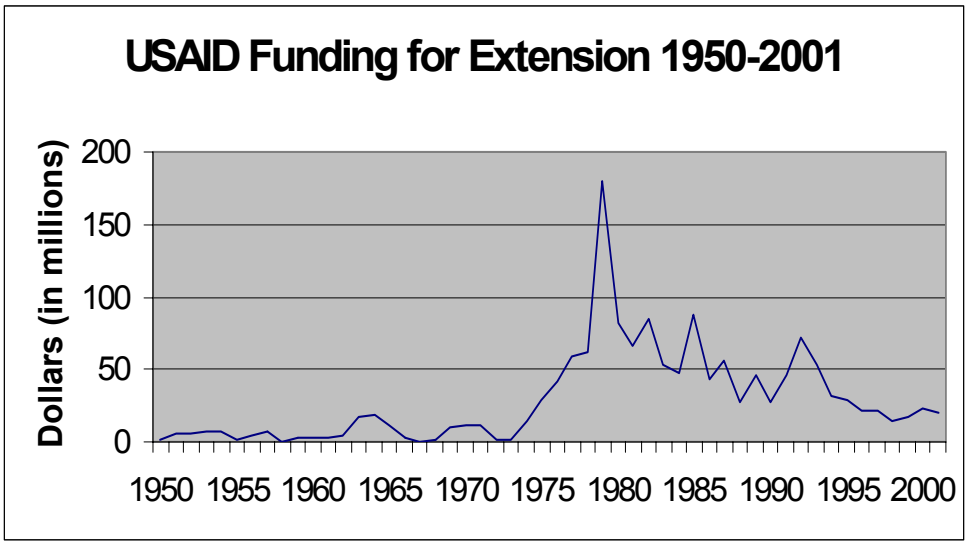
Funding Levels

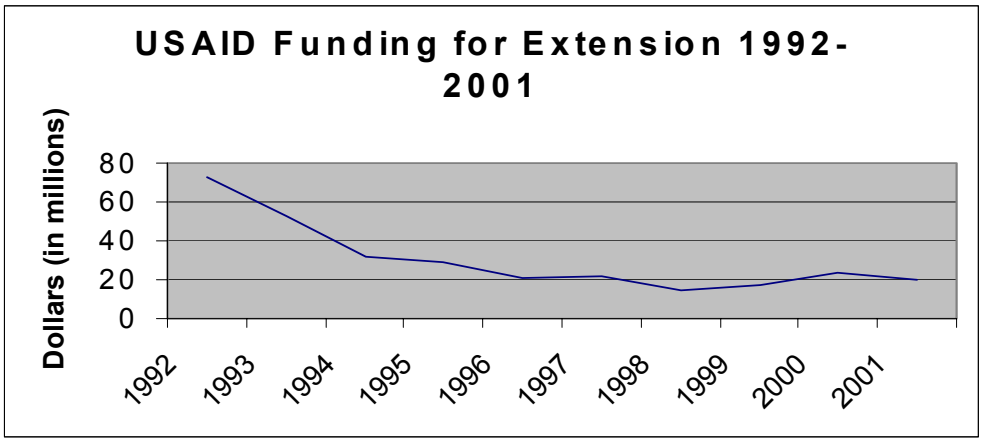
It is difficult to get an extremely accurate account of what USAID has funded in the area of Agriculture Extension and Technology Transfer over the years because the same accounting and project tracking systems have not been used since the inception of USAID. Prior to 1992, accounting records were not broken down into a category that included extension. In order to obtain data for a historical look at the funding levels, Congressional Reports were looked at from 1950 through 1992. Projects that had an extension component in them were listed along with the amount funded. It was then estimated what percent of the budget was spent on extension activities. Actual budget numbers for Agriculture Extension and Technology Transfer are available from 1992 through 2001 as reported to Congress and from an internal USAID budget program.

The following chart shows the amount of funding spent on Agriculture Extension and Technology Transfer by USAID and its predecessor from 1950 through 2001. Even though funding for most projects covers a multi-year time frame, the funding was not prorated over a multi-year time period, but was credited to the first year of the project.



As the chart shows, funding stayed relatively level until around the mid-1970s when it began to increase rapidly peaking in 1979 at $180 million. A contributing factor to the substantial increase in funding in 1979 was $33.1 million attributable to extension projects in Egypt and $60 million for extension projects in Yemen. Without these major influxes, the amount for extension activities would have been $86.9 million. This amount is much more representative of the amounts of the year prior and year following of $62 million in 1978 and $82.6 million in 1980. Since the early 1980's, funding has gone through various peaks and valleys, but the general trend has been a downward slope. This correlates to the decrease in emphasis of funding for agriculture at USAID.

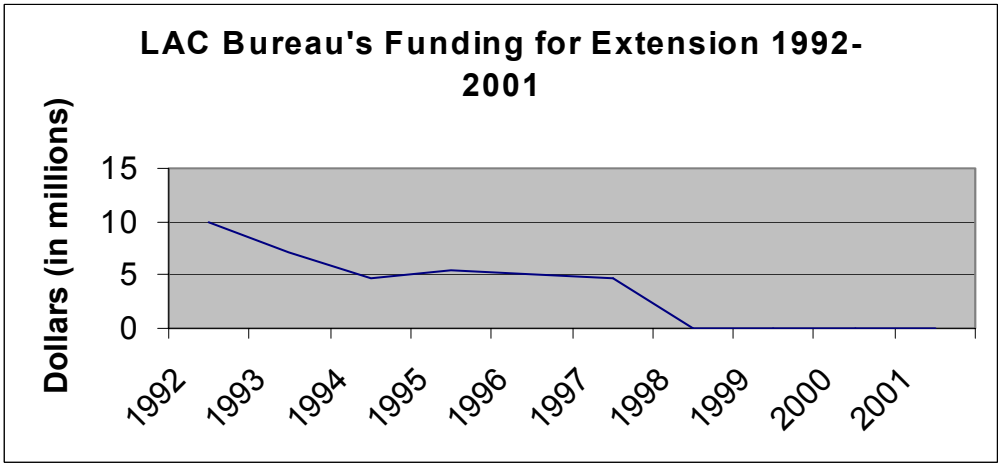
The following shows the trend for funding for extension from 1992 through 2001. These numbers are actual budget numbers reported to Congress and from a USAID budget-tracking program.



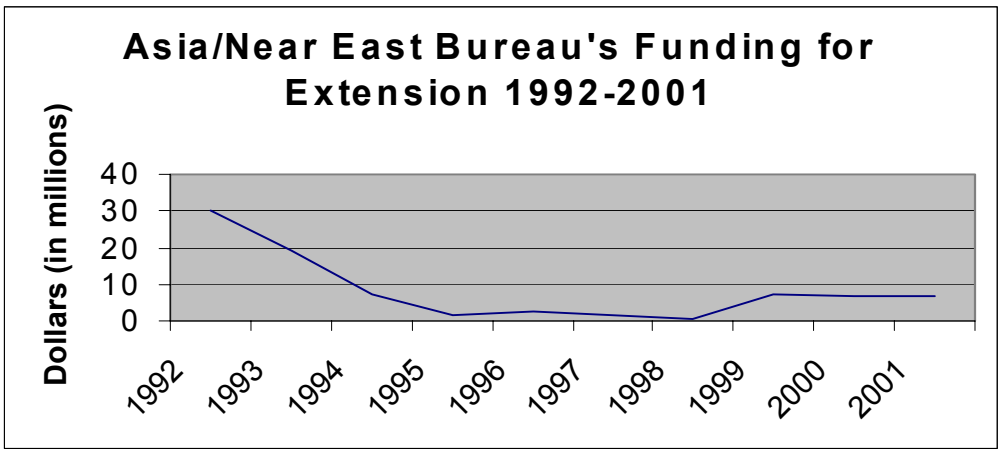
As the above chart shows, funding for extension has decreased from $72.3 million in 1992 to an almost steady $20 million from 1996 onward.

This downward trend can be best illustrated by looking at the extension funding for the Latin American/Caribbean (LAC), Europe/Near East (ENE), and Global Bureaus.

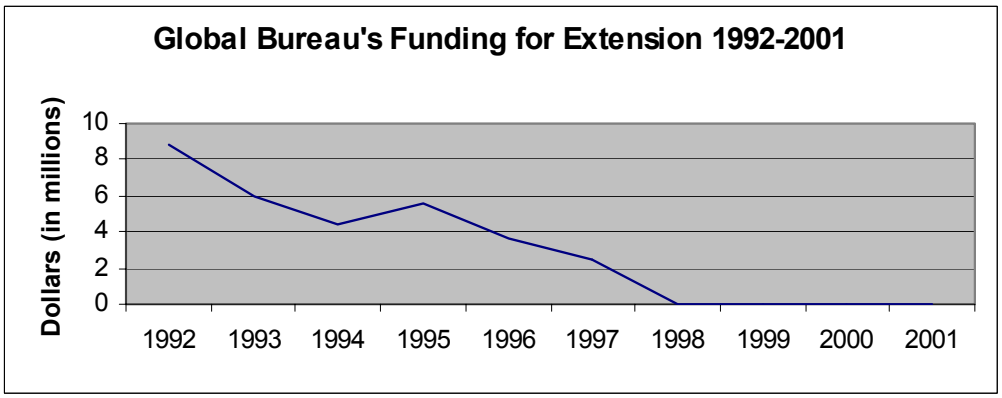
As the following graph shows, the LAC Bureau went from $10 million in funding in 1992 to $0 by 1998.



In the Asia/Near East Bureau, the funding in 1992 was $30.1 million and by 1998 was at $680,000, but has stabilized to around $7 million.

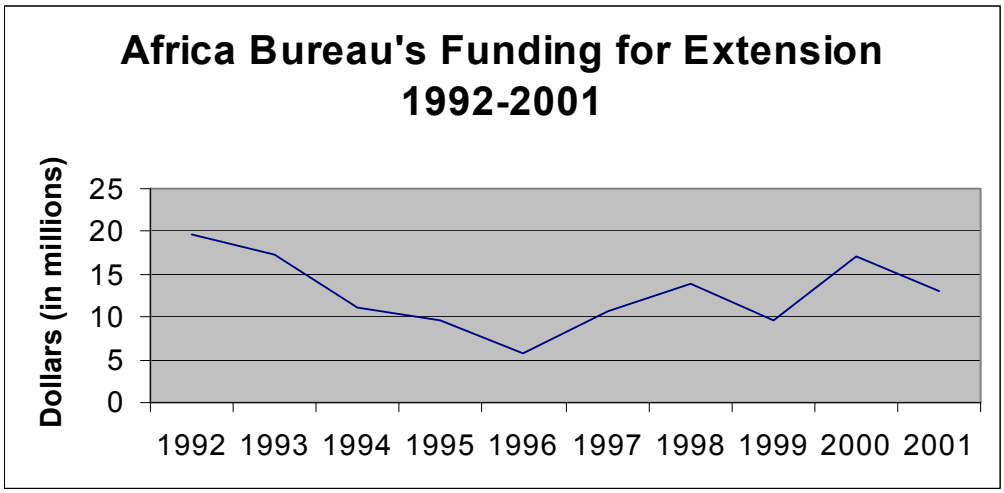


In the Global Bureau, the funding almost mirrors that of the LAC Bureau. From $8.8 million in 1992 to zero in 1998.



The funding for extension in the Europe and N.I.S. Bureau has been very minimal from 1992-2001. Other than funding of $2.7 million in 1995 and $2.0 million in 1996, funding has been zero.

The Africa Bureau's spending has also declined over the last decade, but not as dramatically as the other bureaus. From a high of $19.6 million in 1992, the funding for extension activities has seen a decline in the mid-90s to an increase the last few years to around $13 million.



A Historical Look at Extension

In a paper prepared for the "Report of the Global Consultation on Agriculture Extension" held in Rome, December 4-8, 1989, Ralph Cummings, Jr., broke down USAID's involvement in agriculture extension into three main eras. In 1986, Gerald Britan wrote a paper entitled "AID'S Experience in Agricultural Extension." Most of the historical perspective on extension at USAID is taken from these two sources.

1950's and 1960's

The first era of extension covered the time frame from 1955-1970 and dealt with developing national agriculture extension systems. Following World War II, the belief was that existing western technology could substantially increase agriculture production. Teaching farmers how to use modern tools and technologies was the main component of this strategy. USAID's model for transferring this technology was the United States land grant university systems.

During the early 1950s and 1960s, USAID played a prominent role in helping create extension systems in almost a dozen countries in Latin and Central America. Throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America, USAID built new agriculture universities, trained and assisted indigenous extension workers, expanded national extension systems, and provided direct extension services to farmers. These tasks were carried out by a relatively large number of trained extension officers with many years of U.S. experience. Often the extension programs were integrated into community development programs, which were in vogue during this time period.

Agriculture practices were significantly influenced by USAID's activities, but many of the agriculture improvements introduced were never adopted. This was often due to other constraints to agriculture change. Often complimentary inputs such as fertilizer, credit, storage, marketing, and processing were unavailable. Also, many host governments did not have policies that created a favorable economic environment for agriculture that reduced the profitability of farming and decreased the incentives for technological innovation and agricultural growth. Also, many of the extension activities relied on expatriate technicians who were highly trained, well equipped and in a high ratio to farmers. This was

well beyond the financial and human resource capabilities of most governments and thus impossible to maintain.

By the late 1960's few farmers were adopting improved technology and USAID began to question its strategy of extension-oriented agriculture development. Apparent problems were the following:

- Extension in most developing countries continued to be overly centralized.
- There was limited contact with farmers.
- There were inadequate linkages between researchers, private industry, universities, and other agriculture participants.
- A reliance on poorly trained, inexperienced, and overworked extension agents.
- Numerous nonextension responsibilities were placed on extension personnel.
- Ineffective and outmoded methods were being used.
- There was little technology of practical value to offer.

These problems reflected USAID's extension approach that emphasized national extension bureaucracies, the communications process over technological substance, and an oversimplified view of U.S. extension that ignored the land grant system's participatory history and decentralized structure.

When the U.S. model was partnered with weak research institutions, top-down planning, overly centralized bureaucracies, sociocultural differences, inadequate inputs, and limited markets, it is of no surprise that the "American extension model" failed most of the time in the developing world.

1970's and 1980's

Beginning in the 1970's USAID moved to a more integrated approach to agriculture extension. Integrated agriculture projects provided farmers with a coordinated range of inputs and services that included marketing, credit, transportation, fertilizer, seeds, etc. Even more ambitious Integrated Rural Development (IRD) projects added health, education, and social welfare services intended to promote a broader process of social and community growth.

These projects were based on the simple and often valid premise that multiple and interconnected social and economic barriers to development had to be simultaneously lowered for growth to occur. IRD projects sought to provide a range of complementary services through existing public bureaucracies, newly created quasi-public institutions, or private and voluntary organizations (PVO). Often an overreaching development authority was created to coordinate the diverse inputs.

The major failing of most IRD projects was their lack of a technologically sound basis for improving rural incomes. Even though services were improved, little sustainable progress could be achieved unless better farming technologies were available for adoption.

IRD projects failed to deliver an effective range of services due to a lack of coordination. Examples include extension agents visiting farmers, but with little useful information to offer, improved seeds available but farmers had no fertilizer to grow them, new crops were harvested but farm-to-market roads did not exist.

Long-term impact of IRD projects was often minimal even with the well-coordinated projects. Most host governments lacked the resources to maintain project services or to replicate them in other geographic areas. When a project's funding ended, the new organization and services simply disappeared.

Some IRD projects did improve agriculture production and incomes in certain regions. These projects showed the following:

- That poor, small-scale farmers would alter their agriculture practices when appropriate information and services were provided.
- The poorest and most isolated farmers can be reached effectively through private and voluntary organizations.
- Transmission of agriculture knowledge can occur through special geographically focused extension units.

What they did not do though was improve national extension institutions or provide a sustainable basis for broader technology transfer and agriculture improvement.

During the 1980s, USAID only selectively continued to focus on national extension systems. Most of these projects sought to strengthen existing extension institutions by providing training, technical assistance, equipment, and commodities rather than seeking broad extension reform. Although a few projects included innovative mass media, private industry, or institutional linkage components, most accepted existing extension structures and practices as givens. Many of the projects improved human resources on the margins, but most ignored the deeper problems of extension systems. Extension was no longer a stand-alone strategy, but wrapped in a broader agriculture development strategy that included support for policy reform, agriculture research, private sector growth, and rural resource mobilization.

Review of USAID's Extension Portfolio from 1975-1984

An analysis was done in the mid-1980s of 1,065 projects, covering the years 1975-1984, that involved at least some agriculture extension activities. This was further broken down into 386 cases being identified in which extension appeared to be a major concern. A more detailed analysis then eliminated 120 of these projects in which extension components were too indirect or in which the orientation was primarily towards research.

Of the remaining 266 projects, 81.5% concentrated on extension activities within a single country. These ranged from supporting entire national extension systems to setting up systems in regions of a country. Eight percent of the projects had a multinational focus while another 5.7% covered all developing countries. Only 3.3% of the projects dealt directly with universities and another 1.1% of the projects were conducted with international institutions. One project, or .4%, it could not be determined the scope of the activity.

The studies initial goal was to identify useful models for implementing innovative extension activities based on a review of USAID's documented extension experience. This goal unfortunately was not realized. The documentary evidence did not reveal much in the way of innovative extension activity. Most of the new initiatives at the time were simply too new to be captured through routine project monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Some of the findings included the following:

1. During the time period from 1975-1984, most of the extension activities involved relatively traditional attempts to strengthen existing extension systems or to create parallel extension organizations through training and technical assistance.

2. Most of the extension activities appeared to have been developed without clearly defined long-term extension goals or clear strategies relating to extension to larger technology transfer and agriculture development issues.

3. The support, especially during the 1950's and 1960's, for decentralized extension services centered around agricultural universities may have been dismissed prematurely. Recent Impact Evaluations of Agricultural Higher Education, suggest that USAID's support often played a key role in developing agricultural universities that have the potential to provide important technology development and transfer services.

4. The World Bank's Training and Visit System has proven effective in improving the delivery of extension services in some settings. The T&V approach has yet to prove itself in other settings, particularly in Africa and Latin America. T&V's emphasis on centralized, national extension bureaucracies also seems inconsistent with USAID's own development philosophy and may be particularly ineffective in countries where local agro-ecological conditions are heterogeneous. In any case, the T&V approach remains beyond the financial means of most host countries.

5. Few extension projects have focused on farmer organizations and farmer self-help as important extension components, despite USAID's experience with local participation and the historical involvement of farmers' groups in extension in the United States.

6. The Agriculture Technology Management Working Group and the INTERPAKS project both emphasize that extension is only one constraint to agricultural development and that the impact of extension improvements depends on other elements in a larger agricultural technology transfer system. They conclude that extension initiatives should be implemented as part of a wider agricultural development strategy that takes these constraints into account.

7. Current project papers indicate that a number of the innovative extension approaches are being implemented, but documentary evidence remains sparse. Limited field studies of selected extension projects could provide useful information on the successes and failures of these approaches as a basis for mission guidance.

The Late 1980s and Beyond

The USAID administrator during the peak agriculture funding years during the 1980's was M. Peter McPherson who believed strongly in agriculture as a tool for economic development. In 1985 in a speech and worldwide cable, he outlined a new approach to agriculture extension that included the following:

1) Strengthening public extension by

a) linking research and extension;

b) linking the private sector to public extension systems;

c) applying a Farming Systems approach;

d) direct farmer training;

e) farmer-to-farmer exchanges;

f) developing human resources; and

g) using PVO's as implementing agencies.

2) To reach rural agriculture producers by using mass communications approaches such as radio broadcasts, advertising and social marketing, and

   print media.

3) Drawing on modern information techniques such as microcomputers.

4) Stimulating private sector extension methods.

Was this strategy followed? Interviews were conducted with USAID personnel who were involved in agriculture projects after this strategy was implemented. Since USAID has never had an office to coordinate extension activities, the answers were dependent of the experiences the person had with the projects that were in the country they were working in. Since the answers were so varied, it is difficult to draw any conclusions. One person answered that in their experience, none of the above occurred. Another person said that for 3-4 years this strategy was followed.

As the funding for agriculture in the early 1990's began to dry up, extension was one of the first casualties because it did not have any natural and strong constituents like research did. As the funding decreased, the majority of the extension work for USAID began to be done via NGOs and PVOs. This continues to this day.

The Future

Looking ahead, what should the strategy for USAID be concerning extension? The days of trying to duplicate the extension system in the U.S. on a mass scale and funding for just extension will probably never occur. Many constraints still exist that contribute to extension failing such as lack of production incentives, lack of marketing outlets, minimal inputs, transportation barriers, etc. In an era of budget constraints, will or should extension receive funding over these challenges?

USAID should consider the following in relation to working in extension:

- The importance of extension needs to be reiterated within the agency so that personnel are aware of it when developing agriculture projects.

- For mostly budgetary reasons, extension will probably never be funded as a stand-alone entity. Thus, for all projects an extension and technology transfer component needs to be part of it whenever possible and feasible.

- Research occurring via the CGIAR's and CRSPs need to have extension components as a part of them in order to transfer the new findings into the hands of farmers who can put them to use.

- There may be a situation where funding on a very targeted basis a program similar to the American model extension is the right concept, so this should not be summarily eliminated as a possibility for funding.

- Use of para-extension agents that have been trained in some basic concepts, but are not expected to be able to do everything.

- Use of more women in extension roles.

- Identify successful rural organizations within countries and use these for extension activities.

- A study to examine how effective the use of NGOs and PVOs has been in providing extension services.

- Put money where the farmers are located and what their problems are for researchers. This will get them into the field and in addition to their research, this will also provide extension services.

- Examine closely assisting the private sector in extension roles.

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