# The LIFE Model:
## Livelihood Improvement through Facilitated Extension

**Noel Vock**✉ • **Mary Johnson** • **Kenneth Menz**
RMIT University, AUSTRALIA

**Evy Carusos**
Landcare Foundation of the Philippines Inc., PHILIPPINES

## Abstract

The previous papers (Menz; Puerto et al.; Johnson et al.; Johnson et al., this issue) provided a background context for the development of an extension model thought to be applicable in conflict-vulnerable areas of Mindanao. This was done by developing and using an extension model that is effective and resource efficient, as well as sufficiently flexible to be adapted to local community needs. First, in this paper, learnings from previous extension work are listed. From those learnings, a set of sixteen extension principles are derived. These extension principles are categorized under the umbrella of three overarching and concurrent extension strategies: (1) improving access to technical innovations, (2) building community social capital, and (3) collaborating closely with local institutional partners. Finally, a set of practical activities that defines the model is specified, while recognizing the need for flexibility in responding to prevailing circumstances.

**Keywords:** action research · conflict-vulnerable areas · extension model · LIFE model

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## Introduction

Previous research in Mindanao has highlighted how certain types of community-based extension principles can rapidly enhance agricultural livelihoods by improving both farmer-based learning networks and community social capital (Vock 2015). Although this previous work was conducted in areas not significantly vulnerable to conflict, the potential was observed for modifying the principles to produce similar results in conflict-vulnerable areas.

A key driver for this view was a promising small pilot program conducted by the Landcare Foundation of the Philippines in Malisbong, Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat, which is funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). This program consisted of a farmer livelihood-improvement extension program involving community consultation, farmer-based technical training, cross visits to other project sites, development of a communal vegetable garden as a learning site, and strengthening ties with the local people's organization and other community development agencies. An important part of the process was building trust and confidence with the Muslim community leaders who had some suspicion about "outsiders." The relatively short and inexpensive program (2007–2009) produced some excellent results, including crop diversification, adoption of new technologies, improvements to income, and improved knowledge and awareness from the cross visits. Both the *barangay* (village) captain and the military reported that the community appeared more peaceful, and the process left a positive impression on the Muslim Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) and the Malisbong local government unit (LGU).

Overall, the experience demonstrated the promise of facilitated community-based extension in achieving relatively rapid improvement in livelihoods in isolated conflict-vulnerable communities.

## Learnings from Previous Work

The starting point was to review learnings derived from the Landcare experience in the Philippines from 1999 to 2011, as well as from other papers in this special issue. Nine such learnings were identified from the review of the Landcare experience.

1. *Using trained community-based facilitators to work with farmers on improving their livelihoods.* Facilitators facilitate action, but do not command it or lead it. They emphasize the importance of the farmers themselves taking ownership of their future and then helping them on their journey to achieve their goals. In this process, they link the farmers to research support, material support, other farmers who may be able to help or inspire them, government agency support, and the services of other agencies such as non-government organizations (NGOs). To be successful in the role, facilitators need to obtain the trust of the farmers—this means being open and honest with them and not having any hidden agenda.

2. *Encouraging farmers to take a lead role.* Although a technical or resource person will generally initiate a project or activity, it is important that farmers be encouraged to assume a lead role as soon as they can. The more they take this lead role, the more likely they are to own the process and the outcomes. This process involves identifying farmer leaders (those who can help the farmers to develop greater self-sufficiency)

and mentoring and fostering these leaders. Encouraging farmers to take the lead has two important dimensions:

- *Actively participating in the research*— Expressing their needs to researchers, and adapting and experimenting with new recommended practices. This enables farmers to better evaluate technical claims (and not accept the regular "techno-fads"), as well as to better assess the real costs and benefits of research innovations.

- *Actively participating in the extension*—Relying less on technical experts and more on farmer-to-farmer learning and training, even to the extent of farmers becoming the main extension workers, where they are trained and mentored as farmer facilitators, possibly receiving incentives and rewards. The concept of a farmer training group—farmers training other farmers—is a variation of this principle.

3. *Encouraging farmers to work in small groups.* In general, groups facilitate better sharing, better learning, better social networking, and better collective action. A key outcome of the social networking is the building of social capital—both bonding (within the group) and bridging (outside the group).

4. *Maximizing the opportunity for farmers to be inspired with new innovations.* In most cases, the potential for poor farmers in remote areas to be interfaced with new innovations is constrained by two factors: (1) the fact that few innovators visit their *barangay*/municipality and (2) their inability to travel very far outside of their immediate *barangay*/municipality to view new innovations. Inspiration comes from farmers being able to see new innovations with their own eyes and adopt these within their own farm context. A very effective process used by the Landcare project was farmer-to-farmer cross visits, where groups of farmers were transported to the farms of farmer innovators to view what these farmers were doing. The visits also included interchange with technical specialists on the farms as well as visits to specialist research farms.

5. *Linking farmers more effectively with LGUs and other potentially supportive agencies.* Within any locality, LGU staff and farmers have a common interest in improving rural livelihoods. For the LGU staff, this is because that is their mandate and they have a vested interest in seeing their jurisdictions grow and be more productive. For the farmers, this is because they have a vested interest in improving their income and other aspects of their livelihoods. Similarly, NGOs and other agencies have interest in seeing their programs succeed and have an impact. However, the interface between the farmers and LGUs/agencies is often poor, generally because of a lack of resources, poor communication, inappropriate perceptions, and so on. Sometimes, all it takes is someone to better facilitate the initial linkages, and mutual benefits can quickly flow. An effective early-stage linkage process is to involve the staff of relevant LGUs and NGOs in the farmer-to-farmer cross visits (mentioned above), as these not only improve the social capital between farmer and agency personnel, but they also provide an opportunity for technical awareness and inspiration for agency extension staff.

6. *Maintaining a whole-farm perspective of change.* Any new practice represents a trade-off between improved short-term productivity on one hand and the longer-term sustainability of the farming system on the other. The farmer needs to consider a raft of issues such as labor, materials, finances, risk, resilience, and so on. It is easy for a project or a program to promote and plug in a single piece of technology without due consideration of its broader implications for the whole farm business and its long-term sustainability.

7. *Having a focus on both production and marketing improvements.* A focus on making land more productive (through practices such as multicropping, new high-yielding varieties, and more efficient application of fertilizers and chemicals) ignores the fact that more gains may be possible through better understanding of and involvement in the market chain. In fact, experience has shown that increased market knowledge actually leads to production changes, not the other way around.

8. *Understanding that the site context is important in determining need and interest.* The Landcare project showed that farmers were open to change in more marginal areas—agriculturally marginal, because there was more need for a sound conservation farming platform to underpin crop diversification and improvement; economically marginal, because the farmers' poverty, remoteness, and capital constraints make them more eager for change; and politically marginal, because poorly serviced areas are generally more appreciative of extension services on offer.

9. *Understanding that no single model of extension can appropriately service all areas.* While the processes above can generally be applied to most situations, any extension model needs to be flexible enough to be adjusted to the peculiar needs and circumstances of each community. Here, the process of action research (plan → act → reflect → replan) is significant in that throughout its cycle, the extension process can be readjusted at regular points.

## Extension Principles Derived from Previous Learnings

From the above learnings, a set of sixteen extension principles was established to guide the initial extension model conceptualization and, ultimately, the initial extension model itself. These sixteen principles were as follows:

*Principle 1. Project partnership.* The project recognizes the importance of all agencies relevant to the project sites being informed about the project and having the opportunity to participate. As such, in planning and implementing the project, all agencies will be included in the discussions and invited to be involved, either directly or indirectly, in the project partnership. (This may require institutional mapping to ensure that all relevant agencies are effectively identified.)

*Principle 2. Communication with project partnership.* The project recognizes the importance of communicating regularly with all agencies in the project partnership. As such, a program of regular communication of project activities and outcomes to the partnership will be implemented, even in cases where an agency does not appear to be particularly interested. In planning the communication program, the communication tools most appropriate to agency needs will be determined through interaction with partner agencies, and these will be given priority in the implementation of the communication program.

*Principle 3. Feedback from project partnership.* The project recognizes the importance of a two-way process of communication with all agencies in the project partnership, as a means of not only providing ongoing input into the site programs, but also of alerting the project team to changes and trends at agency levels. As such, an active process for seeking regular feedback from partner agencies will be implemented.

*Principle 4. Group-based process.* The project recognizes that farmer groups are a more efficient and generally more effective process for working with farmers. As such, the project team will focus primarily on working with existing farmer groups and, where none exist, form groups for the purposes of the project. However, where an influential farmer prefers to work outside of the group, special measures may be taken to interface his/her experience and expertise with those of the group.

*Principle 5. Facilitators of change rather than leaders of change.* The project recognizes that for farmers to take ownership of the change process, it needs to be as participatory as possible, with farmers taking the major responsibility for decision making. As such, the project team will focus on its role as facilitators of change rather than leaders or imposers of change—a process of getting farmers to clarify their own goals and direct their own learning and action.

*Principle 6. Capacity building for self-help.* The project recognizes that long-term empowerment arises from farmers and extension agencies developing the capacity to help themselves. As such, the focus will be on training and other processes to build the self-help capacity and self-sufficiency of farmers, rather than just providing technical solutions and farm input materials. In a similar vein, particular attention will be paid to training and other processes to build the service and decision-making capacity of extension agency personnel. In this process, the project team will build on existing or perceived strengths, as these are likely to be the most effective platform for the development of self-sufficiency. Similarly, communication processes with farmers and extension agencies will be built on the platform of existing communication media that have been identified as being most effective in conflict-prone areas.

*Principle 7. Farmer learning processes.* The project recognizes that farmers need to manage and self-direct their learning—learning by doing, learning from their peers, and learning through actually visualizing the change. As such, a strong farmer-centred and farmer-to-farmer learning process will be employed, with priority on farmer cross visits, farmer demonstrations, farmer hands-on learning, farmer field schools, farmer experimentation with new technologies, and the deployment of farmer facilitators.

*Principle 8. Production and marketing focus.* The project recognizes that improving farmer livelihoods involves improving the farm production system, farmer knowledge of marketing systems, and the linkages between farmers and their markets (market chain development). As such, training and awareness on marketing processes will be provided and linkages facilitated between farmer groups and the various other elements of the market chain.

*Principle 9. Nexus between social capital development and livelihood improvement.* The project recognizes that the development of improved social capital is an essential part of improving economic livelihoods but is not the means in itself. As such, the project team will work to enhance both social capital and economic livelihoods in a collective sense while identifying more clearly the extension processes that best service the balanced improvement of both.

*Principle 10. Farmer/community involvement with government.* The project recognizes the importance of farmer groups being empowered to manage their own futures by becoming part of the formal LGU planning and development process (*barangay* and municipal development plans). As such, a component of the project work will be focused on facilitating capacity building of farmer and community groups to achieve this goal.

*Principle 11. Understanding the context of conflict and its impacts.* The project recognizes that conflict may have varied and perverse causes and that these impact on the normal processes of extension and farmer behavior. Therefore, high priority will be given to studying and understanding the impacts of conflict on men, women, farming units, community organizations, and extension agencies, with a view to developing more conflict-resilient extension processes.

*Principle 12. Development of trust.* The project recognizes that in conflict-vulnerable areas, trust in project personnel by farmers and agency personnel is of vital importance. As such, all project interventions will be analyzed against an appropriate measure of trust and consumer confidence.

*Principle 13. Flexibility in project design.* The project recognizes that projects in conflict-

vulnerable areas need to be flexible in their design to accommodate significant conflict-related dislocations that may arise. As such, initial project design and subsequent reviews of the action research process will incorporate a fall-back scenario in the event of on-ground project work having to be suspended for short- or long-term periods.

*Principle 14. Gender issues within conflict areas.* The project recognizes that gender issues may be more important in conflict-vulnerable areas in influencing project outcomes. As such, gender issues will be carefully studied as part of the adaptive research and as part of the development of more conflict-resilient extension systems.

*Principle 15. Respect for cultural values.* The project recognizes that it will be working with farmers and extension agencies with diverse ethnic and cultural values, for example indigenous peoples, Muslims, and Christians. This being the case, programs will be developed and implemented at all times with a deep respect for, and sensitivity to, these values.

*Principle 16. Systematic evaluation of extension interventions.* The project recognizes that it has a research focus and needs to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of project interventions. As such, an action research process will be employed, where interventions are routinely evaluated, reviewed, and redirected appropriately.

## The Overarching Project Strategies

The project's overarching strategy involves social capital enhancement and two other related and concurrent strategies (Figure 1).

The sixteen extension principles are categorized under each of the three strategies. Social capital can be seen to enable the other two strategies (i.e., the three strategies are not independent of one another).

While aspects of these three strategies are inherent in many community-based projects, the simultaneous attention paid to all three, and their application within a conflict situation, is unusual, if not unique. At a practical level, the rigorous and systematic adherence to all the detailed steps comprising the model is also rare.

*1. Improving farmer access to technical innovations*

- Facilitating change rather than leading or imposing it.

- Getting farmers to take the major responsibility for decision making—deciding their own priorities and goals using farmer-centered training and learning—learning by doing, learning
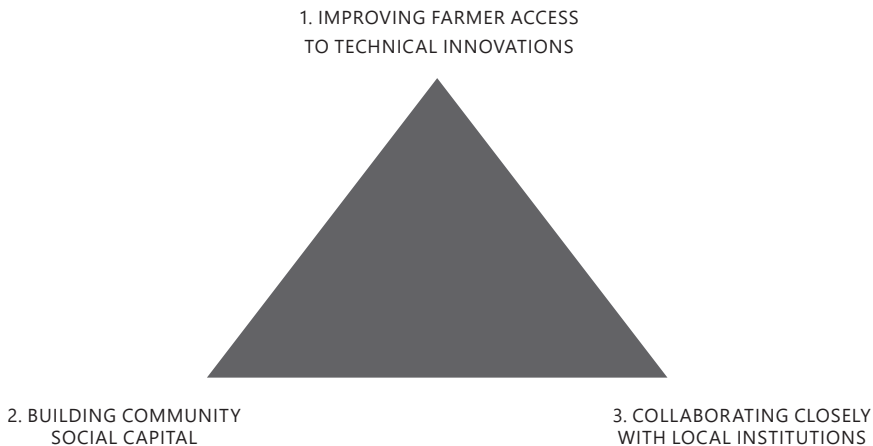


1. IMPROVING FARMER ACCESS
TO TECHNICAL INNOVATIONS

2. BUILDING COMMUNITY
SOCIAL CAPITAL

3. COLLABORATING CLOSELY
WITH LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

**FIGURE 1** The Three Concurrent Strategies Used in the Project

from peers, and learning through actually visualizing the change (strong focus on farmer-to-farmer learning with priority on farmer cross visits, farmer hands-on learning, farmer field schools, farmer experimentation with new technologies, and development of farmer facilitators.

- Building self-help capacity and self-sufficiency of farmers rather than just providing technical solutions and farm input materials. In this process, build on existing or perceived strengths as these are likely to be the most effective platform for the development of self-sufficiency.

- Using communication processes that are relevant to farmers and most effective in conflict-prone areas (e.g., cell phones, radio broadcasts, etc.).

- Improving both the farm production system and the linkage between farmers and markets.

*2. Building community social capital*

- Working with farmers in groups as these are a more efficient and generally more effective process for achieving change. Focus on primarily working with existing farmer groups, and where none exist, form groups for the purposes of the project. However, where an influential farmer prefers to work outside of the group, take special measures to interface his/her experience and expertise with the group.

- Using special group-based learning processes to enhance longer-term social capital (e.g., cross visits involving farmers and LGU officials).

- Facilitating farmer groups to manage their own futures by becoming part of the formal LGU planning and development process (*barangay* and municipal development plans).

- Better understanding the impact of conflict on men, women, farming units, community organizations, and extension agencies—with a view to developing more conflict-resilient extension processes.

- Carefully studying gender issues as part of the adaptive research and as part of the development of more conflict-resilient extension systems

- Implementing our programs at all times with a deep respect for, and sensitivity to, the diverse ethnic and cultural values of the focus communities.

- Analyzing all project interventions against an appropriate measure of trust and consumer confidence.

- Maintaining a strong local presence in the community—e.g., activities within the site, not remote, with facilitators embedded within the community.

*3. Collaborating closely with local institutional partners*

- Including all agencies with an interest in the sites to be involved in discussions and project activities, either directly or indirectly (requires institutional mapping to ensure all relevant agencies are effectively identified).

- Regularly communicating with project partners on activities and outcomes, even where an agency does not appear to be particularly interested.

- Using communication processes that are relevant to agencies in the partnership (may require collaborative identification).

- Seeking regular feedback from partner agencies on the performance of the project and the nature of agency involvement.

- Paying particular attention to training and other processes to build the service

and decision-making capacity of extension agency personnel.

- Facilitating the linkages between LGUs and farmer groups in farmers becoming part of the formal LGU planning and development process (*barangay* and municipal development plans).

## Operational Steps

One year from the commencement of the project, with enough data and experience, the project team formulated a more detailed working extension model, comprising seventeen steps. These steps (like the overarching strategies) are not necessarily sequential and, at times, may be concurrent. Livelihood improvement is the desired outcome from applying the steps in the extension model.

These are the steps (activities) that define the extension model:

1. Identify or select a conflict-affected site (may have already been decided).

2. Appoint, identify, or recruit an appropriate community facilitator (new appointment or drawn from existing institutional staff), preferably a local in the target site.

3. Train and orientate the facilitator.

4. Identify priority institutional stakeholders (LGUs, NGOs, other agencies)—agencies with which regular engagement is necessary to leverage the best outcomes.

5. Consult with relevant LGU and other agencies (to inform them about intentions, to seek support, identify key institutional collaborators, and gather important insights into farmers and farmer groups).

6. Improve and document the understanding of the farmers and their livelihood improvement issues (from a baseline survey through to primary and secondary data gathering).

7. Conduct initial engagement with farmers in their locality to build trust (no hidden agendas); identify farmer leaders and "lines of command" (e.g., indigenous communities);

and clarify farmer groups because of the inherent advantages of working with farmers in groups.

8. Map groups as to their relevance and influence, and from this, identify the best farmer groups to work with (in the absence of a suitable group, form an appropriate group).

9. Engage with farmer groups in their own locality to orientate them to the process and seek input with key institutional partners.

10. Map institutional partners to identify programs and areas of mutual interest, and identify appropriate point persons to include in project activities.

11. Conduct group workshop of farmers and institutional partners to identify main farmer drivers, needs, and preferred ways of addressing their needs to build farmer ownership.

12. Organize a cross visit of farmers and institutional partners to inspire them with ideas and possibilities on their primary needs.

13. Implement livelihood development activities relevant to primary needs—emphasis on farmer leadership and the involvement of both men and women.

14. In the implementation of activities, regularly (at least every three months) discuss ways to improve social capital, group health, gender equity, and farmer leadership.

15. Where appropriate, train and deploy farmer facilitators.

16. Regularly keep institutional partners informed and, where possible, involved in activities (planned communication program necessary).

17. Consistently monitor changes at both farmer and institutional levels (economic, social, and human capital changes) and reflect on changes necessary to improve outcomes (action research methodology)—which is important in ensuring the project is achieving its objectives as well as identifying the important factors in building self-reliance in farmer groups and institutional partners.

## Conclusion

An extension model relevant to conflict situations was derived in an iterative and adaptive way. The starting point was a set of learnings from previous work. That led first to the development of a set of principles and finally to the specific activities that define the model. Three broad extension strategies drove the initial model design: (1) improving access to technical innovations, (2) building community social capital, and (3) collaborating closely with local institutional partners. The delineation of the extension principles under those broad strategies was helpful in conceptualizing the process.

## Reference

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