

Client-oriented extension training: Ethiopia

ABSTRACT

A two-year pilot project, Improving client-oriented extension training in Ethiopia, was launched in 1996, with the aim of improving the capacity of national and regional Agricultural Extension Department staff to design and implement extension training for farmers, or clients. The focus was on gender issues, using participatory approaches, and on developing a gender-sensitive analytical framework for planning and implementing agricultural programmes to be undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture at central and regional levels.

The pilot project, involving staff from all levels of the Ministry of Agriculture, was carried out in one zone in each of three different regions of the country. Activities included a workshop and case studies in each zone to develop appropriate methods. This experience was used as a basis for the regional and zonal training of trainers in participatory approaches, techniques and tools, gender, gender roles and gender analysis in extension planning. A handbook and video were produced on the basis of this experience. Grassroots staff were trained and the approach was then implemented in a number of villages. The experience was reviewed during a second training-of-trainers phase and the approach subsequently improved, with training provided on how to incorporate findings into the extension planning process. In addition, three of the trainers who had attended a course abroad on participation and development provided training based on relevant aspects of their experience. A second handbook was produced, outlining the agreed approach.

Extension staff in the pilot areas were able to involve female and male villagers in identifying and prioritizing problems and solutions through participatory approaches. Having been trained in gender and gender analysis, the gender-aware staff were able to learn about the activities and constraints of both men and women of different social and age strata and carry out gender analysis at field level. Opportunities for development, identified by different clients in the community, were then incorporated into the extension plan for the location.

For the first time, farmers in the pilot areas had the opportunity to be involved in and contribute to extension planning. This was particularly innovative for

women, many of whom had never been consulted before about their extension needs and constraints. Because the extension staff related to groups of women separately from men and used participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools that overcome the barrier of illiteracy, all of the women – young and old, low and high-income, single, married, divorced and widowed – were able to demonstrate, analyse and explain their situations.

The use of participatory approaches and gender analysis was new to Ministry of Agriculture staff. Many important lessons were learned about the client-oriented approach in terms of logistics and methods, networking, links and awareness training, capacity building and institutionalization of the process. In particular, it was observed that a cycle of empirical learning and action in the training process was most effective in enabling staff to practise, modify and improve the approach.

The project did face some obstacles. The Ministry of Agriculture was in the process of reorganization and there was much staff movement and many demands on them, so the timing of activities had to be flexible. Another problem was that of raised expectations amongst villagers when a team of staff came to work with them. It was essential to explain the position of the team and what the villagers could and could not expect from them. There were positive factors, however, including a favourable policy environment and the use of selected extension staff as project coordinators at regional and zonal levels.

The innovative experience in Ethiopia achieved promising results in making agricultural extension training relevant, responsive and sustainable. In particular, a client-oriented approach brings women into the mainstream of development activities and helps countries realize their full agricultural potential.

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural extension as an educational and communications tool makes a vital contribution to agricultural production and rural development. Yet access to extension services and a lack of well-trained extension staff constitute a challenge facing many developing countries. Data collected for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Global Consultation on Agricultural Extension 1990 revealed that in North America and Europe, one extension agent covers about 400 economically active people in agriculture, excluding services provided by the private sector. **By contrast, in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Near East, one extension worker covers an average of around 2 500 clients.**

The majority of Ethiopia's population lives in rural areas where agriculture provides a way of life for many. As in other African countries, the contribution of women and girls to agricultural production is significant but often unrecog-

nized, with some tasks being carried out only by women. Most rural development assistance has focused on men, however, as heads of households. Extension services are male-dominated and work mainly with male farmers, partly for cultural reasons and partly because the extension system itself had traditionally relied on the use of contact farmers, whose criteria for selection tended to exclude female farmers. Assistance for women had usually been in the form of separate women's projects aimed at assisting women in their reproductive role, childcare, sanitation, nutrition and home management or in traditionally accepted roles such as sewing, knitting, processing crops and animal by-products, brewing beer, vegetable production and marketing. Sometimes these projects failed because women had no time to devote to the projects, given their combined heavy burden of domestic and productive work.

In 1994, the Planning and Programming Department of the Ministry of Agriculture conducted a case study on women's access to agriculture extension services. The study confirmed that although women were involved in many aspects of agricultural production, extension services were still oriented towards men. The significant contribution of women to agriculture, the nation's main economic sector, was not recognized. Meanwhile, food security was becoming a priority for the nation. It was recognized that agricultural productivity could be increased if women had access to relevant and timely extension advice, thus contributing to the nation's food security.

As part of the goal of bringing women into the mainstream of development, rather than remaining on the margins as clients of separate women's projects, a two-year client-oriented pilot project started in January 1996. It was carried out in zones of three different regions: the North Wollo zone of Amhara region, the West Harerghe zone of Oromia region and the North Omo zone of the Southern region.

The project, Improving client-oriented extension training in Ethiopia, was innovative in several ways. First, it involved training in and uptake of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and rapid rural appraisal (RRA) approaches and tools and gender analysis. Second, findings were used to make extension planning more client-oriented. Both elements were new to Ministry of Agriculture staff and the villagers involved in the process.

The innovative experience involved tackling the problem of women's lack of access to extension services. In order to achieve this, focus was placed on training and implementation, as an action/reflection learning process. The root cause of the problem, gender blindness, was tackled through a training-of-trainers approach focusing on gender, gender roles and gender analysis for client-oriented extension planning. The approach taken throughout was participatory,

with team planning of project activities and training in the use of participatory approaches and tools.

Specifically, the objectives were:

- to improve the capacity of the Agricultural Extension Department at the national and regional levels to design and implement client-oriented extension training, with a focus on gender issues using participatory approaches;
- to develop and integrate a gender-sensitive analytical framework in the planning and implementation of agricultural programmes to be carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture at both central and regional levels.

PRE-INNOVATION

Prior to the innovative experience, the extension services focused on male heads of households, partly as a result of the training-and-visit extension system most widely in operation at the time. Under this system, contact farmers were relied upon to practise new technologies and convince others of the benefits. These contact farmers tended to be progressive, wealthy and male, although occasionally female headed households were eligible. Under the training-and-visit system, it was assumed that extension advice would trickle down to other family members, although in practice this was often not the case. Extension was biased towards activities in which men were involved, such as field cropping and large livestock management. Horticultural and livestock specialists worked mainly with male farmers, even though vegetable production and the keeping of small livestock were often part of women's roles.

Alongside the predominantly male extension workers, there was a much smaller cadre of usually female home agents. Having been trained in home economics, these home agents worked directly with women, providing advice in the traditional areas of sanitation, nutrition, food processing, childcare and, in some instances, vegetable production and poultry management. They were not in a position to be able to advise women on aspects of field crop production or large livestock management, even though many women were active in these areas.

The extension services were managed in a top-down fashion, which was reflected in extension programme planning. Rather than planning on the basis of local farmers' needs, the plans reflected demands made by higher levels in the hierarchy of the Ministry of Agriculture. This gave very little opportunity for grassroots extension staff to take the initiative and respond to local demands in any significant way. Similarly, the structure, management and organization of the extension services did not allow for a great deal of teamwork and there was little emphasis on multidisciplinary approaches to problem solving.

The result was that very few women had direct access to extension services,

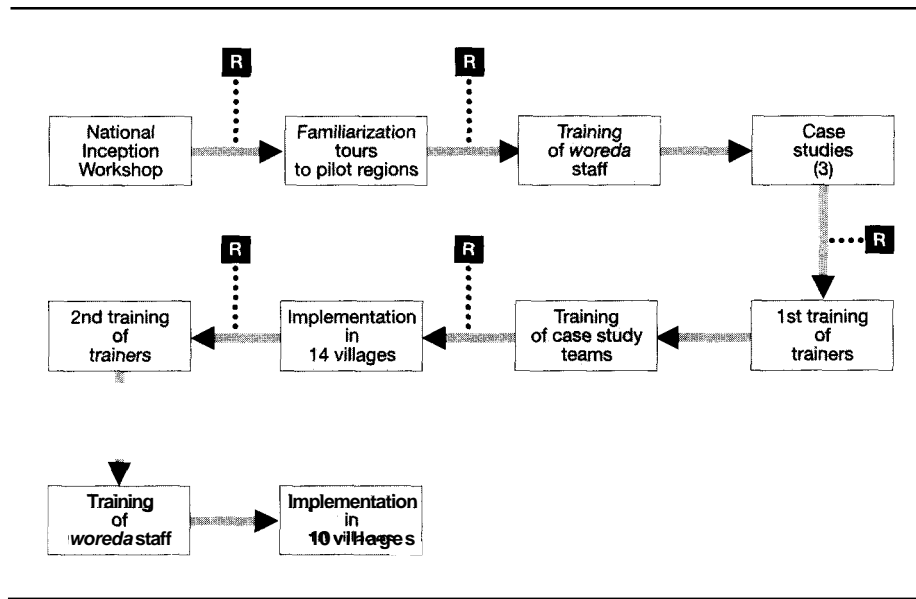
except those provided by home agents. Households headed by women were an exception, as were very old women. On occasion, these two groups received limited advice. However, in general, women's extension needs were not met. Indeed, their contribution to the production of field crops and large livestock management was not acknowledged, either by the system or by the staff within it. Another effect was related to the planning process: extension advice was not always relevant to the local situation, since it was not based on understanding and analysis of local problems.

It is important to outline the situation regarding gender and participation, as concepts and in practice, prior to the innovative experience. A national inception workshop was held at the beginning of the project, to which representatives of various ministries and donor organizations working in the project pilot areas with similar aims were invited. Experience was shared regarding the understanding and use of participatory approaches and tools, gender and gender analysis and the production of extension media. With regard to the use of participatory approaches and tools, it was found that these were not commonly being used within governmental organizations; the Extension Department was no exception. Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had taken them up, however, either as a diagnostic tool or to empower communities to identify and analyse their situations and draw up their own development plans.

In terms of understanding gender and how gender analysis could be employed in the field, the findings were different. Nearly all organizations, whether governmental or non-governmental, ran women's components within their development projects. These tended to be additional or separate activities focusing on women in isolation rather than in their living contexts, gender roles and constraints. Even among NGOs, few had started to gather gender-disaggregated data or to bring work with women into the mainstream of development activities. Meanwhile, extension staff at the Ministry of Agriculture had been trained in gender and gender analysis and the women's affairs departments of the various ministries had started training staff in gender, with the assistance of various UN agencies.

A third area of experience shared at the national inception workshop related to extension media production. Although not reflected in the project objectives above, one aspect of the client-oriented project was a training-of-trainers programme in the production of **extension** materials, ranging from locally made **flip** charts to slides and video films, depending on which resources were available. The opportunity was taken during the workshop to find out which other ministries and organizations were developing materials, how and under what constraints. Within the Ministry of Agriculture itself, there were limited supplies of

FIGURE 1
Flow chart of the innovation and implementation process



materials and great dependence on the provision of extension materials from the national level to the regions, zones, *woredas* (districts) and grassroots.

INTRODUCING INNOVATION

The implementation and innovative process involved a series of stages, as indicated in Figure 1. These stages developed from one another through a process of reflection or experiential learning. Stages at which this was particularly significant are indicated with “R” for reflection. The process was accompanied by events at national, regional and zonal levels designed to raise awareness of policymakers and to facilitate networking. A summary of project events is given at the end of this paper.

The project started with two activities: the first was the national workshop referred to above; the second involved familiarization of extension staff and preparing the ground for the case studies. Project staff from the national level travelled to the regions and pilot zones and, together with the coordinators (selected staff at regional and zonal levels), briefed staff on the project aims and objectives, assessed training needs and shared the criteria by which the case study *woredas* should be selected. The process was repeated within the selected *woredas* and development centre.

Implementation involved three training/village implementation cycles, each

building on the experience of the preceding one through reflection. The first cycle involved research to prepare training case studies and train teams to carry them out. Conducting the research provided an ideal opportunity to learn from experience and start to develop a client-oriented approach tailored to the Ethiopian context. This experience formed the basis of the training materials used in the first training of trainers. Once these trainers had trained grassroots staff and the approach had been implemented in a certain number of villages, a second training of trainers workshop provided the opportunity to reflect on the client-oriented approach so far developed and to improve on it. Grassroots staff were given further training in the light of agreed improvements to the approach and had the opportunity to implement this approach in additional villages.

Training components of the training/implementation cycles

Training objectives were set that blended the theory of participatory approaches and gender analysis with the experience gained during implementation, in order to produce the client-oriented methodology. Experienced national trainers were recruited for parts of the two training-of-trainers phases. Much of the training and most of the handouts were in Amharic. Active learning techniques including group work and role-play were extensively employed; a participatory evaluation technique was used throughout. One staff member from each region also attended a three-month course, Participation and Development, in the United Kingdom.

In preparation for the start of the first training of trainers, a guide entitled *How to make your extension programme client-oriented* was prepared and published in Amharic. The guide was designed for use by *woreda* staff and development agents and as a supplement to the training. Gender, the gender analytical framework and rapid or participatory rural appraisal were covered in the guide, as were the steps to be followed in using the gender analytical framework to put together a client-oriented extension plan. The guide drew on the case study experiences, with all examples of PRA tools and the gender analytical framework stemming from them.

A 25-minute video was prepared on client-oriented extension planning, using film taken during the case studies. The process of drawing up a client-oriented extension plan is illustrated in the video, which introduces the need for extension to reach women farmers, the use of various **RRA/PRA** tools and gender analysis and the validation and ranking of development constraints by the communities. The video was used in the training of trainers and also in awareness-raising workshops.

The three major areas of training were:

- participatory approaches, tools and techniques;

- gender, gender roles and needs and gender analysis;
- extension programme planning.

The level of experiential learning that took place during training increased as the project progressed. By the second training-of-trainers phase, a third of the time was spent reviewing the testing of the client-oriented extension approach and working together on how to improve it. To this end, *woreda* staff also participated, unlike the first training of trainers in which only zonal and regional staff participated. During this second phase, the three members of staff who had been on the overseas course provided five days of training. The last part of the training sequence, the second training of *woreda* staff, was not included in the project document but was seen as vital by all involved in the second training-of-trainers phase. Funds were consequently reallocated to enable training sessions to be run in each of the three pilot zones. During these, reports from the first round of testing of the approach were used for group work.

Implementation components of the cycle

Since the case studies were primarily a learning experience for all concerned – the teams were new in each location – they were each conducted slightly differently in order to try to identify the best and most practical approach. Client groups varied and in two cases the team commuted to the villages. In the third, in North Omo, they resided in the village. Each case study involved spending 10-14 days in the village, including time spent in documentation and analysis.

Implementation took place in the first 14 villages as soon as possible after training. The style of implementation varied between regions. In West Harerghe, staff devised an ordered, systematic and concise methodology. They stayed in town and travelled to the site daily. Using only three focus groups, they completed implementation, including analysis, in one week in each village. Implementation took longer in most instances in North Omo and North Wollo, especially where teams chose to work with many focus groups. Despite working with more focus groups, however, implementation was completed on average within 8-10 days.

Subsequent to the second training-of-trainers phase, implementation took place in a further four villages in West Harerghe, four in North Wollo and two in North Omo, along the lines agreed during training. Findings were then incorporated into the relevant extension programmes.

Training of trainers in extension materials development

Parallel to the cycle of training and implementation regarding participatory approaches, gender and gender analysis and client-oriented extension planning,

another training-of-trainers programme was carried out related to the development of extension materials. This programme was innovative in that it enabled staff at all levels to produce their own extension materials, if adequate resources existed. Previously, staff complained of lack of extension materials of any kind and depended on provision of these from the national level.

In brief, the training of trainers in extension materials production involved running three 2-week training courses for a total of over 70 regional and zonal staff from the pilot areas. These courses covered the history, philosophy and science of the media, non-projected and projected visual materials, types of mounting, screens and stands and radio and radio-forum programmes. Trainees then had several months to prepare gender-aware posters, charts, photographs, slides and videos related to extension. They also had to make flip-boards and stands out of local materials. A second ten-day round of training was subsequently given for the same participants, during which their assignments were assessed and further training provided.

POST-INNOVATION

The extension situation changed in several significant ways after the innovative experience was implemented in the project pilot areas.

First, extension staff became gender-aware, acknowledging for the first time the ways in which women were contributing to agricultural production. They recognized that women's needs and constraints were different from those of men, a result of their lack of access to certain resources and, more importantly, lack of decision-making power and control over resources.

Second, staff were able to work together in multidisciplinary teams from grassroots, *woreda* and zonal levels. Staff learned to pool their knowledge and experience and to hear and respect villagers' opinions. The participatory approach enabled staff to introduce and facilitate use of **PRA** tools by men and women villagers, thus enabling the villagers to express themselves and discuss and analyse their own situations. Staff learned to use teamwork to analyse information and how to present the information to villagers for validation.

Third, staff were able to conduct gender analysis using information from the **PRA** approach. They were able to learn about clients' activities and access to and control over resources. For the first time, they were able to make gender-specific extension recommendations.

Fourth, staff were able to identify with clients opportunities for development. Some were opportunities the clients could take up, some were for extension staff to adopt; others were opportunities for ministries or development organizations. Extension staff learned how opportunities could be taken up and incorporated

into normal extension planning, making it more locally specific and client-responsive. In this way, extension became more bottom-up and less top-down. This was helped by a favourable policy environment, in which the government was pursuing a move to decentralize local-level governance and planning.

Finally, to enable production of extension materials after the innovative experience, regional and zonal staff from the three pilot areas had been trained as trainers in the production of extension media. These ranged from locally made posters and flip-charts with bamboo stands to pamphlets, slides and videos, depending on the resources available. By the end of the project, materials of all types had been developed and tested.

The above examples relate to the situation among extension staff but capacity was also developed amongst rural men and women themselves as a result of the participatory approach. For the first time, villagers presented and analysed their situations and problems, ranking them and suggesting solutions. This was innovative for all farmers but especially so for women who, in Ethiopian culture, do not feel free to speak out. Because the extension teams worked with women separately from men, women were able to analyse and comment on their working days, activities, priorities and constraints. Their needs could for the first time be taken into account in extension planning. The extension teams recognized that women's and men's situations differ according to income, age, marital status and other factors, so women's needs were dealt with individually. The team usually worked with subgroups, such as widows, married women, elderly women, high-income women and landless women. This ensured that certain client-group needs were not masked by those of other groups. Since **PRA** tools rely on visual communication rather than writing, the higher illiteracy rate among women was no barrier for them in communicating their situations; all women were able to express themselves equally.

LESSONS LEARNED

As participatory approaches and gender analysis were new to the staff involved, many lessons were learned. These lessons were very clear, because of the action-reflection cycle employed in the innovative experience. The areas in which lessons were learned can be categorized as follows:

- logistics and methods of the client-oriented extension approach developed during the pilot period;
- networking, links and awareness raising;
- capacity building;
- institutionalization of the process.

Much was learned about the gender roles of different client groups, their con-

straints and needs. Specific lessons were learned concerning opportunities and constraints in developing the capacity to produce extension materials.

Logistics and methods

Because it was a pilot project, the approach and methods used were constantly reviewed and adapted as the teams involved sought to improve the client-oriented extension planning approach. These changes were possible as a result of the flexible use of the project framework and the participatory nature of project planning.

Below are some observations and lessons regarding the logistics and the methods used.

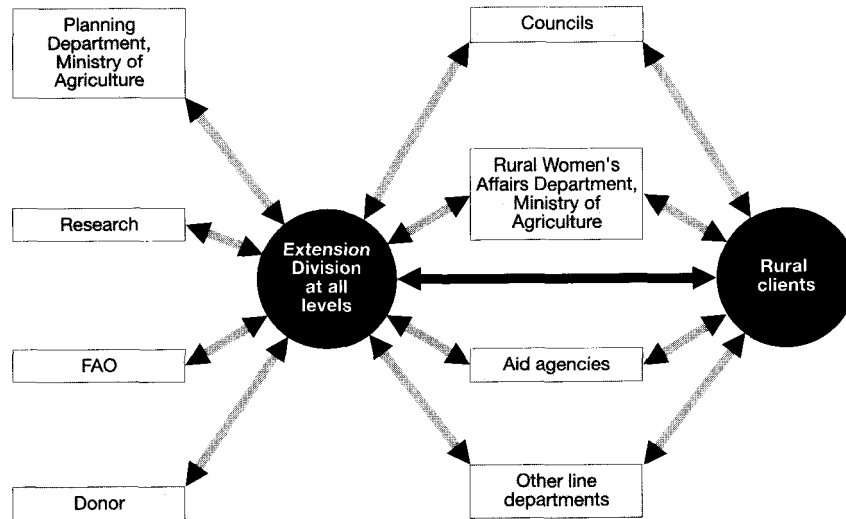
Logistics

- In situations where the team involved in the study comes from one line department only, it is essential that awareness is raised from the outset among policy and decision makers, such as council members, staff of other line departments and local representatives of aid agencies. Unless this is achieved, many constraints raised by villagers will remain unaddressed, and lead ultimately to client dissatisfaction.
- It is important that opportunities for development on which agents or *woreda* staff can act should be addressed as soon as possible after completion of the study, so that clients benefit from the time and effort they put into the study.
- Although both project objectives related to the Ministry of Agriculture at the national or central and regional levels, the nature of the project, involving capacity-building in participatory and client-oriented extension planning, dictated that activities had to start with the rural clients at grassroots level, leading to bottom-up planning.

Methods

- Although gender and participatory approaches and tools were new to team members, it was possible to provide basic training in a few days and gain insights useful for client-oriented extension planning through subsequent implementation. Becoming competent in the use of participatory approaches comes with practice, not detailed theoretical learning.
- It is important to be flexible in choosing which **PRA** tools to use according to time, need and acceptance by client groups, fitting in with the villagers' preferred times for meetings and using the gender analytical framework.
- Contrary to popular opinion, field staff on low pay with few resources or incentives were eager to learn and apply new techniques, despite having to

FIGURE 2
Flow chart indicating links between division-based extension project activities at all levels and rural clients



stay in the villages, sometimes cooking for themselves and working late into the night. Most stated that being involved in the training and implementation changed the way they worked.

- Zoning of *woredas* according to socio-economic and agro-ecological characteristics can facilitate the drawing up of comprehensive *woreda* extension programmes extrapolated from several studies conducted in each zone.

Networking, links and awareness-raising

Networking was part of the project framework, with both national and regional inception workshops planned. These served as a useful means of establishing links with other ministries and aid organizations working in the pilot areas in a similar field. These were not enough, however, to convince decision-makers to act on findings, as mentioned above. Similarly, there was a lack of communication between line ministries. Existing links are illustrated in Figure 2.

Lessons learned regarding networking, links and awareness-raising are summarized below.

- The link between research, extension and the rural clients is very important to ensure that specific agricultural constraints can be addressed as quickly as possible.

- Links with decision-makers such as council members and heads of other line departments are important, especially at *woreda* and zonal levels. If council members appreciate the need to address constraints raised by villagers during the client-oriented approach, they are more likely to pressurize the relevant line departments of local NGOs to assist in solving the constraints.
- Links with aid agencies working in the area in which the client-oriented approach is adopted are vital for the sharing of information and experience but cannot be expected to lead to financial or technical assistance.

Capacity-building

Capacity building, one of the two main project objectives, was based on a sequential system of training of trainers and field staff, implementation of the client-oriented approach at village level and production of extension media.

Lessons learned concerning capacity building are summarized below.

- The cycle of training of trainers, training grassroots staff, implementation, further training and review followed by implementation was critical. It is unlikely that anyone trained once and involved in implementation as a team member without follow-up would internalize nearly as much as was achieved through the action-reflection cycle.
- The pilot project was very much a learning process that relied on staff being able to analyse implementation, see where mistakes were made and decide how the approach could be improved. This would not have been achieved to the same extent if *woreda* staff had not been invited to the second training-of-trainers phase, as they had the most detailed knowledge of the villages in which implementation took place.
- The participatory nature of project planning was vital to the whole capacity-building process. Training objectives, content, location and length were decided by zonal and regional coordinators, the project advisor and the national programme coordinator working as a team. Implementation locations, timing and team membership were coordinated by zonal coordinators. Funding and reporting arrangements were flexible according to regional preferences and needs. Project planning style was thus participatory and bottom-up, allowing the project to be flexible and sensitive to other demands on extension staff in the field. For instance, the project framework was modified in the second year in order to provide time for extension staff to complete other duties.
- Capacity building would be greatly enhanced if there were a strong functioning link among extension, research and farmers. This would have allowed

for more specific and appropriate solutions to be identified in relation to many agricultural constraints.

Institutionalization

The client-oriented extension planning approach developed during the two years was fairly successful in the areas in which it was put into practice. It is not yet proved to be viable over a larger area, however. The use of participatory approaches and tools in learning about local needs and constraints provides relevant information only for that locality. The **PRA** approach involving multidisciplinary teams of staff spending up to two weeks in a single village cannot, of course, be applied in every village. There is a need to modify the client-oriented approach so that it can be applicable throughout an entire zone.

In the light of the above, some of the other lessons learned concerning institutionalization are outlined below.

- A policy environment emphasizing decentralized and gender-aware planning allows gender-responsive participatory approaches to agricultural development planning to be more successful and sustainable. Conversely, a centralized system lacking recognition **of** women's practical and strategic needs would hinder the sustainability of such approaches.
- Placing client-oriented extension planning within the male-dominated extension service, which is the centre of the problem, ensures that programmes and projects will have the greatest impact. It is important not to place any programme specifically related to gender in a women's affairs or home economics department, where impact may be marginal.
- A strong and interactive research-extension-farmer link is critical to the sustained success of the client-oriented approach.
- Client-oriented plans are **of** no use if budgeting problems prevent staff from taking much action for several months every year.
- Most importantly, the Ministry of Agriculture and other line departments must be flexible enough to accommodate client needs. To this end, training in local-level planning **is** vital for staff at regional, zonal and *woreda* levels to assist them in adjusting to the new level of autonomy and decision-making power given to them since decentralization. Hand-in-hand with this, it is important that the participatory aspect of the client-oriented approach is strengthened so that rural clients begin to acquire a sense of involvement, responsibility and even empowerment with regard to their own development.

Finally, there were several obstacles to the innovative experience. The Ministry of Agriculture was being reorganized, so there was much staff movement and

TABLE 1
Summary of main project events and dates

National inception workshop	March 1995
Familiarization tours to pilot regions and zones	March-April 1995
Drawing up of project logframe	May 1995
Training of teams followed by case study work	May-August 1995
Development of training materials, including guide and video	September-December 1995
First training of trainers from pilot regions	November-December 1995 (2 weeks)
Regional awareness-raising workshops	January-March 1996
Overseas training of three staff	March-May 1996
Training of staff in pilot areas	January-April 1996
Implementation of approach in 14 villages	January-June 1996
End of evaluation of project	July 1996
Second training of trainers	July-August 1996
Implementation of approach in a further 10 villages	September-December 1996
Zonal awareness-raising workshops	September-October 1996
Production of second edition of guide and video	September-December 1996
Training of staff in extension materials production	September 1995 - December 1996

many demands were being made on staff. The timing of activities therefore had to be flexible. Another problem was that of raised expectations among villagers when a team of staff came to work with them: it was important to explain the position of the team and what the villagers could and could not expect from them. There were, however, some facilitating factors, including a favourable policy environment and the use of selected extension staff at regional and zonal levels as project coordinators. A summary of the main project events and dates is presented in Table 1.