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### AG-EXTENSION NEEDS NEW PATHWAYS FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Globally agriculture is anticipated as major support towards the livelihoods and national economies as well. Three-quarters of the world's poorest billion people reside in rural areas. Vast majority of them depend upon agriculture for their livelihoods mainstay and survival. Therefore, mounting growth of agriculture refers to the prosperity of farming communities. Encouraging growth of agriculture is also one of the most promising way of confronting poverty, hunger and malnutrition. According to FAO, IFAD and WFP (2013) about 842 million people in 201-13 or about one person in eight globally was likely to be suffering from chronic hunger. These persons were not able to feed themselves regularly to carry the healthy Life. However, this figure is less than 868 million reported during 2010-12. This hunger is cause of various plights like poverty. Today, about 21% people are living below poverty line \$1.25 a day in developing world after the achievement of 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium development goal "to cut the 1990 poverty rate in half by 2015 (World Bank, 2014).

As mentioned earlier that agriculture is sound track towards development and prosperity around the globe providing significant share in economy. Smallholder farmers (fisher folk and livestock keepers) globally fabricate 50-80% of the staple foods consumed particularly in developing countries, but many are inadequately served by research, extension and advisory services. These rural dwellers require support and assistance to improve their knowledge level and skills getting more benefits of modern technologies, policies and market opportunities. Linking with development several other issues are listed hindering the development process immensely. Climate change is one

of them, today the hot topic and pointing a dire need to confront. Climate is changing and affecting agricultural productivity badly and farming communities are not able to confront the devastations. For instance, climate change raised various natural catastrophes around the globe. Floods in Pakistan during 2010 & 2011 are evident with heavy devastations. Jane *et al.* (2013) reported drought, livestock diseases and reduced rainfall along with conflicts over resources in Kenya. Ashraf and Iftikhar (2013) reported similar impacts in Pakistan and depicted the poor knowledge possessed by the farmers. No doubt, research around the globe is making progress to resolve the issues discussed. Prior, it is inevitable to increase the productivity is necessary for better outcome, but it is most important to make these technologies available to the farmers. In this regard, agricultural extension is anticipated as most significant genre. However, role of Extension is not productive as it should be. GFRAS (2012) was of the view that Extension services are mandatory to enable farmers to enhance their adaptation of improved practices to respond to emerging key challenges. Increased knowledge through extension services help farmers to gain resilience through better access to markets. Farmers Field Schools, marketing Training and use of innovative technologies and knowledge sharing are the few major methodologies to highlight sustainable agriculture.

According Baig and Aldosari (2013) in the past, extension systems have not been successful to make positive impacts on increasing agricultural production because dissemination of effective farming technologies was less focused. Few other constraints involved were inadequate investment, lack of qualified and trained extension staff; dwindling infrastructure; weak coordination mechanisms and functional linkages with other allied sectoral institutions including public

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and private sectors, absence of quality control and impact assessment mechanism, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, immense paperwork and political interference (FAO, 2005; APO, 2006, Shalaby *et al.*, 2011). Davis (2013) depicted that in 1980s and 1990s extension services had a hey-day, at that time money was poured into systems that boosted the agricultural technologies particularly in a top down, one-size-fits-all fashion. But, when this system showed inefficiency in late 1990s, spending on extension was declined. Likewise, today multiplication of extensions services has emerged as major issues. Baig and Aldosari (2013) were of the view that most promising and dominant challenges in agricultural extension include Pluralism, Privatization, Globalization and Market Liberation, World Trade Order (WTO), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Devolution and Decentralization. That is also true that modification like pluralism, privatization and ICTS has changed the landscapes of agricultural extension through making technology sharing easy and cost effective but situation differs geographically.

Today the landscape of agricultural extension has been changed tremendously fetching more pluralistic with mounting involvement of private sector (dealing with agro-inputs, agribusiness, financial services), non-governmental organizations (international as well as local); producer groups, cooperatives and associations; consultants (independent and those associated with or employed by agri-business/producer associations) and ICT-based services. All these stakeholders brought additional manpower and resources for extension advisory services. In addition, these sectors also promoted new knowledge, skills, and expertise. However, this pluralism raised another question of ensuring quality providing technical backstopping, and ensuring collaboration and synergy between diverse extension advisory service providers (Davis and Sulaiman, 2012). These new issues mean world need more systematic agricultural extension to tackle all the plights. In past, role of agricultural extension was just communicating and disseminating the relevant information but now its dire need to reinvent the concept. Extension also meant to be complementary rather than competitive with allied departments for the improved agriculture and betterment of rural masses. Today extension tends to focus on facilitation of all the steps involved in whole farming process (Baig and

Aldosari, 2013). There is dire need to make extension participatory and demand driven as the needs of the farming communities are increasing. Few countries like Kenya, Liberia, South Africa and South Sudan therefore, has drafted their extension policies to strengthen the farmers' voice. As Extension is committed to long term goals and seek to meet new demands, therefore, more systematic research is requires to indicate how extension can contribute efficiently in rural development process. At current, research in extension is fragmented and insufficient to support evidence based policymaking. Rivera and Sulaiman (2009) suggested making agricultural extension a better instrument of engine for the promotion and publicity of innovation, dissemination of knowledge and facilitation of development. For said purpose it is inevitable to better understand and document the impacts of extension services on rural development outcomes globally.

The International Conference "Emerging Horizons of Agricultural Extension for Sustainable Rural Development<sup>1</sup>" emphasized collective action of various stakeholders and to augment capacities to generate, exchange, and make effective utilization agricultural technical knowledge for improvements and build effective linkages for research to contribute in development process. But to play this vital role it is essential to bring all the extension personal and institutions on mutual platform to formulate extension policies and goals for the prosperity. Inadequate investment and lack of coordination are one of the prime issues regarding poor performance of extension and advisory service, in this regard mutual concerns of nations globally is vital and necessary.

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<sup>1</sup>International Conference entitled "Emerging Horizons of Agricultural Extension for Sustainable Rural Development" was held on 27-28 Feb, 2014 at Institute of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, University of Agriculture Faisalabad, Pakistan. Guest Editor (Dr. Muhammad Iftikhar) was the Chief organizer of the Conference.