

e. Technical liaison and support

This responsibility is vital to extension and is perhaps the single most neglected area of work in research and extension. In very few countries is this responsibility adequately handled. There is virtually no way the field agent can perform adequately unless the TLS function is carried out well. If s/he does, s/he is acting independently of the system, as an autonomous agent, not as an agent of the system. See Appendix D for a more detailed discussion of the function.

The most effective alternative is for the extension entity to assume this role, assign persons to it, provide them the training needed for the function, charge them with effecting linkage to research, and supporting them with resources adequate to the task. With an adequate liaison and support unit, extension can effect liaison with other sources of technology, if there is more than one research entity in the country. This unit can also help with area-specific research. A fully operative technical liaison and support unit would discharge all the functions expected of the verification as well as those expected of the research-extension liaison officer.

One alternative is for research to assume the role. It is in the interest of the research entity to do it, if extension does not assume the responsibility. It is in the interest of research to facilitate the role, even if extension assumes it. It is seldom that research can give the technical support the field agents need. If research assumes the responsibility, the best that can be hoped for is for research to promote its wares. This will be a minimum of support to field agents and that specific to its most recent technology innovations.

If research accepts this responsibility, it often does it through the research-extension liaison officer. The fact that it is referred to in the singular, indicates the minimum level it implies. In fact, with a technical liaison and support unit in extension, it still may be a good idea for the research entity to have a research-extension liaison officer. The responsibility of this officer can also be broadened to include bulletins, radio broadcasts, and other information services.

Still another alternative is the technology verification officer in extension. His function is to take the technology that research is recommending and verify it in the conditions in which extension programs are working. The extension verification trial is another form of the testing and adaptation trials of research and is a legitimate and necessary function for extension to perform. The verification label does not indicate that the support function is adequately handled.

In very small countries, area-specific research and technical liaison and support could be consolidated into a single unit. It would be responsible for testing and adapting technology introduced by the subject matter research and promoting it through the field agents.