

## Appraising Agriculture Development Strategy of Nepal from Agricultural Extension Perspective

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### Abstract

Nepalese economy is primarily dependent on agriculture which provides employment to the vast majority (>60.02%) of the people. The goal of the Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) is to make agriculture sector more productive, equitable, and sustainable driver for upgrading Nepalese economy. This library based paper thus aims to appraise ADS from extension perspective which is essential for educating farmers about new ideas and information related to agriculture development. The study thoroughly appraises ADS programs, policy documents, scholarly articles and secondary data fact supplemented to the research issue educating and supporting farmers. The result of the appraisal show that implementation of a voucher system and the decentralized strategy of establishing Service Centers for Community Agriculture Extension in each Village Development Committee, use of ICT and GESI based approaches are praiseworthy. However, there are still major obstacles to overcome resource constraints, implementation hurdles, and unclear roles due to the federal governance transition. The paper concludes that to enhance betterment of the ADS, there is a need for increased funding, capacity building, and improved infrastructure. Additionally, stronger monitoring and evaluation systems, along with promoting public-private partnerships and ensuring active farmer participation are essential. Addressing these issues is crucial for achieving goals and objectives of the ADS.

**Keywords:** Agriculture development, Nepal, agriculture polices, extension, farmer

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## Introduction

As an agrarian nation, Nepal is primarily dependent on agriculture which generates its economy and provides employment to the vast majority. The agriculture sector contribute about 20.0 percent on Gross Domestic Product that is equal to US\$ 41 billion and offering employments to 60.02 percent of total population (MoF, 2024). Besides, 67 percent of households are directly and indirectly involving in agriculture sector (NSO, 2021). However, Nepalese agriculture sector has a thunders of challenges, such as low productivity, limited access to technology, and inadequate inputs such as irrigation, fertilizer, electrification and road connectivity (GoN, 2015). Nepalese agriculture was in low stages of development, the vast majority of people being agriculture/agri-food driven with low production efficacy, competition with poor technological adaption. In this respect, Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) (2015-2035) was designed to upgrade Nepalese agricultural sector into a more productive, sustainable, and inclusive engine of economic growth.

ADS is an extended form of Agriculture Perspective plan (APP) which is regarded as first long term agriculture development plan (1995-2015) implemented in Nepal. APP aimed to bring a positive change in agriculture sector, which eventually brought some advancement in food security, production and poverty. But Nepal's inability to achieve anticipated growth and weak growth performance as well as focus on cereal crop production lead to formation of ADS thus taking experience from APP to guide the agriculture sectoral development. ADS has been enhancing Nepalese agriculture sector by focusing on non-farm rural activities, production section, processing sector, service sector including research and extension helping in fostering trade, finance, reducing out migration (GoN, 2015).

ADS focuses on decentralization of extension and research activities while fostering the linkage between researches, education and extension. Extension is decentralized establishment of Community Agriculture Extension Service Centers (CAESCs) in each Village Development Committee (VDC). The idea was/is to strengthen extension centers and promoting scheme of vouchers to the beneficiaries' farmers (GoN, 2015). The aim of decentralized research, extension can be accomplished by

inclusion, sustainability, private sector and co-operatives and connectivity. These will eventually lead to some outcomes such as higher productivity, profitability, commercialization and increase in competitiveness that ADS has predicted.

The ADS lays out a number of goals and tactics intended to raise farming production, encourage sustainable farming methods, and better farmers' livelihoods. The successful implementation of agricultural extension services is essential to reaching these objectives since they are vital in providing farmers with information, innovations, and best practices. Extension services serve as a conduit between farmers and research institutes, enabling the uptake of innovative techniques and technologies. Such services have the potential to increase agricultural productivity and sustainability. In this context, the purpose of this study is to appraise Nepalese ADS from the agriculture extension perspective. The study thus, tried to understand how extension services are essential to achieving the high standards set by ADS and to upgrading Nepalese agriculture sector.

## **Objective and Methods**

This study aims to appraise prospects and challenges of ADS of Nepal from agriculture extension perspective. In doing so, this study intended to offer a thorough assessment of ADS which has been implementing as a long run plan in Nepalese agriculture development. Therefore, the study used library based document analysis method commencing with a comprehensive analysis of ADS. Besides, some of the other policy documents and scholarly articles related to agriculture development and ADS are also reviewed. Besides, in order to appraise agricultural development and extension service coverage, the statistical data also have been supplemented properly.

## **Overview of Agriculture Development Strategy**

ADS (2015–2035) is the primary undertaking as per the continuation of APP. It projected to have cost NRs. 510 billion and was designed to grow the agricultural sector as a whole (Palikhe & Adhikari, 2023). In light of

agricultural growth, APP evolved into a strategy with erratic results. Certain sectors, such roads, horticulture, and community forests, met their goals; nevertheless, the performance of cereals, fertilizer, and seed was subpar; the performance of livestock and irrigation was inconsistent; and the growth of the agricultural GDP as a whole was sluggish. The APP was developed with a limited viewpoint on technology that was unduly influenced by the green revolution and was inappropriate for much of Nepalese agroecology. Because there was little support for the APP's program in terms of institutions, policies, and resources, its implementation was subpar.

The major agricultural stakeholders, including farmers, the business sector, and cooperatives, were not actively involved in the development and execution of the APP, and its ownership was weak. Unresolved were land-related difficulties. The ADS was developed with the lessons discovered from the APP experience in mind (GoN, 2015). A ten-year action plan for the ADS (2015–2024), was created after the APP was implemented for the all-encompassing expansion of the agricultural industry. One of the most important documents for Nepal's economic development was the Agricultural plan (1994–2014), which was prepared by the American company John Mellor Associates and the Agricultural Project Service Centre. The Asian Development Bank and other relevant organizations provided additional support, and it had six key tactics and five interconnected goals (IFAD, 2021)

## **Goal and Objectives of ADS**

The primary goals of the ADS are accelerating growth of entire agriculture sector, reducing rural poverty and improving livelihoods of the people. The goals are directly linked with five factors of agriculture development such as improved security of food and nutrition, competitiveness, reduction of poverty, equal and improved rural households income, and enhanced rights for farmers (FAO, 2023). Similarly, the objectives of ADS are to create a self-sufficient, competitive, sustainable, and inclusive agricultural sector that promotes economic growth, improves livelihoods, and ensures food

and nutritional security. Furthermore, focusing on environmental sustainability and climate change resilience, it seeks to modernize and reform Nepal's agricultural system through higher production, diversification, commercialization, and value addition (GoN, 2015).

## **Designing ADS**

This section explains how the ADS will promote inclusivity (social and geographic), sustainability (natural resources and economy) the growth of the private and cooperative sectors. And also explains about connectivity and market infrastructure such as agricultural roads, collection centers, packing houses, and market centers, as well as information and communication technology (ICT) and power infrastructure, such as rural electrification. It is also provisioned that ADS will accelerate the growth of the agricultural sector through four strategic components: profitable commercialization, competitiveness, good governance, and productivity (ADS, 2015). These actions will help to realize the strategy's vision such as increased food and nutrition security, agricultural trade competitiveness, equitable income for rural households, and improved farmers' livelihoods and rights through multi-sector, and connectivity-based growth (Paudel et al., 2016). More specifically, self-reliance, sustainability, competitiveness, inclusiveness, growth, improved livelihood, food and nutrition security are vision components of ADS (GoN, 2015).

## **Basic Framework of Extension in ADS**

Improved governance, higher productivity, profitable commercialization, farmers' right and their classification are the major framework components of ADS (GoN, 2015). Based on these framework components, Food and Nutrition Security Program, Value Chain Development Program, Decentralized Science, Technology, and Education Program (DESTEP), and the Innovation and Agro-entrepreneurship Program are offered as flagship programs. Among the programs, DESTEP speaks heavily in extension perspective. It aims mainly at decentralization of extension program and services in the community level.

In order to improve responsiveness to the needs of farmers and agro-enterprises, this initiative seeks to decentralize the research and extension while promoting collaboration between research, extension, and education. More so, the three primary components of the decentralized extension system are as follows: (i) establishing CAESCs in each VDC; (ii) enhancing the capabilities of the agricultural extension stations that are currently in place and those that are planned to offer the CAESCs backstopping services; and (iii) promoting the use of vouchers to give farmers access to the top extension agents and extension service providers. In practice, CAESCs regulated by Department of Agriculture and Department of Livestock (Paudel et al., 2016). Three-tiered government system of federal Nepal has also devolved power/jurisdiction to support a bottom-up strategy for delivering agriculture extension programs (Tamang et al., 2020).

ADS equally addresses farmers, co-operatives and private sector as the leading stakeholder. This approach is the first step towards co-operative and private extension. ADS states that higher productivity is the function of extension and the extension should be decentralized extension system responsive towards farmers ad agro-enterprise needs. ADS encourages the participation of private sector, co-operatives, NGOs and public sector in agriculture extension. ADS visualizes to adopt creative demand-oriented technology uptake and distribution through pro-poor, decentralized extension (FAO, 2023). In order to guarantee that farmers are involved in the strategy's development, decision-making, execution, and oversight, the ADS offers institutional frameworks. When creating agricultural sector policies, monitoring the sector, and incorporating them into district-level Food Security Networks, farmers' representatives are consulted. More specifically, the ADS ensures farmers' representatives in steering committees functioning in central and local levels. They are also becoming board members of Commercial Agricultural Alliances, Value Chain Development Alliance and more than 4,000 VDCs based CAESCs and board of National Agricultural Research Council (NARC) (GoN, 2015).

The ADS recognizes that a large number of stakeholders are now involved in agricultural extension and that their importance will only grow over time. Rather than advocating for a massive increase in the number of human resources in the public extension service, the ADS supports the capacity building of current government human resources and a change in their role from providing extension services to acting as an overall facilitator of agricultural extension services. This job transition will be accompanied by a greater emphasis on delivery of high quality inputs at 4,000 CAESCs operating in VDC level (GoN, 2015).

The ADS acknowledges that the availability and uptake of new technologies, along with the efficient management of natural resources and other inputs to achieve an increase in total factor productivity, are critical to the long-term productivity. Whilst subsidies may provide a short-term solution for certain issues or flaws in the market which are not a long-term solution for productivity. In addition to testing a voucher system to provide farmers more control over the inputs and extension services they choose, the ADS will concentrate on developing and implementing sustainable technologies and practices (GoN, 2015). ADS focuses on making agriculture extension GESI responsive in all districts. District-level GESI staff will make sure that extension initiatives are responsive to GESI during the planning and implementation phases. The ADS recognizes that competitiveness of agricultural sector depend on the availability and adoption of new technology as well as the effective management of natural resources (ADB, 2011). In this line, Pasa (2017) also claimed that technological intervention has been fostering commercial farming and generating rural economy in Lele village of Godawari municipality, Lalitpur district.

## **Framework of Extension in ADS**

In order to successfully address the various requirements of farmers throughout various regions, ADS places a strong emphasis on decentralizing extension programs. The establishment of CAESCs in local level thus put this into practice. Under this framework, the centers are

providing reliable, high-quality services to the local farmers. The centers are equally educating farmers, community leaders, and other stakeholders and also has been increasing public knowledge in general. Besides, the capability of technician operating extension services is another crucial component of CAESCs. This covers both the initial training and continuing professional development to guarantee that the employees are knowledgeable about the newest agricultural technologies and practices. Furthermore, seed money has been providing to assist with the founding of CAESCs, helping to defray the initial setup expenses and guarantee that these centers may start up without financial barriers. Following its establishment, CAESCs will get technical support to offer knowledgeable counsel and assistance on challenging agricultural matters. Regular external monitoring will be carried out to evaluate CAESC's performance, ensuring that its goals are met and pinpointing opportunities for development.

Another key priority is enhancing the capability of the current sub-centers and centers for agriculture and animal services. To improve technicians' abilities, this entails planning workshops, study visits, and training sessions. These programs seek to improve the general caliber of extension services rendered by introducing participants to fresh methods and international best practices. Resources will also be allotted for farmer training programs and farm demos, which will facilitate actual application of new techniques and hands-on learning. The ADS intends to upgrade the facilities' gear and infrastructure in order to support these centers even more. These centers will be able to provide more thorough and efficient services if they upgrade their premises and acquire new equipment. As part of the plan, a trial voucher program will be designed implemented, and evaluated in recognition of the need for accessible advisory services. For this scheme budget will be allocated for 50,000 vouchers, allowing farmers to access extension and advisory services tailored to their specific needs.

ADS innovation also includes the creation of farmer marketing schools. These educational institutions aim to increase program capacity and prepare trainers to impart focused instruction on market-oriented farming



methods. VDCs unit have been given priority for value chain development will be the main focus of implementation, ensuring that farmers in these regions obtain the education and training necessary to maximize their market potential. It is a strategic priority to advance ICT in agricultural extension. The ADS intends to supply computer PCs or Tablets to every CAESCs and other institutions for offering effective and efficient services. Furthermore, the creation of mobile applications will give farmers access to resources and information in real time, improving their capacity to make defensible judgments. An essential part of the plan is teaching field staff to be aware of gender equality, GESI and nutrition. In order to guarantee GESI in extension services, ADS will advocate for boosting the proportion of women among Junior Technical Assistants (JTAs). In this line, Civil Service Act also has addressed a wide range of concerns, and also make sure the appropriate individual is in the correct place, creating and using specialized posts (Shrestha, 2023).

### **An Appraisal: Prospect of ADS from Extension Perspective**

In terms of the social dimension, gender disparities are also noticeable in Nepalese farm and non-farm activities. Farmers now have more work to do as a result of the recent outmigration of the younger generation, particularly women and senior farmers (Adhikari & Hobley, 2015). The departure of youth from the village has negative effect agriculture production trend which is determinant of rural development (Chaudhary, 2023). NSO (2021) also reveals that about 1,700 Nepalese youths would be going abroad on a daily basis in search of work. More so, there are 2.2 million Nepalese residing overseas, with 81.28 percent of them being men and 18.72 percent being women. These people departed the nation in search of work possibilities (Aryal, 2022). As a result, there has been a rise in feminization in agriculture. Women are thus becoming important part in the production of crops and cattle in addition to ordinary household duties and off-farm work. Significant progress has been made in social inclusion and gender parity in public agriculture development initiatives over the years. The number of persons from distant locations, socially disadvantaged groups, and women farmers who participate in government

support programs and agriculture extension has significantly increased. But among these groups, genuine participation has been lacking (Palikhe & Adhikari, 2023).

There are various advantages to Nepal's decentralization of agricultural extension services, especially with the creation of CAESCs. By offering farmers individualized, locally relevant assistance, these centers increase farmer access to agricultural extension services. The technical and academic capacity of the technicians have been offering skillful trainings to the local farmers. Enhancing agriculture and animal service centers results in better resources and infrastructure, which has been provide services more effectively. The use of a voucher system for extension services guarantees focused support and encourages farmer engagement. Furthermore, the adoption of contemporary farming techniques, communication, and information distribution are becoming improved by the promotion of ICT in agricultural extension. Connecting farmer groups with financial institutions facilitating them to receive necessary funds. The GESI approach and nutrition education training also have been promoting gender equality, social inclusion, and better nutrition awareness in agricultural practices.

### **Challenges of ADS from Extension Perspective**

Despite the positive aspects, there are several challenges associated with the decentralization of extension services. The foremost is implementation challenges, such as uniform application across diverse regions and potential delays in setting up CAESCs and voucher systems. Resource constraints, including insufficient funding and limited technical and infrastructural support, hinder the widespread implementation of these initiatives. The inconsistent training quality and limited access of training programs, further complicate efforts to enhance agricultural extension services. Monitoring and evaluation challenges also make difficult to assess the impact of these initiatives accurately and ensure effective monitoring. Technological barriers, such as limited digital literacy among

farmers and inadequate internet connectivity in remote areas, also impede the effective use of ICT in agricultural extension.

The current rural subsistence farmers are also unable to pay for the services provided by private extension agents. It's unclear how extension services can be functioned jointly by government and private sectors (Paudel et al., 2016). There are still several crucial rules that need to be started, like reorganizing NARC, creating additional extension service centers, and offering vouchers for inputs and extension. According to the government official, an attempt has been made to set up CAESCs at each local government office. But no action has been taken to restructure the NARC because the government has not offered any financial or logistical support. In a similar vein, the Ministry of Agriculture and Local Development appears hesitant to set up a voucher system for extensions and inputs (Palikhe & Adhikari, 2023). Lack of modern inputs has affected productivity growth and thrown off the country's production goals. The Agriculture and Water Resource Committee of the Parliament (2016) stated that the ADS should specifically cover farmers who are involved in agricultural production, land, irrigation, fertilizer, seed, modern technology, agriculture extension service, infrastructure, agricultural product storage, value chain, market linkage, subsidies, and easy access to financial services.

## **Discussions**

ADS was approved under the previous unitary system of governance. The Government of Nepal ratified a new constitution in 2015, immediately after it was adopted. This new constitution created a federal system of governance with three tiers of government, 753 municipal government units, including 460 rural ones, seven province governments, and the federation. Further, ADS was invented to upkeep the implementation of the Local Self-Governance Act of 1999, which has since been replaced by the Local Government Operation Act 2017 (Devkota & Thapa, 2019). However, this structure is not entirely hierarchical, and there is still some ambiguity about the exact distribution of responsibilities within and among

the several public sector activity groupings. The democratic republican constitution 2015 adopted federalism with the establishment of the three-level government, each with distinct concurrent and exclusive power jurisdictions (Burlakoti & Nettle, 2024). The constitution has devolved specific power/jurisdictions to the three-level governments. More precisely, land use and agricultural research and development are the purview of the federal and provincial governments, extension services are considered the sole domain of local governments (IFAD, 2021).

In practice, GoN has set up a suitable voucher system implementation mechanism for recording and distributing all of the facilities it is planning in order to lower the current barriers to program execution. Additionally, the responsibilities of municipal and provincial governments must be well-defined, and the new Provincial ADS ought to be used to expeditiously implement policies (Paudel et al., 2016). Access to production technologies need to be affordable and accessible to all. The literature also says that public extension services are not accessible according to of geographic region or farmer types in Nepal (FAO, 2014). As a result, subsidies for production technology, the growth of agricultural extension services, and the evaluation of their efficacy ought to be explicitly stated (AWRCoP, 2016). ADS's goal of creating pluralistic, community-owned, and managed CAESCs for expansion throughout the nation is directly aided (IFAD, 2021).

To address these challenges and build on the positive aspects, several strategies for improvement are essential. Enhanced funding and resource allocation are crucial, with increased budget allocations for extension services and adequate seed money for CAESCs. Capacity building and training programs should be standardized and expanded, with regular workshops, study tours, and on-field training for technicians and farmers. Improved infrastructure and technology access, including upgraded service centers and necessary equipment and internet access, are vital. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems through robust mechanisms and feedback systems will help assess the effectiveness of initiatives. Promoting farmer participation and awareness through

awareness campaigns and community engagement in planning and implementation is key.

## **Conclusion and Policy Implications**

ADS becoming comprehensive program designed to upgrade agricultural sector into a more productive and growth oriented. While implementing ADS, decentralizing research and extension activities also becoming key component of ADS which promotes the integration of extension, education, and research. The extension services encouraging farmers to obtain voucher system that intended to increase responsiveness to farmers' demands and promote the uptake of cutting-edge, market-driven technologies. Technology, and Education Program also places a strong emphasis on decentralizing extension services. The ADS also places a strong emphasis on the involvement of private industry, cooperatives, and farmers in the formulation, execution, assessment, and monitoring of policies. ADS's strengths are found in its decentralized approach, which focuses on bringing services closer to farmers, and in its inclusive approach. ADS also acknowledges the feminization of agriculture as a result of outmigration and advances social inclusion and gender equality. Conclusively, the success of ADS in revolutionizing Nepal's agricultural sector hinges on resolving implementation obstacles, guaranteeing efficient coordination among diverse stakeholders, and adjusting to the recently established federal governance system. By doing this, Nepal can raise its agricultural productivity, profitability, competitiveness, and commercialization, which might upgrade national economy and improve lives of the farmers. Finally, increment in public expenditure in agriculture sector can utilize local resources and mobilize farmers' knowledge/skills properly. Therefore, ADS further need to extend public-private partnership for achieving its long-term goals and objectives in coming years.

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