



Contributions to group work and to the management of collective processes in extension and rural development



Fernando Landini ^{a, b, c, *}, Gilda Vargas ^d, Vanina Bianqui ^{a, c}, María Inés Mathot y Rebolé ^b,
Manuela Martínez ^b

^a Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, Argentina [National Council of Scientific and Technological Research], Argentina

^b University of La Cuenca del Plata, Argentina

^c University of Morón, Argentina

^d University of Buenos Aires, Argentina

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 May 2016

Received in revised form

6 July 2017

Accepted 22 September 2017

Keywords:

Family agriculture

Rural extension

Advisory services

Group processes

Rural development

Cooperatives

ABSTRACT

Working with farmers' groups, associations and cooperatives constitutes a fundamental element of extension work with family farmers. Despite the fact that extension practitioners face many problems in this area of their work, there is currently a lack of academic literature that systematically addresses the topic and offers concrete guidelines for practice. Thus, this paper will aim to clarify the benefits of farmers' groups, associations and networks within the context of family farming, systematise problems faced by rural extensionists when working with farmers' groups and associations, provide conceptual tools for understanding group and associative processes, and construct a set of guidelines and recommendations for facing said problems. In order to achieve these aims, the authors conducted an extensive literature review and drew upon their personal experience on the topic.

Results suggest that some of the benefits of associative work are: better access to inputs, produce and credit markets, the facilitation of learning processes, the empowerment of family farmers as social actors, and a reduction of rural extension costs. Additionally, with respects to the problems faced by extensionists, the following can be highlighted: individualist attitudes and conflicts between farmers, scarce participation and commitment, problems with leaderships and with organisations' administrative management, and the lack of extensionists' training to address these processes, among others. With regards to the factors that increase trust and cooperation are: interpersonal communication and mutual knowledge, sharing problems, values and objectives, and the existence of shared rules for the functioning of the group that include sanctions for transgressors. In this context, the extensionists' role will be that of facilitating processes of construction of group relationships, creating rules for the groups' functioning and developing the group's capacities for self-management.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Rural extension, advisory services (particularly those that are public), and rural development interventions in general, are usually carried out by means of methodologies, approaches and settings that require working with groups of people (mostly farmers) and coordinating between different social actors or interested parties. That is, they have to deal not only with technical issues, but also

with group and inter-institutional processes.

In this line, it is clear that group methodologies are widely used in rural extension and advisory services as a means to reach farmers (e.g. Agbamu, 2015; Matiwane and Terblanché, 2012; Ndoro et al., 2014), and that supporting farmers' cooperatives and organisations is often the objective of many rural development initiatives (Alimirzaei and Asady, 2011; D'Haese et al., 2005; Landini, 2016a). Likewise, nowadays, different approaches highlight the importance of interinstitutional articulation and coordination, and consider them to be key components of rural extension work, innovation processes and management of natural resources (e.g. Cacivio and Ringuet, 2012; Catullo et al., 2013; Herrera Tapia, 2006; Leeuwis, 2004; Ojha, 2011). Thus, it becomes apparent that the

* Corresponding author. Barrufaldi 2364, ZIP Code 3300, City of Posadas, Argentina.

E-mail address: landini_fer@hotmail.com (F. Landini).

management of collective processes (i.e. processes that take place among individuals and among groups of individuals such as organisations and institutions) is at the centre of rural extension and advisory services.

Now, in the context of the management of collective processes (on a group and on an interinstitutional level), rural extensionists and advisors have to carry out a series of key functions that involve the facilitation of relationships and consensus building (Abdu-Raheem and Worth, 2011; Gutiérrez, 2014), the development of group and self-management capabilities (Boas and Goldey, 2005; Boza et al., 2015; GFRAS, 2012; Rendón et al., 2015), the support of horizontal learning processes (Samuel et al., 2012; Selis et al., 2013), and mediation and conflict management (Berger and Neiman, 2010), among others. Thus, it is clear that the role of rural extensionists and advisors requires a strong psychosocial component (Landini, 2016b; Landini et al., 2014a; Méndez, 2006) that should not be neglected. However, most extensionists and advisors worldwide are specialised in agricultural production but not in management of social processes (Alves and Saquet, 2014; Landini, 2015; Landini and Bianqui, 2014; Landini et al., 2009; Selis et al., 2013). In consequence, the importance of training rural extensionists in the management of social processes (Cuevas et al., 2014; Landini, 2013a; Leeuwis, 2004), and of interdisciplinary rural extension work (Carballo, 2002; Landini, 2007a, 2016b) becomes apparent.

In this context, it is not unexpected that rural extensionists and advisors tend to face different problems in the areas of group management and interinstitutional articulation (Ekasari et al., 2013; Landini, 2012a; Matiwane and Terblanché, 2012; Nogueira, 2013). Likewise, nowadays, there is a lack of academic articles that systematically address the problems faced by rural extensionists and advisors in these areas or that propose a structured set of guidelines or recommendations to deal with them. Such a paper would no doubt be useful, particularly for extensionists' and advisors' training, but also for researchers who have to address these processes. Thus, this paper will aim to (1) clarify the benefits of farmers' groups, associations and networks within the context of family farming, (2) systematise problems faced by rural extensionists while managing collective processes, particularly when working with farmers' groups and associations, (3) provide conceptual tools for understanding group and associative processes, and (4) construct a set of guidelines and recommendations for facing said problems.

2. Benefits of family farmers' groups and associations

Different authors have claimed that family farmers' groups, associations and networks possess multiple benefits for farmers as well as for the extensionists that assist them, even though it is also important to note that such benefits are not always materialised (Abebaw and Haile, 2013; Alimirzaei and Asady, 2011; Karaya et al., 2013; Vasconcellos and Vasconcellos, 2009). In fact, admitting that expectations are not always met leads to the need for caution and the realisation that partaking in farmers' groups and associations is not the solution to all family farmers' problems. Likewise, it is also important to acknowledge that all farmers do not necessarily benefit, in an equal manner, from partaking in groups or associations. In fact, some studies suggest that men tend to obtain more benefits from associative work than women (Ampaire et al., 2013; Garforth, 1994), which is an invitation to pay close attention to the possible existence of gender inequities within collective processes.

Farmers' groups can be of a varying nature and shape. For instance, they can spontaneously have emerged from within the local community dynamics, or instead have been supported by

public institutions or NGOs (Boas and Goldey, 2005; Garforth, 1994). At the same time, they can have different degrees of formalisation, from community groups supported by interpersonal bonds to formal organisations adapted to legal regulations (Lapalma, 2001), such as cooperatives or even commercial companies. In terms of what they signify for their members, they can be perceived as a place where farmers with similar problems gather (De Dios, 2011; Mora, 2014), but also as spaces of resistance against economic inequity and expulsive economic and productive systems (Berger and Neiman, 2010).

In order to meet the first objective of this article, the benefits of family farmers' groups and associations, as outlined in academic literature, will be systematised and presented. It is worth mentioning that some of these benefits are mentioned more frequently than others. Nonetheless, this does not mean that those mentioned more often are superior or more important than the others. This is particularly relevant when considering that what really matters is that those benefits exist and can contribute to extensionists' and farmers' work, depending on the interests of the group, of the advisors, or on the institutional, economic and productive context.

The first benefit is general, in the sense that it includes others that will be expanded upon later, and refers to the role that farmers' cooperatives play in the provision of, and access to, different services. In this line, authors have highlighted that farmers' cooperatives can help provide access to products and services that otherwise would be inaccessible for small agricultural producers. These products and services are diverse and include agricultural inputs such as seeds and agrochemicals (Abebaw and Haile, 2013; Gutiérrez, 2014), credit (Karaya et al., 2013; Ragasa et al., 2016), training and technical assistance (Boas and Goldey, 2005; Karaya et al., 2013), transport services (Gutiérrez, 2014) and support for commercialisation (Abebaw and Haile, 2013; Boas and Goldey, 2005), among others.

With regards to having access to the market, family farmers often mention problems related to the sale of their produce, a topic also mentioned frequently in academic literature on the subject (Landini, 2016a; Silva and Leitão, 2009). This problem emerges mostly due to farmers' small produce volume and their limited negotiation power with regards to other actors that make up part of the commercial chain. In this sense, it has been argued that farmer associations allow for the increase of the scale of operations (Landini, 2007b; Olatunji and Letsoalo, 2013) and for the design of joint marketing strategies (Boas and Goldey, 2005; Estevam et al., 2015), thus increasing their negotiation power with potential buyers (Caicedo Díaz, 2013; Camacho et al., 2012; Sari, 2011), which allows them to sell their product in better conditions. Likewise, it also has been mentioned that this negotiation capacity also facilitates access to input markets, acquiring seeds and fertilisers, among other elements, in bulk at lower prices or better conditions (Abdu-Raheem and Worth, 2012; Sibiko et al., 2013). However, it is also important to note that farmers' associations or cooperatives not only contribute to commercialisation by means of a more fluid integration within long commercial chains, that is, those wherein multiple links exist between producers and consumers, but also through the development of short chains and local markets, where producers and consumers interact without any intermediation (Cieza, 2012; Paz et al., 2013).

Likewise, cooperatives and farmers' groups have been specifically mentioned as a means to facilitating the access to credit (Ifenkwe, 2012; Ragasa et al., 2016; Samuel et al., 2012). For instance, it has been argued that many cooperatives provide credit to their associates (Alimirzaei and Asady, 2011; Boas and Goldey, 2005) or that farmers' self-help groups can be a means for sharing financial resources by gathering small amounts aimed at

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4759929>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4759929>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)