

THE PILOT AREA APPROACH IN THE NETHERLANDS

IR. J. M. A. PENDERS

In the period 1953-1956 an experiment as a new extension procedure, intended to be used as an integral part of rural development plans, was carried out in the Netherlands through 2 pilot villages. A joint farm and home approach was introduced in 2 hamlets comprising about 30 neighbouring farms each, where the group approach in extension work of a temporarily intensive nature was carried out along systematic lines by extension programme planning based on a previous survey and finalized by an evaluation of the results obtained. The experiment served in the meantime as a demonstration, attracting some ten thousand visitors from the Netherlands and abroad.

Since 1956 this extension procedure is being applied on a large scale for rural areas in the process of development, in so-called "pilot-areas." In 1963 these numbered nearly 100, covering about one quarter of the agricultural acreage and comprising approximately one third of the agricultural holdings in the country as a whole. The great regional differences in production costs of milk—the main produce for small farms—were the original motive for starting pilot areas.

Categories:—The pilot areas are meant to accelerate rural development, improvement of internal production and living conditions in the developing countryside through systematic intensive extension work in the regions concerned. They may be distinguished by the

following characteristics :—

- a. less advanced rural regions, where, as is expected, extension work will permit a considerable improvement ;
- b. rural regions, where a rather fast and far reaching improvement of production and living conditions will have to take place by land consolidation. On these the programmes have to synchronize kind with intensity of extension work. About three-quarters of the pilot areas belong to this category ;
- c. rural regions, where not only improvements of the rural structure is involved, but the total socio-economic structure of the region may also have to be changed by the establishment of industrialization centres. This category presents the most complex problems especially because more ministries are engaged in the overall development plan. The rural pilot area plan as such can only form a part of and will have to be subordinated to the overall development plan for the region.

Choice of the areas : The number of the pilot areas is determined by the amount of money made available by the government. The allocation is carried out by the national agricultural extension council in consultation with the provincial councils. A preliminary survey as to the relative backwardness of the rural regions was made by the sociographic branch of

the agricultural economics research institute in co-operation with the agricultural extension service. Furthermore consideration is given to regions where consolidation schemes will be carried out and for which a long term plan had been set up. These regions cover about one fifth of the total agricultural area.

It is difficult in practice to achieve an equilibrium between technical, economic and social standards in order to get indications for priority to be given to the various regions, apart from the fact that for reason of state policy an even distribution over the country as a whole has to be regarded. Finally the capacity of the existing regional extension services to handle the additional extension work properly must be taken into consideration.

Size of the areas : There is a wide variation in size of the pilot areas, ranging from somewhat more than 100 farms covering 1500 hectares to 4000 farms covering 25,000 hectares. Experience has taught that the ideal size would be one with 200 to 300 farms with one additional extension-officer in order to ensure a close co-operation between the extension service, the pilot area committee and the population within the area. In cases where a larger area is necessary—as by the consolidation scheme or that required for the establishment of industrialization centres—sub-areas should be formed with a co-ordinating committee for the area as a whole.

The planning procedure : The plans for the pilot areas are made within the frame of broad general outlines issued by the national agricultural extension council, which together with the provincial councils supervise the programmes. A national sub-committee for rural home economics is assisting these councils in regard to the home economics part.

The general outlines were changed and improved twice within a period of eight years to fall in line with the experience gained. This may be regarded as a good indication for extension work, which has to remain a dynamic enterprise with flexibility in outlook and readiness to take into account the fast structural changes going on, especially in the areas concerned.

The plan itself has to be set up primarily by the pilot area committee to be selected amongst the rural population, both male and female, in consultation with the respective rural organizations, the extension office acting as advisory members of the committee. It may be regarded essential to emphasize this aspect as it is meant to stimulate :

- a. the self-reliance of the population against the tendency of professional rural development and even of the extension office who direct the plan. The professional extension personnel will have to confine themselves to providing basic information as to the factual situation, formulating the priorities chosen by the people and drawing up the annual plan of work. The alpha and omega of real progress lies in all in the effective co-operation with the people and in the stimulation of their self-reliance.
- b. the achievement of one integrated development associating to the maximum extent, agriculture, culture and rural home economics.

The selection and training of "leaders" in the pilot areas—within and outside the committee—need thorough consideration.

The period : The total pilot period must be divided into :—

- a. one or more years' preparatory period during which a survey has to be carried out.

9. 11. out providing a base for a long term plan to be built up. The extension service is engaged to a great extent in this survey, which if handled properly may, in the meantime, arouse the necessary public interest and that of the rural population for the plan. Practical courses in agriculture (including farm management) and rural home economics, along with extension work as to social aspects are particularly effective in this period.
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15. four years' main period of intensive extension work in agriculture and rural home economics. When land consolidation is involved, this period starts with the allotment of the new farming and housing units ;
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18. final period of one to two years at the most to finalize the plan in such a way that the population will be able to help itself without further assistance from outside sources. The raising of funds amongst members of the pilot area to ensure additional extension work after the period, if this might be required, would have to be stimulated. This has already been realised in a few areas.
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ative costs : The total amount of money allocated to additional extension work in the pilot areas equals annually about $\frac{1}{2}\%$ of the gross value of agricultural output in the respective regions. This means that the intensity of extension work in the pilot areas is about twice that in the other rural areas. In this connection it may be mentioned that the local agricultural extension officer in the Netherlands covers on the average 400 farms.

R The home economics part as percentage of total costs of additional extension work is increasing steadily from nearly 10% in 1956 the first year, to about 30% after seven years of

operation, the average pilot area period.

For the pilot area as a whole, comprising more than 50,000 farms with an average acreage of 9 hectares, about 150 additional agricultural officers and 100 home economics extension officers are employed temporarily.

Apart from agricultural and rural home economics, inter-related social aspects of rural life are also considered more systematically in the extension plan and work, though still to a limited extent in financial terms as this aspect of extension work requires only a small per cent of the total money devoted to the pilot areas.

Some results : The short period of operation will hardly permit a scientifically justified evaluation. The national and provincial secretaries of the agricultural extension councils are assembling the necessary data in this regard. Nevertheless some preliminary results may be mentioned.

In one of the pilot areas, a backward grassland district, the production costs per kg. of milk (the regional disparity as to this indicator was the starting point for the pilot areas in 1956) were reduced relatively, by two cents in five years, which compared favourably with another more advanced grassland district. This would lead to the conclusion that an input of about 25 guilders/ha within a period of some years in additional extension work as applied in that pilot area had yielded an output of about 100 guilders annually, which means a ratio of 1 : 4 through this kind of intellectual investment.

The increase of labour productivity on small mixed farms in several pilot areas was 15—20% higher than that in other areas with about the same external production conditions. This effect was achieved within a period of