

# Professional Extension Capability Pathways

Change Practice – Guiding Principles

Version 1

# TNQ

Drought Hub



[tnqdroughthub.com.au](http://tnqdroughthub.com.au)



Australian Government  
Department of Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry



Future  
Drought  
Fund



JAMES COOK  
UNIVERSITY  
AUSTRALIA

This project received funding from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund

## Relational Practice – Building and Sustaining Self and Relationships with Others

The TNQ Drought Hub brings together farmers, Indigenous landholders, communities, researchers, and businesses to co-design approaches and solutions for drought resilience in Tropical North Queensland. The Hub explores and shares innovative approaches to solutions towards building drought resilience in the region. Key to our activities is enhancing connectivity and collaboration between various groups and service providers in our region.

### Change Practice

*“When time is invested in building relationships by listening to, and understanding what farmers want to work on, we create an environment where change is possible. Relationships are essential for facilitating change and building capacity for change. Obstacles to effective relationships and change can occur if extension officers are inclined to ‘fix’ problems or have a fixed agenda to implement a project or meet targets that fail to address a farmer’s priorities or goals. Change is both a process and an outcome of the collaboration between extension officers and farmers. Both are important and necessary considerations that can be monitored and measured as incremental improvements and/or a step change.”<sup>1</sup>*

### Introductory Comments

This document sets out some guiding principles to support decision making related to extension practice. It is essentially a summary document to support the scoping out of a project or program for an early career extension professional or a more seasoned professional that may wish to review an alternate approach. It is intended to support your decisions, there are three complementary resources setting out some guiding principles associated with Change, Technical and Relational Practice. Each of the documents can be considered as required to support effective extension practice decision making.

### Context

Good extension practices incorporate understanding behavioural change which encompasses the fields of sociology and psychology. The complexity of behaviour change lies in the difficulties in changing behaviours, as opposed to raising awareness for change.<sup>2</sup>

This guideline seeks to provide some principles for effective change management, reviewing the complexities and potential approaches for behavioural change will assist in the delivery of successful extension practices within program or project delivery for the TNQ Drought Hub.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/images/Qld-EMP\\_Report.pdf](https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/images/Qld-EMP_Report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://evaluationtoolbox.net.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=6:what-is-behaviour-change&catid=2:what-is-behaviour-change&Itemid=89](https://evaluationtoolbox.net.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6:what-is-behaviour-change&catid=2:what-is-behaviour-change&Itemid=89)

## Complexity of Behavioural Change

Behaviour change interventions are often planned and evaluated as simple, linear processes of change. However, change requires an understanding of the complexity it presents and how this impacts decision making. Consideration needs to be given to: the number of interacting elements; an understanding that interactions are nonlinear; and the system is dynamic and has a history, external conditions and systems constantly change.<sup>3</sup>

## Key Principles of a Participatory Extension Approach

The Participatory Extension Approach recognises the importance of the producer. The principles encompass: Participation, Empowerment, Ownership, Context-Specificity, and Sustainability. It is a participatory and farmer-oriented approach that aims to promote sustainable agricultural development by engaging producers as active participants in the extension process representing a significant departure from traditional top-down extension approaches to promote sustainable agriculture and rural development.

Table One: Participatory Extension Approach

<b>Participation</b>	Recognizes the importance of involving farmers as active participants in the extension process. Farmers are not just recipients of information and knowledge but are active contributors and co-creators of knowledge and solutions.
<b>Empowerment</b>	Acknowledges the need for farmers to have the power and agency to make decisions that affect their livelihoods. Aims to empower farmers by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to make informed decisions and take ownership of the extension process.
<b>Ownership</b>	Highlighted the importance of farmers taking ownership of the extension process. Recognizes that farmers are experts in their own contexts and that they have valuable knowledge and experiences that can contribute to the development of appropriate and effective agricultural technologies and practices.
<b>Context-specificity</b>	Emphasizes that extension approaches need to be context specific and tailored to the local needs and challenges of farmers. Emphasizes the co-creation of knowledge and solutions through collaboration between farmers and extension agents to ensure that the extension approach is relevant and effective in addressing the local challenges faced by farmers.

---

<sup>3</sup> [https://evaluationtoolbox.net.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=10&Itemid=16](https://evaluationtoolbox.net.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10&Itemid=16)

<b>Sustainability</b>	Recognizes the need for extension approaches to be sustainable over the long term. Emphasizes the development of relationships between farmers and extension agents based on trust, collaboration, and mutual learning, which can support the continued co-creation and adaptation of agricultural technologies and practices. <sup>4</sup>
-----------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

### Increasing engagement to enable greater change: Eight-step process for successful change.

Whilst there are different approaches for various contexts, environments, and personalities of producer groups the following are some guiding principles for successful change, not all steps will be required in all instances.

1. *Create a sense of urgency:* Help others see the need for change and the importance of acting immediately.
2. *Pull together the guiding team:* Make sure there is a powerful group guiding the change – one with leadership skills, bias for action, credibility, communications ability, authority, analytical skills.
3. *Develop the change vision and strategy:* Clarify how the future will be different from the past, and how you can make that future a reality.
4. *Communicate for understanding and buy-in:* Make sure as many others as possible understand and accept the vision and the strategy.
5. *Empower others to act:* Remove as many barriers as possible so that those who want to make the vision a reality can do so.
6. *Produce short-term wins:* Create some visible, unambiguous successes as soon as possible.
7. *Don't let up:* Press harder after the first successes. Be relentless with instituting change after change until the vision becomes a reality. Whilst persistence is important producer ownership of behavioural change is key for project legacy and maintaining momentum.
8. *Create a new culture:* Hold on to the new ways of behaving, and make sure they succeed, until they become a part of the very culture of the group.<sup>5</sup>

### Selecting methods of agricultural extension

Extension practices can range from discussions with a small group of producers to a more systems-based approach across agricultural industries. Various extension tools can be utilised as set out in Table Two.

Table Two: Methods of Agricultural Extension

<sup>4</sup> Saini, S., Mallick, S. and Padhan, S.R., 2023. Participatory extension approach: Empowering farmers. *Biotica Research Today*, 5(4), pp.326-328.

<sup>5</sup> Jennings, J. R., Packham, R. G., & Woodside, D. (2011). *Shaping Change: Natural Resource Management, Agriculture and the Role of Extension*. Wodonga, Vic.: Australasia Pacific Extension Network.

Extension method	Primary focus
1. Facilitated groups/farmer-led groups/small-group learning (including peer-to-peer learning; farmer action groups; focus farms, discussion groups)	Provides a platform for social learning and can include focus farms, demonstrations
2. Technology development (multi-actor approach)	Collaborative approaches with farmers to address specific topics and problems such as application of a new technology or tools
3. Training	Enables the development of knowledge, skills and techniques as a foundation for change
4. Information provision	Facilitates access to relevant information
5. Consultancy (one-to-one, mentoring, coaching)	Provides individual support to make decisions about changes
6. E-extension	Uses information and communication technologies to provide information and extension support virtually/remotely
7. Co-innovation	Collaborative process that brings people together to negotiate and implement shared goals and outcomes
8. Best management-practice frameworks (BMPs)	A formalised process for self-assessing capacity and then responding to gaps or deficiencies
9. Social marketing	Aims to better understand and engage people to towards specific behaviour changes

Source: Selecting methods of agricultural extension to support diverse adoption pathways: a review and case studies.<sup>6</sup>

## Supporting Resources

Various source documents are referenced in the development of this guideline. The reader is encouraged to review the full source documents where further detailed information is required in your decision-making processes.

---

<sup>6</sup> Nettle, R., Major, J., Turner, L., & Harris, J. (2022). Selecting methods of agricultural extension to support diverse adoption pathways: a review and case studies. *Animal Production Science*, 64(1). <https://doi.org/10.1071/AN2232>