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Peer Exchanges on Extension Innovations - An Action Research Project of the RELASER Network in Latin America

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Introduction

The Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services (MEAS) project, a USAID activity implemented by a University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)-led consortium, has the objective of defining and disseminating good practice strategies and approaches for establishing efficient, effective and financially sustainable rural extension and advisory service systems. MEAS has focused its efforts in Latin America through partnerships with organizations that have strong involvement with extension system development in the region. The Latin American Network for Rural Extension Services (RELASER) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) partnered in this initiative to provide six exchanges where innovative programs and practices are shared with extension organizations involving 12 countries in South America over the course of calendar year 2015.

Background

MEAS sponsored a Spring Extension Institute in Montevideo, Uruguay with co-sponsorship from RELASER and participation from the FAO Peru Representative from September 29-October 3, 2014. Extension directors and private sector experts representing Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Chile, Peru, Nicaragua, Uruguay Paraguay and the Dominican Republic were in attendance. The week long institute was hosted by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Uruguay.

A multitude of themes were discussed with presentations from MEAS staff from UIUC and experts from RELASER and FAO. Each country provided an update on the extension and advisory services (EAS) models that are being implemented in their respective countries. In a participatory approach, EAS best practices and innovations were presented and discussed. Extension pluralism, information and communication technology (ICT) innovations, financial models to support extension, the U. S. extension land grant university model, Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS)'s New Extensionist concept paper, gender equity with smallholders, and public/private partnerships were among the themes of the institute.

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The final day of the workshop was dedicated to developing action research exchanges with Latin American countries to enable institutions to share innovative models and programs with the goal to improve practices through learning new behavior changes in the extension organizations hosting each exchange. Each group was composed of a pair of extension administrators from Latin American countries who determined what innovation was most relevant and which of the two countries would take the lead in developing the content for the "Exchange on EAS Innovations."

The EAS country representatives expressed interest in contributing their time to developing these exchanges, so MEAS agreed to provide resources for the travel and organization of the exchanges, while host country organizations covered other costs. RELASER assumed the responsibility for the coordination of the exchanges. The following table describes the timeline of activities for the pilot action research project of the country exchanges.

Action Research Approach

This initiative sought to facilitate the exchange of innovative programs and support their development and adoption in the host countries using an action-research approach between countries of the region. Two countries were paired for each exchange based upon their common interest in a specific innovative EAS program or model. These paired countries also determined which country would be the host country to receive the information of the EAS Innovation and which country would provide the team of experts to present the innovation program or model through sharing innovative practices and extension models.

A steering committee provided a conceptual note for the exchange process as well as the EAS Innovation Exchange Application and Budget. The steering committee, consisting of María Isabel Paredes from RELASER, Benjamin Mueller from MEAS, and John Preissing from FAO, developed the exchange tools and provided guidance and support during the application process.

Table 1. Timeline for the EAS Innovation Exchange Action Research Project

Activity	Jan/Feb 2015	Mar/ Apr	May/ Jun	July/ Aug	Sept/ Oct	Nov/ Dec	Jan 2016
Define and refine the theme of the EAS Innovations Exchanges	X	X					
Develop and present the county exchange application and budget	X	X					
RELASER coordinates the orientation to the exchanges and the exchange countries work together to develop exchange materials		X	X	X	X		
RELASER, MEAS and FAO partners meet via Skype to review progress and provide support in the development of the exchanges		X	X	X	X		
Exchanges are implemented in 6 countries			X	X	X		
RELASER Annual Conference in Santa Marta, Colombia					X		
Preparation of Report						X	X

The exchange countries identified initial themes, which were reviewed by the steering committee before each exchange took place. Appropriate MEAS skill-building resources and innovations along with RELASER and FAO resources relevant to the topic areas of these exchange country pairs were provided to assist in the planning. MEAS provided the resources to finance the travel, accommodation, and organization of Exchange Projects (ca. US$2,000 per exchange).

RELASER, MEAS and FAO steering committee supported the development of proposals. RELASER was responsible for organizing the travel arrangements for the exchanges and managing the resources and to support the exchanges. EAS innovation experts who traveled to the host country contributed their time for the development of the EAS Exchange Workshop materials. The EAS experts worked with their respective EAS host country leadership in preparing an exchange report, photos of the event and a listing of participants and organizations. In some cases exchange countries provided co-financing to complete or expand the scope of the proposals and opportunities for participation in the exchanges to include national extension stakeholders and producer organizations.

At the Annual RELASER Conference held in Santa Marta, Colombia in October 2015, Mr. Mueller presented results of the EAS Innovation Exchanges. During the RELASER conference, Ms. Heinz conducted audio interviews with exchange participants and exchange project representatives from RELASER and FAO in order to document first-hand experiences, lessons learned, and key takeaways from multiple perspectives. Links to the audio files as well as their transcripts can be found in Appendix I.

Overall Impacts and Outputs

As a whole, MEAS operates with a focus on achieving developmental results and impacts through assisting institutions and organizations to identify and engage in practices that best fit local contexts and opportunities. These are monitored through the project Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP).

The following MEAS outputs were accomplished as monitored by the MEAS Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP). Tables 3-8 provide further descriptions of the exchange workshops.

Working towards "Component 1 - TEACH - Disseminate Modern Approaches to Extension", six training workshops were conducted, ranging 2-5 days long. This Technical Note serves as another output.

Working towards "Component 2 – LEARN - Document Lessons Learned & Good Practices," this pilot action research project was completed, and a Technical Note has been prepared on the impacts of the pilot action research EAS exchanges. New extension strategies, approaches and methods were defined during each meetings. The descriptions of exchange are provided in Tables 3-8.

Though this project contributed to several of the indicators in the PMP, the actual numbers of farmers in Feed the Future countries and other developing countries whose livelihoods and quality of extension services will be improved as a result of these exchanges is difficult to forecast. The greatest impact with farmers involved in Feed the Future will be in Honduras, a designated Feed the Future country, that participated in the EAS Innovation Exchanges.

Photo 1. Participants of the Chile-Ecuador exchange

Across all the exchanges, nearly 600 extension administrators and experts, such as FAO, Heifer International, IICA, CATIE International Research Center, leaders from FBOs (farmer based organizations), agricultural researchers, agricultural students and extension stakeholders from national and local settings attended the EAS Innovation Exchanges.

The innovations and programs presented in the six host countries have the potential to induce behavior change in the EAS organizations involved to improve the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of farmers in Feed the Future countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and the RELASER network of affiliated countries.

Box 1. Excerpt from interview with John Preissing (FAO, Peru)

What linkages formed as a result of the exchanges across borders?

Individual countries extension systems and the leaders have gotten to know each other. Now that we're at this meeting (the RELASER Annual Meeting in Colombia), we can see there are directors of extensions, but also field level technicians and public and private groups. However, when the exchanges occur, a country officially sends a delegation, which I think it creates a more serious discussion, and creates a better foundation. … I think it promotes a high level of engagement in discussion and exchanges in policies and capacities.

Particularly in the exchanges involving Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Peru, and Uruguay and Paraguay, the EAS model provided illustrative models of the activities of private sector organizations engaged in extension best practices and active public/private partnerships. These presentations should have a multiplier effect to encourage other private sector companies to initiate or improve their extension involvement in their respective Latin American and Caribbean settings.

Individual Exchanges - Outcomes

Tables 3-8 below summarize each of the six EAS Innovation Country Exchanges. Participants stressed that this initiative facilitated the exchange of knowledge and experiences; and has helped reduce communication barriers between the organizations involved in the host exchange countries. Additionally, the MEAS seed capital offered for the exchanges promoted the mobilization of resources to the national level and support of the EAS forums that, in some cases, had a multiplier of up to four times the value of the initial investment of capital to finance the exchanges. The in kind resources both to develop the exchanges by the visiting EAS experts and the involvement of the host country participants was an significant contribution that demonstrated the willingness of EAS professionals, researchers and FBO leaders to contribute and participate in teaching and learning about EAS innovations and newly developed, cutting-edge extension programs.

Photo 2. Peru-Mexico exchange participants gather at the end of the meeting

This exchange experience demonstrates the potential of extension networks to connect individuals, teach processes and lessons learned, and increase the capacity at all levels of extension to improve services for farmers. Exchanges have been a tool for capacity building and a platform for participants to organize events on extension in most cases. The Spring Institute and the EAS Exchanges helped to

strengthen RELASER and its members by increasing knowledge through the exchanges and greatly increasing the number of people intensely involved in the extension network of Latin America. For many of the participants it was their first, sustained knowledge exchange experience around extension. Many participants (i.e., Uruguay and Mexico) saw new possibilities for productive collaboration.

Key Collaborative Activities

Overall, the exchanges allowed individuals at all levels of extension from different national contexts to collaborate and share experiences. Nicaragua and Dominican Republic (Table 3) visited key stakeholders as well as producers during the meeting and conducted a forum with extension workers and other stakeholders to share experiences and vision.

Photo 3. Participants from the Nicaragua- exchange go on a field visit

Peru and Mexico (Table 4) presented models and experiences of agricultural extension in their contexts, including a study of extension reforms in South America by FAO and RELASER, a study on holistic extension in Mexico, and experiences of agricultural technology transfer in Peru by Instituto Nacional de Innovación Agraria (INIA) and Fondo de Cooperación para el Desarrollo Social (FONCODES). The meeting culminated in a discussion on extension models in Mexico and Peru regarding policies for promoting and measuring impact. The Mexico EAS model, as a privately-led extension approach, demonstrated the key features and advantages of private sector extension with support from the public sector.

The Paraguay and Uruguay exchange (Table 5) facilitated discussions on opportunities for public-private partnership management in Paraguay and gender issues in extension concerning women extension workers, rural women producers, and gender policy. Participants also discussed the Uruguayan system of validation of private extension workers to provide assistance to producers with public funding.

Photo 4. Paraguay-Uruguay exchange participants

The aim of the exchange between Costa Rica and Honduras (Table 6) was to revise and validate a document of extension methodologies that the Ministry of Agriculture of Costa Rica had developed. The expert from Honduras reviewed the document and afterwards conducted interviews with local key stakeholders for the validation (public and private), (these can be found at http://meas.illinois.edu/ras-exchange). At the end, he participated in a meeting of the Country Fora of Costa Rica where they again discussed and revised the document. To finish the process, his suggestions and input were then incorporated in the document that is now guiding the work of the public EAS in Costa Rica.

Fundación Universitaria Agraria de Colombia (UNIAGRARIA), Colombia, (Table 7) hosted participants from Bolivia to exchange ideas and practices to mobilize and train extensionists. UNIAGRARIA presented their extension projects, sharing key features of their research center for social and extension innovation, as well as insights from their literacy

teaching program for rural development and urban and peri-urban agricultural project.

Photo 5. UNIAGRARIA representatives present during the Colombia-Bolivia exchange

The final exchange involved 14 people from Chile and Ecuador (Table 8) engaging in extension dialogue focused on increasing professional capacity across Chile. The study presented a methodology for (i) identifying the competencies required from extensionists in a given extension program, (ii) conducting assessments of the competencies of the extensionists that are part of the program to identify gaps, and (iii) designing training programs to address the gaps. Participants also visited Programa de Desarrollo Local (PRODESAL), a farmer cooperative group, to ask questions and learn what is currently being done and what is needed in Chilean extension.

Box 2. Excerpt from interview with Lorena Romero (Consultant, Chile)

One of the lessons we learned is that in general, countries in the region have many common themes and various challenges. With that, there are more or less similar gaps that some have already been solved with some effective actions [by one country]. Therefore, this learned knowledge is important to help solve the other country's extension problem.

Key Results

The variety of participants and the development and learning activities that were represented resulted in positive takeaways for institutions involved in the exchanges. The key results are documented in the tables below, but the following are some highlights from each exchange.

To start, the participants at the Nicaragua – Dominican Republic meeting identified key limitations and areas for improvement and developed a list of actions to address them, which included plans to establish a cooperation agreement with CATIE for strengthening the competencies of extension workers. The exchange also led to the documentation of the extension models of CATIE, Fundación para el Desarrollo Tecnológico Agropecuario y Forestal de Nicaragua (FUNICA), Heifer International, and the EAS in the Dominican Republic.

Besides learning about different extension models to improve their services, Peru and Mexico made a cooperative agreement to promote exchanges between INIA and Mexico on the topic "Extension and innovation processes such as smart territories in Mexico".

Paraguay and Uruguay identified areas for future cooperation at the end of the exchange, with Paraguay particularly interested in the system of outsourcing technical assistance and the role of NGOs in the rural development committees. Extension leaders in Paraguay were impacted by the presentation by the extension experts of Uruguay related to their program of methods for Family Farming Agriculture. The IICA country offices of Uruguay and Paraguay are analyzing the possibility of launching a joint extension project as a result of their exchange meeting.

The Costa Rica – Honduras exchange opened the door for future exchanges between the countries, with participants citing that the structure of the meeting was positive, as stakeholders are more open with "outside" actors that understand the context of extension. Participants made several recommendations for the preparation of the document on Costa Rican

methodological guidelines for extension; the document has been finished using the inputs of the review and is being printed and distributed to all public extension offices in the country.

UNIAGRARIA of Colombia reacted to the exchange with Bolivia by organizing a "Latin America workshop of extension and rural development", made up of individuals from public, private, and civil society sectors.

Ecuador indicated interest in using methodology from Chile to develop extension profiles based on competencies of extension workers, as well as the Chilean methodology used to define Family Farms. Both countries agreed to seek a mechanism to repeat an extension competencies exchange. Additionally, the directors of extension both in Chile and Uruguay are discussing a possible bilateral replication of this initiative. Uruguay is especially interested to learn about the methodology for identifying gaps in competencies, as well as for developing a training program to address the gaps.

Box 3. Excerpt from interview with Francisco Aguirre (RELASER, Chile)

I think the future expansion or innovation systems is in having stronger networks. Stronger regional networks. And this is not an issue only of extension, or of people who are dedicated to agriculture. I think it's a broader issue. To what extent these can these exchanges strengthen the social fabric? They can strengthen at intermediate levels. We have to see who will be involved in the exchanges, looking at who is permanent? In 20 years you see that producer organizations, farm leaders, and extensionists are relatively stable, who must be involved.

Conclusions

There are a number of opportunities for future collaborations between the actual exchange countries:

- Future exchanges that allow for more in-depth understanding of their respective EAS systems and innovative programs and approaches.
- Outside experts providing an incentive to bring together a broad sector of stakeholders and EAS-related organizations within the countries to participate and learn from regional EAS experts.
- Exchanges of experts may serve other types of exchanges well, such as extension study tours for students, farmer leadership exchanges, and research/learning projects involving scientists from the region.
- The involvement of RELASER as the lead coordinating organization and FAO Peru's support, provided an opportunity for EAS professionals and stakeholders to have an increased awareness of the resources and opportunities presented by their involvement with these respective organizations.
- With a relatively small amount of international donor resources being allocated to this action research project, large numbers of EAS leadership and stakeholders had an opportunity to travel and present to a country within the region interested in their respective areas of expertise; these opportunities might be further supported by donor recipient institutions such as the MEAS partnership in the future.
- One approach for innovation to take place involves a shared experience that is driven by a participatory approach where actors are drawn by common interests and shared

goals. The climate for innovation is enriched by a planning process that is driven by the local EAS actors. As we know, a key component of a sustainable EAS model is that it is "farmer-driven." In the same manner, EAS innovation should be considered more likely to be developed when local EAS actors drive the process for their exchanges and shared experiences of knowledge and systems.

- The exchange experience reflects the need and interest of south-south exchanges, to learn from each other and to share what they are doing.
- The presence of a EAS networks and country fora allow this type of initiatives to be built and to connect the EAS stakeholders of the different countries.
- The key role of projects like MEAS that enable learning across country borders; MEAS was a "catalyst" for strengthening links between regional and national stakeholders. These interventions empower and strengthen the existing structures.
- There is further value added in supporting the development of working networks between extension professionals. This first effort proved to be valuable. As many countries in the region seek to strengthen family farming-related extension services, to increase the monitoring and evaluation skills, improve gender-sensitive capacities, and improve climate change related extension skills, there is much that different countries can learn from each other through these exchanges.
- MEAS and USAID can continue to play this catalytic role with extension service improvements with specific themes (climate, gender, nutrition, youth, etc.) on extension management and structure issues (local vs. national provision, research-tied or independent from research, etc.).
- MEAS and USAID as well as other international donor supported extension improvement projects may take under consideration that extension model development in many Latin American countries has evolved as compared to other regions. Donor-developed support in Latin America may have a greater impact in the region through partnering with regional and local partners in a participative, responsive approach rather than presenting project themes that are currently being used in other global regions. What is an effective EAS approach in Latin America is not necessarily the same for Africa and Central Asia where donor support is more prevalent.

Box 4. Excerpt from interview with Maria Isabel Paredes (RELASER, Ecuador)

What are some lessons learned from the planning and implementation process of organizing cross country exchanges?

- There are a lot of interesting lessons learned. One is that it is possible to engage high level policy makers in initiatives like this one, when you have the back-up of a network and that has previously built relationships among the stakeholders. In this contexts they will find time in their busy agendas to contribute.
- Another lesson, you don't need much money to do this. In this project we invested $16,000, which is a low amount compared to the results we are getting. It's not that expensive...you need to do the coordination and the networking, and we've found that being in a network is what makes it easy to arrange such a thing: 12 countries with people all over the region coming together.

Table 2. Number of participants per exchange

DATES	Exchange Countries	# Women	Total Combined # of Participants
8/24-27/2015	Dominican Republic (host country) Nicaragua	40	**150**
8/5-6/2015	Peru (host country) Mexico	35	**120**
8/4-5/2-2015	Paraguay (host country), Uruguay	20	**56**
6/22-26/2015	Costa Rica (host country) Honduras	11	**23**
8/17-22/2015	Colombia (host country) Bolivia	139	**236**
10/21-23/2015	Chile (host country) Ecuador	6	**11**
Total Participants for all exchanges		**251**	**596**

Table 3. Nicaragua and Dominican Republic

Sharing experiences of extension models developed in Nicaragua and Dominican Republic (August 24 - 27, 2015)			
Host Country Institutions Involved	Visiting Country Institutions Involved	Key Activities	Key Results
Dominican Republic: - Ministry of Agriculture (Director and Sub Director) - Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in the Dominican Republic - Tropical Agriculture and Education Center (CATIE - Dominican Republic) - Dominican Agrarian Institute (IAD) - Several producer organizations	Nicaragua: - Foundation for the Technological Development of Agriculture and Forestry of Nicaragua (FUNICA) - National Union of Farmers and Ranchers (UNAG) - Tropical Agriculture and Education Center (CATIE) - HEIFER International - Universidad Nacional Agraria (UNA)	- Visit to key stakeholders of the extension system - Visit to producers (i. subsistence farmers, ii. farmers oriented to international markets and iii. “territorial dialogue spaces”) - Forum with extension workers and other stakeholders to share experiences and visions - Elaboration of a document of the exchange	- The team discussed and reflected on extension models and how to improve their systems with key RAS stakeholders. - They identified the key limitations and fields for improvement and developed a list of actions to address them (one of them is to establish a cooperation agreement with CATIE for strengthening the competencies of extension workers). - The exchange led to the documentation of the extension models of FUNICA, CATIE, Heifer, and the current approach of the Dominican Republic. - 150 persons attended the exchange including key administrators of the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO as well as CATIE Research Center. Leaders from several producer organizations were also present.

Table 4. Peru and Mexico

Peru and Mexico: "Open Workshop on Extension Experiences and Models" (August 5-6, 2015)			
Host Country Institutions Involved	Visiting Country Institutions Involved	Key Activities	Key Results
Peru: - National Institute of Agrarian Innovation (INIA), incl. Director. - Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MINAGRI), incl. Vice Minister and Policy Director - National Agricultural Innovation Program (PINIA) - FAO Peru - Ministry of Social Development and Inclusion´s Cooperation Fund for Social Development (FONCODES) - 120 people from various sectors participating in the workshop including universities, public and private sectors and NGOs	México: - National Institute for Capacity Development for the Rural Sector (INCA Rural), incl. General Manager - Secretariat of Agriculture of Mexico (SAGARPA), incl. Director. - National Service of Training and Rural Assistance (SENACATRI / *Servicio Nacional de Capacitación y Asistencia Técnica Rural Integral*).	Key points in the agenda: - Public Policies for Agricultural Extension: i.Yachachiq National School – field level farmer-to-farmer training (Peru), ii. Extension management and territorial innovation (Mexico), iii. Competitive funds for agricultural extension projects (Peru). - Models and experiences of Agricultural Extension: i. Study of extension reforms in South America (FAO, RELASER), ii. Holistic Extension in Mexico, iii. Experiences of agricultural extension and technology transfer in Peru (INIA and FONCODES). - The Mexican experience for the provision of extension services as a public good. - The participation of universities in the process of forming the network of extension agents in Mexico. - Debate on extension models in Mexico and Peru, especially regarding policies for promoting and measuring impact.	- Cooperation agreement to promote exchanges between INIA and Mexico in the topic of “extension and innovation processes such as smart territories in Mexico”. Both sides designated a responsible to follow up. - The team learned and discussed about extension models and reflected about how to improve their EAS systems. - 120 people representing a broad range of institutions listed attended the exchange.

Table 5. Paraguay and Uruguay

Paraguay and Uruguay: Organizational innovations in knowledge management: co-management of rural extension and gender in RAS (August 4-5, 2015)			
Host Country Institutions Involved	Visiting Country Institutions Involved	Key Activities	Key Results
Paraguay: - Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Agriculture (MAGA), incl. Vice Minister - Direction of Agricultural Extension (DEAg) - Federation of Production Cooperatives (FECOPROD) - Country Fora of RELASER Paraguay (15 Groups Organizations Including Universities, NGOs and Private Sector)	Uruguay: - Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries, Direction of Rural Development (DGDR) - IICA Uruguay - Feedback and sharing with the RELASER Country Fora of Uruguay	Exchange organized by the Country Fora of RELASER Paraguay. Key topics discussed in the workshop were: - Spaces of Territorial Dialogue (Mesas de Gestión Territorial), conceptual framework and experiences - Paraguay - Co-management of extension. Public-private experiences - Paraguay - Gender Policy in Rural Development - Paraguay - Co-management of extension with producer organizations. System of validation of private extension works to provide assistance to producers with public funding - Uruguay - Gender issues: women extension workers and rural women producers - Uruguay	- The exchange gave participants a chance to present common situations in both countries and discuss some alternatives to improve these realities. - 50 people participated actively in the two day workshop; they identified fields for future cooperation. Paraguay is particularly interested in the system of outsourcing technical assistance and the role of NGOs in the Rural Development Committees. Uruguay is interested in the initiative of a certification for Family Agriculture. - They agreed to explore possible synergies between the agricultural cooperatives in the two countries. They are considering the alternative of implementing joint projects between cooperatives in Paraguay and Uruguay with the cooperation of a third party (GIZ and the RELASER Country Fora). - As a result of the exchange, the IICA country offices of Uruguay and Paraguay are analyzing the possibility of launching a joint project in the field of extension. - 50 persons representing administrative and leadership positions from the organizations listed attended the two day workshop.

Table 6. Costa Rica and Honduras

Costa Rica and Honduras: Consultation about methodological extension approaches in Costa Rica (June 22 – 26, 2016)			
Host Country Institutions Involved	Visiting Country Institutions Involved	Key Activities	Key Results
Costa Rica: - Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), incl. Director of Extension - Country Fora of RELASER Costa Rica - Universidad de Costa Rica - Universidad Estatal a Distancia (UNED) - Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Cooperation (IICA) - FAO Costa Rica - National Institute for Agricultural Innovation and Technology Transfer (INTA)	Honduras: - Direction of Science and Agricultural Technology (DICTA) of the Ministry of Agriculture, incl. Director and Sub-Director	- Review of the document of "Methodological guidelines for Agricultural Extension" from MAG - Definition of validation aspects to review or validate - Design and validation of the tool for interviews - Interviews with experts - Presentation of the document and initiative at a meeting of the Forum of Costa Rica RELASER - Systematization of observations, elaboration and presentation of a report	- Several recommendations for the document. It has been finished using the inputs of the review and is being printed and distributed to all public extension offices in the country. - The experience left an open door for future collaboration and exchanges between the institutions. - It was positive to have a neighbor and foreign expert making the review; the stakeholders are more open with “outside” actors that understand the context and the recommendations are down-to-earth. - Presenting and discussing the initiative in a meeting of the Country Fora of Costa Rica was useful for getting further inputs and for validating the demand of such a thing. - 9 persons were involved in the preparation and interviews and 14 of persons representing administrative and leadership positions from the organizations listed attended the half day socialization workshop exchange.

Table 7. Bolivia and Colombia

Bolivia and Colombia: Exchange and mobility of extensionists as a training strategy (August 17-22, 2015)			
Host Country Institutions Involved	Visiting Country Institutions Involved	Key Activities	Key Results
Colombia: - Fundación Universitaria Agraria de Colombia (UNIAGRARIA) - 100 people from EAS sector in the country including FBO, universities and public and private organizations	Bolivia: - Instituto Nacional de Asistencia Técnica (INIAP), incl. Director	- UNIAGRARIA presented their extension projects: i. “Sembrar Paz”, ii. Research Center for Research Center for Social and Extension Innovation, iii. Program of Literacy teachers for Rural Development iii. Project and peri-urban Agriculture - UNIAGRARIA organized the "Latin American Meeting of Extension and Rural Development"	- In reaction to the proposal of the exchange, UNIAGRARIA organized a "Latin American workshop of Extension and Rural Development". Public, private and civil society were invited. - 100 persons from EAS sector in the country including FBO, universities and public and private organizations - As a result of the exchange some RAS stakeholders in Colombia signed a letter of agreement to create an evolving and inter-institutional course on extension and rural development.

Table 8. Chile and Ecuador

Chile and Ecuador Dialogue Workshop (October 21 – 23, 2015)			
Host Country Institutions Involved	Visiting Country Institutions Involved	Key Activities	Key Results
Chile: - INDAP Chile (incl. Director of the Extension Department - Chilean Agency for Food Safety (ACHIPIA) - Foro RELASER Chile - AGRARIA Chile - Universidad de Chile	Ecuador: - Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Pesca Ecuador - MAGAP, (Viceministro de Desarrollo Rural y Directora de Innovación	- Professional Development of Extensionists based upon Competencies (INDAP, AGRARIA, U de Chile) - Experiences of INDAP which includes their Technical Assistance Programs and their programs to develop and support organizational development - "PROGYSO" – and investments - Field visit: PRODESAL (linked to the training program)	- Ecuador indicated an interest in using the methodology from Chile to develop extension profiles based on competencies. The methodology used by Chile to define Family Farms was also of interest to Ecuador, as how to define Family Farms remains unclear in Ecuador. - In a meeting between INDAP Chile y Director General of Rural Development of Uruguay, it was agreed to seek a mechanism to repeat an exchange based on extension competencies with extension organizations from Uruguay. - 17 persons including high level administrators and leaders from the organizations listed attended the exchange.

Appendix. Interviews

Audio interviews in Spanish and English with Organizers and Participants
http://meas.illinois.edu/ras-exchange/

Interview with Francisco Aguirre (RELASER, Chile), by Benjamin Mueller (MEAS)

Q: Please say your name and organization.

A: Francisco Aguirre, I am executive secretary of the Latin American Network for Rural Extension.

Q: Please provide a background (the role and organization of RELASER in organizing exchanges of countries).

A: I'm working in the executive secretariat from the beginning (5 years ago) and the role of RELASER has always been trying to share experiences, exchange capacities between different countries, to improve extension services. That was our work over the years.

Specifically, for the subject of this exchange, with Isabel we worked on finding the people or institutions in the countries interested to transmit (or receive) experiences from neighboring countries.

Q: Francisco, talking a little about the process, because it is always interesting when a project type as this is done. What could be the lessons or things that were learned organizing and implementing the proposed exchange centers. What did you learn during the development of this process?

A: There are several things in the process that are interesting to note. First, the "exchange" generates enthusiasm, to see a different experience and about showing what they are doing. And that proves one thing: in Latin America we know very little about us. We travel very little, we don't know the experiences, and therefore we wonder what is happening even in a neighboring country, a short distance from us. It is a first lesson, so I think that sharing all these experiences (well-organized) is positive. They have to be well organized, planned on time, to be enriching, otherwise they become a little vain travel, such as tourism.

The second lesson is that it is important that the group that travels on these experiences is heterogeneous. Not only policy advisers, not only producer organizations, not just the people who work in extension. The heterogeneity of the group is very important, because they are seeing different things. But in this heterogeneity I think there has to be at least three types of areas: there must be a policy advisor, people working on extension to know what are the difficulties and the strengths of their systems to transmit them truthfully. It is not just a theoretical transmission, but their experience, in this way they can identify what is relevant for their reality and bring it back to their country. That is learning. And producer organizations too. In Latin America there are organizations that are very well trained and have ability to raise demand and there are others that are not well off, then this exchange is also very profitable at that level.

Now the addition of the three is what gives us the ability to lift specific policies.

Q: That's something that I really liked, the exchanges had actors from various sectors and points of view, such as producers, extensionist and policy makers. I think it was very interesting to have this exchange. Speaking of the exchange, which were are the main areas to strength in countries, extension organizations, and other organizations. Do you believe there is potential to strengthen the product of exchanges?

A: I do not know in detail all exchanges. Maybe I know more in depth what was done in Chile. I got to participate in the meeting of Chile-Ecuador, and I know something of what happened between Mexico and Peru. I think the most important things that appeared in these two experiences were: 1) to know the capacity of institutions to do something. And there are no significant differences, the ability of the institution to have good extension services e.g. in this case. It is essential to ensure that resources are properly allocated, to convince policy makers to invest in that. In the Chilean case, that was well organized, it was a good experience, and has a large extent in terms of coverage. The participants could evaluate if it was a good experience for their own country and decide if they can replicate it in their reality. They have to evaluate if there is the political support to do it that gives importance to the coverage, puts the necessary resources to do the job. For example, there are notable differences, some invested $90 per farmer and other invested $ 2,000 per farmer per year. Then the strength of institutions has much to do with what you want to do.

The case of Mexico and Peru, Mexico has a very organized extension system, and Peru is in the process of organization but with very low coverage. So learning with what Mexico was very relevant and useful (from my perspective).

2) It is important to consider that behind the extent there is an ideological thing too. It is not just a technical thing. So this sharing is also important. There are extension systems that are super privatized, the Chilean case, Mexico too. And the Ecuadorians have a quasi-socialist system in terms of political organization. But besides the methodology or approach, what matters is how the system is organized to make it effective. So the idea of the exchange is not to copy the model, but rather is looking at ways of organizing systems that work.

Q: With respect to two cases of exchange, do you think that there is any possibility of resources to follow up? And do you think that RELASER can give any assessment, some follow-up? Because I think, as you were talking, that there is a good start here, enough organization, a combination of actors from different sectors, at different levels, and is not the first or last time that happened, but it is worth somehow. What role can RELASER, FAO, or another organization follow up on that?

A: I'd have to think a little more what the possible continuity. I think: 1) it is extremely important to give continuity to this, but for us as RELASER it's interesting to link this with the ongoing strategies that we have and our priorities. So for us it would be very interesting to have continuity in the exchanges, but even more important it would be to achieve results in specific topics where the institutions that participate engage. For example, in the issue of natural resources, we can discuss about the theme of water and soil and the experience between countries. It may be a more concrete discussion to achieve specific learning in terms of a particular product that we want to get.

2) Another example is to work on the issue of extension labor skills, not necessarily the exchange has to be in the countries we are considering now. Argentina has such a great learning experience in terms of training extension workers. And we could look for a country that does not have it, and then start working there as a major theme. Now we had six countries in the project, we should take advantage of those experiences and involve more countries.

3) One issue that is increasingly putting pressure on us, that we know very little about and we think it will be very important for the future is the issue of rural youth. If we do not address the issue now, I think we will be left behind, as this is an urgent issue. We are not only thinking about the subject of replacement farmers. We need to learn experiences in terms of how to give the youth opportunities for making enterprises in the rural areas. I think that today there are many opportunities for enterprises without, for example, being a farmer living of the cultivation of fruit, coffee, or whatever.

I feel that these three issues are very important for future exchanges which can focus and get more specific products.

Q: I agree; I think we have to keep thinking in rural development. Since rural development is not just planting and harvesting. And if we want young people to work there we need a broader vision. The last question I have for you Francisco: there are many that say that the social fabric is more a feeling, it is very difficult to measure its impact. But I support that when good contacts are made between countries or extension organizations there are ways to continue the interaction beyond the exchange. That will grow to be part of the technology, part of the social fabric, where that relationship is formalized. There are many examples where countries are hosts, for example between the United States and Central American countries. Do you think there is intangible value or leave any chance to strengthen, beyond the programs or projects, such as joining a stronger network?

A: I think much of the social capital or social fabric. I think the future expansion or innovation systems is in having stronger networks. Stronger regional networks. And this is not an issue only of extension, or people who are dedicated to agriculture. I think it's a broader issue. To what extent these exchanges can strengthen the social fabric? They can strengthen rather in intermediate levels. I think we have to see who will be involved in the exchange. Who are permanent? Farmers and extension workers. In 20 years you see that producer organizations, farm leaders, and extensionists are relatively stable. But those who are unstable are the policy makers. In Latin America, the government changes and it changes all the political advisers. And in some countries it happens every year. For example, in the case of Bolivia, we had seven meetings with 7 different representatives. Because ministers, secretaries, etc. change and there's a big problem. Because you can send a policy adviser to an exchange, and the next month he's not there anymore, and the new person knows nothing about what happened in the exchange. So the issue is how to strengthen those who are permanent, so they can assume a greater role in the process and may advocate with governments, which are those who manage the resource.