

Restructuring Public Institutions for Horticulture Development in Nepal

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Abstract

The formation of a horticulture unit in 1957 marked the beginning of horticulture organization in the government sector followed by the establishment of horticulture farms in different parts of the country in 1960s. The separation of Department of Horticulture in 1967 was another milestone. Realizing further importance of horticulture, an Assistant Minister was entrusted responsibility to look after horticulture in the Ministry of Agriculture in 1980. In addition to the public institutions, several organizations like universities, development partners, NGOs/INGOs and private are now involved in the horticultural research and development. After the introduction of a three-tier governance system in the country, a federal Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development has been created as the apex body to look after agriculture sector. Some changes have also been made at the departmental organizations. The Fruit and Vegetable Development Directorates have been renamed as National Fruit Development Center and National Potato, Vegetable and Spice Crops Development Center. In the province, Horticulture Development Section is under the Agriculture Development Directorate. All 51 Agriculture Knowledge Centers and 14 Horticulture Farms are placed under the provincial administration along with some Agriculture Development Units in local level. The recent restructuring has posed several challenges and gaps. Institutional linkages among central, federal and local governments have not been formed properly and the mechanism of retaining experts has been lost. So there is an urgent need to develop a mechanism of horizontal and vertical coordination among the governments of local, provincial and central level. Although NARC yet to be restructured in the context of federalization, strengthening of its horticulture wing is necessary. Similarly, strengthening and modernizing facilities and infrastructures in the existing horticulture farms/center are needed. Technically and physically strengthen government farms may be the effective practical schools for farmers where they can acquire practical knowledge. The ways forward to strengthen linkages among research, extension and education could be (1) joint action plan; (2) recognizing MoALD as the line ministry of AFU; and (3) developing horticultural alliances at provincial level. This paper has made an attempt to address all these gaps and issues through restructuring.

Keywords: horticulturist, organization, extension, public institution, government

1. Introduction

Nepal has varied climatic and soil conditions in which a large number of fruits, vegetables including potato, ornamentals, spices, coffee, tea and plantation crops particularly arecanut and coconut, are grown. More than 40 species of fruit crops (Kaini, 1994) and 50 species of vegetable crops (Pandey, 1994) are found grown in different agro-ecological zones of Nepal. Similarly, many species of spices, flower and ornamental plants, tea and coffee, and medicinal and aromatic plants are also grown. The hilly and mountain regions of Nepal, which cover about 75 percent of the total land area of the country and makes up the entire northern boundary running from Mahakali in the west to Mechi in the east, have now been well known for horticultural production, specially citrus, apples, kiwi fruit, potato, off-season vegetables, vegetable seeds, coffee and orthodox tea, cardamom etc. Horticulture is a very important sub-sector of agriculture for improving livelihoods of people by harnessing income generation, food and nutrition security, employment generation and environmental balance.

The investment in horticulture has been rewarding and this has attracted the private sector to invest in the sub-sector. After the eight five-year plan, there has been paradigm shift from cereal based agriculture development to horticulture and livestock development. Farmers are shifting their cultivated land from cereal crops to horticultural crops. The rapid rise of per capita income in India and China are leading to increasing demand for healthy, safe and sustainably produced horticultural products. These developments offer new opportunities for farmers and entrepreneurs involved in this sub-sector. However, it also requires the transition from highly traditional production and marketing systems to a more professional horticultural sub-sector. This is possible only when there is a strong institutional support.

Brief History of Horticulture Organizations

In the organizational front, there have been many changes in the past. The creation of a horticulture unit in 1957 marked the beginning of horticulture organization in the government sector followed by the establishment of a number of horticulture stations and centers in different part of the country in the 1960s. Furthermore, the network of horticulture stations expanded after the creation of a separate Department of Horticulture in 1967. However, the department lost its identity in 1972 with the merging of five agriculture related departments to create the Department of Agriculture. Following this, horticulture extension was carried out by the District Agriculture Development Offices (DADOs). The Fruit and Vegetable Development Divisions, National Commodity Programs for Citrus and Potatoes, and Horticulture Farms were mainly involved in research activities.

Realizing further importance of horticulture, an Assistant Minister was entrusted responsibility to look after horticulture in the Ministry of Agriculture and a post of Deputy Director General was created in the Department of Agriculture in 1982 for implementing horticulture development programs effectively. Such structural arrangements showed the commitment of the then government. This was appreciated by all concern stakeholders.

A separate Department of Horticulture was again created in 1990 under the Ministry of Agriculture. The rationale for this was the need to develop the horticulture subsector in an organized and planned manner. The organizational structure of this department included three Deputy Director Generals (DDGs), one each for fruit, vegetable, and planning and evaluation. District Horticulture Development Offices (DHDOs) were also proposed for all 75 districts of the country, of which 30 DHDOs were established. The remaining 45 DHDOs were in the process of establishment.

Again in 1992, all four departments related to agriculture were merged to create a Department of Agriculture Development (DOAD) with the objective of bringing all programs under one umbrella. Under the new DOAD with the Director General as the head, provisions of posts for seven Directors were made including one for Horticulture. But research function was separated from development and an autonomous institution known as Nepal Agriculture Research Council (NARC) was formed. So NARC is an apex body created by the government of Nepal as per the Agricultural Research Council Act 2048 (1991). At present NARC is involved in research programs on different horticultural crops with its nationwide network of research stations, farms and outreach sites distributed in different ecological regions. However, horticulture research has not received priority in NARC's budget and programs.

Under the DOAD, Fruit Development Division (FDD), Vegetable Development Division (VDD) and two Commodity Development Programs were restructured. The two divisions were upgraded, while the status of the two National Commodity Programs were degraded placing them under the respective divisions. However, new commodity programs for tea and coffee, cardamom and ginger were initiated. At the same time, a National Tea and Coffee Development Board was formed. Posts for Horticulture Development Officers (HDOs) were also created in all 75 DADOs to deliver extension services effectively as well as extensively.

In 2001, the National Agriculture Research and Development Fund (NARDF) was created for supporting CGS system in agriculture research and development. One of the priority areas for CGS programs of NARDF is horticulture.

In addition to the above institutions, several other organizations including public agencies, universities, development partners, NGOs/INGOs and private organizations were also involved in the horticultural research and development.

Context of Restructuring

With the promulgation of the new constitution 2015, a three-tier governance system has been introduced: national, provincial and local. In this context, all old municipalities and village development committees (over 3,900 of them) have been restructured into 753 local units grouped under four categories: Metropolitan Council, Sub-metropolitan Council, Municipality Council and Village Council. All 75 district development committees (DDCs) are replaced by new 77 district coordination committees (DCCs) that will have much less power than the DDCs. But in the case of local units, powers and resources that were heretofore centralized will now reach villages. The services that were provided by district administration will now be provided through these local units.

Furthermore, Nepal is considerably smaller than most countries that have adopted a federal structure, in terms of both population and land area. Thus, Nepal's small size and limited resources may pose a number of challenges for its transition to a federal country. Furthermore, the recent restructuring has been done without sufficient homework on organizations and management. This is going to create some major gaps and challenges in agriculture sector including the horticulture sub-sector as listed below:

2. Major Gaps and Challenges

- Institutional linkages among central, federal and local governments have been broken.
- Different tiers of government have authority over different elements of agriculture making horizontal and vertical coordination complicated.

- Gaps in available human resource and requirement particularly at the local level are widening.
- Extension staff are responsible to local government but they are to be hired through the Provincial Public Service Commission. This may widen the gap between authority and accountability.
- Horticulture may not be prioritized by local governments or communities, which has already suffered from under investment.
- Potential disconnect between national horticultural priorities and those of locally elected governments may also slow down the pace of horticulture development.
- There is big gap between the capacity and responsibilities of local governments for planning and implementing climate-smart horticultural programs.
- The other reality is that the federal system increases the financial burden, and the start-up cost may amount to billions of rupees. This will also widen gap between financial requirement and the yearly budget available during the initial years.

3. Restructuring at the Central Level

After the introduction of a three-tier governance system in the country, a federal Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development in the center and 7 provincial Ministries of Land Management, Agriculture and Cooperative-one in each province-have been established. Some changes have also been made at the departmental organizations in the central. Six centers have been created dissolving the existing 12 Program Directorates. The Fruit and Vegetable Development Directorates have been renamed as National Fruit Development Center and National Potato, Vegetable and Spice Crops Development Center. Their roles and responsibilities are also reduced considering the federal structure. The provision to keep open the chief of the center to any gazette first class officer from any service group or faculty of the agriculture service is not a right decision. This provision will result in the loss of specialization, without which horticulture cannot be developed in a scientific way. Structures of horticulture before and after federalization and the proposed structure are as shown below:

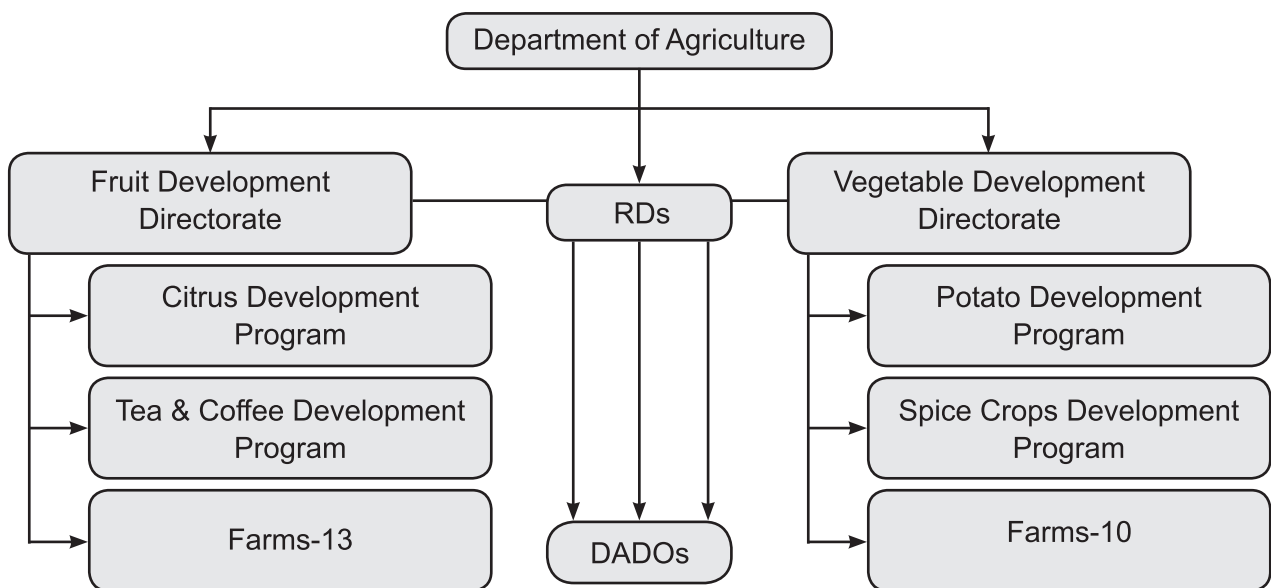


Figure 1: Structure before Federalization

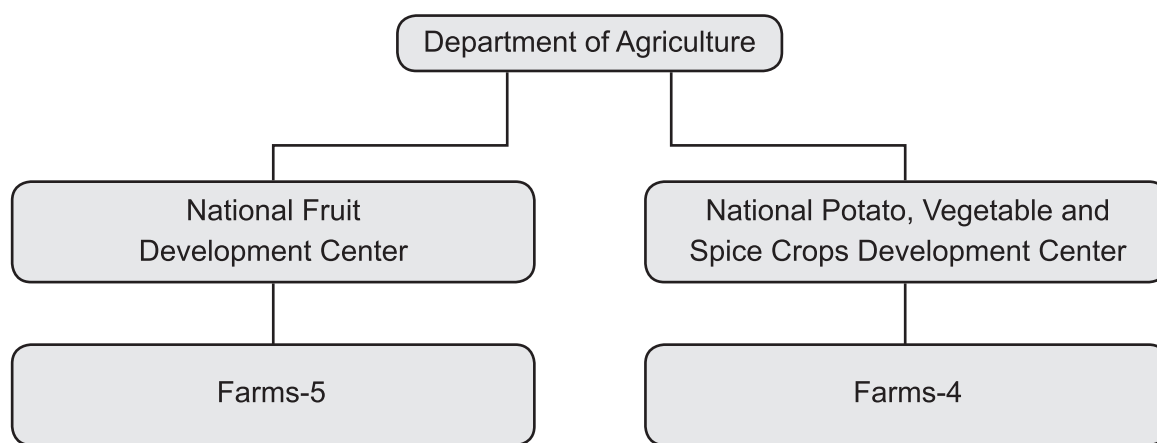


Figure 2: Structure after Federalization

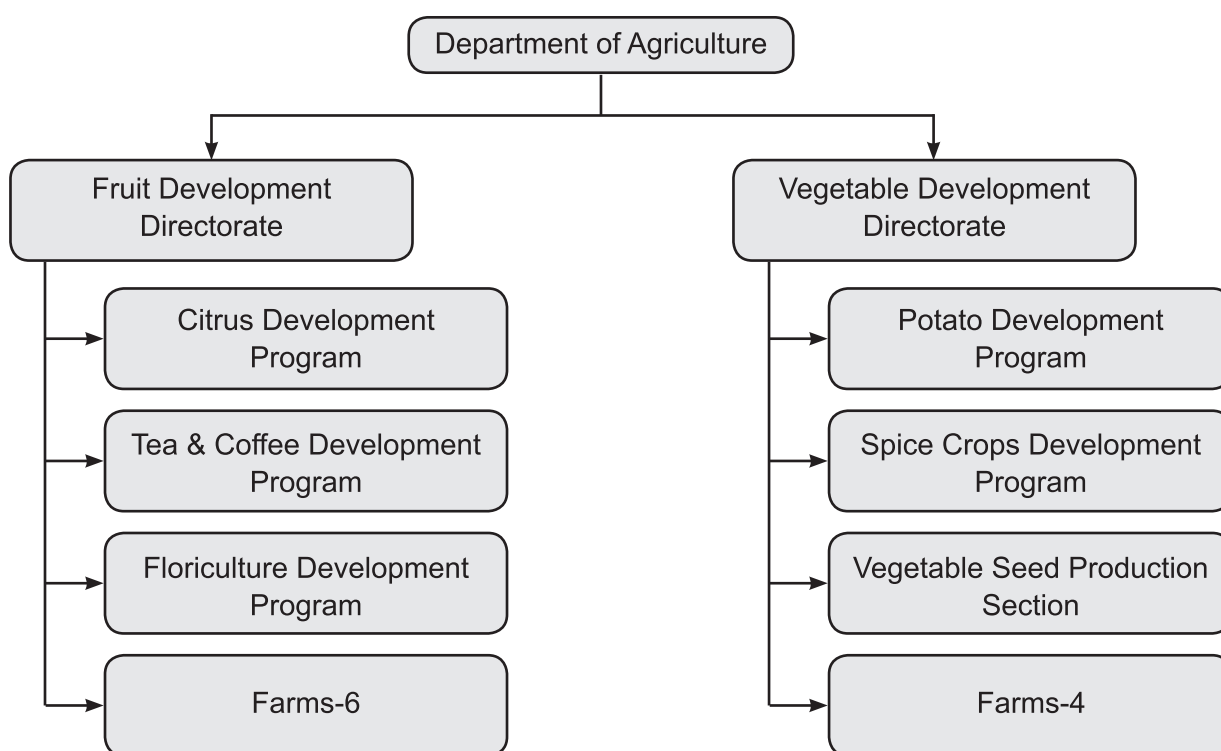


Figure 3: Proposed Structure

4. Structuring at the Provincial Level

In each province, there is Agriculture Development Directorate (ADD) under Ministries of Land management, Agriculture and Cooperative. Provision of Horticulture Development Section in each ADD with 2 HDOs and 1 JT/JTA has also been made where a gazette second class officer from horticulture faculty will be the chief. Similarly, 51 Agriculture Knowledge Centers (AKCs) are being established throughout the countries. Although the chief of the AKC is from non-faculty gazette second class officer from any service group, there is a provision of a gazette third class officer from horticulture faculty. The given terms of reference of the AKC are better performed by the farms provided they are strengthened accordingly.

But, as in the past, the government horticulture farms are again kept in low profile. So it is suggested to handover the responsibilities of the AKC to the farm in the district where it is located. At present, these farms are managed haphazardly on personal interest of the farm manager. In the present context, each horticulture farm should have four types of functions as shown in the following figure. Service function should have collaboration with AKCs and NGOs. Training should be collaborated with ABPTC and NGOs. Research providers should be the partners for research function and private sector might be interested to collaborate in production function. The trial and demonstration function of the AKC should be handed over to these farms and each farm should have its command areas for providing technical services.

Provincial Structure for Agriculture Development

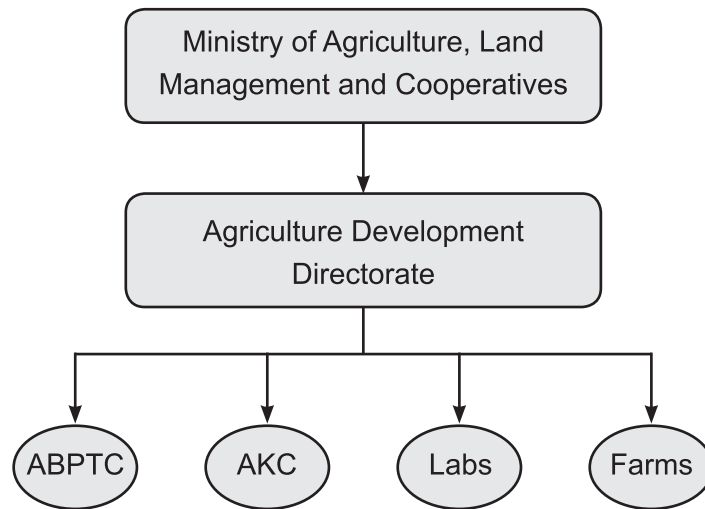


Figure 4: Horticulture farm operation

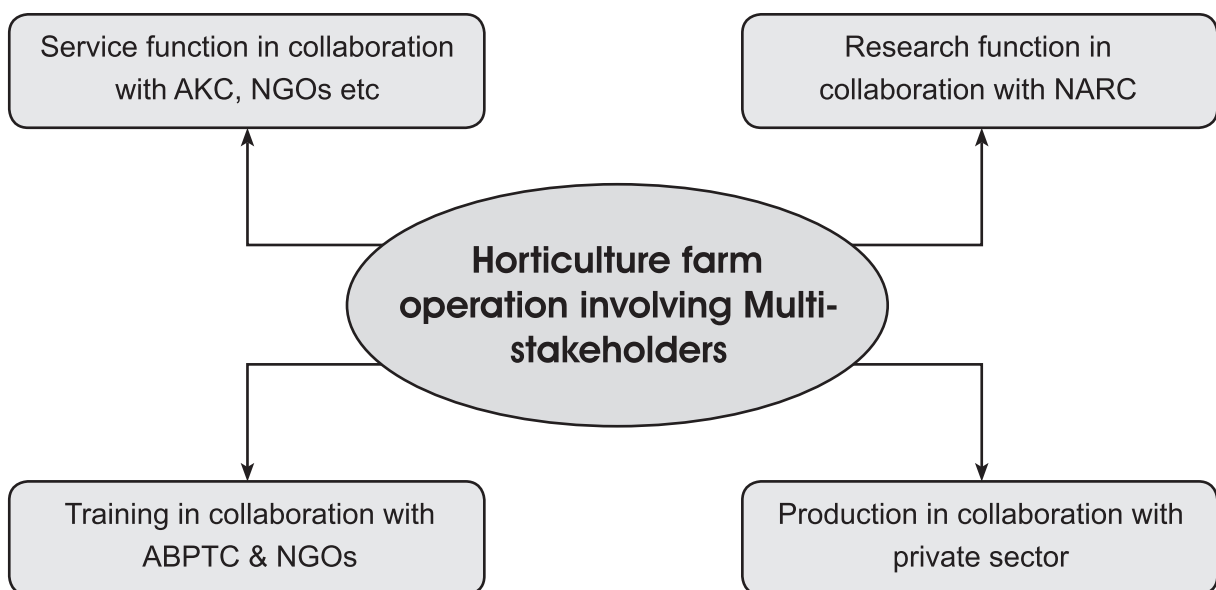


Figure 5: Structure at the local level

The Federal Republic Nepal has 6 metropolitan cities, 11 sub-metropolitan cities, 276 municipalities and 460 rural municipalities. So there are 753 local units in totality. Responsibilities over agricultural extension services, local agricultural roads, small irrigation projects, and livestock health services are given to these local units. Considering these responsibilities of the local government, we may need 1-3 Community Agricultural Service Centers (CASCs) in each ward as proposed by the Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS). But the present arrangement is 1 Gazette class II officer with 2 support staff in the Metro and Sub-metro City Councils, 1 Gazette class III officer with 1 or 2 support staff in municipalities and 1 JT and 1 JTA in each village council. There is no faculty system in the local units.

5. Recommendations and Suggestions

- A three-tier system of governance has been introduced. So the issue of coordination will get more complicated. No rural council will have a perfect team of experts. And local units might not be in a position to use the right technology or to manage required production inputs. So two type of coordination-horizontal and vertical, will be needed. The horizontal coordination will apply to rural councils that need to work complementarily and the vertical coordination to local governments, provincial governments and the central government.
- Establishment of National Horticulture Research Institute under NARC is the need of the day in order to make research system strong
- Strengthen and modernize research facilities and infrastructures in the existing horticulture research farms/center
- In order to cope with disaster and climate change problems, human resources and research facilities need to be developed in each research center or farm.
- Government horticulture farms may be effective practical schools of farmers where they can acquire practical knowledge by seeing and doing. The government of Nepal should look these farms in this perspective and prioritize them in providing adequate budget and other resources for conducting training programs
- A study on management strategy of the government farms conducted by the APP/SP in 2006 reported that majority of the farmers wanted government horticulture farms to be service oriented. This is even more relevant in the present context of federalism. So, it is suggested that each horticulture farm should go outside the farm for providing technical services to the farmers.
- Nepal has already started to practice pluralistic extension services where the role of private sector organizations, cooperatives and NGOs has become synergistic to public sector interventions. Public-private partnerships should thus be encouraged to augment the process of technology development, technology transfer and agri-business.
- We need one Community Agricultural Extension Service Center (CAESC) in each ward as proposed by the Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS). The CAESCs will hire their own extension service providers including horticulture as per demand.
- Providing unconditional funds to the local governments can lead to unintended consequences for the agricultural sector. That is why, it is suggested to provide some conditional funds for the development of agriculture including horticulture. In most of the cases, local leaders have no commitment to horticulture development

- There is an urgent need of orienting local leaders on the contents of the ADS. Otherwise horticulture will not get priority at the local levels and the long-term goals of horticulture development will not be fulfilled.
- At present, the linkages between agricultural research, extension and education are very weak. The ways forward to strengthen linkages among them could be (1) joint action plan; (2) recognizing MoALD as the line ministry of AFU; and (3) developing horticultural alliances at provincial level.
- Monitoring is the tool to make implementation of programs effective. Realizing this fact, the ADS has considered monitoring and evaluation as one of its main outputs of the Governance component. But it is not possible to do regular monitoring professionally and in a participative manner, unless the existing monitoring units at all levels are strengthened.

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