Mennonite Central Committee

IPDN PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Canadian Foodgrains Bank
A Christian Response to Hunger

Farmer Field Schools on Food Security

A project on food security through Conservation Agriculture, using the FFS methodology.

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26/11/2019

Farmer Field Schools

- According to the FAO, is an approached focused on people-centred learning
- Participants are encouraged to exchange knowledge in a conducive and risk-free environment
- This is in order to have farmers participate in finding solutions for their own problems

Characteristics of an FFS

- Lessons are in the field
- Facilitation, not teaching
- Discovery based learning (hands-on)
- The farmer as an expert
- Equity and no hierarchy
- Learner defined curriculum with cross-cutting topics

- Comparative experiments
- Agro ecosystem Analysis
- Special topics
- Team building and social animation

Main differences between FFS and traditional extension approach

- Study plot not demo plot
- School is the field and plant/crop teacher
- Facilitation is what is encouraged, not training
- Encourages bottom up technology transfer
- Is developed/adapted locally unlike traditional recommendations
- Creates proxy extension agents (Farmer-to-Farmer aspect)

- It is majorly hands on (experiments in field and on other matters)
- Unlike traditional extension approach, provides a route for other benefits to farmers (saving, health insurance, family planning, HIV issues, Gender, nutrition, etc)
- Empowers farmers to innovate and tackle issues unlike in traditional where they are fed what the extension agents assumes works (farmers are empowered, achieve solutions, and are prepared to face other challenges)

Organisation of FFSs in the project

- 11 FFS groups per district (5 districts across Rwanda) formed and followed up over 3 years
- Each group having between 20 and 30 farmers (28 on average)
- Farmers recruited by field staff who do mobilisation and extend invitations to WILLING farmers to join (in partnership with local leaders) but intentionally targeting female farmers especially those heading a household
- FFS groups are given inputs for 2 seasons, plots hired for 2 years

- In some cases, the local leaders will include farmers they personally want to use to extend the approach (farmer promoters)
- The groups have a goal to meet at least 2 times every month but they meet weekly
- One joint Field Day per district, per year
- Now currently providing technical backstopping for 1,291 farmers of which 244 are spontaneous adopters.
- Indirect beneficiaries are about 6,324 household members

How Food Security is improved through FFSs

- Initially, the project's focus was on training farmers on CA practices
- Despite high adoption rates, food security was still below the project's goal and hence a Situational Assessment was carried out
- This helped us customise our interventions further, using feedback from the intended beneficiaries themselves

- Whereas increase in yield using **CA** and **GAP** (Good Agricultural Practices) were mainly addressing food availability and access, more interventions had to be incorporated
- Training on **nutrition** and **kitchen garden** establishment to increase availability, access and utilisation of food
- Training farmers and their spouses on **gender** and **family conflict management** aimed at improving access and stability
- **Post-Harvest Handling and Storage** training mainly to increase availability and stability
- **Village Savings and Loan Associations** integration to facilitate access to finance and hence increase access and stability

Limitation of the FFS approach

- It is relatively more expensive than other extension systems
- It takes more time training farmers than other conventional methodologies

Project photos

Experiments on maize under CA vs non-CA(same day and plot - Bugesera District)

Training on gender and family conflict management, Ruhango district

VSLA meeting, Burera District

FFS study plot Harvest day, Kayonza district

Joint Action Development Forum open day, Gicumbi District

Murakoze - Thank you.