

Farmer Trainers: An Emerging Dissemination Pathway

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Abstract

The decline in national agricultural extension services across Africa has led to the development of new approaches to disseminating information that help make scarce extension staff and resources more effective. One such approach is the Farmer Trainer approach. Farmer trainers are volunteers who are selected on the basis of their interest in developing and disseminating new innovations in their communities. This poster describes the methodology that has been used by East Africa Dairy Development Project in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda in backstopping 368 farmer trainers. The poster shows the process of selecting and training farmer trainers and the activities they implement in their areas. It also describes how some farmer trainers become business service providers and start selling feeds, seeds, and other planting materials, reinforcing their interest in spreading knowledge. An approach to assessing the effectiveness of farmer trainers and an example of a Ugandan farmer trainer are also presented.

Introduction:

- Agricultural technology is a key to improving farm productivity and rural livelihoods. But the decline in publicly funded agricultural extension services has left a void; there is a need to develop new cost effective approaches for spreading information about new technologies.
- Farmer trainers are one such approach; they are volunteers who are selected by their communities on the basis of their ability as communicators and interest in disseminating new practices and marketing products and services.
- Previous approaches used “model farmers” and “expert farmers” but these selected farmers based on their farming expertise. Gladwell (2002) and Nanok et al. (2006) have shown that experts are not necessarily good trainers or communicators. In contrast, the farmer trainer approach emphasizes the farmer trainer’s interest in and ability to communicate and spread information. By helping trainers to market goods and services, they can cover their training and extension costs and be further motivated to spread knowledge.
- The objective of this poster is to describe the farmer trainer approach used in the East Africa Dairy Development Project (EADD), including selection of trainers, business opportunities that farmer trainers have pursued to make their dissemination activities more sustainable, and lessons learned. In addition, an approach for measuring the effectiveness of the farmer trainers is presented.



Educational tours are a good way to train farmer trainers and promote the exchange of information among them

East Africa Dairy Development Project(EADD)

- In East Africa, small-scale rain-fed agriculture is the main source of rural livelihood. The dairy industry is rapidly emerging as a means for smallholders to earn higher incomes.
- EADD started in 2008; its objective is to double the incomes of 179,000 farmers in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda through improved dairy production and marketing.
- ICRAF leads the project's feeding systems component. Seven "dissemination facilitators" lead project activities across the three countries, including backstopping the farmer trainers.
- Farmer trainers are volunteers; they receive training and seed for demonstrations but no salary or allowances.
- As of June 2009, EADD had recruited 368 farmer trainers. Nearly all host demonstration plots of fodder crops (Tables 1,2). The plots contain 5-8 technologies and range in size between 100-1000m²



A farmer trainer Mr. Soi trains farmers in his farm on how to protect fodder tree nursery.

Recruitment of trainers

- Project hubs are centers where chilling plants and other dairy services are available. Dissemination facilitators liaise with dairy hub management to identify and select farmer trainers.

Criteria for selecting trainers vary somewhat across the countries but common criteria include:

- Have the ability to read and write
- Able to interpret extension material to farmers.
- Be a member of the farmer organization/cooperative selected by EADD to work with
- Farming is his/her main source of income.
- Willingness and ability to pass knowledge to others
- Having a leadership role
- Honest, as this will build trust
- Be a resident in a particular site for easy access.
- Communities were encouraged to select women as well as men

Training, support, and incentives of trainers

- Dissemination facilitators train farmer trainers on feeds and feeding practices. They also exchange ideas on how to communicate new practices to their peers.
- Farmer trainers are exposed through educational tours to innovative farms
- Periodic monitoring and training is done.
- Trainers are recognized in their communities for the services they provide and may accrue social benefits from their work. Some are called “Mwalimu” (teacher).
- We are experimenting with giving trainers bags and T-shirts to further motivate them.

By June, 2009, 369 farmer trainers were operating across Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda (Table 1)

Responsibilities of farmer trainers

- Set up and maintain demonstration plots on their farms.
- Train other farmers
- Visit fellow farmers to give advice
- Keep records of people they have trained

Figure 1. A sample of training record kept by farmers trainer

Business Opportunities

We also help the trainers to market products and services so as to cover their costs of training. Some have started small businesses offering inputs and services at a fee:

- Selling seeds and seedlings
- Selling fodder fresh or conserved.
- Making silage for others at a fee
- Hosting farmer tours at a fee



Farmer trainer chopping silage material at a fee

Strengths and weaknesses of farmer trainer approach

Strengths

- They have good contacts and social networks in the community (Van Veldhuizen et al. 1997)
- The cost of supporting farmer trainers is low compared to extension staff
- They communicate easily with other farmers. They understand the language of the audience making it easy to pass information
- Farmers will easily adopt technologies as they can identify with the trainer
- They can reach many farmers in a short time
- The spouse and other members of the farmer trainer's family can also train fellow farmers

Weaknesses (most of these are also weaknesses of extension approaches hiring salaried staff)

- They may not understand the technology well
- They may pass the wrong information
- They may neglect the work as they have other responsibilities
- They have high expectation from projects and if not managed may cause disappointment
- They may have difficulty reaching farmers, particularly in sparsely populated areas

Measuring the effectiveness of Farmer Trainers: a research proposal

A study is underway to understand the forces driving and hindering farmers to participate in the farmer trainer program (Lukuyu, 2009). The study uses both formal and informal surveys to collect qualitative and quantitative information. The study involves interviews with farmer trainers as well as the farmers they train. The study will focus on:

- How the farmer to farmer extension approach is carried out
- Trainers and trainees' perception of the approach
- How effective farmer trainers are in terms of the number of farmers they reach, the planting material they disseminate, and the quality of information they transmit.
- How various factors may influence the effectiveness of farmer trainers. The factors include
 - “meso” factors such as population density, and access to roads and markets, and
 - farm and household characteristics, such as gender, farm size, education and wealth.
- Identify opportunities and constraints of using the approach, as viewed by various stakeholders
- Identify incentives which may motivate farmer trainers
- Advantages and disadvantages of the approach, relative to other dissemination approaches.

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Disclaimer: Recommendations contained herein are based on recommendations of research carried by the national research systems and Universities in various parts of Africa. The views expressed are not necessarily those of EADD project

Appendix 1 Article on Farmer trainers in
EAST AFRICA DAIRY DEVELOPMENT NEWS | MARCH 2009 VOLUME 2 |

Passing on the gift of knowledge: The story of a farmer trainer

In Uganda, one of the implementing partners of EADD,

The World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), is working together with other development stakeholders like Namulonge Agricultural research institute and farmers to develop strategies and options for improved animal nutrition. Together with the partners, extension providers, farmer leaders and farmers, a number of farmer trainers have been identified, engaged and trained to train other farmers in improved fodder technologies.

In Mukono, one of EADD Uganda project sites, it is evident that the farmer trainers have picked up with zeal and are already training other farmers. One such successful trainer is 54 year old widow, Sara Kawere. Sara has trained over 30 farmers in a period of two months. She tells her story.

“As a widow, I have multiple tasks to perform in addition to being a farmer trainer. I look after two families, mine and that of my co-wife who died. This is a challenge but I have sacrificed time to train my fellow farmers on how to grow and manage fodder crops to increase milk production from our cows. I am motivated by the fact that being a farmer trainer has made me popular. I meet many people as they pass by my fodder demonstration garden, in church, in women groups and village meetings.

“Normally, I train these groups informally and my joy comes when I see them appreciate and take on the new fodder technologies to improve their milk production and income. Since I don’t pay for the knowledge I receive as a farmer trainer, then I must pass it on as a gift for free” she says.

Sara acknowledges that she regularly receives advice and help from an extension worker, Mr. Enock Mukalazi and EADD staff. ‘They keep monitoring what I do on my farm and have encouraged me to improve my feeding practices,’ she continues.

Sarah says that she has faced a few challenges as a farmer trainer including transport limitations. She also finds a challenge in handling multiple tasks which she has tried to solve by involving other family members to assist her. Sarah’s exemplary training techniques demonstrate that the use of farmer trainers is an effective approach of passing on new farming technologies to many farmers in a relatively short time and in a more cost effective manner. Farmers learn more from fellow farmers whom they easily

identify with and whom they believe share similar problems and challenges. If Sarah is able to train 30 farmers in two months, it means that she can train 180 farmers in a year!

