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The problem with Training-and-visit extension

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IN THIS ISSUE:

- Background, overview and analyses
- Experiences from the region
- Gender and agriculture
- Regional news and events
- Book reviews
y years until the government introduced universal education and prosecuted parents who kept their children from school.

However, severe crop losses followed. Farmers experimented with several materials until they discovered a better, affordable alternative. Learning from their children's games, they found that polythene bags make a peculiar sound which makes wild animals uneasy, and the different colours probably make the bags resemble a group of people in a garden. Somehow the baboons and other primates keep out of gardens.

This instance of adoption has not been documented, and the family who discovered it may never be known, but I see colorful polythene bags all over fields in this part of Uganda, proving that the technology was passed on successfully. Learning has happened.

A related technique, also developed by children in play, is to use strings of old radio cassette tapes to keep birds away from crops. The tapes reportedly produce a high-pitched sound, even in the slightest wind, which scares the birds.

Such practices give the farmers more time to devote to other social and economic activities.

When a farming family discovers good knowledge, they share it with those they care for

When things are given in love, the disadvantaged accept them without seeing them as charitable hand-outs. I heard an interesting story about green grams the other day. These bean-like plants, whose seeds are used as food in India, were introduced in Palisa district in Uganda. Although they are sold countrywide, most farming communities in the south lack the skills to raise them.

My friend's mother worked with a woman from Palisa. Several times the woman brought her a gift of green grams and the mother soon developed a liking for them. She planted them but did not know how to tend them. The next time the woman told her how to plant, weed, harvest, store and process the new crop. This knowledge the mother passed not only to friends but also to her married daughter.

Passing agricultural knowledge to daughters is central in most Ugandan cultures. Traditionally when a young girl goes to marry, her relatives give her the best seed and bombard her at the last minute with lessons about best practices of cultivating crops and animal husbandry. The success of the young marriage depends partly on the outcome of such lessons. The learning is based on love, respect and trust.

Economically viable initiatives are adopted faster, more widely. Farmers do subdue their pride for anticipated cash gains, as is illustrated in this account about musa, a banana variety used for brewing kasee, an extremely strong gin.

Back in the fifties, before Uganda got its independence, the Governor of Toro (a certain Mr Switzer) was a German national married to a Ugandan. He returned from a trip to South America with five suckers of the musa variety. The hunter-gatherer ways of the Toro Kingdom people in times of hunger had long worried the governor. He reckoned the people would grow these perennial bananas to see themselves through the tough times.

The bananas were adopted and they did relieve the hunger. But little did the governor know that musa was to become the leading cash product for the area. It was adopted by a minority tribe who had migrated from northern Uganda in search of jobs on a new railway line. The tribe was not esteemed by the people of the Toro Kingdom and often lived in secluded settlements. These people are renowned as distillers and consumers of alcohol. When they experimented with the new crop it yielded an abundance of the strongest kasee gin ever. Today kasee is a major ingredient of Uganda's main commercial gin, Uganda Waragi.

In conclusion . . .

I have come to believe that FTF served our grandparents, is serving us and will serve our children's children. Its strengths and sustainability through generations stem largely from its compliance with traditional learning practices of farming communities.

I have come to learn that FTF needs less to be pushed than facilitated. The foregoing case studies clearly show that farmers do not need training in FTF: it is we, the development workers, who need to understand better the relationships and learning avenues which operate among farmers, their families and communities.

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The problem with training-and-visit extension

By Sarah Kimakwa

TRAINING-AND-VISIT (T&V), one of several extension approaches used in the past, was the main farmer training method for most State agriculture departments in East and Southern Africa. It was introduced to Africa in the early Eighties after it had achieved some success in India during the Seventies, at the time of the Green Revolution.

The approach is prescriptive and rigid and fails to value the social, cultural and economic factors in the rural development process. It puts strong emphasis on bringing "better" technologies which had worked in other countries, but without adapting them to local conditions.

The extension process had laid-down steps which had to be followed strictly. The information from "experts" or researchers was conveyed to "subject matter specialists" at a monthly two-day meeting. The sub
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sion while the community ex­

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Monitoring and supervision were rigid. Extension workers had route maps, listing dates and places, so that the subject matter specialists (SMS) could follow them up. But the work on the ground suffered because the routine was inflexible. The SMS used four-wheel drive vehicles for su­

sometimes covering 800 farmers in a given area. The bicycles were not appro­

The system relied heavily on eter­

several farmers and extension

The Nineties have seen a shift

subject matter specialists (SMS) passed the message to the extension work­
ers in fortnightly training sessions, and they in turn passed the message to the smallholder farmers over the next two weeks. One message was passed on at a particular time of the year and sometimes for very many years, regardless of whether it was still necessary or whether farmers had other priority needs or the means to carry out the activity.

A few farmers referred to as “con­
tact farmers” then passed the infor­
mation to other farmers. The way in which contact farmers were cho­

ed depended on their social status: needy farmers would shy away from the technology, thinking it was for the rich.

Demonstration plots were estab­

lished in the contact farmers’ fields; other farmers would find this in­

The system relied heavily on eternal resources, such that most gov­

cernments could not sustain it after the donor had phased out funding.

When one reads the foregoing, one is drawn to any one or all of the following conclusions:

• The T&V extension system is rigid, expensive and assumes that farmers don’t know any­

thing.

• It encourages farmers to believe that all “good” technology is intro­

duced from elsewhere.

• The system is more concerned with the number of training ses­

sions held and how many farm­
ers were trained than with the impact of the training on the farmers.

• The T&V approach is strongly “top-down” and mechanistic.

• It not only failed to deliver, but the extension workers found it bothersome, according to a study published in Nairobi in 1992. Below are comments from some farmers and extension workers in Kenya (not actual names):

What are farmers saying about T&V?

Mrs Kamau: When they promise to come, they don’t come. They are always in a hurry.

Mrs Wekesa: When they come, all the time they talk about agricultu­

re. They never wait to hear my problems.

Mr Kimani: The officer comes and tells me about the same thing every season. But I think I know more about it than he does.

Mrs Opande: They bring us the messages - the new ways of doing things - but they never discuss with us about money to buy the things like fertiliser.

Mr Fondo: You know our extension worker is a young man, and he talks to me the way he was taught in college. I think I can do better than him, because I have done it practically for many years.

Mama Kinoti: Eh, what I think about an extension worker: he comes to me with new ideas about calcula­

tions, but my problem is that he doesn’t make me understand exactly what I benefit from the calculations.

Baba Ken: I am not happy with them at all, because they don’t sell the ideas to me. They just tell me what they think I should do. They should take an example from the man who sells shoes: he really sells.

What do extension workers say about T&V?

Mrs Wanjeri: They don’t accept all our teachings. An example of this is when it comes to spacing: they find it difficult to apply the measurement given.

Mr Odongo: They get bored with us because we take the same mes­

sage every season.

Mr Okwo: Some farmers have financial problems to buy inputs that we advise them about.

Ms Kiprono: My problem is using the language they understand. Another problem is transport to reach the farmers’ farms.

Mr Mbi: We have to give farmers written material and some of them can’t read or write.

Miss Njeri: Labour is also a prob­

lem. The mother is the only one working on the farm, and the children have gone to school, and it is very expensive because the modern methods we use to teach farmers need a lot of labour.

Farmer-to-farmer extension

It is clear that it was not possible for T&V extension to promote rural development effectively. New approaches have long since emerged which are participatory and allow farmers and extension agents to inter­

act successfully.

The Nineties have seen a shift from the top-down methodology to bottom-up approaches. One such methodology is farmer-to-farmer extension. This recognises that smallholder farmers themselves constitute the appropriate starting and end points of any process for designing technical interventions. Sometimes it is referred to as the “farmer-first-and-last” model (Chambers and Ghildyal, 1985).

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