

Farmer-to-farmer extension model

strength, weakness and issues of sustainability

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Realizing needs to identify and measuring the effectiveness of best extension model is being undertaken. Several strategies and mechanisms have been deployed for intensive dissemination of knowledge and information to the community at large. Following decline of investments in government extension services in 1980s and 1990s, community-based extension approaches have become increasingly important. We use 'farmer-trainer' as a generic term, even though we recognise that different names e.g. lead farmer, farmer-promoter, community knowledge worker may imply different roles.

Key words: Extension, Farmer, Model, Strength, Sustainability



Figs. 1. and 2. Farmer-to-Farmer Extension (F2FE) can help in building effective, farmer-centred extension systems and empowering farmers as change agents for improving livelihoods in their communities.

EXTENSION services are mainly funded and delivered by government in Indian context. At present a pluralistic system of extension is operating in the country where the partners from public, private and corporate sectors are engaged in developing, promoting and providing services to the farmers. However, there is still continued search for newer and effective mechanism for knowledge dissemination because of various kinds of existing gaps viz., technological, information, yield,

income, accessibility to food and livelihood opportunities etc., which are serious impediments to nation's stride towards inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Philosophy and principles

Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) approach is defined as provision of training by farmers to farmers, often through the creation of a structure of farmer-trainers. Key principles are as follows:

- Farmers and local institutions (e.g. producer organizations or village leaders) should play a key role in

selecting farmer-trainers and monitoring and evaluating them. This makes the programmes more accountable to the community or groups that they serve.

- Farmer-trainers are 'of the community'; they communicate in local languages and are more sensitive to local cultures, mannerisms, farming practices and farmers' needs.
- Farmer-trainers should be selected on the basis of their skills and interest in sharing information, not just on their farming expertise.



- Farmer-trainers need strong linkages with and support from development agents (whether government, non-government organisation (NGO), or private, people who train and backstop them. Farmer-trainers generally serve as a complement to existing extension systems, rather than being a substitute for them.
- Facilitating organizations and local institutions need to be proactive in ensuring that women as well as men become farmer-trainers.
- Simple and appropriate reference materials should be made available to farmer-trainers.

Strengths and weaknesses

Strengths: F2F model can reduce extension cost and workload of extension functionaries in a large country like India where the extension worker: farmer ratio is very wide i.e., 1:1000. However, this approach has following advantages.

- Farmer-to-farmer (F2F) approach valued because of low-cost.
- It helps extension services expand their reach, and improved accountability to community.
- Farmers' command of local languages and culture help and promote uptake of new practices.
- F2F extension programmes promote feedback on new practices to research and extension and help strengthen the capacity of communities to access information.
- As the approach is low-cost, it is often sustainable, with government extension staff or farmer

organizations taking over the backstopping of farmer-trainers after a project ends.

- F2F extension has the potential to improve feedback from farmers to extension staff.

Weaknesses:

- The farmer-trainers need coaching and technical backstopping, without these they may perform poorly.
- Some programmes appear to recruit more farmer-trainers than they are able to effectively backstop, reducing overall performance of the programme.
- If extension staff perceives farmer-trainers as a substitute, rather than a complement, to their own services, conflicts between farmer-trainers and extension staff may occur.
- Some programmes experience high drop-out rates, requiring extra training for new farmer-trainers.
- F2F programmes may simply be an arm of a top-down technology transfer model where communication is one-way.
- Finally, as low-cost as F2F programmes are: they may not be sustainable following the end of a project, if no local institution agrees to support them.

Sustainability of F2F model

Several factors appear to be associated with sustainability of F2F programmes. The important programmes are given below.

Ownership by local institutions: The approach is very effective, if the local village authorities can support and promote the trainers. For example, in western Kenya, farmer-trainers were actively involved in imparting training of farmers three years after the project supporting them had ended.

Motivation to farmer-trainers' and low-cost incentives: Extension Managers need to understand farmer-trainers' motivations to volunteer and to implement low-cost incentives to

reward them, especially those not paid for their services. For example: in Cameroon, Kenya and Malawi, knowledge and helping others were farmer-trainers' most important motivations, followed by social status and project material benefits (e.g. inputs for demonstrations). The offer of increased training opportunities is an important incentive. For those farmer-trainers, motivated by helping others and social status, contests, certificates, T-shirts, and community recognition are important. Others are motivated by the ability to earn income from activities associated with their extension duties like selling seed from demonstration plots or providing training for a fee.

Government policy support: There are many ways to support the farmer-trainers i.e., financial, technical and support in kinds. For example Peru and Indonesian governments support and pay farmer-trainers. In other countries like Malawi and Rwanda, governments do not pay farmer-trainers but do support them technically. Hence favourable government policy support may promote the approach.

SUMMARY

There is plenty of information available in public domain that covers various aspects of extension and know-how about new methodologies for implementation. However, this information is often scattered and presented in complex academic language. Hence practitioners, who often have very limited time and/or may only have basic formal education, find it difficult to make use of this information. F2F model can reduce extension cost and workload of extension functionaries in a country like India where extension worker : farmer ratio is very wide. However, approach needs community as well as government support for sustainability and scalability.

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