

A farmer's own knowledge is the basis for development. Being aware of this knowledge helps farmers decide on the new information they wish to acquire fitting their ecology, economy, culture and interests. In this article, the authors describe a project where the learning objectives defined by the farmers became the basis for communication campaigns. Farmers in five Philippine barangays (villages) are experiencing this approach following earlier experiences by FAO in Development Support Communication. The project builds on the Filipino tradition of schools on the air and echoes Paulo Freire's lesson that, as an empowered learners, people are liberated from a major constraint to their development.



Farmers control communication campaigns

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Learning with farmers, rather than transferring technologies to them, is the essence of the rural development experiences described in this article. Where equity is a priority -rather than simply increased productivity- farmers can best be helped when they are able to make informed choices about the evolution of their farming system, their health and education. If a farmer is faced with more choices each growing season, then one could argue that the production system is moving towards sustainability.

Shifting roles

Facilitating learning is easier said than done. It requires that the outside agents change their role. Farmers are the ones who must control the learning. They should be able to access information according to their specific needs, times and means. The shift is from the transfer of solutions to the communication of choices for adaptation and appropriation. The facilitator's tools are no longer technologies and recommendations, but rather communicative and educational tools to enhance farmers' exploration of the information they deem relevant and necessary. Facilitating agencies must be willing and able to accommodate this shift in function. It means that it is now up to the farmer to make choices about what technologies are needed. The outsider (NGO, extension worker, community organiser, researcher) supports problem definition and helps the

farmers to make an inventory of potential solutions. If a government agricultural service is going to adopt this approach, it means they are willing to challenge their researchers to respond to farmers' demands.

Once options are developed, the facilitator becomes a communicator with the task of organising knowledge, recording it on different media, and presenting it back to the farmers for them to judge, digest, reject, or modify and appropriate.

Identifying needs

A pilot project was established two years ago with the Government of the Philippines through the network of agricultural research consortia coordinated by the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD). The three year project was designed to ensure a two-way flow of information between farmers, rural development workers and researchers. The project hoped to increase the participation of small farmers in identifying technologies for research, development or transfer to them. It is being implemented in five fairly isolated barangay sites with small farmers, fishermen, rural women and youth as beneficiaries.

The project builds on three elements:

- short-term trainings on communication techniques and other skills needed by field staff, extension workers and farmers
- a village loudspeaker system called "Community Audio Tower System" or

CATS (borrowed from Thai experience)

- the production of communication packages in multi-media form on the basis of farmers demands for information.

With the help of several appraisal methods (Rapid Rural Appraisal, Key Informant Panel, Knowledge-Attitude-Practice Survey), farmers' demand for outside information was identified. With the help of these tools, the community first described their environment to the field workers. The physical and social information thus collected served as the basis for a group discussion with a selected number of 10-12 men and women, representing different ages and social groups in the barangay. In this discussion, problems and their underlying causes were identified and mapped in a problem tree diagram. These diagrams are useful in showing and verifying the information with a wider number of community members. As this project focuses on communicating agricultural technology, for the non-agricultural problems identified during the exercise, such as lack of infrastructure or financing, the community was encouraged to demand services from other government services and NGOs.

Surveying knowledge

The farmers ranked their agricultural concerns in order of priority. A survey form detailing the knowledge on recommended technologies for those issues was drawn up and tested with farmers. Subsequently all adults in the community were surveyed, men and women separately. The survey

results indicated the major knowledge gaps. These gaps, in turn, guided staff in defining educational objectives for the communication campaign. This Knowledge-Activities-Practice survey will be repeated at the end of the campaign and the farmers will be able to witness their own knowledge gains. Identifying knowledge gaps may be a less participatory step, but it enables farmers to recognise their accomplishments at the end of the communication campaign. In future, these surveys could be done on traditional technologies when one community wishes to acquire knowledge from another barangay.

This approach is more than just a media effort. The strategy is to systematically document what the farmers, the "audience", is interested in. Through this approach we are hoping to experience and demonstrate a synergistic effect among farmers, field workers, communicators and researchers in technology development, transfer and utilisation.

Media campaigns

The multi-media campaigns involve the production of printed materials, village posters, "schools on the air" (training programmes split into 20 or more lessons with accompanying printed materials which are aired for fifteen minutes 3 times a week in the early morning or evening), and some video programmes. The materials in each medium complement the information conveyed in the other media. Each medium, or media combination, is aimed at a specific audience, with a set of messages developed and field-tested in consultation with those farmers. Most materials are produced by project staff, yet community members are now being regularly trained to prepare radio scripts.

Project staff introduced the Community Audio Tower System as an entry point for their development activities. A disadvantage of this approach was that during the early stages, community attention focused on the medium at the cost of the underlying learning process.

Great enthusiasm

"Ploughing with carabao is easier than writing a radio script" exclaimed a farmer from a Community Broadcasting Association. The approach has generated an active participation by farmers. In barangay Tacunan (near Davao City) a Community Broadcasting Association was established by the barangay as a result of regular meetings between project staff and the community. Several members have received training in script writing. The Association is charged with determining programming and scheduling of the "Radyo Tacunan" broadcasts. They also collect funds from the barangay to cover operational costs, particularly fuel for the generator. The following factors explain this enthusiasm.

- **Building mutual trust.** The appraisal tools and the regular consultations between farmers and field workers built a sense of trust within the barangay and with the outsiders. Thirteen courses were organised and local organisation at the barangay level flourished.
- **Ownership.** The level of commitment shows the sense of ownership over the approach. Indeed, the essence of the process is that the information that is being systematically transmitted, is based on the knowledge which the residents themselves have helped to identify. The learners are in control of the process.
- **Organisational development.** The barangays with a good level of organisational development are the ones benefiting most of the approach. This is because they already have a system for dealing with decisions and problem solving. They are also faster in organising new groups, as well in keeping regular meetings. They are able to exploit the CATS as a means of sharing information on issues important to them: the close to 100% vaccination rates achieved by the Health Service in these barangays proves this.

Forging links

Farmers become active seekers of infor-

mation by being at the forefront of project implementation. To solve their demands they establish linkages to demand information and services from government and from NGOs. Information is no longer a limitation. The farmers are now confident and knowledgeable of whom to address their needs related to technology, information, services and resources. The banana farmers' problem with "bugtok" disease is now being controlled, because an expert on banana, based at the neighbouring Department of Agriculture, willingly shared his expertise during one of their meetings. In Tacunan, farmers were trained by soil science specialists on soil testing, they toured the soils labs and obtained soil testing kits.

The links forged by the community have widened the perspective of the barangay leaders, in particular, and the residents in general on the possibilities and opportunities available to them. They have also seen the fruits of their own investment: the construction of the Radyo Tacunan station (in Barangay Tacunan) is a small hut beside the barangay hall which was built cooperatively by the menfolk. It now has become an "after office" or "after farm" meeting place of sorts, particularly among the broadcasters, the farmers and their spouses.

New tradition

Early evening broadcasts are part of a new routine. In barangay Tacunan the new routine could one day become part of local tradition; in other barangays the process may need further support from facilitators. If it is to be sustained by the community, the true new routine is one of defining knowledge, identifying additional information needs, demanding and obtaining it, and sharing it. It is a process of agricultural learning which in essence should be as sustainable as life-long learning.



The CATS consists of a karaoke system (an integrated sound unit with double cassette player, very popular for entertainment in Asia), two microphones, an amplifier with a 500 watt power output capacity connected to four 100-watt loudspeaker systems attached to a metal pole. Total cost: US\$ 2,000 approximately. These are housed either in a specially renovated room in the barangay centre or in another place agreed upon by the community. "Broadcasts" can reach up to a two-kilometre radius so that in some sites, other adjoining barangays benefit as well from the information dissemination.

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The DSC Branch will publish a case study on this experience in the Philippines in 1994 as part of its Case Study series. Other publications include manuals on media use for development, and guidelines for the design of DSC components for rural development programmes. As part of FAO, the DSC Branch offers technical assistance to Governments and is now exploring collaborative arrangements with NGOs in some countries.