



Moving pictures

Videos are a very useful tool for the dissemination of both technological and institutional innovations. Producing these videos also helps identify constraints and solutions to local challenges. The result is a much greater impact. | Text Jonas Wanvoeke, Espérance Zossou and Paul Van Mele

How to reach more farmers? This is one of the questions regularly heard within many organisations. It was also one of the major concerns of the Africa Rice Center, especially after it started its adult learning programme. Since 2000, the centre has been working in what is now known as Participatory Learning and Action Research (PLAR) – an approach meant to promote technological and organisational change on the basis of farmers’ knowledge and capacities. PLAR combines ideas from the Farmer Field Schools approach (such as weekly sessions with groups of about 25 farmers, discussing a specific issue while stimulating learning) together with tools like cropping calendars or transect walks.

This approach helps farmers and facilitators interact and learn about local agriculture and its constraints, and has had, according to different evaluations, many positive results. A recent study in Ghana, for example, showed that farmers participating in the PLAR sessions increased their yields by more than 50 percent and their profits by 86 percent. But the centre can only work with a relatively small number of farmers. How could more farmers benefit?

More than filming Having acquired a good understanding of local contexts and regional issues, the Africa Rice Center opted for the preparation and dissemination of short videos. By using videos, the centre aims to reach more farmers with relevant technological and institutional innovations, focusing

in particular on those ideas coming from farmers themselves. The production, use and distribution of low-cost and high-quality videos was chosen as a good way to increase impact, and to scale up sustainable rice technologies.

In recent years, the centre has followed an approach called “zooming-in zooming-out”. The process starts with a broad stakeholder consultation, where participants help identify topics of regional relevance and also identify the local learning needs. During the “zooming-in” part, farmers and facilitators engage in participatory research activities, analysing local problems, discussing possible solutions and identifying local innovations. Only after having “zoomed-in” is the exact content of the video decided upon. Fine-tuning comes next, with the preparation of the script and the actual production of the video, and with tests in different locations. So starts the “zooming-out” phase, which also includes adding practical examples in order to reflect the diversity of alternatives or solutions to a given problem. Scaling up and scaling out means disseminating the final product to a broad range of organisations, both within the region, within one country and also abroad.

Reaching more farmers The Africa Rice Center (also known as AfricaRice) has facilitated the production and translation of eleven videos since 2005, all of which look at different innovations related to rice production: seed sorting, flotation, drying and storage; rice quality and parboiling; and land preparation, seedbeds, transplanting, weed and soil fertility management. These videos have all been distributed to the centre’s partners during meetings, workshops, conferences, trainings, and also during field visits. These partners are the National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) of 24 countries, all of which work together with AfricaRice in the identification and dissemination of rice-related technologies, and also on the introduction of new rice varieties. But these videos have also been posted on the website, from where low resolution versions can be viewed. And other organisations, including some from outside Africa, have also written and requested copies. As the role of AfricaRice is to share and provide information, any organisation can request the rice videos. As a result, the rice videos are increasingly being used by development organisations, schools and universities as training or learning material, or also as an extension tool.



Interesting practices make very interesting videos. Photos: Paul Van Mele, Folkert Rinkema

In contrast to participatory video projects, farmers are not encouraged to stand behind the camera, but rather to help develop the content. Rural men and women play an active role in identifying the ideas, principles or technologies which are to be shown, and in preparing the scripts. In addition, working together with extension agents, researchers and NGO staff is meant to facilitate and stimulate learning. For example, the local NGOs LDLD, Rabemar, Castor and Un Monde in Benin learnt that women have developed creative ways to reduce vapour loss and thus enhance the quality of their produce. Looking in detail at how this is done, and adding these ideas into the scripts, helped in sharing them with many others.

Since 2005, when AfricaRice started producing, using and disseminating these videos, they have reached a growing number of farmers. It was thus interesting to look in detail at the path these videos are taking, and at the spontaneous linkages that emerge. Some of the organisations that received the rice videos volunteered to serve as distribution points for in-country distribution. By early 2009 the videos had reached 164 partners (in 33 African and 11 non-African countries). They, in turn, shared them with 346 other organisations.

In addition to just sharing them with others, many local partners decided to translate the videos into languages other than French and English, helping to

make them available in more than thirty languages. AfricaRice facilitated the process by providing these partners with the written scripts of the video programmes and also with the original master tapes (mini DV). All partners sought local expertise and supervised the translation process. Having shared the rice videos with only 6,300 farmers in 2006, they have been seen by more than 130,000 farmers already in 2009. It has been even more encouraging to hear that these videos have been broadcast on national television in different countries, and that, in many cases, farmers are willing to pay for them. The main reasons mentioned for this are the quality of the videos and the usefulness of the information and technologies presented. In addition, when people own the videos they can watch appropriate sections whenever the need arises during the crop season.

case, more than 90 percent of the women who watched the parboiling video improved the quality of their parboiled rice by removing dirt, washing their rice several times and drying it on tarpaulins. Almost all of them started using the improved parboilers which the NGOs helped to obtain. Those who did not have the means to purchase the improved parboiler modified their traditional practices and followed some of the ideas seen on the video (trying, for example, to use sticks so that the rice no longer touches the water during the steaming process).

■ During the same period, the NGO Association pour la Promotion Economique de Kindia (APEK) in Guinea has trained thousands of farmers using the videos before reinforcing the lessons through *Radio Guinée Maritime*. The meetings have been mainly organised in market places, showing the video the

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Dissemination = impact These videos are being watched in Benin, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda. A few examples from different countries have also shown how these are being used, and the positive results that this is having:

■ In Benin, since 2006, video shows have been organised by a few local NGOs (like Cinéma Numérique Ambulant, LDLD, Rabemar, Castor and Un Monde). These take place in classrooms and public places in the evening, when farmers are back from the field and before the women started to cook. The extension agents facilitated the discussions before, during and after the projection. In one specific

night before the market. The videos shown are in Susu and Guerze, two local languages. Farmers were highly impressed with the translations and clarity of the videos, and were eager to comment and discuss what they had seen. It was clear that local language videos were a useful tool.

■ In Nigeria, in 2009 the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS), a public extension service, multiplied and translated the rice videos into Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo languages, and distributed them to the Agricultural Development Programs (ADP) of all the states. In Ekiti state, the ADP further distributed copies to farmers’ organisations. This encouraged these organisations to purchase the necessary equipment (DVD player, laptops, and television) so that they could see the videos anytime they need. Some groups rotated the videos amongst members and many farmers stated they would be willing to pay to have their own copy to watch at home. One group had collected money from members to buy a laptop for the specific purpose of watching the videos.

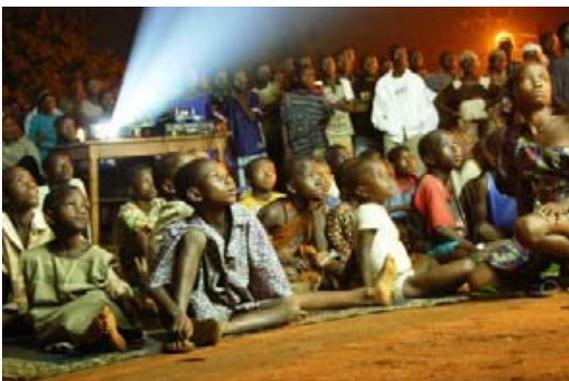


Photo: Cinema Numerique Ambulant Agondè, Benin

Quality counts Looking at these different cases in detail shows that the success of the centre’s strategy is based on (i) the relevance of the technologies shown; (ii) the production process followed; (iii) the quality of the videos; and on (iv) the existing networks of partners. The quality catches the

attention of intermediaries and farmers alike, whereas the format stimulates learning and discussion, in particular because farmers themselves explain and show the good agricultural practices. Besides improving farmers' knowledge and changing their behaviour, the videos are seen to build trust between the different stakeholders. This is one of the "results" which the centre is now measuring in detail.

Unfortunately, in some countries, the majority of in-country media companies do not have agricultural expertise and practically none are familiar with producing agricultural training programmes. Also, many NARS have little media expertise and are not used to working with media companies. Sometimes this results in poor quality end products. This is one of the challenges we are facing in scaling up with video. In many countries, after having attended a video show, farmers requested their own copies, but relatively few organisations are able to respond in a positive way. Hence, AfricaRice is currently exploring public-private partnerships in Benin, Ghana and Uganda to make the local language videos directly available to farmers. It is equally looking into the

possibility of having governments subsidise their dissemination on national and local TV, thus helping reach a far larger number of farmers. ■

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You can watch the videos by clicking on:

www.africarice.org/warda/guide-video.asp

You can also request a hard copy of the videos in other languages by consulting the distribution list at: www.africarice.org/warda/guide-video-contact.asp

Visibility, motivation, scaling up

Using videos is only one of the ways of increasing the visibility of farmers' roles, and of the important contribution they make. This also takes place *in situ*. This is what several organisations are doing in Nepal, building on the traditional *Ropai mela*, the festival celebrated every year to mark the end of the rice planting season. Serving traditional food and playing traditional music, villagers celebrate the important role of rice as their staple food crop, and the important role that rice producers have in feeding the country. In the central and eastern parts of the country, *Ropai mela* is now carried out as part of the National Paddy Day celebrations (June 29th).

This year, the district of Kailali, in western Nepal, saw an "improved" version of their festival, as farmers planted 16 local varieties instead of the high-yielding varieties that now predominate. This was meant to raise public awareness about the importance of traditional seeds, and to highlight their many advantages. Organised as a competition between different groups, this was also meant to

show how farmers work as groups. These groups planted local landraces such as *Nirmoi*, *Anjani* or *Bagari*, and have continued monitoring their growth, and comparing their development with that of the high-yielding (or "modern") varieties. These activities are supported by the Village Development Committee and LI-BIRD. They expect that, thanks to the growing popularity of the festival, farmers and extension agents will come to recognize the importance of local varieties, and the vital role small-scale farmers play. The media now plays a large part in making this known and seen throughout Nepal, so it will also help reach the local and national authorities. The organisers' main objective regarding this event is that policy makers will be encouraged to develop strategies to promote the conservation of the local biodiversity.

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