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Good Practice Note

Farmer-to-Farmer Extension For Agroecology

Introduction

The farmer-to-farmer extension (FtFE) is a participatory learning and knowledge-sharing strategy in agriculture where experienced farmers, known as farmer trainers or farmer leaders, transfer their expertise, skills, and good practices to their fellow farmers. In FtFE, farmer trainers serve as models and mentors within their communities. FtFE promotes farmer empowerment, self-reliance, and collective action. It fosters a sense of ownership and pride among farmers, as they actively participate in decision-making processes and take ownership of their learning and development. This note describes a way this extension approach can be used to promote agroecology based on the experience of the Global Programme "Soil Protection and Rehabilitation for Food Security (ProSoil)" implemented by GIZ in Benin.

Principles of farmer-to-farmer extension for sustainable promotion of agroecology

- The inherent value of peer-to-peer learning and the influence of trusted local voices are recognized.
- Local institutions play a key role in such a way that farmer trainers are more accountable to the community. The trained farmers contract a social debt when they agree to be trained, to receive seeds and technical support on behalf of the village. They publicly commit for one or two agricultural seasons to transmitting knowledge and skills to at least 5 members of their community.
- Farmer-trainers are selected based on their local culture knowledge and language, agroecology farming experiences and skills in sharing information.
- Continuous support to farmers trainer is required from extension agents to help them handle complex situations of needs of customizing technologies to adapt to specific context.
- The inclusion of women as farmer-trainers is important to assure that gender issues related to agroecology are well addressed.

Application of farmer-to-farmer extension to promote agroecology

Farmer-to-farmer extension can be tailored and implemented to serve as a powerful mechanism for catalyzing the widespread adoption, adaptation, and scaling of agroecological practices.

Step 1: Video-based mobile digital enables to disseminate information, to make public awareness on agroecology and connect farmers across geographic areas.

Step 2: Farmer trainers are selected by community members based on their expertise, commitment, and credibility among their peers.

Step 3: Extension workers from NGOs and farmer organizations trained farmer trainers using improved training and visits systems.

Step 4: Farmer trainers implemented different activities in support of the adoption and scaling of agroecological practices.

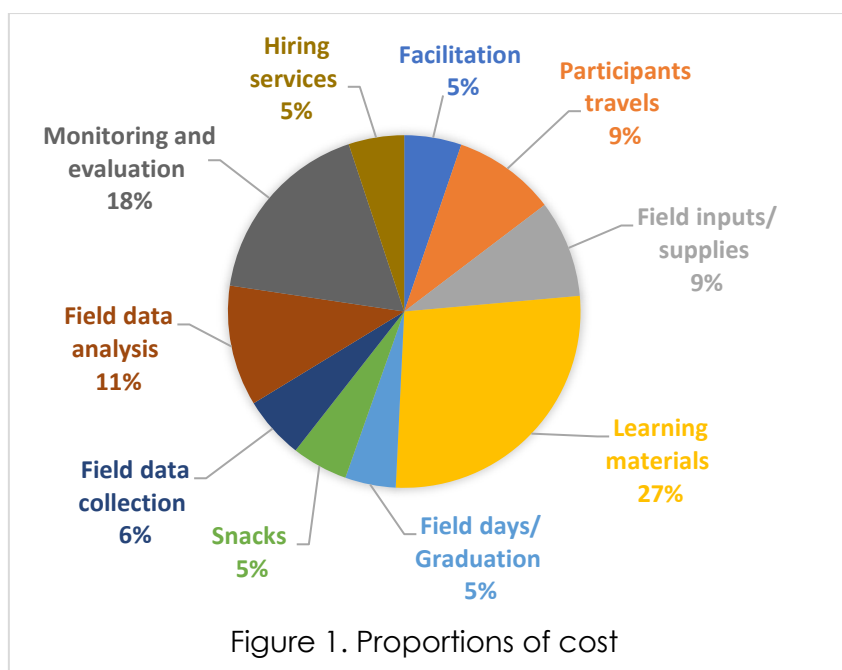
- Firstly, they serve as models of successful agroecological farming, implementing innovative techniques on their farms.
- Second, they selected their learnees and provide on-farm hands-on training and inputs (fertilizing plants seeds).
- Third, they provide their peers as mentors with practical guidance, empowering them to overcome barriers to adoption of agroecological practices.
- Farmer trainers facilitate peer-to-peer learning networks where farmers can openly share challenges and solutions, creating a supportive environment for continuous learning and improvement.

Step 5: Participatory monitoring of farmers trainers work by extension agents

Step 6: At the end of each agricultural campaign, efforts of best farmers are publicly acknowledged, and certificate is given to them as a proof.

Resources

The total cost of FtFE for an extension agent to train and monitor a group of 25 farmers trainers is 3 163 300 FCFA (USD 5 210) for one agricultural campaign, meaning USD 210 per farmer trainer. Proportion of cost items are presented in the figure below. Given that the farmer trainer is expected to train at least 5 peers, the cost per farmer become USD 35 after one year. When the 5 new farmers trainers mentored five others, the cost becomes less than USD 6 in two years. Farmer trainers did not generally commit cash money for their extension work. Skill acquisition certification, social networking, and the perspective to become certified trainer rank amongst the top ten incentives that driven knowledge sharing by farmers trainers.



Success story

Promoting agroecological practices through FtFE in Sinanwongourou village in Benin

The Farmer-to-Farmer approach has played a pivotal role in promoting sustainable land management in Sinanwongourou village, Benin. This grassroots initiative facilitates the exchange of knowledge, practices, and innovations among farmers, fostering a community-driven transition toward sustainable agriculture. ProSol Benin extension workers trained farmers trainers who are selected by communities to train at least five of their peers of own choice in one or two agricultural campaigns.

Farmers training give hands-on training and support to peers to compost crop residues and organic waste to produce nutrient-rich compost, which is then used to enrich soil fertility and structure, reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers. By incorporating nitrogen-fixing plants like *mucuna* and cowpeas into their cropping systems, trained farmers minimize the need for chemical fertilizers, thereby reducing input costs and environmental pollution.

Through practices such as minimal soil disturbance and mulching, farmers preserve soil structure and moisture, promoting soil health and resilience to drought and erosion.

Farmers intercrop diverse varieties of crops and integrate trees into their fields, creating biodiverse agroecosystems that support natural pest control, soil fertility, and resilience to climate change.

Farmers combine livestock grazing with crop cultivation, allowing animals to graze on crop residues and cover crops, thereby recycling nutrients and enhancing soil fertility while providing additional income streams for farmers.

Through Farmer-to-Farmer knowledge-sharing sessions, farmers learn about the nutritional benefits of diverse crops such as indigenous vegetables and legumes, leading to dietary diversification and improved food security within the community.

Furthermore, the FtFE facilitates the co-creation of knowledge and fosters social cohesion among farmers, agricultural extension workers, and researchers. Through collaborative learning and knowledge sharing, farmers gain insights into innovative agroecological practices tailored to their local context, promoting continuous adaptation and improvement.

From a social perspective, the FtFE promotes economic diversification by empowering farmers to explore alternative livelihood strategies and value-added enterprises. Moreover, it fosters social values and diets by promoting the production and consumption of diverse, nutritious crops, enhancing food security and dietary diversity within communities.

From an institutional point of view, the FtFE embodies principles of participatory governance, as farmers actively engage in decision-making processes related to agricultural development and resource management. By empowering local communities and promoting decentralized decision-making, this approach contributes to more inclusive and resilient agricultural systems.

In summary, the practices adopted by trained farmers align with several key principles of agroecology. The FtFE promotes the integration of agroecological principles by fostering knowledge exchange, social empowerment, and participatory governance. By getting farmers embracing these principles, FtFE is not only enhancing the sustainability of their agricultural practices but also contributing to broader efforts towards food sovereignty, environmental conservation, and social equity.

References

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