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Farmers teaching farmers: What motivates volunteer farmer trainers?

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Abstract. This paper assesses the motivation behind the decisions of smallholder farmers to volunteer as farmer trainers despite the fact that they are not paid for their services. Volunteer farmer trainers (VFTs) are trained in livestock feeds and feeding methods by extension officers. They in turn train other farmers within their community without pay but receive training and seeds for setting up demonstration plots. Data collection was through a combination of focus group discussions and individual interviews with 99 VFTs from seven East Africa Dairy Development (EADD) sites in central and Rift Valley regions of Kenya. Findings of the study showed that VFTs were motivated by altruism, gaining knowledge/skills, social benefits, financial benefits and increased demand for training from farmers. Financial benefits were not only from sale of seed, seedlings, planting material but also VFTs have diversified into other business opportunities such as charging for services which include silage making, hay baling, training, ear tagging, chaff cutter hire and dehorning. The findings point to the fact that investments in human, social and financial capital are crucial to keeping VFTs motivated. These factors are key to ensuring the sustainability of farmer-to-farmer extension programs beyond project lifespans.

Keywords: Farmer-to-farmer extension, volunteer farmer trainers, sustainability, motivation, social benefits, financial benefits.

Introduction

Public sector extension services in the developing countries have over the last decade been going through a transformative process from the linear model of technology transfer to the more pluralistic demand driven extension (Davis 2008). Despite the transformation, extension in Africa is still faced with many challenges which have been accelerated by structural adjustment reforms aimed at reduced public spending. Some of the challenges include low budgetary allocation, understaffing and low staff morale due to poor remuneration (Kiptot *et al.* 2006; Gautam 2000). It is against this background that the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community based organisations (CBO) have come up with alternative extension approaches. These approaches focus on farmers as the principle agents of change in their communities, who with enhanced learning and empowerment increase their capacity to adapt/innovate and train other farmers. The role of extension officers is also changing from agents of technical messages to facilitators who train farmers on entrepreneurship, link them to markets and credit institutions (Christoplos 2010). For these new approaches to be institutionalized in the mainstream extension service they must demonstrate their superiority over old approaches that were abandoned for being high cost, ineffective, inefficient and not taking into account the needs of farmers (Gautam 2000). The new approaches should be accountable to their clients, ensure sustainability and be effective in disseminating new technologies. One such approach is the volunteer farmer trainer (VFT) approach that is being used by the East

Africa Dairy Development (EADD) Project to disseminate information/knowledge on livestock feed technologies to dairy farmers in Kenya.

The volunteer farmer trainer approach in the EADD project

The VFT approach is a form of farmer-to-farmer extension where farmers take centre stage in information sharing. It is envisaged that farmer-to-farmer extension is a more viable method of technology dissemination as it is based on the conviction that farmers can disseminate innovations in a better way than extension agents because they have an in depth knowledge of local conditions, culture, practices and are known by other farmers. In addition, they live in the community, speak the same language, use expressions that suit their environment and also instil confidence in their fellow farmers. It also works on the basis that the model is able to achieve economies of scale in technology dissemination by reaching more farmers more quickly through group based extension approaches that have a multiplier effect and help reduce transaction costs.

The EADD Project is implemented by a consortium of partners led by Heifer International. The project started in 2008 with its main objective being to double the incomes of 179,000 dairy farmers in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda through improved dairy production and marketing. In order to meet its targets, the project has been using VFTs to disseminate livestock feed technologies to other farmers within their communities. As of June 2012, EADD had recruited 1443 VFTs in Kenya (Kirui and Franzel 2012). VFTs in the EADD project are selected through a

participatory process involving their dairy management groups (DMGs), dissemination facilitators and the Dairy Farmers Business Associations (DFBAs) on the basis of the following criteria: ability to read and write, a member of a farmer organization/cooperative society, a dairy farmer, resident in a particular area and willing to disseminate without pay.

After selection, VFTs go through training in feeds and feeding systems. They are trained by extension agents who receive specialised training from project dissemination facilitators. The VFTs are supported to set up demonstration plots of various feed practices which include different grasses, fodder shrubs and herbaceous legumes. These demonstration plots are used as training grounds. They are also trained on feed conservation techniques which include silage making, hay baling, management and utilization of crop residues. They are also exposed through educational tours to innovative farms. So the big question is, in the absence of a salary, what is it that motivates small-holder farmers to volunteer their time and resources to train other farmers within the community?

Methods

Description of study sites

Selection of farmer trainers for the individual interviews in the formal survey was based on how long they had served as farmer trainers. EADD works in 21 sites spread out in several districts. The formal survey study was however undertaken in seven sites in Central and Rift Valley Provinces of Kenya. These were; Kieni (Mweiga), Olkalou, Muki, Kipkaren, Kabiyeet, Cheptalal and Longisa. All the study sites practice dairy farming with the cattle feeding systems ranging from zero grazing (cattle confined and stall fed) to pure grazing where cattle graze freely on private land in paddocks or tethered.

Sampling and selection of farmer trainers for the study

The VFTs in various sites were recruited and trained by the EADD project at different times from 2008. Sites selected for the study had recruited their trainers in 2008. Those that recruited much later were purposely left out in this study. By the end of December 2008, EADD had recruited and trained 107 VFTs in Kenya, a third of whom were female farmer trainers (Kirui *et al.* 2009). The selection of VFTs for this study was based on this list of 107 VFTs. Due to various reasons such as attrition, illness and commitments, the study interviewed 99 VFTs from Central Kenya and Rift Valley Provinces where the project is working. The selected VFTs were from two, three five and one districts in the South Rift Valley province, North Rift Valley, Central Province and Central Rift Valley respectively.

Focus group discussions

In order to capture qualitative information about motivational incentives of VFTs, focus group discussions were held in five sites. The main purpose of the focus group discussions was to collect qualitative data from the VFTs to be used in formulating hypotheses for more in depth interviews to gather quantitative data. Group discussions

were held in each of the five sites with groups of 5-20 VFTs to get their perceptions about their motivation.

In depth interviews with individual farmer trainers

Collection of quantitative data was through in depth interviews through a formal survey that was conducted by interviewing 99 individual farmer trainers using a structured questionnaire.

Results

Factors that motivated farmers to become trainers.

The motivating factors discussed in focus group discussions were grouped into four categories for in depth analysis in the formal survey. The factors are: altruism, gaining knowledge/skills, income and social benefits. Results from the formal survey showed that a majority of farmer trainers (93%) said that before they became trainers, they were motivated by the fact that they would gain knowledge and skills on improved dairy feed technologies. This was followed by altruism which was mentioned by 85% of farmer trainers. Another 76% of farmer trainers were motivated by social benefits that they anticipated they will receive by being trainers. These include fame/popularity which they indicated may be a springboard to leadership positions within the community or even nationally, satisfaction, improve their social status and more interaction hence increase in social networks. A substantial number of VFTs (71%) had anticipated that they will receive professional development opportunities such as training, going for tours and exchange visits. The desire to increase their income through agro tourism and sale of seeds was mentioned by 64% of farmer trainers

Factors motivating farmer trainers to continue training

Three years after becoming trainers, the two factors that were mentioned by VFTs in all the five sites during the focus group discussions that continue to motivate them are improved production (milk quality and quantity) as a result of using the knowledge acquired on improved livestock feed technologies which has in turn increased their income. The knowledge gained has also improved the quality of their animals hence increased productivity. Another motivation is improved income from services such as cow registration, ear tagging, chaff cutter hire, sale of seeds/planting material, silage making and hay baling. Non tangible benefits that continue to motivate VFTs include being kept busy, increased social status, being famous and the fact that impact from the training activities gives them satisfaction.

In order to critically analyze the factors that continue to motivate VFTs in depth, the factors from the focus group discussions were grouped into five broad categories; knowledge/skills, altruism, social benefits, income/financial benefits, project benefits and demand for training from farmers. The in depth interviews revealed that the majority of farmer trainers (88%) mentioned income as a factor that continues to motivate them. It is interesting to note that although income was not among the most frequently mentioned reasons for becoming a trainer; it was

mentioned by the majority of VFTs as a reason that continues to motivate them. This is because of the fact that some of them are now selling seed, fodder and also charging for services such as hay baling and silage making. For those not yet doing so, they anticipated also diversifying their income streams in this way in the future. Gaining knowledge/skills was mentioned by 87% of the trainers, altruism (81%), increased demand for training (81%), social benefits (73%) and project benefits was mentioned by 72% of the farmer trainers. As more and more farmers within the community benefit from training, there has been an increased demand for training and therefore this has motivated farmer trainers to continue training/disseminating livestock feed technologies to other farmers. The fact that more and more farmers are coming to them for training has boosted their self-confidence and has encouraged them to continue training.

Further analysis of the importance attached to the factors mentioned above was undertaken where farmer trainers were asked to rate the factors based on a Likert scale of 3-1. The findings revealed that altruism, gaining knowledge and income were rated highly at 2.5 while increased demand for training (2.4), project benefits and social benefits were both rated at 2.2 (Table 1).

Discussion

These findings suggest that VFTs are motivated by personal and community interests. Personal interests aspects includes: improving themselves economically (financial capital), building knowledge and skills (human capital) and enhancing social capital. Altruism on the other hand concerns community interests and also builds social capital.

Conclusion

The study has illustrated that the investment into VFTs in terms of time and resources associated with training farmers in their community can sustain VFT motivation. The benefit is the human, social and financial capital that is nurtured or built in the course of their dissemination/training activities. These three aspects are therefore key to sustaining voluntary farmer-to-farmer extension programs. Without these investments, it is doubtful whether voluntary farmer -to-farmer extension programs can be sustained beyond project lifespans. What is critical therefore is to keep VFTs motivated; the greatest motivators being gaining knowledge/skills, altruism, social and financial benefits. The key message from this study is that for

Table 1. Types of motivations that drive Volunteer Farmer Trainers (VFTs) recruited in 2008 to continue being a trainer as expressed during focus groups in 2012.

Motivation after becoming trainer	% of VFTs N=99	Mean Rating ^A	SE
Altruism	81	2.5	.073
Gain knowledge	87	2.5	.068
Income	88	2.5	.085
Social benefits	73	2.2	.089
Project benefits	72	2.2	.097
Increased demand for training	81	2.4	.077

^ARating was based on a Likert scale of 3-1 where 3=very important, 2=important and 1= least important.

voluntary farmer extension programs to be sustainable, considerable effort has to be made to encourage/support VFTs to invest in human, social and financial capital.

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