The role of farmer groups in technology dissemination:
Ingredients for success

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Abstract

This presentation examines the role of farmer groups in technology dissemination, focusing on the factors that make groups effective in extending technologies to other small-scale farmers in Meru Central District of Kenya.

The research method used was an in-depth case study of dairy goat farmer groups in Meru Central. The study to a large degree was descriptive, and therefore qualitative methods were employed to provide deep and rich accounts of the study. Interviews, non-structured observation and document analysis were some of the main means of collecting data. Purposive sampling was used to interview key informants for the preliminary information gathering. Groups, individuals and organizations were interviewed in order to triangulate the data.

From the preliminary qualitative part of the study, hypotheses were identified and questionnaires developed for further data gathering. Data will be entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and correlational techniques and measures of association and multiple linear regression will be used to examine and predict relationships among the study variables. Comparisons of groups will be made using contingency tables or cross-tabulations, and tested for significance with tests such as chi-square.

Participatory techniques such as Venn diagrams and group timelines will also be used. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) will be employed to examine the relationship of farmer groups to variables such as population density, terrain, agroecosystems, markets, rivers and roads.

Results of the qualitative and quantitative data will be shared regarding the factors that correspond with success among farmer groups in technology dissemination. Factors that will be examined as possible issues in success include leadership type, group resources, poverty of members, distance from the information source, population density, agroecological zone, gender balance, member commitment, group unity and management.

Farmer groups have a definite and important role to play in the technology generation and dissemination process. There seem to be some factors which contribute to groups’ success in extension of technologies and information. Some of the preliminary results include factors such as group cohesiveness, organization, leadership, capacity building, available resources and wealth of the members.

Extension is at a crossroads. With the focus today on issues such as decentralization, democratization, pluralism and privatization, one important focus for extension should be at the grassroots level. Farmer groups are one important stakeholder in extension. This study shows some of the factors which make them more successful in disseminating information to other smallholders. This provides important information for extension stakeholders and especially policy makers who are seeking means to effectively extend technologies.