Cross-disciplinary and South-North Collaboration for Development of Farmer-driven Study Circles in Africa

Deborah Duveskog, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Nairobi, Kenya

Introduction There is currently a strong focus among African countries on developing more effective and efficient agricultural extension services. Group study approaches building on the study circle concept have had enormous impact in other regions of the world, such as Europe and USA, and there are currently emerging initiatives also in Africa that provide valuable lessons and experiences for how farmer-driven study groups can contribute to effective demand-driven extension in Africa.

The study circles provide an opportunity for people to learn together, to strengthen their opportunities for influencing their own situation in life, and to fill gaps of knowledge and information in society. By managing the process themselves, participants practice democracy, and systems of shared power, where participants come to conclusions or make decisions by talking, listening and understanding.

Purpose of Poster The purpose of the poster is to demonstrate how agricultural extension can benefit from drawing lessons, experiences and principles from various social and natural science disciplines normally not connected to agriculture education, and how merging of experience from various continents can contributed to making extension services more effective in responding to farmers demands in a holistic manner.

Major Points of Information to be Shared The poster will show how international collaboration and exchange of ideas among actors involved in adult education have led to the development of a model of extension through farmer driven study circles which is much broader than agriculture and lead to empowerment and democratisation among farming communities in East and Southern Africa. Lessons from the civil society study circle movement in USA and in Scandinavia have been merged with experiences from experiential learning methods applied in innovative agricultural extension activities in Eastern and Southern Africa. The poster will show both the development of the innovative study circle model which included cross country exchange visits between programs in Africa and Scandinavia. Further the poster will explain the pedagogic principles of the farmer-driven study circle model developed, and give examples of applications.

Conclusions and Educational Importance The poster presentation will conclude that agricultural extension services can benefit greatly by integrating ideas and lessons generated in disciplines outside of the agricultural domain and across regions. The educational importance is to get practitioners to realise the potential of thinking broader and to bridge the gap between agricultural extension and general adult education.