

Are Farmer Field Schools stepping stones to improve agricultural extension in Uganda?

Contributed by Arnoud Braun
Monday, 14 May 2007
Last Updated Friday, 02 November 2007

In May 2007 Prossy Isubikalu defended her PhD. dissertation titled "Stepping-stones to improve upon functioning of participatory agricultural extension programmes. Farmer Field Schools in Uganda." at Wageningen University, The Netherlands.

The Farmer Field School (FFS) originated in the 1980s in the context of integrated pest management in Indonesian rice farming. With the hope that it is the remedy for agricultural extension system, FFS has been promoted as a tool for participatory learning and experimentation all over the world. This work results from a critical analysis of the introduction of the FFS concept into the agricultural innovation system in Uganda. Ideally, an FFS produces new technical knowledge in the context of application through the input of local human resources.

The analysis, framed as a technography, shows that implementation and operation of an FFS is hugely complex. This detailed study of institutional factors, from the level of international donor organizations down to the level of local leadership and gender relations, and analysis of technical factors in different rural areas of Uganda makes clear that and FFS is more than a local tool for farmer participation in agricultural improvement. Implementation of a FFS requires adjustment of the agricultural innovation system at all levels and an integrated tackling of agricultural problems in order to meet its objectives.

Isubikalu shows that it is imperative to "demolish" existing organizational structures and create new ones, which align scientific with local structures to produce an appropriate people-centered system that is more responsive to agricultural and rural development. She provides stepping stones in redesigning FFS to fit the specific conditions in Uganda.

Complete summary and further information: see the FFSnet database.

Download the table of contents of the book 'Stepping-stones to improve upon functioning of participatory agricultural extension programs - Farmer Field School in Uganda' (PDF-file).

Thesis on Video: This PhD-defense (both video and PowerPoint) can be viewed on WUR TV. Access here (only for broadband/ fast internet connections and only visible with MS Internet Explorer and MS Media Player).

Correct citation:

Isubikalu, P., 2007. Stepping-stones to improve upon functioning of participatory agricultural extension programmes - Farmer Field Schools in Uganda. PhD-thesis Wageningen University. Wageningen University Publishers, Wageningen, The Netherlands. 216 p.

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Book purchase

The copyright of this publication is with the publisher, Wageningen Academic Publishers. As such the book is not available electronically. FFSnet has been able to acquire a 40% discount on the purchase of the book of the thesis of Prossy Isubikalu, titled "Stepping-stones to improve upon functioning of participatory agricultural extension programmes. Farmer Field Schools in Uganda."

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Review in New Agriculturist - on line magazine

The New Agriculturist has reviewed the PhD. thesis "Stepping stones to improve upon functioning of participatory agricultural extension programmes: Farmer field schools in Uganda" by Prossy Isubikalu.

"When first introduced in Indonesia as a way to improve pest control in rice crops, the philosophy behind the Farmer Field School (FFS) was one of farmer-centred learning. Top-down approaches had failed; farmers needed an environment in which they could experiment, innovate and learn. External support from extension officers could help guide the process, for example shaping experiments to ensure they produced useful data, but ultimately farmers were given control of their learning.

As the FFS has been spread around the world, its basic format has been adapted. And in Uganda, writes Isubikalu, the

role of farmers in determining what they learn has been lost. Instead, the FFS curriculum has been decided by higher level actors - researchers and funding organisations - and is focussed on introducing externally developed technologies. This, Isubikalu argues, is ineffective in achieving the intended goal of FFS - poverty reduction. The system therefore needs radically redirecting, through careful examination of its structure, and of the roles of the various actors. The revised model will focus on catalysing, promoting and building on local innovations.

Originating as a PhD thesis, Isubikalu's work is written more to satisfy the demands for thoroughness from examiners, rather than the need of the ordinary reader for concise, punchy presentation of the essentials. However, for those interested in local innovation and how to achieve true participation of rural people in development decision-making, it is certainly worthy of attention."

Source: New Agriculturist - on line magazine, <http://www.new-ag.info/07/04/books.php#184>

Discussion about this thesis

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