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New Agriculturist



The Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) brings together all those working to strengthen and transform agricultural research for development around the world. As part of this role, GFAR is working with *New Agriculturist* to showcase and raise awareness of important initiatives and their outcomes, to update and inspire others.

Farmers on film in the fight against striga



Juliana Toboyee from Ghana, gives the go ahead sign for action
 © Marcella Vrolijk

With the widespread scaling back of agricultural extension services in Africa, those with a responsibility to deliver information to rural communities are learning to follow new channels. In West Africa, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) has built on experiences gained by the Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice) in developing a series of ten farmer-to-farmer videos. The ten films are now being widely shown to support rural learning on practical and affordable ways to control one of Africa's most serious weeds - striga.

Strong participation of farmers has been key to the film making process. First and foremost, the knowledge and farming techniques shared in the videos have been developed over a number of years within farmer field schools. ICRISAT and partners established the schools, starting in the early 2000s, to support farmer experiments on a wide range of striga control options. The result was the development of an integrated set of striga and soil fertility management practices (ISSFM) for use in sorghum and pearl millet cultivation.

For the past 40 years, scientists from international research organisations have invested heavily in finding solutions to striga, one of the world's most troublesome weeds, also known as witchweed. Of great concern to African farmers, this parasite seriously damages maize, sorghum, millet, rice and fonio. While developing striga-resistant varieties has been a key area of research for striga control, researchers have also developed insights in how soil fertility management and other options can help to reduce striga.

Production process

In 2010, inspired by AfricaRice's rural learning initiative, which managed to reach over 1 million farmers through farmer-centred videos, ICRISAT commissioned the former coordinator of this initiative, Paul Van Mele, to train staff from its own offices and partner organisations in farmer-to-farmer video production. Working with farmer field school groups in Niger, Nigeria, Ghana and Mali, a comprehensive series of ten gender-sensitive films was made under the name 'Fighting Striga'. Each video focusses on a different aspect of ISSFM, including variety testing, composting, intercropping cereals and legumes, crop-livestock interactions, cowpea seed storage and cost-benefit analysis.

Building on the experiences of AfricaRice was crucial in enabling the videos to be effectively planned and produced



Joel Aiki from Nigeria films a woman drying cowpea seed
© Marcella Vrolijk

within a short timeframe. As a result, all ten were completed in both English and French and ready for wide-scale dissemination within a year. But Van Mele acknowledges that developing effective videos requires careful planning and coordination of mixed video teams that include members of national research institutes, NGOs and farmer organisations. Engaging senior management of all these organisations to understand the specific challenges of producing farmer-to-farmer videos has proved essential in getting the full involvement of their staff in the process.

Reaching the audience

Disseminating the videos for widespread viewing has been another challenge. Initially, ICRISAT and its partners used the videos during farmer exchange visits, and several were shown and discussed at community open air viewings. Held in the evenings, these attracted large crowds of children, women and men. Christine Keita, a Malian farmer who features in the video on composting, was excited about how the audiences have responded. "Farmers from different regions came together to learn how we controlled striga," she recalls. "Although our crops were close to harvest we could show them on the video all the different steps needed to make good compost and how to apply it. They were all very excited; they asked me lots of questions. As I had learnt so many things at the farmer field school, I felt really proud and confident to answer them."

To further promote the videos, the project has sought to inform and enthuse a large number of agriculture-oriented organisations to share and show the videos in communities where they operate. A key success has been the inclusion of farmer training videos in the communication strategy of the Network of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organisations of West Africa (ROPPA). Early dissemination efforts led to a strong demand for the videos to be translated into local languages. With support from language experts, extension officers and radio broadcasters, this has recently been completed, with the videos now available on multi-language DVDs that include six major West African languages (Bambara, Bomu, Hausa, Mooré, Peulh and Zarma).



Hundreds of people attended an open air video show in Koutiala, Mali
© Tom van Mourik

Online streaming



Strong participation of farmers has been key to the film making process
© Paul Van Mele

The most recent development in sharing the videos has been through the internet. Using advanced video-streaming technology, anyone can now download and watch the videos from a dedicated site, established by Access Agriculture, an international NGO. Access Agriculture also aims to support new productions and more local language translations. For those without internet access and to ensure the DVDs end up in the villages where farmers can organise themselves to watch the videos whenever they like, major distribution of the hard-copy DVDs is planned through a wide variety of outlets: rural radio networks, research and extension agencies, farmers'

organisations, development organisations and Chambers of Agriculture.

Meanwhile, ICRISAT is continuing to work with the trained teams to develop more videos. Improving scripting skills is, for Van Mele, a major priority. "Many people can be taught to use a video camera and editing software," he says. "More training is now required in the development of video scripts that

respectfully show farmers' realities and that present scientific and local knowledge in ways that capture farmers' attention and encourage them to experiment. For this to be effective, a passion for agriculture is a prerequisite."

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