GFRAS GOOD PRACTICE NOTE FOR EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICES

NOTE 24: Extension Campaigns

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The Global Good Practices Initiative aims to facilitate access to information and know-how on agricultural extension for a wide audience of practitioners. It does so by providing Good Practice Notes, which are descriptions of key concepts, approaches, and methods in an easy-to-understand format. They give an overview of the main aspects, best-fit considerations, and sources for further reading. The notes are openly available at www.betterextension.org. To download, use, disseminate, or discuss this note, access it online by scanning the QR code in the bottom right corner. Feedback is highly appreciated.

Philosophy and principles

An extension campaign is a coordinated effort to inform many farmers in a relatively short period of time about an agricultural topic of widespread concern or interest. The aim is to achieve quick, large-scale change in farmer behaviour and practices through carefully choreographed efforts by different organisations, using a variety of communication channels. An extension campaign requires a sharp focus (Box 1) and a clear end point. It should deliver material benefits to farmers, whose needs and demands are paramount in shaping the campaign.

The chosen topic should have realistic and achievable outcomes. Campaigns are well suited to tackling plant health problems, where concerted action is needed to mitigate risks and to scale up proven but underutilised technologies. Campaigns go beyond the limited scope of individual projects to promote technologies and innovations to farmers. To be effective, campaigns need a panoply of partners and people, especially those beyond agriculture. Mass media and influential citizens, for example, offer new ways to reach large-scale audiences.

Campaigns are usually one-off events, though some may last for several months or longer. Whatever their length, all campaigns should complement rather than replace existing extension efforts, promoting practical, direct ways to improve agriculture and benefit livelihoods.

Extension campaigns differ from advocacy campaigns, which aim to influence policy, for example on the use of genetically modified crops. The most successful campaigns think and act expansively, encourage wide participation, and focus on topics that matter most to people.

BOX 1: WHAT ARE GOOD TOPICS FOR EXTENSION CAMPAIGNS?

The most suitable topics are those where there is an urgent need to provide information to farmers, or where a proven innovation is not being widely used, or where simple actions adopted by many people would lead to significant improvements in livelihoods. SCALE – System-wide Collaborative Action for Livelihoods and the Environment – is an approach that has been used to address global climate change in Uganda, tractor safety in the USA, and several public health issues (see Box 3). Plant health rallies (see Box 2) are well suited to pests and diseases problems, but have also been used to promote nutritious vegetables and safe handling of pesticides.

Implementation

All campaigns have common features, regardless of the methods used to disseminate messages[1]. The following generic points are based on experiences with plant health rallies (Box 2) and the SCALE approach (Box 3).

- Start at the geographical scale you wish to influence; avoid pilot efforts that start in hope but may fail to materialise into a full campaign.
- Define the topic (Box 1) and common goal; focus on practical needs of farmers. Draw up a schedule of activities, the expected end point of the campaign, and the deadline for assessing outcomes.

[1] For earlier efforts to develop strategic extension campaigns, see Adhikarya, R. 1997. Implementing strategic extension campaigns. In: Swanson, B.E., Bentz, R.P. and Sofranko, A.J., eds. *Improving agricultural extension. A reference manual.* Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, chapter 10. Available at: www.fao.org/docrep/W5830E/w5830e00.htm

- Assess strengths of cross-sector networks to identify the roles of public, private, and civil society partners – the most effective campaigns depend on broad alliances.
- Involve representatives from all sectors (including mass media) in planning activities; identify the key people and organisations that can make change happen.
- Identify communication channels that maximise information flow. Prepare guidelines on different ways to deliver messages: plant health rallies, radio programmes, mobile phones (texting), social media, farmer meetings, and so on.
- Define and validate the key messages to be conveyed. Design suitable formats (e.g. text messages, fact sheets, posters) for disseminating messages. For print media, ensure you have enough copies to distribute to target audiences.
- Compare knowledge, attitudes, and practices before and after the campaign. Carefully consider what data you really need and who will coordinate data collection and analysis.
- Cost all actions, identify funds, and confirm partner contributions.
- Ensure that results and lessons learned are published and shared with all participants.

Campaigns require careful planning and work best when there is widespread consultation and multi-sector involvement. Ensure there are enough funds to support proposed activities. It is important to show what a campaign has achieved beyond the numbers of people reached. What happened after key messages were disseminated?

Large-scale campaigns require major funding, and this usually means separate, donor-funded projects. More modest local campaigns are still worthwhile and can act as the starting point for greater support from government.

Capacities required

Extension campaigns require a range of social, communication, and organisational skills. Always consider sources of expertise outside agriculture. Radio presenters, journalists, and well known public figures (such as religious leaders) have useful contributions to make to campaigns. Technical experts are important, but those who develop technologies are not always best suited to promoting them. Good interpersonal skills are essential, as is the ability to work and negotiate with diverse groups of people. Get good advice on data needed to assess campaign outcomes and impacts.

Training can also be given as part of the campaign. Plant health rally teams are taught basic communication skills: keep messages short, listen more than you talk, and respond to what you are told. Other skills are more difficult to acquire. SCALE requires experienced facilitators in its early planning stages and a core team of communications specialists to give advice once activities begin.

BOX 2: PLANT HEALTH RALLIES

Plant health rallies are a low-cost, flexible method for running campaigns (usually comprising a series of rallies), often on crop pests and diseases. They have been used to tackle new problems such as tomato leafminer (*Tuta absoluta*), an insect pest, and maize lethal necrosis disease, caused by viruses. Rallies have been conducted by public extension providers in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda, supported by the Plantwise programme of CABI[2]. A short course gives senior staff practical experience in running rallies, holding short interviews, and writing farmer fact sheets on the target problem. The senior staff then train local teams of extension workers, who conduct local rallies.

Each campaign involves around eight people, enough for two separate teams. Each team usually holds rallies of 45–60 minutes in up to eight public places over two days, or longer if teams can be reassigned from everyday extension duties. The teams first identify locations where people congregate, such as market places, shopping centres, and busy road junctions, and then map a route. In larger markets, teams move around for as long as they can attract new audiences (usually one or two hours).

The rally begins with a short introduction to the topic, broadcast by megaphone to a gathered crowd. A raised position increases visibility and a banner helps to attract audiences. Afterwards, team members create small discussion groups where people can ask questions and receive fact sheets and other information (e.g. who to contact for more advice). One rally member records the location details, number of people attending, topic presented and duration. A small number of people are interviewed at each rally to assess their current knowledge of the topic. These interviewees are contacted later to find out how they have benefited from information received at the rally.

Ad hoc or spontaneous rallies are not suited to all countries. In Rwanda, for example, where civic networks are strong, rally teams pre-invite (mobilise) people. Mobilisation guarantees an audience, but there are drawbacks: it is time-consuming, invited audiences may expect something in return for attending, and it is difficult to guarantee starting times.

[2] Plantwise: www.plantwise.org

Costs

The Kenya SCALE application lasted one year and cost approximately US$150,000, with in-kind contributions of US$100,000 from the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF). This included paying for a major planning workshop and supporting a small coordination unit. A regional training-of-trainers plant health rallies course (for 15 people from four countries) cost an estimated US$15,000. The basic cost (fuel, printed material) of a two-day plant health campaign involving two teams of 16 people is around US$100. Campaigns will vary in scale and scope, and therefore these are indicative costs only.

BOX 3: SCALE – SYSTEM-WIDE COLLABORATIVE ACTION FOR LIVELIHOODS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

SCALE is a structured approach for amplifying a proven but underutilised technology. The aim is to increase awareness and technology uptake (scaling-up) through strengthened partnerships and collaborative actions. Campaigns are an important element of this approach.

The SCALE approach has been used in Kenya to improve dairy production. It is relatively costly in terms of resources and time, but with proportionally greater long-term benefits. Multiple players from multiple sectors are involved from the start, when they map the context and agree what should be addressed. In Kenya a workshop brought together 100+ people from 80 organisations to consider practical ways to help small-scale dairy farmers. The group agreed to promote fodder shrubs, one of several competing ideas. Once consensus was achieved, participants could focus on how to work together in channelling information to farmers.

SCALE attempts to catalyse coalitions and partnerships by building trust and mutual confidence. In Kenya, participants considered both real and perceived reasons why organisations didn't work together, facilitating a shift from competition and confrontation towards collaboration. The next step was to create collaborative, sustainable solutions and identify participants' contributions, an essential prerequisite before direct actions could begin.

SCALE helps to build social capital around a specific development topic, with positive effects for participants as well as target audiences. Local, targeted campaigns show the positive ways that different organisations can add value. In Kenya, the mass media were active partners and advocates of fodder shrubs, rather than mere reporters of what others were doing. About 100,000 farmers obtained seeds of fodder shrubs after this one-year project, compared with 40,000 farmers over the previous eight years. It was unclear, however, how many farmers had successfully planted seeds as a result of the SCALE efforts

Strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

- Campaigns can reach many people in a short time with a clear message and a simple solution or proven technology.
- The alliances and partnerships formed during campaigns stimulate new collaborations that often continue after the campaign has ended.
- Campaigns create a strong unity of purpose, encouraging contributions from organisations that boost resources and increase the scope of activities.
- Campaigns can be run at all geographic scales and need not be expensive or require major planning.

Weaknesses

- Launching campaigns (particularly large-scale ones) can become over-reliant on project funds and international organisations, ignoring opportunities that are locally led.
- Coordination can be challenging, particularly ensuring the timely availability of recommended inputs (e.g. seeds) and information (e.g. planting rates).
- Partners with competing interests may complicate planning and implementation.
- Measuring of outcomes is often weak, partly because it is difficult to ascribe change to campaigns alone, and because not enough emphasis is given to assessment during planning.

Best-fit considerations

Campaigns have universal relevance and are suited to many different topics, from mitigating plant health risks to promoting sustainable fishing and better natural resource management. All sectors and organisations have potential contributions to make. Campaigns may be small-scale and local or large-scale and national, depending on funds and committed partners. Information and communication technologies may be best suited to reaching younger farmers, though all ages listen to radio, and mobile phone ownership and coverage is increasing steadily.

Governance

Government and public organisations will usually oversee large-scale campaigns, though these are ideally led by an advisory group that balances the interests of different partners. A small secretariat is often funded by SCALE projects to coordinate activities (e.g. providing training). Small-scale campaigns will have a simpler management structure, and could be led by a single organisation (e.g. extension provider or NGO).

Evidence of impacts, sustainability, and scalability

Evidence of impact is often dependent on numbers of people reached or anecdotal accounts, rather than

widespread, well documented changes in behaviour. Campaigns have undoubtedly raised public awareness, particularly of new plant diseases in East Africa, but their ability to achieve enduring, large-scale impact is limited by the availability of durable control measures (e.g. resistant crop varieties). Where such measures exist and concerted, sustained action is taken, campaigns have had remarkable success, as in the global eradication of rinderpest. Other indirect ways of measuring impact include assessing changes in social capital, the strength of relationships, and trust between partners. Two years after the end of the SCALE dairy project in Kenya, partners continued to collaborate in promoting fodder trees. Campaigns are by definition one-off, usually short-term events and are sustainable in the sense that they are routinely used to address topics. Campaigns are inherently scalable.

Further reading

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Bentley, J., Boa, E., Van Mele, P., Almanza, J., Vasquez, D. and Eguino, S. 2004. Going Public: a new extension method. *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* 1 (2): 108–123.

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USAID. 2009. *Transforming the Kenyan dairy feeds system to improve farmer productivity and livelihoods: A SCALE case study*. Washington, DC: USAID and AED. Available at: www.worldagroforestry.org/sites/default/files/AED%20Transforming%20the%20Kenya%20Dairy%20Feeds%20System%20SCALE%20in%20Kenya.pdf

Training materials

Boa, E.R. 2015. *A guide to plant health rallies*. Wallingford, UK: CABI (with notes on training and implementation).

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