

A positive attitude means more than following the book

EXTENSION
METHODS

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Right attitude

The attitude of extension staff when working with farmers can be as important as the extension method itself. Having the right attitude about farmer creativity may stimulate more farmer experiments than following all the steps in a formal program designed to encourage those experiments.

Following the manual

A certain project run by the Africa Rice Center promoted participatory learning and action research (PLAR) with rice farmers in West Africa. The PLAR was based on FFS (farmer field school), but with even more emphasis on encouraging farmer experiments. The project began in the early 2000s, working in Ghana through government organizations, and in Mali through NGOs. Mali had a tradition of involving local organizations. In Mali the project leadership was more stable, and included more women.

In Ghana the project staff covered all 28 weekly modules from the PLAR manual, while in Mali the staff started by covering all 28 modules, but later only gave the ones on new technology. In Ghana the staff limited participation to 25 people per site, as the manual indicated. The staff thought of PLAR as an extension method for teaching rice technologies to farmers, while in Mali the staff understood that PLAR was an approach for mutual learning and that it was meant to develop and test technical and institutional innovations with farmers. In Mali the project innovated by including public viewings of the Bangladesh rice seed videos in which men and women farmers share their knowledge and innovations in front of the camera. The project staff in Mali valued farmer innovations more than the extensionists in Ghana.

In Mali the interventions resulted in more farmer experiments and they were more creative than the ones in Ghana.

Conclusion

A positive attitude towards farmers' knowledge and practices helped to nurture mutual learning. Multi-stakeholder platforms that promote a long-term engagement with grassroots organisations may be as conducive to changing public servants' attitudes as the actual participatory approach used on the ground.



Cissé Dramane designed a stick to help him transplant rice in lines. Inventions can be nurtured by an encouraging attitude, and by new ideas

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