



Africa Rice Center (WARDA)



Centre du riz pour l'Afrique (ADRAO)

Embargoed until 0000 GMT on 11 June 2009

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Radio, video key to agricultural innovation in Africa

Two-thirds of rural women creatively applied ideas illustrated by videos demonstrating improved food processing techniques compared to less than 20 percent who attended training workshops

Cotonou, Benin – Conventional media, radio and video, are powerful, accessible and relevant forces of agricultural innovation and transformation in Africa than usually considered, a study published in this week's issue of the International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability reveals.

The study undertaken by the Africa Rice Center and Benin's University of Abomey however finds that the power of radio and video programming is not adequately recognized and accorded due attention by Africa's policy-makers, stifling its potential to unleash farmer innovations.

"Farmers' innovations are often shaped by capital limitations and mainly rely on locally available resources, of which knowledge is a key one," says Paul Van Mele, a scientist at the Africa Rice Center. "Video proved a powerful, low-cost medium for farmer-to-farmer extension and to expose rural communities to new ideas and practices."

Titled *The power of video to trigger innovation: rice processing in central Benin*, the study examined the impacts of educational videos featuring early-adopting farmers demonstrating the use of new technologies and techniques. The study found that when women watched videos featuring fellow farmers demonstrating new techniques, they showed better learning and understanding of the technology and creatively applied its central ideas.

Innovation levels of 72 percent were recorded in villages where women were introduced to improved rice processing techniques by videos compared to 19 percent among farmers who had attended training workshops. When women who had attended training workshops watched the videos, the innovations recorded shot up to 92 percent.

Indeed, the study found that watching videos spurred greater innovation than did conventional farmer training techniques. Notably high levels of creativity (67 percent) were recorded among women who did not have access to the rice processing technology featured in the video.

"The adaptations by Benin women to improve rice processing after having watched the video illustrate the power of video to quickly stimulate creativity

among rural people, who are often seen as much more passive technology consumers,” says Van Mele. “Besides being more powerful, video was also able to reach more people than conventional training workshops.”

Drawing lessons from a similar rural learning initiative undertaken in Bangladesh, the Africa Rice Center with a wide range of partners is using local language videos to train farmers on various facets of rice production and processing in Benin, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, among other countries.

By last year, the rice videos had been translated into 20 African languages, and were being used by more than 400 community-based organizations across Africa to strengthen their own capacity in rice technologies.

The videos, which are disseminated through mobile cinema vans or local organizations, have been viewed by about 130,000 farmers across Africa unleashing their creativity, reaching thrice as many farmers as do face-to-face farmer training workshops.

Partner organizations in various countries are combining the videos with radio programming to reinforce the lessons and knowledge. In Guinea, one radio station, Radio Guinée Maritime has aired interviews with farmers involved in this program reaching some 800,000 listeners, an experience which has been replicated in Gambia, Nigeria and the refugees of Northern Uganda.

In order to effectively capitalize on the potential of radio and video technologies in Africa, the study recommends broadening the common outlook on innovations beyond the traditional research and extension systems to include localized farmer innovations too. “Local innovations better reflect the realities of rural people than do outside techniques,” say the study authors.

About the Africa Rice Centre (WARDA):

The Africa Rice Center is an autonomous inter-governmental research association of 22 African member States. It is also one of the 15 international agricultural research Centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

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