

2016

Development of Transformational Strategies of Smallholders Based on Indigenous Knowledge

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Recommended Citation

Westgate, Mark E.; Butler, Lorna Michael; Mazur, Robert E.; and Lenssen, Andrew W., "Development of Transformational Strategies of Smallholders Based on Indigenous Knowledge" (2016). *Agronomy Conference Proceedings and Presentations*. 18.

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388-9 Development of Transformational Strategies of Smallholders Based on Indigenous Knowledge.

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Wednesday, November 9, 2016: 9:55 AM

Phoenix Convention Center North, Room 226 C

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Abstract:

This presentation will outline a few of the key lessons learned during the first 12 years of extension programs implemented by the Center for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (now the Iowa State University – Uganda Program, a Ugandan NGO). These lessons and recommendations are described in greater detail in “Tapping Philanthropy for Development”, L.M Butler and D. E McMillan (eds), Kumarian Press 2015.

Adhere to the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach. The CSRL initiative was developed to identify ways to improve the livelihoods of small landholder farmers in rural communities of a developing country. Uganda was chosen because the vast majority of the population relies on agricultural production, and it was a relatively safe place to engage ISU faculty, students, and donors in the program. The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach is the guiding principle for engaging farmers in the program. It places the resource poor at the center of the development equation. It considers individual wealth, food, land, physical and mental health, knowledge, skills, attitudes and social networks as capabilities and capitals at his/her disposal that contribute their livelihood.

Actively incorporate indigenous knowledge into extension programs: The involvement of farmers teaching and helping their peers is an indigenous practice; the program is largely based on this strategy. People look to respected leaders for knowledge, advice, and assistance. The program volunteers/community trainers are quite effective at adapting improved practices in ways that local farmers could/would manage them, which greatly enhances the likelihood of adoption and retention. Recovery of banana plantations is a positive example. Farmers knew how to grow bananas (plantain), but abandoned production because it was generally deemed not profitable due to pests and diseases. Building on their indigenous knowledge and using a cooperative training and demonstration approach, new resistant varieties were successfully introduced and adopted. Bananas became a major income producing crop in the District within a few short years. Introduction of kitchen gardens, in contrast, did not rely on indigenous knowledge or practice. Initially, farm households enthusiastically accepted this intervention because it was seen as way to access nutritionally dense ‘medicine’ for those suffering from HIV/AIDS and for malnourished children. The gardens all but disappeared in a few years. A survey revealed the practice was not relevant since land was not a limiting factor for vegetable production. Development of ‘Nutrition Education Centers’ for young mothers and their infants, however, has been highly successful. Training at these ‘Centers’ held in rural households incorporates local knowledge, attitudes, customs, and community support to overcome infant malnutrition and improve maternal health.

Most importantly, put people first in participatory program appraisals. It is critical for a development project to have a mechanism for listening to the farmers’ own assessment of their situation. Participatory rural appraisals conducted before, during, and after program interventions are instituted must be conducted with active involvement of small landholder farmers, community leaders, and extension personnel. This provides a mechanism for developing ownership by the community, trust among participants, and well-informed program adjustments.

Finally, garner support and actively engage 'Venture Philanthropists.' Encourage donors to do more than write checks. Attack social problems the way venture capitalists and entrepreneurs attack business problems -- by developing a 'failure is not an option' partnership between investors and investees. The ISU-Uganda Program has benefitted greatly from very active participation by its donors.

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