

Scaling up the Farmer Field School approach - challenges and opportunities

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In 2017 having a global overview is an ambitious project because of the several implementations and the adaptations during the last decades and because in two different communities in the same region of the same country the approach could be completely different, but in literature, through guidance documents, it's possible to identify a number of steps to create the approach. The aim of this report is to deeply understand the evolution of the approach from its creation and to underline the possibilities that it has today.

The Farmer Field School approach from the 80's

The FFS is a school without walls, created for the farmers by the farmers with the help and the cooperation of scientists that can both teach and learn.

Historical background

The Farmer Field School approach has been created by the FAO during the 80's as a response to the green revolution, aimed to gain behavioral changes in land use and management among communities (Braun et al., 2006).

The first project was established in Indonesia as Integrated Pest Management FFS in response to the resistance and sometimes resurgence of pest species; initially it has been designed to address a specific problem in a specific local context by placing the control of small scale agro ecosystems in the hands of people who actually manage it (Okoth et al., 2006). Then it has been flexibly adapted to over 90 countries (FAO, LEI and CTA, 2006) in response to the growing demand due to the necessity to feed an increasing number of people (Leeuwis, 2004). The use of the word "adaptation" is not casual because one of the main characteristics of the approach is actually the fact that works exclusively at a community level. It changes to address the necessities of the small farm holders in relation to the specific soil type, water availability and food security, playing a multidimensional role not exclusively related to crops themselves (Habermas, 1984).

Why FFS?

The main FFS objectives and necessities have been divided in ten categories (Waddington et al., 2012), namely:

1. Improved crops productivity and establish an appropriate model for agriculture management
2. Food security and nutrition: increasing the crop yields and using micronutrient rich foods (SPRING, 2014), people are more likely to have more food and a more balanced diet (USAID, 2014); additionally the lack of knowledge in food preservation, preparation and

storage can affect the community in relation to health and hygienic problems (FAO, 2013).

3. Market access or entrance: promoting labor and managerial skills to generate, where possible, an additional income.
4. Community and farmers' empowerment through a participative adult-learning approach
5. Environment: ensuring sustainable food production, soil-water management and avoiding waste.
6. Pest and Pesticide reduction
7. Livestock healthcare and management
8. Social development and technological advancement
9. Institutionalization: involving NGOs, local and governmental organizations and stakeholders' partnerships in a cooperative action to ensure a long lasting impact for the community. Health: with innovative FFS groups in West Africa promoted by IFAD in relation to vector-borne diseases and with the promotion of HIV/AIDS prevention in rural communities (IFAD, 2011)

Structure of the approach

Despite having many variations of the original FFS approach there are characteristics that are common across all. A global objective, that can be pursued by the approach in general terms, has been identified by the UN with the second SDG: "increasing the agricultural productivity and the incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous people, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, markets and opportunities" (UN, SDG 2.3, 2015).