

THE AGRICULTURE EXTENSION STRATEGY FOR THE NORTH EAST CHILLI PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION (NECPA)

Farm Africa and the North East Chilli Producers Association (NECPA) are implementing a three-year programme, running from August 2018 to September 2021. The project will create a more competitive and profitable chilli value chain in Lira, northern Uganda, to capitalise on growing international demand for varieties of Ugandan African bird's eye (ABE) dried chillies.

Through this partnership, Farm Africa is strengthening the technical capacity of NECPA extension workers to support market-orientated chilli production across their entire area of operation. In particular, it will initially focus on delivering an enhanced extension package to 3,000 (120 groups of 25) chilli farmers in Aromo, Barr and Amach sub-counties. By engaging the 3,000 farmers in a more market-oriented approach to chilli production, NECPA will be in a position to meet its minimum export volumes.

Agricultural extension services provided by staff will cover leadership and group dynamics, post-harvest handling, production planning, varying chilli markets, GLOBALG.A.P. certification, organic farming, Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and gender mainstreaming. These modules will prepare NECPA and its farmer groups to produce quality chillies for European markets. As a result, NECPA will obtain the proper certification and licensing required to begin accessing and selling their farmers' chillies directly into high-value export markets.

This document lays out a strategy that NECPA will use to deliver enhanced extension services to targeted chilli farmers in the Commercialising Chilli Production project and beyond. This will ensure the field extension team deliver demand-driven training, which is market-oriented using a mix of participatory approaches, to enable farmers to produce chillies that are fit for the market.

NECPA AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION STRUCTURE

In order to reach as many farmers as possible and provide them with immediate solutions to challenges being experienced, NECPA has devised a robust extension structure that covers up to grassroots level. This structure ranges from qualified Agricultural Extension Officers, a network of village agents, agro-input dealers, group leaders and model farmers.

Agricultural Extension Officers (AEOs)

With support from Farm Africa, NECPA are recruiting people who meet the minimum qualifications of a diploma in agriculture, agribusiness, agroecology or other relevant courses. AEOs are trained on major themes in agronomy of chillies, GLOBALG.A.P., organic farming, VSLAs, gender and cross-cutting issues like peace and reconciliation.

Upon completing training, the AEOs are deployed to sub-counties, each with a minimum of ten groups (250 farmers), who they offer enhanced extension services around production, marketing and group dynamics. Additionally, the AEOs provide mentorship to farmers to ensure they're conforming to best practices.

The AEOs, with support from the project officer, are responsible for identifying early adopters and business-oriented farmers to be contracted as field agents, model farmers and agro-input dealers. Group leaders are elected by their group members in a transparent manner according to group constitutions.

Field agents

Field agents are those business-oriented farmers who are selected to sell inputs like seeds, fertilisers and pesticides and buy back chilli produce from farmers.

Field agents provide after-sales training to farmers and continuously follow-up with farmers to ensure they adhere to best quality assurance, GLOBALG.A.P. and organic farming practices. The field agents will alert the AEOs to any challenges farmers face, such as the occurrence of unique pests and diseases.

Model farmers

Model farmers are effective innovators and disseminators in the community. The extension team identifies progressive farmers as models who train other farmers on new technologies and innovations like solar drying, making and using farmyard manure, organic pesticides and fertilisers, and other practical solutions.

Agro-input dealers

Agro-input dealers are identified by the AEOs with support from the project officer. These are fairly established business owners who deal in a variety of inputs like seeds, pesticides and fertilisers.

NECPA contracts the agro-input dealers to sell chilli seeds, organic pesticides, fungicides and fertilisers. In addition, the agro-input dealers are trained on the handling and use of these inputs, offering advisory services to farmers who buy the inputs.

Group leaders

Group leaders are often active and influential members of the community, who have a basic level of literacy. They offer informal farmer support to their group members, especially on field management and ensuring the quality of their chillies. Group leaders link their group members to the AEOs in case they need technical advisory support.

Members attend meetings held by NECPA to ensure information is shared and spread to a large number of farmers.



EXTENSION APPROACHES

The type of extension approaches AEOs use to reach out to farmers are varied and farmer driven. This ranges from farm visits, group demonstrations and radio broadcasts.

Group approach

This is the most common approach for introducing new technologies to a given community. In farmer groups of a maximum of 25 members, AEOs introduce farmers to the bigger picture of commercialising chilli production and offer training on group dynamics, agronomy, GLOBALG.A.P., organic farming and gender.

Farm visits

Farm visits enhance personal contact between AEOs and farmers. It enables the AEOs to familiarise themselves with the farmer's farming practices and their family in order to give specific advice or information to the farmer.

Field days

A field day is an event where 10 or more farmers visit a demonstration site to learn about new technologies. There they can ask questions and are encouraged to try out new ideas on their own farms.

Field days are arranged during the key stages of crop growth when particular management practices are being carried out, for example; at the time of planting, during fertiliser application, mid-season when growth differences can be observed and during harvest time when farmers can compare the yields. A minimum of two field days is recommended in a season.

Demonstrations

Demonstrations are used to show farmers the results of a particular technology being introduced, usually in a field or homestead. Examples may include the use of organic manure on chillies, pest control using organic pesticides and planting methods.

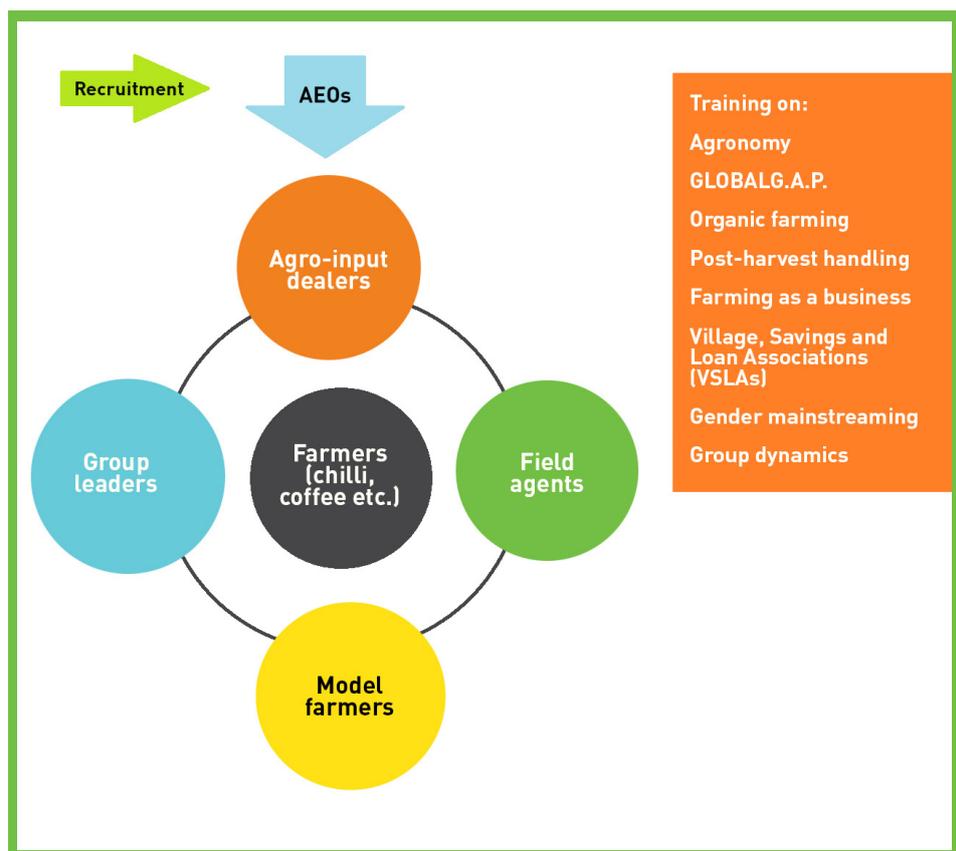
Demonstrations can be conducted over one season or more. They can also be conducted with an individual farmer as well as groups of farmers. Farmers use demonstrations to learn and exchange ideas and experiences.

Radio broadcasts

Radio broadcasts offer an alternative means of communication with extension staff. Farmers can call into the radio station with discussion points and questions and receive responses from extension staff in a culturally acceptable way. This approach is relatively cheaper in coverage and is useful where literacy levels are low.

Exchange visits

Exchange visits involve taking a group of farmers from one village or area to another area in order to expose them to new developments and technologies. Farmers can visit other farms, other extension organisations such as NGOs and research stations to see activities and technologies being implemented. Exchange visits offer good learning and experience sharing opportunities for farmers.





Useful tips for working with communities

1. Know a community is not homogeneous.

The community is made up of people of different languages, cultures, customs, ethnicities and tribes.

2. Observe to adapt. Constantly observe and reflect upon the practices and behaviours of the communities and conform accordingly in order to gain acceptance.

3. Appreciate the cultural specificities within a community. Appreciate people's religions, tribes, beliefs and practices. For instance, in some communities women avoid talking in front of men.

4. Win trust by spending time with the community. Give sufficient time, repeated visits and be patient to build trust between the community members and you.

5. Clear doubts about your role. Explain your role to the community at the onset of your engagement so that they are aware of it, and avoid raising expectations over what you cannot deliver.

6. Talk to resolve conflicts. Since a rural community can be divided and hierarchical, it is paramount that you work to resolve conflicts and ensure mutuality.

Investing in smallholder farming is the number one way to combat poverty in rural Africa. Farm Africa is a leading NGO specialising in growing agriculture, protecting the environment and developing businesses in rural Africa.

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