

IFA INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP on Effective Last-Mile Delivery

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ROLE OF MEDIA IN AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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Speaking notes of Susanna Thorp, WRENmedia, UK

1. WRENmedia – multi-media communication company based in the UK focusing mainly on agriculture. One of our main activities is producing an online magazine on agricultural development in the tropics, New Agriculturist. We also have a monthly radio service with interviews recorded by Africans for Africans, which is sent to over 80 radio stations across Africa. Here you can see some of our network of African correspondents. These are actually print and radio journalists from East and Southern Africa who attended a training course in Mombasa.
2. Agriculture is back on the development agenda and radio is still seen as one of the most effective ways of reaching rural populations. However, African journalists have very little training, if any, or background in agriculture. On top of this there are multitude of constraints (access to equipment, going out into the field, lack of editor's interest) which holds them back from reporting effectively on agriculture. Consequently, many researchers and others have a negative view of the media's ability to report accurately on agriculture. So one of our activities, is to work with African journalists to inspire them, provide them with greater confidence and motivation to become better agricultural reporters.
3. But – it's an uphill struggle. There is a need for information and this is greater than ever – more so if farmers are to cope with climate change, small landholdings, increase their productivity, add value to their crops, and if agriculture is to have any future at all in Africa – inspire and keep the next generation as farming entrepreneurs. The conventional role of the media – rather like that of research – has tended to be one directional – disseminating information to the audience rather than interacting with them. Although this is now beginning to change.
4. So who if we are communicating, are we trying to reach? The backbone of the rural economy in Africa is an ageing population of farmers. Just look at this man – doesn't his face tell you that he's seen it all before, possibly even heard it all before – at least he continues to look amused by it all.
5. This woman and her husband are well into their seventies and yet still farming. Here she is picking off leaves from fodder shrubs planted on their farm to feed to her dairy goats. The shrubs are leguminous and help provide stability and fertility to the soil. It is a technology that has now spread across East Africa. Despite their age, this couple are interested in change, keen to improve their farm.
6. This farmer, Gilbert Kamau, is a farmer of diversity. In this picture alone, you can see that he keeps goats and has poultry. He also has a few pigs, a couple of cows, grows a variety of crops and in his hand he also holds cuttings from his fodder shrubs. Since he started growing them, so too have his neighbours. But he is not only growing these trees on his farm – he is also raising them for seed to sell. Let's just hear what he has to say about how he gets his information.
[“I get my information from many sources. I listen to the radio but I also read posters. And I am a member of a farmer group which started with dairy goats but has gone into fodder shrubs and seed sales and a milk bar and we have other ideas too. Best, we like to discuss things amongst ourselves.”]
7. So decisions are rarely made individually – usually done collectively, with family members, neighbours, group members, and may sometimes by NGO-supported. Collective decisions –

reduce risk. This is Gilbert with group members outside the milk bar they have set up together. So we have an idea now who we are trying to reach but with what are we trying to reach them with.

8. This is Peter Kenriati – he is an agricultural consultant and trainer. Let's hear his view:
[“There is a tendency to concentrate messages on a particular issue or aspect of farming. Most media messages are not targeted in an integrated way at the whole farm. This is why Integrated Farm Management is so important so farmers can get integrated communication on integrated farming.”]
9. This is Edwin Mungai, He is an agronomist for an export horticulture company. He has a team of 7 assistants who support 700-1000 farmers in Central Kenya. It is still around one person for around 100 or more smallholder outgrowers but each of them need to be kept up to date with the latest environmental standards and farm management plans required by European retailers. To be effective, this form of extension communication is heavily reliant on field teams and mobile phones to reach growers. But it works and it highlights how effective the commercial sector can be where public sector extension services have failed.
10. So let's hear Edwin's view on the role of the media:
[“Farmers do listen to the radio but they also need to hear the same message in person from someone they trust.”]
This is Edwin training with one of his groups of farmers providing them with information that they can discuss together.
11. So multi-media is important. Receiving information from a number of different channels. And this can include local agri-input suppliers such as this one. I believe we will be hearing case studies on this from here in India. In Kenya and elsewhere in Africa, agri-input suppliers are being professionalised, and provided with more advice and training although this tends to focus on advice for veterinary drugs, agro-chemicals etc.
12. Farmers often learn best when not only can they discuss things in groups but they can 'see' a new technique or approach in action. Apollo Owour here on the left is Production Manager for KHE, a major exporter in Kenya of green beans. An important part of their approach is to set up experiments and demonstrations for holding farmer field days.
13. So this is Apollo in the middle of a soil management workshop, which is held at one of the training centres and collection points for KHE. Holding these events allows for debate and discussion, and clarification over points that farmers don't understand, which can be backed up leaflets and posters – to reinforce the messages.
14. If it is not possible to hold farmer field days then debate and discussion can be encouraged through the use of farmer discussion groups – using messages broadcast on radio and/or on audio cassette. To give you an example from Uganda, we are going to hear one of our correspondents in an interview on the work being done in Apac District in collaboration with its local FM radio station.
15. Work like this is also being done in Malawi in an initiative called Story Workshop, which works with radio dramas, backed up by print materials in form of comic books, posters and calendars. It is a particularly grassroots initiative using the voice of rural people to communicate to their peers about health, agriculture and other livelihood issues. In Kenya, another interactive agricultural programme has been trialled on KBC, the national broadcast station. Known as Mali Shambani, (wealth on the farm) the programme was an attempt to use self-financing business development services. Programmes, sponsored by private sector companies, focused on agriculture but the content was driven by farmers who interacted with the programme giving feedback on what they wanted to hear and learn about. This is Weldon, one of the programme correspondents collecting material in the field about spraying.

16. But when we think about communicating messages and the media, we need to remember the next generation. Getting agriculture into schools and onto the curriculum is beginning to happen in some places, but more could be done. It is important the generations interact, that information is passed on and that children can be motivated to ask questions and to see that there is a future in farming.
17. Because for young adults, the interest in agriculture, in farming, is declining. This is Margaret, a livestock researcher. Let's just hear what she has to say:
[“We are failing to reach the young with agricultural messages. They are not coming into the profession. They do not take it seriously. They are just messing around like drop-outs. We need to capture them.”]
Margaret works with communities quite close to Nairobi, they have access to markets, communication, farmers are reasonably prosperous here. And yet the rate of alcoholism and unemployment is high.
18. To capture the attention of the youth, a new initiative in Nairobi has been launched. Using comic strips, FM radio and interactive SMS, Shujaaz Youth communications initiative aims to inform the young and to again encourage discussion. Originally launched to focus on social issues, further funding has been provided through the DFID Research Into Use programme to provide information to young people on generating income through agricultural activities.
19. And finally – well almost, words from a young farm manager who has studied agriculture and is determined to succeed. He is excited by biodiversity on his farm and through his integrated practices; he has reduced water usage by 30%, fertiliser use by 40%. However, he provides words of advice and warning to those disseminating information:
[“What is offered in a lot of radio programming is not the latest – e.g. in integrated farming there is a lot of innovative ways to understand predator-pest relationships is not being made available to smaller scale farmers. There is a growing divide between the better resource use and sustainability being practiced on larger scale farms compared with small-scale, more subsistence type farmers.”]
20. As a communication company, we are excited by the opportunities offered by agricultural science for development. Getting young reporters like this to be excited about it, to get the information out there, is another important aspect of motivating the next generation. But it is important to think outside the box – to get agricultural information and science not just into farming programmes, but into news and current affairs, business, health as well as ‘light’ reporting. And the onus is not just on those who communicate, but on those who have something to communicate. What is it we are trying to say – we have to provide the hooks, the interest, the innovation and the achievement. We need message ambassadors and we need media for agricultural development to become a multi-dimensional process.