



DEVELOPING THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND TALENT OF YOUTH TO FURTHER FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

The following case study was received as a result of a call issued by the Committee on World Food Security for case studies highlighting examples of initiatives aimed at 'Developing the knowledge, skills and talent of youth to further food security and nutrition'. The cases received provide the background for a discussion of lessons learned and potential policy implications at a special event on October 15th, 2015 during CFS 42. Find out more at www.fao.org/cfs/youth.

SYNGENTA FOUNDATION INDIA

Background

Agriculture is the single largest productive sector in the Indian economy. It accounts for about 13.8 per cent of GDP and employs 50 per cent of the total workforce. Indian agriculture is characterized by smallholders: about 80% of holdings are less than 2 hectares. The most important cause of low farm productivity, and therefore rural poverty, is lack of knowledge of improved agronomic techniques.

Challenges

The most significant challenges faced were the difficulty of access to markets for rural smallholders, as well as their lack of trust in outside interventions.

Approach Used

Syngenta Foundation India (SFI) has made strong progress since its creation. There have been three main phases:

During Phase I (2005-2009), SFI launched three extension-driven projects in disadvantaged regions and introduced high-performing seeds, improved agronomic practices, and new technologies for control of pests, diseases and weeds. New departures included special techniques such as SRI (system of rice intensification), mechanization in rice, and raising seedlings in poly-houses. With improved yields, farmers started to trust SFI and the technologies it introduced.

SFI then embarked on Phase II (2009-2013) with 'market-led extension', where the emphasis was to 'produce together and sell together'. Essential features of this approach included linking vegetable producers' groups with markets through fewer intermediaries.

Phase II also witnessed substantial contributions to policy, notably in a research project on transforming agriculture to support overall economic growth.

Buoyed by the success and strong basis of these phases, SFI is now shifting gears rapidly. Phase III (2014 onwards) is going for impact at scale. The core task remains unchanged: create value for farmers, help modernize agriculture and the food system, and be an intelligent catalyst.



The approach for Phase III is to develop ‘enablers’ which can be replicated in different locations. SFI intends to introduce enablers in domains such as financial solutions (including insurance), ICT and mobile computing, irrigation solutions, agro-processing and farm machinery.

SFI has developed a unique ‘cluster-based’ approach to agricultural extension. In each project area, an extension worker serves a cluster of villages, with guidance from a team of experts. The extension worker holds frequent farmer meetings, and the team runs seasonally adapted training programs. Demonstrations of new techniques and products take place directly in the farmers’ fields, combined with visits to particularly progressive farms. In some areas, SFI also organizes annual fairs to introduce large numbers of farmers to the latest inputs, processes and equipment.

The Foundation and NGO partners jointly identify potential villages for initial projects. These villages act as models for generating awareness among other farmers in the region. Before the season, farmers are motivated through village-level meetings and encouraged to form groups of 15-20 members. Aggregation in groups gives them a stronger position when buying inputs and selling vegetables.

Outcome and Impact Achieved

SFI’s recommendations have transformed the livelihoods of farmers, allowing them to boost their incomes through the cultivation of high-value vegetables. Successful market-led extension has occurred in 4 locations: Jawhar in Maharashtra, Kalahandi in Orissa, Kesla in Madhya Pradesh, and Bankura in West Bengal.

Lessons Learned/Opportunities for Scaling-Up

There are many models and opportunities for scaling up SFI’s activities. One such model uses agri-entrepreneurs (AEs) to anchor market-led extension in vegetables. SFI supports the entrepreneurs at business start-up. Thereafter, they work independently with neighboring farmers on a commercial basis. SFI also connects the entrepreneurs to IDBI Bank, which provides credit both to the AE and their farmer clients. With this support, the entrepreneurs can consider their business as social enterprises and help farmers at every stage in the value chain. For example: AEs buy inputs cheaper in bulk, and should pass on some of the discount to farmers. Similarly, when an entrepreneur facilitates the sale of produce by linking farmers to buyers, he or she should charge only a modest fee. SFI and its NGO partners also insist that entrepreneurs keep a strict eye on the quality of inputs they sell to farmers, and on their local suitability. Further scalable solutions under development include irrigation systems for tribal communities, community-owned agro-processing and seed units, and index insurance for farmers producing seed.

Policy Implications

SFI’s activities show that there are 3 major components to market led extension:

Facilitating purchase of agri-inputs

High-value vegetable cultivation requires access to high-quality seeds and other inputs. Policy makers should ensure that farmers get the best varieties in terms of season, cost and local availability.



Providing knowledge on production

In the past, many smallholders knew very little about modern crop protection and topics such as application timing. Policy makers should enable knowledge transfer and regular monitoring of agricultural activities.

Linking Farmers to Markets

Connecting farmers to markets is a complex process. Policy makers should enable detailed analysis of the demand for agricultural products and facilitate market research.