

ANNEX 8

POSITION PAPER: LEAD-FARMERS & FOLLOWER-FARMERS

Lead-Farmers & Follower-Farmers in the FISRI Project

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1. The Performance of the Lead Farmer Approach to Extension

In the FISRI project, the lead farmer was the main vehicle through which CA information was disseminated. The selection criteria for the lead farmers varied in the project districts that were visited. Although selection through community meetings that involved local leadership was the most common approach, the strong influence of camp extension officers on the ultimate choice for a lead farmer was also evident in some camps. The extension worker went through the village headmen to call for a meeting where the programme and the extension method of the lead farmer were explained. The main work of the LF is to attend to follower farmers, establish demonstration plots from the vouchers received, and organize meetings for their area or at the request of the camp officer. The lead farmers were capacitated by the project through training on CA and other related technologies, access to inputs and implements through the e-voucher scheme and bicycles to enhance their mobility. In return for this support, each lead farmer was expected to recruit 15 follower farmers whom he or she would then mentor and support in terms of implementation of CA technologies at their own homesteads or farms. The presence of the lead farmer network, the improved mobility of the camp officers through the provision of motor cycles and increased use of cell phones across all the groups have greatly facilitated communication allowing camp officers to coordinate some activities through the lead farmer. The existence of management structures among the farmer groups in the project was limited to those groups that had already existing group structures at the start of the project. In cases where there was no structure existing prior to the project, the responsibility of the groups seemed to lie solely on the lead farmer.

1.1. Role and impact of Farmer field Schools

Farmer field schools were established by the majority of the districts and camps in the project areas. The number of farmer field schools, which were the centre for learning for the lead farmer was not consistent in the different camps but depended on the initiatives of the camp and district officers. In camps where farmer field schools are active, the lead farmer held meetings more regularly, once a week like in the farmer field school observed in Kalomo, which however suffered from lack of attention and inputs. As such, its role as a school was somewhat diminished. In Mwachisompola camp in Chibombo for example, the camp officer was able to establish two farmer field schools using the inputs acquired through the e-voucher supplied to the extension worker. In Mono Camp in Mumbwa, the camp officer established four FFS with farmers contributing inputs from their own vouchers and other sources. Having fewer farmer field schools meant that lead farmers had to travel long distances on a regular basis for learning, while more FFS schools reduced the distance travelled by the lead farmers. The lead farmers were further constrained as the bicycles that were supplied by the project were of very poor quality and had broken down within the first few months of use. Where the bicycles were still operational, farmers had to replace several parts including the tyre rims, brakes, saddle, etc. The ideal situation would be to have a FFS for each zone within the camps, which was not possible due to the absence of funding for the farmer field schools. The farmer field schools will also act a source for long term data for CA development and adaptation and provide evidence for CA best practices.



Figure 1. A farmer field school in Katete camp, Kalomo

1.2. Input support for lead farmers

Observations from focus group discussions in the field indicate that the purpose and role of the lead farmer was not clearly understood, especially at field level by the lead farmers themselves and their follower farmers. The farmers seemed to view the project as just another input support programme; hence the demand for increased voucher value by the lead farmers themselves and requests for inclusion in the voucher scheme by the follower farmers. The presence of previous and/or existing projects in some areas, like CELIM in Kalomo which supplied free inputs to both lead farmers and follower farmers and FISP which was an input programme may have contributed to this perception. The farmers did not seem to link the support that the lead farmer received to the duties and responsibilities that he or she was involved in such as those relating to the training, supervising and following up on the follower farmers. In addition, since the Lead farmers were selected at community level, some of those who were not selected have been reluctant to become follower farmers as that appears to demote them or elevate certain people to a status “that does not suit” them. Consequently the interaction between the lead farmer and the follower farmer is problematic and presents a lot of challenges to the extension approach as implemented in the project.

Many follower farmers, who had joined the programme in anticipation of input support in subsequent years, eventually lost interest as no inputs were forthcoming. In Mumbwa, for example, the SAO indicated that the initial understanding was that the follower farmers will receive vouchers whose value will amount to half of that received by the lead farmer. Although replacements are made to cover attrition the number who are active remain lower than 15. The low participation of follower farmers was also reflected in the lower numbers of follower farmers attending the focus group discussions and being interviewed throughout the assessment mission.

The expansion or replication pathway for the lead farmer model of extension has stalled. The discord between the lead farmer and follower farmer is palpable. New camps on to which the programme has expanded do not have active follower farmers due to the conflict over e-vouchers and bicycles which lead farmers have and follower farmers do not. Overall, the number of follower farmers is lower than planned as often only about half of the 15 or in many cases even less are actively or purposively involved in the project activities. In this regards, the “free” e-voucher does not sit well with the lead farmer concept and may be an obstacle to the linkages between the Lead Farmer and the follower farmer, quite the opposite of what it was meant to be.

Another source of possible stagnation is the leeway given to the lead farmer to select follower farmers. This team came across a case where the lead farmer was the senior wife and the junior wife and a son to the senior were follower farmers. All these were under one household where the decision to use a parcel of land was not in their hands but the owner of the farm, in whom lay the power to dispose.

In the face of alienation of the follower farmers and the loss of the demonstrations at out scaling in farm, the justification for keeping the lead farmer is diminished. A clearer emphasis of the link between the inputs given to the lead farmer and his roles and responsibilities as expected by the project is essential, or alternatively the best performing follower farmer should be picked every few years so that members of a group know they have a chance to access the e-voucher. A payback mechanism for the inputs by the lead farmer into a revolving fund was one suggestion offered by one district officer in Sinazeze.

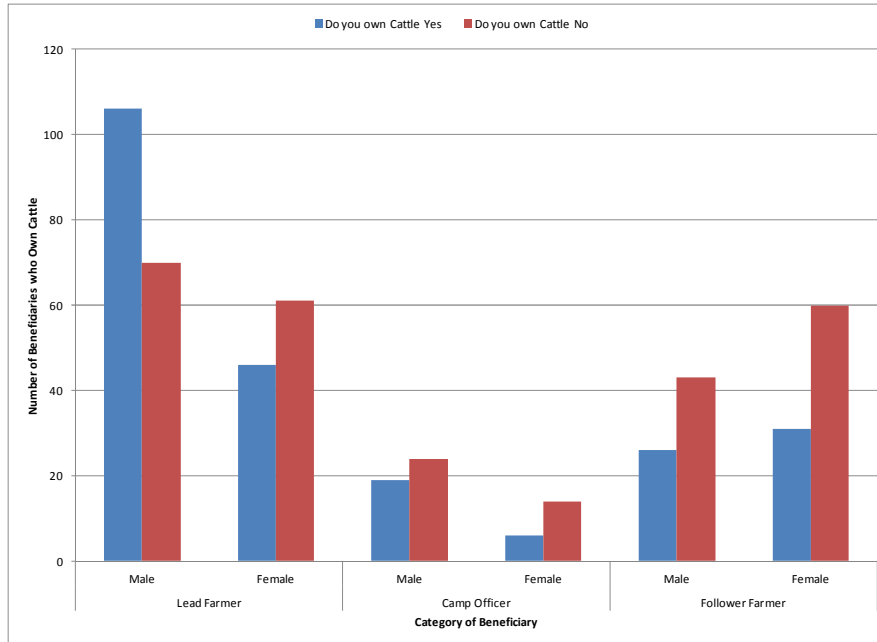


Figure 2. Number of Beneficiaries Interviewed by Category and Sex

1.3. The Role and impact of demonstrations

Lead farmers in the project areas visited were able to establish CA demonstrations using the inputs received through the e-voucher. However, it appears that the lead farmers did not feel obliged to effectively manage the demonstrations and adequately facilitate the learning activities of their follower farmers. While there was evidence of interaction between camp officers and lead farmers, the frequency of lead farmers meeting follower farmers was not immediately clear. The meetings are generally guided by the key management steps of planting, ripping, and herbicide application. This lack of understanding of the roles and obligations of the lead farmer has negatively affected the standard and therefore the impact of some of the demonstration plots hosted by lead farmers, many of which look like ordinary conventional fields due to poor management and lack of attention to detail. In Chibombo, the SAO highlighted that camp officers had no capacity to correctly set up demonstrations and therefore needed training in that area. Failure to realize this training need may have affected the status of the demonstration in some other districts. The limited understanding of the CA concept also appears to have affected the status of the demonstrations. The absence of soil cover or mulch, for example, which was mostly attributed to communal livestock grazing regimes and wild fires, was in many cases also observed even at homestead field that were protected. This implies that farmers did not apply this principle mostly as a result of the lack of appreciation of the benefits associated with maintaining soil cover in CA systems. To enhance the understanding of the CA concept by lead and follower farmers, the lead farmers should have considered it as an obligation to have demonstrations that portray the correct message. Limited availability of appropriate CA material at field level may also have affected the both the lead and follower farmer's understanding of CA.

In subsequent years as the lead farmers out-scale, the status of the initial CA demonstration plot becomes unclear. The larger expanded fields replacing the initial demonstration plot may not have the same management levels as the smaller demonstration plots that have an advantage in terms of easier management and therefore better ability to correctly portray the potential for CA. It is also not possible to show the long term benefits of CA unless the demonstration plot is maintained in the same position (see Figure 3) for some time¹. There may be need, therefore to adequately support farmer field schools, which could be maintained over long periods and provide data in terms of long-term benefits of CA, like soil quality changes, progressive yield increase, etc.

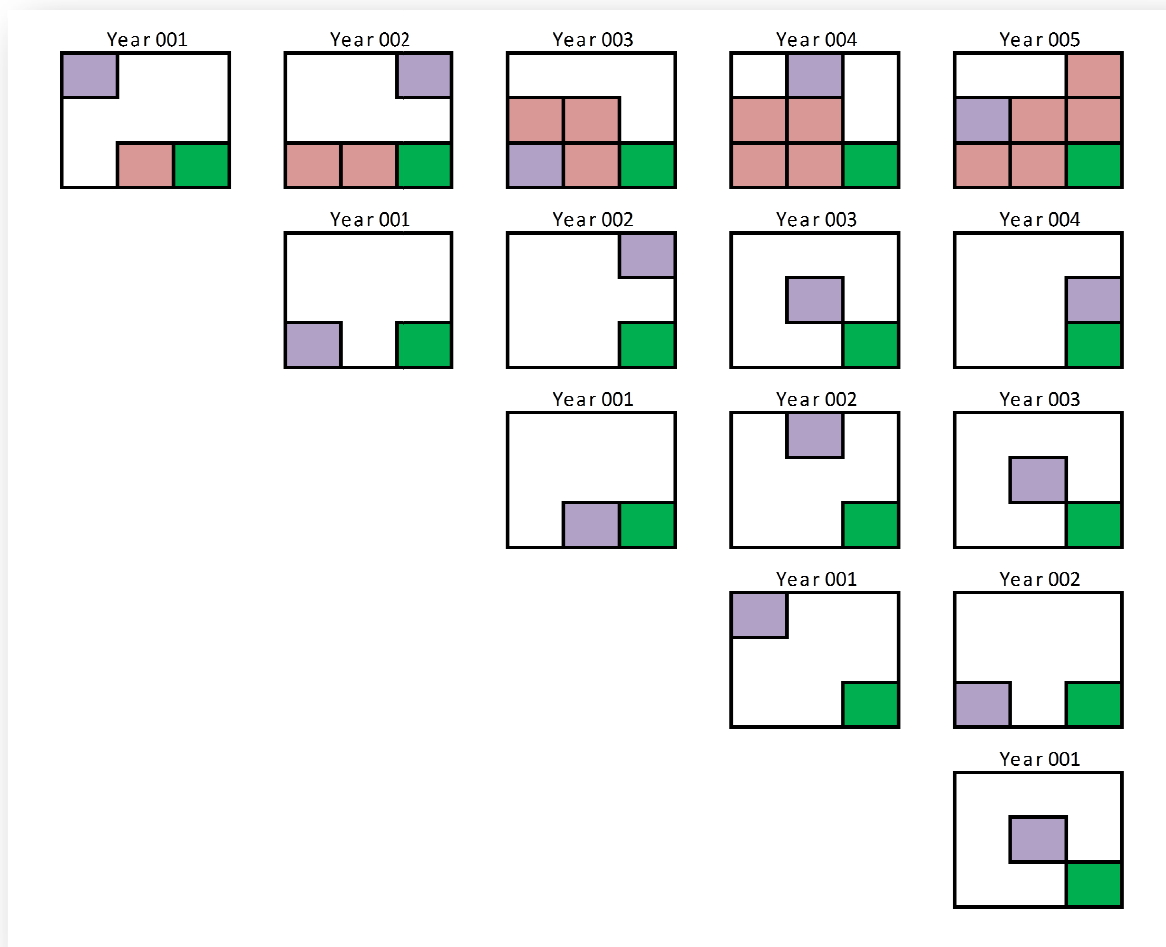


Figure 3. Value of demonstration at current (purple) and preferred (green) out-scaling on a model farm (white).

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¹ This is the weakness of out scaling within the farm we lose the long term effect in the demo

In the face of alienation of the follower farmers and the loss of the demo at out scaling in farm, the justification for keeping the lead farmer is diminished. Instead the best performing follower farmer should be picked every two years so that members of a group know they have a chance to access the e-voucher. Or better still each member of a study group may have an equal chance of hosting the voucher by randomly selecting a voucher recipient every two years. Other forms of non-voucher incentives should be considered. For instance the farmer could receive certification to prove they have attained a yield level above 5 tons per hectare while using CA. Such certification would indicate the farmer is less vulnerable to weather changes and, therefore attractive to finance institutions who may find it safe to extend seasonal loans to such farmers. The fact that CA practice should confer preference for loans should be a stronger but neutral incentive limited only by the level a farmer dedicates to CA practice.

2. Challenges of the Lead farmer Model

The lead farmer identified the follower farmers, and interested them to join the project. Because of the input and equipment vouchers given to the lead farmers, the participation of follower farmers has gone down. As the Lead farmers were selected at community level, those who were not selected have been reluctant to become follower farmers as that appears to demote them or elevate certain people to a status “that does not suit” them. Consequently the interaction between the lead farmer and the follower farmer is problematic and presents a lot of challenges to the extension approach as implemented in the project. The lead farmer reported specific times that they met with the follower farmers:

- a. At harvest, the lead farmers are called to explain the start of the land preparation
- b. Start of planting
- c. Occasional home visits to encourage the follower farmers on their journey to adoption of CA to improve productivity.

The lead farmer has fewer than the 15 farmers he/she is supposed to have. In contrast, the lead farmer in CFU has 90 follower farmers. The lead farmer model in FISRI is stalling and needs injection of new dynamism to prevent it from falling into dead routine for a clique.

2.1.Fate of the Follower or Participating Farmer

Follower Farmers are essentially “club members” without benefits. The project is seen as a source of support for members. There is a growing division between lead and follower farmers because of this apparent exclusion from the perceived benefits of the project. Despite this clamor for the FISRI inputs, most receive inputs from the FISP programme which is also on course to adopt vouchers. The district extension has explained that the Lead Farmer demo is for all follower farmers to learn from. Follower farmers are free to visit the LF whenever they need to. The overall mood, however, is that the follower farmers would rather visit the camp officer than the lead farmer. The ownership of the inputs obtained by some camp extension officers from the E-vouchers is apparently strictly personal. A camp officer in Chipata asked if the project could give camp officers an extra voucher to support the farmer field school. Currently, the farmers provide inputs for the farmer field school from their own proceeds. This author pointed to him that he already had a voucher which he could use to buy the inputs for the farmer field school. He promptly replied, without hesitation, that “The voucher is mine” and he could not therefore cede it to the farmers. If the camp officer is that clear about the vouchers, we see a link with the strong and persistent request for the follower farmers to have vouchers of their own.

Given the uneasy relationship between the lead farmer and the follower farmer, a rotating of the demo plot across the members may create a sense of belonging to the exclusive club of members who access inputs and implements through e-vouchers. Since the lead farmer is supported, it may not be clear at this stage whether he or she is implementing CA as a result of the inputs supplied. The follower farmer in this case represents the ultimate impact of the project, there is therefore need to make a deliberate effort to document their activities.

This potential role of the follower farmer was not clearly understood at the implementation level by both the camp officers and the lead farmers resulting in their neglect. Field days were mostly hosted by lead farmers, while the participating farmers with something to show were mere bystanders. Efforts to document a sample of follower farmers should be facilitated by the project in order to gather evidence on adoption processes as this data will provide evidence on the sustainable adoption of CA technologies. Random samples of these farmers could be taken and then followed through during, and beyond the project where possible.

It is important to note that the adoption process normally takes over several years – four to five years as shown in Table 1 below. This implies that there may be no actual adoption by follower farmers in the initial years as many of them may still be going through the initial stages of adoption. A monitoring framework could, however still be put in place to document their activities in order to capture any aspects that the follower farmers may be adopting.

Table 1 Stages of the adoption process

1.	Awareness: farmers hear about the innovation
2.	Interest: farmers seek further information about it
3.	Evaluation: Weighing up the advantages or disadvantages of using the technology
4.	Testing: farmers will test the innovation on a small scale for themselves
5.	Adoption: Farmers will apply CA technologies on a large scale in preference to conventional farming methods

Source: Adapted from Van Den Ban and Hawkins, 1985