



Farmer Field Schools; an unavoidable path for Africa.

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Summary: This article seeks to establish merits for Farmer Field Schools in Africa. It argues that farmers knowledge and experience is vital for curbing climate change and for guaranteeing food security. It also explores village poultry as a tool to fight the incidences of climate change like prolonged droughts and low farmers productivity, poverty etc.

Climate change is real. Its impacts include prolonged droughts; change in weather patterns, etc and its incidences include land degradation, soil erosion, floods and reduction of farmers' incomes as they harvest less from their farms. The last incidence is extremely grave for developing economies in Africa, Latin America and Asia. It has led to:

- Difficulties by farmers to have enough harvest to feed their families or to sell in order to provide education and welfare to their children, sick household members and pregnant and breast feeding mothers.
- Shrinking harvests imposed by prolonged droughts have embedded poverty among farmers and imposed the need to use expensive fertilizers in already destitute communities.
- As many of these communities cannot afford fertilizers due to high prices (Arrey, 2008) they are drifting from farming to other professions like hunting or migrating to other places in search of more fertile lands.

Two important areas where the impact of climate change has been noticed include the Okavango Delta in Botswana where the Drying of Thaoge the main distributory of the Okavango River has led to reduction in flood recession agriculture and migrations from Okavango to other parts of Botswana (Mbaiwa, 2004).

More so, in Ghana many people are leaving the Delta Region to farm and graze in more fertile lands in Wuripe (Braumoh, 2004).

In Cameroon Bororo pastoralists have been observed go further towards volcanic rich soils and grass-packed areas in the South West Region to graze and fatten their cattle due to shrinking of historical range lands caused by climate change and other factors like rapid urbanization and population growth. The population in Cameroon rose to 16.1 millions in 2004.

All these movements hint that people's incomes are shrinking from their livelihoods tools. This is very serious as this has impacts on people's access to proteins for farmers cannot afford expensive red meat in Cameroon for instance even from selling their harvests hence their general health and well being is compromised by shocks and stresses imposed by climate change.

A way out however, could be boosting village poultry in African communities (Alder et al, 2007). The reasons include:

- The fact that it is tested livelihoods option in most Sub-Saharan countries over time.
- The fact that it strives on local species hence no imported breeds to sustain itself.
- It is also not affected with many diseases and hence has low medical cost for fowls. The most common disease in communities is Newcastle Disease and it has a vaccine.

- More so, fowls are fast breeders. Farmers can easily get enough chicks and eggs both for domestic consumption and the market in a few months. This will provide income for health care and education of family members and improve protein bases.

With this, it is clear that embedding Farmer Field Schools in Africa is an unavoidable path towards guaranteeing food security (ICRISAT, 2004). These schools will;

- Use farmers' knowledge and practical experience to fight climate change. This may reduce dependence on industrial inputs and favour low external inputs among poor farmers. This will arguably boost practices like the use of seed banks, green manuring, mulching, vermicomposting etc (Shah and Ameta, 2008)
- Create a curriculum to train farmers and new users on alternative and scientific ways of fighting climate change.
- Farmer participation in policies aimed at poverty reduction or fighting climate change will lead to collaborative advantage and growth. Communities will benefit from participatory plant breeding which has been introduced in Nicaragua by CIRAD, INTA and CIPRES a local NGO from 2002 to 2008 (Trouche et al., 2008).

Educating farmers via innovation systems while using their perceptions and knowledge is indeed a necessary path for Africa, if not for the Third World. Farmer Field Schools are viable tools to achieve this.

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