

FARMER FIELD SCHOOLS

Community based, experiential learning in Africa for sustainable intensification and climate change adaptation

“ We must learn from farmers’ experience. Pragmatic, field-based and farmer-centric education can and must play a key role in making agriculture stronger and more sustainable. At the end of the day, sustainable intensification will be the result of the collective action of millions of small farmers, who through their daily decisions determine the trajectory of agricultural ecosystems across the world ”

José Graziano da Silva, Director-General, FAO, February 2014

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The Farmer Field School (FFS) approach is based on non-formal education principles first adopted by FAO 25 years ago in Southeast Asia and brought to Africa in 1996. West Africa saw the development of the Integrated Production and Pest Management (IPPM) programme in 2001, which to date has trained more than 180 000 farmers.

FFS provides a risk-free, field-based setting for guided experimentation, debate and decisions in a small-group learning environment over the course of a growing season; leading to:

- > locally adapted solutions;
- > greater understanding of social, economic, and ecological mechanisms;
- > higher rates of adoption of new methods and technologies.

SUSTAINABLE INTENSIFICATION

Through FFS, FAO helps farmers applying ecosystem-services based approaches including:

- > Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and pesticide risk reduction;
- > integrated soil fertility management;
- > improved seeds management.

The results have led to increases in production and profits and substantial reductions in the use of highly toxic chemical pesticides.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

FAO, through FFS, supports farming communities to develop and implement ecosystem-based adaptive strategies. The adoption of practices which strengthen farmers’ economic, social and ecological resilience will reduce the threats of increased temperatures, droughts and floods.

POLICY AND LEGISLATION

The IPPM programme has been working closely with governments at local, district and national levels to create an enabling environment for policies that support a range of issues from improved extension systems, to reducing risks from highly hazardous pesticides.

GENDER EMPOWERMENT

By encouraging a fair representation, the programme promotes visibility of rural women and positive changes in attitudes and behaviours. The FFS learning-by-doing environment bolsters critical thinking, decision-making and communication skills; thereby building leadership capacities.

MARKET LINKAGES

Smallholders and farmer organizations are also empowered to better plan production, enhance product quality and improve linkages with local and regional markets.

