F-18: Farmer field school as an extension approach: dissemination of Integrated Pest Management techniques in rice farming

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Technology dissemination in the agricultural sector has become a questionable issue as most of the past extension approaches failed to render reasonable

benefits to the clients. A new extension approach - Farmer Field Schools (FFS) has been introduced as an alternative. The FFS provides a participatory learning environment where farmers were given an opportunity to observe, to analyse and make decisions.

This study mainly focuses on effectiveness of FFS as an extension approach in technology dissemination pertaining to Integrated Pest Management. This study was carried out in Ambalantota Divisional Secretary's Division in Hambantota district, during 1996/1997- Maha season. Two villages, Karawilagama and Superintendentgama were selected for the field survey.

The study investigated knowledge gaps between two farmer groups in two aspects related to IPM. Farmers who have undergone FFS on IPM methods were included in one group while ordinary farmers were included in the other group. Estimation of knowledge gap in preventive measures was followed by an agro-ecosystem analysis to estimate level of knowledge in beneficial insects and pests.

Study reveals that 93% and 80% of FFS and non-FFS farmers possess a high knowledge on mixing ratios and expiry dates of agro-chemicals indicating a lower knowledge gap. However, FFS group had a better knowledge in several other preventive measures indicating positive impact of extension programme. FFS farmers had a higher ability than non-FFS farmers did in identifying pests and major beneficial insects in their microenvironment as well as threshold levels. This knowledge leads farmers to reduce pesticide use and hence to maintain agro-ecological balance. This validates FFS as a knowledge dissemination approach as it has proved effective in dissemination knowledge on IPM.