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Impact of Farmer Learning Groups — A Participatory Approach in Integrated Pest Management in Egypt

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Abstract

The bilateral Egyptian-German Integrated Pest Management Project started in 1992 with the objective of assisting in the design and verification of appropriate IPM contents in fruits and vegetables and the subsequent conveyance to small-scale farmers.

During the first 3–4 years the project followed a conventional IPM approach which focused on pests and diseases. It relied to a large extent on classroom training and field demonstrations. The response from small-scale farmers and extension staff was limited and implementation of IPM measures low as was the overall impact. This resulted in remodelling the concept towards a more holistic approach of Integrated Crop Management (ICM). From 1996 onward a participatory, group based approach was introduced in which the farmer was placed in the centre. In so called Farmer Learning Groups (FLGs) they decide what topics are of interest and the group together with the village extension worker (VEW) seek solutions to occurring problems over a whole cropping season.

For this task VEW were trained in both technical topics and facilitation skills to enable them to lead the group during this time. Parallel to this a coaching structure was established to ensure the quality of the approach. Today, Master Trainers (MT) at national and regional level are responsible for co-ordinating the different programmes in 8 governorates in the Nile delta and Upper Egypt. Nearly 300 VEWs have been trained so far and more than 30,000 farmers attended FLGs. Currently an impact assessment with a total of 700 farmers cultivating mango, citrus, tomatoes and strawberries is ongoing.

Members of FLGs applying recommended IPM measures have bigger economic success than farmers who are not members of such groups. They are able to realize substantially higher gross margins through a combination of savings on inputs, higher yields and better qualities. In addition both farmers and extension staff appreciate the participatory extension approach because it allows them to interact better, establish professional relationships, introduce own ideas and improve their decision-making skills.

Keywords: Egypt, impact, integrated crop management (ICM), integrated pest management (IPM), participatory extension