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Agroforestry Farmer Field Schools: Informed Farmers for Sustainable Landscapes

ENDRI MARTINI, JAMES ROSHETKO

World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Indonesia

Abstract

Most of the current extension methods in agroforestry refer to the methods developed in agricultural extension that is more focusing on disseminating the technology with the impact that can be observed in a short period of time. However, in an agroforestry the presence of combinations of perennial crops in the system will take more time to see the impact of the technology dissemination. Thus, it requires extension methods that can observe the changes in a longer period than the agricultural extension for annual crops. Farmers also need to be equipped with knowledge that can enhance their analytical skills in managing their agroforestry garden. Farmer field schools can be an effective extension approach that provides a two-way communication between farmers and extension agents to enhance farmers' capacity in managing their gardens. Designing an Agroforestry Farmer Field School (AFFS) focused on tree-garden management would be expected to enhance agroforestry productivity. The objectives of the AFFS are to 1) stimulate an extension approach that uses demonstration plots as places to learn new knowledge and technology; 2) provide an innovative extension approach that can enhance farmers' analytical skills and information networking and which can be continued by government extension agents; and 3) prepare expert farmers who can play a role as extension agents in the future. Combinations of different extension methods were applied in the AFFS, ranging from scientist-to-farmer, farmer-to-farmer, site-visit and development of demonstration trials. The approach of AFFS was tested in Sulawesi, Indonesia under Agroforestry and Forestry project (AgFor) in 2013–2015. The implementation of AFFS has contributed to the development of sustainable landscapes in Sulawesi where agroforestry is the main source of livelihood in rural areas.

Keywords: AgFor, agroforestry extension, Demonstration trials, Expert farmer, Sulawesi