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Using farmer-to-farmer field days to support adaptation to climate change in Ethiopia

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Abstract

The concept of farmer-to-farmer field days (F2F-FDs) builds on the understanding that socially diverse farmers' epistemologies are varied yet similar. F2F-FDs are an approach that recognises co-production as important. Farmers like to learn about innovations in practical and visual ways, ideally from other farmers. Inherent in the approach is the option to reach more people through group formation and working with a snowball effect.

The farmers who are organising and facilitating the F2F-FDs are so called pioneer farmers. They were selected with an approach called Pioneer Positive Deviance (P-PD). In this approach we look for those farmers who perform better than others under the same circumstances. This means they implement adaptation practices more successfully than others and are willing to share this knowledge and practice with peer farmers.

In North Shewa Zone, Ethiopia, six F2F-FDs were held in 2021 and 2022 on sheep fattening practices with 77 participants. The facilitating four pioneer farmers and the participants were interviewed at the end of the field day about their experience. Six months later, 31 were interviewed for a follow up to understand how useful the F2F-FDs were for them. Based on the feedback, the pioneer farmers then organised a second F2F-FD.

In our research we found that the following aspects were crucial for managing F2F-FDs successfully: one is representativeness of participation to ensure social inclusion as well as gender equity. Secondly, it is crucial to manage expectations so that the objectives of the F2F-FDs are clear for all actors involved to avoid dissatisfaction. Thirdly, one of the positive effects of a F2F-FD is a change in self-perception of the facilitating farmer who realises in the process that they have something to share with others, they get confirmation that what they do is right, and are motivated to share with others. Finally, F2F-FDs helped to create more linkages to other farmers, and to extension agents, to create a knowledge network and groups to continue learning in mutual and practical ways.

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