

People watch videos, even in Mali

IMPACT
STUDY

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Striga, worthy adversary

Striga is the nastiest weed in Africa. By holding FFS (farmer field schools) in several countries, ICRISAT researchers learned that farmers were confused by the striga's strange and difficult-to-observe strategy of reproduction. Farmers failed to recognise the tiny seeds and did not understand that the striga plant lives for weeks underground, parasitising the crop's root, before emerging.

Video vs. workshop and live demonstration

Researchers would never have reached all of the farmers of Africa via FFS, which has small audiences, so they made 10 videos featuring techniques that FFS graduates had used to control striga, and printed the videos on DVDs for mass distribution. ICRISAT made 20,000 copies of the DVD and distributed 10,000 copies in Mali.

A follow up study in Mali showed that most of the people who received the DVDs were able to find a way to watch them. For example the school or a neighbour had a DVD player and TV set, a laptop, or a portable DVD player with built-in screen for watching entertainment videos.

Most of the villagers watched the videos on their own, without an extensionist to answer questions. A few people had trouble with the language menu, but most were able to choose Bambara from among the eight language options available on the DVD.

Some people watched the videos several times, to study them, inviting different neighbours over on different occasions. Radio stations played the audio tracks over the air and discussed the shows with farmers who called in. Some listeners travelled to the radio stations to request a DVD to take back to their villages.

Conclusion

The smallholders made good use of the information on the videos. Because these videos told farmers why a technique worked (not just what to do) farmers were able to creatively adapt the ideas. For example, once farmers realised that legume crops stimulate striga to sprout, but then kill the weed, farmers began trying different styles of intercropping cereals and legumes. Farmers invented new styles of weeding, e.g. combining a hoe with hand weeding. Many people tried different ways of using fertiliser (e.g. compost and micro-dosing) which strengthens the crops so they can better defend themselves from the striga.

Burning a DVD with farmer learning videos only costs about a Euro. That is a good investment, because even if the villagers do not have electricity or an extensionist to help them watch the videos, the farmers will find ways of watching and learning.



Get videos into the hand of farmers, and they will use them

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