Hussein Jeba: Bringing Innovative Agricultural Practices to the Community

> *The introduction of new technology is extremely difficult and costly, as you have to convince each individual, his or her influencers and decision makers.*
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> *But now, people can watch videos featuring people they know, and they develop interest and trust in the technologies. For us, the video mediated approach is beyond mere introduction of technologies and has already become an integral part of our organization.*

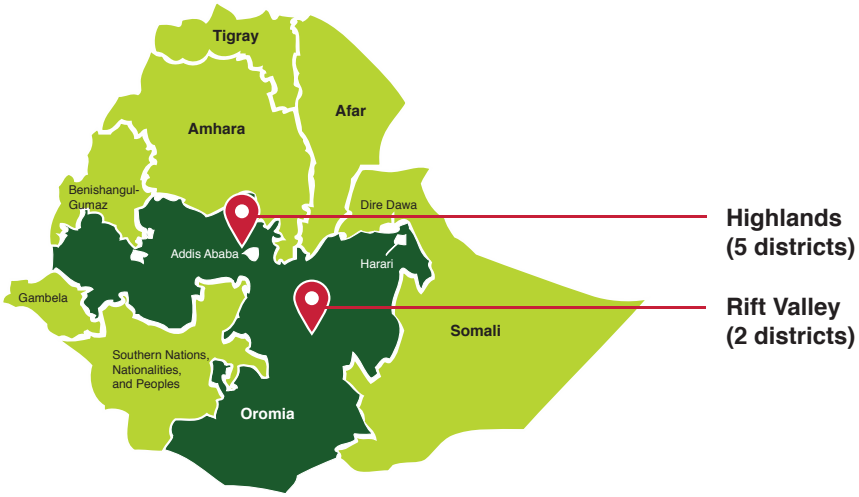
Hussein Jeba, a 25 year-old farmer from the Kore district of Ethiopia, has been a Community Marketing Agent (CMA) for about two and a half years. Selected and trained by iDE (International Development Enterprises) because of his farming expertise and entrepreneurial attitude, Hussein promotes new agricultural technologies and provides extension services to his community. He is responsible for taking iDE's interventions to farmers in four different kebeles or villages in Kore, and often goes from house to house to convince individual farmers about the benefits of adopting new technologies and practices.

Limitations of the Existing Extension System

In Ethiopia, as in many developing nations, agriculture is the foundation of the economy. It accounts for over half of the gross domestic product, 83.9% of exports and 80% of total employment. However, Ethiopia's agriculture suffers from drought, soil degradation, overgrazing and other issues that limit its full potential. To overcome these challenges, the government and development organizations, including iDE, have initiated agricultural extension programs to assist farmers in adopting better farming practices and improving their livelihoods.

For generations, Ethiopian families have relied on farming as their greatest source of income and nourishment. Because it often represents their entire livelihood, farmers need to be entirely convinced of new methods before they relinquish proven practices and risk jeopardizing their livelihood. This can pose a great challenge for agricultural extension workers like Hussein, who are tasked with the responsibility of informing, training and assisting farmers adopt innovative practices.

Digital Green and iDE collaborations in Ethiopia



23 Videos Produced

103 Villages Reached

3361 Individuals Engaged

Using videos to trigger behavior change

To overcome challenges in information dissemination, iDE partnered with Digital Green to create videos of best agricultural practices - a new, highly visual and effective way to reach out to farmers. The videos are made by the community featuring local actors, usually progressive farmers, and are then screened by a local facilitator for a small groups of farmers. Subject matter specialists ensure the accuracy and relevance of content, and facilitators are trained to make the experience as participatory and engaging as possible.

This approach not only allows the extension workers to reach out to more farmers collectively in one place, but also helps farmers grasp the concept with greater ease. According to one farmer, Kasim Godana, 45, "Before Digital Green arrived, the CMAs simply presented their information verbally. Now, with the videos, we can easily visualize the practice and see how we can use the new technology or adopt a new way of doing things."

Impact of videos on adoption

Hussein, who has been pilot-testing Digital Green's methods in two of his four kebeles, is convinced that the videos help make his work more effective. In fact, he has managed to sell 42 manual well drilling machines (rope and washer pumps) in the two Digital Green kebeles, while he has sold only 23 pumps in the other two.

Since the videos showcase local

Video production in progress

farmers, those attending screenings can easily identify with the actors in the video, who may even be someone they know. Consequently, they are more inclined to and adopt the new practice.

Another important benefit of these community video screenings is the increased level of participation, discussion and peer learning. Several farmers who were interviewed pointed out that this discussion allowed them to clarify doubts and share their experiences and best practices. They were encouraged to learn from one another and to build stronger group dynamics, and also to create an atmosphere of positive competitiveness. As an extension worker pointed out, when farmers see their peers succeeding using new and improved practices, they think, "if they could do this, why can't I?"

Most participants at the screenings felt that the new practice they adopted showed either an increase in produce or a decrease in effort or cost. However, most could not confirm an increase in income, as insufficient time had passed since they began attending the screening sessions.

Challenges and proposed solutions

Peer-to-peer learning was difficult at the beginning of the intervention, as community groups in Ethiopia either do not exist, or are not strong. Digital Green and its partners will have to collaborate to form and strengthen farmers' groups in order to make the intervention successful.

Another interesting challenge observed during the pilot phase was that many farmers had never before been exposed to any kind of video prior to the screenings. This meant that the visual spectacle of the medium became almost distracting in the initial phase, and prevented them from properly absorbing the actual content that was being shared. This can only be overcome through familiarizing these farmers with videos, since it is precisely the visual aspect of Digital Green's method that makes it so effective.

Lessons Learned

A crucial learning from the pilot is that the subject matter of the videos must be closely associated with the season, location and needs of the farmers in the area. Hence, it is best to involve the community and identify their needs and interests.

Another important insight is that integrating information about agronomic practices with knowledge about irrigation technologies is most effective. This is because facilitators are only provided with incentives to increase adoption of the latter, which means that adoption verification for agronomic practices tends to suffer.

The increased adoption rate of practices through the videos reflects well on the facilitators, and the community looks up to them as mentors and educators. Tefere, a CMA, echoes this when he says, “earlier, we relied on spreading the message orally, but now with the videos, we can demonstrate the practical application of the new practice. This makes the farmers believe and respect us more.”

For the farmers, the videos provide a more realistic and relatable set of instructions. Adding this layer of video-enabled learning to the existing system has helped reduce time and effort, and increased the efficacy of extension efforts.

Hussein feels that while the videos are extremely beneficial, they cannot entirely replace the individual interactions and household visits of the past. Therefore, he advocates following the video screenings with household visits so that farmers can ask the CMAs targeted questions and clarify any doubts. This combination, he feels, is most effective in converting the farmers into adopters of the new practices.

In effect, the videos add an additional layer of value to processes already in place. While previously the CMAs were the only source of information, the farmers now get to learn through the videos and their peers in addition to the extension workers. This naturally deepens their understanding of the practice and increases the likelihood of adoption.

Video production team at work