



digitalGREEN

Voices from the Field



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Digital Green is an international not-for-profit organization, which uses an innovative digital platform for community engagement to improve lives in rural communities across the globe.

Till date, we have reached over 330,000 individuals across India and sub-Saharan countries in over 3,000 villages producing over 2,800 videos in 20 languages.

This is a compilation of stories of some of the many lives we have touched over our journey. These stories have been made possible through the collective efforts of Digital Green staff and our partners, and most importantly, the communities with whom we engage.

digitalGREEN

Vision

A world where all individuals live a life of dignity.

Mission

To integrate innovative technology with global development efforts to improve human well being

Values

Humility
Excellence
Accountability
Empathy
Integrity

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Bawa Kurubie: Pioneering Change in Ghana's Cocoa Farming Community



Bawa is not only an enthusiastic supporter of the Digital Green approach, but himself a progressive Cocoa farmer

As the world's second largest producer of cocoa, Ghana's primarily agrarian economy depends largely on cocoa production. Cocoa is the country's highest source of revenue from the agricultural sector and is the main source of livelihood for the majority of its rural population, especially in the Ashanti region.

To educate cocoa farmers on best farming practices as well as assist them in overcoming diseases and other challenges, the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) has developed a cocoa extension system, which uses the services of specially trained community extension agents (CEAs), who reach

out to and educate communities on good agricultural practices (GAPs). The CEAs act primarily as communication agents, but their responsibilities also include supporting farmers in accessing agricultural inputs, as well as providing them with non-agricultural information such as immunization schedules. Their outreach efforts are accomplished primarily through the formation of farmer groups, who are mentored for a period of three years, at the end of which they are ready to manage their cocoa farms independently. Each group has a lead cocoa farmer (LCF), who serves as the team lead after the CEAs have moved on to other communities following the three-year training period.

Digital Green partnered with COCOBOD in 2012 to test the efficacy of its participatory community video-based approach. Prior to this collaboration, the CEAs relied on live demonstrations and paper drawings to educate farmers on good cocoa farming practices. Now, however, the CEAs have access to a repository of videos that can aid their extension work. One such CEA, Bawa Kurubie, echoes this assertion, saying, "I initially doubted the Digital Green approach for GAP training, [but] I can now say with confidence that the videos have really helped to make my work simpler. I now have to do less talking and explaining, and instead have increased practical field-based demonstrations. The videos have also facilitated effective discussions at training sessions, which was previously not the case."

Bawa, who has been a CEA for about two years, has been instrumental in implementing the Digital Green approach in Ghana, and has facilitated the production and dissemination of several videos. Being a cocoa farmer himself gives him a distinct edge over

other CEAs in communicating with other farmers, as does his natural ease in facilitation and communication. In addition, he holds a diploma in General Agriculture, which gives him a scientific knowledge base that aids his work. As a CEA in New Akrufuom, a community located in the New Edubiase District of the Ashanti region of Ghana, Bawa has been reaching out to farmers using visual diagrams, in-person demonstrations and verbal accounts. In late 2012, Bawa was selected to be part of a group that was trained on the Digital Green video production, facilitation and data entry processes. This training session not only gave him video production and leadership skills, but also boosted his self-confidence.

As a CEA, Bawa has first-hand experience of the approach and has witnessed the positive feedback and enthusiasm from the farmers in his groups. Based on the increased rate of adoption after the videos were introduced, Bawa has championed the approach in his district, even convincing senior leadership of COCOBOD of its potential.



Exposure to Digital Green's data management technology has given Bawa a sense of empowerment, as he can now track progress of his extension efforts and plan follow-ups. In addition, the use of this technology has given him confidence to go online in search of information. This has been of tremendous benefit to him, as previously he had shied away from the internet.

For Bawa, the use of local actors and languages, the brevity and succinctness of the videos, and the timeliness of the subject matter render this approach a success. He does feel that higher resolution projectors to screen the videos and a more streamlined data collection process will enhance the impact of the approach.

Bawa's immediate supervisor in COCOBOD, Madam Beatrice, endorses using community-sourced videos as a medium to disseminate information, stating, "earlier, we were using modules and numerous other methods for extension, but these didn't yield enough results. However, with the introduction of videos, farmers have live access to visual demonstrations of the practices. Since farmers here feel that seeing is believing, this has been far more effective."

For Bawa, the benefits of using videos to share information stretch far beyond his regular extension work with the COCOBOD. So much so that at his recent birthday celebrations, he utilized his newly acquired skills to produce a video of the celebrations and proudly screened it to his family and friends.



Cocoa beans slowly ripen on the tree

Kalavati Devi: Using Videos to Trigger Behavior Change



Kalavati is now well versed with all the healthcare information provided at the Anganwadi center

It is noon in Jeegon village of Rae Bareilly district in Uttar Pradesh as Kalavati Devi scurries around her house trying to finish all her chores in time to conduct a mothers' group meeting at the Anganwadi center. She has been working as an Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) under Government of India's flagship National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) since 2008. ASHAs are frontline workers who serve as an integral link between the community and the health system, promoting key health behaviors and mobilizing the community to access available health services.

At half past noon, Kalavati leaves her home to reach the center, where pregnant and lactating women, their mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and a few kids are settling down for the meeting. Following the registration of new members and checking attendance, a video on exclusive breastfeeding is screened by Kalavati in the darkened room using a battery-operated pico projector. She

occasionally pauses the video, allowing for discussions within the group. There is constant murmuring in the room as the women recognize an actor (usually a local community member) in the video, which increases in volume when Kalavati herself appears on screen.

The screening is punctuated with questions from the women: "Why do we need to feed the newborn within an hour of delivery?" "Why can't we feed the newborn with goat milk or jaggery?" Kalavati handles these and other doubts with finesse. Towards the end of the screening, she encourages all the members, especially the silent ones, to share their experiences. The key messages from the video are summarized and reinforced to the audience. Though a few older women still cling to their cultural beliefs, which their families have practiced for generations, the video does succeed in triggering questions and generating a discussion. The session draws to an end with Kalavati leading

everyone in a song that touches upon key health messages and reiterates the importance of maternal and neonatal health.

Kalavati is part of the Digital Public Health (DPH) pilot project, initiated in 2012 through a partnership between Digital Green, PATH and Grameen Vikas Sansthan (GVS). Leveraging Digital Green's model of video-enabled learning and mediated dissemination, the pilot promotes key maternal and neonatal health behaviors through ASHAs in 27 villages of Rae Bareilly.

DPH-led video screenings are mediated by ASHAs during monthly screenings at mothers' group meetings and Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHNDs). Pawan Kumari, an ASHA from Churwa village, says 'Initially, I was very scared of using the pico projector for the screening. I thought I would never be able to learn how to operate this technology, but with continuous mentoring and support, I am now able to use it with ease and confidence'. The videos offer a medium through which ASHAs can promote

health behaviors with ease and increased clarity.

Prior to the DPH intervention, ASHAs relied on verbal communication, games and print job aids such as posters, flip charts and flash cards to convey key health messages during mothers' group meetings and on VHNDs. It was often difficult for them to remember everything that had to be communicated. They would often need to refer to prompters written behind the job aids, which would obstruct the smooth flow of the session. "Now, conducting meetings using pico projectors has become easier, and attendance has also improved. We have to speak less as the video does most of the talking but we facilitate the discussions around the video to address concerns and reiterate the messages," Indira Mishra, an ASHA from Sarura village recounts. Parwati, a young mother, endorses the effectiveness of the approach: "We are now able to understand breastfeeding positions easily as these are conveyed explicitly through the videos. We are also able retain messages better through videos,



Video production on proper health and sanitation practices in progress



Kalavati, with one of the many families she has helped

as we are able to see and hear.”

A unique aspect of this pilot is the formation of the Community Advisory Board (CAB), comprising members from diverse backgrounds and institutions, including the Department of Health, Women and Child Development and Panchayati Raj institutions. The CAB is responsible for vetting the content and videos, as well as monitoring the pilot's progress, challenges and learnings at quarterly meetings. ASHAs too are included in the CAB, thus giving voice to the lowest in the hierarchy of the Indian health system and ensuring an inclusive approach to the delivery of health messaging. Playing dual roles of community member and representative of ASHAs in the CAB, Kalavati says “I feel important when I am given the opportunity to share the same platform with high ranking officers, and my experience is respected and valued by the CAB.” For approving the content and videos, she pays close attention to the language of the messaging in the video to ensure that it does not offend or hurt community sentiments.

Kalavati, Pawan Kumari, Indira Mishra and others like them have come a long way from the day they got appointed as ASHAs. They entered the frontline health workforce with skeletal knowledge and skills and are now respected, confident, knowledgeable and experienced members of the community. With the introduction of DPH, the ASHAs have taken a leap in skill enhancement and consequently in effective delivery of health messaging. They are no longer seen solely as vehicles for the delivery of content, but are also being increasingly acknowledged for their contribution to the development of that content.

The use of technology has definitely added value by making the messaging consistent, and by significantly reducing the energy and efforts of ASHAs. They are now adept at handling technology and facilitate the groups with elan. The DPH pilot has, thus, enhanced the ASHAs' capacity to deliver key messages, and more significantly, reinforced the critical role played by this cadre in the Indian health landscape.

Kushal Dange and Narsingh Lal: A Family of Progressive Farmers



Narsingh Lal, Kushal's father, proudly points to his orange trees as he explains the process of intercropping

Kushal Dange, a young man from a farming family in the village of Biaorakala (Khilchipur block, Rajgarh district, Madhya Pradesh), embodies the wave of change sweeping India's villages. Unlike his father and brothers and generations before them, Kushal does not spend much time on his farm, choosing instead to run a small shop in his village, where he sells everything from mobile phones to school stationery supplies. Across rural India, increasingly more young people like Kushal are looking for non-farming work, either moving to cities or creating new opportunities within their own villages. Kushal epitomizes this entrepreneurial bent of mind, involving himself in a number of activities that not only provide additional sources of income but also enable new learnings and experiences that can benefit his community.

One of his new roles is that of a community facilitator for the Digital Green

partnership with ACCESS Development Services, an NGO focused on the development of rural livelihoods. Since 2010, Digital Green and ACCESS having been working together to promote better agricultural practices using short, community-made, locally relevant videos in three districts of Madhya Pradesh.

Kushal has been facilitating screenings of these community-sourced videos in six different villages in Khilchipur block of Rajgarh district since 2012. In addition, he works with farmers' groups in the area to understand their challenges and needs, helps to implement new practices, and acts as an interface between the ACCESS staff and the community. This job also necessitates him to attend various training programs, knowledge-sharing workshops and seminars on agri-practices and the use of ICT for development.

For someone who never imagined a



Kushal Dange speaks about his work as a facilitator

life outside of farming or outside of his own village as a child, Kushal is proud of all that he has now accomplished. In particular, he is pleased that he can contribute to his community's development in a significant way, and that his own learnings can be passed on to others. His own social standing has also changed, as he explains: "In the beginning, I used to feel shy about going and talking to farmers about ways to improve their work. But now, whenever people see me, they know that I'm the person who shows videos. In fact, many people who didn't know me before now easily recognize me as the person who

shows videos, and often come to me for advice and assistance."

One of the many people who have benefited from Kushal's work as a facilitator is his own father, Narsingh Lal, whom he introduces as one of the most progressive farmers in the entire village. Narsingh has been attending the video screenings ever since they first began, and was one of the first adopters of several progressive farming techniques. Walking through his fields, he points proudly to a patch of orange trees, planted in rows and interspersed with onions, garlic and even cauliflowers. He explains, "I decided to practice intercropping after watching a video that showed its benefits. When taller crops are interspersed with smaller ones, you can maximize utilization of available space. Also, the video showed that mixing the crops like this can help improve the health of the soil and the crops."

Narsingh also watched a video on line-sowing and planting vegetables on slightly raised beds, which involves creating channels through which excess water can flow, thus, preventing rot and disease. Inspired, he decided to try the process for himself, and is very pleased with the results, showing off his flourishing orange trees and the healthy vegetables that lie in between.



Line-sowing makes it much easier to maintain the field with frequent weeding, Kushal's mother (photographed) maintains

Narsingh Lal and his son are also the very first people in the village to adopt another practice - poultry farming. While they only initiated the project recently, their chickens look plump and are almost fully grown and ready for the market. The chicken coop receives a great deal of attention from the community, and Narsingh Lal explains that others in the village have also considered building one after witnessing the success of theirs. Indeed, due to his enthusiasm for trying new practices and urge to learn and experiment, Narsingh Lal is looked up to by the other farmers, and was even chosen as the featured farmer in a few Digital Green videos. Both Narsingh and Kushal smile as they share the thrill of acting, and the sense of pride they felt watching the video later, along with the rest of their family.

Describing the relevance and usefulness of the videos, Kushal says, "even when Digital Green was absent from our village for a few months, the farmers were interested in continuing the screenings. Since there was a demand, we continued to show them the videos, and am sure that

we would do so even in future. The main challenge that we face is not the interest of the farmers, rather the availability of good equipment." This, Kushal feels, is a good indication of the success and sustainability of the approach, even though he remains cautious about the availability and access to resources.

Kushal's growth and achievements over the course of his work with ACCESS and Digital Green illustrates that this work can grant the opportunity to move beyond traditional jobs even while continuing to live in the village and serving the community. The technological aspect of the work is clearly interesting and exciting for him, for one. In addition, he is also given access to other opportunities that take him outside the village, such as attending educational sessions at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (farmer education centers), and participating in seminars and conferences in nearby cities. As he says shyly, "I am happy to be doing something that helps my family and community. Personally too, I feel like I have grown since I began working as a facilitator."



Kushal and Narsingh's poultry farm is something of a novel spectacle in the village, with curious daily visitors

Malli Lohar: Promoting Better Health Practices in Rural Odisha

“ When I watched the videos on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding, I was surprised to learn that there are so many benefits for the mother and baby. I learnt a lot of new things from these nutrition videos and found them beneficial for myself and my village. ”



Women from Malli's self-help group sit and discuss the best practices for childcare during a group meeting

Malli Lohar and Sita Majhi have been friends for many years. When Sita was pregnant, Malli told her about the importance of only giving the baby breast milk for the first six months after delivery. Malli, a 30-year-old mother of two from Kothaghar village (Keonjhar district, Odisha), was not always this savvy herself about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding; she learnt about it after watching a short video. Malli has been part of the Lakshmi Narayan self-help group (SHG) for a year and a half and is now the secretary of the group. A year ago, when videos on health and nutrition were screened at their SHG gatherings, it opened up a whole new world of

information for Malli and hundreds of women like her.

The introduction of these nutrition videos was part of a pilot project led by Digital Green and the Strengthening Partnerships, Results and Innovations in Nutrition Globally consortium (SPRING). The pilot aimed at adapting Digital Green's agriculture-focused, video-based approach to promote high-impact maternal infant young child nutrition (MIYCN) practices. Implemented by the community-based non-governmental organization, VARRAT, the pilot engaged SHGs in 30 villages of Keonjhar district, screening 10 short videos on proper care

within the first thousand days after birth.

Digital Green's community-led ICT approach has been successfully used to disseminate agricultural information to farmers in India and Africa since 2008. The Keonjhar pilot, however, is a unique attempt to converge agriculture and nutritional messaging by disseminating nutritional videos to groups who have already been watching agricultural videos for some time.

Malli has watched all 10 videos that were produced and screened as part of this pilot. Although she cannot benefit from the practice herself, she feels the information is important and is keen to help others in her community. "I see that children in the village are not so healthy and if I can help new mothers with some information, then I feel it is my duty to do so", she says.

As Malli was neither pregnant nor lactating when she watched these videos, she falls into an interesting group referred to as 'promoters'. Promoters are SHG members who cannot adopt a practice themselves at that time (as they are not pregnant or lactating), but who nevertheless have the ability to accurately counsel their families and other members

of the community on these topics. The concept of the promoter arose from the recognition that certain members of a community can be powerful influencers, particularly in the case of healthcare.

In one year, the SPRING-VARRAT-Digital Green pilot has reached 3,088 households and the videos have successfully triggered 1,063 adoptions in the MIYCN domain. In addition to these achievements, the pilot has also been a great learning experience, shedding light on the many differences between the uses of videos for agricultural and nutritional messaging. Whereas agricultural adoptions are easier to track because they are more tangible, verifying nutritional adoptions during home visits is a complex process. Given this fundamental difference, this pilot has allowed Digital Green to adapt the project design and the adoption verification process to make it more conducive for tracking nutritional adoptions. The concept of the 'promoter' is one such iteration to the Digital Green approach. However, the challenge of tracking these promoters and the extent of their influence still remains, and will be explored further as the intervention scales up to 70 villages in Keonjhar and Kendrapada districts of Odisha.



One of the many babies who will benefit from the knowledge her mother gains at the SHG meeting

Pinky Devi: From Homemaker to Change Agent

“ *Hum mahilaon ki apni pehchaan ban gayi hai.
Ab gents kehte hai ke aap aage chalo, hum poothche
chalenge. (We have our own identity now. The men
now tell us to lead the way and they will follow.)* **”**



Pinky Devi, center, with members from her self-help group who are early adopters of rice cultivation best practices in Nahub village

Pinky Devi, 30, mother of three, from Nahub village (Rajgir block, Nalanda district, Bihar), was a regular homemaker till 2009, when she came in touch with JEEViKA. JEEViKA, also known as the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS), is a state-level mission of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission. that has been working in partnership with Digital Green since 2011 to provide extension services and support local communities across 22 districts of Bihar.

Pinky Devi's association with JEEViKA began when she joined the self-help group (SHG) in her village, which gradually evolved from a 12 member SHG to a village organization (VO), comprising 8-10 SHGs. The VO took concrete steps toward the development of the village, for instance, shutting down alcohol shops. The village *pradhan* (head) and the men in the community were supportive of the women's community-building efforts.

Pinky volunteered to be a Village Resource Person (VRP) in 2010 and was imparted appropriate training by Jeevika, including information on techniques like system of rice intensification (SRI) and its benefits. Having adopted SRI on her own land, she visited and counseled each member of the self-help groups under her VO on SRI and encouraged them to adopt these techniques for improved productivity and reduction in production costs. At the beginning, 20 women farmers adopted SRI under her guidance. Based on her enthusiasm and commitment, she was trained as a Master Resource Person earlier this year and now supervises around 20 VRPs.

Digital Green's participatory local video production and mediated learning approach, introduced in Pinky's area four months ago, has increased the efficacy of her messaging and interpersonal communication. Now, she does not have to visit each villager's house to disseminate information on practices. Instead, the members assemble to view the video at a pre-determined time and venue. Like other farmers in her self-help group and community, Pinky too finds it easier to understand and explain the best practices in the videos, which feature farmers like her. Operating the pico projector has also been a smooth experience, since it is similar to operating a mobile phone.

Around 50 farmers in Pinky's VO have adopted SRI and 35 have kitchen gardens in their homes after attending

the relevant disseminations. The early adopters were also 'rewarded' with a rechargeable torch. Although it has only been a few months since the Digital Green approach was introduced in Pinky Devi's area, the community is extremely responsive. Pinky Devi's aim is to convince 70-80 farmers to adopt SRI by 2014. She is eager to view more such videos on improved agricultural and livelihood practices and implement them with the rest of her community.

With JEEViKA's current focus on nurturing community producer groups, Pinky's VO members have also attended video screenings on mushroom cultivation and poultry farming. There has been a palpable acceptance of the mushroom cultivation technique in Nahub; the villagers find the mushrooms taste good. Poultry on the other hand hasn't had much success yet. A couple of the community members interviewed felt that hens are difficult to let roam and create a mess with their droppings, which are also not reusable, unlike those of cow and buffalos. Despite these faint misgivings, there is overall much receptivity in the community to improved cost-effective techniques to boost productivity.

Pinky Devi attributes her empowerment to JEEViKA. The organization has helped women like her who never left their homes to actually find their voices and speak out against ill practices, mobilizing them as change agents working toward strengthening their community and improving its wellbeing.

Santosh Sharma: Combating Climate Change with Better Agricultural Practices

“ After watching the Digital Green videos, I came to know about new practices for sowing wheat, which have made my work easier, increased its yield, and have protected my crops from pests and disease as well. ”



Santosh Sharma explains how the changing weather has been effecting his crops

In January, the wheat fields sown all over Rajgarh district in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, in October or November last year are in full bloom. Their long stalks sway elegantly in the breeze and the ears of the grain are ripening into plump seeds. However, the picture is not as rosy as it appears to an untrained eye, and the changing weather has wreaked great damage to the crop. Everywhere, large patches in wheat fields have been flattened by the excessive rain and wind. The kernels of wheat are full of water from the dew and fog, and the seeds inside are rotting from the uncharacteristic lack of sunshine.

Despite the obvious problems caused due to the weather, Santosh Sharma, a veteran farmer from Biaorakala village (Khilchipur block, Rajgarh district) is upbeat about his own wheat fields. When prompted, he explains that this year, he has chosen to plant a different variety of wheat, a decision he made after watching a video. This newer strain of wheat, called Variety 322, is more resistant to climate change in addition to giving a higher yield of grain. Each seed produces a greater number of individual stalks of wheat - about 10 per seed, as opposed to about six per seed in the older varieties - and each stalk is thicker



Santosh demonstrates the sickness of the wheat stalks

than in earlier varieties. This means that this variety is better able to withstand the wind, rain and excessive moisture that the region is facing this season. Although Santosh anticipates a lower yield than if the weather was amenable, he is grateful that his crops have survived the harsh climatic challenge.

Santosh Sharma started working on the fields with his father when he was little. Now about 45 years old, he is the president of a 20-member farmers' group, the Bajarang Mishak Samuh. Elected to the position a year ago because of his forward thinking and entrepreneurial attitude, Santosh has been extremely active in introducing farmers to new practices and improved techniques that can improve their farm productivity. Eager to enhance his knowledge of good farming practices, Santosh has been attending video screenings since 2010 when Digital Green's community video-enabled behavior change communication approach was first introduced in his village. He urges the other members of his farmer's group to attend the screenings since, "the videos make it easy to understand a new practice because they show [it] in detail,

demonstrated by farmers like us, which makes it easy to understand and gives us confidence to take it forward ourselves."

Videos are screened according to their seasonal relevance and applicability to farmers' needs, and most often relate to the primary cash crops of the area: wheat in the *Rabi* (winter) season, and soybean in the *Kharif* (rainy) season. Other important crops of the area, also featured in videos, include *chana* (chickpea), *masoor dal* (pulses), *dhania* (coriander), *methi* (fenugreek), *sarson* (mustard), onion and garlic. Santosh has adopted numerous practices relating to almost all these crops, and has also been featured in a few videos as a lead farmer. Expanding on why he considers this approach successful, he says, "not only do these videos allow farmers to see a visual demonstration of the entire process, they also feature practices that can easily be tested. For example, I planted Variety 322 on a small part of my land last year. When I saw that it gave me a bigger yield than the other variety, I decided to plant more of it this year. Luckily, it is also stronger and better at surviving this bad weather."

In addition to switching to a new variety of wheat, Santosh explains, he also adopted a few other practices featured in the videos that have contributed to a healthier crop, such as proper preparation of soil prior to sowing, by applying urea to the field at a particular depth for optimized nutrition. He also uses a mechanized method of sowing that plants seeds in rows at a depth of about three to four inches below the ground. In the past, he clarifies, “farmers used to simply throw the seeds on the field. They would use about 65-70 kilograms of seed, and much of this would either get eaten by animals or would simply not germinate and go to waste.” With the new sowing method, seed wastage has been considerably reduced, and the amount of seed required is nearly halved - only about 30 kilograms. Moreover, planting the seed at a greater depth means that the plants are rooted more firmly, making them both stronger as well as better able to access water, therefore requiring less irrigation. Additionally, the line-sowing method has made it easier for farmers to

walk between the plants and get rid of unwanted weeds.

Speaking more generally about the needs of farmers in his community, Santosh stressed the need for them to stay updated about new technologies and practices, especially given today’s unpredictable climatic conditions. He feels that community-made videos are a convenient and accessible resource for conveying this information since they provide both technical know-how as well as detailed process-related knowledge. Speaking on the community’s receptiveness to new practices, he says, “farmers are typically very progressive and open to learning, and they are always eager to know about any new method to improve their yield or ease their work. They aren’t scared by technicalities and in fact want as many details as possible. Of course, we still face challenges of time, money and most prominently, climate change, but at least we now have easier access to the knowledge that helps us deal with these constraints.”



Wheat fields all over Biaorakala have been flattened due to the uncharacteristically bad weather

Shyam Lal: Student for Life

“

Samajh nahi aata kyon, gaon vapas kheechte rahatee hai.
(I don't know why, the land keeps pulling me back.)

”



Shyam Lal (center), with Kamlesh and his granddaughter

Shyam Lalji (56) doesn't remember how old he was when he first left Tamanpur (Rae Bareli district, Bachrawa Block, Uttar Pradesh). They were poorer then, even though his father had more land than he does now. Shyam Lal, was the most academically inclined of his siblings, completing his matriculation and undergraduate degree with good marks. He soon got a job with the railways and moved to Allahabad.

"A government job with a pension is the dream for most people. I tried to stay for as long as I could, but my heart

wasn't it." As he recounts wistfully his return to the village, a small crowd has gathered around us. It is around 5:30pm. It is evident that the elderly farmer, with his thick glasses strong jaw and clear, confident voice is respected in this community.

After returning to the village, Shyam Lalji tried to become a government school teacher for many years, without success. He taught the children going to the local primary school free of charge till the private school came up, and they finally began to get an education.

With just 11 *bighas* of land, his family is not well to do. Both he and his son have MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) job cards – the extra income has become vital to them. The desire to give his grandchildren an education is what drives Shyam Lal to labour even at his age.

Despite a difficult life, Shyam Lal is not averse to change - he constantly experiments with new farming techniques and multiple crops in his field. In addition to paddy, wheat and mustard – which are grown by almost the entire community – he plants peppermint, okra, onions, brinjal, potatoes and tomatoes. Last year he began to subscribe to updates on agricultural practices on his son's mobile phone. When Kamlesh, Digital Green's Village Resource Person (VRP) screened the first video a few months ago, Shyam Lal was among the most enthusiastic. Of the four practices featured in the videos screened since, he has adopted three.

"The *Mentha* nursery video came too late. I had already planted peppermint by then. But I will surely try it next time."

With all his experimentation, Shyam Lalji is still a careful man. "He always adopts a new practice on a small piece of land. 'Only results matter,' he says. He still doesn't trust me!" says, Kamlesh, half jokingly.

Farmers like Shyamal are rare, taking immediately to new practices – changing habitual ways of working. His age and background command respect and quite a few others followed suit after he adopted the practice featured in the first Digital Green-enabled video screened in his area. During the dissemination he is vocal, grilling Kamlesh for details.

For now, though, he is waiting for videos on how to make his paddy crop flourish.



Teshale Amde: The Changing Face of Ethiopia's Agricultural Extension System



Teshale (left), in the process of creating a video

Teshale Amde is a development agent (DA) in Arsi Negelle district of Ethiopia. He is a government extension service provider responsible for promoting relevant modern agricultural practices in rural areas. Teshale provides crop extension services, engaging with 411 households of the Gubeta Arjo peasant association, Teshale's key responsibilities include providing classroom and field-based training in the Farmer Training Center and supporting farming households to develop their annual plans and assist with their implementation, while following up with the farmers to assess their agricultural performance.

For about a year now, Teshale has been using videos to disseminate information, part of a pilot implemented by Digital Green in partnership with Oxfam America and Sasakawa Africa Association in association with the Ministry of Agriculture, to test the efficacy of Digital

Green's approach in the Ethiopian context. Discussing his experience during the pilot phase, Teshale says, "Using the Digital Green approach has helped me to be successful in my job. The videos help farmers to quickly understand and accept new technologies and practices. This saves me time because now I do not need to travel from house to house to explain the new methods or technologies. Since we began using the video dissemination method, my focus has shifted to providing follow-up services after video disseminations and offering assistance to farmers who adopt the new practices or technologies."

The pilot project was initiated in late 2012, reaching out to approximately 1,000 farmer households in three districts of Ethiopia: Arsi Negele and D. Libanos in Oromia region, and Gumer in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS)

region. The pilot was designed to help amplify the effectiveness of existing government extension systems for agriculture by building the capacity of DAs. This was done by training DAs in Digital Green's video production and dissemination techniques, and by providing technical operational support of low-cost mediated, instructional video as a method of extension services.

Teshale finds the video-enabled dissemination approach suitable and beneficial for Ethiopian communities, as, "The process helps us teach farmers the ever-changing agricultural technologies in a very visual and practical manner. The discussion between farmers also helps to increase trust amongst the community, and to create a spirit of healthy competition in implementing practices"

Elaborating on how the Digital Green method has helped his work, Teshale says, "Traditionally, we did not have either the means or the capacity to demonstrate best farming practices or irrigation technologies practically. Convincing farmers about a new practice or technology verbally through theoretical lessons was very difficult. Farmers are far more willing to adopt practices or technologies after observing the benefits firsthand."

Jero Gelgelu, a farmer from Arsi Negelle district, agrees, "[the video-based

approach] helps the DAs to explain new technologies and practices in a more detailed manner along with scientific evidence that substantiates their claims." Emphasizing the community-learning benefits of the approach, he adds, "Before the end of the dissemination session, there is an active and open discussion among group members. Farmers are able to ask as many questions as they like, no matter the question's content. This discussion helps to minimize doubt farmers may have in regards to the new technology or farming practices. Through the video dissemination process, farmers learn new practices from three different sources: the video, the development agent, and the farmers themselves."

The statistics complement Teshale and Jero's enthusiasm about this innovative ICT-enabled, community-sourced approach to share information on best practices. During the pilot phase of the intervention, within the Arsi Negelle district in Oromia region, about 88% of the engaged farmers adopted a practice featured in the videos.

Buoyed by the success of the pilot, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA), a technical support agency established by the Government of Ethiopia, have invited Digital Green to scale up its approach to amplify extension efforts and reach 150,000 households across four regions of Ethiopia: Oromia, SNNPRS, Amhara and Tigray.



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.

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.

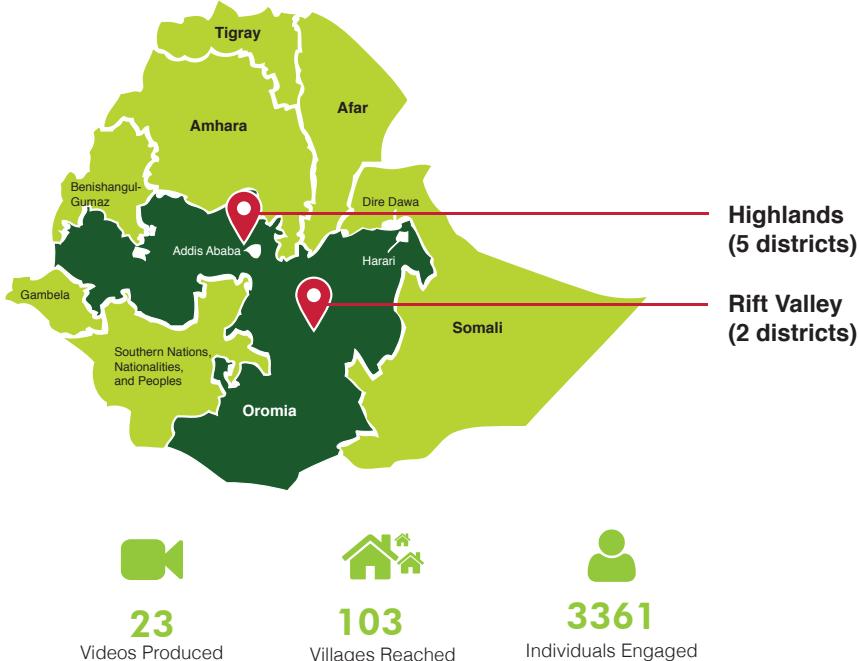
Limitations of the Existing Extension System

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



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

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