



Going Public

A quick way to interact with communities

Paula Nash
Paul Van Mele

SUMMARY

Going Public is an extension method that trains farmers in public places. Because people are already gathered, at a market or bus stop for example, Going Public uses less staff time and transport costs than a trip to a remote village. Many who attend sessions have never had contact with an extension worker before - and never will because of the impracticality of visiting every individual farm family. The increased access of extensionists to farmers is the essence of Going Public. It is a novel approach to complement other extension methods, not replace them. It is not a substitute for field-based learning and consultations, but it can make other extension efforts more effective and provides a unique entry point to rural communities. With simple, advanced planning, Going Public can be implemented by a confident facilitator who is familiar with local conditions. Planning begins by choosing a simple and short learning topic that is relevant to a general audience. A Going Public session might last only two hours, although each one is unique; the topic is repeated as new batches of passers-by arrive. Going Public allows one to learn about local farm knowledge, triangulate farmers' needs assessments and identify villages where services are needed most urgently. In this chapter, we describe how Going Public was used to learn with farmers about seed health, and pay special attention to facilitation.

ACTORS AND NETWORKS

The experiences presented here are based on Paula Nash's field work for her MSc at Reading University. Paul Van Mele, who tested Going Public previously in Bangladesh, would help to select suitable partners and advise if needed. Both authors are staff from CABI Bioscience, the scientific division of CAB International or CABI, an intergovernmental organisation with expertise in sustainable agriculture, knowledge and information systems, and farmer education.

We chose hard working organisations with different organisational styles, that were involved in PETTRA sub-projects and were enthusiastic about taking part (Nash, 2003).

The Rural Development Academy (RDA) in Bogra had previous experience with Going Public, under the Seed Health Improvement sub-project (SHIP), when it was used at a village road junction to get community feedback on multi-purpose seed drying tables. The second time in 2002, Going Public addressed the rice brown spot disease *Bipolaris oryzae*, its management through seed sorting, and improved drying. The event took place at a weekly hat or market (Van Mele and Zakaria, 2004).

The second organisation selected was the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI). Since 2000, SHIP had conducted on-farm research and developed technologies with farmers to improve the quality of their farm-saved seed. As time went on, more emphasis was put on participatory learning. Therefore, Dr. Taher Mia, head of the Department of Plant Pathology at BRRI and national coordinator of SHIP, was enthusiastic about testing the Going Public method. In 2001, he had learnt about participatory research during a 3-week study visit to the UK, organised by CABI Bioscience. Working closely with farmers has been on his agenda ever since, so he fully supported his project staff to help implement these activities.

The third organisation selected was an NGO, namely the Agricultural Advisory Society (AAS), with a staff of dynamic young men and women. AAS was unfamiliar with Going Public, but wanted to be involved. Their organisation and working philosophy is described in Chapters 3, 4, 8 and 18.

EVOLUTION OF THE METHOD

Conventional agricultural training methods rely on face-to-face communication, specifically for teaching about pest and disease management. Nevertheless, the majority of farmers still have not been reached. To reach many farmers, but maintain the quality of face-to-face communication, we explored novel ways of applying these principles.

Going Public started in Bolivia where CABI was developing extension exercises for farmer field schools (Bentley et al., 2003). Politicians, preachers and salesmen have attracted audiences in public places for centuries, so Bentley and colleagues wondered if extensionists could communicate plant health messages to crowds in

market places. To test the idea, extensionist Juan Almanza led the first Going Public at Tiraque market, Cochabamba, Bolivia, in December 2001. People gathered as Mr. Almanza set up his 'market stall', unloading microscopes and simple tools for showing how to extract nematodes from the soil. Mr. Almanza told farmers that nematodes existed, showed a simple method to extract nematode cysts from the soil with a glass of water and a piece of newspaper, and gave advice about controlling nematodes.

Since the first Going Public session in December 2001, other events have been held in Asia and Africa (Table 9.1).

THE GOING PUBLIC METHOD

Figure 9.1 is a guideline for organising a Going Public event. We use plant health as the learning topic, but obviously this can be interchanged with any other topic. Further advice is given by Bentley et al. (2003).



Identify the problems

Identify the main plant health problems in the region. Local extension agents are good sources of information as they have regular contact with farming communities (Boa et al., 2001). Using topics that farmers care about engages their interest and stimulates discussion.

Select key learning topics

Once extensionists and farmers have been consulted, the plant health problem needs to be diagnosed and a short, accurate learning topic prepared. Because of their past experience, RDA and BRRI chose rice seed sorting, drying and storage as topics to address at the Going Public.

As two partners had selected post-harvest issues, our first concern was how to host a Going Public for women. "You may get many men at the market to come and see Going Public, but women don't come to the market place. We also have no prior experience of Going Public, so how will you bring women to the market place? My worry is that Going Public may not be able to address such issues as storage [of rice seed]," said Mr. Harun-Ar-Rashid, executive director of AAS. Because seed drying and storage is done by women, AAS considered this an inappropriate topic to take to the market place. Instead, they chose to address rice bakanae disease, caused by *Fusarium moniliforme*, because this would be of more relevance for men coming to the market. Later, we learnt to Go Public in places where we could reach women.

Discovery learning exercises for integrated pest and crop management are mostly developed for farmer field schools, but can be equally used in videos or Going Public sessions.

Table 9.1 Overview of Going Public events in various CABI projects

DATE	PLACE	CROP	FOCUS OF ACTIVITIES
December 2001	Tiraque market, Bolivia	Potato	How to identify nematode symptoms on roots and test soil for presence of cysts
December 2001	Sucre public truck stop, Bolivia	Peach	How to distinguish peach leaf curl from aphid damage, and discuss integrated pest management
January 2002	Maria village road intersection, Bangladesh	Rice	Demonstrate seed drying tables developed with one community, and obtain comments on their wider appeal
April 2002	Noi Mile market, Bogra, Bangladesh	Rice	How to recognise brown spot disease, seed sorting and improved drying
September 2002	Kalimantan, Indonesia	Pepper	Describe general diseases, introduce a new problem recently occurring and how to manage it
February 2003	Ferry stop and markets in My Tho, South Vietnam	Fruit trees	Demonstrate diseases of mango and control options
February 2003	Thai Nguyen, North Vietnam	Pineapple	Demonstrate diseases, discuss control options
May 2003	Sylhet, Bangladesh	Rice	Bakanae disease in rice; what it is, how to recognise and how to control it.
May 2003	Mouna market, Gazipur, and Maria market, Bogra	Rice	Improvement to rice production. Rice seed sorting, drying and storage
September 2003	Tiraque, Bolivia	Potato	Andean potato weevil, seed health and other topics
March 2004	Kamuskonko market, Sironko, Uganda	Banana	Raise awareness about bacterial wilt disease by discussing symptoms and control; gather local knowledge on disease and learn local names
April 2004	Weekly fair in Los Negros, Bolivia	High value horticultural produce	Hand out flyers, show samples of key diseases, collect samples for laboratory referral and provide advice on control

The right person to lead the event

The extensionists, researchers, or local people leading the Going Public should have a good agronomic background to be able to explain the plant health problem, besides attracting a crowd and maintain a lively dialogue. The three partner organisations had different personalities heading the events. AAS used researchers to host Going Public events, whereas RDA chose farmers trained under the SHIP project. Both types of leaders were appropriate. The person leading the event will affect the types of people that attend Going Public. A lively character can be more

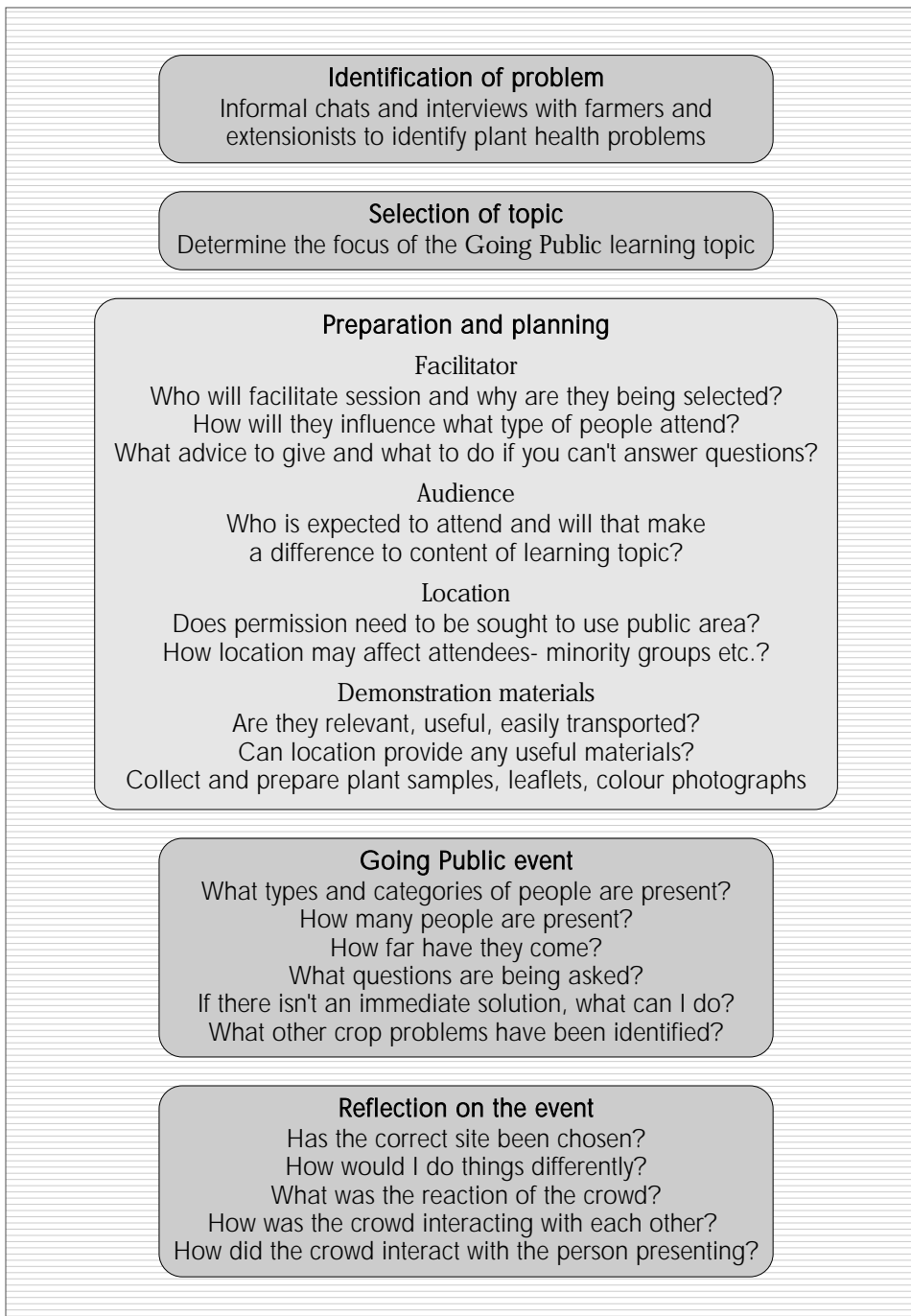


Figure 9.1 Steps of Going Public

effective at attracting people, maintaining their attention, and starting dialogue. Yet shy members of the public may feel more comfortable listening to a relaxed person. How to choose local innovators is described by IIRR (1996) and Van Mele and Zakaria (2002), but anyone who is comfortable speaking in public, and who has something to say can Go Public.

"We engaged farmers for Going Public, as they can do a much better job than researchers. Their conversation is much more natural," said Mr. A. K. M. Zakaria from RDA. Using farmers to conduct Going Public events is likely to be easier when a working relationship has already been established.

Whoever hosts the Going Public session should have an idea of the likely questions that the farmers may ask and the questions that should be asked to the farmers.

Find the right location

Choose a venue in advance and ask permission from the relevant authorities. Selecting the right place is important. For example, in Bolivia, markets are open to women and men, but villages are less receptive to outsiders, the houses are dispersed and it is difficult to attract a crowd in a village. On the other hand, in Bangladesh, women rarely attend markets, but villages are densely populated and it is easy to draw a crowd there. So villages are good sites for Going Public in Bangladesh, while market towns are better in Bolivia.

As women are by and large excluded from markets in Bangladesh, and we wanted their opinions on rice seed health, BRRRI agronomists set up stalls in a village area where some women had already gathered. As word spread through the village, more women arrived to join in the discussion on rice seed drying and storing. Paula Nash noticed manure drying on a platform, and asked the women how they dried other

Photos of seed drying tables, which were made by families under the SHIP project, are exhibited in the village. Neighbouring women can see and comment on the technology without having to leave their village.



materials, including rice. Once their curiosity was raised, we introduced the concept of drying tables. The agronomists showed seed flotation and women asked many questions. They shared with us their traditional seed storage practices. We spent about an hour and a half with women in the village and shared many ideas using few resources.

Prepare demonstration materials

Going Public can be made impractical by using large demonstration boards and a lot of poorly thought out demonstration materials that are heavy, require a car to carry them, or serve no purpose. To keep costs low, use portable, practical materials. For AAS's first Going Public in Sundarpur market, they took tables and benches so Nash could interview farmers for her thesis (Nash, 2003), although the experience taught us that taking clipboards and sitting on nearby walls for the interviews works just as well.

BRRRI took a plastic bucket to the Going Public session, filled it with water and demonstrated seed flotation to remove insect-infested and partially filled rice seeds. They also took a seed drying table to Mauna market, but then the extensionists realised that the table was a handy place to show off other demonstration materials. The table became so cluttered with other things that the audience could hardly see that it was a drying table. Project farmers who had already made drying tables tried to explain their many uses, but as they were hidden beneath irrelevant items, people could not see for themselves what the tables were good for. The farmers could have spread rice seed on the tables, and lifted them up to show people how the table makes it easy to bring seed in out of the rain. The farmers could have shown the audience the tables' other uses, like storing blankets or pans; they could have sat or lain on one of the solid drying-threshing tables to show people that it can serve as furniture. This would have stimulated the audience to ask questions. Videos can be better than farmer-to-farmer extension just for these reasons (see Chapter 7).

Apart from showing three drying tables of different designs, cluttered up with other demonstration aids, RDA used other props to good effect, including different types of storage pots for rice, trays of rice seedlings grown from both hand sorted and unsorted rice seeds. The staff and project farmers of RDA used lots of information boards at Maria village. Some of the boards were placed at ground level so people could not see them well, especially when people crowded around. Agronomist Shafiul Karim (Shafique)

During a Going Public session, Shafique from RDA and Zabed Ali, one of the trained farmers, use a calendar to teach passers-by when to do which activity in order to improve the quality of their farm-saved seed.



explained the rice calendar, showing the best time to practise improved rice tasks. The calendar, which was well placed for the crowd to see, provided a condensed view of complex information in an easy to understand form.

Use materials that can be found locally and arrange them in ways that allow many people to see them at once, or that can be easily handed around to the crowd. Photographs or drawings help to stimulate questions and allow more people to take part. But real live materials are even better than photos. Samples of healthy and diseased rice seed have been shown beside healthy and infected seedlings.

The Going Public event

The facilitator(s) interact with the crowd and ensures that all topics are addressed and that education materials are wisely used. They should try to engage people on the outskirts of the crowd.

When the event is in full swing, record some key data to give an estimate of where people are from, what types and roughly how many people are attending. Assign one person from the team to record these data and write down the questions people ask or interesting discussions that emerge as in Box 9.1.

Asking the farmers in the crowd about their pests and diseases helps learn about local problems and can help choose crop health topics for future Going Public exercises. It also allows to triangulate information gathered through other means.

BRRI staff learnt that farmers in Gazipur mainly referred to bakanae as *sat*, meaning off type or mixture of different varieties (as bakanae infested plants are clearly elongated), or as *pata sada*, meaning white leaf (leaves of infested plants turn pale). AAS staff learnt of many different local names that farmers used to describe bakanae disease (see Table 9.2) and as Mr. Ferdous said: "Although farmers did not know it was a disease, they had a good knowledge of the symptoms." Farmers also mentioned that they had had the disease for a number of years; some commented that their yields were steadily decreasing. Although the names and interpretation given by farmers has potential, it would need more work to unveil their local knowledge on diseases.

Reflection

Analyse what went well at the Going Public, and what could have been better, i.e.

Box 9.1
Once Upon a
Time in a
Market

April 25, 2002. "These seeds look very bright and give such strong seedlings, which new variety is this?" wonders one of the farmers looking at the materials on display at noi mile hat, the weekly market near Maria village in Bogra. Mr. Zabed Ali, one of the farmers trained under SHIP, tells him it is one and the same variety. Those who have gathered look puzzled; some even think that a machine has polished the seed. "Come to my village, we can provide some healthy seed to you, or we can show you how to produce them yourselves. And let me assure you, we do not have a machine in our house," reassures Zabed. (See Chapters 16-20).

Table 9.2 Local names for bakanae given by farmers when shown infested plants at a Going Public session, Sundarpur, 2003 (n=23)

LOCAL NAMES	INTERPRETATION	NO. OF RESPONSES
Sat	Off type, a mixture of different varieties	19
Hinnua/Hinno	Taller and yellow plant in a hill	6
Laim/lam	Off type, a mixture of different varieties	5
Baoni	Rice plant with leaf rot at top that goes downward	2
Bao	Bad air. Also given to human diseases thought to be caused by bao; sometimes related to evil spirits	2
Monna	A kind of weed	2
Hinnua dhan	A rice plant which has nodes like chingri shrimp	2
Dhan vat kai	Pale or yellowish rice	1
Noa dhan	New rice	1

was it set up in the right spot, was it too noisy, were there too many distractions, how was the learning environment affected by the location? Learn lessons from documented Going Public events (Bentley et al., 2003; Nash, 2003; Van Mele and Zakaria, 2004).

We encouraged the facilitators to write their experience in a lively narrative immediately after the event. This is a relaxed way to let people document their views and reactions. Short quotes should be recorded to document reactions, local knowledge and comments of people in the crowd. These could be used to clarify future action points, or be combined with the narratives into short stories, as we did in Box 9.1.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Keep it simple. Have a well-planned Going Public with a clear learning topic, the right amount of demonstration materials, and a facilitator who knows the topic and is comfortable speaking in public.

Be creative. Think of possible problems and concerns before doing a Going Public, and come up with answers to solve them before they occur.

Few resources are needed. One or two extensionists, transport, some demonstration materials, a few good ideas and some time are all it takes to Go Public.

Farmers' time is not disrupted. One farmer remarked: "This system is very good, and we can learn a lot without any fixed schedule." He appreciated not being taken from his farm work by an extension programme with a lengthy agenda.

DIFFICULTIES, RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

A main initial concern of partners was that women would not be reached using this method, as people only thought about markets. Go Public at places where women do gather: schools, NGO meetings, health centres and so on, as this reduces transaction costs (see Chapter 21).

An agronomist raised the point that "Going Public is no substitute for field work". Indeed, some topics like village soil fertility mapping, as described in Chapter 8, are better done in the field, or in more controlled meetings than in a Going Public session.

One characteristic of Going Public is that the facilitator has no control over who comes and who does not. Effectiveness of this new extension method is hard to measure as the audience may come from various places and differ every time. As with any other extension method, researchers will need to measure the impact of Going Public, which poses extra challenges due to the fluidity of the audience. See Nash (2003) for suggestions on how to study adoption rates.

SCALING UP

Going Public is a flexible method that has been used in several countries, for various topics, and with diverse institutions, facilitators and audiences, making it a proven, transferable method. With ingenuity and planning even complex ideas can be communicated.

After Van Mele presented the method during a national workshop on uptake in April 2004, organised at the premises of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Dhaka, Syngenta expressed interest in using Going Public to promote its

latest herbicides in Bangladesh, but so far hasn't undertaken action. Also the NGO Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) showed interest, and some months later their management decided to start using Going Public in their agricultural programme from 2005 onwards. RDRS has a formal agreement with the DAE through the Northwest focal area forum, so it is likely the government extension service will also gradually learn about the potential of Going Public.

In the future, Going Public could be combined with mass media and face-to-face extension in the following ways:

- Advise farmers where and when people can meet extensionists to ask questions and get

Research on extension methods requires detailed record keeping during events. This will not only tell us the type of questions farmers asked or what names they used to describe certain insect pests or diseases, it will also serve as a basis for future reflection.



materials like seed, leaf colour charts or leaflets with information on safe herbicide use. This can be done over the radio, TV, newspaper or through miking (see photo)

- Invite men and women farmers who have been trained by a project or a farmer field school (FFS) to interact with the audience at fairs, markets, village meetings, and other events
- Validate short, five-minute discovery learning exercises in a farmer field school and then use them at a Going Public.



CONCLUSION

People attended the Going Public sessions in the markets from distances as far away as seven kilometres. Each organisation approached Going Public with different views, ideas and styles. Sessions differed in style of presentation: one was like a demonstration, and others were more like facilitated discussions. Either way, farmers shared information with each other, asked questions, picked up new ideas and learnt something about plant health management. The sessions also opened the eyes of those organising the event: they learnt about the names farmers use to describe certain plant health problems and how to better communicate with farmers in the future. One of Going Public's major advantages is that it is a quick and flexible extension method that can be used by anybody. Extensionists who want to use it, will develop their own style, noting the two-way flow of ideas.

Miking is a popular way to get messages across in rural Bangladesh. Rickshaws move from village to village and announce events through a microphone. It is an excellent means to announce Going Public sessions, field days or the promotion of new technologies, such as mobile pumps (see Chapter 13).

REFERENCES

- Bentley, J., Boa, E., Van Mele, P., Almanza, J., Vasquez, D. and Eguino, S. (2003) Going Public: a new extension method. *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* 1(2), 108-123.
- Boa, E., Bentley, J. W. and Stonehouse, J. (2001) Standing on all three legs: the técnico as a cross-cultural occupational group. *Economic Botany* 55(3), 363-369.
- IIRR (1996) *Recording and Using Indigenous Knowledge: A Manual*. IIRR, Cavite, Philippines.
- Nash, P. (2003) *Comparing Conventional and Novel Extension Activities for Seed Health Improvement in Bangladesh*. MSc thesis, Reading University, UK.

- Van Mele, P. and Zakaria, A. K. M. (2002) The Innovation Tree: a new PRA tool to reveal the innovation adoption and diffusion process. PLA Notes 45, 54-58.**
- Van Mele, P. and Zakaria, A. K. M. (2004) From concept to impact: developing and communicating multipurpose seed drying tables in Bangladesh. In: Participatory Research and Development for Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management. A Sourcebook. Vol. 3 A. CIP/UPWARD Philippines, in press.**