

DESPERATELY SEEKING CONTENT: WHY SERVICE PROVIDERS INCREASINGLY SEARCH FOR QUALITY AGRICULTURAL TRAINING VIDEOS

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ABSTRACT

Despite considerable advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) since the 1990s, their application in rural development has often been used to promote, test and advance ICTs, with rural development being merely a welcome by-product. This is partly due to a lack of investment in the developing appropriate content for small-scale farmers. Extension service providers looking for audio-visual training materials on the internet soon discover that little is on offer that suits their farmers. Nevertheless, several initiatives of farmer-to-farmer video-mediated learning have sprung up independently in recent years. The increasing, yet scattered demand for quality videos, and their growing availability, have allowed new innovation brokers to emerge. Once farmer-to-farmer training videos appeared in multiple local languages, they helped stimulate interest at the national and global levels. Donors have also pushed to create impact, triggering demand for more and better farmer-to-farmer training videos that, in turn, provided new stimulus for these innovation brokers. In one example, training videos on rice were used by over a thousand organisations across Africa. The experience of mass multiplying local-language versions of these videos inspired the establishment of Access Agriculture to support the production, translation and sharing of agricultural training videos at global, regional and national levels. The paper considers how quality content development can keep pace with the rapidly changing ICT market and increased demand from extension service providers and provides suggestions.

Key words: Content, Farmer-to-farmer, Innovation brokers, Internet-based platform

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Many new players have entered the rapidly changing field of agricultural extension in developing countries. Strengthening the skills and available tools of all these actors has become a particularly important challenge (Van Mele *et al.*, 2010a). Various organisations have started assuming a role as knowledge broker at the local, national, regional or global level. While in some places the publicly funded national extension service is still active, in most developing countries their influence has waned and the extension functions (organising and strengthening farmer groups, training, articulating demand, networking, linking to markets, etc.) are carried out by a dispersed and uncoordinated body of organisations, entrepreneurs, media professionals and projects.

Obtaining insights on the use of video in agricultural extension in developing countries is hampered by the almost total lack of documentation and impact studies. The expansion of information and communication technology (ICT) projects has been followed by an equally impressive string of studies. Video, however, has featured in very few of them. Cheap digital technology and an increasing appreciation that visual support tools are

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needed to enhance impact have triggered a renewed interest in video for rural development. This has coincided with an emerging understanding that ICT technologies are only as useful as the content they carry and the intent and skills of the people using them (Toyama, 2010).

In Uganda, the Grameen Foundation customised some rice videos (made in South Asia and West Africa) to be used on cell phones by their village extension workers. The Foundation's search for farmer training content only started after they had developed their mobile applications for Android phones. Given the changes in the ICT landscape and an eagerness of donors to enhance impact on the ground, organisations are increasingly looking for quality agricultural training videos.

METHOD

From June to September 2011, Agro-Insight conducted a scoping study for the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS), the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI) Platform and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) on the production, dissemination and use of farmer training videos in developing countries. Literature was consulted, the internet screened, experts and users consulted, and a global on-line survey launched in English, French and Spanish.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Over 500 people responded to the on-line survey, which was widely announced via networks, blogs, listservs and websites. All respondents were involved in service provision, mainly in Africa, Central and South Asia and Latin America. The type of respondents showed that some professional groups are more 'connected' to professional networks and the internet than others (Table 1), and as such would benefit more from an internet-based service for video sharing.

Table 1: Respondents to survey on video use (n = 505; 29 August 2011)

Affiliation	Number	%
National research or university	119	24
International research and/or development	81	16
International NGO	64	13
National or local NGO	55	11
Extension service	39	8
Radio	24	5
Food industry	23	5
Farmers' organisation	19	4
Communication enterprise	12	2
Other	69	14

Radio broadcasters, farmers' organisations and extension agents desire quality training videos, but they have less access to co-ordinated networks (and the internet) and will benefit more directly from video CD or DVD compilations on specific themes.

The relatively low response from staff of national extension services also partly reflected differences in infrastructure and equipment. Whereas staff at national research stations and universities often have access to the internet, this is not the case for extension

workers who often rely on public internet cafés and pay for time on-line out of their own resources. However, researchers are not always better off. In five states in south-eastern Nigeria, about 81% of female researchers and 59% of female extensionists travelled on average 13 km to public cyber cafés because their office computers were not connected to the internet. Seventy per cent of female extension agents and 44% of female researchers spent 5–8 hours on ICT weekly (Adebayo and Adesope, 2007).

About 77% of the respondents to the on-line survey used video to train farmers (Figure 1). Apart from training farmers directly with video, about half of the respondents said that they also looked at videos to get new ideas for extension experiences.

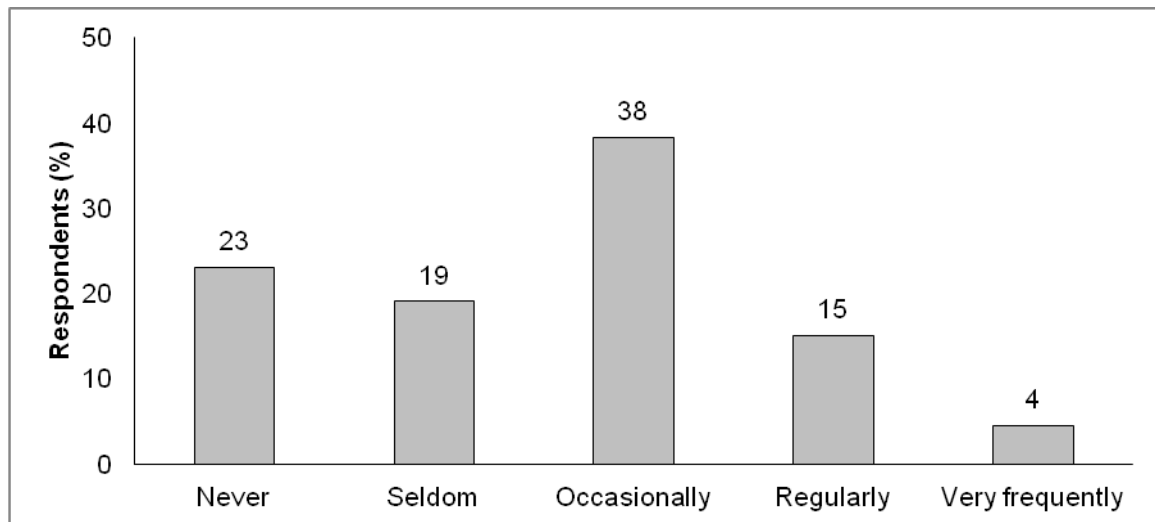


Figure 1: Frequency of video use to train farmers (n = 472)

Although answers differed according to the local context and people's personal experiences, most respondents found video a very useful tool for reaching illiterate, youth and women, and for training groups. In teaching rural children in Nigeria about construction of vegetable beds, simple farm tools and soil conservation, video was as powerful as real-life demonstrations (Isiaka, 2007). More than 95% of those women who watched a video on rice parboiling in Benin adopted various good practices, compared with only about 50% of women who attended a training workshop (Zossou *et al.*, 2009). The public video screenings triggered an equally positive change in four out of the five livelihood capitals among those women who attended the open-air video shows and those who didn't (Zossou *et al.*, 2012). An increasing body of evidence of the power of video has led to more organisations and companies wanting to invest in the production and use of agricultural videos.

Those respondents who did not or only rarely used video to train farmers mainly did so because they either did not find local language videos, did not know where to look for videos or did not find videos on the right subject (Table 2). Some said they do not train farmers themselves or only recently began exploring the use of video in training their farmers; some mentioned logistical problems; others asked to be pointed in the right direction to find good agricultural videos.

Table 2: Reasons for not or rarely using video (n=166)

Reason given	Number	%
I don't know where to look for videos	59	25
I haven't found videos on the right subject	39	16
I haven't found videos in local language	54	23
Other	86	36

About 85% of the respondents found the use of local languages very important for effectiveness of farmer training videos. However, focusing only on local-language productions limits their spread across language borders. In India, Digital Green has produced a large number of local-language videos (Gandhi *et al.*, 2009), but each is only used within the relatively narrow geographical area where it was produced, because the scriptless approach does not favour translating the videos into other languages. To ensure that videos can be shared and are of use to the global community of extension service providers and farmers, the zooming-in, zooming-out (ZIZO) approach shows how to make regionally relevant and locally appropriate farmer training videos (Van Mele, 2010). Organisations are willing to translate and use videos made in other countries if they are relevant, of good quality and if video scripts are available.

By 2011, the 'Rice Advice' videos, made by the Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice) and containing 11 learning modules, had been distributed to about 200 organisations across Africa, which in turn shared them with another 800 organisations. The videos were translated into about 40 African languages and shown on national TV stations in 10 countries.

Since the early 1990s, extension has gone through a major paradigm shift under the influence of the farmer field schools (Davis, 2006; McIntyre *et al.*, 2008). However, the mindsets of many scientists and extension service providers continue to be prescriptive rather than collaborative when working with farmers. This has direct implications for the scalability of training videos. Highly prescriptive recommendations have limited scope for scaling up. If the focus is more on learning about a technology by explaining and visualising underlying principles of a technology, farmers across countries and continents can more easily apply this in their own context (Van Mele *et al.*, 2010b). Rather than scaling-up ready-made technologies, more focus is needed on the learning than on the technologies (IIRR, 2000). This is one of the reasons why videos made according to the ZIZO approach involve scientists, extension workers and farmers who have been engaged in FFS or other ways of discovery learning.

Farmer-to-farmer training videos made according to the ZIZO approach not only appeal to a wide range of service providers, but also motivate farmers to mobilise their own resources to organise viewings. Women groups in Bangladesh who were given a VCD on rice seed health reported that they watched the videos on various occasions and on average 6.2 times (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2011). They watched it 2.4 times with the group members only, 1.9 times with group members and neighbours or other villagers, 0.9 times with family members and neighbours and 0.8 times during TV broadcasts. Farmers in Africa who watched local-language versions of the Rice Advice videos were eager to obtain a copy for themselves and were even ready to pay for it.

From an innovation-system perspective, having videos that are used by many (known and unknown) service-providers to train farmers is a great achievement. However, lower

quality training videos also have their use. Even though such videos are rarely downloaded by intermediaries to show to farmers, they are a source of new ideas for extension service providers.

Nearly 80% of the respondents to the on-line survey said that they searched the internet for agricultural videos (Figure 2), yet most of them searched it occasionally. This is not surprising given that quality agricultural training videos are scarce, scattered and hard to find.

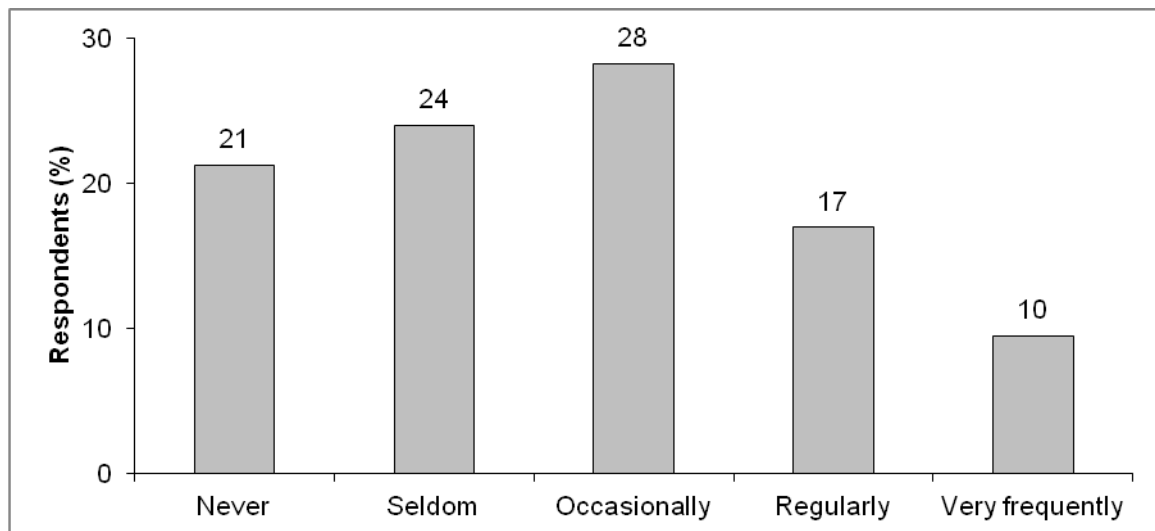


Figure 2: Frequency of people searching the internet for agricultural training videos (n = 442)

Those searching for such videos most commonly visited the websites of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and the CGIAR Centres (albeit each by less than 5%). Many respondents had no clear target as to where to look for videos and those who used Google or YouTube to guide their search mainly did so to get new ideas themselves rather than to download the videos to show to farmers.

Many agricultural projects have their videos hosted on their YouTube channel, but after having watched one video and following links to suggested related videos, within one or two clicks one is completely removed from anything related to agriculture. YouTube is overloaded and this seriously affects people's searching behaviour. A Google search on 'video' and 'soil fertility' yielded 640,000 hits in June 2011. Narrowing down and adding 'Africa' still left 294,000 hits. Although users with fast internet connections and with plenty of time to spend behind a computer (a rare combination in most developing countries) may find things that are of interest, the internet pollution with poor quality videos means that for many service-providers finding a good video is like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Considering that there is no authoritative website to which people can turn for watching and downloading agricultural training videos, most public and private service-providers perceived the proposition of establishing a new internet-based platform devoted to agricultural training videos as very useful (Figure 3). Various companies that are members of the SAI Platform (an umbrella organisation created by the food industry to communicate and actively support the development of sustainable agriculture) have

already expressed their eagerness to collaborate in the development of a new internet-based platform to share agricultural training videos.

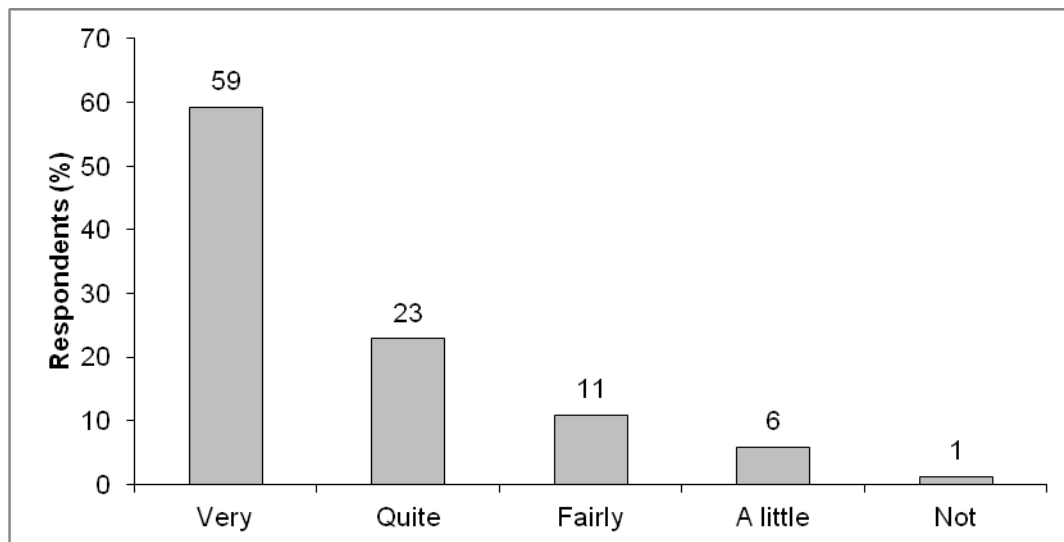


Figure 3: Perceived usefulness of establishing an internet-based platform for agricultural videos (n = 442)

An international non-governmental organisation, Access Agriculture, has been established to facilitate content creation and sharing of agricultural training videos through its internet-based platform and an evolving network of regional and national video-distribution mechanisms. Access Agriculture is a joint not-for-profit effort of three media companies: Countrywise Communication, Agro-Insight and Streaming Tank, with the SAI Platform, GFRAS and SDC showing interest in taking this further under a public-private partnership.

To reach farmers with agricultural videos, a new internet-based platform is required, but not sufficient. Local-language versions must be made available on VCD or DVD, mass multiplied and be made widely available through a well-planned communication distribution strategy.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Over half of the extension service providers in developing countries who responded to the on-line survey have used video to train farmers ranging from occasionally to very frequently. Those who have not used video said that they did not know where to look for videos, that they hadn't found videos in local languages or with the right content. Many service-providers browse the internet in search of videos, but often have no clear target. Given the existing internet pollution (poor-quality material), finding a good video is similar to looking for a needle in a haystack. Access Agriculture has been established to facilitate content creation and sharing of agricultural training videos through an internet-based platform and an in-country video distribution mechanism. It can only be hoped that the time of desperately seeking content will soon be over.

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