

FARMER GROUPS AS A WAY OF MOBILISING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT: AN EXAMPLE FROM KENYA

By

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Abstract

Dominant development policies implemented by Governments of post independent African countries were mainly done using top-down approaches. They are for example the structural adjustment policies of 1980s and at present, the poverty reduction strategy. Kenya being largely an agricultural country began from the beginning to focus on agricultural sector. Agricultural extension service department was charged with working with farmers towards development. Using results of research carried out between 2003 and 2005, which looked at the communication strategies used in extension services, this paper shows that initiatives of extension service providers, though noble, yet, in using the *baraza* (village gathering) mode of community mobilization, failed to take on board social factors and dynamics of human relations i.e. horizontal, dialogical and participatory strategies, which lead to commitment to given policies and ultimately development. The *baraza* mode is imbued with discourse features related to the exercise of power and officiality. Power and control is displayed at various linguistic levels including, style, topic control, address forms, inclusive and exclusive pronouns and modality. Extension service can be viewed as service delivery of the top-down mode. Asymmetry of relations and power difference continue to be of concern in discourse of development. The research also focused on farmer groups where communication strategies were found to be more participatory and dialogical. Farmer groups as a strategy appeared geared towards better citizen mobilization. The idea of using participatory approaches in development is meeting the approval of many scholars, and it seems to fit and to be well captured within the concept of farmer groups or community groups where rural folk define and implement their own development. The paper shows the strengths of farmer groups, and suggests ways in which governments can begin to explore these as possible ways of mobilising populations in development.

Key words: Extension service Communication and development
Farmer/rural groups Community mobilization

Introduction

Post independence development policies adopted by Kenya, like those in many African countries were not participatory approaches recommended by many scholars. Blake (1993:11) for example, says, what has gone wrong in development communication in Africa is it's rooting in euro-centric approaches to both development and

communication. She affirms the need to acknowledge local cultural patterns; which also involve the use of local languages. Focusing on discourse practices of agriculture extension services, a research project conducted by the Department of Languages and linguistics of Egerton University Kenya, in 2003-2005 examined closely approaches used in service delivery, to understand how communication is structured and how community was mobilized. Agricultural extension services were singled out for study on communication and community mobilization because Kenya relies a lot on agriculture and many programs have been geared towards this sector.

The principle of supporting farmers through extension service is now a well known

phenomena in Kenya. It has been widely endorsed in policy statements since the nineteen fifties, for example, the Swynerton plan of 1954 which also formed the basis of post-independence policies. However changes have been marginal in terms of agricultural output, number of farmers involved and in terms of gender integration (Hinderick and Sterkenburg 1987). Sessional Paper 1986 was in response to the bad times of 1981-1985. The Sessional Paper, together with all the other programs before and after were set to encourage self- sufficiency in food. However, by 1994, the Government was nowhere near meeting its targets. As recently as June 2004, the president of Kenya had to painfully declare to the rest of the world that sections of Kenyan people, if not given urgent food donations, would die of hunger. The question to date remains, how are farmers mobilized and convinced to be active participants in innovative agricultural programs? How are women who provide 75% of agricultural work force targeted and given information? It has been proposed before that a plan be set to 'encourage and ensure access to agricultural information' particularly by targeting women. This was to be realized by employing larger numbers of women as extension workers and also translating extension information into vernacular languages. Not much came out of this proposal. The strategies of mobilizing and getting information to the farmers have been problematic. Over the last twenty years Kenya tried different approaches of extension to get to the community in order to disseminate information. The most used approach of mobilization has been the '*baraza*' (i.e. the gathering of farmers on a given day for teaching). However, in the last two years, the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Program, (hereafter NALEP) has also used farmer groups approach to bring farmers together.

The '*baraza*' as an approach of community mobilization.

'Baraza' is a Swahili word, which means 'gathering'. It is widely used in Kenya to mean the gathering of people usually in the village to listen to the chief, village elders, politicians or government officials. It is a concept that has been used by the Government to mobilize communities, particularly when there is information to pass to the populace. In order to get a gathering, information is passed using the assistant chief's office, who then passes it to religious leaders to announce to

their congregations. Some posters may also be pinned up for those who are literate to read. The meeting place may be in an open field outside the chief's office or a church or mosque. It is in such a place that development officers will try and pass their teachings.

The *baraza* is a quick method of passing information fast to the citizens; however, it falls under the top-down approach because the expert comes with information and programs to pass down to the rural community. The group being big leaves little room for interactive talk, questions or other topics outside the schedule set for the day by the expert.

The group as an approach of community mobilization

The idea of communities working in groups is not new. In Kenya for example, the country's motto of '*Harambee*' meaning 'to pull together' is drawn from the traditional practice of working together to help a neighbour raise the roof of his house, or working as a group during the planting or harvesting season. FAO, has in the last 17 years experimented with the idea of using farmer groups to deal with farming issues in countries in Asia with relative success. In Kenya, though formal acceptance of the idea is new in agriculture, yet, it has been in use unofficially particularly among women in what is called the 'merry go round groups'. In the 'merry go round' a group meets regularly to contribute money to give each member in turn for household needs. The cooperative movement, which is patterned on group formation, has not had much success because of bureaucracy and political interference. The SACCOs, (savings credit and cooperative society) another form of groupings have done better where they are run by members. However, these are big movements, and cannot be said to serve the interest of small farmers in the way it is now conceptualised for mobilizing rural community. Formation of small farmer groups as a concept is now finding acceptance in agriculture in a few regions through the NALEP effort. How such a noble idea could have been relegated to the back up to now is not clear.

There are other reasons for focusing on the farmer groups. One is that extension services as a concept has suffered a great deal in Kenya because of lack of funds and in some parts of the country it seems not to have worked in the last fifty years.

Groups become a good place to start in examining new modes of delivering services to the community.

In practical terms the extension officers start off the farmer groups. After two years they are 'weaned' and left to carry on the affairs of the group on their own. Occasional help from the extension office is available in case of need.

This paper examines farmer groups concept as beneficial to those involved and therefore useful as an approach of community mobilization in comparison to '*baraza*'. Here an

examination is done of the two modes to show why the farmer groups as organizational mechanism are better placed for mobilising rural communities.

Communication and development

Communication between participants in development networks reflects the state of relations between development workers and ordinary members. Communication is an important component in the context of development. While it is generally agreed that participatory methods lead to better development, and dialogue as a strategy of communication is taking root to replace the delivery of pre-packaged messages (Clinton 1996), few studies have done detailed analyses of such communication to show how it is structured, and how to mobilise communities to engage in the said dialogue. The little done in Kenya on communication has focused on broader issues of communication (i.e. use audio visual aids and publications). In our study, an examination of communication strategies in use was key in understanding the goings on of 'baraza' conferences and also farmer groups.

It is now clear that improved technologies by themselves cannot increase productivity unless the farmers for whom they are intended are mobilized and encouraged to utilize them. Communication studies give impetus to research in agriculture by looking into discourse practices and mobilizing strategies of this sector; (i.e. by understanding how farming communities are brought together, how knowledge is availed to them, how knowledge and programs are negotiated and agreed on, how knowledge is accepted and 'owned' and therefore put into use). This is important for sustainable development.

The study focused on minute details of face to face interaction and how they impact on issues of formal/informal talk, open, two way, frank, joint construction of knowledge and subsequent behavior on farming practices.

Ethnographic approach specifically conversational analysis and its use as an evaluation technique offered a theoretical perspective and methodological principle for the study.

Conversation analysis focuses on production, interpretation, and sequencing of speaking turns in social interaction. This approach assumes that speakers and hearers continually negotiate meaning in and through conversational exchange and in so doing create social reality. The use of this approach was to determine whether dialogue as a strategy of communication has taken root to replace the delivery of pre-packaged messages (Clinton 1996). By studying the rules and presuppositions inherent in conversation, an appreciation of interactional 'work' involved in successful and unsuccessful communication in relation to adherence to agricultural technologies was built.

After audio and video recordings were done of naturally occurring interaction, all tapes were listened to. Later, a selection (done on grounds of clarity, recurring phenomena) of tapes was transcribed. These were expected to be representative of interaction in extension services and would enable us to construct patterns that can usefully be generalized to other sessions. Detailed transcriptions of speech production process were made. Analysis focused on the overall structural organization of the event or activity. It also focused on style, topic control, address forms, modality and relationship between pairs of adjacent utterances. In line with ethnographic research, interpretation was aided a lot by an understanding of the historical and cultural context. Though originally the research was to focus on communication strategies in extension service, the analysis brought out useful insights on the approaches in use of community mobilization for development programs which are outlined below.

Therefore, though several issues related to communication in extension services were looked into, for the purposes of this paper the two modes of community mobilization will be given specific attention. The aim of examining the *baraza* and the group is in a bid to understand how discourse is structured, how farmers are initiated into, and generally positioned in the discourse of modern farming and specifically the strategies used. It is argued from the onset that interaction in extension services is expert driven, thus emphasizing the extension officer's power as a scientist and as agriculture education extension practitioner. Extension officers determined the community mobilization, field and farm work agendas and shaped the nature of interaction in the construction of knowledge. The farmers were constructed as passive learners. However, this changed somehow in the farmer group as will be shown below.

Discourse practice in extension service

i. Physical organization.

In table 1 is a presentation of the organization of the meetings in the two modes

Table 1 the structure and activities during (a) baraza and (b) group meetings.

(a) Structure of interaction in the baraza

| Duration - time average 2 to 4 hrs | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Phases | Activity of Extension officer | Activity of Farmers |
| Opening phase (5min) | Greetings/introduction | Prayer |
| Instructional phase (20min-1hr) | Lecture by officers | Listen |
| Closing phase (5min) | Closing remarks | Listen/vote of thanks |

(b) Structure of interaction in the group

| Duration- time average one to one and a half hrs | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Phases | Activity of extension officer | Activity of group leader | Activity of group members |
| Opening phase | Greetings and pleasantries | Greetings and pleasantries | Greetings and pleasantries |
| | listening | Register and house keeping | Register and house keeping |
| Instructional phase | *Extension worker's slot or farmers' own discussions | Listening asking questions or discussing | Listening asking questions or discussing |
| Closing phase | listening | Prayer and closing remarks | Prayer and closing remarks |

* if present

The structure of meetings show how interaction is organized. It also shows the power Relations in place. Three aspects are telling as regards style and power relations.

First is the physical arrangement. A baraza, has a high table in a raised place, where the visitors (extension officers) and the village elders sat.

Farmers sat on the grass facing the high table. The number of participants would range between 30 and 50, all drawn from different villages with few women in attendance.

The meetings went on for long hours 4 to 5 hours. In contrast Most groups' meetings were conducted without high table. The number of attendant was never more than ten, who were all neighbours. The number of women was high in the group table 2 (appendix). The meetings were held for short durations of one to two hours.

This timing was quite conducive to women whose participation in baraza was explained as caused by time

constraints.

Discourse organization

While the structure of the meetings in the baraza shows officiality and that of the group is less informal, it is the organization of talk that is most telling, and may be shows why the group is better tuned to handle bottom up approaches of community mobilization. According to table 1, three distinct phases can be pointed out.

These are, the opening phase, The instructional phase and the closing phase (Mehan 1979). The opening phase is marked by greetings. In the group this is usually the FFs (special greetings and prayer), pleasantries and house keeping (registers marking, giving notices, collection of membership fee). These were good strategies that helped break down social barriers and cement the group together. In the Baraza, this phase is controlled by the officials either of the extension office or the village leaders. These sit at the high table and a clearly separated from the group they have come to address.

The second is instructional phase. In the baraza, the session is marked by speeches, teachings or whatever is on the agenda for the day. The extension officers are again in charge. In the group, the session is marked by discussions in which all participate. A slot is usually reserved in the group for extension officer in case they show up. Active groups would have agreed on a topic with the officer. Whether the officer was in attendance or not, the farmers were in control of the meeting and topics for discussion. However, the presence of the extension officer was always an added advantage for the group because they could get expert advice on issues they were discussing. The slot was an important session where technologies could be passed down to the farmers. Unfortunately, extension workers did not attend frequently. I was not officially expected of them to attend. Some groups did not bother to seek them out. It is this the Government needs to work on to make it policy (official) for extension officers to attend as part of their performance contract.

Discourse strategies that made the group work

A micro-analysis of the language in use is perhaps the most illuminating in terms of how top-bottom and bottom-up approaches work. Use of particular linguistic items is usually unconscious, but it nonetheless indicates our affinity to propositions and relationship to other speakers. First was an examination of the pronouns such as; inclusive 'we', 'us', and exclusive 'you', 'them'. It was found that in the baraza farmers and extension officer would use in these in ways to indicate two social groups; the officers on one side and the farmers on the other. In the group this was not so. 'We' was interpreted to mean cohesion of the group with relationships of trust and friendships. The argument is that exclusive forms create social distance. The psychological impact of 'we' in the group is that it says we belong together.

Secondly, in the *baraza* topics and schedules are initiated by extension officers as they are the ones who call the meetings as in the following case (a, b, c) by one extension officer:

(a)

*EO: we have come here because of teaching
will take the step of explaining what has made us come here. ..today we are here
farmers fromand
we hope to be here the whole day..i don't know if we are welcome or may be you
don't like visitors}*

(b)

EO: So we are here crop, cattle keepers.... let's start with maize

(c)

1. EO: *{your name}* (writes down)
2. WF: (inaudible)
3. EO: what's in your shamba?
4. WF: (..)
5. EO: kondoo ngapi..{*how many sheep*}

♣ EO –extension officer

As shown in the extract a,b,c, interaction was expert-led on field days as well as during farm visits. This is understandable on grounds that the officer occupies the position of the expert. Hence the monologues and lecture methods of instructions. The style is formal and patterned on conventional education discourse of teacher-teach, pupil-listen scenario. Examples of this form of interaction were seen in the questioning pattern. The extension officer/speaker asked questions and the farmer (s) replied in one word answers. The extension officer(s) tended to hoard most of the speaking turns. This is not so in the farmer group discussion. All farmers contributed in the talk.

Thirdly, forms of address were examined. While farmers used non official addresses, the extension officers used formal ones as in (d).

(d)

(one farmer talking about another farmer to the extension)

- | |
|--|
| 1. EO: huyu mwanamke anaitwa nani? {what is the woman called} 2. WF: mama muigai.. (mother of muigai} 3. EO: lile jina lingine mrs. Nani... {what is the other name..mrs. who..} |
|--|

Benefits of Farmer Groups

Experiences of farmer group members

In the focus discussion group members identified several benefits accruing from the group as follows. Their own experiences are presented in (e,f,g,h, i)

(e)

| |
|---|
| We contribute one hundred shillings as agreed, when the total gets to five thousand, we give that money to the one picked through the vote to go and buy a cow, roofing sheets or whatever he could not buy at once alone. The group in my opinion has helped me a lot. There is no loss. |
|---|

(f)

| |
|---|
| Through the farmer field schools we were given money to study, I was laughed at because I am old. After that we were given loans, even though it was of little amounts it was a good seed |
|---|

(g)

| |
|--|
| We also became teachers to our neighbours. |
|--|

(h)

| |
|--|
| ‘We are ethnically mixed. Before I would not have mixed with Kalenjin, luos’ ‘We now have friends’ ‘we visit other regions for courses and general visits’ |
|--|

(i)

| |
|--|
| ‘Even people like myself have found work’ ‘my family livelihood has improved. I get school fees for the children’ ‘now I get seven sacks (560kg.) of beans from half an acre’ ‘ |
|--|

Conclusion

The study concluded that communication strategies patterned on the traditional, more personal and less institutional oriented modes could help in disseminating technologies to the farming community. It was concluded that awareness of the fore said is a useful tool for understanding non-adherence to agricultural technology. Such information allows the practitioners to do a diagnosis of their own behavior as a possible cause of influence on the problem. A change of mode of delivery would be particularly beneficial to women who did not attend *barazas*

and say little in meetings. Therefore, in recommending interactive talk as found in farmer groups this was to say that the *baraza* plus a host of other formal strategies are nonstarters in terms of getting farmers involved.

Women participated more in the group than in the *barazas* previously observed. Indeed, the number of women in groups was higher in the mixed sex groups. There were also women exclusive groups. No men group was found. The group may be the answer in terms of certain cultural constraints, which hinder women's participation. (See e.g. Munyua, (2000)). The group provides a flexible institution for the woman, in that there is back-up for those with difficult home fronts. Group members are neighbors who understand when one is genuinely facing problems at home and she can not pay membership or attend. Groups also provide peer monitoring, so that one is unlikely to fall back on technology. They also pass technology learnt from one group to another. There was a sense in which the farmers were taking control of their destiny in terms of raising money for themselves, or through sales of products. These positive ideological and political effects of the group need to be acknowledged more widely as form of community mobilization..

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Table 2. Details of the Farmer groups

| | | Tumaini FFs | Kikapu FFs | Kerma FFS | Ogilgei FFs | Thairira Women group | Msaac wome |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------------|---|--|---------------|---|-------------|
| Number | | 14 | 25 | 24 | 26 | 27 | 23 |
| Gender | Men | 6 | 11 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| | Women | 8 | 14 | 17 | 20 | 27 | 23 |
| Age of the group (years) | | 5 | 4 | 4 months old | 3 | 35 | 15 |
| Activities of the group | | Maize farming | Maize farming | Maize farming | Beans farming | 1. Carrots 2. Tree-Seedlings 3. Water | Dairy water |
| Leadership | | | | | | | |
| Chair | | Man | Man | Man | Man | * | * |
| V/chair | | Woman | Man | Man | | | |
| Secretary | | Woman | Man | Woman | | | |
| Treasurer | | Man | Woman | Woman | | | |
| Visits of extension officer | | None | 80% | 100% | 50% | On request | None |
| Technology in use | | Crop-rotation | 1. Donkey plough 2. Jab planter 3. Mulching 4. Crop-rotation | 1. Donkey plough, 2. Jab planter 3. Mulching 4. Crop-rotation | * | 1. Crop-rotation 2. Tanks | * |

* No records