

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES**

**LEAD FARMER APPROACH GUIDELINES**

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# **LEAD FARMER APPROACH GUIDELINES**

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## **Executive summary**

Provision of agricultural extension in Malawi has evolved since the pre-independence era in order to remain relevant and responsive to the needs of farmers and other users. Socio-economic, political, demographic and consumers needs have influenced the manner in which extension is organized and provided. Different approaches such as Master Farmer, Modified Training and Visit known as Block Extension and Lead farmers (LF) have been used in attempt to make extension more responsive. Innovative farmers willing to try-out new ideas and technologies have been used as role models or Lead farmer in their respective communities.

Lead Farmers are role models identified by their communities to train and support fellow farmers in specific technologies. The objective of Lead farmers approach is to build capacity of local innovative farmers to effectively share knowledge and skills with farmers within their localities. This consequently can result in creating critical mass of adopters on a specific technology in designated locations. Lead farmers support fellow farmers in specific technologies whilst working in collaboration with frontline extension workers to ensure technical correctness of the content they disseminate.

Effective performance of Lead farmers relies on technical support from subject matter specialists, frontline extension workers from public and private sector organizations. The organizations build capacity of Lead farmers through training, provision of resources and technical backstopping. Local leaders and farming communities provide moral support and initiate mechanism for rewarding Lead Farmers in their communities. The Lead farmer approach is linked to other approaches used in extension such as model Village, household approach, clusters and M'ndandanda and Farm Business Schools (FBS). Lead Farmer Approach need to be integrated in existing extension and advisory services as stakeholders can continuously train Lead farmers and continuously monitor their activities. Thus sustainability of the approach and work of the Lead Farmer can be assured.

## **Acknowledgement**

Lead Farmer Approach has gained popularity in the public and private sector agricultural extension. The guidelines have been developed to provide technical guidance to extension professionals and frontline extension officers in the promotion of the Lead Farmer Approach. The guidelines can be used by users wishing to gain insights in the Lead Farmer Approach.

The guidelines received valuable comments from various stakeholders including members to the Technology Generation and Dissemination Technical Working Group, Staff and Farmers in Mponela EPA, Dowa District and Mpingu EPA, Lilongwe District. Subject Matter specialists in the Department of Agricultural Extension are also recognized for their valuable inputs. Special recognition to Extension Methodologies and Systems branch team; Noel Limbani, Paul Fatch and Yakosa Tegha, led by Dr. Clodina Chowa for the initiative.

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## **1.0 Background**

Provision of agricultural extension services began in colonial period around 1903 (Masangano and Mthinda, 2012). Demand to increase agricultural productivity to supply raw materials in European industries and the need to reduce rampant land degradation due to massive opening of new land for cultivation necessitated the need for advisory services. Master Farmers who were better off and innovative were trained to act as demonstrators. They received government support in form of farm inputs to mount demonstrations on the premise that fellow farmers would follow the recommended practices demonstrated. Contrary to what had been envisaged, many non-participating smallholder farmers, did not adopt the improved farming methods. The underlying cause was jealousy and envy to the Master Farmers' prosperity and also suspicion that they were stooges of the colonial government.

After independence from the British rule in 1964, the Master Farmer approach was changed to Achikumbi (Progressive Farmer). This led to deployment of increased number of village level extension officers to reach out to more smallholder farmers with extension messages on modern farming. The first President of the Republic of Malawi, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda demonstrated high level political commitment and will by operating commercial farmers. The approach was also politicized as the extension workers were blamed to concentrate on politicians who emulated the M'Chikumbe No.1, who was the President. Successful farmers were consequently crowned M'Chikumbe No.2. Low coverage of majority of smallholder farmers characterised the approach (Knorr and Gerster- Bentaya 2007), the need to reach more farmers remained priority.

Modified Training and Visit Extension known as Block Extension Systems (BES) approach was adopted in the 1980s to improve farmers coverage with agricultural extension services. BES assumed that extension workers lacked training skills, hence fortnightly trainings were advocated. Farmers were mobilized in groups and clubs to increase coverage. Reality however revealed that increased operating costs were incurred and that extension services were mostly used to access credit. Thus credited unworthy farmers particularly the poor and women were marginalized with the approach.

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reforms in the public sector such as democratization necessitated paradigm shift in the manner agricultural extension services are organized and implemented in order to respond to demands and needs. Shift towards decentralized, pluralistic and demand-driven services became guiding principle to bring services closer to the people and solicit their participation in development. Public and private sector organizations participation in agricultural extension using different approaches calls for harmonization and standardization for quality assurance. Consolidating efforts from different stakeholders also require creation of critical mass of technology adopters, hence need for quality participation of farmers.

## **Justification**

Male and female farmers' needs at household and farm level are diverse. Agricultural extension uses diverse approaches using the village as the planning and implementation base for interventions. Since the pre-independence era role models and or innovators in the village/ community level such as master farmers have played critical roles individually or collectively and in collaboration with the agricultural extension worker to ensure dissemination of agricultural messages on improved farming methods. This guide therefore, intends to assist extension workers in the agricultural sector to promote use of farmer-to-farmer extension through use of Lead Farmers to reinforce learning and innovation at village/ farm level.

## **2.0 Definition of Lead Farmer**

A Lead Farmer is an individual farmer (male and female) who has been elected by the village to voluntarily assist in the delivery of a maximum of three good agricultural practices/technologies that are enterprise specific and is trained in those technologies.

Lead Farmers are often called by different names by various stakeholders. These include:

- Farmer Trainers
- Farmer Promoters
- Community educators
- Rural Promoters
- Indigenous Promoters

- Farmer Extensionists
- Paraprofessionals
- Village Technicians
- Volunteer Extension Workers
- Local Facilitators
- Extension Multipliers
- Farmer Technicians
- Progressive Farmer/Achikumbi
- Beacon Farmer
- Key men
- Farmer to farmer

The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development has adopted the name **Lead Farmer** as an appropriate name because the farmer technically guides other fellow farmers, hence playing the role of a leader.

### **3.0 Roles and responsibilities of Lead Farmers**

A Lead Farmer is responsible to Village Agriculture Committee and the local Extension workers. He/she should cover one village or Group Village Headman where he or she is expected by the community and local extension worker to:

- Train fellow farmers
- Implement technologies introduced by Extension workers
- Conduct demonstrations, field days, extension meetings and local field tours in liaison with the local frontline extension worker
- Facilitate development and implementation of action plans with fellow farmers
- Discuss progress of activity implementation with the Extension Worker
- Conduct follow ups on action plans of fellow farmers
- Give feedback to the extension worker through the local committees (Village Agriculture Committee) on experiences by the community with agricultural technologies
- Liaise with extension workers on farmers' needs

- Champion community based monitoring and evaluation with support of the Extension Worker

#### **4.0 Characteristics of Lead Farmers**

The characteristics/qualities of a Lead Farmer (male or female) are as follows:

- Self starter
- Willing to share information with fellow farmers
- Able to lead fellow farmers
- Early adopter of technology
- A communicator with good facilitation skills
- Should be honest, trustworthy and humble
- Should be development conscious
- Should be tolerant
- Should be a member of the village and socially accepted by the community
- Should be able to sacrifice for fellow farmers
- Should be cooperative
- Should be approachable
- Should be able to read and write

#### **5.0 Identification of Lead Farmers**

The following are the steps:

##### **First step**

The extension worker facilitates a sensitization meeting with local leaders to introduce lead farmer approach. Characteristics of Lead Farmer are discussed.

##### **Second Step**

The village identifies and shortlists the potential lead farmers by technology, whilst taking into consideration gender balance.

##### **Third Step**



The village selects male and female lead farmers from to shortlist taking into consideration of the characteristics discussed earlier.

## **6.0 Empowerment of Lead Farmers**

In order for the male and female lead farmer to perform the roles properly, the following need to be done by extension staff:

- Orient them on the lead farmer approach
- Train them on facilitation, communication and leadership skills
- Train them on prioritized good agricultural practices and technologies that they will promote
- Support Lead Farmer to formulate his/her work plan
- Conduct regular supervision and mentoring to re-enforce implementation of work plan
- Provide and orient them on the technical reference resource materials (leaflets, posters and booklets)
- Provide the lead farmer with basic working equipment/materials such as stationery, rulers, tape measures, protective gear (rain suit, gumboots, bag), push bike.

## **7.0 Benefits of Lead Farmers**

Benefits of the Lead Farmer in a community are diverse. Some of include the following:

- Available and accessible source of technical information since the Lead Farmer lives within the community
- Enhanced communication because the Lead Farmer shares the same cultural beliefs and language as the community
- Increased adoption of agricultural technologies because of enhanced and mutual support during learning derived from fellow farmers
- Farmers' problems are easily identified, understood and addressed since the Lead Farmer stays in the village
- Farmer coverage is improved because the Lead Farmer assists in imparting good agricultural practices
- The lead farmer compliments the work of an AEDO

- Lead Farmers encourages ownership of agricultural programmes by the community from within their localities.

### **8.0 Sustainability of Lead Farmers Approach**

The services of the Lead Farmers need to be lasting in nature. Therefore, all stakeholders should work with the communities in establishing mechanisms for ensuring sustainability. The following are some of the mechanisms:

- Periodic orientation of local leaders on the Lead Farmer approach
- Mobilize the communities and local leaders to find ways of motivating Lead Farmers
- All stakeholders and partners should support the implementation of the Lead Farmers' approach
- Conduct joint trainings with stakeholders for Lead Farmers
- Conduct joint stakeholder supervisory visits
- Conduct joint planning, implementation and review meetings

### **9.0 Roles of stakeholders in promoting Lead Farmers**

The following are the roles of various stakeholders in promoting Lead Farmers

#### ***Role of Subject Matter Specialists at National and ADD Level***

- Develop and disseminate Lead Farmer training manual
- Develop and disseminate technical messages and information packs
- Develop and disseminate standardized reporting format for Lead Farmers
- Sensitize stakeholders on Lead Farmer Approach at national and ADD levels
- Develop guidelines for identifying and rewarding best performing lead farmers
- Establish and maintain database on Lead Farmers, Follower Farmers and technologies
- Backstop districts on implementation of Lead Farmer Approach
- Conduct collaborative meetings with stakeholders on implementation of Lead Farmer Approach

### Role of Subject Matter Specialists at District Level

- Disseminate Lead Farmer training manual
- Develop and disseminate technical messages and information packs
- Sensitize stakeholders on Lead Farmer Approach at district level
- Backstop AEDCs and AEDOs on the implementation of Lead Farmers Approach
- Disseminate guidelines for identifying and rewarding best performing lead farmers
- Train AEDOs on Lead Farmer approach and technologies
- Establish and maintain an inventory of Lead Farmers, Follower Farmers and technologies
- Facilitate linkage of Lead and follower farmers to micro-financing and marketing institutions
- Conduct collaborative meetings with stakeholders on implementation of Lead Farmer Approach

### Role of Frontline Extension Worker and AEDCs

- Facilitate identification of lead farmers
- Conduct regular training sessions to the lead farmers at least twice a year (at the beginning and midway of the agricultural season)
- Orient other stakeholders including Area Stakeholder Panels (ASP), Group Agriculture Committees (GAC) and Village Agriculture Committees (VAC) on the approach
- Conduct frequent supervisory visits
- Motivate Lead Farmers through tours, training, and provision of extension reference materials
- Award best performing Lead Farmers
- Provide adequate technical support to the work of Lead Farmers
- Promote equity and impartiality when working with Lead Farmers
- Promote interaction among Lead Farmers
- Establish and maintain an inventory of Lead Farmers, Follower Farmers and Good Agriculture Practices

- Facilitate linkage of Lead and follower farmers to micro-financing and marketing institutions
- Conduct joint planning and review meetings with stakeholders on implementation of Lead Farmer Approach (monthly at sectional level and quarterly at EPA level)

#### Role of NGOs and other service Providers

- In collaboration with the AEDO, conduct joint planning and review meetings on the implementation of Lead Farmer approach
- In collaboration with the AEDO facilitate identification of Lead Farmers
- Mobilize resources for training Lead Farmers
- In collaboration with the AEDO, conduct Lead Farmer training
- Motivate Lead Farmers through tours, training, provision of extension reference materials
- In collaboration with the AEDO, award best performing Lead Farmers
- Create opportunities for Lead and follower farmers to access micro-financing and marketing services

#### Role of Local Leaders

- Community mobilization
- Institute mechanisms for motivating best performing Lead Farmers and follower farmers
- Monitor Lead Farmer activities in their areas
- Provide moral support to Lead Farmers

#### Role of the Farming Community

- Providing moral support to Lead Farmers
- Facilitating their operations materially
- Attending meetings convened by Lead farmers
- Practice and adopt technologies promoted
- Allow Lead Farmer time to take care of their personal affairs
- Recognize and respect Lead Farmers

## 10.0 Linkage of Lead Farmers approach to other approaches

The implementation of the Lead Farmer Approach requires harmonization with other extension systems and approaches. Some of the extension approaches to be harmonized with the Lead Farmer Approach are: the model village, household approach, Farm business school, farmer field school, Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs) Clusters and Mindandanda.

**Table 1: Linkage of Lead Farmer Approach to existing approaches**

| Approach   | Linkage to Lead Farmer Approach   |
|--|---|
| The model village  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members in the model village identify Lead Farmers</li> <li>• Lead Farmer can engage committees of the Model Village to undertake monitoring and evaluation sessions e.g. review meetings</li> </ul> |
| Farmer Based Organizations e.g. Cooperatives, associations and clubs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Lead Farmers can promote good agriculture practices and technologies in FBOs</li> <li>• FBOs can act as training grounds for Lead Farmers</li> </ul>   |
| Household Approach   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead Farmers are potential participants in the approach</li> <li>• Lead Farmers can assist the extension worker in providing technical guidance to participating households</li> </ul>               |
| Clusters and mindandanda   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Lead Farmers can promote good agriculture practices and technologies in Clusters and Mindandandas through harmonized demonstrations and field days</li> </ul>                                    |
| Farm Business School (FBS)/ Farmer Field School (FFS)                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FBS and Farmer Field School can target Lead Farmers as potential participants to act as leaders and champions to practice what they have learned in the communities.</li> </ul>                      |

## 11.0 Monitoring and Evaluation of Leaf Farmer Approach

### Planning and review meetings

- The planning and review meetings should be done at all levels:
  - Section level
  - EPA level
  - District level
  - ADD level
  - National level
- The frequency of the meetings should be:
  - Monthly for the section
  - Quarterly for the EPA and other stakeholders and structures such as ASPs
  - Quarterly for the District and other stakeholders
  - Semi annual for ADD, National and stakeholders

### Monitoring and Supervision

- The monitoring and supervisory visits should be done with other stakeholders as follows:
  - Monthly for village (community based monitoring) and Section
  - Quarterly for the EPA
  - Quarterly for the District and ADD
  - Semi annual for National

### Information flow

- Regular communication and information flow is critical in the Lead Farmer Approach. Information in the implementation should be from the farmer to the national level through local committees, AEDO, AEDC, DADO, ADD. However in practice this may not be linear as indicated.

- Simple and user friendly data collection tools should be developed that will be used at all levels. This will form part of routine data (monthly, quarterly, semi annual and annual reports)
- Data will also be collected periodically to provide evidence for action and in form of special studies to address emerging issues and reviews.

## **Conclusion**

Generally, Lead Farmers assist in promoting good agriculture practices for addressing prioritized problems within their localities. Since the technical problems in the communities are multiple, several Lead Farmers would be required to attend to different technical areas. This will result into empowerment of the village, which would transform into a model village. For the success of Lead Farmer approach, extension workers need to be mindful that they are custodians of all technologies while the Lead Farmer is the implementer and promoter of only some of the technologies, and especially those best managed by them.

## **Annexes**

### **Annex 1: References**

- Masangano, C. & Mthinda, C. (2012). Pluralistic Extension System in Malawi. Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office: International Food Policy and Research Institute (IFPRI) Discussion paper # 01171.
- Knorr, J., Gerster-Bentaya, M. & Hoffmann, V. (2007). *The History of Agricultural Extension in Malawi*, Weikersheim, Margraf Publishers GmbH.



**Annex 2: Data documentation form for Lead Farmer**

*Date .....Name of Lead Farmer.....Year started .....*

*Technology.....*

| Name of Follower farmer | Village | Technology implemented | Year started |
|-------------------------|---------|------------------------|--------------|
|                         |         |                        |              |
|                         |         |                        |              |
|                         |         |                        |              |
|                         |         |                        |              |

**Annex 3 : Quarterly Report**

*Date .....Name of Lead Farmer..... Year started ..... Technology*

*.....*

| Activity eg training, demonstration | Subject | Farmer attended |        | Remarks |
|-------------------------------------|---------|-----------------|--------|---------|
|                                     |         | Male            | Female |         |
| Training                            |         |                 |        |         |
|                                     |         |                 |        |         |
|                                     |         |                 |        |         |