 

**USAID/Zimbabwe Knowledge Summit: Lessons Learned**

Case Study #1:

Increasing Smallholder Productivity

*The following are hypothetical stories developed by synthesizing specific and general information about conservation agriculture training programs and efforts to increase smallholder productivity in Zimbabwe. Each story is followed by targeted questions intended to stimulate discussions around present challenges in food security related programs.*

Themes Discussed:

Conservation farming/agriculture (CF/A)

Participation challenges

Cross-cutting issue: gender

Funding delays

Local vs. externally sourced inputs

“Extension” approach: lead farmers

# Mudiwa:

Mudiwa and her family own a small maize farm in Makonde, Zimbabwe. When they have a good season she goes to the market to sell the surplus maize, but it is primarily used to feed her family. Her three children attend a local primary school and help their mother with some of the farm work when they return.

Last year, Mudiwa heard about a new training program from some of the other women in her area of Makonde. Her friends told her that an organization had helped a man create a beautiful farm several kilometers away and that people can go there to learn new ways to grow more maize on the same size of land.

The time to plant maize was in full swing, so Mudiwa figured it was already too late to learn anything to help grow more that season. Despite having been invited to a group training, or “field day,” at the special farm, Mudiwa did not attend.

She had previously heard of the techniques being taught at the farm from programs that other organizations had implemented in the past. She had even tried to use conservation agriculture techniques on a piece of her field. She had seen the results of the new practices but since the new practices meant more work, she stopped. She felt that her children were too young to provide the help she would need to adopt such practices, especially if they were to attend school.

## Discussion Questions:

1. In past CA training programs there has been a sizable disparity in attendance between men and women; despite women being responsible for a large portion of the agronomic decisions, they are not attending CA training as much as men. Increasing women’s participation in these trainings, therefore, naturally increases the number of individuals trained and may, arguably, have a larger impact on the use of CA. What may be some other possible reasons Mudiwa did not attend the training program?
2. What solutions could have been included in the project design to mitigate obstacles to attending training for women like Mudiwa?
3. What solutions could lighten the labor restraints preventing Mudiwa from using CA practices?
4. From your experience what characterizes farmers who have easily adopted conservation farming. What might be the motivators for adoption by these farmers? Particularly those who have continued after the end of the project.
5. Which techniques of the conservation farming package are least adopted or are dropped after the project? What could be the challenges affecting adoption of these techniques?

# Chuma:

Chuma works for a local NGO, Ag-Help in Makonde. As an implementing partner for a recently devised food security program throughout several districts, his organization was responsible for establishing demonstration plots which would serve to train surrounding smallholder farmers in conservation agriculture (CA) techniques.

Although Chuma and his colleagues could have purchased many of the required inputs for the demonstration plot from local markets, the international agency funding the project could not give them cash but required them to receive inputs from prescribed sources who had contract with the Agency. In order to receive the needed inputs, Chuma was supposed to travel a significant distance to the designated supplier and organize transport for the inputs to his operating ward.

Unfortunately, the funding allocated for this program was delayed due to a variety of communication and management challenges. The funding became available only a week before the planned implementation period, which had been set to line up with the farming season. As a result, the location of the demonstration plot did not have access to irrigation, neither was it central to the catchment area, due to a hasty selection process which was not consultative.

The planting of crops for the demonstration farm was very rushed because Chuma and his colleagues received funding and inputs later than is typical for planting crops. The machine used to plant seeds for the demonstration plot arrived rusty and nearly unusable. The demonstration plot only yielded 80% of its target and caused skepticism among the local farming community as to the effectiveness of the techniques.

## Discussion Questions:

1. What measures could have been taken to mitigate the delays that Chuma and his colleagues experienced in implementing their program?
2. How have the implementation choices of the Ag-Help team affected the sustainability of the demonstration plot and productivity of the smallholders who are meant to benefit? Considering that there were delays, what could have been done to adjust the implementation to increase the effectiveness of the program?
3. What could have been done to salvage the impact of the demonstration plot on the local farming community, even considering its rushed implementation?

# Banga:

Banga’s family owns a small maize farm. Banga attended a field day at a local demonstration plot. He was excited to learn new ways that his family could increase productivity. He arrived at the demonstration plot to see a crowd of 700 other farmers from the area. Banga wasn’t able to ask questions or see everything, due to the large crowd. He returned home confused about what he had seen.

Sometime later, Banga heard a farmer closer to his family’s farm was offering similar conservation agriculture training. He and five other farmers attended a training session with the farmer. He was able to ask questions and discuss CA techniques with the lead farmer and his peers.

Because of the training session hosted by his neighbor, Banga had learned significantly more about CA than when he attended the very large field day. Nevertheless, Banga could not help but wonder how the lead farmer was able to purchase all of the seeds and other inputs. Later Banga found out the lead farmer had been given seeds and other material by a local NGO. To Banga, these techniques seemed to only be effective for people like the lead farmer because they had all the right inputs given to them. Shortly after, Banga returned to farming techniques with which he was comfortable, only integrating a few minor lessons from the lead farmer.

## Discussion Questions:

1. Judging from Banga’s experience, what are the pros and cons of large-group, small-group and one-on-one training? In what contexts would large-group instruction be best utilized, if any?
2. The extension approach to CA training was cited as being effective but as also having disproportionately more benefits for the lead farmers. How could program implementers motivate follower farmers like Banga?
3. What alternative extension approaches could be used in promoting CA?