



Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Collaborative Research Support Program

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Trip Report: Lesotho, Uganda and Kenya

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Purpose of the Trip:

Conduct household survey of farmer contacts in Ha Sefako and Ha Tabolane, Lesotho and survey the most frequently identified community agents and service providers for Technology Networks Cross Cutting Research Activity. Facilitate feedback workshops on Technology Networks research in Tororo and Kapchorwa, Uganda and Bungoma and Kitale, Kenya and distribute working paper and extension pamphlets at each site

Sites Visited:

Botha-Bothe District, Lesotho
Tororo and Kapchorwa, Uganda
Bungoma and Kitale, Kenya

Executive Summary:

Following up on the baseline survey conducted in Botha Bothe District in 2010, the Technology Networks Cross Cutting Research Activity (CCRA) conducted a 59 household survey in the Ha Sefako and a 77 household survey in Ha Tabolane communities. The purpose of this survey was to identify the most frequently reported contacts of farmers, and how contacts might differ between a highland and lowland community. These results were used to generate a snowball sample of community agents and agricultural service providers to conduct 39 follow up interviews on farmer network contacts. As many Basotho farmers source their agricultural inputs from South Africa, some of these interviews also took place across the border. Upon concluding the survey, preliminary findings were shared with Dr. Marake at the National University of Lesotho. The second leg of the trip involved traveling to Uganda and later Kenya to facilitate workshops with local service providers and farmers regarding the results of the technology networks surveys conducted in the various localities in 2011.

Description of Activities:

Lesotho: The Lesotho surveys got underway very quickly and efficiently. On 8 January one enumerator and myself went up to St. Charles, and were joined in the morning the following day by two additional enumerators for training and to review the survey instrument. An edited copy of the survey instrument was printed in Botha-Bothe town and the household survey in Ha Sefako got underway on 9 January. It was quickly observable that the upland community of Ha Sefako is extremely close-knit with a number of highly active farmers. In fact, one farmer came up on over half of the surveys in the site. By 11 January, the team had finished the household survey and 'Masekonyela and I began working on the Technology Networks survey with a few key farmers. Several of these farmers explained their involvement with the long-standing Falimehang Farmer's Organization, which organizes group purchases of inputs, implement sharing, educational activities for agricultural production, and some post-harvest processing. There is also an active youth organization in Ha Sefako, which is interested in producing vegetables for commercial production and sale. The organization is headed by a young woman who recently received a diploma in agricultural science and the recently elected Counselor of Ha Sefako, also a recent graduate of the National University of Lesotho. Members of both groups also reported working with a pastor from South Africa who was also a serious farmer and provided advice and inputs.

Accessing inputs is a major challenge in Ha Sefako. The trip to Botha Bothe is about 3 hours with a vehicle, and public taxis only leave once per day and very early in the morning. As a result, farmers often work together to purchase their inputs in bulk. The government has made considerable effort to bring inputs closer to farmers through the establishment of a network of resource centers throughout the countryside. The closest resource center to Ha Safako is Matsoaing, about a 45 minute drive. Most of the local farmers do not have vehicles but rely on walking or horses for transport. Farmers reported a strong relationship with the Matsoaing Resource Center and after an opinion leader farmer the center manager was the most frequently reported contact by farmers. While farmers accessed information from the resource center, many farmers said that they could often not access the inputs they required from the Resource Center. Alternatively, those farmers with a passport and transport often purchase from cooperatives in South Africa. The nearest cooperative is located in Qwa-Qwa, about 45 minutes away from Ha Sefako across the border, but farmers also reported traveling to Bethlehem for agricultural inputs.

Follow up interviews conducted in South Africa revealed some strong opportunities for farmers in Ha Sefako. Specifically, the VKB Cooperative in Qwa Qwa expressed an interest in having the Ha Sefako farmers join the cooperative and access the benefits of traction support and being able to purchase fertilizer on credit. The manager at the cooperative also knew of the Qwa Qwa pastor and his involvement in the community. A later interview conducted with this pastor revealed that he had been working with the Ha Sefako farmers since 1988 and was currently working with the youth group closely on their vegetable project. The pastor, who has a 180 hectare farm and contracts with several major grocery chains in South Africa, is a highly successful black farmer in the Free State and the first to acquire a pivot irrigation system. The pastor and his daughter, who coordinates a lot of the business transactions, think that there is an opportunity for Ha Sefako farmers to sell to South African markets using organic production methods. The pastor was also excited about identifying opportunities to collaborate with the SANREM project through hosting demonstrations and inviting farmers from Ha Sefako.

The following week, the team began the surveys in Ha Tabolane. The general impression from this community was very different. There appeared to be no organized farmer groups. More frequently, farmers would tell us that they work for themselves. By contrast, farmers frequently reported contact with NGOs, especially World Vision and the Red Cross. These NGOs provide a substantive amount of support to agricultural production in the community by providing inputs, trainings, and even hiring plowing services for farmers. Teachers and the local Resource Center were also reported frequently as contacts of agricultural information, and in the latter case resources. Farmers in Ha Tabolane also reported sourcing inputs from Fouriesburg and Ficksburg, South Africa. The household survey in Ha Tabolane took four days to complete.

After completing the week's work, 'Masekonyela and I moved to Botha-Bothe town to conduct interviews with the identified agricultural service providers. Four shops in Botha-Bothe town were interviewed. Interestingly, most of these shops are run by people of Indian descent who claim only limited knowledge of agriculture, and have found themselves selling agricultural products because they are in high demand. Mostly, these stores sell seeds, fertilizers, and sprayers. There appears to be only one major source of pesticide in Botha-Bothe, in a store that is operated by a Basotho farmer who regularly advises local farmers to improve their production. This store also only sells organic fertilizer. Interviews with NGOs and the Rohoboth Church, which has been promoting CA for several years in Botha-Bothe, took place later in the week.

During the final week, I conducted interviews with the FAO and National Agricultural Research Center and reported on the results of the research to Dr. Marake. Dr. Marake was interested in the potential opportunities for positioning a demonstration plot in Ha Sefako during the upcoming scale-out phase of the project. We discussed sharing the survey results and the potential for feedback workshops as to be hosted in Uganda and Kenya during the following two weeks.

Uganda: The first several days in Uganda were spent in Kampala preparing the final powerpoint presentations for the feedback workshops to be hosted in Uganda and Kenya. Brochures and maps dropped by Keith Moore in Kampala were incorporated into the presentations. On 8 February, the AT Uganda team, including Executive Director Rita Laker-Ojok and SANREM Project Manager Grace Tino and I traveled to Tororo for the first workshop.

Generally, the workshops followed a similar format in each of the sites. As the participants entered, they were provided with a brochure, notepad, and pen. The local site coordinator welcomed the group and a short introduction to the project, principles, and conservation agriculture were provided to frame the results of the network research to be presented and discussed. Next, the network presentation highlighted the importance of involving various members of the agricultural production network to promote conservation agriculture. The most frequently cited contacts by farmers to obtain agricultural resources (seeds, fertilizer, agrochemicals, plowing services, veterinary services, loans/financing, etc.) and information were identified. Following this, the presentation introduced the network map, and measures for identifying the centrality of particular agents. Finally, graphs of the distribution of beliefs between small farmers, large farmers, and service providers were presented. Throughout the workshop, participants were encouraged to provide feedback and ask questions about the results presented. For full descriptions of the workshops, please contact Keith Moore keithm@vt.edu for a copy of the working paper.

Held at Prime Hotel in Tororo town, the workshop on 9 February was well attended. All of the key agents from the service sector and farmers interviewed were represented, including: agrovets, religious leaders, local stockists, farmer group leaders, women's group leaders, the governmental parastatal Tororo Datic, NAADS agricultural agents, the acting District NAADS Coordinator, and the District Agricultural Officer. Farmers from all of the SANREM farmer managed experimental plots as well as the AT Uganda staff was also in attendance. Several main themes became the focus of the conversation. The concept of conservation agriculture was not universally understood, and many of the representatives of different organizations disagreed with some of the basic principles. In particular, plowing is equated with progress and development in Tororo, so the emphasis on minimizing plowing did not sit well with some participants. Generally, it was also believed that the concept of maintaining a permanent crop cover was unclear and caused confusion among participants. Nevertheless, participants agreed that declining soil fertility was a problem in the area and that conservation agriculture may emerge as one effective method of improving this. Finally, participants expressed concern about increased chemical use under CA and how these chemicals would affect local health and long term fertility of the soil.

The technology networks feedback session in Kapchorwa was held at Noah's Ark Hotel on 10 February 2012. The session was well attended, with twenty participants present, seven of which were women. Nearly all of the individuals interviewed in 2011 were represented, including Mt Elgon Seed Company, agrovets, the Uganda Wildlife Authority, the NAADS coordinator for Kwozir, the Sub-county Chief for Kwozir, the Kapchorwa District Agricultural Officer, Landcare Kapchorwa, banking institutions, farmer group leaders, and all of the farmers currently hosting SANREM demonstration plots. The only notable absence was a representative of the Kapchorwa Commercial Farmers Association (KACOFA) as the time of the workshop coincided with the opening week of the new KACOFA warehouse in Kapchorwa town. Nevertheless, the diverse set of participants allowed for a lively discussion throughout the workshop. Issues of maintaining a permanent crop cover and whether tillage causes land degradation were again central to the discussion. It was agreed that maintaining a permanent soil cover may have been a more appropriate formulation to maintain the meaning of the concept. Meanwhile, service providers were surprised at the fact that the majority of farmers believed that tillage caused soil erosion, and it was discussed that this formed an encouraging foundation for the introduction of tillage reduction methods.

Kenya: The full 24 invitees (including 10 women, although one was quite late) attended the SACRED-Africa organized Workshop on Technology Networks for Conservation Agriculture in Bungoma. Participants were receptive to the presentation of research findings for which many of them had been interviewed. There were a few surprises but no strong criticism. In general, the participants agreed that the findings were in line with their expectations. There were a couple of points that focused more discussion: (1) the concept of "crop cover" seemed to be poorly formulated; (2) the finding that extension was not the only source of information for farmers and that there were multiple alternative sources of information; and (3) that conservation agriculture (which several participants were still unaware) was a potential option for farming in their region.

Sixteen invitees (including 5 women) attended the Manor House organized Workshop on Technology Networks for Conservation Agriculture in Kitale (Trans Nzoia). The diverse but close-knit group held a lively discussion throughout and after the presentations. The groups represented nearly covered the full range of stakeholder groups with the exception of agro-vet

dealers, who while identified as a key source of information and resources for -the farmers surveyed did not attend. While several insights for improved data interpretation were provided by the participants, overall they reported the findings to be consistent with their understandings of the agricultural sector perspectives and relationships in Kitale. Several debates were held, but the participants recognized the importance of their collaboration despite whatever disagreements they had among themselves. The discussions were informative and reflected the diversity found in the data.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

In Lesotho, the encouraging findings of the strong network for agricultural production in Ha Sefako indicate that this may be an ideal community to position a demonstration plot for the scale-up of conservation agriculture. Moreover, this survey work helped to identify individuals in South Africa who already actively engage with Lesotho farmers through volunteer work and commercial transactions, and may be key individuals to be brought on board for further plans to scale up conservation agriculture.

On a methodological note, categories in the technology networks surveys may limit responses. For example, no farmer groups and therefore no farmer group leaders could be identified in Ha Tabolane. However, there were key opinion leader farmers which came out during the later technology networks surveys. This suggests that the category farmer organization leader may need to be more generally formulated in order to capture network activities.

In Uganda and Kenya, this trip was the first Technology Networks CCRA experience in sharing the results of our research activities and getting feedback from local actors. Overall this process went quite well. The brochures were especially well received, although there were requests for brochures to be made available in the local language. An important lesson was the importance of an introduction to CA and the project when bringing together the larger audience of farmers and service providers so that everyone is on the same page at the outset of the presentations. Generally, farmers and service providers felt that the research reflected the dynamics in their locality well and were able to use this information to pinpoint specific areas for improvement. In Kitale, for example, the network feedback session suggested that several additional actors needed to be interviewed during the follow up survey, especially the Agricultural Finance Corporation and the Agricultural Development Corporation.

In order to continue to gain the valuable insight on the research provided by local farmers and service providers, it is recommended that these sessions and accompanying brochures be introduced in each of the Technology Networks CCRA sites.

Training Activities:

Program type (workshop, seminar, field day, short course, etc.)	Date	Audience	Number of Participants		Training Provider (US University, host county institution, etc.)	Training Objective
			Men	Women		
Workshop	9 Feb 2012	Agricultural service providers, community agents and farmers in Tororo, Uganda	16	8	Virginia Tech	Report and discuss network research conducted in 2011
Workshop	10 Feb 2012	Agricultural service providers, community agents and farmers in Kapchorwa, Uganda	13	7	Virginia Tech	Report and discuss network research conducted in 2011
Workshop	14 Feb 2012	Agricultural service providers, community agents and farmers in Bungoma, Kenya	14	10	Virginia Tech	Report and discuss network research conducted in 2011
Workshop	16 Feb 2012	Agricultural service providers, community agents and farmers in Kitale, Kenya	11	5	Virginia Tech	Report and discuss network research conducted in 2011

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