

Examining the Role of Farmer-Centered Participatory Action Learning in Building Sustainable Communities in Rural Haiti

Authors : Charles St. Geste, Michael Neumann, Catherine Twohig

Abstract : Our primary aim is to examine farmer-centered participatory action learning as a tool to improve agricultural production, build resilience to climate shocks and, more broadly, advance community-driven solutions for sustainable development in rural communities across Haiti. For over six years, sixty plus farmers from Deslandes, Haiti, organized in three traditional work groups called konbits, have designed and tested low-input agroecology techniques as part of the Konbit Vanyan Kapab Pwoje Agroekoloji. The project utilizes a participatory action learning approach, emphasizing social inclusion, building on local knowledge, experiential learning, active farmer participation in trial design and evaluation, and cross-community sharing. Mixed methods were used to evaluate changes in knowledge and adoption of agroecology techniques, confidence in advancing agroecology locally, and innovation among Konbit Vanyan Kapab farmers. While skill and knowledge in application of agroecology techniques varied among individual farmers, a majority of farmers successfully adopted techniques outside of the trial farms. The use of agroecology techniques on trial and individual farms has doubled crop production in many cases. Farm income has also increased, and farmers report less damage to crops and property caused by extreme weather events. Furthermore, participatory action strategies have led to greater local self-determination and greater capacity for sustainable community development. With increased self-confidence and the knowledge and skills acquired from participating in the project, farmers prioritized sharing their successful techniques with other farmers and have developed a farmer-to-farmer training program that incorporates participatory action learning. Using adult education methods, farmers, trained as agroecology educators, are currently providing training in sustainable farming practices to farmers from five villages in three departments across Haiti. Konbit Vanyan Kapab farmers have also begun testing production of value-added food products, including a dried soup mix and tea. Key factors for success include: opportunities for farmers to actively participate in all phases of the project, group diversity, resources for application of agroecology techniques, focus on group processes and overcoming local barriers to inclusive decision-making.

Keywords : agroecology, participatory action learning, rural Haiti, sustainable community development

Conference Title : ICAAR 2019 : International Conference on Agroecology and Agroecological Research

Conference Location : Cape Town, South Africa

Conference Dates : April 16-17, 2019