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READY, SET, BUREAUCRACY! KICK-STARTING FARMER TRAINING VIDEOS IN EGYPT

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Egypt is an agricultural country, with over 50% of its population either farming or processing the harvest. As Egypt's population nears 90 million people, the country is not growing enough to feed itself. There is an urgency to enable small-scale farmers to become more productive, and also to create jobs for a young and growing population.

After the Revolution of 2011 and its aftermath, the extension system became almost dysfunctional and could no longer respond to the needs of the farming community. Thus, I co-founded with other motivated people, a social enterprise called Nawaya that offers innovative tools and projects for small-scale farmer empowerment.

I met the Access Agriculture team shortly after the Revolution, at the International Conference on Innovations in Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services held in Nairobi in 2011. I was immediately drawn to work with them—I believe that most solutions already exist, but need testing and adapting to local contexts. In a few minutes, videos allow a farmer to travel and meet other farmers who are dealing with similar challenges and improving their livelihoods and environment.

Inspired by Access Agriculture's philosophy, I immediately set out to meet all the rural and agricultural projects I could find in Cairo: going to donors, government research departments, extension offices, and

universities to promote farmer-to-farmer video as a way to add value to their work and to share much needed good practice.

I did feel that these meetings could lead somewhere—and people were intrigued by such an international platform. However, my enthusiasm was crushed by a long list of bureaucratic processes that kept Access Agriculture from blossoming in Egypt. Government offices needed a paper trail and a series of permissions from their ever-changing list of superiors. After the Revolution, it became especially difficult to create partnerships between local organisations and foreign NGOs and to be filming videos in the tense political climate.

Donor programmes would have to restructure their communications and publications activities to make room for training videos. Nawaya became a video production partner to Access Agriculture, which wants the groups it trains to become self-driven video-makers. But we could not be hired locally to produce videos, because we did not have the right

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registrations or mass communication certifications to register our video activities.

If you have a camera, people assume that you are a journalist, and we did not even have filming permits so there would be a risk if we were ever questioned by the authorities.

Nevertheless, Nawaya and UNIDO staff were trained by Access Agriculture and produced 6 videos in 2 years. We adopted a bottom-up approach to cope with bureaucracy.

The first six topics we selected were “low-lying fruits” – easy to film within our own project activities, therefore requiring less external coordination and planning.

We chose topics of high interest to the average Egyptian farm family, like disease control in home-raised chicken, donkey health or fighting the red palm weevil infestations. We could then use these videos to reach out to a larger audience and to sway reluctant production partners.

In hindsight, I had underestimated how much time it would take to introduce farmer-to-farmer videos at the management level and how much resistance we could face, even with an already proven and effective extension method.

Most rural development programmes have used training videos as promotional tools, so our first challenge was to explain that Access Agriculture videos highlight small-scale farmers, rather than the opinion of technical engineers. We said that the videos could not promote a programme, donor or product, but only the innovation and why it works, as explained by small-scale farmers.

Many contract farming programmes or large donor-driven programmes implement new technologies from the top-down, and do not encourage farmer-driven innovations—making the search for filming content difficult. When filming you must always find a trustworthy entry point into a community, and we were at loss on how to start.

We discovered that many rural development programmes do not collaborate with each other in sharing curricula or lessons learned, creating a vacuum in understanding the real farmer training needs versus their programme objectives.

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There is no extension network in Egypt that regroups all rural stakeholders to prioritise video topic selection. Most programmes funded by foreign donors simply follow project application criteria set by larger institutions.

In such contexts it would be easy to create simple promotional videos on various technologies and practices and satisfy donors or government programme, but how could we identify the most needed learning gaps to empower smallholder farmers? How could we find innovative farmers who were also willing to spread their knowledge on camera with us strangers?

It became much easier for us to kickstart video production once we had developed local content on topics like how to press dried dates, and managing the red palm weevil. Egyptian farmers relate to videos of their fellow Egyptian farmers speaking with such knowledge and pride. Once we had made a few videos we began to snowball from there, using community video screenings to identify topics and farmers to interview.

The impact was immediate: farmers directly involved in Nawaya activities were interested in using video as a way to express themselves. Egypt is a media-oriented country and every household has a satellite TV. We created a small scriptwriting team, and creative



Videos on topics such as donkey health are of great interest to every Egyptian farm family.



It is easier to develop content for videos when you have good colleagues.

and humorous ways of transmitting messages about sustainable farming started to develop.

To increase interest in video requires that you take the time to talk to your colleagues and farmers on the benefits that video can bring in training activities, advocacy, awareness raising and even promotional efforts. As we are discovering now, maybe the best way to start is to have fun with it!

We promote farmer-to-farmer videos at many levels, even going door to door, but proactive networking, attending meetings and video planning take considerable time. Although it might not lead to immediate results, keeping good relationships with diverse partners has led us to connect to the few enthusiastic individuals within the bureaucracies.

This helps to forward our efforts. For example, we are now collaborating with knowledgeable experts in agricultural research departments, and committed university professors who guide us on script content.

At Nawaya, we will keep exploring how to integrate videos across diverse activities, building confidence

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and success. At the same time we do not waste energy fighting the hurdles of bureaucracy or narrow-minded training approaches, because that delays the important work. Nawaya remains dedicated to integrating the Access Agriculture philosophy and building a network of production partners and farmers who can share good practices that bridge knowledge gaps.

We aim to empower millions of Egyptian small-scale farmers using video.

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