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TIME AND PLACE

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Farmers are as sensitive as anyone else to their setting and time of day. Where, when and how people watch a video influences how well they learn. In August 2015, I went with Emmanuel Aliguma to ask 48 rice farmers what they had learned from video shows, as part of my Ph.D. research in seven villages in Kamwenge district, Uganda.

In 2000, farmers in Kamwenge district did not know much about rice farming. They were used to seeing rice served on plates at funerals, weddings and introduction ceremonies.

They thought it was food for white, Indian and rich people. They enjoyed eating rice but did not know how to grow it. Even those that grew rice on a small scale did not know the best practices for growing it. They broadcast it or dug planting holes, rather than growing rice in lines, for example.

Then in 2006, an NGO (SG 2000) introduced rice videos, and farmers were mobilised to watch them at the Mahyoro Rice Farmers' Association hall every Friday from 7:00 to 10:00 PM.

The timing was chosen because it is when people are home from work, and the darkness allowed for clearer viewing. Men attended the video screening because they were free to move at night, unlike women. For those living close by, it was a time to see their friends, drink and play chess or pool. But farmers from further away would hurry home after viewing the videos.

The videos were in English, and they showed all the steps involved in rice growing, from land preparation to harvesting.

It took the farmers about 2–3 hours to watch all 10 videos and discuss them. The farmers were free to attend and watch the videos as often as they wished. Those willing and who had time to attend would come back the following Friday to view the same videos.

We were surprised when one of the female farmers in Kyendangara village told us: “Learning through videos does not occur while in the video hall, but occurs outside when farmers can discuss, reflect and share experiences to practise what is being screened”.



Many rural telecentre initiatives failed because they lacked content for farmers.



In Uganda some kibandas or video shacks have started showing farmer training videos, not just football games.

Others added that during the video show, more entertainment takes place and less learning. The farmers were watching the attractive pictures, but not learning much. This was partly because the videos were shown so late at night, when the farmers were too tired to pay attention.

Farmers told us that showing videos in their local language, particularly, Rukiga and Runyankole would have increased their understanding.

This taught us a lesson that this group of farmers wanted to start earlier in the day. This allowed them time to discuss and reflect on what was being viewed in the video, and to retain more information and learn more.

Farmers were mobilised into groups in their respective villages. The videos triggered the farmers to establish demonstration sites based on the new practices they learned about in the videos. For instance, each group compared the yields of broadcast rice with rice planted in lines.

Farmers met weekly in these fields to discuss more complex information/practices they did not understand, reflect and share experiences about what

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was happening on the demonstration site relating it with what was seen in the video.

At these demonstration sites, they were able to speak the local language everyone understood. They even translated the key messages from the videos into local songs and drama. On field days, farmers were given an opportunity to watch the videos and later sing the songs.

Watching the videos as an organised group, earlier in the day, as part of a formal farmer-experimenter format helped the farmers to better understand the English in the videos. They also enabled farmers to share the information with others. Even those that never attended the video shows came to learn.

Everyone learns from experience. After this study was completed, the rice videos were translated into five of the major languages of Uganda, including Runyankole, and 7500 copies of the DVD were distributed around the country.

When there is no local language version, farmers can add their own creative ways of understanding the information, such as doing experiments, composing songs and discussing the videos among themselves.

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