

FIELD EXPERIENCE WITH THE DELIVERY OF EFFECTIVE ANIMAL HEALTH EXTENSION TO SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN NORTHERN MALAWI

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A basic animal health service project in northern Malawi has successfully implemented an extension project for smallholder farmers. The project is based on a drug-revolving fund and has been set up under the control of a non-profit, non-governmental organisation, which is under the control of local farmers. A specific effort was made to understand the social infrastructure of the villages in order to resolve problems with administration and participation using participatory extension methodology.

As part of a primary animal health project in Northern Malawi a programme for ensuring effective provision of animal health extension to smallholder farmers has been developed. A major cornerstone of any primary animal health care project is a functional drug-revolving fund (DRF) and reliable veterinary assistants. In Northern Malawi a novel concept has been implemented where the DRF and the veterinary assistants are under the control of a non-profit, non-governmental organisation called *Foundation for Improvement of Animal Health*. Village livestock committees comprising local farmers provide the basis of the organisational structure of this foundation. Membership is based on an annual subscription.

A survey of members of these committees aimed at identifying any problems with the programme in July/August 1994 came up with the following findings. It was reported that elderly cattle keeping men dominated the committees, drugs were predominantly used for cattle, farmer meetings frequently had to be initiated by project staff and group cohesion and organisation were often poor. The veterinary assistant was supplied with a bicycle, which often resulted in conflict about its ownership between them and the farmers on the committee. The sustainability of the DRF depends to a large extent on the effectiveness of the bookkeeping to be done by committees and veterinary assistants. The survey indicated that in 33% of the committees bookkeeping was not done or performed inadequately.

A number of activities in the project were specifically targeted at improving community participation. Participatory extension methodology was used to identify the problems considered relevant by the target group. Local leaders were involved in planning and special attention was given to women's participation in the programme. Responsibility for maintenance and replacement has been transferred largely to the village livestock committees. Specific pictorial displays were designed to assist extension workers. Experiences with different displays demonstrated the importance of taking into account cultural aspects, as farmers incorrectly interpreted a number of displays.

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