How to…produce farmer-friendly printed information

In July 2012 ASHC facilitated two workshops with partner organizations in Ghana. Each was asked to define what they thought constituted farmer friendly material. One of delegates was a farmers' representative called Asiedu Biney. He said: "*I want messages that are down to earth...*" ASHC has combined the findings of these workshops to suggest a checklist for the production of down-to-earth printed materials. Here are the suggestions that ASHC has on

How to…produce farmer-friendly printed information…

Technology

- Include realistic suggestions of what can be achieved.
- Include an honest assessment of the impact a technology will make – likely improvements not the best possible outcome.
- Include a clear explanation any risks.
- An understanding of the impact of a technology on a farming family – not just on farm production but the unintended consequences (stover left in the field and therefore no longer used as cooking fuel can create a burden of collecting firewood)

Economic data

- A clear cost benefit analysis (even allowing for fluctuating commodity values) helps smallholders make rational decisions.
- Clear comparisons – e.g. with improved seed and without, with organic material and without.
- Information on likely markets for surpluses – don't recommend investment in scaling up production if there is a risk that the market will be saturated or cannot be reached in a cost efficient way.

Design

- Good design and strong use of colour.
- Layout in a logical order and format.

Text

- Aim for easy to understand information so test your drafts with the target audience to make sure they understand what you are saying
- Farmer's jargon, not scientific language – make sure you know the terms farmers actually use.
- Short words and short sentences make it easier to follow instructions.
- Bear in mind that children of the house may do the reading – where adult literacy is an issue

Images

- Real photographs – reflecting real conditions – with named farmers in named locations appear to build confidence in the ideas being suggested.
- Ensure that images reinforce all key processes that are recommended – images help lock in meaning for people who struggle to read
- Clear comparisons – e.g. with improved seed and without, with organic material and without shown in photographs will be very persuasive.

Language

- In the right language – in Ghana ASHC was told 'people who could read, could read English' as well or better than they could read local languages. The partners decided print should be in English and radio and film should be in local languages.

Measurements

- Use of non-conventional methods to explain qualities and distances based on available and familiar items – in addition to conventional methods e.g. plant the maize an arms length (45 cm) apart.
- 50kg fertilizer bags (the bags that the farmers actually used could contain up to 85kg of harvested maize)
- Coke/Fanta crown tops and cutlass blades are always available to farmers. Whilst ensuring that we do not use kitchen equipment for any agricultural practices

Gender

- Ensure that the text and images reflect the differences in the way men and women work. For example in making the ISFM introductory film, ASHC realised that women only usually had access to small animal manure – so more images of sheep and goats were included in the film.

Customisation

- Leave white space for local customisation of the leaflet or poster so that the nearest agro-input dealers and extension service contact details can be written on the print. Instead of saying 'contact your local agro-dealer', leave a space for specific follow-up contacts to be added.

At the technical advisory group meeting for ASHC in May 2012 some recommendations for communicating integrated soil fertility management to farmers.

Quality assurance

- The **technical advisory group** (TAG) is central to the quality assurance and sign-off of ASHC materials. This will mean that a suitable member of the group will be allocated to peer-review the technical aspects and the clarity of the information – rather the style or design.
- If no suitable TAG member can do this in a timely fashion – we need specific inputs from other acknowledged experts who will be asked to peer-review the materials.
- Peer review of the underlying science is seen an essential part of safe-guarding farmers from unnecessary risk and checking that good ISFM principles are applied.
- Materials that have gone through this process should be recognizable as ASHC-supported products – even if the design is based on a partners house-style

Rational economic decision-making

- Materials should stress the need to adapt advice to local conditions
- Materials need to help farmers to work out the likely costs of any set of recommendations and the implications or partial adoption
- Materials need to talk about accessible markets for any surplus harvests.

Brands

- Text and photographs within the ASHC materials should not single out brands of agricultural inputs. There was a danger that these brands would be seen as the recommendation – rather than being indicative.
- Chemicals need to be listed in terms of the active ingredients – so that agri-dealers can help farmers to get the right sort of inputs deal with pests and diseases.
- Exception would be where ASHC worked with private sector in-put manufacturers or suppliers to produce materials or in showing non-standard measurements where branded container may need to be identified to clarify

Site-specific materials

- The materials developed should be designed and written for a particular locality – and then adapted for use elsewhere.

If you have suggestions for improving this checklist please **email ASHC**

The ASHC team would like to thank:

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