



# THE LEAD FARMER APPROACH: AN EFFECTIVE WAY OF AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY DISSEMINATION?

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## Introduction and justification

- Agricultural extension services have reduced in most developing countries in Africa.
- With the increasing pressure for land and other resource, the need for training farmers in new technologies is even increasing. The lead farmer model of technology dissemination where lead farmers are trained and then pass on the technologies to their peers seems to be adopted by donor organisations.
- The lead farmer approach works with groups of 15 to 30 smallholder farmers. The lead farmer is the main contact for the project and partner organisations.
- The centrality of one individual in this dissemination approach, raises questions regarding their selection as lead farmers, bias and selection in the pass-on of information to and from farmers, power distributions and dynamics within the group, their durability.
- This paper explores the implementation of the lead farmer approach within the N2Africa Project in Zimbabwe, a project that aims to disseminate legume technologies to small-scale African farmers to achieve goals of improving soil fertility, farmers' livelihoods and food security in eight countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. We analyse the effectiveness of this approach in the dissemination of legume technologies.

## Materials and Methods

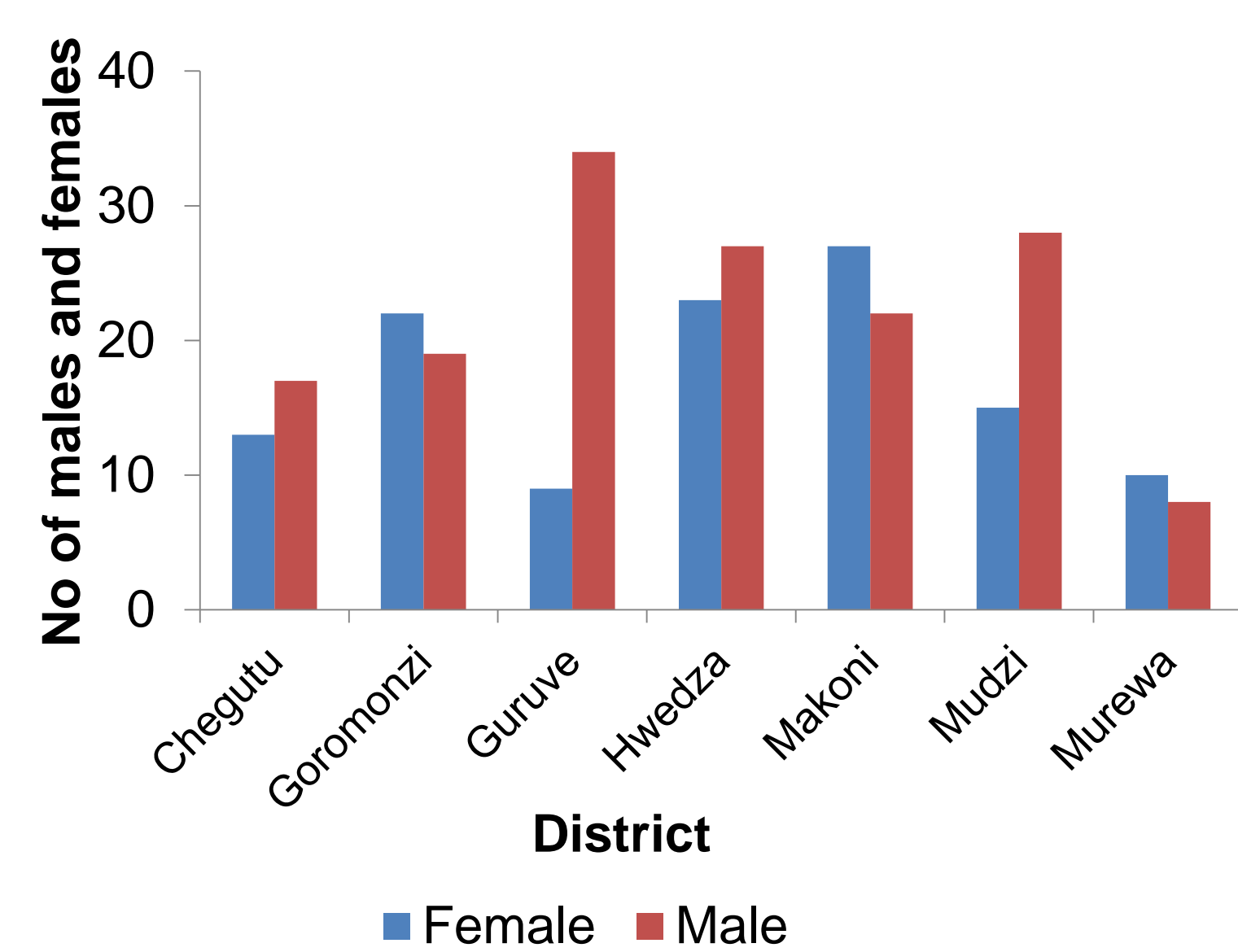


Figure 1. Number of Males and Females interviewed.

The study focused on the assessment of lead farmers who were selected in the N2Africa project in the 2011-2012 agricultural season. A sample of 274 lead farmers (43% females and 56% males) was selected and were interviewed using structured questionnaires. The data were collected and results were analysed. Partner organisations were also interviewed on how they perceived the effectiveness of the lead farmer approach.

### How are lead farmers selected?

Selection is generally based on their technical expertise, their role in the community and their level of literacy.

### What are the responsibilities of a lead farmer – according to lead farmers?

1. Someone who motivates other farmers to try new technologies
2. Must always lead by example by practising what they are taught on their own fields.
3. Farmer chosen by other farmers to represent them in agricultural development and train them to use new technologies.

### What Defines an Effective Lead Farmer?

An effective lead farmer is the one who always produces the best crop in his/her field, takes up new innovations as quick as possible and is willing to train other farmers. The person should not hold another leadership role in the community because work will be sacrificed for other responsibilities. The field of the Lead farmer becomes a learning centre, where other farmers can come and learn. The lead farmer should also be accepted by the farmers he/she mentors to be effective.

## Results

Table 1. Number of Farmers and their Age Classes as a Percentage

		District							Grand Total
		Chegutu	Goromonzi	Guruve	Hwedza	Makoni	Mudzi	Murewa	
Age Classes of farmers	Above 60	10	7	7	16	13	3	0	9
	51 - 60	28	23	14	27	21	24	24	22
	41 - 50	28	67	23	29	39	29	24	35
	31-40	28	3	40	22	23	29	35	25
	30 and below	7	0	16	6	4	15	17	9
		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Lead farmers who were selected were categorised according to their age classes. Most Lead Farmers were in project were 41-50 years of age (35%). Those lead farmers who were above 60 years and below 30 years and below were 9% respectively.

70% of the selected lead farmers had attained secondary education as their highest qualification while 29% reached only up to 29%. All lead farmers indicated that they were able to train other farmers although they differed in the training methods used. A large number (75%) of the lead farmers said they prefer formal gatherings while 14% indicated that they prefer to train other farmers at their fields.



Figure 2. Lead farmer Demonstrating the process of inoculation in Guruve District, Zimbabwe



Figure 3. Lead farmers receiving training in Goromonzi District, Zimbabwe

### What is means to be a Lead Farmer for lead farmers themselves:

**Phillip Mandishona:** "I feel so proud being a lead farmer because it makes me work hard so that my follower farmers will have something to learn from my field. It also makes me compete with other lead farmers and sharpens my farming prowess"

**Elizabeth Nyandoro:** "I learn even more when I train other farmers".

**Gladys Petro:** "I travel long distances when I visit my ordinary farmers' fields and sometimes that makes not to be effective in my duty as a Lead Farmer"



Figure 4. N2Africa personnel explaining the importance of demonstration plots to Lead Farmers

### Conclusion

The study explores the lead farmer approach using one season experience. There is need for further research on the effectiveness and durability of the approach, and the effect of geographical location of the lead farmer and how this affects the effectiveness of the lead farmers.

