THE CASE OF MAKING TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS PRACTICAL AND LOCALLY RELEVANT IN ZIMBABWE

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"It is now real, we can now comfortably talk of a better future for the children", Mrs. Mandikiyana, Head Teacher, Ruda primary school. She reflected on the opportunities for children to make a living in the future.

CHALLENGE

FEW CHILDREN IN ZIMBABWE GO BEYOND PRIMARY EDUCATION

About 32% of the pupils that finish their primary school do not continue to have a secondary education in Zimbabwe.1 This means that at the age of 12 years their future is set. Unless they go to cities to join the masses of unemployed and unskilled cheap labour, young people are likely to stay in the area where they grew up and make a living locally. In rural areas this means that the pupils will fall back on small scale farming.

The very few years that children spend in primary schools are thus crucial to prepare them for adult life that is ahead of them. Basic literacy and numeracy are critical and so are subjects that give children practical skills. These can help in their future livelihoods.

In the eastern region of Zimbabwe SNV works in Honde and Rusitu Valley and the need for practical skills for children in primary schools is there equally important. Whilst almost 60% of the household heads have primary education less than 30% had secondary education in Honde Valley. In Rusitu Valley only 50% completed primary education and a little over 30% had achieved secondary education.2 Most people ended up farming to make a living, and so will their children.

The primary school curriculum is very academic and pays little attention to practical subjects like agriculture. This is not always useful to the pupils. The population in the valleys is poor3, and the future for the children that do not go to high school is bleak.

CLIENTS

PEOPLE THAT CAN MAKE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SNV helped the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture in Manicaland Province to improve the primary curriculum to make it more practical. The Provincial Education Director had a keen interest as he has the authority to appoint 'extra' technical and vocational teachers to primary schools and felt these teachers were not used. At a national level the Curriculum Development UNIT at the Ministry was aware of the importance and supported the development of a practical curriculum. SNV also worked with local banana producer associations in the two valleys to improve the fruit growing practices. The assignment on developing banana teaching and learning materials a unique nature, because it created synergies between BASE and PIE sectors. PIE advisors and clients focused on banana agronomy and marketing. BASE advisors focused

"Empowering aspect makes me very happy, because we are starting with the child going out to communities", Mr Mutamiswa, Head Teacher, Makwara primary school, a beneficiary of the materials.

[1] December 2009 Child Friendly School workshop, Mutare.
[2] SNV Zimbabwe, Baseline Report for Honde and Rusitu Valleys, 2008.
[3] Though endowed with favorable natural conditions, 32% and 30% of households lived below the poverty line in Honde and Rusitu Valley respectively as at 1995. Following the country's general economic decline the percentage of households living in poverty worsened to 54% and 64% in 2003 and 2004 respectively: Ministry of Economic Development, 2003 Poverty Assessment Study Survey key Findings for the Zimbabwe Economic Development Strategy Formulation process, 2004.

on the practical curriculum in primary schools. Working together led to further cooperation between the schools and the farmers.

METHOD / SNV INTERVENTION

PREPARING FARMERS OF TODAY AND OF TOMORROW

WHERE PRODUCTION MEETS EDUCATION

About 80% of the bananas consumed in Zimbabwe come from Manicaland especially in the Burma Valley where commercial producers are located, the Honde and Rusitu Valleys where the small scale farmers are located. There is generally great potential for school leavers and 7,000 small scale farming households out of 25,000 households in the valleys to climb out of poverty by linking their banana production to the formal market.

SNV Zimbabwe has been supporting the Banana Value Chain in the two Valleys. SNV invested in 12 demonstration plots. The Local Capacity Builder (LCB) working with SNV also recognized schools as centers for production of bananas. Early in 2009, 3 primary schools signed a contract with SNV for the establishment and maintenance of banana demonstration plots.

Figure 2: A pupil with 'his' banana plant.

SNV thought that while PIE Advisors are training the 'farmers of today', BASE Advisors would create the platform to teach the 'farmers of tomorrow' in a product that is locally and abundantly available and has the potential to provide a reasonable standard living. This was how the idea of developing the banana teaching and learning materials was born.

The concept fitted well with government policy to provide vocational education and local content in the school curricula. Vocational skills and self-employment had become increasingly important within the context of a fast shrinking formal economy.[4]

BANANA TEACHING & LEARNING MATERIAL

After consultations, SNV Zimbabwe brought together economic development and basic services advisors, the Local Capacity Builder that was responsible for extension work, heads and agricultural teachers for the schools that had banana demonstration plots and the responsible education inspector.[5]

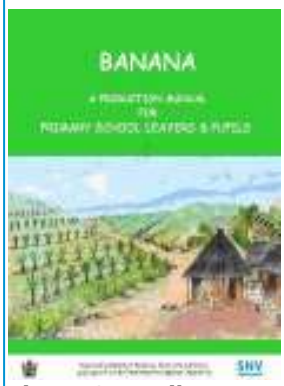

Figure 3: Pupils Banana Manual

These people developed the banana teaching and learning materials between July and December 2009. The development of the Banana Materials had so far entirely depended on the enthusiasm and spirit of voluntarism. In early 2010, for the purpose of enhancing the quality, the materials were further developed by local Teachers' Education Colleges.

On 15th and 16th July, 2010 the banana teaching & learning materials were launched in Rusitu and Honde Valleys. In total 33 primary schools from the valleys were invited. These have an approximate outreach of 9900 pupils. 8

[4] The Nziramasanga commission in 1999 further advised the Ministry of Education to intensify the 2-pathway curriculum, which means that pupils should not only leave school with numeracy and literacy skills but also with vocational skills. This thrust was further embedded in the Education Act of 2006, which seeks to improve quality and relevance of education through vocationalisation of school curricula.

[5] Client Visit Report Banana Syllabus, 30 July, 2009.

schools have taken up the concept and will plant bananas in September for this farming season. According to head teacher Mr. Chinamara "*The framework is very relevant to our area. Here if a student leaves school, and has nowhere to go, he can easily become a modern banana farmer and earn money*"

OUTCOME

THE RESULT IS A MODEL AND CAPACITY TO MAKE TEACHING LOCALLY RELEVANT

At St. Peters Mandeya primary school, the first harvest of bananas from the 150 plant demonstration plot provided enough funds to repair all broken window panes and improve the Early Childhood Education learning center. For a school where the parents struggle to pay US$11 school levies per term, which would give the school a total of US$3000 a year, a profit of US$1032 from the school's plantation is a considerable amount. It was enough to convince the School Development Committee to invest in another plantation of 600 plants, with plans to extend the plantation by another 1500 plants. "*We would want a situation where our pupils pay very nominal fees or no fees at all owing to the success of the banana project*", said Mr. Musoro the head of the St Peters Mandeya primary school.

Figure 4: A show of hands. Who grows bananas at home?

The children at the school are learning how to grow bananas and take care of them the way they have been taught on the plantation during vocational periods. Desire, a grade 5 pupil, demonstrated the process of growing bananas and how to take care of them. Indeed she takes care of her own banana plant on the plantation. It is so personal to her because it is also named after her. She does everything to make sure the banana grows well. So do each of the children in the school!

Practically all pupils have bananas growing at their homesteads and with some of the pupils already trying out the process at home, the potential of improved agronomy adopted by pupils is enormous. It will transcend the boundaries of the schools and into the communities. With the teaching and learning materials in place, it is expected that more teachers will be able to use banana plantations at their school to teach the children the nuts and bolts of growing and marketing bananas. It is also expected that members of the community will continue to throng the school premises to learn from the banana demo plots.

The initial successes of the banana teaching and learning materials and the enthusiasm it has generated in the Risutu and Honde Valleys has become a rallying point for discussions around local content in school curricular. Already the Ministry is suggesting extending the idea of the banana syllabus to livestock in the Matabeleland Provinces, where livestock is abound.

IMPACT

WE FORESEE BETTER EDUCATION AND HIGHER INCOMES

The potential economic impact of bananas in Honde and Rusitu Valleys is high. The weight of banana bunches is expected to double with sound farming practices. This would lead a doubling of incomes from banana in two years. With the banana teaching and learning materials pupils are not only taught a locally relevant curriculum, but they are also equipped with knowledge and skills to tap in the potential of economic development.

The head of St. Peter's Mandeya Primary School Mr. Musoro says prophetically *"Through this seed that SNV has sown in the area and the way farmers from afar troop in to see the plots as well the enthusiasm the banana learning materials have generated in the schools, banana will become the main driver of economic activities in the Valley in less than ten years".*

SUSTAINABILITY

WE HAVE DEVELOPED A MODEL FOR UPSCALING

SNV will engage stakeholders and the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture at the national level to have the localised agricultural subjects become examinable options for the agricultural syllabus. Making local and practical initiatives examinable will not only make SNV's current efforts sustainable they will also encourage school headmasters all over the country to make the agricultural subjects in their schools more relevant to their specific local contexts.

The model of localizing practical subjects can count on wide support following the encouraging words of Mr. P. Muzawazi the Provincial Education Director in Manicaland Province *"processes will count less as I would be interested in seeing results just like at St Peters primary school (school that helped develop banana materials)"*

In addition, the model will answer to SNV corporate and regional priorities that emphasis investment in Vocational Skills Development as motor for economic development.

GOVERNANCE FOR EMPOWERMENT

While addressing economic factors with the assignment of developing teaching and learning materials, the potential of the methodology involved is one of influencing policies. The aim is to assist the Ministry to make the agricultural curriculum flexible in its demands so that schools are able to teach the agricultural subject based on the local thriving product and it will be examinable.

LESSONS LEARNED

The main lesson is that SNV product development and success can be a simple story of innovation through coincidence. The process towards this case shows the value of grabbing an opportunity when it presents itself. If advisors are open-minded to do so and are willing to work in teams with others with different interests and goals, it might just give SNV's capacity building the cutting edge it needs. This was particularly relevant for PIE and BASE advisors to come together. Also important was the element of working on common grounds and exploring mutual beneficial products rather than compete between sectors.

STANDARD DATA

[6]

MoU	MoESAC National Province	July 2009 – June 2013	
	MoESAC Manicaland Province	February 2008 – December 2009	
	Farm Groups and Honde Valley Smallholder Development Company	April 2008 – December 2009	
Composition of the Team	Advisory Staff	2	35 PP days
	LCBs	3	40 PP days
Partners involved	None yet		
Resources PPdays[7]	Euro		
Resources (programme)	Euro 3000		
Output Measurement	Internal score yet to be measured		
Outcome Measurement	Internal score yet to be measured		

[6] Data on MoUs are for separate BASE and PIE agreements. Data on team composition and PP days reflects the assignment on Teaching and Learning Materials only.

[7] Cost per PP day in Zimbabwe.