Can Agricultural Extension Programs Increase Knowledge Sharing About Modern Practices in Liberia?

Youth participating in Liberia's 4-H program ©Agricorps

Researchers in Liberia are evaluating the impact of an agricultural education
program on knowledge sharing toward the adoption of modern practices, and the constraints that hinder agricultural knowledge transmission from students to elders.

Adoption of modern agricultural practices remains low in low- and middle-income countries despite significant efforts toward their promotion. For example, government extension agents may train a small number of farmers and then instruct them to diffuse this knowledge to others in the community. Yet diffusion and take-up of these practices do not always occur. [1] Evidence suggests that agricultural schools for youth can effectively stimulate knowledge transmission within farming communities, but little is known about their potential on a larger, national scale. [2]

In Liberia, agriculture accounts for over half of the population’s livelihood, primarily subsistence farming. Many of the country’s farmers continue to apply traditional farming practices on their plots, which can hinder them from realizing gains in yields, income, and productivity. [3] In line with promoting productivity and knowledge sharing via education, 4-H was founded as a program for youth aged 12-20 to develop leadership and life skills through hands-on agricultural schools. In turn, students can transmit the knowledge they attained to members of their households and the community more broadly. However, youth teaching elders is considered a stigma in Liberia, which may hinder the transmission of knowledge and consequently the adoption of modern farming practices.

Researchers are evaluating the impact of the 4-H program on the diffusion of knowledge on modern agricultural practices within communities. They focus on the household-level constraints and tensions between students and elders that limit the transmission of this knowledge. A total of 197 schools across Liberia have been divided into the following groups:

- **4-H schools with household intervention**: 50 4-H schools are being evaluated on their impact in knowledge transmission; households receive the intervention that examines the tensions between students and elders. Elders are shown a video either explaining the value of 4-H in enhancing students' knowledge and its potential for improving production outcomes or providing general information about 4-H. Before or after watching the video, elders are asked about their beliefs regarding their child's present or future performance and skills. These revelations are shared with half of the students but not the other half.

- **4-H schools without household intervention**: 33 4-H schools are being evaluated on their impact; households do not receive an intervention examining tensions between students and elders.

- **4-H schools where household interventions were infeasible**: 17 4-H schools are being evaluated on their impact; because these schools were isolated from communities, household interventions could not be conducted.

- **Comparison Group**: 97 non-4-H schools are serving as a comparison to the 4-H schools on agricultural knowledge transmission within villages.

The results of this evaluation will be available in 2024.
Sources


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