Learning Knowledge and Skills for Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods

Literature findings and research design

Transforming agriculture for development and poverty reduction

- Understanding the influence of globalisation, climate change, and current challenges for smallholder farming (FDI, migration)

- Taking a wider lens on 'agriculture' than only 'farming'

- Gendered roles of young women and men in relation to kinds of livelihoods and constraints faced

- Youth regarded as a homogeneous group in policy and programmes
- Dominant discourse around youth considering agricultural work dirty and degrading. But serious issues around land ownership and access to training, capital and technology
- Various agricultural career paths: full-time on family holding, on new holding, part-time combined with household enterprise, or off-farm wage work

Youth and agriculture: the occupation of 'last resort'

- Assumption that basic literacy and numeracy skills can improve farmer productivity
- Linear view that basic skills should precede vocational training ('literacy first' approach)
- Agricultural extension – from centralised, linear model to participatory empowering approaches
- Categorisation of different kinds of skills (e.g. foundation, transferable and technical/vocational skills)
- Recognition that soft skill development can help respond to rapid economic, environmental and social changes
- Assessing skills/competencies: taking account of experiential learning

Agriculture and skills development policy: from basic skills to lifelong learning

Formal Learning: Formal learning occurs as a result of experiences in an education or training institution, with structured learning objectives, learning time and support which leads to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

Non-formal learning: Non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

Informal learning: Informal learning results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or 'incidental'/random).

[from EU 2001]

Adult learning: moving beyond schooling

- Situated learning and situated literacies
- Multiple literacies (rather than one literacy)
- Non-literate people use literacy/numeracy and have developed strategies for learning
- Valuing young people's everyday learning and recognising gendered practices

A social practice approach to literacy and learning

Literacy environments-texts and pictures
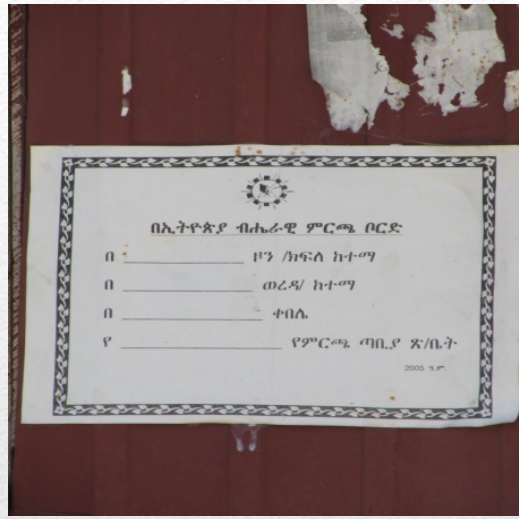
- What skills are in demand (individuals, employers, community etc)
- The kinds of skills and knowledge specific to agriculture and rural livelihoods which are currently acquired by young people through different programmes and learning channels
- The specific modes of learning and teaching of knowledge and skills for agriculture (informal, non-formal and formal), roles of providers and learning places and the dynamics of interrelations between different channels
- How such knowledge and skills are communicated and learned and who provides this learning
- How such knowledge and skills are transmitted from generation to generation
- What is the role that literacy can play in the learning and teaching of agricultural knowledge and rural livelihood skills
- The perceptions of those who teach and learn knowledge and skills on the modes, means and values of the process, on the effectiveness of learning, including the views of young people disaggregated by gender

Research Questions

Ethnographic Study

- Two contrasting sites selected according to criteria such as geographical, social, economic and cultural characteristics; level of infrastructure, type of agriculture and types of educational provision/participation. Initial literature review informed this too.

- Research team focused on understanding the everyday practices in which young people already engage within the particular community, analysing changes taking place and how formal learning programmes fitted into this picture.

Research Methods

- Participant observation in two communities
- Life history interviews with 15 people in each field site
- Focus group discussions using PRA methods
- Interviews with providers (two case studies)