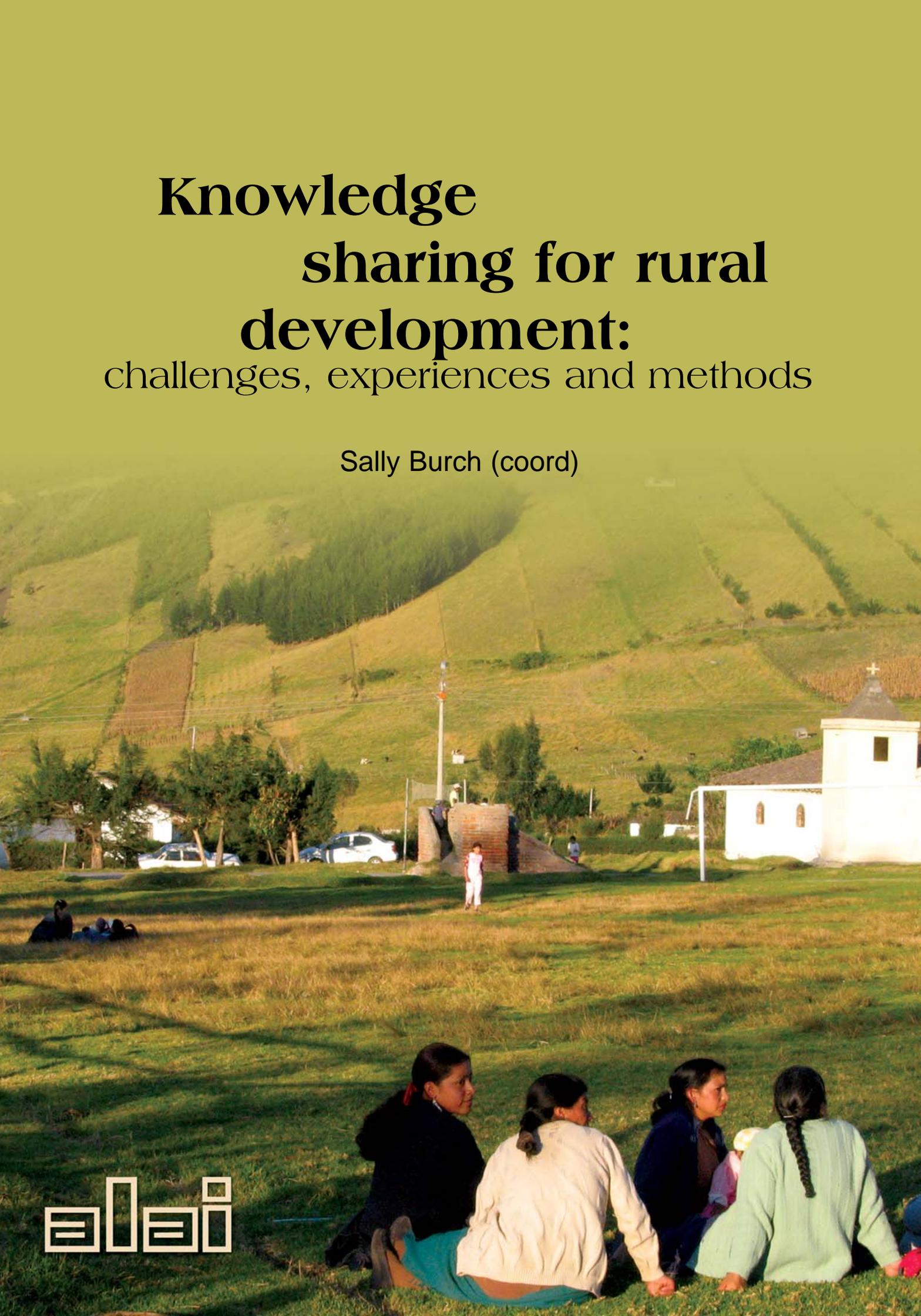


Knowledge sharing for rural development: challenges, experiences and methods

Sally Burch (coord)



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challenges, experiences and methods

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Since the "Green Revolution", world food production has grown at a dizzy pace. Yet hunger continues to spread throughout the globe, chiefly in the countryside, as small farmers are increasingly forced into ruin. The agro-industrial model is thus showing signs of fatigue.

More and more peasant farmers are seeing ecological agriculture, combining ancestral and new methods, as a sustainable solution. This brings about new challenges, such as how to recover knowledge that was becoming lost, adapt it to current conditions and complement it with new knowledge. The creation of mechanisms to generate and share knowledge - both among farmers and with investigators and specialist centres -, is now a condition of survival of rural communities.

This book explores these issues, combining reflections with concrete experiences that, among other things, are experimenting how new information and communications technologies can foster effective knowledge sharing.



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Exchange of local agricultural content in rural Uganda

Ednah Karamagi Akiiki

Rural communities have a wealth of information that could improve livelihoods in rural areas. However, to get it requires a lot more than just mobilizing people and get them sharing. This initiative combines aspects such as sharing meetings, radio programs, SMS, publications y local knowledge facilitators.

Knowledge Sharing Forums

Sveiby describes knowledge as an intangible resource that exists within the mind of the individual (Sveiby 1997). The farmers from time immemorial have had vital farming knowledge passed on to them by their parents. This farming knowledge is based on use of local content, for instance:

Dilute 1 litre of milk with 9 litres of water. Spray the solution every 10 days to prevent mosaic virus in tomatoes, tobacco and sugarcane. Weaker solution of 1 part milk to 10-15 parts water applied every 10 days is effective in controlling mites and plant diseases in many plants e.g. blights mildew, other fungal diseases and mosaic virus. Spray every 3 weeks to control spider mites and caterpillar eggs...

This is an example of a message that was sent out through Project SMS on 15 August 2005. This kind of information is what is shared among the farmers during the Knowledge Sharing Forums. The bottom line is that knowledge can be shared but it is up to the farmers to adopt this knowledge to increase their returns and income.

Knowledge is a vital vehicle to development. Interestingly, with each district visited, knowledge sharing for personal development is a new concept

Busoga Rural Open Source and Development Initiative (BROSDI) works in west Uganda. The organization involves the government and civil society in the rural areas, in issues relating to agriculture, health and human rights. It also develops methods in the use of ICTs and has participated in South-South exchanges in Africa.

<http://www.brosdi.org.ug>

among the farmers. After the first knowledge sharing forum in Pallisa District, one farmer Namutosi Rose acclaimed that:

Gwiko is my friend, everybody's friend... We all know him and that he rears turkeys... What we didn't know is that he has such enormous amounts of knowledge in turkey rearing... Our turkeys die every day yet we have the cure in our homes... More so, we call the 'cure' stubborn weeds and keep digging them out!

Additionally, Namutosi learned how to maintain the turkey houses and rear the young birds to maturity. She learnt all this from a man she knew, but it never occurred to her that he had practical answers to her challenges.

In the sharing process, the members of the forum choose one representative from each village who henceforth becomes the Village Knowledge Broker (VKB). Computer literacy and the ability to read and write are not obligatory because the project helps the VKBs to improve the quality of their task by encouraging intergroup adult literacy classes as well as providing them with training, support, information, etc. The VKBs are expected to be the information vanguards of the village they represent. Knowledge is processed and repackaged and then disseminated back to the VKBs who in turn pass the information on to the village members.

Means of dissemination

Radio

Every first Sunday of the month, the farmers share knowledge on Radio Star from 3:00 pm to 3:30 pm. Listeners are free to call in and ask questions pertaining to the crop or live-stock type being discussed. The radio programme is also recorded and cassette tapes are sent to the district so that those farmers that missed the programmes can listen to the tapes at their convenience. The project also sends listenership reminder notices to the farmers by SMS every first Friday of the month. These SMS indicate the Radio Station, time, date and the crop or livestock type to be discussed.

SMS

This method is used to send agricultural information to the farmers on a weekly basis. This is done every Monday, and the information is also uploaded on the project website for others to access. The database is composed of phone numbers from persons involved in community development work, individual farmers residing in rural as well as urban areas, male farmers, organizations and even government representatives. The activity that brings them together is 'agriculture using local content'. The information that is sent out is mainly derived from the Knowledge Sharing Forums.

Publications

Publications are also used in an attempt to disseminate information. This is by sending out monthly newsletters and information brochures. These were printed in English and

Luganda, the most widely spoken local language in the country. Unfortunately, they proved quite expensive and also were not the format preferred by the community. The project therefore opted to produce more information brochures and disseminate those to the farmers. These are in the form of 'How to Guides' and can be downloaded in PDF format from the project website (www.brosdi.org.ug).

Music, dance and drama

It also uses music, dance and drama to portray the information from the Knowledge Sharing Forums. Orphan children who are members of the Hope Children Club in Mayuge bring to life the knowledge shared. This is recorded and available on DVD and videotapes, and is used by farmers who can access computers and video decks. This approach is also a rational answer to the farmers who cannot come for the forums due to household chores and also those who are in areas not yet covered by the project.

Lessons and conclusions

It is important to understand that each community addresses gender concerns differently. Therefore it is important to understand the specific community culture. This also helps in understanding and making plans in advance on how to address the foreseen challenges and take advantage of the strengths.

Even if it is true that the rural communities have a lot of information, to get it requires a lot more than just mobilizing people to get them sharing. It requires planning at the base level; and conducting a mini-research to find out issues pertaining to culture, gender, other players, receptivity of persons and others. Then adjusting the plan according to the results, and visiting the community.

The project team, the district networks, government and other members of civil society have to work together in order for project ownership to prevail.

The complete, published article can be found in Karamagi, Akiiki, E. (2006), *Towards improving farmer's livelihoods through exchange of local agricultural content in Rural Uganda*, KM4D Journal 2(1):68-77, <http://www.km4dev.org/journal>

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