

MALAWI

WRITE SHOP SUMMARY REPORT

Mangochi, Malawi

November 7-11, 2016



Report prepared by Jan Henderson

November 2016



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Introduction

WHAT

During the first months of 2016, approximately 1,950 Agricultural Extension Development Officers (AEDOs) in Malawi received a copy of the “Agricultural Extension Field Diary” created by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Water Development (MoAIWD) in collaboration with Michigan State University (MSU), and the Department of Agricultural Extension Service (DAES), as part of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project “Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services” (MEAS, <http://meas.illinois.edu>). A copy of the 2016 Agricultural Extension Field Diary is available at:

<http://meas.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/MEAS-2015-Diary-for-Ag-Extension-Malawi-Suvedi-Dec-2015.pdf>

DAES, with support from MSU, collected feedback from Agricultural Extension Field Officers and others throughout 2016 on the usefulness of the diary and how the diary might be improved. Representatives from strategic divisions, departments, and organizations, including frontline Extension staff, were invited to attend a write shop to develop the 2017 diary.

The objectives of the write shop were to:

- **Review** feedback from stakeholders and **identify** revisions and improvements for the 2017 diary.
- **Recommend** a theme, key messages, target audience, technical agriculture information, reference material, and format for the 2017 diary.
- **Create** a draft of the 2017 diary, including suggestions for layout and format.

WHERE

November 7-11, 2016
Andrews Hotel
Mangochi, Malawi

WHO

15 participants (see list in Appendix A)
District Agricultural Development Officer (DADO) Mangochi
DADO Nsanje
Agricultural Extension Development Officer (AEDO) Nasenga Extension Planning Area (EPA)
AEDO Mawa EPA
AEDO Maiwa EPA
AEDO Mbwadzulu EPA
DAES, Agriculture Gender Roles and Extension Support Services (AGRESS) Branch
DAES, Communications Branch
Department of Animal Health and Livestock Development
Department of Fisheries
Strengthening Agriculture and Nutrition Extension (SANE) Project
Kusamala Permaculture

Daily Activities

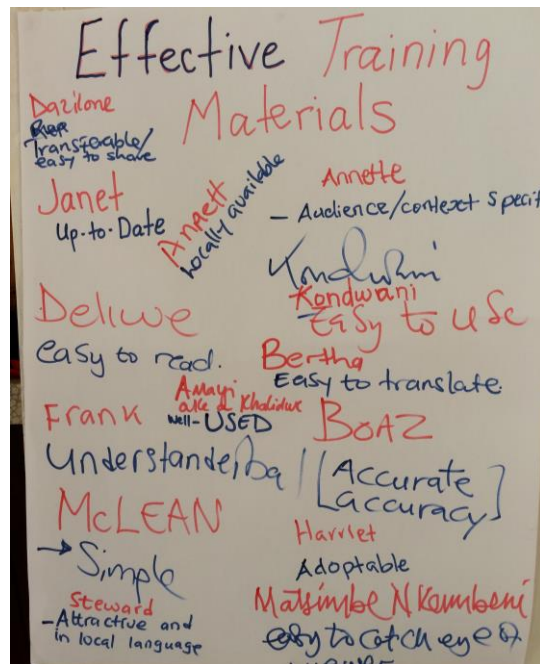
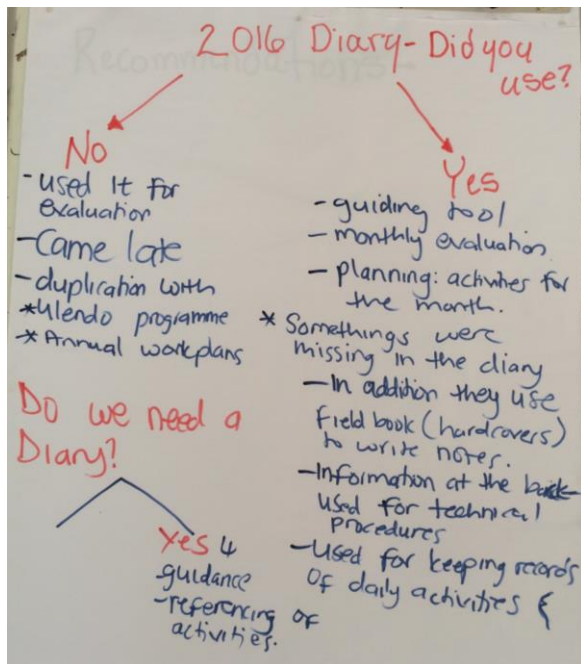
Day #1

Participants introduced themselves and suggested one characteristic of effective training materials to guide our writing for the week.

We reviewed comments and feedback regarding the 2016 Agricultural Extension Field Diary, including reflections from five field officers about how they had or had not used the diary. We also asked the group to consider the question “Do we need a diary? Why or why not?”

Participants divided into three groups to brainstorm the components of their “dream” diary...what improvements and additions they would like to see in the 2017 version. The groups recorded their ideas on flipchart and selected one person to present.

We participated in an energizer – “Group Juggling” that focused on the importance of maintaining accuracy and quality when trying to juggle or balance personal/family and professional obligations.



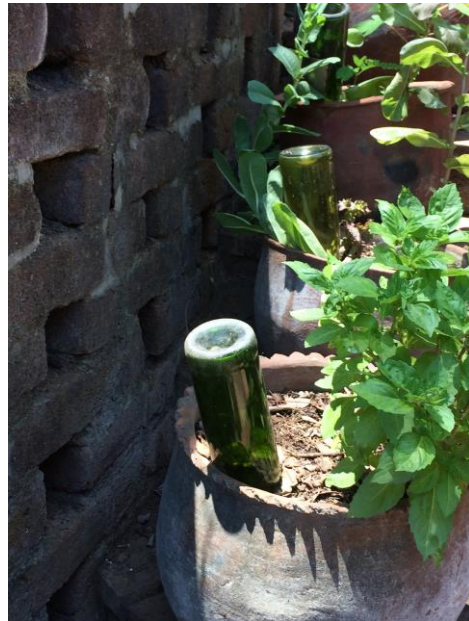
Day #2

Participants divided into two groups and were tasked with making the case for a diary that was tied to the annual and monthly planning/reporting system currently in place or for a journal-type tool that was tied to a specific theme and the seasons. The groups identified and defended the target audience, purpose, and contents for the two different approaches to the diary. We decided that a hybrid of the two versions was the best way forward.

After lunch, the five field-level officers were thanked for their participation and returned to their work locations. The remaining 10 participants represented subject matter specialists from fisheries, livestock, land resource conservation, extension methods, and nutrition. This smaller group divided into teams and began writing the technical agriculture section of the 2017 diary.

A graphics design team began working on the format and layout for the proposed diary.

Two participants focused on extension methodologies, statistical information, and other reference material.



Day #3

To obtain a clearer focus on the intent and purpose of the diary, the group discussed the primary purpose, the target audience, a proposed theme, and a title for the tool...deciding on the following:

- **Title:** Agricultural Extension Field Notebook (to move away from the diary, date-based focus)

Primary Purpose:

- Yearly & Monthly Planning Tool
- Tracking & Recordkeeping Tool for Reporting and Reflection
- Reference & Technical Information Tool

Target Audience: Agricultural Extension Field Officers

Theme: Farming for Resilient Livelihoods

Subject matter specialists continued writing during the day focusing on fish farming, poultry and goat management, mulching, rain water harvesting, intercropping, seed saving, improved crop varieties, composting, and drought tolerant crops. At the close of the daily session, three writing teams presented their work to-date and received feedback and constructive criticism from the participants.

Day #4

This morning we went on a mini field trip to June Walker's Thanthwe Farm near Monkey Bay (<http://pipsnseeds.org/hubs/thanthwe/>). The purpose of the trip was to expose and inspire write shop participants by observing June's sustainable and self-sufficient approach to farming: permaculture. "Permaculture is a philosophy of working with, rather than against nature; of protracted and thoughtful observation rather than protracted and thoughtless labour; of looking at plants and animals in all their functions, rather than treating any area as a single-product system." Bill Mollison (from <http://permaculture.net/>). For another excellent example of a permaculture approach in Malawi please see: <http://www.neverendingfood.org/>.

Writing teams continued their work for the remainder of the day.

Day #5

Writing teams completed their drafts and added seasonal tips related to their subject matter area. We brainstormed the types of images and colors we would like to see on the front, inside, and back covers of the Field Notebook that reflect the integration of people, plants, animals in an sustainable agro-eco system. The graphics design team was tasked with creating an image based on our ideas.

The following suggestions were also offered and discussed:

- The tool should be viewed as a "Field Notebook" to track annual work plans and write reports...and as a place to record reflections on successes/challenges during the month.
- Have fewer pages for summarizing work plans (than the previous version) and more pages for tracking the plans and capturing learning.
- Do not include dates or calendars to allow the Field Notebook to be used for more than one year, potentially reducing cost of production. Field staff can add their own dates.
- The Field Notebook will run from July – June with three main sections: Introduction, Planning & Notes, and Reference Material. Limit the Notebook to about 200 pages.
- Color-code the planning and notes section according to the four seasons:
- Jul-Sep: brown for dry

- Oct-Dec: bright purple for flowers
- Jan-Mar: dark blue for water
- Apr-Jun: dark green for greenery
- Deliver the Field Notebook in Quarter 3 (January, February, March) to begin using in July every year when annual work plans begin.

We identified next steps: de-brief with the Department of Agricultural Extension Services; complete a rough draft of the Filed Notebook and circulate to selected people; send an update email to write shop participants and their direct supervisor. Participants were presented a hand-carved key chain as a token of appreciation for their involvement in the write shop. Adjourned after lunch.



Observations

Including the five field-level extension officers at the beginning of the write shop was most helpful; their input and feedback provided a glimpse of how the 2016 Diary was used and perceived by the intended target audience. They will be asked to review the draft version of the Field Notebook which will ensure the tool has been “vetted” by at least a small sample of field officers. Designers of training materials sometimes assume they can “speak” for the end users which can result in materials languishing on shelves.

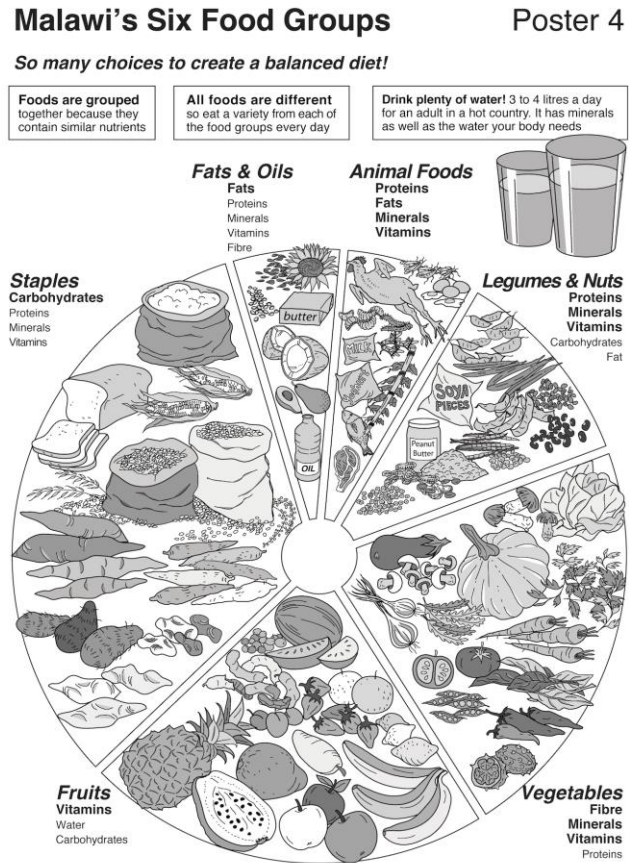
We discussed the importance of including a monitoring and evaluation segment to the Field Notebook distribution. Capturing how the notebook is actually being used in the field is essential for making improvements, calculating a cost/benefit analysis, and deciding on future investment. Having the M&E component and the unit or department responsible identified at the onset of the project will be most helpful.

Changing the mindset of Extension from a maize production orientation to a year-round, sustainable farming approach is challenging. Including photos and sketches of a variety of native plants, animals, and practices that depict the entire agro-eco system and value chain will be included in the Field Notebook. Seasonal tips at the beginning of each month will hopefully encourage field officers to view their work more holistically rather than “tie” their activities to the growing and harvesting maize.

The “roll out” of the Field Notebook is critical; field officers will need some type of orientation on how to use the tool most effectively for planning, reporting, and reflecting. We provided guiding questions at the end of each month to assist the field officers in evaluating their previous month’s work. Similarly, direct supervisors will require training on how to best incorporate the Notebook into their visits with the field-level officers.

The enthusiasm and dedication of the write shop participants was most encouraging...selecting the “right” people to attend a writing workshop can be difficult; the subject matter expert may not be the best writer and the skilled writers may have limited knowledge of the subject. This first draft of the Field Notebook provides a solid base to work from as additional people review and refine the content and format. Sharing the draft with the person(s) who gives the final approval or “go ahead” should occur as soon as possible to avoid spending additional writing time needlessly.

I was impressed with the insistence that the workshop hotel serve healthy snacks and meals...the chef was provided a detailed outline of “acceptable” foods and he and his staff did an excellent job of preparing healthy choices ...yes, good, healthy, local food can be served...we all need to be more



conscious and determined to help change the current food system whenever we have the opportunity...we can set a positive example! Here is the e-mail that was sent to the hotel:

We would like meals/snacks that reflect healthy eating. Follow the 6 food group guide, aiming for:

- 3-4 food groups at every meal and snack, resulting in 6 food groups by the end of each day: Fruits, Vegetables, Staples, Legumes & Nuts, Animal Foods and Fats. Attached is a poster.
- Local foods to boost local economy as much as possible and enhancing the local culture and history of Malawi
- Fresh is often best: salads, fruits, nuts, in-season produce
- Less processing is often best: whole grains, e.g. brown bread or rice vs. white
- Environmental food packaging (compostable ideally, as little plastic as possible)
- Water – preferably in jugs with cups & no plastic bottles
- Avoid high refined starch/sugar, salt, fat, preservatives

Appendix A: List of Write Shop Participants

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