

Farmer Field Schools and the Diffusion of Integrated Pest Management in Ghana's Cocoa Sector

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ABSTRACT

The adoption of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in West African cocoa cultivation is critical for sustainable production and farmer livelihoods. Farmer Field Schools (FFS) have been promoted as a key extension model to facilitate this knowledge transfer, yet their specific influence on practice diffusion requires critical examination. This commentary analyses the role and influence of FFS in disseminating IPM practices among smallholder cocoa growers. It aims to evaluate the mechanisms through which FFS operate and assess their effectiveness in altering established farming behaviours. The analysis synthesises findings from existing programme evaluations and academic literature on agricultural extension in the region. It employs a critical policy analysis framework to examine the implementation logic and social dynamics of the FFS model within the local context. A key finding is that FFS participation correlates with a marked increase in the adoption of specific, low-cost IPM techniques, such as phytosanitary pruning, reported by over 60% of school attendees. However, diffusion beyond direct participants remains limited, constrained by local labour economies and land tenure systems. While FFS are effective for intensive skill-building with enrolled farmers, their design often underestimates structural barriers, limiting broader community-wide diffusion of IPM. The model's impact is thus contingent on complementary support addressing these contextual constraints. FFS programmes should be integrated with community-based resource centres to sustain learning. Policymakers must couple FFS with interventions that address labour shortages and provide incentives for collective action to enhance spill-over effects. Agricultural extension, sustainable agriculture, knowledge diffusion, smallholders, policy implementation This commentary provides a novel critique of the implicit scaling assumptions within the FFS model, arguing for a shift from a focus on individual training to a systems-oriented approach for pest management diffusion.

Keywords: *Farmer Field Schools, Integrated Pest Management, Ghana, participatory extension, sustainable agriculture, West Africa*

Article Highlights

- FFS participation correlates with >60% adoption of low-cost IPM techniques among attendees.
- Diffusion beyond direct participants remains limited by labour economies and tenure systems.
- Impact is contingent on complementary support addressing contextual constraints.
- Argues for a shift from individual training to a systems-

Core Limitation

The FFS model's implicit scaling assumptions require critical examination. Broader diffusion is constrained not by knowledge gaps alone, but by structural factors like land tenure and local labour markets.

This analysis synthesises findings from existing programme evaluations and academic literature.

oriented approach.	
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