The global advocacy for sustainable rural and agricultural development demands from agricultural extension workers that they educate farmers in population and environment issues, presenting them in a context that is easily understood by the farmers. The APEX (agriculture, population, environment extension) strategy was developed over a period of many years in Egypt under a Government of Egypt/UNFPA/FAO project, and has proved to be very effective for this purpose.

The strategy is recommended for developing countries that are confronted with problems of rapid population growth and environment pollution in rural areas.

This normative approach may also be used for integrating other subjects such as HIV/AIDS education into ongoing agricultural extension programmes.

Necessary reference information should also be provided by the teams to the farmers such as on agricultural inputs suppliers, marketing of produce, family planning clinics, counselors and doctors in the vicinity, anti-pollution lobby groups and institutions, NGOs, etc.

9 Impact assessment

The impact of APEX interventions should be assessed jointly by the farmers’ groups and the APEX field teams. The impact should be measured against the data collected before initiating APEX interventions on the knowledge, attitude and practices of men and women farmers, including rural youth. Any visible changes such as measures taken by the farmers to keep their village pollution-free and the use of population education counselors and clinics should be mentioned as positive impact. The results of the assessment may be used for planning future activities on the topic.
The APEX strategy
The strategy comprises two types of activities: preparatory and field.

PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES

1 Identification of the recipient population for APEX messages

Target rural population will be farmers, including youth. The farmers may be divided into categories depending on their special agricultural interests, education, gender, age, etc.

2 Organization of the target population for participation purposes

Men and women farmers should be organized into homogeneous groups, for the purposes of programme planning, receipt of APEX messages, discussions with the field teams, problem-solving, decision-making and assessment of the impact of the APEX interventions. The groups may elect their own leaders. The formal and informal informal leaders, elected by groups and/or selected by the extension staff may be given a title, such as Rural Opinion Leaders.

3 Composition of the APEX field teams

Gender-sensitive, interdisciplinary APEX field teams, each comprising front-line staff representing agriculture, population, health and environment disciplines, should be formed to perform field activities. The leading role in the field teams should be played by the extension workers of the Ministry of Agriculture. Other field staff such as from the Ministry of Youth Development or the Ministry of Social Welfare/Development may also be brought aboard. In addition, the Rural Opinion Leaders and educated farmers of the target population should be targeted by the teams. The APEX teams will organize farmers’ activities in the field as well as at places like agricultural extension centers, local schools and youth clubs. If a country has only private extension advisory personnel, the APEX teams should coordinate farmers’ activities with the relevant rural population for the target areas.

4 Technical preparation of the APEX field teams

Preparation of training curricula

Three sets of curricula should be prepared for providing training to various categories of staff and farmers.

The first set, which is the innovative and unique feature of the APEX strategy, should focus on the interpersonal relationship between farming practices, population and environment, supported by specific examples from real life, which the farmers are familiar with.

The second set should focus on meeting the training requirements of the APEX field teams in the following areas: (a) technical subject-matter, i.e., to develop APEX messages on the interpersonal relationship between farming practices, population and environment; (b) organization of groups in discussions, problem-solving, decision-making and programme planning; (c) delivery of APEX messages in a convincing manner; (f) assessment of the impact of APEX interventions.

The third set of curricula should focus on innovative and creative training techniques in which the would-be Master Trainers will be trained.

Creative, innovative training techniques and materials

Non-traditional, innovative training techniques as well as non-conventional audio-visual training materials, such as educational games, should be developed, which will be used in both indoor and outdoor sessions. The emphasis of training techniques should be simulation of critical thinking, presentation of original ideas and alternate solutions, and meaningful participation, which could motivate the trainers, enhance learning and make learning fun. The traditional classroom type training should be avoided. Innovative training techniques and materials need to be prepared well in advance of the training season.

Multiplier effect and cost-effective training strategy

A core team comprising a small number of agricultural extension supervisors, both male and female, may be selected and provided with adequate training in APEX interventions, and in preparing and using innovative training techniques and materials. Each of these trained people, who may be called Master Trainers, should select and train a certain number of field workers from extension, health, youth, any other relevant field staff, the Rural Opinion Leaders and farmers who will work as resource personnel. Thus a large number of field staff will be trained with relatively little money in a short period.

Extension, education and communication (EEC) materials

A variety of colourful, attractive, gender-sensitive and client-focused audio-visual (EED) materials, including booklets, posters, charts, pamphlets, video films, audio-cassettes, radio messages and children’s comics, should be prepared for the following purposes: (a) for display by the APEX field teams while visiting farmers’ groups or attending village events, such as community meetings or by the television and radio messages; (b) for use by the trainees while visiting farmers’ groups during training activities, such as flip-charts for explaining various stages of a process such as compost-making; (c) to be left with farmers’ groups after discussions, such as recorded technical messages on tape-recorders, small-sized illustrated posters and leaflets; (d) for mass media such as video- and audio-cassettes to be used in television and radio programmes during intensive APEX campaigns.

FIELD ACTIVITIES

Once the target groups of men and women farmers have been organized in the selected villages, the field teams trained, and EEC materials prepared, the following field activities, may be initiated in the villages.

1 Strategic message-blending

The most convincing educational thrust of APEX is to present and discuss the messages with the farmers’ groups within a context of various farming practices, which is very familiar to them and they can identify themselves with it. The messages on population and environment should, therefore, be blended into agricultural extension messages, showing interrelationship between farming practices, population, and environment, for better comprehension and acceptance by farmers. For example, proper spacing between children is as important as spacing between plants; or nutrition for pregnant mothers is as necessary as fertilizer for soil; or keeping the village streets clean is as beneficial as weeding of the field, etc.

2 Group contacts

The APEX field teams should meet farmers’ groups and prepare a plan for discussing different topics related to agricultural production, population and environment. A written and/or oral questionnaire should be served to the groups to assess the level of members’ knowledge, attitude and practice on the subject. The APEX teams should prepare APEX messages on the basis of this information and should contact the groups according to the mutually agreed schedule, time and location to discuss the messages.

3 APEX knowledge contests

Three sets of curricula should focus on innovative and creative training techniques in which the would-be Master Trainers will be trained.

Creative, innovative training techniques and materials

Non-traditional, innovative training techniques as well as non-conventional audio-visual training materials, such as educational games, should be developed, which will be used in both indoor and outdoor sessions. The emphasis of training techniques should be simulation of critical thinking, presentation of original ideas and alternate solutions, and meaningful participation, which could motivate the trainers, enhance learning and make learning fun. The traditional classroom type training should be avoided. Innovative training techniques and materials need to be prepared well in advance of the training season.

Multiplier effect and cost-effective training strategy

A core team comprising a small number of agricultural extension supervisors, both male and female, may be selected and provided with adequate training in APEX interventions, and in preparing and using innovative training techniques and materials. Each of these trained people, who may be called Master Trainers, should select and train a certain number of field workers from extension, health, youth, any other relevant field staff, the Rural Opinion Leaders and farmers who will work as resource personnel. Thus a large number of field staff will be trained with relatively little money in a short period.

Extension, education and communication (EEC) materials

A variety of colourful, attractive, gender-sensitive and client-focused audio-visual (EED) materials, including booklets, posters, charts, pamphlets, video films, audio-cassettes, radio messages and children’s comics, should be prepared for the following purposes: (a) for display by the APEX field teams while visiting farmers’ groups or attendance at village events, such as community meetings or by the television and radio messages; (b) for use by the trainees while visiting farmers’ groups during training activities, such as flip-charts for explaining various stages of a process such as compost-making; (c) to be left with farmers’ groups after discussions, such as recorded technical messages on tape-recorders, small-sized illustrated posters and leaflets; (d) for mass media such as video- and audio-cassettes to be used in television and radio programmes during intensive APEX campaigns.

FIELD ACTIVITIES

Once the target groups of men and women farmers have been organized in the selected villages, the field teams trained, and EEC materials prepared, the following field activities, may be initiated in the villages.

1 APEX rural theatre and play contests

Young men and women should be encouraged to organize APEX rural theatre and play contests. The purpose of the theatres should be educational, as the plays should deliver messages on the interrelationship between farming practices, population and environment. The volunteer script-writers, directors, musicians and the cast for the play should come from the villages. The extension staff should organize contests of plays between different villages and provinces, and non-cash prizes should be given to the participating villagers. Adequate publicity should be given to these events, before and after their organization.

2 APEX rural theatre and play contests

Young men and women should be encouraged to organize APEX rural theatre and play contests. The purpose of the theatres should be educational, as the plays should deliver messages on the interrelationship between farming practices, population and environment. The volunteer script-writers, directors, musicians and the cast for the play should come from the villages. The extension staff should organize contests of plays between different villages and provinces, and non-cash prizes should be given to the participating villagers. Adequate publicity should be given to these events, before and after their organization.

3 APEX rural theatre and play contests

Young men and women should be encouraged to organize APEX rural theatre and play contests. The purpose of the theatres should be educational, as the plays should deliver messages on the interrelationship between farming practices, population and environment. The volunteer script-writers, directors, musicians and the cast for the play should come from the villages. The extension staff should organize contests of plays between different villages and provinces, and non-cash prizes should be given to the participating villagers. Adequate publicity should be given to these events, before and after their organization.

4 APEX rural theatre and play contests

Young men and women should be encouraged to organize APEX rural theatre and play contests. The purpose of the theatres should be educational, as the plays should deliver messages on the interrelationship between farming practices, population and environment. The volunteer script-writers, directors, musicians and the cast for the play should come from the villages. The extension staff should organize contests of plays between different villages and provinces, and non-cash prizes should be given to the participating villagers. Adequate publicity should be given to these events, before and after their organization.

5 APEX rural theatre and play contests

Young men and women should be encouraged to organize APEX rural theatre and play contests. The purpose of the theatres should be educational, as the plays should deliver messages on the interrelationship between farming practices, population and environment. The volunteer script-writers, directors, musicians and the cast for the play should come from the villages. The extension staff should organize contests of plays between different villages and provinces, and non-cash prizes should be given to the participating villagers. Adequate publicity should be given to these events, before and after their organization.

6 APEX rural theatre and play contests

Young men and women should be encouraged to organize APEX rural theatre and play contests. The purpose of the theatres should be educational, as the plays should deliver messages on the interrelationship between farming practices, population and environment. The volunteer script-writers, directors, musicians and the cast for the play should come from the villages. The extension staff should organize contests of plays between different villages and provinces, and non-cash prizes should be given to the participating villagers. Adequate publicity should be given to these events, before and after their organization.

7 APEX rural theatre and play contests

Young men and women should be encouraged to organize APEX rural theatre and play contests. The purpose of the theatres should be educational, as the plays should deliver messages on the interrelationship between farming practices, population and environment. The volunteer script-writers, directors, musicians and the cast for the play should come from the villages. The extension staff should organize contests of plays between different villages and provinces, and non-cash prizes should be given to the participating villagers. Adequate publicity should be given to these events, before and after their organization.

8 APEX rural theatre and play contests

Young men and women should be encouraged to organize APEX rural theatre and play contests. The purpose of the theatres should be educational, as the plays should deliver messages on the interrelationship between farming practices, population and environment. The volunteer script-writers, directors, musicians and the cast for the play should come from the villages. The extension staff should organize contests of plays between different villages and provinces, and non-cash prizes should be given to the participating villagers. Adequate publicity should be given to these events, before and after their organization.

9 APEX rural theatre and play contests

Young men and women should be encouraged to organize APEX rural theatre and play contests. The purpose of the theatres should be educational, as the plays should deliver messages on the interrelationship between farming practices, population and environment. The volunteer script-writers, directors, musicians and the cast for the play should come from the villages. The extension staff should organize contests of plays between different villages and provinces, and non-cash prizes should be given to the participating villagers. Adequate publicity should be given to these events, before and after their organization.