

FARMER FAMILY LEARNING GROUPS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



Based on experiences from 'The Rwenzori Project' in West Uganda

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Farmer Family Learning Groups are groups of farmer families, who together define their goals and needs in relation to their own future development, and help each other to reach the goals. The groups form strong networks and help each other, and help the entire local community. The approach is inspired by the well-known 'Farmer Field Schools', which can be practiced in very many ways – and in the approach described in this manual, we have used a very flexible approach with great success. We understand a Farmer Family Learning Group as a group of farmers or farmer families which – by the help of a facilitator – go together to support each other and may be, market their produce together, and which work, develop and learn together. All decisions and activities and plans belong to the group members of each group, and each group will be shaped and formed by their needs, which change with time. We believe that the group members' ownership over the group and its approaches and activities is the sole pathway to sustainable groups. We do not e.g. work with a curriculum for a certain crop or livestock specie – we try to enable facilitators to be able to form and facilitate groups and base their work on an identification of what each individual group wants and needs.

We – the author team of this booklet – have learned about this approach by practicing it together with a number of groups in Rwenzori Region since 2009. The groups come from different NGOs and CBOs, all members of the Sustainable Agricultural Training Network SATNET, and all groups work for food security obtained through locally and household based food and income generation, produced through sustainable agricultural methods which feed the soil for future generations.

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Our biggest and warmest thanks go to all the facilitators – internal and external – and the farmer families, who so generously shared their insight with us and made it possible for everybody involved in the project to learn. We hope that we thank you on behalf of the many people who can use this manual and work with local community for empowerment, interaction and improvement of the community in terms of more social capital and better food security and food sovereignty. Not only did you share your insights – but you were also pioneers in this approach in your area, and at times struggled to make it all work. It is our greatest hope that the learning from this project will encourage many to do similar group collaboration, share and be active together.

We will step back so that you can start acting ...

Kind regards, the author team

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIC FARMING AND FARMER FAMILY LEARNING GROUPS FOR RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

1.1 What is Organic Farming?

Organic farming is the process of producing food and fiber focusing on conservation of natural resources and maintaining fertile soils, clean water and rich biodiversity naturally. In organic farming, we aim to build up healthy fertile soil, which can produce healthy plants and give feed to healthy animals and healthy humans. Organic farming is a way of farming which is based on locally available resources and avoid chemicals and genetically modified organisms. In organic farming, agro-ecological farming practices are used consciously to reach good health at all levels. Some examples of relevant agroecological methods are given in the figure on the next page.

1.1.1 Organic Farming is Based on Four Principles

The International Federation of Organic Farming Movements (IFOAM) formulated four important principles for organic farming. These four principles guide the way an organic farm is organized, and in every context the principles have to be practiced in ways, which are relevant in the particular conditions of that context...: The four principles are:

1. The Principle of Ecology: Organic Agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them
2. The Principle of Care: Organic Agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations of the environment
3. The Principle of Fairness: Organic Agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities
4. The Principle of Health: Organic Agriculture should sustain the health of soil, plant, animal, humans and planet as one and indivisible

1.1.2 Is Organic Farming Just Farming without Using Chemical Pesticides and Fertilizers?

In organic farming, nobody can use chemical fertilizer and pesticides. We can give natural fertilizer in terms of compost, manure and materials from plants, soils, animals and humans (e.g. animal urine). We can also give natural pesticides produced from natural materials. A farming system however, is not organic just because no chemicals were used. A farming system is organic if the non-chemical approach is combined with the conscious use of agro-ecological methods and practices, which enrich the whole system and makes the land more fertile with time.

Figure 1: Examples of agro-ecological methods which can be used in organic farming. A lot of manuals go more in-depth – the photos below are just some examples.



Compost making manure using plant material



Trench digging (and planting stabilizer grass or shrubs on edges) to prevent soil erosion



Mulching - keeps fertility and soil moisture



Diversified gardens and farms



Artimisia

Tephrosia spp

Tithonia

Grow herbs for bio-pesticides, medicinal use and plant fertilizer



Improved stove – saves wood fuel and gives less smoke



Water catchment in mandalas

1.1.3 Is Organic Farming always Certified?

No, organic farming is defined by the way that it is practiced. The guiding principles from IFOAM can be used to evaluate whether a farming system is truly organic. The organic certification is based on rules which reflect the principles. There are many good organic farms which are not certified, for many reasons, for example that it can be very expensive to have a farm certified, and most smallholder farmers cannot afford this. But the farm can still be a good organic farm where the organic principles are used and where good agro-ecological methods are practiced.

1.1.4 What is the Difference between Organic Farming and Traditional Farming?

Traditional farming is many ways of farming, based on practices which have existed for centuries among different communities, and are very different between different parts of the world. Many call it natural farming, and when it works in an ideal way, there is a good balance between the farming practices and the surrounding nature. Traditional farming is often based on indigenous knowledge – and much of this knowledge can be used also in organic farming. Organic farming however, is not the same as traditional farming. In organic farming, the farmer constantly aims at feeding the soil, and leaving the land more fertile for the next generation. This is not necessarily the case in traditional farming. Many traditional farmers practice for example the slash-and-burn system, which is not a good agro-ecological practice. It has worked for centuries in many places because there was plenty of land and therefore farmers could leave some land to rest and recover, while farming elsewhere. When there is high population pressure, this is no longer possible. Farmers have to plan their farming, so that they can grow a lot of food and still keep the land fertile.

1.1.5 Food Production Increases in Organic Farming

Many people say that organic farming gives a lower yield than non-organic farming. It is true that in some industrialized farming systems with heavy use of chemical inputs, the yield is very high, and this level cannot be reached in organic farming systems, especially at the beginning of conversion to organic farming. The point is that the soil becomes exhausted in these farming systems, where no nutrients are given back to the soil but rely on increasing amounts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides to be utilized by the crops. The glaring fact however, shown and demonstrated in very many studies throughout the world, that the use of organic methods makes the yield increase dramatically. It is complete nonsense to state that organic farming gives a lower yield than nonorganic farming. After complete conversion, organic yields increase consistently and are sustainable.

1.1.6 Organic Farming is Sustainable Farming

Sustainability includes that something is sustainable both seen from an environmental, an economic, a social and an institutional point of view. When organic farming is practiced to the

principles, all these four aspects are covered, and therefore we can call organic farming a sustainable way of farming.

- Environmentally: because we feed the soil and keep the land fertile. In organic farming we do not use methods which destroy the future generations' chances of producing the food they need.
- Economically: because the yield increases and we produce more food on the same piece of land, when using organic methods appropriately and relevantly.
- Socially and institutionally: because organic farming is based on a principle of fairness, and sharing the natural resources which should be available for everybody. In organic farming, some challenges cannot be fought alone by an individual farmer. Whole communities have to collaborate when planning irrigation from a river or a stream, or when limiting the amount of insects which can transmit diseases to the animals. Institutionally, we can see that the use of locally available resources requires a democratic structure also in the institutions, and it involves more decision makers and the farmers themselves in participating in forming policies which are fair. In other words, organic farming is a sustainable way of farming, covering all aspects of what contributes to a system being sustainable.

1.2 The Farmer Family Learning Groups as an Approach to Improved Food Security in the Households

The Farmer Family Learning groups is a type of Farmer Field Schools (FFS), which we also called 'Organic FFS'. In this manual, Farmer Family Learning Groups is an extension approach built on principles of adult education and experiential learning processes. The Farmer Family Learning Group concept is based on the belief that each farmer's field is unique. The activities in the group are focused on the participating farmers' own farms and not a demonstration plot or few demonstration farms. The Farmer Family Learning Group encourage a farmer to gain insight in his or her own system, respect the farmers' own priorities, and enable farmers to proceed on their own even when the facilitator leaves.

The general concepts of Farmer Field Schools have been developed over the last decades and used in different forms. In many contexts, it is an approach to farmer groups for common training and learning in practice, in combination with forming credit and saving schemes. The approach has often been used in integrated pest management training, and often in relation to a specific commodity, where curricula for training have been developed and the farmers follow a special training program. Organic Denmark, NOGAMU and SATNET analysed the situation together with a number of different organizations related to SATNET and NOGAMU, and it became very clear that farmers had different needs, and organizations had different scopes, and therefore the team had to form a framework for working and developing together with farmers, which fitted into every farmer's situation in all ways. Only the farmers themselves in every context can guide this framework, so the team built this into the approach and the training of facilitators. The

facilitators need to be able to manage this flexibility together with the farmers, with whom they work. We called our approach Organic Farmer Field Schools or Organic FFS and now refer to it as ‘Farmer Family Learning Groups’ – because it involves whole families, and it is a process of continuous learning in addition to working together, marketing together and having all kinds of activities together which support the community and all the involved households.

1.3 Why is a Farmer Family Learning Group (or an Organic FFS) Particularly Relevant for Organic Farming Development?

A Farmer Family Learning Group in our approach is a group of farmers, who by the help of a facilitator, go together to develop their farms, improve livelihood and food security in their families, develop and learn together and build up social capital in their local communities. The Farmer Field School should be organized in a way which fits best to the needs of the participants at any given time and place. If the participants choose their approach they take ownership over their own development and commit themselves to the togetherness in the group.

As discussed above, organic farming is based on the conscious use of agro-ecological methods. This requires a lot of knowledge and skills. Some traditional farming methods are also relevant for organic farming, and this also requires knowledge about these methods. Whenever knowledge is required, it is relevant to create situations where knowledge can be exchanged, developed and debated. In a group of farmers working like a Farmer Family Learning Group, people go together and the pool of knowledge and experience in a group of farmers is tremendous. Each farmer is an expert in his or her own farm and farming practice, and if open to change and challenges, these practices can be developed. All the experiences in a farmer group will be debated and new common knowledge is developed. Knowledge intensive systems like organic farming therefore, are so relevant to develop in groups of farmers, who need this knowledge.

Organic farming also requires labor. It definitely requires more labor to make compost and take it to the garden, and to mulch and weed and work with the soil in an organic system, than the use of chemicals. In many Farmer Family Learning Groups, people go together and help each other with these big tasks. Twenty to thirty persons can make a whole banana plantation well maintained in few hours. This is much more encouraging than working the same amount of hours alone on one’s own land. The social aspect of working together in a group adds to building up of social capital in a local community.

CHAPTER TWO

FORMING A SUCCESSFUL FARMER FAMILY LEARNING GROUP AND HOW IT WORKS

2.1 Different Focus Areas and Directions of Being and Working Together in a Farmer Family Learning Group

Most Farmer Family Learning Groups have multiple purposes and develop with regard to many different aspects at the same time, for example:

- working together and learning new things,
- making savings and credits, and
- marketing together.

All farmers in an Farmer Family Learning Group group need to involve themselves and participate actively. This means that all the farms in an Farmer Family Learning Group group are open to meetings in the group, and the group rotate between the participating farms. This rotating system, coupled with the small number of farmers (most often 12-25 families per group) makes communication easy amongst them; builds cohesiveness; give the members complementary skills; helps the members to have a common purpose; helps the members to set goals both for their family and in the group; provides the members with a common approach; and makes them mutually accountable.

The group will also be dynamic and change the ways in which they work together over time. This should be chosen by the group and guided by their needs. Therefore, the group must hold meetings regularly – for example once every half year or monthly – where they can spend time to discuss their visions and directions of working.

2.2 Examples of Aims and Elements of the Work in a Farmer Family Learning Group

2.2.1 Working Together to Improve the Members' Farms

The common effort involving 20-30 group members to improve something on one farm can help the farmer move very far in just one day. This is very encouraging and stimulating for everybody. Men and women may have different tasks – e.g. the men doing the primary tillage on a piece of land, while the women carry compost or construct an improved stove. They rotate therefore between farms so that they meet on a group member's farm e.g. once per week. This rotating system in the Farmer Family Learning Group allows every household to benefit from the whole group working together. All members must have the appropriate tools, e.g. hoes, also for the children who participate. If many households are involved in an Farmer Family Learning Group, it makes sense

to split the group so that the group work on 2-3 farms on the same day, because this also allows everybody to benefit in a growing season of for example 2 months of a certain crop and allows participation of all members in the discussions than working in an extremely big group.

2.2.2 Sharing Resources and Enterprises

Some Farmer Family Learning Groups start by cultivating a common piece of land together. It can be a common crop for marketing, either on a piece of land owned by an organisation to which the group is connected, or to the Farmer Family Learning Group, or it can be on a piece of land offered by one of the member farmers. It can also be nursery beds with vegetables seedlings, or making banana suckers for the group members. Many groups acquire donations from organisations or government programs like NAADS, and therefore have pigs, goats or other animals together. They can be taken care of by one group member, or they can be given to one group member who then will give the offspring to other group members.

2.2.3 Making Common Investments

A group can decide to invest together, e.g. in a poultry house for their common hens, or in a milling machine, a water source with clean water or tools to rotate between farms. This requires trust between farmer families and the facilitators should ensure that there is constructive collaboration and feed-back, and that the common resources are managed well.

2.2.4 Learning Together to Create Common Knowledge

The group members represent a huge amount of experience and knowledge, and they benefit from open discussions and sharing of this. It requires a conscious effort to take time and have peace in the group to take common farm walks to learn from host farmers, see things together, make excursions to relevant demonstration farms or gardens, and to discuss what they have learned from their own experiences in the group. It is the facilitators' role to make sure that time is given in the group to share and build up knowledge.

2.2.5 Make Savings and Credit Together

Most groups make savings and credit schemes together. It can be organised in different ways – e.g. as mentioned above, the group can decide to invest together in shared resources. They can also make funds for loans, and group members take loans with or without paying interest, which they can use for the families, e.g. school fees, farm improvements, health care or any investment they want for the individual. Some groups also have emergency credits, where the members very quickly can get a loan for immediate use e.g. in case of emergency or need for facilitating a funeral.

2.2.6 Solving Problems Together

When the level of trust and commitment is high in a group, some groups have the capacity to solve problems between individual group members together, or within families. A group that is able to

solve problems has many other advantages for other forms of associations. Nevertheless, this requires much from the group members, as well as the facilitators, but it adds to the social capital and trust in the whole group. Members can even intervene in conflicts at household level if a member family is affected or involved.

2.2.7 Marketing Together

Many groups start joint marketing initiatives together, based on different models of working together. These initiatives can involve organising bulking the produce, transporting the produce to a town/ trading centre, and require skills to link up with business partners and plan for the whole group to be able to meet the agreements of supplying a buyer with what is agreed on with the buyer. It can be risky, but bring good income to the member families and/or the whole group (some groups choose to give some of the income to the savings, to be able to invest in the forthcoming season).

2.2.8 Raising a Voice Together

Many groups become strong enough to organise and raise a voice to local politicians and the local government, or even at higher levels. They can address issues like getting access to more healthy water, better roads, address problems with thieves and justice in the local area, or public transport. This could in future become serious advocacy energies that can influence government programs and interventions.

2.3 Different Phases of a Group's life

2.3.1 The first phase: the young group

A group is established with some goals which the group members define together or are attracted to. The group members need to find each other and gain a common understanding of why the group exist and what they can reach together. At this stage the facilitator is active in supporting this process, and helps the group to exchange and share the knowledge which exists in the group.

2.3.2 The mature phase: the group consolidates itself

The mature phase can last for very many years. In this phase the group may change focus many times, and the group members become more and more bonded to each other, and the trust at this stage should be very big. As the group members gain a common understanding of their aims and build up trust and social capital in the group, they can start working more and more together, share businesses and make credits and savings. It is important that each group set their own agenda for how and what they focus on in their collaboration, and that they are aware about the possibilities to change focus and still work together. In the maturing phase, the group may not need a facilitator from an organisation, but can choose a person amongst the group members, who can become a trained facilitator and gradually take over the facilitation of the group.

2.4 The Dynamic Farmer Family Learning Group: the group will change over time

The group will change over time, as discussed below, and in chapter 4 about social capital. A group can become ‘dull’ and the members feel that they do not reach so much together anymore. As discussed in chapter 4, they can choose to break up the group, or they can rejuvenate and find new goals or directions together. Therefore, as long as all group members feel comfortable with the development, a group will develop over time. The flexibility of the group as well as the dynamic development over time is the beauty of this approach – this is what allows the group members to take ownership, because they will shape the group and the work in accordance with what is needed at any present time. A group with a long term plan will normally last long compared to short term goal GROUPS for example aiming to slaughter a bull for christmass may imply that the group will start late in the year and end late in the year (December groups).

2.5 The Daily Life of a Group

The group rotates between farms. All members must have their turn, where they open up the farm and the group help them to improve the farm. We encourage whole families to participate, and when possible also the children and youngsters.

The host farmer decides where he / she / the family needs help and the group works on this. It can be constructing a goat’s house, clearing land, weeding, mulching, making improved stove or anything else which the group has agreed on as ‘things they can do together’ and are necessary to improve their livelihoods and organic farms.

Most groups work in a way where they meet at certain days and have a certain rhythm. The following are examples from the Rwenzori project; but each group has to decide for themselves what suits them best:

- The group meet to work together on early Saturday mornings and then they meet up till midday, where they share some little food or refreshment, while they discuss issues for the host farm, solve problems together, discuss issues and make savings and credits.
- The group meet at a farm to work together on a certain week day, and hold a meeting twice in a month to make savings and credits and discuss their common interests, share on marketing issues and challenges among group members.
- The group meet and split up to work in groups on three different farms for 3 hours. After this, they go together and discuss issues of common interest for the group, and make savings and credits together.

2.6 What needs to be present among the members in a well working Farmer Family Learning Group?

To be able to work together as a group, certain characteristics need to be present. The facilitator must be aware that the group actually feel the existence of these characteristics, or they work actively to improve the group. Otherwise the group may fall apart and fail. We experience that these characteristics are the following, and they are interlinked:

Trust: Group members must trust each other. Household members from the participating families should of course never do things to each other or in the local community, which can break this trust. That means, e.g. children should never go into neighbour farms to take anything without permission. Trust also means that the group members should trust the capacity and resources of the group to solve problems and help each other.

Openness: Every family participating in the group opens up their own farm to other families, and is open to discuss their own problems, challenges, and ideas on vision for the whole group.

Ownership: Each member must take ownership over own development, and take equal responsibility together with the other group members over the group's development. No other can do this, and if each member does not own the group, it will fall apart.

Commitment: All group members must be committed to the group, meaning that they should be willing to contribute to the development of each other's farms and the whole group and sacrifice something to the benefit of the group – and trust that others will do the same.

Sharing: Knowledge and experience must be shared openly. The group members must acknowledge that the knowledge among the group members is valuable for everybody, and that all aspects of knowledge can benefit others. Problems and challenges are also shared – and the group members will experience that problems become smaller and benefits become bigger when shared.

Equality: Members of a group may have different farm sizes, different capacities, different skills and different resources both human and physical. Across all these differences, each group member still participates on equal level with all the other group members. No group member is more worth or have a higher status than others as humans, be it men, women or children.

Respect: All group members who commit themselves to the attitudes expressed above, also will show respect for other group members, and this is needed in any group which has the ambition to last. This involves that members speak respectfully to each other, and respect the individual goals and personalities of each other, also when being open and maybe even disagreeing with certain statements. Respectful dialogue in openness leads to common development and learning.

Empathy: All group members should be able to understand and be conscious of each other's limitations and difficulties.

2.7 Members can enter or leave an Farmer Family Learning Group

A long lasting group will always be dynamic to a certain extent. Members will move to other places, die or for some reasons want to leave the group. Others may be attracted, looking at what is going on among neighbours who are group members.

The group must take basic decisions on the development they wish for. This means that they must take decisions on the desirable size of the group, and what happens if the group becomes bigger: will the group prefer to split into two groups e.g. based on distances between farms, or will the group prefer to stimulate and maybe participate actively to help a new group to form itself?

If including more members, the group also needs to be clear about the selection of these members. They need to maintain a good group dynamics, and this means that not everybody can just enter. They must decide the criteria for including the new members. Examples of relevant criteria can be:

- The new members are eager to adopt the agro-ecological farm practices
- The new members share the interests, visions and goals of the group, e.g. to improve farms with non-chemical inputs
- The new members are committed to help each other on equal basis and to contribute to help the local community,
- The new members want to include the whole family in the group.

2.8 The Role of a Facilitator

All the above points to some key values and attitudes, which guide a good facilitator. The role of the facilitator is discussed more in detail in a separate chapter, but it is important to highlight the following here:

- a- The facilitator does not tell the group members what to do, but is constantly aware of letting the group members direct the development in the group, and let all group members be heard and remain focused on their goals and principles. All ideas of the individuals are important. No idea or individual is more important than another. This requires respect and empathy.
- b- The group members must be encouraged to work together to reach the group's goals. This requires that the facilitator has the cooperative skills to encourage this.
- c- The individual facilitator and the group must be honest and open about each other's feelings, values and priorities.
- d- The group should assume responsibility for the solutions and their implications. The facilitator should be able to take the responsibility to facilitate the development of joint responsibility among group members.
- e- Flexibility: The facilitator should be sensitive to the needs of the individuals and adjust the schedule and process as required.

CHAPTER THREE

TAKING OWNERSHIP

3.1 Taking ownership as individual and group: a necessity for development

You develop when you learn something new. This learning leads to new ways of viewing things and it empowers to implement and engage in new practices. But learning does not take place, if a person is not motivated, and if a person does not trust that he or she can actually change and develop and improve. To develop, you have to be motivated. Without motivation, development and learning does not take place. All this can be stimulated in certain environments, and be stimulated by certain people and in groups, but the basic motivation is within each person. The major change must happen within each person, each FFLG group member, if development should take place in his or her farm, home and family and take root. Nobody can develop anybody else more than him- or herself. This is the major reason why it is so important that every person takes ownership. Every person must take the situation in his or her own hand and start improving, and move to another point, following a vision. When a person takes ownership, he or she can direct the route for own development. The FFLG therefore, should stimulate every member as well as the whole group as a group, to take ownership over their own development.

3.2 Stop blaming others. Stop waiting for others to do things for you. Start doing something yourself to move to the point where you want to be

It is easy to blame others for where you are in a life situation. And it is true, that most persons start from a point which they have not chosen themselves. A person can be born into poverty or be surrounded by lack of resources and privileges, or be born into a very privileged life in terms of material resources. Many persons react by blaming others for their life situation. This is easy, because it releases the person from taking any responsibility and justifies their poor situation. But it does not help the person! Some people also react by waiting – may be a whole life – for others to come and help them. This is very much stimulated by the donor culture which has dominated the relationship between powerful rich countries and under-privileged countries. This strategy – to lean back and wait for somebody to come and help, and especially to come and just give some inputs sometimes completely without building up the sufficient capacity to manage the inputs and move on from there – also seems easy, and removes the responsibility from the person who claims to ‘be in need of help’. But it still does not help the person. On the opposite, it rather makes that person more dependent on others and the so-called donors, and it definitely makes the person less empowered, submissive and more of a beggar.

No matter what a person is born in to, it is still up to each person to start developing from that point. This includes building up necessary knowledge, resources and skills, among others. The question is where to start when you want to change your life.

3.3 The FFLG approach: one way of starting to move together

As clearly stated in chapter 4 of this manual, nobody can change the environment which can keep you down, alone. It is necessary to go together, and it strengthens everybody to go together and start managing an environment which can be difficult in many ways. In this manual, the need for knowledge, capacity and skills is emphasised, and this is a big step and can be stimulated in a group. Any group of people, who start focusing together and pull their knowledge together, discovers how much knowledge and resources they have. When combining knowledge, new discoveries are made, and these discoveries are shared between all who participate in the process. The group start building something unique together: namely knowledge which arose from the group itself, and which is relevant to all group members. This is an important step for a group to take ownership over their development.

3.4 How does a Farmer Family Learning Group take ownership?

A FFLG group take ownership when they form the group and decide to do something to commonly improve themselves. They take ownership over the development in the entire group when they care about each other, and help each other, and let others help themselves. When the members start sharing responsibilities and commit themselves to the common development, they take ownership not only over their own individual development, but over the development of a whole little community. Therefore, the characteristics mentioned in Chapter 2 are so important and must be present for the group to really take ownership and responsibility for development both at individual, group and community levels.

3.5 To take ownership, the approach to FFLG must be flexible

Every person, who wants to improve, has his or her own background and starting point. In each local community, certain conditions are present which may be unique for this particular community. These can be related to market, weather, geography, history (many immigrants or previous conflicts), and many other things. Therefore, the group has to identify these conditions, including the constraints and challenges for improving livelihood, and the opportunities for the group.

Therefore, each group has to be able to shape the mode of operation and choose their own focus areas in accordance with their conditions, challenges and needs in the group. The facilitator needs to

be able to guide this process and not try to shape each group into a uniform program or way of working together.

In the case of the Organic FFLG groups in Rwenzori, new settlers surpassed the development of locals by realising that they had to work harder because they were living among a people who had already established themselves, so they had to catch up – and they could do that in a group together by taking responsibility for their own development.

3.6 The flexible approach is still based on common values

Because the surroundings vary and people are different, and the combination of people in a group is different, each FFLG group must be allowed to develop in accordance with their own identified needs, and find their direction based on their own starting point and perception of where they are at any given time. It is important to emphasise that the values and characteristics discussed in chapter 2, such as respect, openness, mutual equality etc., still need to be fundamental for any well-working group, and that these values and characteristics form the very basis for a group to find its own direction and way of working together.

CHAPTER FOUR

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL CAPITAL IN FARMER FAMILY LEARNING GROUPS FOR ORGANIC DEVELOPMENT

Mette Vaarst & Professor John C. Munene

4.1 What is social capital?

Social capital is when the individual sacrifices something on short term basis for the community to the long term benefit of everybody and the community.

Social capital is

- Voluntary and given free of charge
- For the purpose of common gain
- Not selfish and not completely free / non-selfish
- Gain in the future for everybody
- Invest in the community and take from the community

Social capital is also about the capacity of a community to mobilize resources

- Some new developments can start with an individual but can survive only if the community catches it.
- If people do not catch it, it will fail
- Social capital is transforming the values in your head and makes them become vibrant.

Social capital demands an effort.

4.2 What does social capital produce?

- Networking
- Gain for everybody when people do things together for example
 - o if people in a village make cough medicine together
 - o boosting community efforts against poultry thieves by encouraging all village mates to keep poultry
 - o common road construction
 - o when people in a community keep goats together. In the beginning it may seem expensive – but in the long term not. And sell them with advice and give the new owners knowledge.



A number of villagers had built a trench together (see the photo). This is a valuable resource which can improve the use of land for the whole community, but it was not fully exploited. The FFLG group made much better use of it within the first year of their existence as a group.

4.3 Cooperation is more enriching than competition

Competition isolates people and makes them focus on their own benefits only, and feel that if others gain then they may lose something themselves – which is definitely not true.

Cooperation brings people together and strengthens networks which help everybody.

Example: the woman Hajati

- She was successful growing her vegetables, but villagers considered her to be a witch
- She was almost kicked out of the village for that reason
- She organized a meeting to show other women why she was successful and share her knowledge
- In the end, she brought the organization Africa-2000 into the village
- She was finally accepted and safe

THAT IS SOCIAL CAPITAL

Example from the book 'Escaping from Behavioural Poverty in Uganda. The Role of Culture and Social Capital' by J.C. Munene, S. Schwartz & G.M. Kibanja, 2005.

4.4 How to stimulate building of social capital in a group of farmers in practice?

It is a challenge to facilitate a development where people start building up social capital together. Many farmer groups are formed because people live in the same area or have same interests, and that is not enough – people in a group should be interested in changing their lives and invest in the group with the expectation to the long term benefit of everybody – otherwise it does not work: select people with same fundamental values!

- Give time and work with those who are interested, Then others will join.
- The rural community can give the framework and direct the needs, e.g. need for security, a road, manual labour, and/or common marketing.
- Share resources in the local community
- Offer services for / on free basis
- Promote team work and networking
- Foster interpersonal skills
- If people focus on money, maybe it is a wrong group; start with another focus. Money can come in later.
- Start one group – move on to other groups

4.5 Moving out of poverty through interaction

Moving out of poverty does not start with cash. When you just pour money into a system, it evaporates. Cash is the outcome of good decisions and practice.

Moving out of poverty can happen when people interact:

‘An individual is learning by interacting with others. Getting out of poverty is not action, it is interaction. If you think you are going to act yourself out of poverty you are probably making a mistake. You interact yourselves out of poverty, in a group of people whom you understand and you act together and you get out. Because action alone is simply not enough, because it’s the environment that keeps you poor, and you are not alone, you cannot manage the environment as an individual. Once you interact with others then the individual customizes the new learning she subsequently uses to solve the problems towards survival. So getting into a group and people can work together is central to getting out of poverty.’

(Munene, Oct. 2008)



Social capital builds on mutual trust and sharing. When a group of people genuinely want to help each other, they all benefit. They base their network on common values: they all want to move out of poverty, rather than common interests (e.g. that they all have a banana plantation).

Social capital does not stop there with collaboration and helping – it is also thinking forward together as a group.

4.6 Understand poverty: do not focus on poverty indicators but poverty carriers: ‘what do people do to keep themselves poor?’

Poverty indicators

- A poverty indicator is nothing more than a sign of poverty; a figure or statistics e.g. ‘% illiterate’ or ‘a certain expected age of life’. Often, the general debate on poverty does not focus on individuals but on bigger structures like market and indicators. They are static and do not include action.

Poverty carriers

- A poverty carrier involve an action or a decision which can explain poverty and which the poor carries with him or her. The main question is: *what do people do to keep themselves poor?* Most of this can be changed. The following were mentioned as poverty carriers:

- Laziness
- Envy
- Selfishness
- Greediness
- Poor decision making
- Poor resource management and lack of proper resource utilization
- Undirected expenditure
- Low level of education
- Lack of information
- Lack of respect for the families
- Irresponsible gender planning in families
- Example: successful harvest sold and goes to husband who uses it for public relations. That is a poverty carrier which makes families poorer and poorer. Why does he make those decisions?

Examples of poverty carriers given by the participants at the course in Kasese, June 2009

4.7 Wrong decisions keep people poor

Often, people blame others for their poverty. They maybe think that if there was a market, then people can move out of poverty; this is not true. At least not in cases where they behave in ways which make them waste the resources and money anyway.

Focus on ‘what do you do to keep yourself poor?’

- The decisions that the poor make can make them more and more poor
- Much poverty is a result of wrong decisions
- Many decisions are about resources that could have been useful: **RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE BUT PEOPLES’ DECISIONS MAKE THEM WASTED**
- Poverty recycles itself and becomes very deep



The solution is to turn things around and ask: ***How can you get the best out of your resources?*** How can a group of farmers together get the best out of their resources?

- Start little savings
- Even if you do not know how to help exactly: look for resources in the nearby surroundings
- Question: will money be used in a focused manner if brought? In most cases the answer is NO because poverty is in peoples’ mind. Moving out of poverty will therefore also happen in peoples’ minds.

A decision may be understandable but it can still make things worse, e.g.

- Leaving the rural community for urban life has made many people very poor
- Leaving a husband that drinks can make a woman even poorer

One of the wrong decisions poor people often make is to think that they can move out of poverty alone (as indicated in section 4.5 above). This is often not possible, and they only benefit by interacting with others, learning with others and networking. Therefore the first challenge is to understand what it is in a person’s life that makes them say ‘Don’t interfere in my poverty’, and to convince them that they need to work together with others to move somewhere, and they need to commit themselves to it. Good advice was given to convince people:

- Show them your own farm which is a result of group work and learning,
- Let agitators for ‘use-the-money-behaviour’ visit farms where credits and savings have let to improvements and let them see what good it does,
- Call or invite somebody else to stimulate people in a village to think.
- Accept that people make smaller savings and spend some money, e.g. in a womans’ group so that the husband does not get impatient with the group, or e.g. for Christmas celebrations.

4.8 People can learn and you - as facilitator for FFLG groups - can help them do it. What is the learning about?

Learning can take place in two different ways, and both are necessary:

Interpersonal:

You get together and work on a problem which is relevant for you all => learning can take place. Focus on the trainee. Start with which problems do people want to solve? Some problems are results of other things (e.g. lack of money as result of bad decisions: use resources), so you have to find the problem which you need to target in order to solve the problem in focus.

Intrapersonal:

When each individual takes ownership over the knowledge that is shared and is able to internalize knowledge got from somewhere and use it in own practice.

Design your facilitation to ensure that intrapersonal learning takes place

- The learning should take place in peoples' own home and farms
- The group should always follow up on whether the intrapersonal learning has taken place and how it is used – and if the learner has met any challenges
- The individual who learns need to be committed => selected on basis of that

All participants should be involved in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. All participants should be exposed to impressions and discussions all the time.

4.9 It is important to think *FUTURE* when establishing a group

Friendships are formed within FFS groups, and people help each other and develop. It is very important to make sure that the group always moves somewhere and is forward directed: 'We want to learn, develop and work together towards a common goal and based on common values'.

4.10 When a group needs new inspiration

At a certain point or level, all the knowledge existing in a group has been used and they have learnt together and feel that they cannot move further. No group can exist for more than a limited period without new skills, competencies, or information from outside. When you get nothing more out of it you will get out unless the group is saved by bringing new stimulus. That means that this group now ia in the zone of proximal development. Two things can happen to the group:

- Decay
- Rejuvenate

What to do if you want to save the group?

- Identify the time where it starts to decay (e.g., people become tired, drop out and the same things are repeated)
- Help the group go beyond their first objectives – setting new objectives or new goals
- Motivate group members to further developments, as they focus on overall objectives
- Give them alternative frameworks
- Inspirations from outside: exchange visits, new experiments, demonstrations, new responsibilities and challenges.

4.11 Why is focus on social capital particularly relevant in the development of organic farming?

- Organic farming demands knowledge about eco-systems and how to take care of natural resources – and this means that knowledge, learning and experience exchange is fundamental to develop organic farming in a certain area.
- Organic farming can be quite labour intensive, and it is a benefit if farmers in a community can work together.
- Agro-ecological methods also include terrace building, water trenches etc. depending on the local conditions – and whole communities need to be involved in organising those initiatives.
- Organic farming allows people to find/take resources in own village.
- Organic farming can sometimes give access to markets – common marketing can work if social capital is there.
- Organic farming does not rely on chemical inputs and expensive seed that are bought from other countries, but on local resources. When labour force, knowledge and benefits of development are shared, everybody wins in a community and as a group.
- Organic farming is farming in accordance with local conditions – and therefore the context relevant methods need to be identified by the people living in a given area. Their knowledge which they have put together through their experiences is needed in order to evaluate and discuss contextual specific issues.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROLES OF THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL FACILITATORS OF A FARMER FAMILY LEARNING GROUP

5.1 What is an External and an Internal Facilitator?

In the Rwenzori Experience approach we have worked in a structure where an external facilitator is involved in the initial phase, where the group builds up its identity as a group. The group members then appoint an internal facilitator, who will be able to stay with them on everyday basis, and who is a part of the group itself. In Box 5.1 below, the two types of facilitators are described.

Box 5.1: The characteristics of the External and the Internal Facilitator.

<u>The external facilitator</u>	<u>The internal facilitator</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Educated facilitator, who works for an organization, often comes from outside the local community, and has the specific task to facilitate the group through the initial phase.- Supervising and guiding the internal facilitator- May have a background of agricultural advisor, but only starts ‘training’ on request from the farmers in addition to the facilitation.- May stay as a kind of consultant for the internal facilitator and the group, also after having pulled out as facilitator for the group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- A member farmer of the group, appointed by the group- Takes over gradually the daily facilitation of the group, supervised and trained by the external facilitator- Will participate in the local or district based network of facilitators who supervise each other- Will need to be stimulated and trained, and this is up to the group/internal facilitator/external facilitator?

In practice we experienced mixed roles of the facilitators in the Rwenzori project, e.g. external facilitators also being farmers within the same group as they facilitated and therefore more or less continued as ‘internal facilitators’ and members of the group at the same time, meaning that the

internal facilitator was a kind of replacement facilitator when the external facilitator was not present.

5.2 Creating an Enabling Environment for Learning and Changing Practices

In chapter two, we stated that some of the values and characteristics of the process in a Farmer Family Learning Group must be trust, openness, commitment, sharing, equality, respect and ownership, and in chapter 3, we further discussed the crucial importance of the groups to take ownership. All these characteristics form an environment for the group members, in which they can feel safe also to explain their doubts and fears and hopes, and to learn together, and develop their practices. In other words: a well working group needs an environment which enables them to learn, develop and change attitudes and practices from which they can benefit.

It is a major task of a facilitator to create this enabling environment for the entire group, and this is the case for both the external and the internal facilitator.

5.3 The alliance between facilitator and group members is about ownership

The facilitator – external or internal – cannot take the sole responsibility to create an enabling environment for learning. All group members have to be active, enthusiastic and want this, and the key to this is taking ownership and be committed. If the group members want the development which is stimulated in a group, then they will show commitment by following the democratic approaches which are facilitated by the external and internal facilitators. They will acknowledge that the facilitator is a partner who will stimulate them to move together as a group. The bond between the facilitator



and the group members is an alliance where the group members give the facilitator the task to guide them. When they turn up for a meeting in time, then this does not happen because the facilitator wants this, but because the group itself has given the facilitator the task to make sure that he or she can facilitate their own development.

5.4 The group needs different types of support from the facilitators at different times

The facilitator is also confronted with different challenges and expectations at different times of a group's existence:

Phase of establishing or change: In the phase of establishing a group, and when major changes take



place in the group structure (such as many new members enter), the group dynamic and building of trust, respect, equality and the whole atmosphere within the group needs special attention. In a newly formed group, where the members do not know each other well yet, a good facilitator will spend time listening and asking questions to the group to make sure that every member feels comfortable in the group. Sometimes it can imply that the facilitator approach a group member individually between group meetings, to make sure that everybody

considers themselves to be an important member of the group and feel well.

Consolidated everyday life of a harmonious group: If a group is in a phase, where they are happy about their mode of operation and working together, they need facilitation to the practical planning of meetings and selection of host farms. However, the facilitator must continuously be aware of general group dynamics, and ensure that everybody participates and can speak freely in the group.

When learning new things or formulating new plans or ambitions: The group needs knowledge from outside to both understand the background for moving in a new direction and to acquire skills to reach there. The facilitator should then use the network of organizations, contacts and other facilitators to find the necessary knowledge and resources to do this.

Crisis management: If a crisis occurs in the group, the group needs special support to negotiate themselves out of a difficult situation. The facilitator may need to discuss these issues with colleague facilitators or others, because it can be difficult. It can be both crises related to the group itself (e.g. that some members want to engage in a business which others feel are risky), or it can be a participating family or quarrel between two group members. Depending on the situation, the facilitator will use different methods, either involving others, different ways of discussing it in the group or with individual group members.

A tired group: A group can reach a point where they feel that nothing really happens, and they do not learn much more, or they are just stuck with each other, as explained in chapter 4 about social capital, where Dr. Munene classifies this stage as the so-called 'zone of proximal development'. It can be recognized by the way the group members start dropping out or become less active and enthusiastic. Here, difficult decisions may be necessary, such as dissolving the group. Another solution can be to rejuvenate it with new initiatives, directions and ambitions. Maybe the group can move into a new phase by setting new goals and maybe work together in new ways, search for new knowledge or include new members.

5.5 The difference between a facilitator and a trainer

From the above, it becomes clear that a facilitator has a role which is very different from the role of a trainer. Based on experiences in the Rwenzori project, we defined the differences in the ways which are listed in Box 5.2 below.

Box 5.2: Difference in Roles of a Trainer and a Facilitator

<u>A trainer</u>	<u>A facilitator</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A trainer is a person who has acquired particular skills, knowledge, practices and delivers these to learners so that they are informed and maybe even gain insight into new principle and practices - Often sets the goals for the training - Lectures and use class room teaching - Will often demonstrate ‘what is generally best for everybody’ and let participants struggle with trying to figure out how they can implement these ‘best practices’ themselves at home - Will bring new knowledge or want to implement new methods in an area - Will feel that the task is fulfilled when having delivered the knowledge and not be so interested if the subject which was taught actually also was learnt by the participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A facilitator is a person who helps other people to learn from each other, guides them through learning processes and helps the group to identify their problems, potential solutions and how to implement these solutions. A facilitator creates an enabling environment for the participants to learn through the activities which are performed in the group. - Guides the group to set their own goals - Facilitate self discovery in the participants own environments - Will first stimulate the participants to exchange existing knowledge amongst themselves, and only bring new knowledge on explicit request - Will follow up and ask for lessons learnt and be interested in the development of the common learning in the group

It is important that the facilitator thinks of him- or herself as a facilitator, and not a trainer, even though many facilitators have a background where they are educated as agricultural trainers. Being a facilitator is vital especially for adult learning and sustainable practice of acquired/enhanced skills

CHAPTER SIX

NETWORKS BETWEEN FARMER GROUPS AND FACILITATORS

6.1 Why exchange of experience always is valuable

In Farmer Family Learning Groups, knowledge is created in the group when it is needed. The solution to a given problem is rarely coming from somewhere or somebody outside the group. There are more reasons for this: first, resources are scarce so paying somebody to come and teach or advice is difficult. But, secondly and most important: any solution to a problem must be found in the context where the problem is, and therefore local conditions and knowledge must be the main elements for any solution or direction for development. In a group of farmer families, there is a lot of knowledge, especially when more generations are involved. Young people make some observations and old people carry knowledge from their parents and their youth. All in a group can contribute with knowledge and experience. An environment of experience exchange is therefore always valuable. It is valuable inside a farmer group, but it is also valuable to exchange across farmer groups.



6.2 Exchange visits between Farmer Family Learning Groups



Whole farmer groups can agree to visit each other.

The date has to be organized between the groups, so that both groups are prepared. Exchange visits always should be both ways, so that a date is settled for a visit in one group, and another date is settled for the visit in the other group. This is like in the Farmer Family Learning Group: all families contribute by exposing themselves, opening their homes and contribute to common knowledge creation.

Some groups live in quite short distance from each other – if starting from home early in the morning, walking can be an option, if it is only a couple of hours walk. The host group will then have some refreshments ready when the group arrive and is being introduced to the hosts. Some groups can even choose to make a ‘tradition’ of visiting each other for example every year.

If there is larger distance between the groups, they have to agree on the transport costs within the group – e.g. they can take the necessary transport fund from the saving and credit box.

Alternatively, they can choose to send a smaller delegation, e.g. the external and internal facilitator and one of two members from the group, who then have to share their experience with the rest of the group at home. This does not give the shared and common experience in the whole group, but can be a good solution to still bring in new inspiration and knowledge in the group. The more eyes and minds, the richer the group becomes from what they can pick up from the other group – if few are sent, it can be a good idea to discuss with the group before the excursion about what they should particularly ask and inquire about.



6.3 Networks between facilitators

Exchange of experience and knowledge between facilitators is particularly valuable and important when new internal facilitators take over the facilitation of a group. Then they can benefit greatly from hearing from others how they work and operate in a group, and how others e.g. organize savings & credits or rotate between farms or share some animals. Facilitators can learn and get new ideas from each other on how to facilitate groups.



The facilitators in a region can also form networks and meet in workshops in larger groups e.g. every year, to exchange and solve problems together, if there is something which they struggle with in a group. This may require support from some organizations (NGOs or CBOs) in the area, to which the farmer groups may be connected.

Forming networks between facilitators also allow them to take contact to each other if they lack knowledge about a certain plant disease, or if their group feels ready to build improved stoves but do not know how to do – then the facilitators can use the network to seek knowledge which they need.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FARMER FAMILY LEARNING GROUPS AS A PROJECT FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

7.1 A major experience in the Rwenzori project: more unity in families

In the Rwenzori project, one major outcome of forming the Farmer Family Learning Groups was the improved situation in many families. We were told that improved food security in the families led to less domestic violence, and improved the health of everybody in the family. In the following we will explain factors which in the Rwenzori project led to improved family situations. The group must focus on making the group participation a project for the whole family.



7.2 A whole farming system needs a whole family approach

The arguments for involving everybody in the family in the farmer group are many. All family members contribute to the maintenance of the farm. Most organic farms – especially smallholder farms – are diversified and have many crops and maybe animals, and need planning which involves everybody who has responsibility even for a small part of the farm. Bringing every part together on a farm demands efforts from everybody, who are involved in the different activities. Every family member needs knowledge in the areas for which they carry particular responsibility. At the photo (left) some of the older family members carried knowledge about seed conservation, which enabled and encouraged the farmer group to start exchanging local seeds. In other groups, the elder members knew about medicinal plants and started passing on that information. Every family member survives on the income and products produced at the farm – so everybody is dependent and should be able to take responsibility and practice in appropriate ways. In other words: a whole farming systems which sustain a family's livelihood needs a whole family approach and empowerment of everybody to share and take ownership and decisions. This is the major reason for calling this approach 'Farmer Family Learning groups'.



7.3 Appreciating the efforts of other family members

When the farm improves, and the yields increases, the feeling of security becomes bigger. When the land becomes more well maintained and the banana plantation as well as the crops and kitchen garden more beautiful, there is a good reason for being proud of what a family can achieve by pulling the efforts together and also work together with a group. This also improves the bonds between the family members. The family members start appreciating much more the efforts done by all household members to maintain a well working farm, being able to maybe construct a better house, produce more healthy and diversified food including vegetables and fruits, and take good care of healthy livestock. Being proud together creates an atmosphere of unity and peace.

7.4 Involving the children: Arguments and ways

The children may take over the farm one day, or may start or be involved in another farm in another place. If they should continue the same good practices as acquired by the parent generation, it is a great advantage to involve them from a young age, both in the farm work, and in the farmer group. It is a big challenge worldwide that the youth seems more attracted to ‘easy city life’ and less to agriculture, especially agriculture using knowledge intensive practices. Therefore, children should be stimulated to learn about agriculture and good agro-ecological practices, which can be passed on to the future generations. It requires that there are available tools, and that they are involved in types of work which are appropriate for their age group. Young children should not carry heavy things, or work with dangerous tools which may be over-sized for them. Also, they should not be given responsibilities without proper guidance, and they should be involved in the community. In the daily life, it is an advantage for the whole family that the children know and are able to discuss about the farm practices, because then they can take over the work for each other when needed.



7.5 Organising the group work so that all family members can participate

In some groups, many different groups of participants do work together, and the group work should be planned accordingly. These groups of participants can be e.g. elderly people, very pregnant women, children and young strong men. It is a task of the group to organise the work so that the efforts and resources are well used, but also so that the learning is shared across the different groups

of participants. By doing this, they appreciate the capacities of each other, and the benefits that the whole group gain from everybody. A young man may contribute by being able to do hard physical work such as land tillage and lifting heavy things, and an elderly woman may contribute by growing medicinal plants and sharing knowledge about this with the younger members. Some members can take care of small children when the other group members work in the field, and some can cook a meal or provide the group with refreshments during the work and the meeting. There are roles for everybody in a creative and open-minded group, where the attitude is that everybody should benefit.

7.6 The farm's production of cash crops must be shared both in terms of money and responsibilities

In many smallholder farms, the wife produces food crops for the family and maybe the local market. In some farms, a certain amount of land is allocated for a specific cash crop for the local, regional or international market. We define 'family food security' as being able to produce on the farm so that every family member can have healthy meal all year round, but also to create income generating activities which enables the children to go to school, and the family to buy the necessary things to the household. We therefore encourage farmer groups to do business. Doing business as a family requires openness – and the whole group has to support this process in the families. Professor Munene – who is a co-author of chapter 4 in this manual – said at the initial meeting about planning this project:

'... It is not enough to know about the end-result – for example that men control all the money. We have to understand the process how they became the dominating over the money that was made in the home. If you understand that you can intervene. You cannot intervene when the money is already in their pockets, that is not possible, and you destroy the family. You cannot tell me 'share my money with my wife' --- no no no, that is culture. But if you looked into the way where the decisions were made, then you can intervene, and people can listen, because you tell people in that process at stage 1 you actually do a, b, these kind of things...'

In other words: the group has to support the process where both responsibilities and money are shared in the homes. We showed that keeping records of the money is one powerful way of doing this. In families, where income and expenditures were recorded, it became visible for everybody from where the money comes and to which activities it goes. This create basis for rational and well-informed decisions and planning in the family. In the Farmer Family Learning Groups, many families started to make small 'family planning meetings', where all family members shared concerns and experiences and made plans together. Sharing responsibilities and decisions and money in the family is a benefit for every family – and it is a necessity for families which engage in income generating activities! The facilitator must focus on this aspect when facilitating a group process where doing business together is a part of the work.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FARM PLANNING

8.1 Organic farming involves the whole farm

Organic farming is based on a whole farm approach. All aspects of farming must work and fit together in the farm. Everybody must work together. A real farm-eco-system works this way, and it is important to consider all the factors with potential importance on the farm system. Even the surrounding nature must be considered in the planning, e.g. rainfall and animals which belong to the nature.



8.2 Drawing a farm plan helps us visualise the farm – now and in the future



A drawing of the farm makes it visible where the production of different crops takes place. In the Rwenzori project, farmers were provided with flip charts when drawing farm plans – this allows them better to share it with the whole group in a group discussion. However, it does not require flip charts and pens, but can be made on smaller papers with ordinary pens maybe in different colors where some indicate the present use of land and resources, and another color indicates the future plan.



By drawing a farm plan, the overview over the farm gives a good platform for identifying the needs and the potentials of the farm, and to use it to discuss in the family.



A farm plan can be used as a good tool for discussion and supporting the

farmer to improve the farm. The experience in the group is a big resource for supporting the farmer in thinking about his or her plan.

8.3 What do we need to consider when planning the farm?

Since all elements of the farm need to be considered, farm planning helps us to get better organised. It helps us to focus on the whole system and how the different elements and enterprises support each other.

The following should be considered in planning of the farm:

- Time for all the activities on the farm – both on everyday basis and when special efforts are required in relation to one crop or activity,
- Labour, which is required for the different activities. This can be the family's own labour, as well as the visits by the FFS group and where they are needed most at a given time,
- Costs and expenditures, e.g. to buy seeds or for family activities including school fees, or for new investments and constructions,
- Do the family plan for new productions? How can these new productions be introduced and maintained, and where is land and resources available?
- Where are the strengths and weaknesses of the farm? This becomes visible in the discussions which will form basis for the planning,
- Income generating activities?
- Can available resources be used better in the future?

8.4 What is AESA?

'AESA' means 'Agro-Ecological System Analysis' and it means that you evaluate all the elements of the whole farm and analyse the whole system and how it works. Using an AESA form guides you to make a farm plan, or to analyse the whole system and discuss like when discussing a farm plan.

An AESA can guide you through the process by giving you some check points. We use the AESA form for the whole farm – this is the most important to know about the farm system and how it works as an agro-ecological system – and we use adjusted AESA forms for the livestock productions to make sure that they are well integrated into the system and that they are kept under conditions which are suitable for organic animals. In the following pages, the whole-farm AESA is used, as well as some AESA forms for poultry, goats and cattle.

8.5 The AESA form gives a checklist and guidance for the whole system

Table 8.1 An example on a check list for an AESA analysis which can be done on each farm by the group. After the analysis has been conducted, the host farmer family and the group should discuss advice for this particular farm, and the farmer family should share with the group which improvements they will attempt to make before next visit.

Topic	Check list, e.g. (find more relevant points when you work with it)
Land	How is it organized and used? Are there poor versus good plots (e.g. poor soil)? Does it slope?
Farm tools	What is available at the farm?
Labour / skills	Who work on the farm, and which responsibilities and activities do they carry out?
Homestead	Is it placed well in relation to the crops, animals, water, etc.?
Source of power on the farm	Electricity? Trees? Sun?
Water	Source? Distance? Is it placed so that manure cannot contaminate?
Stove	Where is it placed? Does it work well?
Animals	Housing, shelter, feed and management of all age groups? Products? Handling of diseases? Where are they placed and can they be properly watched?
Compost and organic fertilizer	How is the flow organized? How does the compost making work? Is it placed where it is healthy in relation to the animal herds, the water source and the humans? Is it well covered?
Latrine and hygiene	How is the latrine placed? Is there water for washing hands close to? Is the latrine of a good hygienic standard and easy to keep clean?
Crops for family food	Family food, vegetables, fruit and medicinal plants – how is it organized? Intercropping? Labour? Annual pattern? Placed on the farm?
Commercial crops	Does the farm produce crops or animal products for sale, or sell surplus of e.g. stable food? How is it integrated into the family food crops?
Seeds	Use of local / bought in seeds? Costs? Quality?
Trees	Use of living fences? Animal feed trees, fruits for the family or which trees and plants, and how are they organized? Agro-forestry systems?
Storage facilities	Post harvest treatment of food and products? Seeds?
Security	Safely kept animals, stores etc?
Agro-ecological balance and resilience of the system	Is the ground well covered? Earth erosion prevented? Inter cropping and crop rotation? Protection against wind and water? Do plants support each other? Is there a harmony between livestock and available land? Can the farming system absorb disturbances and shocks (e.g. extreme weather events) and still maintain its function?

8.6 AESA forms as drawing, and for livestock

The checklist above can alternatively be organized as a drawing, which reminds the group members of what they need to consider and discuss every time a farm is visited. If there is specific focus on e.g. livestock or a certain crop, a separate AESA form can be organized for these specific focus areas. See an example of an AESA form for poultry below. Here, here more details about livestock are included. Depending on the needs of the group, other animal species or other areas on the farm can be in focus, and specific AESA forms can be made either as checklists or as drawings to remind everybody about the elements of the system. It is important that the group together identify which elements constitute a farm, and analyze the whole farming system together as a part of their activities, also when one animal species is particularly in focus. The group can vary between analyzing the whole farming system in one round, and a specific area – for example the poultry – in the next round where all farms are visited. In this way, attention is paid to various parts of the farming system as well as the way in which the whole farming system works.

Table 8.2 An example of a check list for AESA analysis for a poultry flock

Topic	Check list, e.g. (find more relevant points when you work with it)
Characterize the group of animals	How many are there? In which age groups and which sex? Are they bought – if yes: where? - or hatched in the farm?
The condition of the animals you can observe	How do they look? Feathers? Are the animals healthy looking? Do they walk normally? Is their manure normal? Is the color of the legs and beak normal? Do they show any signs of parasitism?
Death and sickness	Have animals died? How, and for what reason or under which circumstances? Are there any ill animals? Have they been treated using any medicine recently? Are they vaccinated? Which diseases are prevented and how?
Production	How many eggs and chicken can they produce? Are they sold or consumed in the family? Sometimes a small economical analysis can help to understand the
Fodder and water	How are the animals fed? Do they get enough clean water throughout the day and is the water and feed available at all times? Do they get sufficient amounts of vitamins and minerals? Do they get vegetables? Which differences between dry and wet season, and how it this handled? Where do they lay their eggs?
Surroundings	Look at the surroundings of the animals. Is it clean? How is the hygiene? Can they dust bath sufficiently? Do they have perches? Are age groups separated? How are the routines of maintaining the surroundings? Are there any predators? Outdoor access? How are the animals protected?

CHAPTER NINE

RECORD KEEPING ON THE FARM AND IN THE GROUP

9.1 Farm record keeping is a tool to keep the overview and to plan the future



Farming is a way to provide the family and the local community with food. In this way, farming is also a business. All families need income for the things they cannot produce, and to pay school fees and disease treatments and other things. Therefore, it is important for a farmer family to keep track of what is produced on the farm, and what is bought and sold to the farm as well as the household. Farm records are important for the farm's sustainability and long term planning and management.

Families, who can keep records, say that they benefit from the overview which these records give them. Keeping records makes it visible for all family members what income they get from their production, and what they spend money on. It allows them to have discussions in the family based on facts about the flow of money. It also allows them to see whether they actually increase their production and income.

9.2 Keep it simple! First step: family income and expenditures

Our experience in the Rwenzori project gave us the advice about farm record keeping: **Keep it simple and start with the most necessary records!**

The most necessary records in most households are simple overview over the family cash flow, that is, the total economy in the household: what comes in, and what do we buy. An example is shown on the photo (right) and in the table 9.1 on page 37 (next page).

Date	Items	In	Out	Bal.
11/1/20	Green S		200	00
11/1/20	Buying of Chicken	500		500
11/1/20	Selling of Banana		200	300
11/1/20	Buying of Chicken	600		900
11/2/20	Selling of Banana	300		1200
11/2/20	Buying of Banana		400	800
11/2/20	Payment of medicine	100		700
11/2/20	Buying of medicine		100	600
11/2/20	Payment of medicine		400	200
11/2/20	Selling of Banana	1000		1200
11/2/20	Transport of Shovel	300		900
11/2/20	Selling of Banana	300		1200
11/2/20	Buying of Caron Hour		300	900
11/2/20	Selling of Greens	200		1100
11/2/20	Selling of Coffee 15kg			1100
11/2/20	Selling of Bananas	500		1600
11/2/20	Selling of Greens	200		1800
11/2/20	" "			1800
11/2/20	" of Banana	1000		2800

This type of records makes it visible for the whole family what creates an income for the household. In this way, it gives a good basis for discussing how to plan. This can also be discussed with other group members, because they may also have experiences at the local market. They also can see how all money is spent in the family. It helps the family plan in the future for their common priorities. Family record keeping was emphasized to be a major reason for creating peace in the family because it made all this visible.

Table 9.1 Family records

Date	Income from Farm / Business	Family Expenditures	Farm Expenditures / Other Business
Total each month			

9.3 Keeping records of special enterprises on the farm

When the family is familiar with keeping records on the entire flow of money, it will be an advantage to focus on some of the crops or products, which can give an income to the family. If records are kept particularly for these income generating commodities, the family can see what they invest in it, and what it costs to produce it. It is important to realize that an investment is more than an expenditure, because an investment is also something which enables and improves the production in the future. For example is a tool an investment which enables an efficient harvest of a given crop in the future. It is also important to count approximately how many hours of work it has taken to produce a crop. This can be done by noting it down by date how many hours one has worked on a crop. This helps to judge in the future whether it was worth the effort, or whether the family should look for something else to produce.

Table 9.2. An example of how records can be kept for the cash crop maize. Input can be for example seeds, and investments can be for example some tools which also can be used in the future.

Date	Description	Input	Hired labor costs	Current expenses	Sales income	Estimated costs of own work	Investments
Total per season							

Table 9.3. An example of how cost calculation can be organized for goats. Inputs can be for example feed or veterinary costs, and investments can be for example a new shed or a fence or something else which can be used in the future. Remember that income covers both milk, meat, skin and live animals and any other product.

Dates	Description	Inputs (feedstuff, veterinary etc.)	Hired labor costs	Current expenses	Sales income	Estimated costs of own work	Invest- ments
Total per year							

9.4 Use of farm recordings for decision making in the family

When the farmer family can keep records of income and expenditures, investments, livestock production, harvest, labor use and time, then they have a good foundation for discussing their plans for the next season and the distribution of tasks between family members. On the long term, future plans and goals can also be discussed more realistically while having records of what actually happened during a season. Even though many things also depend on factors beyond the family’s control, such as fluctuating prices and need for hospital care and other things, proper recordings still gives a better basis for decisions.

9.4 Find ways of recording and planning in the cases of illiteracy



In many families, some members are unable to make records because of illiteracy and lack of skills. The group can have a goal to improve individual members’ skills and to help each other to plan their farms for the future. In some families, the children start keeping recordings. This can be a solution, although to make it sustainable, the family has to work actively to improve the understanding and abilities to make record keeping for everybody.

9.6 Recordings of group level

A Farmer Family Learning Group may need to keep some simple recordings to keep the structure of the group and to keep track of the participation of everybody. Therefore a group should make a regular recording of who are group members and how they are organized. If they have a chair person, a treasurer and other members with specific responsibilities, this should be noted down.

Many groups find that it makes sense to note the following information down at each meeting:

- Who were present?
- Where did the group meet and at which time?
- What were the main activities?
- Which decisions were taken at this meeting, if any?
- What learning points did the group members share, if any?

If the group engages in Savings and Credit schemes, careful recordings should be kept of each member's investments and loans from this account.

9.7 More sophisticated recordings in accordance with needs, when the group engage in group marketing

When a farmer family group has more or less ensured food security and power over land and money for each member, they will maybe start discussing possibilities for joint activities in terms of growing and marketing crops or any other product together. This is beyond the scope of this small manual, but will be provided in a second volume developed by SATNET, NOGAMU and Organic Denmark when having gained more experiences from that part of the project, because some groups seem mature now to enter the market.

CHAPTER TEN

FFS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

10.1 Farmer Family Learning Groups help the local community

Participating in a farmer group greatly benefits the members of the group, because they through interaction learn a lot, get a lot of work done on their farms and create a network which helps everybody to move out of poverty. In many groups, it was a great improvement that every group member could walk into a fellow group member's farm and feel welcome. However, there are also many ways in which the groups help the whole community, directly and indirectly. It is important for the facilitator to be aware of these ways and stimulate the development. It is important to remember that this is also about building up social capital on community level, and building up social capital is sacrificing on the short term basis for the benefit of everybody including oneself (see chapter 4). Everybody benefits from making an effort for improvements in the local community.

10.2 Resource persons and knowledge accumulation

In a village where a farmer group starts accumulating and exchanging knowledge, a number of persons improve their skills and knowledge and become aware of the knowledge which they already have and how useful it can be for others. This means that a number of resource persons actually emerge in the local community. Some of the group members can suddenly see that their neighbors make their mulching or trench digging in a way which can be improved, or maybe the neighbors have no mulching at all. Then they can approach these neighbors to suggest improvements. They also set an example on their own farms, and make it visible for the neighbors how things can be improved. Sometimes farmer group members observe that their neighbors start copying what they see on their land. A dialogue with the neighbors may even improve it more, because not everything is visible from just looking at the neighbors fields. One group in the Rwenzori project developed a routine where each member went back and made small groups with the neighbors to extend the learning from the Farmer Family Learning Group to the neighbors. It improved the knowledge, collaboration and openness also in the neighborhoods, and it even prevented some cases of theft from young people just feeding themselves from neighbors' fields.

10.3 Improving the environment

In a village everybody depends on the common environment. In the farmer group approach, many environmental improvements on household levels could benefit the whole community. They will be listed in the following:

- **Improved hygiene by building latrines:** Some groups had the goal that every group member should build a latrine, and have water outside the latrine to wash hands.
- **Collecting non-decayable waste:** In addition to making compost for the soil improvements, many groups started to collect non-decayable waste. This made the farm look better, but it was often extended to the whole village so that it became more healthy and beautiful.
- **Building improved stoves:** When some households start building improved stoves, they may inspire others to do the same. Improved stoves improve the health especially of women and children, who spend much time in the kitchen. But it also benefits the whole community, for it saves considerable amounts of wood, and gives less smoke in a populated area.
- **Collecting water:** Some groups organise water collection trenches of rain water or leading water from a local stream through the village. This requires an effort – in some cases also involving the local authorities to get a permission, but it can benefit others in the local community who can collect water from there to their gardens and animals.
- **Planting trees:** In some areas, there are too few trees, both for shade and for other purposes, such as animal feed or fuel wood. A group can decide to plant trees from their own home made seedlings or cuttings.

10.4 Raising a voice in the local governmental system and for other improvements

A group is stronger than the number of individuals separately. This becomes very clear in all types of contacts with authorities and local governments as well as organizations. In the Rwenzori project, we experienced a number of initiatives taken by the farmer groups to improve the village and the village inhabitants' opportunities, such as:

- **Advocacy for establishment of a road to the village.** One group managed to address the need for a road to the village in their communication with their local government in such a powerful and convincing way that the end result was the establishment of a road. This is a very good example of how raising a voice in a group can benefit the whole community.
- **Establishment of the area as an acknowledged LC2:** One group advocated so much for the local needs that their area became an established LC2 area.

In communication with organizations and with the governmental agricultural program NAADS, groups also proved themselves able to raise a common voice and make themselves visible in such a way so that they e.g. received animals (goats, pigs, flocks of poultry), trees or good seeds (not GMO or other non-organic types of seeds).

10.5 The group makes an effort for everybody's benefit in the local community

In many communities the increased activity in the farmer groups benefitted many others outside the group in terms of more resources, surplus of healthy food for sale on the local market and in other ways, like the examples below illustrate:

- **Cuttings / suckers / seedling production for many households:** Some groups organized a relatively big production of various types of seedlings, suckers and cuttings which could be sold in the local community (and contribute to the saving and credit of the group) or in some cases were given for free to neighbors.
- **Limitation of theft problems in local communities:** Many groups did an effort to limit local problems with thieves coming from outside the village. It seemed that more thieves were attracted to the village when more wealth (e.g. vanilla plantations or bigger groups of goats) came into the community. Therefore, some groups made an active effort to limit theft by taking night guard shifts, hire a person to guard and prevent thieves, or collect animals in the night in one night shelter and acquire one or more dogs to bark at the slightest suspicious sound. Such efforts benefitted the whole community.
- **Production of seeds from local plants to share with others:** Some groups started to exchange and conserve seeds from vegetables and food crops. In cases of excess, this benefits others than the group members.
- **Supporting elders in the local community:** Some groups extended their efforts to also support elders in the village who were without family and had difficulties in managing their gardens. The group helped some of these elders with their garden and/or building an improved stove or organizing a latrine.
- **Growing and drying herbs which can prevent disease in plants, animals or humans:** Some groups and the NGOs or CSOs to which the groups were connected, have started growing and drying e.g. *Artemisia annum*
- **Building a school or constructing / improving roads:** Some groups decided to start working on things which they found a need for in the village. One group started building a school pulling their efforts together, and another group took it on themselves to maintain the road to the furthest end of the village, because this part of the road (uphill) often was washed away.

10.6 Social capital on community level

In chapter 4 we describe and discuss aspects of social capital. We understand social capital as 'when somebody is ready to sacrifice on the short term, for the long term benefit for everybody including him- or herself'. Extending the network and the efforts to make things better to the local community and strengthening this will contribute to the longterm benefit for everybody in the community, but also for everybody in the group and each of the individual.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FACILITATOR TRAINING: GROUP WORK AND PARTICIPATORY LEARNING METHODS

A short guide to some methods to stimulate participatory group work
to use in facilitator workshops or in farmer groups

11.1 Why participatory methods?

Tell me and I will forget
Show me and I will remember
Involve me and I will understand
Step back and I will act

- Learning takes place when new things are discovered, the learner becomes surprised.
- When the new knowledge is relevant to the learner, the new knowledge will be integrated in what is already known.
- You can give information and tell about your own experience and knowledge. But you can never give the learner knowledge nor insight – they have to create the meaning themselves. You can facilitate this – and this is why the participation of the learners in the process of learning and teaching is crucial. Learning takes place though active participation.



Singing the song ‘SEEING IS BELIEVING’: When I see I remember – when i do I understand, when I am told I forget – seeing is believing!

11.2 Class room teaching – make it participatory

Class room teaching can be very boring, because it often is based on one active teacher and a passive class. The thinking behind it is that the teacher delivers knowledge to the pupils, and they can pick it up.

The learning can be made much more participatory by involving the students / the class in discussion, asking them to give examples or breaking the one way communication by making 10 minutes buzz groups or making a brain storm (see below).



Make class room lectures and presentations lively by moving around in the class room, or move outside.



In general, when the learners find the topic relevant and it is open for questions and discussions then the learning situation will be intense.

11.3 Brain storm



Brain storm

- All participants give their immediate thoughts on a given topic or issue
- No restrictions of each other
- No negotiations of what is right or wrong or priorities

Allows everybody to express everything on their mind related to the topic

11.4 Cards on the wall – or on the table



Hearing everybody's voice

- An 'anonymous brain storm'
- Gives all participants possibility to reflect and formulate thoughts & expectations
- Exchange ideas and thoughts in a rather anonymous way
- Together find a structure in what people need and expect which can be a good guide to a course or a discussion
- Requires cards and that all are literate.

Cards can also be used as a flexible way of planning and moving things around until everybody agrees

- at a table or a wall



11.5 Buzz groups



Groups of two or three persons who are discussing a question or exchanging view points e.g. about how today's subject relate to their own world or job. Buzz groups activate people and make the topic relevant in their own everyday. Everybody in the class has to say something, and can be organised very simply in a class as short 10 minutes 'wake-up-breaks'. After the exercise, each little buzz group can tell fellow participants in a few sentences what they discussed, or the exercise can just be used to make people reflect and relate to what they know from their own experience.

11.6 Structured group work



Structured group work often involves joint problem solving, finding answers and solutions to a common question, negotiating leading to mutual understanding, and coming up with conclusions and clarifications which can be shared in the class after the group work. The group sizes and time given for discussion depends on the purpose and the topic of the group work. The group work can be organised either so that all groups discuss the same questions or issues, or that each group has a topic or question different from the other groups. No matter what, everybody can learn from exchanging and discussing in a final plenary session.

11.7 Café discussion I: groups move from table to table

- a dynamic way of group discussions, where all participants discuss a number of questions within a given time; the example below is 4 groups with approx. 7-8 persons per group.

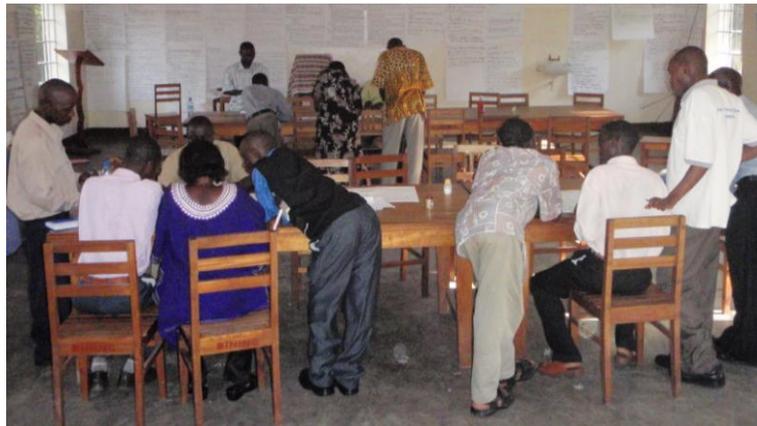


- Prepare four issues / questions
- Place each question at a table in different corners in the class room
- Form 4 groups in the class and let each group go a table.
- Allow the group to discuss their first issue e.g. 20 minutes and then ring a bell.
- When the bell rings, all groups move to the next table.
- Repeat 3 times, until all groups have discussed all questions.

11.8 Café discussion II: One secretary stays at each table, and all participants move around

- a dynamic way of discussing four (or more, depending on the size of the group or class) questions in a slightly 'chaotic' structure always confronted with new persons and questions, and where there is one secretary at each table who collects everything related to his/her issue.

- Prepare 4 questions and place each of them at a table in different corners in the class room.
- Ask one person per question to be secretary. He/she stays at the table.
- All participants distribute themselves among the tables.



- Allow the formed groups to discuss the first question e.g. 20 minutes and ring a bell.
- When the bell rings, all participants find a new table – in a way so that there are as many 'new faces' at each table. Repeat three times so that all participants have discussed all four questions – preferably with as many new persons in every group.
- At the end, additional 20 minutes can be allocated by letting everybody finding their first table + group, and let the group secretary tell about all the discussions and then exchange what they have discussed where they were.
- The exercise can be completed by letting all group secretaries present in plenum.

11.9 ‘Increase the circle’ exercise

- *a way that allows everybody to reflect and stimulate negotiation about rather big and complex questions and issues*



The exercise starts with couples discussing the issue and together identify the focus of the discussion and exchange opinions and idea.



After e.g. 10 or 15 minutes of couple discussions, two couples merge to form groups of four to discuss the issue.



After e.g. 20 minutes, the groups merge again, and form groups of 8 persons, who now together produce a poster for presentation in plenary session, which include their common conclusions.

11.10 Practical demonstrations, observing and developing something together is about ‘show me and I believe – involve me and I understand’



11.11 Role play



Role plays are useful for thinking through a situation and ways of reacting and inter-acting. Groups can use it as exercises for their own learning, and share learning points with the class afterwards. Or it can be used as a theatre play in front of the class to show different angles to a given problem (photos).

11.12 Play – it brings people together and gives energy

- *there are many energizers and play exercises in various books about participatory methods; fruit salad is one of them, and a very funny one!*

Fruit salad:

- Place all at chairs in a circle so that all sit except one person in the middle left without a chair.
- Divide the group in 3 categories: mango, banana and pine apple
- When the person in the middle say the name of one of the fruits, all persons from this category must move to a new chair and the person in the middle will try to find a chair. When saying 'fruit salad' everybody moves.



NOTES

The approach which is owned by everybody who uses it

Farmer Family Learning Groups are groups of farmer families, who together define their needs and goals in relation to their own future development, both as individuals, families and as a group - and then they help each other to reach the goals. The groups form strong networks and help each other, and help the entire local community.

Organic farming is practiced in ways which are contextual specific and dependent on the environment, wherever it is being practiced. Forming farmer groups using this approach is likewise contextual specific and entirely determined by the needs and wishes and agreements within the group of families who in the first place decided to form a group for conscious and goal directed development in their households and local community.

The beauty of the approach – like many other empowering group approaches – is its flexibility and at the same time strong and clear foundation on values like respect, trust, equality, common learning, building up human and social capital and knowledge which is relevant and meaningful to each participant and learner, as well as probably the most important value: ownership.

Contact to the authors and further information can be obtained through the web pages of SATNET, NOGAMU and OD.

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