Introduction to the five skills for rural development

Guide to the multiple-skills approach

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Catholic Relief Services (CRS) serves the poor and disadvantaged overseas. Without regard to race, creed or nationality, CRS provides emergency relief in the wake of natural and man-made disasters and promotes the subsequent recovery of communities through integrated development interventions. CRS' programs and resources respond to the U.S. Bishops' call to live in solidarity—as one human family—across borders, over oceans, and through differences in language, culture and economic condition. CRS provided co-financing for this publication.

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Contents

List of figures

List of tables

List of forms

Acknowledgements

This manual and the other manuals in this series are the product of a process that began in 2002 with agroenterprise learning alliances in East Africa and Central America. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) were co-facilitators and among the principal participants in these learning alliances. Since 2002, many other organizations and individuals have contributed to the content by adding new knowledge and experiences and by reviewing the materials brought together here.

The authors would like to express their sincere thanks to Dina Brick, Gaye Burpee, Geoff Heinrich, and Kathy Younker for their support in developing the concepts for the five skills sets methodology, and to Jorge Enrique Gutiérrez, who produced the drawings for this guide.

Shaun Ferris

Rupert Best

Paul Mundy

Foreword

"La Esperanza" is a savings and loans group of 11 women and one man in Estelí, Nicaragua. Formed in 2010, the group used a part of their savings to invest in producing vegetables on a one-quarter manzana (0.175 ha) drip-irrigated plot. The group sells their produce at the Friday market in Estelí and to other villagers. They earn around US$ 50 a week from selling their produce, a welcome income for the members. The members get paid for the time they spend working on the vegetable plot. The group's manager is also paid for her efforts in organizing and running the group. These payments are important incentives that enhance the stability and growth of their business. The group wants to double the size of its plot and is exploring the possibility of selling its produce to a supermarket in town.

La Esperanza is an example of a new way of combating poverty in vulnerable rural communities – by helping them engage with markets. To do this, the group members need five types of skills:

- **Organizational management:** the group memgers need to plan and monitor the performance of their work.
- **Financial skills:** they need to save money, invest it in the enterprise, and maintain financial records.
- **Market and enterprise skills:** they need to produce something that customers want to buy; they need to find those customers; and they need to plan their business to make a profit.
- **Natural resources:** they need to conserve their soil, water and other natural resources so they can produce on a sustainable basis.
- **Innovation:** they need to find new, more efficient and more profitable ways of doing things.

In common with many other development agencies, CRS is incorporating a multi-disciplinary approach into its development efforts. We realize that increasing food production alone cannot move poor rural people permanently out of poverty. Building the capacity of smallholders means helping rural communities to work together effectively, manage their money and natural resources, engage in profitable enterprises and learn how to innovate. These are all important elements in a successful and more sustainable agricultural development strategy.

Field agents, extension workers and development managers typically focus on one particular area of expertise. This series of training modules gives them a broader set of skills they need to understand and support a robust enterprise approach and to build the capacity of local people.

Through building the capacity of local people, we are reshaping the way we support vulnerable communities. As in the case of La Esperanza, communities progressively become agents of their own change. They identify and grasp opportunities that turn previous desperation into a brighter hope for the future.

Carolyn Woo
President and CEO, CRS

Preface

This set of manuals on “Five skill sets for preparing smallholder farmers to successfully engage with markets” presents an integrated and sequential approach to building the capacity of vulnerable farmer, both men and womento manage their resources and link with markets. The manuals have been prepared for use by development facilitators, field extension agents and community leaders working with poor rural communities. The aim is to improve the livelihoods of these communities through better production and marketing of their crops and livestock products.

Where the five skills sets came from

The identification of these skills has its origin in the establishment of the Agroenterprise Learning Alliance between the Catholic Relief Services and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in 2002. The purpose of a Learning Alliance on agroenterprise is to strengthen the participating organizations’ capacity to advance and refine approaches that link farmers to markets. CRS has used this modality across Africa, Latin America and Asia, with up to 35 countries participating in one or more learning cycles. In Central America and Southern Africa, the learning alliances are multi-institutional with the participation of several national, regional and international research and development organizations. In 2005, the Learning Alliance identified the need for a new approach to improve the capacity of the poorest farmers to link effectively to markets, and to sustain and manage these links in the long term.

To address this need, the Learning Alliance organized a study tour that visited five different farmers’ groups in Uganda, Bolivia and India to improve its understanding of the formation and development of groups of farmers who want to produce and sell their goods to various markets. A team of eight scientists and technical advisors drawn from both institutions reviewed the literature on five different approaches to farmers’ group formation, and visited examples of each. Their aim was to look for common elements in farmer groups that are successful in achieving their goals. The approaches to forming farmer groups that were visited included:

- Farmer field schools
- Producer or agribusiness groups
- Self-help groups for internal savings and lending
- Watershed management groups
- Farmer research committees.

From their visits to these groups, the team observed that independently of the country, the cultural setting or the original purpose for forming the group, poor farmers who wanted to increase their income were proactively trying to acquire one or more of five sets of skills. These skills include:

- Group management skills
- Internal savings and lending skills
- Basic market skills
- Innovation and experimentation skills
- Sustainable production and natural resource management skills.

Even though all groups were receiving external assistance in developing or strengthening at least one skill set in a formal way, no one group was receiving facilitation in all five skill sets. Although there is nothing new about any one of the skill sets on its own, the team discovered that the farmer groups were seeking combinations of these five skills. In many cases, farmers commented on the difficulty in making progress from their original purpose of savings or experimenting with technology into more successful market linkage, unless they had acquired new knowledge and other types of skills.

The team therefore concluded that the five essential skill sets combined will effectively contribute to more successful and sustainable market linkage by the poor.

At CRS, we are excited about the way in which our early experiences in applying the five skills in an integrated way are having important results for both the communities we work with and our development partners. We recognize however, that the application of the approach makes high demands on field agents and training methods are important. The intention of these modules is to facilitate the learning process for both field agents and the farmers they serve.

This first iteration of the five skills set training materials consists of 8 written documents, including the following titles.

0.0 Introduction to the 5 skills set
1.0 Group management
2.0 Savings and loans communities
2.1 Financial education
3.0 Natural resource management theory
3.1 Natural resource management process
4.0 Marketing basics
4.1 Seven steps of marketing (process)
5.0 Innovation

These titles are also being developed as distance learning products. As the process is rolled out and experimented with in different situations, we look forward to receiving feedback on modifications and improvements so that these learning products can be continually improved.

What is in the manuals

Each manual contains the following types of material:

- **Lessons** the knowledge and skills you need to master in order to teach the skills.
- **Quizzes** to test your own knowledge.
- **Staff exercises**, for you and other field agents to gather information and practice your skills.
- **Field exercises** for you to use in gathering information and helping farmers master the knowledge and skills they need. They are printed on shaded pages. They typically include a set of instructions, along with a big picture for you to use as a discussion starter. The exercises are also available as a PDF document on the CRS website www.crsprogramquality.org/agriculture/. You can print out this document and have the pages laminated so it lasts longer when working in the field.

How to use this manual

As a learner. Read through this manual lesson by lesson, section by section, trying to absorb the information presented. At the same time, imagine the situations that you encounter in your work. Picture how you would use the information and techniques described to help you work with farmers to develop their skills and work towards more successful agroenterprises. At the end of each lesson, answer the short quizzes. If you get all the answers right, congratulations! Go on to the next lesson. If you got some of the answers wrong, go back to review that section again before moving on to the next lesson. Some of the lessons have specific **Staff exercises** for you and your colleagues to improve your knowledge before you begin training farmers in the field.

As a trainer working with field agents. You can use this manual to teach other field agents about the five-skills-sets method. You can present the information in the text, then work through the staff exercises and field exercises with the participants. The **Field exercises** are intended for use with farmers and other rural people. If you use these field exercises with field agents, ask them to pretend that they are farmers.

As a field agent working with farmers and other rural people. Once you have taken this course, completed the staff exercises and passed the quizzes, you will have gained useful knowledge about how to use the five sets of skills that you can share with rural communities.

You can use the information and Field exercises in this manual to plan how to work with farmers to develop their agroenterprises. Every farmer group and every situation is different, so this manual does not try to tell you exactly what to do in each situation. Instead, the items should be selected based on discussions with the different groups to be trained to ensure that the skills being taught are the skills they need. Also, the needs of the groups might differ depending on the gender breakdown: all men groups, all women groups, and mixed gender groups. Use this manual as a basis for building your learning process so you can pass this information on to farmers.

When you plan a session with farmers, look at the text and decide which items to present. You may decide to give a short presentation, or elicit the information from the farmers through discussions and a question-and-answer session. You can then use the Field exercise to help farmers understand the material. Feel free to **adapt** the exercises and quizzes to suit your own situation, and to **develop new materials** as needed.

Wherever possible, you should work in a **participatory manner** with the farmers. This means you should make sure that farmers are gathering and analyzing information and making decisions that will affect them. Your role is to facilitate their learning, not to do the job for them.

As a reference source. You can also use this manual as a reference. If you need to check on a technique or concept, look it up in the table of contents.

Learning online

In addition to the paper documents, you can also study the ideas in this manual online, through an e-course. Contact your supervisor for a **username and password**, then visit the 5 skills set distance learning site and link into https://crs.brainhoney.com to register and start an online course. In some cases these courses may be available on a thumb drive, or smart stick.

The e-courses courses use the same lessons, quizzes and exercises as in this manual. Many of the tables are presented as **forms** that you can fill in online to help you record and analyze the date you have collected.

Farmbook software

CRS and partners have developed a software application called **Farmbook**, which you can download from the CRS website. This software is especially useful in the production, marketing and business planning work. You can use Farmbook to register a farmer group and collect information about their production and business performance, which is important for lessons X within Group management and also in lesson X of Seven steps of Marketing. Planned features for Farmbook will allow you to do the following:

1. Register a farmer group
2. Do a profitability analysis for a single product for your farmer group
3. Write a business plan
4. Produce a production plan for the season
5. Keep a record of training events and asset transfers to a group
6. Analyze post season sales and profitability

To learn more about Farmbook, visit www.crsprogramquality.org/agriculture/Farmbook.php.

This software can be downloaded at www.crs/programquality.org/farmbook/

Introduction

People who live in rural communities in the developing world must master a wide range of skills to navigate through the many challenges they face and make progress. They have to know how to grow or purchase enough food to feed themselves and their families. They need to manage relationships with other people in their communities. They need to know how to manage a challenging environment. They need to know how to manage their finances and how to earn money by selling surplus produce from their farms to various markets.

They learn these skills from their parents, from friends and neighbors, and through observation and trial and error. By and large, they are pretty successful. Most people manage to support themselves – most of the time.

But many people still cannot grow or earn enough. They are still poor. Drought, flooding, war, disease and economic shocks can drag huge numbers further into poverty. And the world is changing: rising populations, changing lifestyles, more extreme weather and the global marketplace put ever-increasing demands on natural resources and force people to adapt in order to survive.

To lift themselves out of poverty, rural people need to learn new skills. One of your tasks as a **project manager or field agent** is to help the rural people learn and practice these skills so they can improve their incomes from agriculture.

Purposes of this manual

This manual introduces you to five key skills:

- Group management
- Finance
- Marketing
- Natural resources management
- Innovation.

These five sets of skills are covered in more detail in separate manuals in this series. This manual provides a general overview of the skills and describes how to plan and implement training courses using these skills.

What is in this manual

This manual describes the multiple-skills approach and how to use it in rural development projects. It is made up of six lessons:

1. **Using a skills-based approach.** An introduction to the multiple-skills approach to rural development.
2. **A closer look at the five skills.** Discusses the five key sets of skills, and how they relate to each other.

3 **Organizing the team.** How to organize the project team, use the multiple-skills approach in a project, and use new training approaches.

4 **Working with the community.** How to start working with a community and target particular groups in it.

5 **Ensuring sustainability.** How to manage and transfer different types of assets in a way that does not promote dependency.

6 **Building a training plan.** Ideas on how to plan a series of training courses, how to monitor progress, and how to exit at the end of the project.

This manual does not try to cover all the things you need to know to plan and implement the multiple-skills approach. You will have to draw on your own experience, and that of your colleagues, to fill in the gaps. Feel free to adapt the ideas and exercises where appropriate.

Lesson 1. Using a skills-based approach

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- List the five skills that groups of male/female farmers need to improve their livelihoods.
- Explain why farmers need a combination of skills.
- Outline the model of change used in this and related courses.

Five farmers

Achieng raises chickens in her backyard. But birds of prey often swoop down and carry off her baby chicks. Others chickens die from a disease that seems to recur every few months. How can Achieng raise more chickens?

Anita grows crops on a steep hillside. Her yields are low, and every time it rains, fast-moving water will wash tons of precious soil down into the valley. How can she prevent this erosion and improve her yields?

Viju grows vegetables and sells them to a trader at harvest time. The trader offers low prices, and Viju has little choice but to accept. How might he earn more by improving his marketing?

Everyone in **Marco's** village grows rice. But they thresh it by hand, and many of the grains are lost. Marco wants to buy a machine to thresh his own grain, and to rent out to his neighbors. But he has no money. How can he get a loan to cover the cost?

Victor is a member of a farmers' group that grows and markets chickpea. An NGO helped them with the production technology and linked them with a big trader. But the project has ended, and the NGO staff has gone. Without regular meetings, the group has started to fall apart.

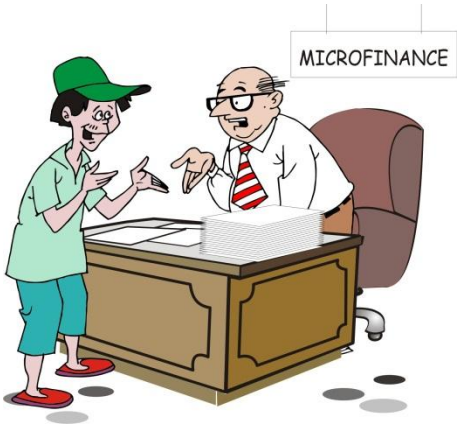
Five types of skills

Achieng, Anita, Viju, Marco and Victor are all small-scale farmers. They need different types of skills to solve their problems.

Innovation. Achieng needs to identify and test technologies that will help her improve her production.

Natural resources. Anita needs to stop erosion and improve the fertility of her soil by planting trees.

Marketing. Viju needs to find ways to improve the marketing of his vegetables.



Finance. Marco needs to find ways to save money, get a loan and invest in new equipment.

Group organization. Victor needs to improve the organization of his group so it can continue to function independently.

Five skills: Innovation, Natural resource management, Marketing, Finance, Group organization

One skill is not enough

Good news: Achieng has found a way to raise more chickens: she uses baskets to protect the baby chicks from birds of prey, and she vaccinates them against the disease.

But that is not the end of the story. She now realizes she needs to grow more grain to feed her flock. She needs a loan so she can build a bigger chicken house. And she wants to sell chickens and eggs on the local market.

To be a successful farmer, Achieng needs **multiple skills** – in innovation, natural resources management, marketing, finance and group organization.

Multiple skills – a common need

The other farmers are in a similar position.

To control erosion, **Anita** will have to **organize** with other people in her village to plant trees and build contour bunds on the hillside. Once they have managed to control the erosion, they may want to **innovate** by testing which types of crops to grow, and find out how to **market** them.

Victor's group already knows how to grow and market chickpea. But they need to take care of their **natural resources** to ensure they do not exhaust the soil. And by forming a savings group they can qualify for a **financial** loan to invest in a warehouse to store their output.

Many different types of farmers need the same **five sets of skills**: large, well-established groups as well as farmers who are just getting organized; richer farmers as well as poorer ones; women and men; farmers in different parts of the world.

Multiple skills – mutually supporting

The five sets of skills all support each other. For example, getting organized as a group will help **Viju** and his neighbors take full advantage of the opportunities for marketing their vegetables. They will need financial skills to manage their income and get loans from the bank. They will need to manage water, maintain their soil fertility and control pests to grow their vegetables in a

sustainable manner. And they will need to introduce innovations to boost their yields, develop new products, and improve quality of the vegetables they sell.

Without all these skills, their efforts may fail.

With several of the skills – or all five – they have a much better chance of succeeding. And they have a better chance of sustaining their success, or being more resilient.

Benefits for beneficiaries

It is clear how farmers and other beneficiaries can gain from the five sets of skills:

- **Food security:** by growing, accessing and utilizing more food.
- **Income:** by selling better-quality produce at higher prices in more lucrative markets.
- **Organization:** by working with neighbors to learn and overcome problems together.
- **Sustainability:** by maintaining and building on improvements without outside help.
- **Scaling up:** by reaching more people in the community.

Better projects

Project management should also benefit:

- **Training tools.** Field agents will have a more effective set of training tools to use with farmers and other partners and clients.
- **Open education.** Easy-to-use training materials for the five skills are available in printed and online formats. Online training and testing makes it possible to certify learners who have taken the courses.
- **Better information.** In the five-skills approach, field agents, farmers and community members systematically gather information that they can use themselves, and they can use to improve the management of the project.
- **Measuring outcomes.** Better information makes monitoring and evaluation more effective by showing what works and what does not work.
- **Improve sustainability.** When local people have mastered the five types of skills, they can be more responsible for their own development. This can lower project costs in the long term. Community members can start providing services, and can continue when the project ends, providing greater sustainability to the development process.

The five skills in development projects

How do the five skills help promote change in rural areas? They help farmers and other beneficiaries to manage their finances, natural resources, technologies and market linkages more effectively. Farmers learn how to manage money, save and invest wisely, improve their productivity in a sustainable way, and build long-term and profitable market linkages.

When designing a project, you must make sure that the development approach fits the local context and needs. The five skills are a part of the process of matching the interventions with the needs.

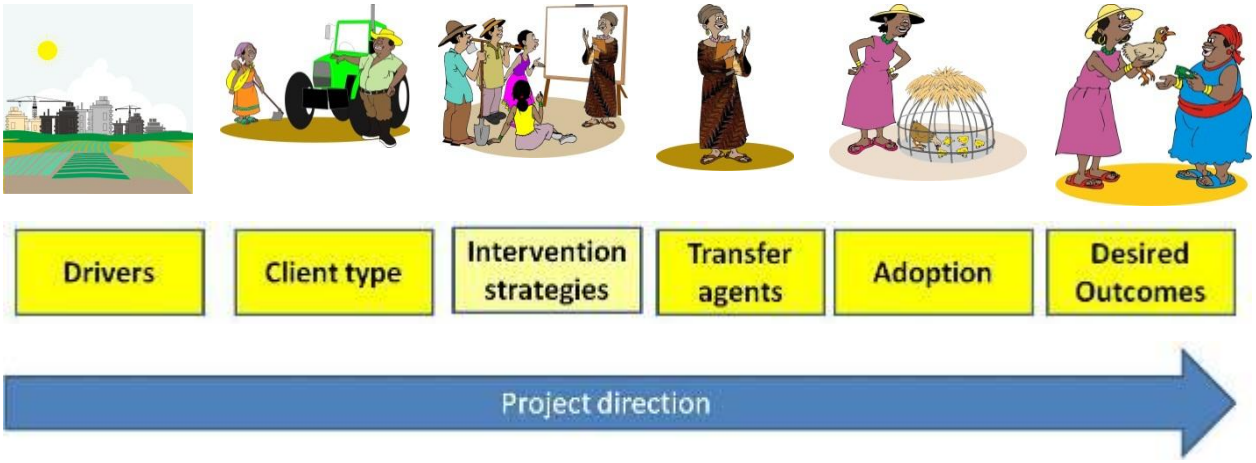


Figure 1. Six aspects of development projects

To understand project design and how the five skills fit into a project, , let us look at six aspects of development projects:

- Drivers of change
- Client types
- Intervention strategies
- Transfer agents
- Adoption
- Desired outcomes.

We will look at each of these aspects in turn.

Drivers of change: National context

The scale and types of results a project sets out to achieve will depend on many factors at the country and local level. You need to take these factors into account when designing a project.

At the **country level** there are various **drivers of change**: demographics, national and local patterns of economic growth, infrastructure, markets, government policy, stability, large-scale investments, and climatic conditions.

These drivers set overall framework conditions within which a project will operate. The project has to take them into account, but has little or no influence over them.

Client type

Initial status
Emergency
Acute / chronic
Asset building
Growth

Segment
Poverty rank
Market access
Ethnicity,
Education
Gender
Age

Assets
None
Low
Medium
High

Project context and client types

Initial status. The local situation is also vital in shaping the project design and intervention strategy. Are the people recovering from an **emergency**, such as a flood? Or are the problems **longer-term** in nature, caused by political instability or poverty? Does the project aim to help poor people **build up their assets** from scratch? Or does it aim more for **growth** – helping people who already have some assets to boost their incomes and escape poverty?

Population segments. Who are our **clients**? We use the term **client** rather than **beneficiary** to highlight the point that we respect those we work with. We should take a business-like approach to identify challenges for specific client types, and to find cost-effective interventions that will raise the ability of specific clients to live a more fulfilled life.

In the fives skills approach it is important to engage both male and female (single, married, and/or mothers) clients from the planning process onwards to ensure their needs are being addressed. The proportion of men and women involved in the planning and carrying out of the activity should be align with the proportion on men and women in the community/ region/ country, depending on the reach of the project. Also, the proportion of clients should be equivalent to the gender proportion of the community, region, country

Different people in a community have different opportunities and challenges. **Very poor people** are in a different situation from those who are slightly better off, so projects that target the very poor, or people with some assets will need different approaches and different measures of success.

Women and men also have different situations and types of opportunities, needs, and constraints. People who live in **remote areas** face different challenges from those close to roads or markets. Similarly, people of different ethnic groups, educational levels and ages also have differing ambitions and possibilities.

Assets. People with no or very few assets (the landless, widows, orphans) may find it impossible to invest in improving their lives. Those with a little land or some savings have a basis on which they can build.

The mix of people in the community may also be important: a few relatively well-endowed farmers may help their poorer neighbors improve their lives – or they can make it more difficult for them.

Intervention services

Assets transfers
Technologies
Food
Money

Skills Training
Groups
Savings & loans
Marketing
Production
Innovation

Service linkage options
Inputs
Finance
Extension
Output markets

Public Works
Roads
Water
Watershed
Communications

Intervention services

Projects help clients by providing them with various types of **assets**: technology, food and money (for example, in food or cash-for-work programs).

Projects also provide clients with **skills and linkages**. This is where the **five-skills approach** fits in: it builds the clients' skills in five key areas. It ensures the clients develop the linkages with input suppliers, financial services, extension advice and markets that they need to improve their resiliency and prospects for growth.

Rather than focusing on a single theme, the five-skills approach provides a combination of assets, skills and linkages.

At the end of the project, the clients should have a better knowledge about financial management, more sustainable production and better links to markets so they can support their families.

A project may have to **invest more time and resources** with certain types of clients. For example, it may cost more to work with women than men at the outset of a project. This is because many women are too busy to attend courses, and they may need more training in basic skills before they can adopt new technologies. Poor women are often less educated than men, so they may also need extra training in literacy or numeracy. Women are often socially less empowered than men, and may need special support and agreements from the community to start new endeavors.

Transfer agents

Government services

Civil society services

Private services

Transfer agents or "trusted intermediary"

Projects generally work with local service agents: **government extension advisors, NGO field agents, community volunteers, private-sector service providers**, and so on. Most projects use a combination of these players to supply a mix of services to communities. It is important that the gender balance of the transfer agents are aligned with the clients gender-balance and that the appropriate transfer agent is assigned to groups.

Projects increasingly use service providers that charge clients a fee. That makes the intervention more sustainable, as the provider can continue to offer the service after the project ends as they are paid. Fee-based providers can include farm input suppliers, trainers, business or financial advisors, veterinarians, and marketing specialists.

There are many ways to introduce fees: for example, the project may negotiate with the community to provide in-king contributions from the participants so that the services are not explicitly free. Alternatively, the project may begin with providing farmers with free extension or financial services, but on the understanding that after a certain time, perhaps two seasons, that additional training will be on a fee basis. In other cases, fees may be introduced once the farmers have passed a certain level of skills or received training for a certain period of time, they have to start paying for the service.

If you plan to introduce fees during a project, the field agent must make this change clear to them from the beginning of the project.

In many countries, it is highly advisable to hire women as field agents so they can support female farmers and other clients..

Adoption

Skills integration

Technology

Market relationships

Adoption

How quickly can the clients make progress towards the project goal?

The answer depends on who they are and their starting point.

- Projects that support very poor, less educated, male or female headed households in remote areas are likely to show slow rates of overall change. But these changes may have profound positive impacts on the lives of the women and her children, for the rest of their lives.
- A project that supports middle-income, educated, male-headed households who have access to services and markets can show fairly rapid progress in terms of production and income gains. If these changes are sustainable they can lift entire communities out of poverty.
- In both cases however, the positive gains will only lead to long-term change if the community members sustain them when the project ends.

When making decisions on interventions, it is also important to weigh the effects of investments within different community segments. Look at percentage gains as well as absolute amounts.

- For a poor farmer who produces a dozen eggs a week, three more eggs is an **increase of 25%.**
- That is more in percentage terms than a yield increase of 200 kg of maize per hectare for someone who normally harvests 1000 kg per hectare: a **20% increase**.

For the very poor, a few extra eggs are very important: they make a bigger difference to a family than the extra bags of maize would for a richer farmer.

Interventions at **both levels** are important.

Adoption rates and continued use of a new technology or best practice also depend on the clients' ability to **integrate skills**, understand and use **technologies that meet their needs**, and develop **relationships** with markets and providers of services such as finance and input supplies.

Desired Outcomes

↑ Productivity
↑ Income
↑ Sustainability
↑ Resilience
↑ Diets
↑ Hygiene
↓ Food prices
↑ Growth

Desired outcomes

A project must be defined clearly in terms of the context, the type of client, and the interventions needed. The goals must be appropriate for the client types, and the expected rate of change must be realistic and achievable. For change to be meaningful, positive and long-term, the clients must be able to sustain and manage it.

The targets should be relevant to the group. For example, targets for groups of men and women may be different.

Women have many household duties, so may take longer to learn and apply new skills. They tend to have fewer assets than men, so may not be able to use their new skills as quickly as men. Their enterprises may also be smaller-scale, and they may not be able to travel to distant markets, but their enterprises can bring in small amounts of money on a regular basis. For example:

- **Men's group:** Target = each member increases his yield from 4 to 5 bags of maize per acre. He sells the extra bag for 1200 shillings.
- **Women's group:** Target = each member sells 6 eggs a week at 3 shillings each. She earns an extra 18 × 52 = 936 shillings in the year.

Important: Over a year, the women selling eggs earn and save almost as much as the men! And small, regular earnings may end up having a bigger effect on family nutrition and well-being than big, one-off sales.

Projects that rely on the five skills put emphasis on transferring skills. Monitoring and evaluation must measure the clients' ability to use a combination of skills as well as the skills individually.

A model of change

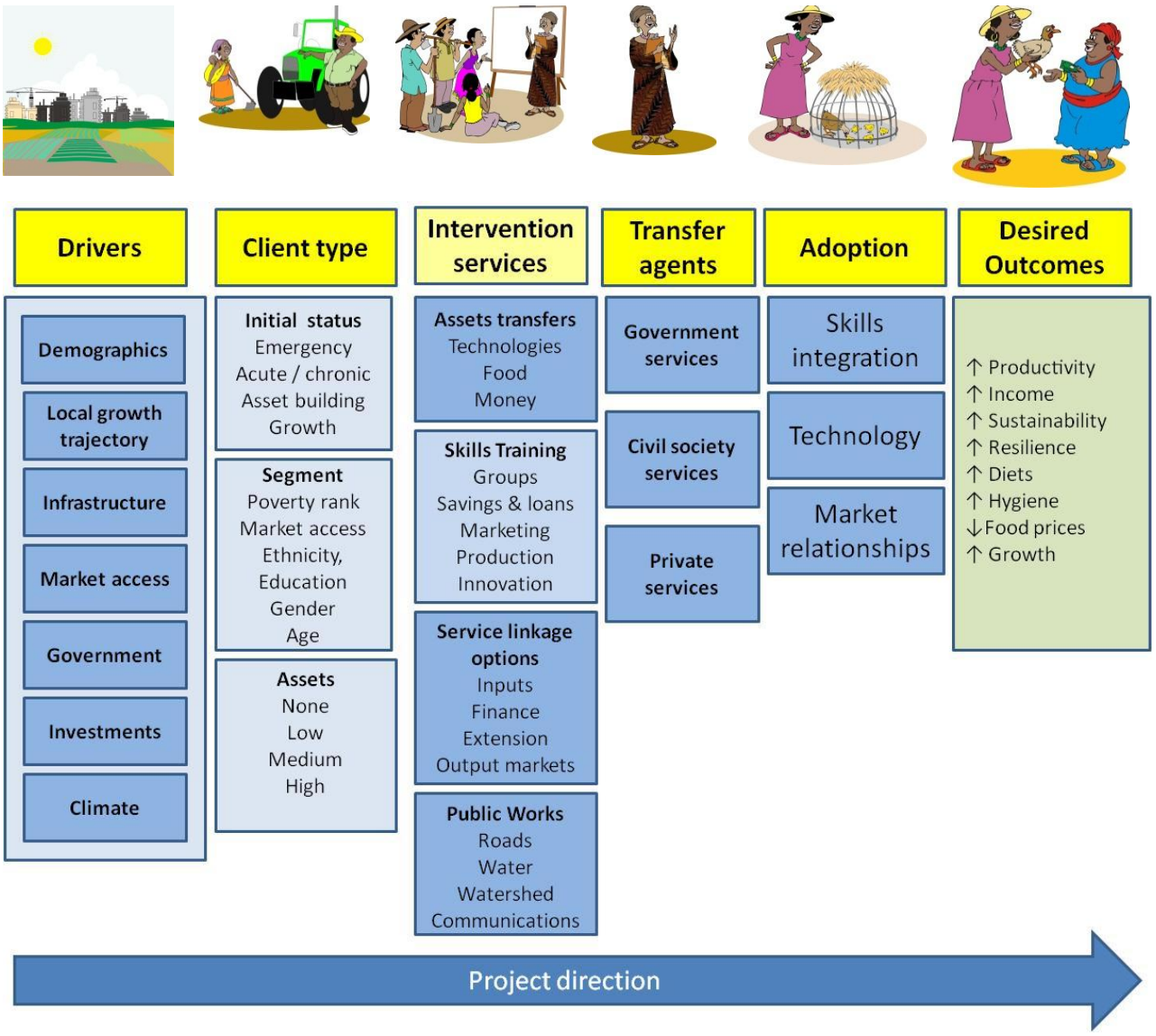


Figure 2. Project intervention approach

A project integrates each of these six aspects in a combination that meets the needs of the clients in a particular area.

The five-skills approach fits into the "skills training" box in the "**intervention services**" column. The skills approach also influences several of the other columns: in the choice of **client type**, in the use of different **transfer agents**, in the integration of the various skills during **adoption**. The result may be improvements in some or all of the **desired outcomes**.

Conclusion

Rural people all over the world need a range of skills to improve their livelihoods. Five types of skills are particularly important: **innovation, natural resources, marketing, finance** and **group organization**.

People often need a **combination** of these skills in order to be successful during the project and most importantly in being able to sustain their progress when the project ends.

Projects incorporate six aspects: **drivers of change** (or the macro context), **clients** and the local context, **intervention strategies**, **transfer agents**, **adoption** of new practices, and **desired outcomes**.

Lesson 2. A closer look at the five skills

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Name three detailed aspects of each of the five sets of skills.
- Describe how individual skills reinforce each other.
- Name the three central skills.
- List additional skills that farmers may need.

A closer look

Let us take a closer look at the five sets of skills.

Group organization

Finance

Marketing

Natural resources

Innovation.

Group organization

For a group to work together over the long term, the members must trust each other, learn to plan ideas together, and make important decisions. They need to decide things like:

- Who is in the group?
- What are the rules?
- What will the group invest in?
- How to resolve disagreements?

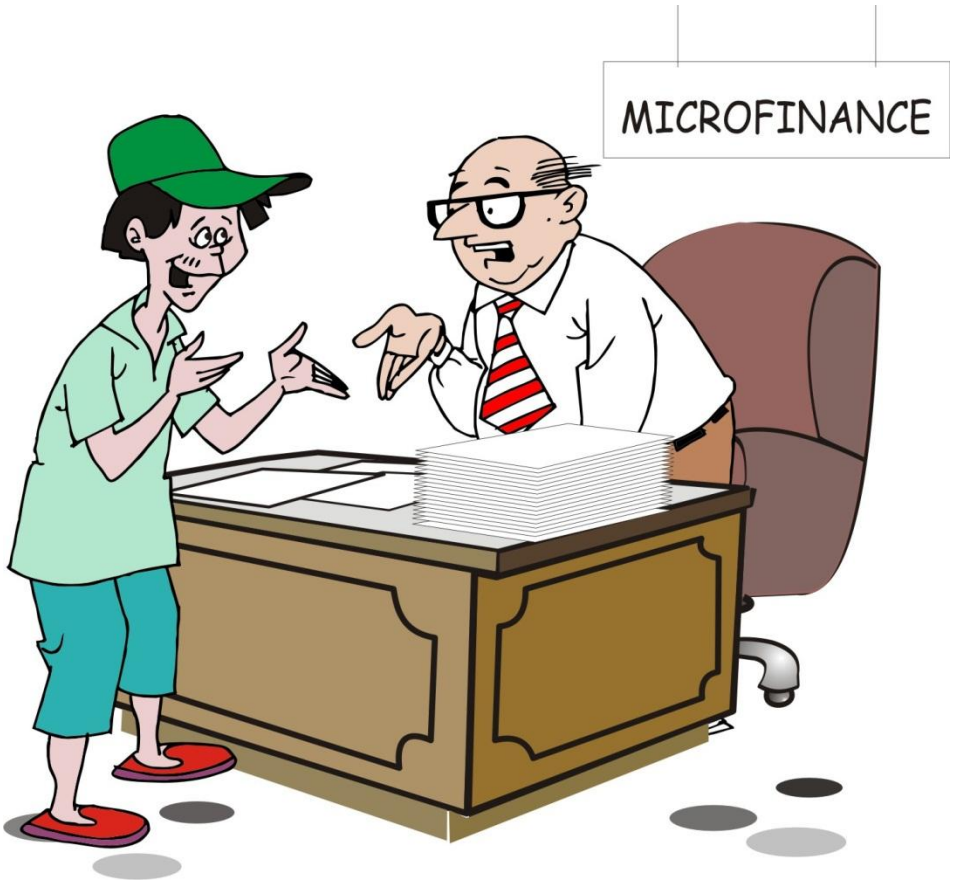
To be able to address these issues, it is helpful to learn the basics of good group management.

This includes:

- Selecting members
- Defining the group's purpose and setting goals
- Holding meetings
- Writing a constitution
- Electing management positions and setting timeframes for these positions
- Planning and implementing activities
- Holding officers and members accountable for the actions

- Managing finances
- Registering with local authorities and opening a bank account (in some countries).
- Having learning processes and
- Feed-back mechanisms, to assess group performance and progress.

Finance



Managing money is a vital set of skills for both individuals and groups. Financial skills include calculating costs, understanding cash flow, predicting incomes, planning budgets, saving money, opening and managing a bank account, understanding the cost of borrowing money and using loans. **Basic financial literacy** is important for the household and an essential part of farming for the market.

Many groups start off with **savings and loans**: members contribute a small amount each week to build up a pool of cash; they can then borrow money from this pool and repay it with interest. Many development agencies use this approach to help local people raise their own capital. By saving and lending money to each other, group members build trust, learn how to work together with money, and understand how to grow their money.

Savings-and-loans groups need many of the same skills as groups that focus on production and marketing: they need to organize themselves and set rules on how to operate. They also need the following skills:

- Group establishment and agreement of rules of operation
- Financial record keeping
- Agreements on amount, regularity of saving and payout time
- Loan disbursement – applying for and approving loans, rates of repayment, loan terms
- Loan repayment
- Managing capital over the long term
- Agreements on penalties if members do not conform to group rules
- Registering the group with authorities (in some countries).
- Managing personal budgets
- Managing investments

Marketing and agroenterprise

How can small-scale farmers earn more from their crops and livestock? By organizing as a group, they can learn together, gain from lower input prices by buying in bulk, pool their produce and gain better produce prices by aggregating their goods and selling larger amounts. They can identify buyers who are willing to pay a higher price for bulked goods. They can improve their product quality, or process it to raise its value. They can switch to more profitable products and more lucrative markets.

To understand how markets work and how to work together to increase their incomes, farmers need skills in:

- Organizing groups
- Selecting products
- Analyzing markets
- Calculating the costs, incomes and profits for a new agro-enterprise
- Working with business development services
- Building business plans
- Collective marketing
- Reviewing actual costs, income and profits at the end of the season
- Planning for next season and scaling up.

Natural resource management

Rising rural populations have led to the over-exploitation of natural resources: soils are eroded, hillsides deforested, groundwater levels are falling, and changes in the climate mean that droughts and flooding are becoming more common. For farmers to continue to produce food and to raise their production on a sustainable basis, they must learn how to manage and **conserve their natural resources**.

It is possible for **individual farmers** to improve their management on their own farms – for example by:

- Managing their soil better, using methods such as zero tillage
- Using compost and appropriate amounts of artificial fertilizer

- Improving water use by harvesting rainwater and using irrigation
- Reducing agrochemical use and applying them safely
- Growing more suitable crops, rotating crops, and using improved varieties.

Some improvements are possible only if **groups of farmers** (or the whole community) work together. For example:

- Controlling erosion by building bunds, check dams and diversion ditches
- Replanting vegetation and restricting the cutting of wood
- Protecting springs and building and managing irrigation systems
- Restricting grazing in degraded areas.

Innovation

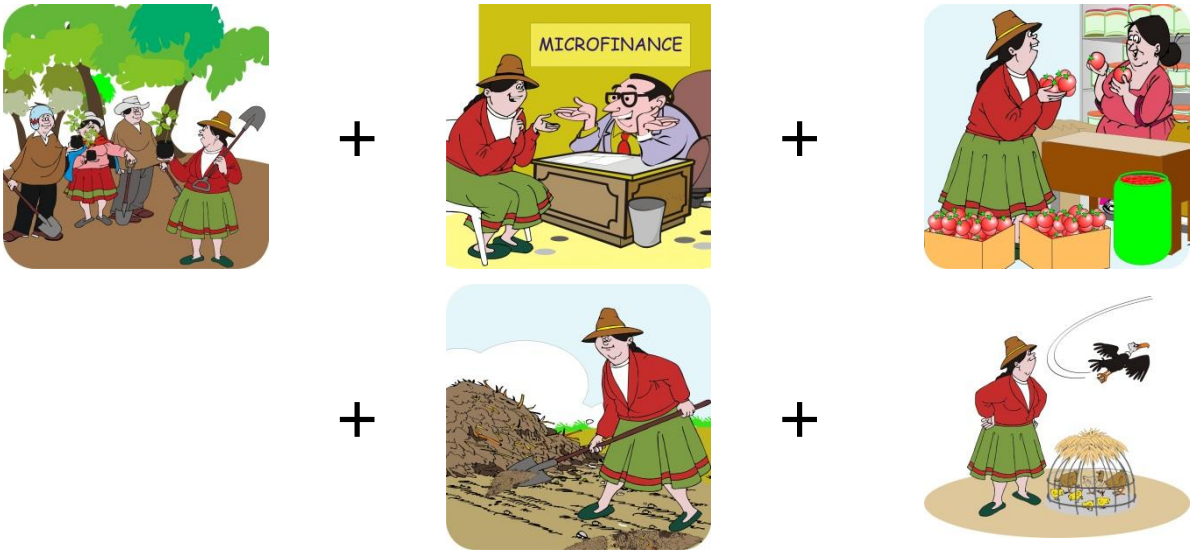
Changing markets, rising populations, declining natural resources and a changing climate are making traditional farming methods more challenging. Many farmers want to test new ideas to improve their situation, but they do not know how to do so systematically. They can learn some relatively simple methods to test new ideas.

Key skills for innovation include:

- Identifying and defining problems
- Exploring possible solutions and finding sources of information
- Designing a practical way to do research

- Collecting and recording observations
- Analyzing and evaluating the results
- Applying the findings and sharing knowledge.

The power of combining skills



Each of our five sets of skills is valuable in its own right: farmers and other rural people can use them to improve their incomes and livelihoods. But the real benefit comes when they combine these skills. The most successful farmers' groups start off focusing on one type of activity, then **add skills** over time. Many get support for the first activity, but have to seek training in the other skills, or learn them on their own.

Let us look at two examples: a group that expanded **from savings to agroenterprise**, and one that started with an **enterprise and added savings and financial skills**.

From savings to agroenterprise

A group in **India** started as a simple **savings-and-loan club**. Every week, members paid a small amount into a common pool. The treasurer kept careful records of who had paid in what amount. Members could borrow money from the pool, to spend on anything they wanted, as long as they repaid the loan and the interest.

This was so successful that the group started using the money to invest in farming. Their first investment was a failure: they did not know anything about the products or the risks involved. So they decided they needed to learn how to **market** farm products. After learning a new set of skills and studying their market opportunities, they decided to invest in trading products rather than growing them. They now buy products, such as potatoes and wheat from groups of farmers in the village, store them if required and sell them to buyers in town.

From enterprise to savings

A project in **Tanzania** was developing **agroenterprise** groups to export chickpeas. These groups were successful as long as the project gave them advice and support. But they started to fail after one or two seasons after the project support was withdrawn, because the farmer groups were not cohesive.

A follow-up project introduced **savings-and-loans** and **group-organization** skills. Regular meetings to discuss finance, promote joint saving and to improve group management helped the members to learn how to work together and build a level of mutual trust. Working with regular savings and loans helped the group to understand more about finances, and working together resulted in a more sustainable and expanding chickpea business.

Three central skills

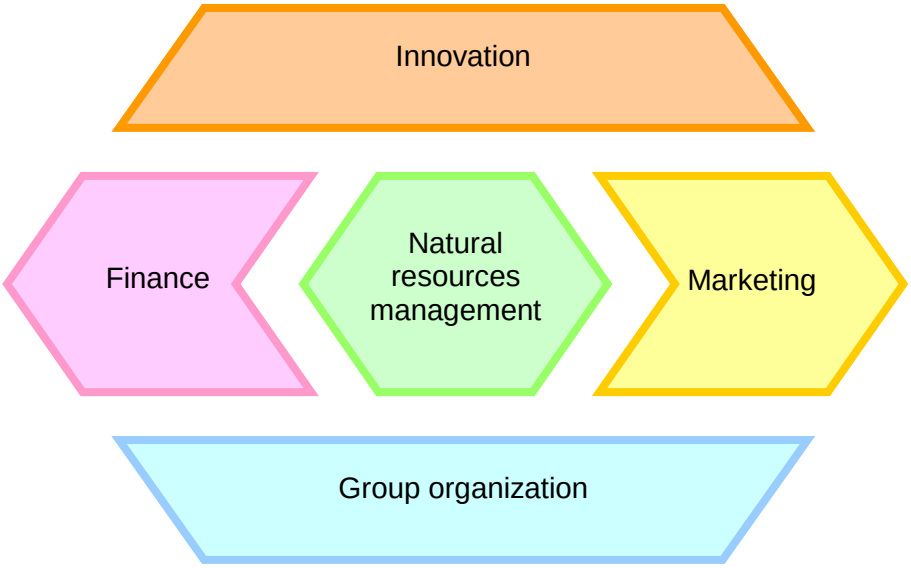


Figure 3. Finance, resource management and marketing are the three central skills

Three types of skills – finance (especially savings), natural resources and marketing – tend to be central to improving livelihoods. Group management and innovation complement these.

Adding skills

Many development projects focus on developing particular types of groups. The three most common are:

- Savings and loans groups (focusing on finance)
- Farmer field schools (natural resource management and farm production)
- Marketing groups (agroenterprises).

Men often want to start by improving their farm production. Women often prefer to start with savings.

Wherever people start, projects can then help these groups develop further by training them in the other skills. For example, a savings-and-loan group may want to learn about marketing. A farmer field school may decide to improve its management and ability to innovate. A marketing group may find it needs to improve its production and management of natural resources.

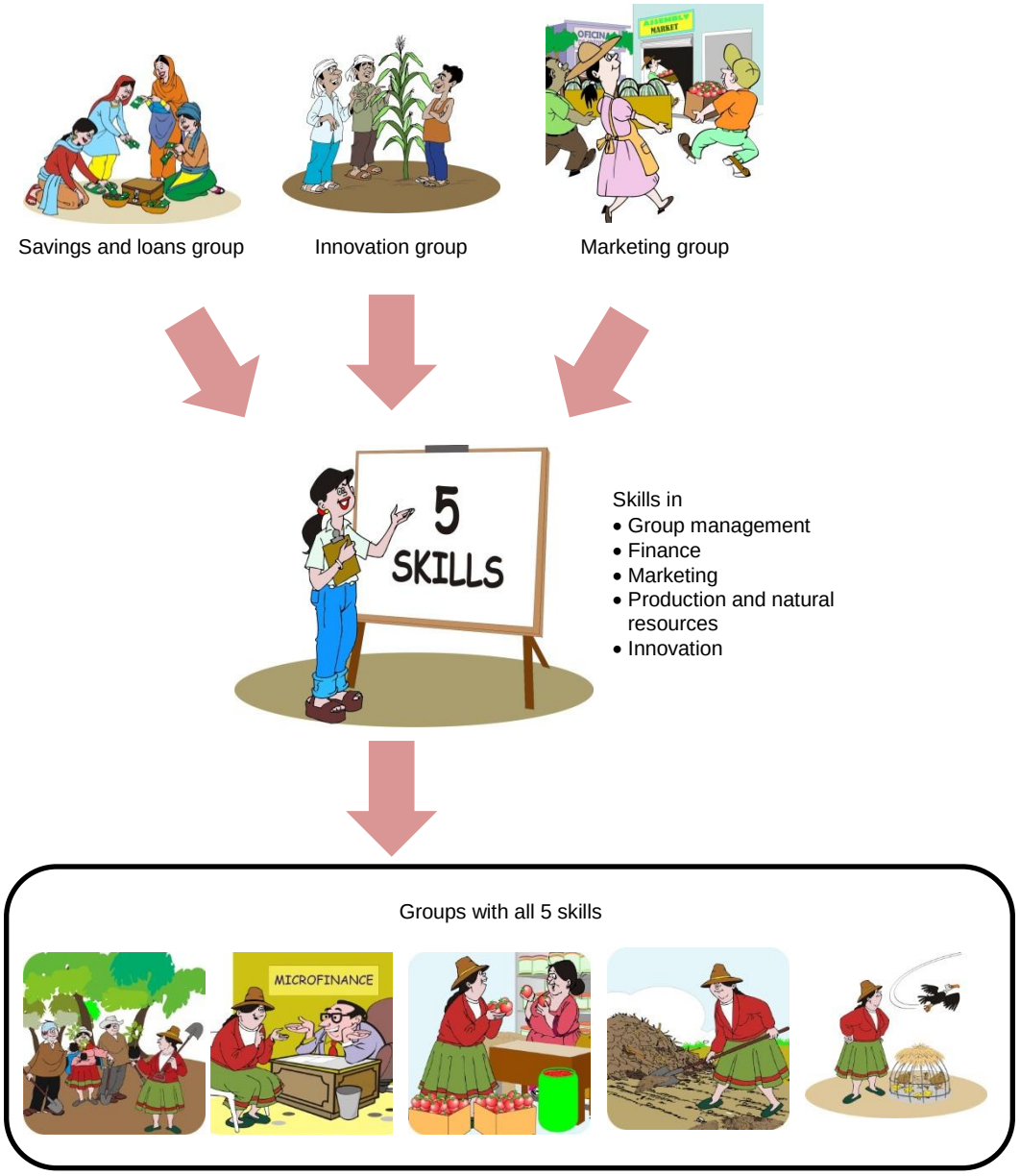


Figure 4. Skill set progression over time

Are all five skills necessary?

No. Many groups and individual farmers successfully produce and sell goods without all the skills. But a group's chances of long term success are higher if they have all five sets of skills.

Different people in the group or the community may specialize in different skills. It is not necessary to train every community or group member in all the skills. The important point is access to the skills and knowledge.

The skills can be learned in any order. The ability to provide training in several skills will depend on the project resources and timeframe.

Different groups in a community may have different goals and combinations of skills.

- **Single-skill groups.** Some groups may focus just on one skill, such as savings, or may focus on production, managing natural resources or innovation.
- **Multi-skill groups.** Other groups may combine two or more of the skills – such as a savings group that also markets its members' produce. Some groups may have all five skills.

Different groups in the same community may have many members in common, and these groups can learn and benefit from one another.

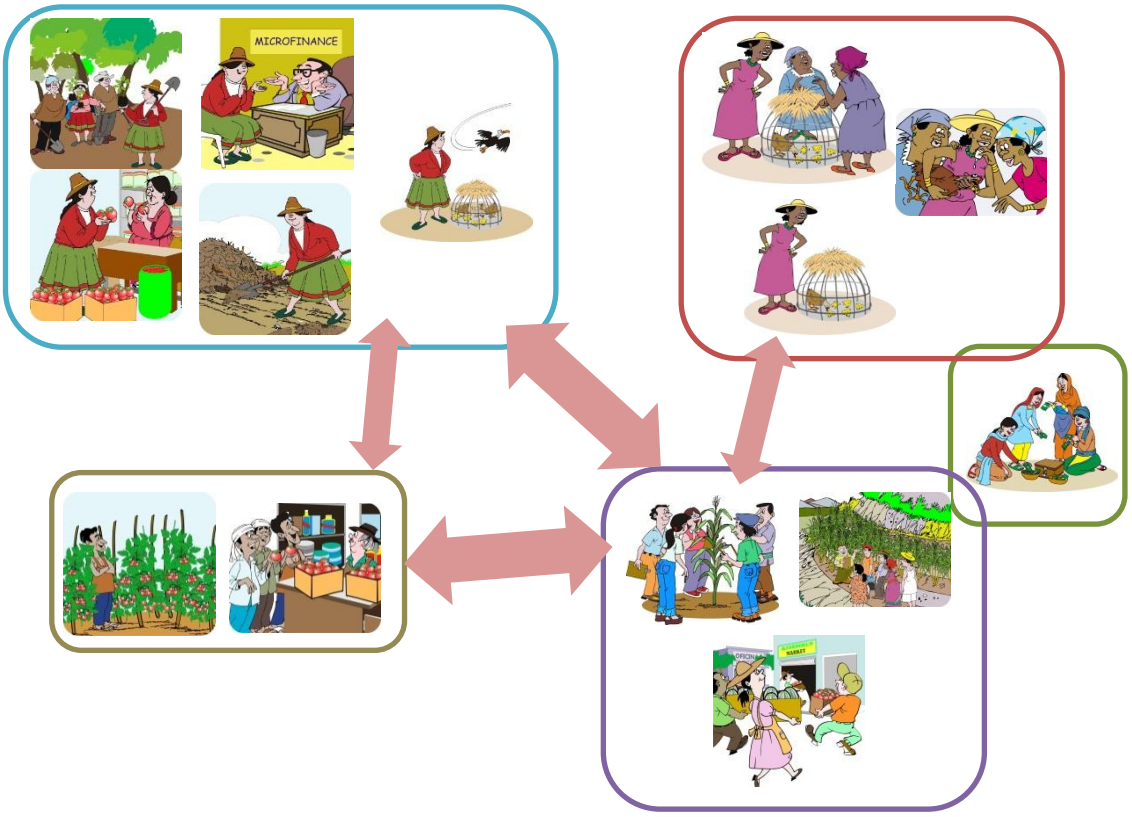


Figure 5. Different groups in a community combine different sets of skills

Other skills

The five skills – group organization, finance, marketing, natural resources and innovation – are important for many rural communities around the world. The needs and approaches are also fairly common, making it possible to use one course in many different countries and situations.

But these are not the only skills that rural people need. They often also need skills in:

- **Literacy.** Low rates of literacy are common in many poor rural communities. Women are often less literate than men.
- **Numeracy.** This is the ability to read and write numbers, do sums, and keep numerical records.
- **Leadership**. This is the ability to inspire a group, make clear decisions and accelerate progress.
- **Production methods for specific crops and livestock.** These depend on the crop or animal raised, the local climate and soil, and the production system.
- **Agricultural processing.** Adding value to a product, for example by drying, milling, cleaning, sorting, grading, canning, packaging, and so on.
- **Nutrition, health and hygiene** (including dealing with HIV).
- **Non-farm income-earning skills.** This covers a huge range of skills and jobs: labouring on other farms, carpentry, metalworking, driving, hair cutting, vehicle maintenance, electrics, building, computer use, office skills, and so on.
- **Gender issues.** How to work in ways that support the roles of men, women and children.

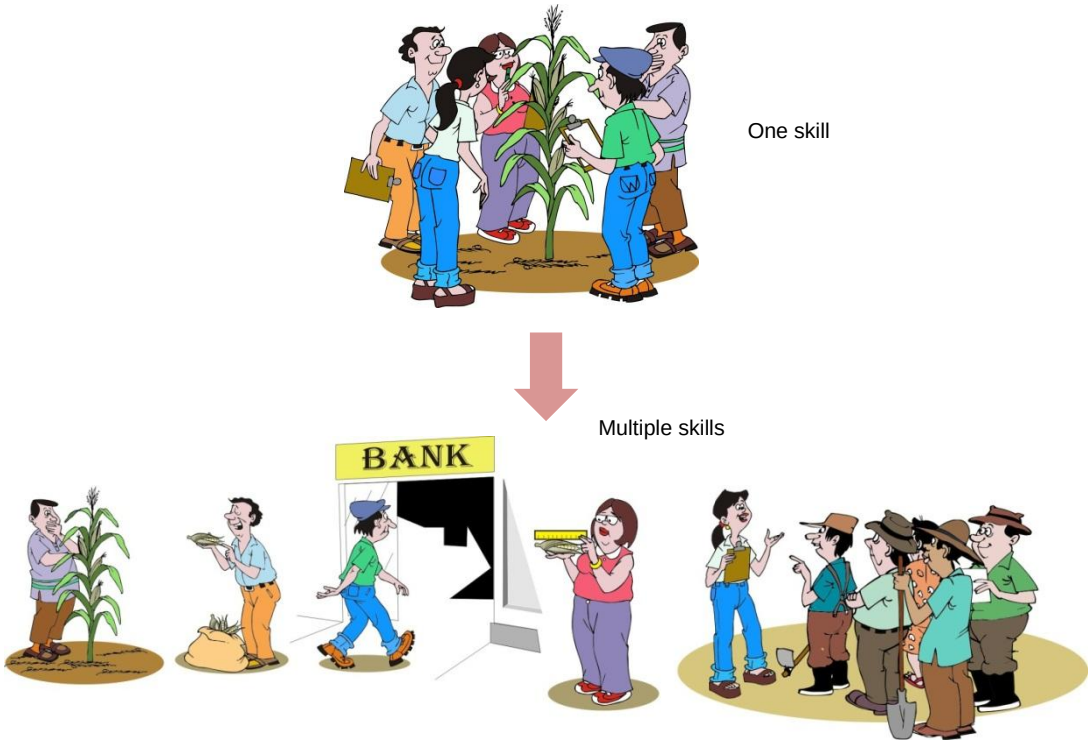
- **Conflict management.**
- **Communication, lobbying and advocacy.**

Some of these skills depend on the language (literacy), or type of crop grown or livestock raised and variables such as climate and soil. It is not possible to produce courses on all of these skills that can be used throughout the world.

Others (such as gender) are relevant to many different fields, so can be touched on in the relevant courses. This module, for example, stresses the need to ensure women as well as men can benefit from training. As the needs of women and men often differ, these differences should be considered in designing and implementing the training

You may need to make sure that local people have basic literacy, numeracy and production skills before you start teaching the five sets of skills covered here.

From single-skill to multi-skill thinking



If your team is used to working with just one type of skill, you will need to change your approach. You and your colleagues will need to:

- Ensure that all team members understand the multiple skills approach.
- Train the team members in the additional skills they will need.
- Determine the skills needs in the communities you serve by engaging both men and women. It might be necessary to engage different types of women (i.e. single, married, mothers).

- Design training programs for clients to learn the multiple skills.
- Design interventions that enable clients to use their skills.
- Set up a gender-disaggreated monitoring system to keep track of progress and adjust activities.

Your project team needs members with the right types of expertise, and who can train community members, your clients, effectively. The team may also need other types of expertise, in addition to the five types of skills outlined here.

Individual team members do not need to master all of the skills. But they do need to understand the multiple-skills approach, and help clients identify and obtain the information they need.

Conclusion

This lesson has looked in detail at the five sets of skills that people in rural communities need.

- **Group organization** enables them to work together effectively to improve their lives.
- **Financial skills** mean they can budget, plan, save and invest.
- **Marketing and agroenterprise** improves their abilities to make a profit by selling what they produce.
- **Natural resource management** helps improve their productivity on a sustainable basis.
- **Innovation** enables them to identify, test and adopt new technologies that will improve their livelihoods.

The five skills are **complementary**: each one supports the others. The multiple-skills approach provides groups of people within the community with a combination of skills that they can use to improve their lives.

Lesson 3. Organizing the team

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Describe how a typical development project team is organized.
- Assess the skills of team members.
- List four participatory training methods.
- Describe the advantages of participatory training compared to traditional training methods.
- Describe how to adapt training for illiterate people.
- List the major types of training materials and equipment you will need.

Getting organized

This lesson covers the following:

- Organizing the project team
- Evaluating the skills of team members and partner organizations
- Participatory training methods
- The types of training materials and equipment you will need.

Organizing the project team

Many projects are managed by a small team of people from a lead organization and perhaps one or more partners. This team works with many other people: supervisors and field agents; traders, processors and retailers; business and financial services; farmers and community leaders.

The team has a **project leader**, who coordinates the project direction, investment and progress.

The team may have several **theme leaders** who coordinate activities and provide training for a specific objective such as production, marketing, and finance.

These theme leaders train and coordinate **field staff** from the lead agency, who in turn coordinate **staff of local partner organizations**.

Field agents from these local organizations work directly with **groups of farmers.**

The project team needs to be organized so people in each of these positions work effectively together.

First meetings

Before starting to work with a new community, the project team should meet and prepare for the implementation phase. These first project meetings are an opportunity for the members and partners to meet and discuss how a new project will addresses key challenges faced by the community and how it can complement existing activities and projects. This meeting will enable the community to become familiar with the project plans goals and strategies. They will also learn about each other and find out about their strengths and weaknesses.

Before the first meeting:

- Be sure that the team meeting the community have a clear understanding about the project
- Provide sufficient time for the community to be prepared
- Have prepared a clear agenda

- Have a discussions about the local culture and any important background information regarding culture, recent history and local achievements.

Tasks for the first meetings:

- Hold sessions and workshops to reinforce the key goals and objectives of the project. Make the objectives/ goals meet the needs of the client
- Make sure that everyone knows the approach and the steps to follow in implementing the project.
- Determine how the project team and community will work together.
- Draw up an organogram with names of each staff member.
- Prepare clear scopes of work for each staff member.
- Discuss training plans and plan according to the needs and views of the people in the community.

Evaluating project team experience and training skills

Do the team members have all the skills they need to achieve the project's goals?

Many people in the team may need new skills. The managers should assess the team members' skills and arrange training needed to build their capacity. See Staff Exercise 3a for how to do this.

Questions to ask yourself and your team

- What experience does each person have in:
    - Group management?

    - Finance, savings and loans?
    - Natural resource management and sustainable production?
    - Marketing and agroenterprise?
    - Innovation?
- Does the person's lack of capacity affect the work with the clients?
- What additional skills and experience do the members of the team need? How can they get these?

Working with partner organizations

Large projects often involve several partners, each with its own functions and capabilities. These may include local NGOs, church organizations, government agencies, research institutions, financial institutions and private companies.

Some things to discuss with potential partner organizations:

- **Skills.** Review the skills of the partner organization in the same way as with your own team. What can the partner offer the project group? Does the partner have the skills needed? Are its staff trained in using participatory multi-skill techniques? If not, will it agree to training?
- **Commitment.** Is the partner's management committed to support the project for 24–36 months? How will they contribute and support the project? Is the partner interested in a long-term commitment to a multi-skill approach?
- **Specialization.** Is the partner able and willing to support only one of the skills? Is this acceptable and helpful?
- **Location.** Does the partner work in the same geographical area?
- **Resources.** Does the partner have the resources to engage in the project, or is funding required?

- **Reporting.** Does the partner agree to link field data and financial reporting into a single routine reporting process?

The five-skills approach will probably be new for some of the partners. The lead organization should provide training to partners when the project begins. You should also check the quality of the service delivery on a regular basis.

The partners should discuss conditions for their collaboration. Once agreement is reached, prepare a formal memorandum of understanding between the partners that outlines their roles and responsibilities and any financial arrangements.

Reporting

Technical reporting is as important as good financial accounts. Financial support for program activities requires clear rules for **both** financial accountability and technical reporting. Both are required to maintain payments.

All financial transactions between project partners should be tied to technical reporting, using agreed formats, and timetables. It is particularly important that field based agencies provide clear data on the financial and gender-disaggregated social and production-based performance of the farmers' group.

The regular project payments should be based on an agreement of **no data –no payments!**

Field agents

If the partners are to provide field agents, they should be selected carefully. The field agents should:

- Be dynamic and interested in their new role
- Have strong participatory skills
- Reflect the gender composition of the clients, where possible and appropriate,
- If possible, have some background in the core skills areas.

It may be necessary to hire new staff with these attributes.

Provide training to all new staff of partner organizations to ensure they have the necessary skills and a clear understanding of why the skills are key to project success.

Training project and partner staff

Once you have determined the skills and experience of the lead team and partners, you can design a training program to upgrade their skills as needed. This may include:

- Giving the staff the **training materials** for the five sets of skills**.**
- Arrange **face-to-face workshops** for staff.
- Arrange for staff to take **online training courses**.
- Enable staff to **learn on the job**, perhaps by being coached by a more experienced staff member.
- Hire **new staff** with the missing skills.
- **Ask partners with specialized skills** for help. Many agencies support training in key areas. Consider looking for trainers from the private sector.

Traditional teaching

In many countries, teaching is traditionally a **one-way** process. The teacher stands in front of the class and delivers a lecture. The students are expected to listen and learn. They often have to learn by rote and then repeat what the teacher has told them. Discussion and disagreement are discouraged.

This is **not** a good way to teach the five skills!

- Learners are **adults**, not children. They have their own experiences and know many of the problems they face.
- For many problems, there is no one right answer. There may be **many solutions**, and it is a question of finding the best one to suit the situation. Often, it is not a question of learning a ready-made solution, but of **discovering** a new solution that fits a particular situation.
- Plus, people learn best not just by **listening**, but also if they **see** and **do** things for themselves.

Participatory training

Participatory training is a better approach for the skills set method. It means encouraging the learners to **share** their experiences, **suggest** ideas, and **debate** solutions. It also means trying things out in a **practical** way – through exercises and experiments. Trainings may need to be gender-disaggregated to get full female participation

Traditional teaching	Participatory training
• The teacher tells the students what they need to know. • The teacher is more knowledgeable and experienced than the students. • The teacher shares his or her knowledge by lecturing. • The students are passive, just listening and taking notes. • The students learn from the right answers given by the teacher.	• The trainer asks questions and facilitates discussions. • Both trainers and trainees are knowledgeable and experienced. • Everyone reflects on their own, then shares their ideas, experiences and expertise. • Trainees are active and analytical, asking questions and exploring alternatives. • Trainees develop their own answers. Indeed, there may be many different answers.

Working with people with little education

Many people in rural areas – especially women and older people – have had little or no **formal education**. They may find it hard to:

- Read and write.
- Do arithmetic.
- Understand symbols like the plus sign (+) or arrows (→).

- Understand diagrams and maps.
- Understand line drawings (people, crops or animals).

Plus, remember that many people – including the better-educated – have poor eyesight or may be **color-blind** (so cannot see the difference between the colors in your beautiful color-coded diagram).

In addition, schooling helps us learn to think logically, understand abstract ideas, and remember what has just been said. People with less formal education may need more time to understand an idea, though they often have very good long-term memories.

It can be hard to tell if someone is illiterate or has difficulty seeing or understanding what is written or drawn on paper. In some places illiteracy is seen as a stigma, and people get skilled at hiding the fact they cannot read. They may sit at the back of the group, pretend not to be interested, not take part in discussions, or defer to better-educated people. As a result, a project cannot take advantage of their knowledge and experience, their opinions are not heard, and decisions are made that may not be in their best interest. The result may be a bigger, not smaller, gap between the well-off, better educated elite in a village and the less-educated poor.

But illiterate people have just as much to contribute to their own development as better-educated people – and they have just as much right to do so.

Fortunately, many of the things that make it easier for educated people to understand also help people who have difficulties with reading, writing and arithmetic.

Tips on working with people with little education

Here are some tips on how to help people and these may help with educated people too!

- Say things **clearly**, and repeat if necessary. Do not use technical jargon.
- **Ask people questions** to find out if they are following the conversation.
- **Make the learning fun!** Try to keep the group members interested and engaged. Keep them happy.
- Use lines or dots rather than **numbers** if people are having difficulties following figures. For example, instead of

  $$3 + 5 = 8$$

  you can write

  $$||| + ||||| = ||||||||$$

- Use **objects** (such as sticks and stones) as counters, rather than numbers.
- Use **leaves or seeds** to represent different crops and trees.
- Use **pictures** as well as words. For example, instead of just “maize” (corn), draw a picture of a maize plant or corncob. Your pictures do not have to be professional – you can use stick drawings like the ones in Figure 6.

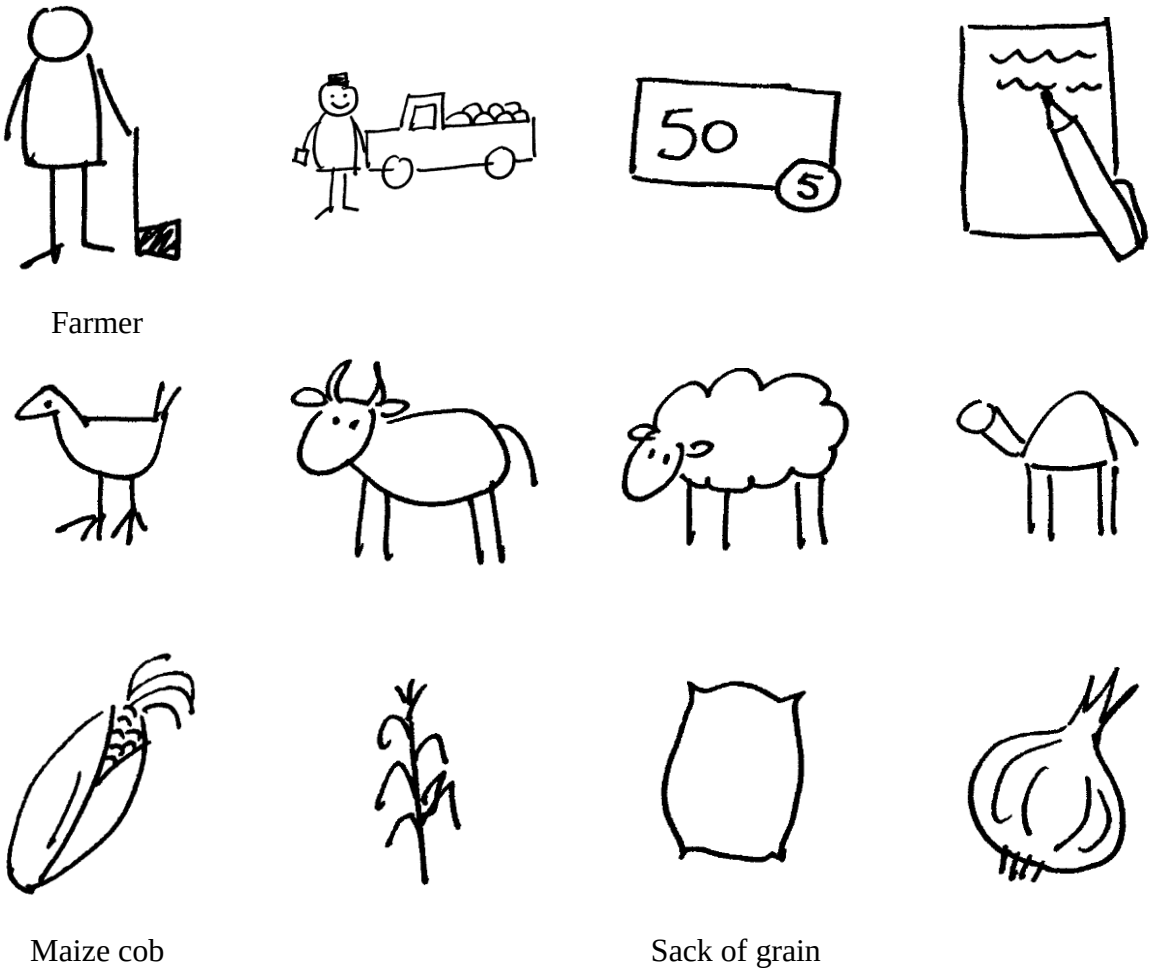
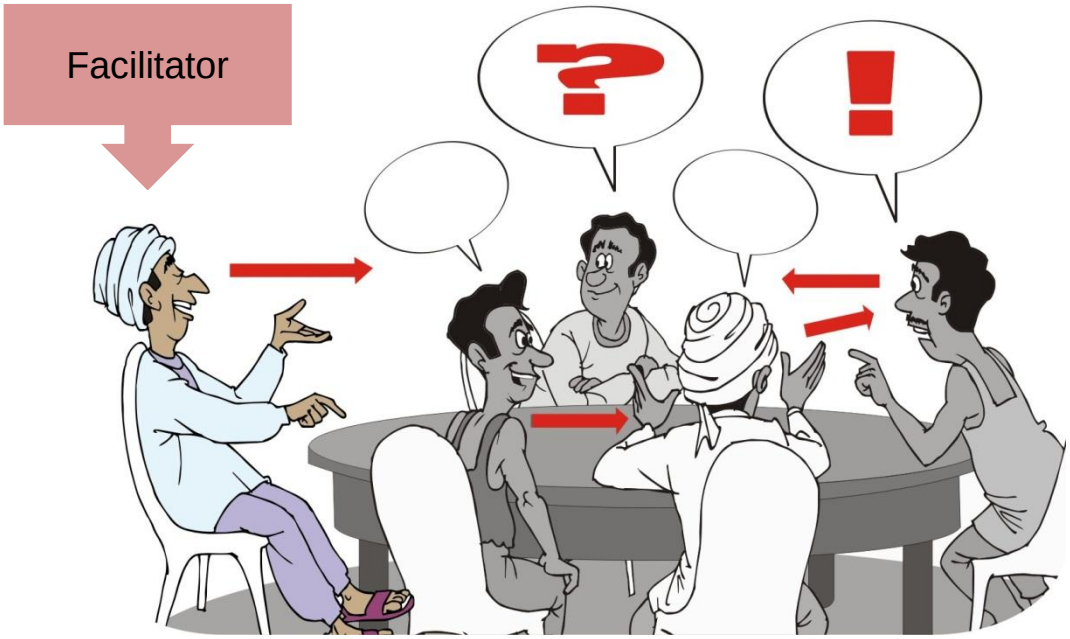


Figure 6. Examples of simple drawings

- When **drawing** something (such as a house or a cow), ask people what they think the drawing represents.
- Rather than drawing things yourself, get a **group member** to do the drawing.
- **Simplify** numbers and tables. Use round numbers (3,000, not 3,056). Reduce the number of rows and columns in a table to a minimum.
- **Check** which participants can read and write, and who can do arithmetic (but avoid embarrassing people in front of others). If necessary, find a way to discreetly test people to be sure they have the skills needed to do what they are asked to. For example, at the end of a meeting take one or two individuals aside and give them some assignments to write or read, that is related to the meeting. Either wait until they have finished or check back with these individuals before the next meeting, to find out how they have done. Engage these people in a conversation to get an idea about general literacy levels.
- Ask people how **they** want to deal with low levels of literacy. Perhaps you can arrange some lessons in reading and writing for them.

- Make sure that **someone** in each group can read and write – but make sure that they do not dominate the group.
- If no one in the group can write, consider bringing in a **younger person** to keep records.
- Make **exercises** practical and real. If you want to make a point about the soil, don't just talk about it. Take them into the field and get them to dig a hole so they can see what you are talking about.
- **Repeat ideas** several times in a lesson. In the next lesson, go over again what they learned the last time to remind them.
- **Get people to repeat key ideas back to you!** Many people learn or retain ideas through repeating a sentence or idea out loud. When people say things out loud, they think about them. But only use this method if it fits the local culture.
- Do not **talk down** to people.

A good facilitator



A good facilitator…

- Structures the sessions and guides activities.
- Presents information in an interesting and lively way.
- Stimulates participants to share their own ideas and experiences.
- Ask questions, gets people to feel comfortable and engaged.
- Poses problems and encourages the group to analyze them.
- Provokes people to think critically and motivates them towards action.

- Guides participants towards reaching conclusions and making decisions, and accepts decisions reached by consensus.
- Creates an atmosphere where all participants feel included and able to participate.
- Is sensitive to the verbal and non-verbal communication and the feelings, attitudes, culture, interests and any hidden agenda that may be present in the group.

Participatory training methods

You can use a variety of methods in training and to gather and analyze information. Choose those that best fit your situation.

Presentations. Useful to introduce a topic and to present information or give assignments. Keep them short, make them interesting! Presentations may be given by the facilitator, by a guest speaker, or by one of the participants.

Plenary discussions. Useful to ensure that participants have understood the presentation and to enable general questions and comments.

Group discussions and exercises. Best for detailed analysis of a topic. Divide the participants into groups and give them a topic to discuss, a task to perform or a problem to solve. Go around the groups to make sure they have understood the assignment and to help them if necessary. When they are finished, bring the groups back together to present and discuss their findings.

Focus groups are a kind of open-ended group interview. They are a good way to gather information about a particular subject, identify challenges and opportunities, and explore interest in possible solutions. Consider holding separate focus groups for men and women to make it easy for the women to share their views. See section on how to conduct a focus group. **Error! Not a valid result for able.** for how to conduct a focus group.

Maps and diagrams are a good way to gather information, to get participants to identify and analyze problems, and to present information to others. They can be drawn with a stick on a piece of sandy ground (use leaves, stones or seeds as markers), with colored chalk on a concrete floor, or with marker pens a large piece of paper.

Games and role plays are a fun way to start talking about project work and to start people thinking about more complicated issues such as money, sustainability, marketing and business. They also get people to think about their own skills in issues such as entrepreneurship and marketing.

Individual or pair work. Give individual participants (or pairs of participants) an assignment – such as filling in a form or drawing a map of their farm. Go around to make sure they understand what to do. At the end of the assignment, ask one or two to present their results to the whole group.

Practical assignments. A practical assignment may last from several hours to a whole season. Examples include organizing market research, participatory appraisal exercises such as transect walks and seasonal calendars, and registering a savings group with the authorities. Make sure that the participants make the decisions and do as much of the work as possible! Remember that you should not do things for them.

Coaching. Some activities are complex, and they require intensive or repeated guidance. For example, you can visit a new group to advise members how to get organized and draw up a constitution.

Field visits, cross visits. You can organize visits to other villages, research organizations or markets. Participants can study particular aspects of a topic and learn how others solve a problem.

Demonstrations and experiments. These are often done in the field rather than the classroom. You can prepare the demonstration yourself, or ask a group of participants to do so. A demonstration or experiment may be quick and simple (such as digging a hole to look at the soil profile), or take a whole season (such as an experiment to compare the yields of several varieties of a crop).

Field days, fairs, posters, theatre, exhibits. These are good ways for the group to share their findings with other local people and outsiders.

In the classroom or under a tree?

Where possible, hold sessions with farmers **in the field** rather than in a formal classroom. For some activities, you can choose a suitable venue beforehand. For example, if you want to discuss soil erosion, find somewhere where participants can see several types of evidence of erosion.

It is better to have people **sitting in a circle** rather than in rows facing the trainer. That makes it easier for participants to discuss among themselves.

For group activities, arrange participants in groups of **four to six** people.

Make sure women can participate

It can be especially difficult to ensure that women can participate in training.

- Encourage women to join groups and to attend the training.
- Hold training sessions at times that women will be free from their household duties.
- If necessary, hold separate training sessions for women.
- In joint sessions with men, make sure that the women are not seated right at the back.
- Invite women to speak up and contribute their ideas. Do not allow the men to dominate!
- Make sure that women are adequately represented on committees and in official positions.
- To support women's involvement, allow their children to attend or better, arrange for someone to look after the children.

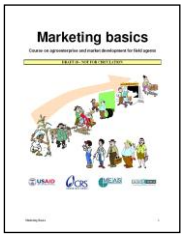
Who should be the trainer?

Most field staff have a background in one or two skill areas, not all five. So it is unlikely that that they will feel qualified enough to teach all of the modules. Do not assume that all field staff can teach all of the modules straight away.

- **Assess the training needs** of each staff member and arrange courses for them to learn the extra skills.
- Arrange for less-experienced staff to attend training courses with local people, or to work alongside a skilled trainer to **learn the ropes**.
- Assign skilled trainers as **mentors** for less-experienced staff.
- Do not try to train all staff as trainers in all areas. Instead, designate certain staff to train groups in their own **specialty subjects**.
- Train staff in **participatory training methods**.

Training materials

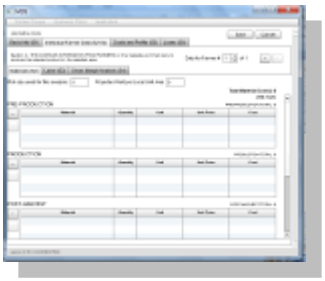
The training materials for the five skills are available as:



Printed training guides.

Online books.

Distance-learning courses.



Software applications.

Exercises that you can laminate for use in the field.

Projects will always make some provision to train staff through **face-to-face courses.**

They can complement this…

- With training that uses additional printed manuals for staff to study **on their own.**
- By enabling staff to study **online**.
- Some **combination** of these.

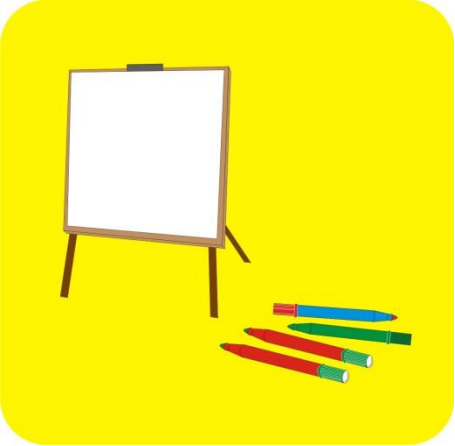
Forms: paper, online and offline

Some of the modules use forms that participants can use to help them learn, record and report observations, make calculations or analyze information.

- **Paper forms.** You can photocopy these forms to use as handouts, or copy them onto a flipchart or blackboard to use with a group.
- **Online forms.** Electronic versions of these forms are included in the online versions of the modules. If you have a computer connected to the internet, you can fill these in online.
- **Offline forms.** You can also fill them in the field while offline, and upload them when you return to the office and get online.

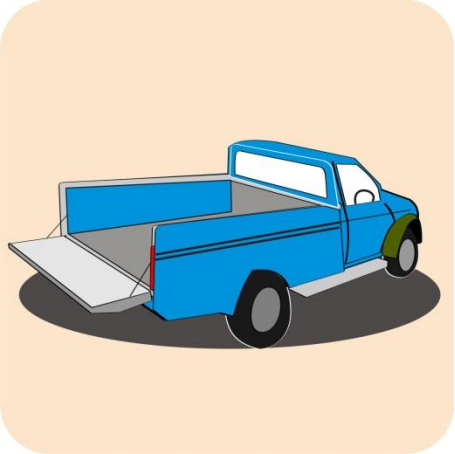
Equipment needs

You will need some simple equipment to teach the modules in this series.



Large sheets of paper, marker pens and cards. You will need these for many of the class-based exercises in the modules.

Hoes, spades, other farm tools, seed, etc. You will need items like these for some of the assignments in the modules on natural resource management and innovation.



Transport. You may need to arrange transport for visits to markets and service providers.

Computer. A mobile device of some sort is not necessary to teach the modules, but it is very useful to plan courses, and to gather and report data. If your project uses some form of electronic mobile information device, such as a smart phone, laptop or tablet computer, make sure that staff know how to use them. The project may need to hire someone to maintain the computers and train staff how to use them.

Conclusion

A multiple-skills approach needs a **well-organized team** with the right experience and skills. It is necessary to **assess** the skills of the team members and give them the **training** they need to apply the approach in the communities.

A good facilitator uses **participatory training** methods such as group discussions and exercises, role plays, practical assignments, field visits, videos and field demonstrations. These methods, and the content of the courses, should be **adapted** to suit the local situation.

Staff Exercise 3a. Assessing the skills of the field staff

This exercise enables you to gather information about the team members' skills and experience in developing the five types of skills. It will identify their strengths as well as gaps in their knowledge, and hence their training needs. It can also be a good team-building exercise as it allows members to get to know each other's skills and experience.

Objective

After this Exercise you will be able to:

- Assess the skills of potential team members.
- Identify the team members' training needs in the five skills.

Equipment needed

Skills set assessment forms (Form 1) (one per person).

Expected outputs

A list of skills of each team member; a list of training needs for the team members.

Time required

30 minutes

Preparation

None

Suggested procedure

1. Ask each of the team members to fill in the skills-assessment form (Form 1). They can do this individually or in pairs, with each person asking the other about their skills and experience and filling in the form accordingly. Tell them that they should be honest in evaluating their own skills!
2. Ask the team members to calculate the overall score for each row by multiplying the number or score by the figure given. For example, if someone has established four farmers' groups, multiply 4 by the number given (2) to get a score or 8 for that row.
3. Collect the forms and collate the results (see Table 1 for an example).
4. If a team member scores highly (e.g., more than 40), he or she can be considered to have strong multiple skills that are well suited to this development approach. If the score is low (say, less than 15), then the person would benefit from additional training, perhaps in specific areas, and may need some expert assistance. You can identify the specific types of training needed from the responses to each of the questions.

Form 1. Assessment form for the five skills

Name	
Male or Female	
Organization	

Part 1: Subject areas *For each of these subject areas, give yourself a score from 1 (beginner) to 5 (very strong)*	Score (1 to 5)
Group management	
Financial management and savings and loans	
Natural resources management, farmer field schools	
Marketing and agroenterprise	
Developing and promoting innovation	
Computers	
Part 2: Experience	
How many years of experience do you have in development? *(number of years)*	
What is your level in your organization? *(5 for management level; 3 for senior field technician; 1 for assistant)*	

Part 3: Support for groups *For each of these questions, write a number in the space provided*	Number	Multiply by…	Score
Group management • How many farmers' groups have you established?		2	
Financial management • How many savings and loan groups have you set up and supported?		2	
• How many farmers groups have you linked to a microfinance institution or bank and have secured an agricultural loan?		2	
Natural resource management • How many natural resource management groups have you supported?		2	
Marketing and agroenterprise • How many market value chain surveys have you completed?		2	
• How many farmer group **business plans** have you facilitated?		2	
• How many farmer agro-enterprises have you supported?		2	
• How many collective **marketing groups** have you set up and supported?		2	
Innovation • How many **innovation groups** have you supported?		2	
Overall score			

What skill areas are you strongest and most confident in?	
What skill areas do you think you need to strengthen further?	

Table 1. Example scores from training needs assessment of team members

Name	Subject areas (from Part 1 of Form 1)					Overall score (Parts 1-3)	Strong in	Needs
	Group manage-ment	Finance, savings and loans	Marketing, agro-enterprise	Innovation	Natural resource manageme nt			
Adrian	4	1	1	2	4	25	NRM, groups	Finance, agro-enterprise
Beatrice	5	5	2	1	1	20	Finance	NRM, marketing
Conrad								
Dexter								
…								

Lesson 4. Working with the community

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- List the things you need to explain to local people when you start project work in a new village.
- List the types of information you need to collect in the village.
- Describe five categories of people your project may target.
- Describe how to sort people into these categories.

Initial meetings

You should not go into a community with a ready-made plan. Rather discuss ideas with the community and negotiate according to the needs and views of the people in the community and what you as a team can offer.

You will need to hold a series of meetings with the community to find out what the situation is, explore their needs, and introduce them to the idea of building their capacity in agricultural development using multiple skills. These meetings will draw on the overall project design to develop a detailed implementation schedule. Table 2 shows how the project team could organize a series of start-up workshops to do this.

Between the workshops, the team members will need to gather information through participatory appraisals, rapid surveys, and discussions with key informants, partners and community groups.

At the workshops, the project partners will need to analyze the information, make decisions and plan the next field sessions.

These initial project set-up meetings give the team a chance to learn about the communities' resources, assets, skills and ambitions, as well as organizing themselves to plan the most appropriate interventions.

Things to explain

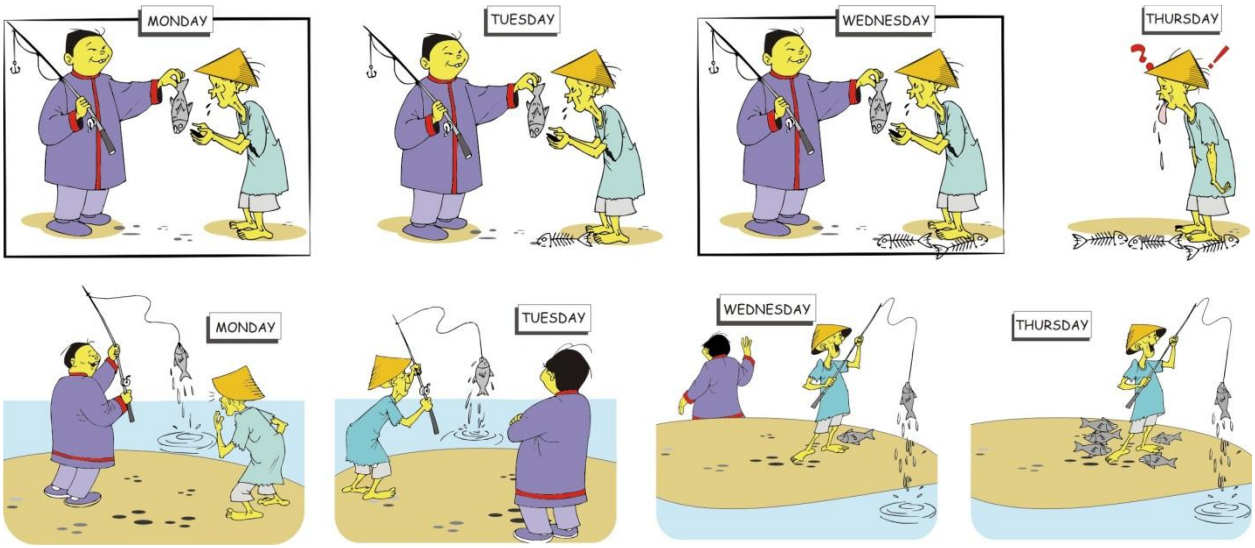
The purpose of the project. Explain that the project aims to help members of the community improve their livelihoods by improving how they produce and market crops and livestock, manage their money and organize among themselves. People may not fully understand all the ideas you are trying to put across. Keep your language simple! Be sure to ask community members if they understand the idea of the project. One way of doing this is to ask them to explain the project ideas back to you. If they have not understood well, take time to go over the information again.

The multiple-skills approach. Describe the approach the project will use and why you think it will interest them. Explain that the proposed project is about group support, production and marketing. You will help them work in groups, learn about finance, manage the natural resources they rely on, improve their marketing, and test innovations. The process consists of multiple steps, some of which may last several months.

Giving people skills rather than assets is a bit like the story of the fisherman:

- **The question**: Is it better to give people fish, or to teach them how to fish?
- If you **give them a fish** today, they will want another one tomorrow, and the day after. They will come to depend on you for the fish you give them.
- But if you help people **learn to fish**, they can continue to catch fish when the project is over.

Explain that this project is like teaching them to fish: they will quickly learn to do it for themselves.



The roles of the project team and community members. Explain that the project will work **with** local people, not **for** them. The community members will do the work; it is your job to give them the skills they need and to facilitate their activities. You can use the "crossing a river" exercise (Field Exercise 4b) and visioning (Field Exercise 4c) to introduce them to the overall process. Consider repeating this exercise at various stages during the project to remind people of progress and the actions still to be taken.

Gather information about the community. You will need to gather information about the community, the problems local people face and the opportunities that are available. This includes finding out what assets the community members have: their land holdings, houses, livestock, and other basic assets. Talk to both men and women of the target households and you may get better results if you talk to them separately. Knowing the wealth differences between people in the community helps in targeting the right people with the right type of support.

Decide who to work with. The project will work mainly with certain people in the community, but it is helpful to be clear that everyone can benefit. Explain the type of people who should be directly involved: poorer people, women, landless, etc. (This will depend on the particular situation and the donor objectives.) Be clear that you are interested in working with people who want to increase their savings and food production for their families, and who also want to find ways to increase their income by selling produce to markets.

Possible start-up meetings

Table 2 shows one way of organizing a series of start-up meetings with the project team and the local people. Some of these meetings involve the members of the project team; others include community members in orientation, information gathering and analysis, and decision-making.

Table 2. Possible start-up meetings and field work with communities

Topics	Subject matter	Lead	Participants	Activities	Timeframe
Workshop 1	Project orientation workshop	Lead agency	Project team	Establish basic ground rules for the project, staffing plan, capacity analysis, orient project team	3 days
Field work	Participatory appraisal, rapid market survey, sensitize communities	Field agents	Field staff and community leaders. (To avoid bias, hold small group meetings with men and women, with and without leaders)	Gather initial project information from target communities and markets, start forming groups	1–2 weeks
Workshop 2	Project planning based on results of participatory appraisal	Lead agency	Project team	Review participatory appraisal results, identify important food crops and income sources, plan groups for five skills sets training	3–4 days
Field work	Visioning, registration of groups, design monitoring	Field agents	Field staff and community	Register farmer groups, select products	1–2 weeks
Workshop 3	Project implementation schedules	Lead agency	Project team	Agree on entry points, method for implementing project and reporting responsibilities	3–4 days
Project work	Start implementing	Field agents	Field staff and community	Training and implementation	Ongoing

Gathering information about the target area

In order to advise the local community, you and the other members of the project team must gather information from both men and women, to gain a clear understanding of the situation the community faces. Here are some things to look for:

- **Geographic context.** General information on the target area, topography, roads and rivers, nearby towns, climate.
- **Social context.** Demographics, types of farmers, who are considered farmers, social groups, social hierarchies and administrative processes.
- **Natural resources.** Information on soils, water, major farming systems, food and cash crops, livestock and any major assets in terms of natural resources. Major agricultural challenges faced, such as severe erosion, droughts, floods, diseases, etc.
- **Local production resources.** Average farm sizes, typical farming equipment used, livestock production, access to irrigation, transport systems, market infrastructure.
- **Financial services**. Savings groups, money lenders, microfinance agencies, formal banking services and access to mobile money. Find out challenges to accessing financial services, such as lack of knowledge, culture, local laws which may prevent women from borrowing etc.
- **Business and market organization.** The main market options, types of marketing systems, major products and services traded, availability of input supplies, local food processing plants, major business challenges and opportunities.

You may already have much of this information from previous work in the area, from reports and from the project design documents. Make sure to collect only the data that will help you to support your target communities to achieve the project goals.

Baseline study

You may need to do a formal gender-disaggregated **baseline study**, especially if your organization is new to the area. This gives you information about key indicators of wellbeing, which includes things like:

- Demographics
- Assets
- Food security (access and utilization)
- Access to services
- Health status of family members
- Average income.
- Group memberships

During the project lifetime you will **monitor** these indicators to assess whether the project is improving the wellbeing of the target beneficiaries, and that it is on track to meet specific targets.

At the **end of the project**, you will normally do another **impact study** to measure changes since the baseline study, to see what changes the project has had on the target community.

The combination of a baseline study, regular monitoring and a final study enables the project to find out if the things made a difference to the people you worked with. Did things get better, worse or stay the same? We recommend that a follow-up impact study is done 12 or 24 months after the project ends to see which elements have been sustainable

Participatory appraisal

Consider conducting a participatory appraisal or rapid market appraisal to fill in gaps in your knowledge. See the various modules in this series for how to do this. For example:

- **Information on markets:** Interview traders, support agencies, NGOs, extension workers,business services and those who buy food for the household. See the module "**Seven steps in linking farmers to markets**" for ideas on how to do a market survey.
- **Information on natural resources:** See the module "**Creating and implementing natural resource management strategies**" for how to collect information on natural resources.

Understanding the social structure

It is vital to understand the social structure in the community and how the community defines who is a farmer.

Decision makers. It may be important to get the approval and support of the local authority, village chief or council of elders in order to work in a community. They may also be able to point to farmers who are particularly innovative, who are sources of traditional knowledge, or who act as traders. Community leaders may also wish to be involved in the project work, even if they are not members of the target group. Many projects now include village leaders in the regular evaluation activities, to give more voice to the community. At the same time, work with the leaders to avoid reinforcing the concept of who a farmer is and be careful about favouritism.

Elites versus the poor. Some societies are strongly divided by wealth or caste. Be careful that the project does not merely reinforce the existing elites in the community.

Women and men. Women do most of the farm work in many countries, but it is often the men who make the important decisions. Plus, women are often neglected in development efforts: they cannot attend meetings because of their other duties. The project should help women gain more status and equality in their communities.

Where possible aim to select times that allow women to actively participate in meetings and training sessions. Provide support if necessary for watching children during the session, and understand that information given to the male head of household may not be transmitted to the women in the household

Ethnic groups and language. Some ethnic groups may dominate others. Different groups may have different interests, and disagreements may turn into open conflict. Try to avoid this by making sure that all groups are adequately represented.

Entry points for starting a project

Projects very rarely start from zero. Your entry point may already have been chosen. Maybe your organization is already working with savings groups in the community. You could help such groups expand into agricultural processing and marketing.

If there are no suitable groups to work with, you may have to help local people get organized. See the module "**Organizing and managing groups**" for ideas on how to do this.

Who to work with?

Projects usually aim to reach specific types of people. Some support the poorest farmers in a community. Others are designed to assist women or young people. Still others aim to upgrade middle-income farmers.

Many communities have a large number of poor people, a smaller number who are slightly better off, and an even smaller number who are reasonably well off

Figure 7 shows an example of a community where there are five such levels. Development projects generally aim to help people in each level in this pyramid move up to a higher level (or at least to help them avoid falling down to a lower level).

The development strategies are different for each level. Let us look at each of the four levels in turn, starting at the base of the pyramid. We will use a village in southern Africa as an example; communities in other parts of the world are likely to have different amounts of assets and have different needs.

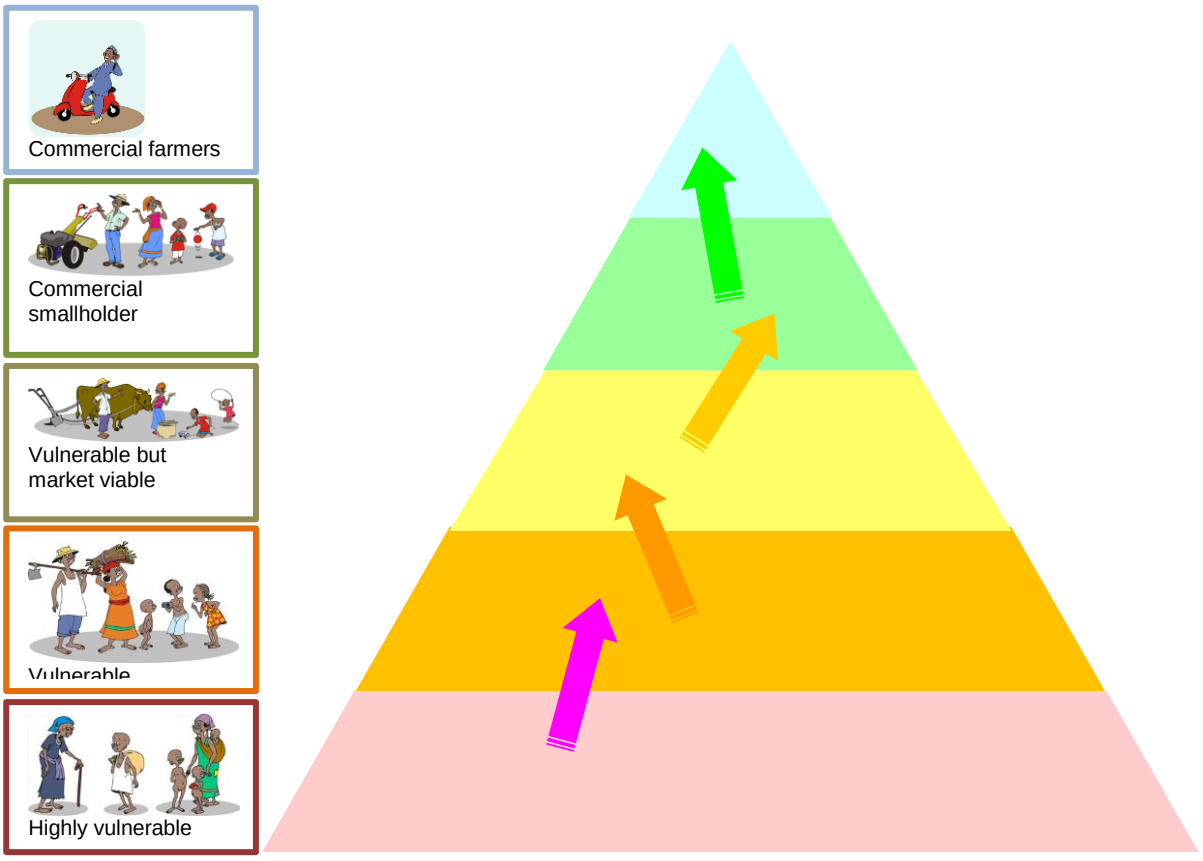


Figure 7. Development projects aim to move people up to a higher category.

Highly vulnerable

Highly vulnerable. The poorest and most vulnerable people in the community include households with little (less than half a hectare) or no land, single women and their families, orphans, the elderly, sick and disabled. They may also be refugees fleeing war or a natural disaster. These people cannot grow enough food, so often do not have enough to eat for the whole year. They usually need to have off-farm sources of income, for example as laborers on other larger farms and regularly rely upon community charity.

Emergency / development strategy. Depending on the severity of the situation, people in this category often require emergency relief. Once their immediate needs for food and shelter are met, development organizations try to quickly shift from a relief to a development phase, helping them rebuild their assets, grow more food and ensure they have enough to eat year-round.

Interventions. Once the immediate food needs have been overcome, the next step is to help this group to improve their productivity, learn about their financial options, form savings groups and access small loans, diversify their production (for example by keeping chickens or growing vegetables), and ensure they have clean water supplies.

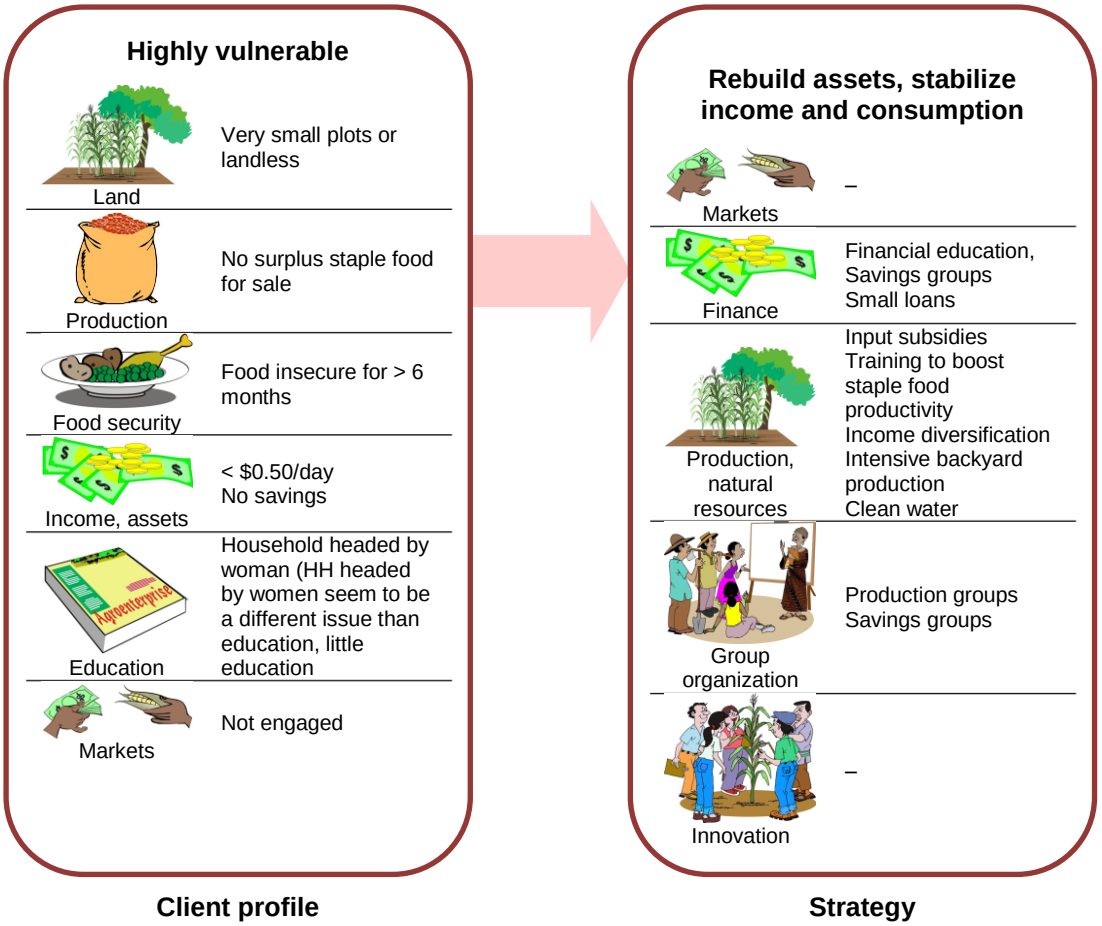
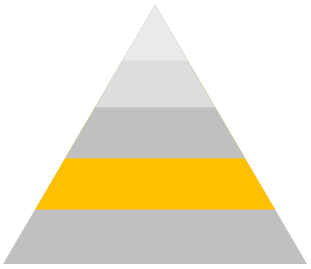


Figure 8. Strategies to assist highly vulnerable community members.

Vulnerable



Vulnerable. Slightly better off than the previous group, these farm a little more land: perhaps 0.5 to 2 hectares. They can produce enough food for perhaps 6 to 9 months of the year. In most years they are net buyers of their staple foods, but if they have a surplus during a good year, they will sell it. They may also try to make money in other ways, such as growing fruit or vegetables to sell, or by raising a few livestock. But they have few other assets.

Development strategy. Development organizations help these people protect their assets. That lets them improve their **resilience** (so they do not slip back into deeper poverty) and build their assets so they can withstand **future shocks** such as drought, flooding and other problems. Development agencies help them find ways to improve their productivity, stabilize their incomes and build their skills in working together to market their surpluses better so they can earn more regular income.

Interventions typically include helping these people grow more staple foods, produce dual-purpose crops (that can be eaten or sold), intensify production (e.g., by growing a second crop on the same land, and build alternative enterprises such as raising vegetables or livestock. As these people often work on marginal lands, other important interventions include working to control erosion, manage water better, and learn how to manage their finances by forming savings groups, so that they are more economically resilient and can invest more in their farms and in their children's education.

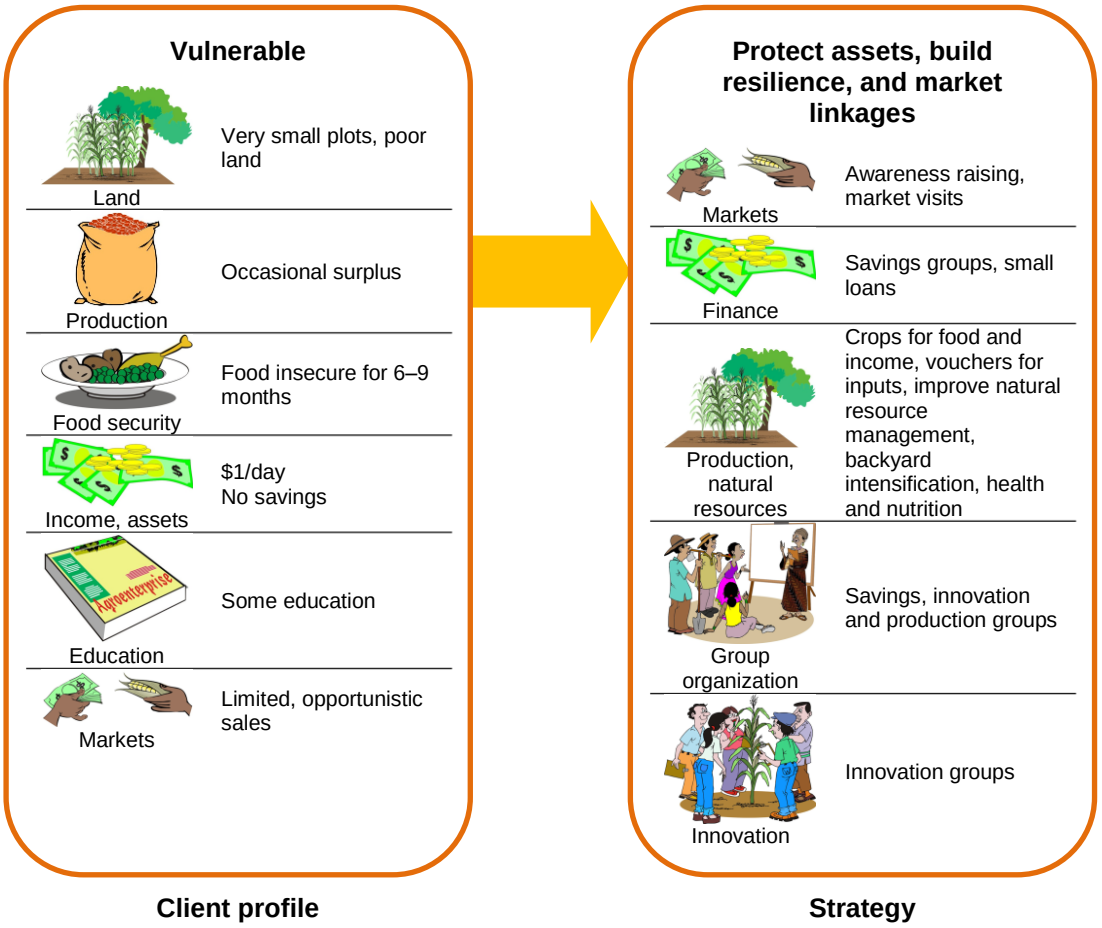


Figure 9. Strategies to assist vulnerable community members.

Vulnerable but market viable

Vulnerable but market viable. These people have slightly larger plots of land, 2–5 hectares or can rent land and find workers to farm more land. Their fields are often more fertile. They may use some fertilizer and other farm inputs, enabling them to grow enough staples foods so that in most years they can go 10 or 11 months without going hungry. They have some savings, and may keep several types of livestock.

Development strategy. Development efforts focus on helping this group to organize themselves more effectively, to build their assets, skills and business relationships with others as a firm basis for investing more in their farming livelihoods.

Interventions. Examples include strengthening producer organisations, improving farm productivity, improving soil and water management, learning more about how to grow their money, being part of a savings and loans group, being in a producer association, planning production and marketing of goods, producing and selling a product collectively to an identified market and building trading relationships, and establishing innovation groups to solve technical

and business problems.

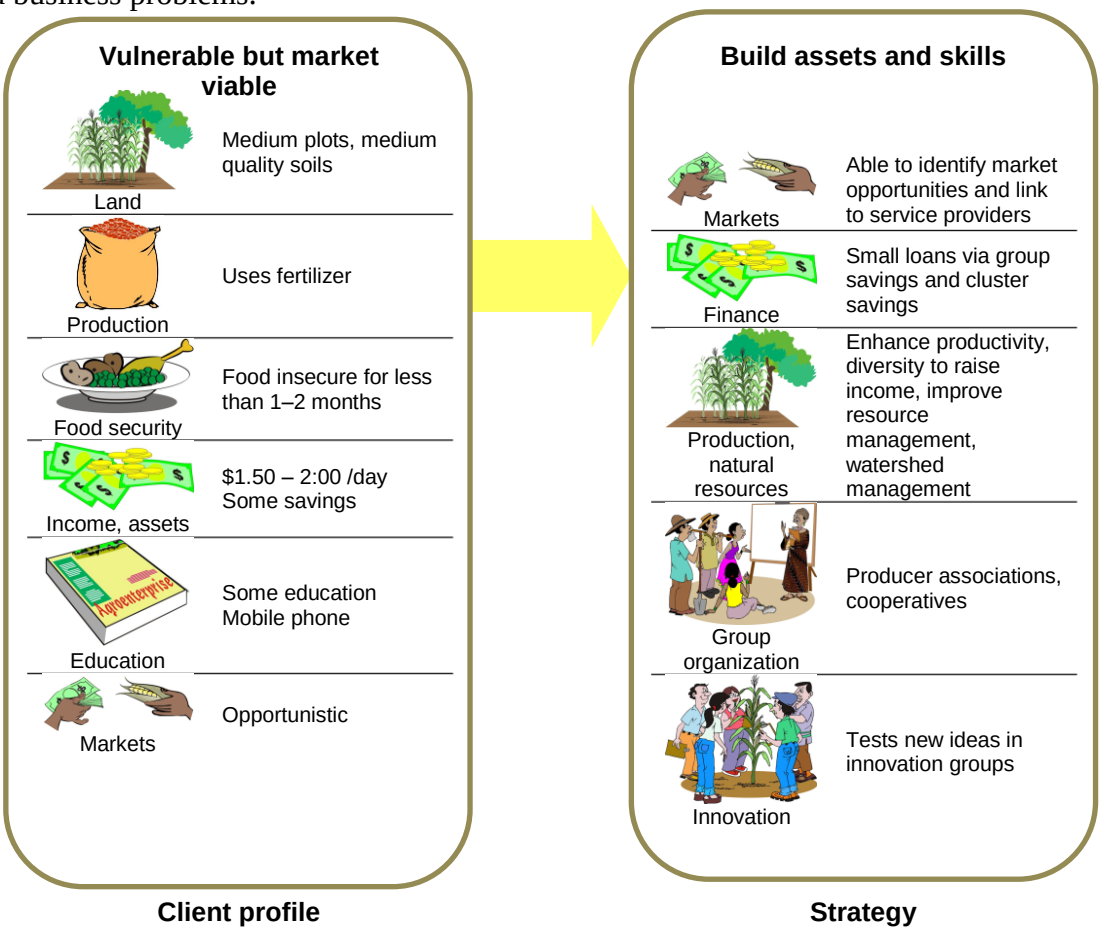


Figure 10. Strategies to assist vulnerable-but-viable community members.

Market ready smallholders

Market ready smallholders. This group is still poor, but suffers from food insecurity only during extreme weather events. They have larger farm plots, perhaps 5–10 hectares, or have access to labor or can rent more farm land. They usually have farms on better soils, in more

fertile regions and and some may have traditional irrigation. They regularly produce a small surplus of staple foods and other products, , but their market engagement is periodic or inconsistent. They are better educated than the other groups, and where there is a signal, this group will typically have mobile phones that they use to get market information and strike deals with buyers.

Development strategy. Development organizations usually try to help this group to become more organized, learn basic business strategies and develop more consistent, repeat relationships with identified buyers. This type of farmers is typically seeking opportunities to work with stronger organisations to access new technologies. They are keen to engage with market opportunities but need support in developing more robust marketing strategies. This group generally requires support in improving their financial skills and learning how to use their capital more effectively and access loans to shift from periodic market linkage to consistent investments and market sales.

Interventions. This level of farmers need support to improve their business capacity and strengthen both their organisation and access to services for marketing, financial services and technology. With more land, these farmers have the potential to specialize in larger areas of crop production and livestock that will attract larger or more formal buyers. To be successful in these endeavours they need support in leadership skills and how farmers can scale their individual operations and also work together to improve the management of their natural resources. These types of farmers, are often in primary groups, but need help to organize or upgrade their second-tier groups, such as associations or cooperatives. This will help the farmers to improve their ability to market produce, access business services and markets. Within this group it is important to consider how women can become an active member of these groups and to consider what is needed to empower them. Innovation is vital for this group in their endeavours to identify and test new technologies and financial options that will make them more competitive.

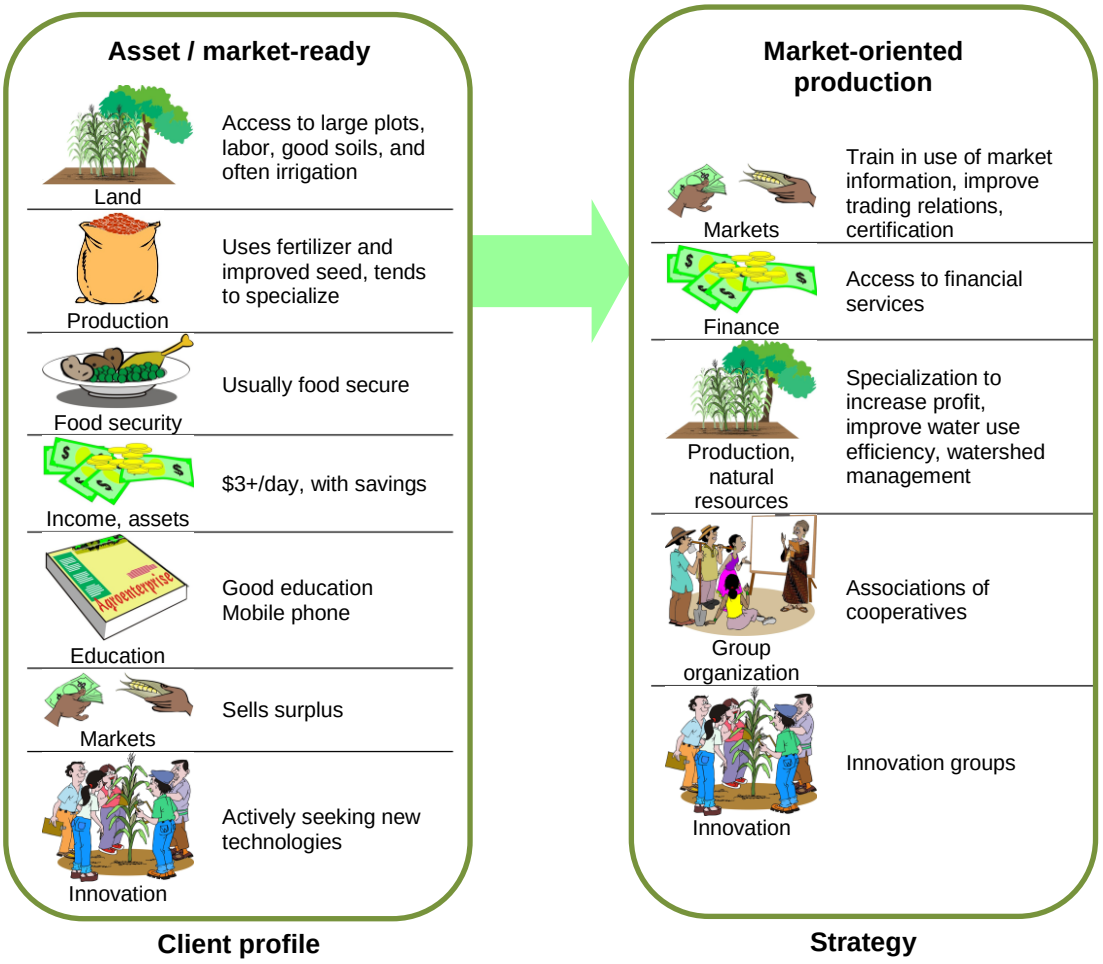
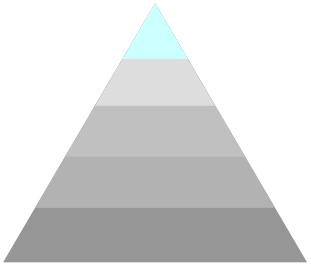


Figure 11. Strategies to assist asset-ready community members.

Commercial smallholder farmers



Well-off or commercial smallholder farmers or local business people are not normally the targets of development projects. But it may be a good idea to include them in project planning and guidance and involving them in testing and demonstrating technologies and in supporting market linkage opportunities:

- To ensure their **support**. Development efforts may fail if powerful local people oppose them.
- To provide **role models** for poorer community members.
- To benefit from their **expertise or inputs**. For example, you might want to work with a rich trader to ensure that poorer farmers have a market for their produce. A rich farmer may be willing to let a group store their grain in her warehouse, or to train her neighbors in a particular farming method.
- To benefit from their **business relations**. Better off people are often in privileged positions and have deep business networks that help them to succeed in their business ventures. Many poorer farmers, or farmers with less land, can benefit from introductions and linkages to these business partners. In some cases, farmers can add their goods to the shipments from more commercial farmers to increase the volume of sales.

Targeting groups

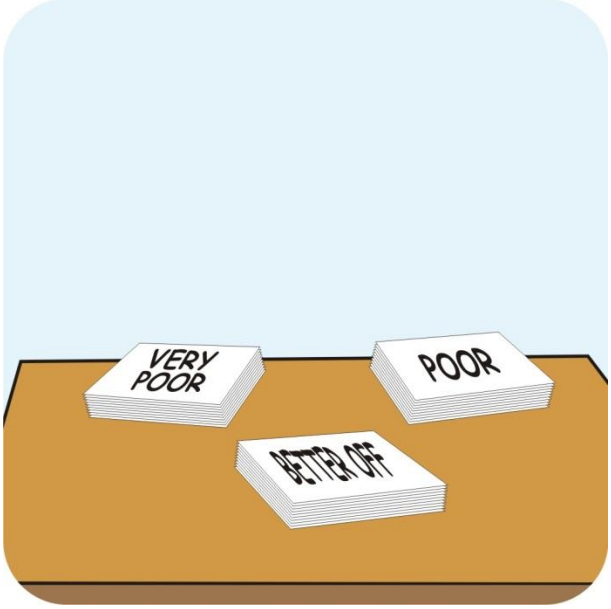
Some projects serve the entire community: they accept everyone who is interested in taking part. If there are big differences within the community, you may need to design different interventions for each category.

Other projects target specific categories, such as the highly vulnerable, women, or those who farm 1 hectare or less.

Some projects target groups other than the poorest people. For example, it may want to help market-ready farmers who lack the organization and trading relationships to sell their produce at a profit. In this case, the project may set up criteria like this:

- At least 4 hectares of land
- Regularly sell more than 50% of their produce to the market
- With access to irrigation.

How to identify categories?



Development projects do not usually have the time or resources to do a detailed survey to identify who is in which category. It is important to reach the right people, and to weed out richer people who merely want free handouts, people who mainly work off-farm, or those without any land.

Here are some ways to sort people into categories quickly:

Ask the authorities. Local governments and village leaders often have a list of people or households who are most in need of assistance. Even if there are no formal records, community leaders generally know who are the richer and poorer households, and who are likely candidates for the project. You can use this local knowledge to form your first list of potential project clients, for further screening. Be careful to avoid favouritism in local records and try to identify a mix of male and female farmers, where possible.

Wealth ranking. Call one meeting in a village, or a series of meetings in larger villages, with a number of the candidates proposed by the local councils. Explain the purpose of the project to them. Ask the candidates to group themselves according to certain criteria. The best criteria will depend on the location and the purpose of the project. Box 1 gives some ideas for questions to ask to categorize people. Choose the questions that are most appropriate to you area.

Box 1 Questions to help with wealth ranking

How much land do you cultivate?

Ask farmers from a household to stand in groups with different land allocations, such as:

- Less than half a hectare
- 0.5–2 ha
- 2–5 ha
- 5–10 ha
- More than 10 hectares.

Is your land irrigated?

How many cows do you own?

- None
- 1 or 2
- 3–10
- More than 10.

How many rooms are there in your house?

How many months a year do you have enough food to feed your family?

- Less than 6 months
- 6–8 months
- 9–10 months
- 11–12 months.

Do you earn most of your money working outside the village?

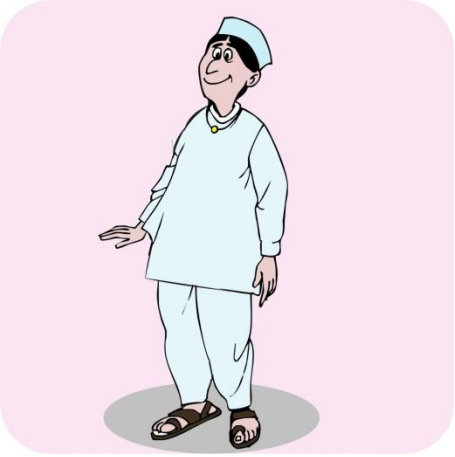
Once you have categorized people into different segments, take their names, get an idea of where there houses or farms are, and ask them to attend a follow-up meeting. In some cases, you can ask for telephone numbers and send them SMS messages to arrange meetings. All subsequent meetings should be held with local leaders to make sure your categorization was valid.

Card sorting. If it is not possible to call a meeting with all the candidates, write the names of all the households in the communities on cards (one name per card). Then ask a group of local people to sort the cards into piles according to your criteria. You will then need to send out a team member to contact these candidates to verify the card sorting

Specific groups in the community

Your project may target specific groups in the community. Some examples:

Women. Widows and households that are headed by women are particularly vulnerable. Consider targeting women specifically or forming women-only groups.



Young people. Young people are a majority in all developing countries, but few development efforts target them. They have little say in decisions, and see no future in rural life. Projects can help them gain the skills they need to earn a decent living in their communities.

People living with HIV. People who are infected with HIV face additional problems: they may appear healthy, but they need nutritious food, and are often too weak to do heavy farm work. They are often stigmatized by other people in the community. Their families have to support them and must pay for medical expenses. Work with the community, to navigate specific sensitivities that avoid exacerbating any negative situations.

Orphans and vulnerable children. Many children have lost one or both their parents due to HIV/AIDS, conflict, or other reasons. Many households in conflict areas are now headed by children: instead of attending school, the older ones have to earn a living and take care of their younger brothers and sisters.

Production types. You might target groups such as landless people, pastoralists, or farmers with irrigated land.

Vulnerable farmers. You might target farmers with less than 2 hectares.

Serving specific groups

Projects can be designed to address the needs of these specific groups. They should:

- Identify key challenges faced by these groups by interviewing both men and women within the specific group.
- Design customized solutions to meet the needs of men and women in these groups .
- Integrate support measures for specialized groups within the project design.

- Allocate sufficient budget to support specific groups, allowing for higher costs than for general groups.
- Hire staff with training and experience in dealing with the target groups and use gender based policies to support gender balanced hiring.
- Hire women and younger people as staff and make sure they have the skills needed to work with the clients.

Helping people form groups

Sometimes suitable groups already exist in the community. If so, you may be able to work with them.

If no suitable groups exist, you should help get them organized. See the module on **"Organizing and managing groups"** for some ideas on how to do this.

Conclusion

When you start work in a community, you should explain the **purpose** of the project and how the **multiple-skills approach** will assist both men and women now and in the future. You should make sure the community members understand what their and the team members' roles will be.

You will need to gather information about the community and the local area. You may need to do a formal gender-disaggregated **baseline study** so you can keep track of the project's impact. Part of this may be a **participatory appraisal**, where you facilitate local people (men, women, OVC, and others with special circumstances) to gather and analyze information about their community.

It is important to select the **target groups** carefully. Wealth ranking is one way to do this. Your project may decide to focus on one level, such as the highly vulnerable or the "asset-ready." Or it may aim to serve particular groups, such as women, orphans or people affected by HIV. The approach you use will depend on the characteristics and needs of this group.

Field Exercise 4a. Focus groups

A focus group is a small group of people who discuss a subject, gradually focusing on specific areas that need to be explored in detail.

Objective

After this Exercise you will:

- Have key information about the current situation and farmers' interests.

The participants will be able to:

- Explain their production and marketing system and constraints.

Equipment needed

Large sheets of paper, marker pens

Expected outputs

Information about farmers' conditions and priorities.

Time

1–2 hours

Preparation

Identify 10–15 farmers who are interested in the marketing project, for example by asking lead farmers, traders and village elders. Arrange a meeting with these farmers. You may wish to have a focus group of only men and another focus group of only women, to understand their different views.

Prepare some questions that you need to have answered.

Suggested procedure

1. Explain the goals of the project to the participants.
2. Ask the participants about themselves, the local situation and their interests. Make sure that the participants realize that you are helping them find solutions to their problems. Ask a colleague to note the responses.
3. Start off with general questions, then gradually focus on more specific subjects. For example, you might start out asking about general farming problems/ constraints, then focus on a particular men-crop and women-crop, then discuss the marketing of these crop.
4. End the meeting with a clear summary of what has been discussed, your conclusions, and thanking the group members for their time and support.

Questions to stimulate discussion

- What are the main crops or livestock that you and your neighbours grow for food? For income? How many farmers grow these crops in your village?
- What crops or livestock are you and your neighboring farmers interested in?

- Who grows and sells these products? Who knows best about production and marketing questions?
- What are the yields, prices and marketing channels for these products?
- What challenges do you face in producing and selling these products?
- What do people want to buy?

Notes

Consider holding separate meetings if a lot of farmers are interested, or if it is advisable to talk to different groups (e.g., women, young people) separately.

Field Exercise 4b. Crossing a river

This exercise illustrates the field agent's role to empower and guide the community.

Objective

After this Exercise the participants will be able to:

- Explain the roles of the field agent and group members in developing an agroenterprise.

Equipment needed

Two pieces of rope or branches

Several sheets of A4 paper (or a piece of chalk)

Expected outputs

The participants understand the role of the field agent, and that they will have to work to learn the skills they will need.

Time

1 hour

Preparation

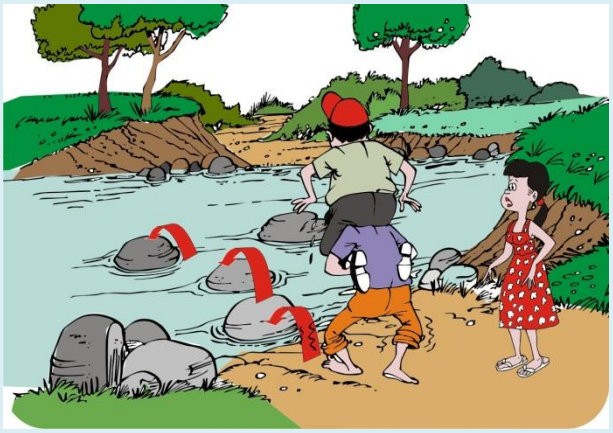
Lay out the ropes or branches parallel to each other, several meters apart. These represent the banks of a river.

Scatter the pieces of paper on the ground between the "river banks" (or draw large circles on the ground with chalk). These represent stepping stones.

Suggested procedure

1. Take aside three members of the farmer group and instruct them for a three-act role play (see below).
2. Explain to the audience that the rope or sticks are the river banks and that two people are trying to cross the river. They want to find something better on the other side.
3. Invite the three actors – a "field agent" and two "farmers" – to act out the play in silence to the rest of the group.

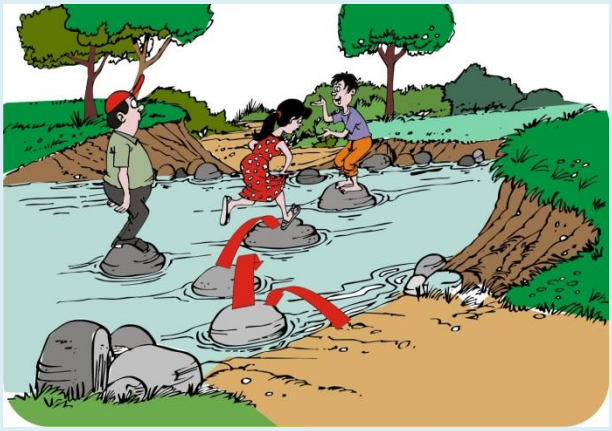
4. **Act 1:** Starting on the near bank of the river, the field agent and one of the farmers try to cross the river using the stepping stones. The field agent tries to carry the farmer across the river on his or her back.



5. But the field agent gets tired.

6. So he or she leaves the farmer in the middle of the river and goes back to the near bank. The farmer who was being carried is abandoned, and gets no more help.

7. **Act 2:** The field agent tries to cross the river with the second farmer. This time, he or she does not carry the farmer, but instead holds his or her hand and shows where the next stone is positioned.



8. The field agent and second farmer take time to cross the river but in the end they succeed in reaching the far bank. They celebrate when they reach the other side.

9. The field agent then waves goodbye and leaves the play. The second farmer returns to the near bank of the river.
10. **Act 3:** The second farmer takes a member of the audience and shows him or her how to cross the river. The person does not hold hands with the audience member, but leads him or her to the near bank and then shows where to step. The role play ends when the two people have finally crossed to the far bank.
11. Lead a discussion about what the play represented.

- The river represents a challenge: **the work needed to find a new market opportunity**. The near bank is where the community is now. The far bank is where the community would like to be. To achieve their goal, community members must cross the river.
- In **Act 1**, the field agent brings everything to the farmer. In reality, this means supplying the community with free seeds, tools, fertilizer, credit, transport, and links with traders. But after some time, the field agent gets tired of continuing – and the project ends. When this happens, the farmer is left behind because he or she cannot get free seeds, tools, fertilizer, credit, or transport without the project, so does not know how to get to the other side of the river. That is, the farmer was being "carried", and when support was withdrawn he or she was unable to continue along the same path.
- In **Act 2**, the field agent empowers the farmer by guiding him or her across the river, clearly showing the stepping stones to use to get to the other side. This time the farmer is slower to cross, but gets there by working with the service provider. At this point, the

field agent leaves. However, the farmer has learned how to cross the river and can now return to where he or she was and, most importantly, help others cross (**Act 3**).

Questions to stimulate discussion

- Who are the three characters in the story? What is the river? What are the stepping stones? Who did what?
- Which approach (carrying or guiding) took longer? Which approach was more effective?
- What happens next? Can everyone now cross the river?
- How does this relate to ideas on enterprise skills, learning, and community empowerment?

Field Exercise 4c. Visioning

Visioning asks community members to imagine what they would like to achieve in their long term development, then decide what steps to take in the short term to achieve this.

Objective

After this Exercise the participants will be able to:

- Describe the future they desire for their community group.
- Identify the steps they need to take to reach this desired situation.

Equipment needed

Large sheets of paper, marker pens.

Expected outputs

A long-term goal for the enterprise, and a series of concrete steps to achieve this goal.

Time required

2 hours.

Preparation

None.

Suggested procedure

1. Ask the farmers to summarize their **current production situation** (types and amount of product produced) and their key challenges. See the list of questions below for ideas on what to ask.
2. Ask the farmers about their key challenges they face in the areas of organizing as a group, production, gaining access to finance, marketing, and learning about new technologies.
3. Ask the farmers to imagine what they would like their farming enterprise to be like in the **long term**, in 10 or 15 years' time. What will they be producing? How much of the product? How will they be producing it? How will they finance their work and market the output? Who will buy their produce? How will their incomes change? List these goals on a second sheet of paper under the same headings.
4. Ask them to think of the **long-term activities** they will need to do in order to reach this goal. For example, will they need to bring more land into cultivation, get bank loans, test new technologies, install irrigation, expand the group membership, build a processing shed or storage warehouse? List these activities on another sheet of paper.

5. Ask the farmers to repeat this exercise, but this time to think of **activities in the medium term** – say, 5 years from now. Get them to be more specific and realistic about their suggestions. Their suggestions should lead them towards the long-term goals they have just set out. Record their answers on another sheet of paper.
6. Now get them to repeat the exercise for **short-term activities**, to do in the next year or the next production cycle. This time they should be very specific and realistic about what activities they will undertake, who will do what and when, and what types of support they will need. Record their ideas on another sheet of paper.
7. Mark which activities they can do themselves with their existing resources, and which will require external support.
8. Summarize the results of the discussions and notes (see Form 2).

Questions to stimulate discussion

These questions are about the current situation. You can rephrase them to ask about the future. These questions should be asked to both male and female farmers and recorded by gender. The number of male and female farmers asked should represent the proportion of male and female farmers in the population.

Groups

- Are the farmers already in groups to produce and sell key crops or livestock products?
- Do they have any savings groups in the village?
- What groups are in the village?
- How many of the participants are members of these groups?

Production

- What is his/her most important food crop or type of livestock?
- What area of land does each farmer usually plant? How many animals does each farmer keep?
- What are the main management practices that farmers use to produce this crop or animal?

Finance

- Do you get a loan to produce your main crops? (These should be answered based on the individual and not a perception of the village)
- If yes, where do they get these loans?
- Do farmers save? If yes, as individuals or groups?

Marketing

- How do they identify buyers? How do they market the product? Who negotiates prices and delivery details?
- What transport do they use? What is the delivery schedule?

- What price range do we negotiate for? What are the payment terms? Do they have a bank account? Who are the signatories for the account?
- What happens to the money? If they form a group, how will it be shared?
- How much of the profit do they invest, and what in? How do they save money to invest?

Innovation

- Has there been any new equipment, support or technologies that have really helped the farmers to improve their production in the last 5 years? (such as mobile phones, mobile money, loan operators, new varieties, NGOs providing support, new government initiatives)
- Do farmers test new technologies to increase their production?
- If yes, where do they get these new technologies?

Form 2. Form for converting a long-term vision into short-term action

	Current situation (where we are now)	**Short-term activities** (in next year)	**Medium-term activities** (in next 5 years)	**Long-term activities** (in next 10–15 years)	**Long-term goal** (where we want to be in 10–15 years)
Groups					
Finance					
Production					
Marketing					
Innovation					

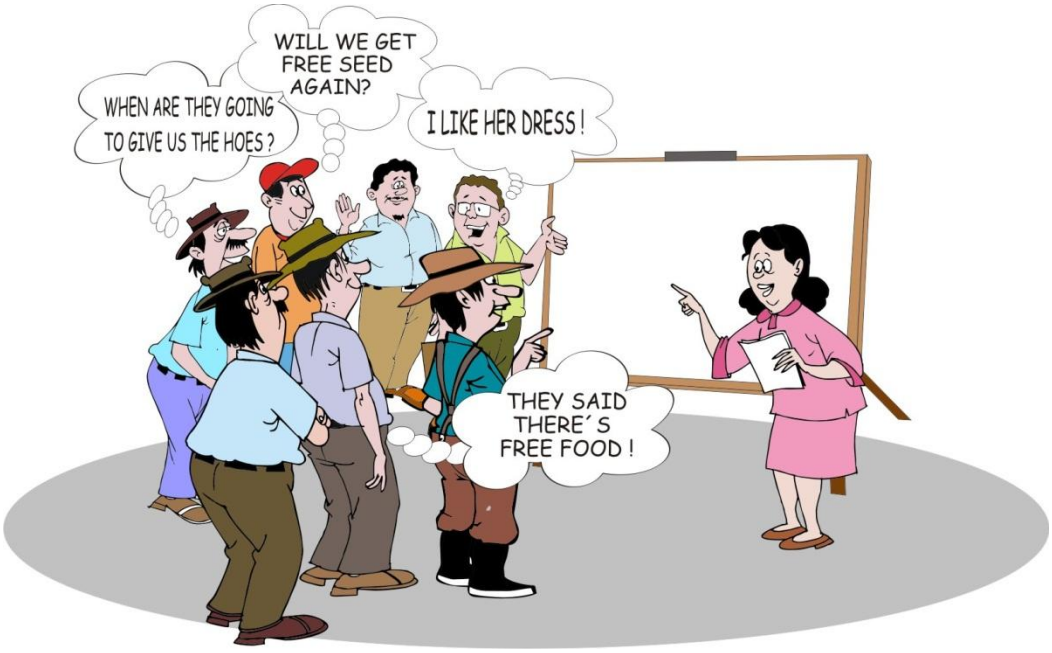
Lesson 5. Ensuring sustainability

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Explain why handouts are generally not a good idea.
- List three categories of assets, and put different assets into these categories.
- Describe how to manage the transfer of assets to increase the likelihood that the project will be sustainable.

Why do things stop after a project ends?



Many community groups perform well during the project's lifetime, but fail soon after it ends. This is often because the project provides inputs and services for free.

- **Unwillingness to pay for inputs.** Used to getting things for free, people may be reluctant to start paying for them.
- **Free inputs as reason for participating.** The main purpose of some groups is to get free inputs. Once these disappear, the group has no reason to exist.
- **Lack of alternative suppliers.** Local people have nowhere else to go for the inputs and services they need.

Planning for the long term

To avoid the entitlement problem and help with sustainability of project work, it is necessary to plan for the long term. Here are some ways to do this.

Start with a business mindset. Tell the project participants that you want to help them over the long term but that they must help in the process right from the start, and by the end of the project they will lead it the process. The community must want to do the activities and wherever possible co-invest in activities.

Don't pay people to participate. Do not pay people to come to meetings and implement activities that the project has decided. They will not continue such work without payment!

Reinforce that the knowledge or information received will help them improve their income or production.

Don't give free handouts. Like everyone, poor people enjoy getting free goods and services. They love field agents who give away free assets. **But remember**, everything that you give away now will not be available free when you leave. If you try to change things by giving away the things that people need, the project will not be sustainable. Some of the best development projects work to improve the lot of poor farmers but give **no free handouts**.

The best development projects give no free handouts

Don't try to move too fast. Some projects try to achieve very rapid results by providing free goods and services. They do so to "prime the pump." But when the pump is over-primed, the initial rapid gains fall away quickly when project support ends.

Don't provide free credit. Instead, help farmers to test new technologies with small amounts of a new seed type (for example). When they need more seed, give them vouchers to spend with local input suppliers that cover a part of their needs. The use of vouchers may start by supporting 80–90% of their needs, but the level of voucher support should be reduced rapidly during the project. In this way, the farmers are co-investing in a process and the project is supporting local business services.

Charge for inputs and services. Where possible, charge people for inputs and services. For example, do not give away tree seedlings. Sell them to farmers, or link them to local entrepreneurs who are selling trees – if possible at the real market price.

Include the hidden costs. Many successful community enterprises fail when hidden costs are revealed when the project ends. A project may fail to count the cost of providing things like advice on crop production, testing new technologies and links to traders. But these require staff time and expertise. They cost money. Without them, the enterprise may be unprofitable. Likewise, the farmers need to consider all of their costs including costs of accessing services and marketing produce. It is better to calculate in these costs so you know whether the enterprise has a chance of being profitable.

Build local businesses. Instead of providing inputs and services through the project, do so through local businesses. That will help develop the private-sector providers that the community will need in the future. Instead of setting up your own tree nursery, get a local farmer to do so, and help her sell seedlings to farmers.

Provide training in core skills. Farmer groups often lack the skills to work with new appropriate technologies and link with markets when key project staff withdraw. Make sure that they have all the skills they will need so they can continue without such support.

Help the community prepare. Community members need to prepare for what will happen when the project ends. Make sure they know what to expect so they can plan accordingly.

Keep handouts to a minimum

In reality, many projects still do provide goods and services for free. For example:

- Where farmers need some assets for the project to have a measurable effect within a short project timeframe.
- Where people do not have the initial funds to buy improved technologies and require some financial assistance to get them started.
- Where farmers need improved seeds or other inputs to begin improving their productivity, but can use the improved seed for many years.
- Where communities need to repair irrigation schemes or other vital infrastructure.

In such situations, keep free handouts to a minimum. Here are some ways to **avoid or reduce giving free handouts**:

- Work with the community and make agreements on co-investments for building physical structures. This may include in-kind contributions to the activities, or using food or cash for work.
- Survey business services and identify where local services are weak or do not exist (see the module on "**Seven steps in linking farmers to markets**."
- Plan how to strengthen existing services or encourage them to extend their support to smallholders. Integrate such services into the project's overall program.
- Rather than giving inputs to male and female farmers, provide them with vouchers to buy inputs from a local dealer. This helps link farmers to input suppliers and also avoids the project putting local entrepreneurs out of business!

Getting the balance right

It is not simple to get the balance right between organizing people to meet project goals and building people's capacity to use new skills and technologies. Ask yourself, "Are the project activities only successful because of the project support?" If the answer is yes, should the project be doing them? Or should it be looking for another, more sustainable, approach?

How to manage skills transfers and different types of assets

We can divide the goods and services provided to rural communities into three types:

Skills transfer, such as training.

Consumable assets, such as seeds and fertilizer.

Durable assets, such as buildings and equipment.

Table 2. Skills and assets often used in multiple-disciplinary projects

Skills transfers	Consumable assets	Durable assets	
Savings group training Production training Demonstration plots Farm visits Market studies Business planning Implementation planning Working with microfinance Financing through banks Extension support Learning to innovate Childcare provision	Seed Fertilizer Agrochemicals Safety equipment (masks, etc.) Airtime for phones Vouchers for services Contracts	Checkdams, terraces Tools (hoes, plows, machetes) Lockable money boxes Mobile phones Draft animals Plows Mini-tractors, tractors Irrigation equipment	Drying floors Mills Storage buildings Processing equipment Road rehabilitation Bridge and culvert construction Vehicles

Skills transfers

Skills refer to what people **know** and **do**. People with skills increase the knowledge and organization of group members. Skilled people benefit all members in the community, and most skills can be transferred relatively easily to other people depending on who is trained and the local culture.

Examples:

- A member of a savings group helps set up another savings group in a neighboring village.
- A farmer trains her neighbors how to grow and manage seeds of a new crop variety.
- A farmer trains his friends when is the best time to apply fertilizer.

For the support agency, training is usually a big cost. It needs to be done well if it is to have clear results. Be aware that providing some types of skills training (such as setting up savings groups, or scouting for pests) can be the basis for a business that communities are willing to pay for.

Many NGOs are considering charging fees for training, or they train local community based agents who can continue providing training services at a fee after the project withdraws. For many projects it may make sense to offer training through local service providers rather than directly.

- **Consider charging fees** for certain types of training to cover all or part of the cost.
- **Provide other types of training in skills for free**, but ensure they are spread to the whole community.

Consumable assets

Consumable assets are things that get **used up**. Where markets are functioning normally, they can be purchased locally from traders, input suppliers, moneylenders, banks, extension services, and so on. If the markets are not working well, try to re-establish such links so farmers can get the goods and services they need.

- **Charge the full cost** if possible. Where possible, use vouchers via local service providers, rather than providing the service yourself.
- **If you provide free consumables**, try to provide small test amounts with farmers as a demonstration, and try to shift from free to paid-for whenever possible.

Important: The principle of **"do no harm"** is at risk if we simply hand out free goods to poor farmers. They will expect free in the future, and are unlikely to get it.

Durable assets

Durable assets are things that **do not get used up** – or they get used up only slowly. They can also be purchased from local businesses and other providers. As with consumable assets, the project should try to make sure that groups buy from such businesses.

- **Charge the full cost** if possible. Require the community to **co-invest** – for example by providing materials and labor for construction work, or loan repayments for equipment. Provide such assets only on the basis of an agreed **business plan**.
- **Take care in deciding the terms of transfer** for physical assets that go to individuals or groups. Give clear guidance on how to manage the assets, and make sure they are not "captured" by a small number of individuals or type of individual
- **Insist on a business plan**. Durable assets should be provided only if a clear business plan has been developed to show how the asset will be managed, repaired, and financed over the long term, that is, beyond the life of the project.

Managing asset transfers

Here are some ways to manage the transfer of assets in ways that are sensitive to local marketing structures and that support communities to rebuild and improve their market linkages.

Short-term asset delivery linked to a plan. In some cases, farmers need direct support in the form of seeds, fertilizer and tools so they can start producing a product. Very poor farmers may also need such support to produce enough food to eat, before they can think about marketing anything. In such cases, make it clear that the support will be short-term and it is to help them build the assets they need so they can develop their businesses.

Vouchers for consumable assets. Vouchers are a market-based way of providing consumable assets such as fertilizer. The project gives vouchers the client farmers, who can then use them instead of cash to buy certain types of goods or services from a reliable local service provider, with sufficient stocks. The vouchers can take the form of paper, scratch cards or mobile phone codes. The service provider then returns the voucher to the project in exchange for cash.

This system lets the farmer choose the type and amount of goods or services that he or she wants. It prevents the farmers from spending the vouchers on unrelated items. It also lets you direct business towards local service providers, rather than having to deliver the goods or services yourself. You can give different numbers or types of vouchers to different clients.

Over time, you should rapidly reduce the value of the vouchers – and make it clear to the farmers that this will happen. For example, perhaps the vouchers will cover 90% of the value of the asset in year 1, 60% in year 2, 30% in year 3, and nothing in year 4.

Co-investment with durable assets. “Co-investment” means that the community contributes a significant part of the investment. For example, the farmers may be asked to provide free labor and materials such as sand and rocks to build terraces and small dams, while the project provides cement and perhaps food for the workers.

A similar approach can be used for equipment such as tillers, mills and drying floors. A local entrepreneur may

agree to contribute part of the costs and co-invest with the project to access a mill. A farmers' group may be able to invest some of its savings. Or a microfinance institution may lease the equipment to the farmers in return for regular repayments.

Co-investment combined with vouchers. For example, a local storekeeper and the project may invest in a flour mill. The storekeeper charges farmers to mill their grain. The project gives vouchers to the poorest people in the community so that they can use the mill to get their grain milled at a subsidized rate. This enables the mill to be operated as a business.

The co-investors should have a say in the type of product they wish to invest in. Projects sometimes tend to buy expensive, imported goods, when cheaper local equipment, or second-hand equipment, is more appropriate. In all cases, there needs to be a plan to maintain the asset and be sure that there are local people who can repair the equipment or spare parts are available.

Managed assets. One way to administer expensive assets such as a drinking-water system, an irrigation scheme, or a rice or flour mill, is through a management committee. This manages the operations as a business, and charges a fee for using the asset. For a rice mill, for example, the fees go to pay the individuals running the mill, to pay for spare parts and repairs, and to invest in a savings fund to buy a new mill when the old one wears out.

A similar system can be used for livestock. The project may help a group of farmers buy some animals. When these breed, a management committee decides who should get the offspring and how the clients should pay for them.

From emergency to development

Emergency projects give people a safety net. They replenish assets and services that people have lost in a disaster. For example, after a flood, donors distribute seeds, tools and assistance to help people start farming again. They may also give people building materials, livestock and other assets so the community can get back to a basic level.

But what happens **after the emergency is over**? The transition to the more modest and longer-term development phase is rarely smooth.

After years of free handouts, communities come to think they are **entitled to free support**. Many development organizations continue to work on handout principles long after the emergency has subsided. Projects may even compete with each other: one organization may want people to co-invest, while another one still gives stuff away for free.

Supporting local businesses

If the project provides goods and services for free, people will not be interested in paying the private sector for the same services. Existing businesses will lose money, and new businesses will not be able to start. The project will "crowd out" the private sector.

- Wherever possible, avoid having the project provide services. Instead, **encourage existing businesses** to supply these services, or help local people build businesses that do so. That ensures that once the project ends, the community will still be able to get the services.

Table 3 gives an example of how a project might ensure that farmers can get fruit-tree seedlings.

Table 3. Example of providing fruit-tree seedlings

	Options	Why
Don't	Provide farmers with free tree seedlings. Set up your own nursery to sell seedlings to farmers.	Existing nurseries will not be able to produce and sell seedlings.
Do	Introduce them to an existing nursery where they can buy seedlings. Persuade existing nurseries to start raising the types of seedlings the farmers need. Help farmers get organized to set up their own nursery.	These approaches all encourage businesses to produce tree seedlings.

Conclusion

Plan for the long term. When designing and implementing a project, always think of what will happen after the project ends.

Always have a plan for assets. Do not provide assets to people that they may not need or cannot afford. Be sure that each asset – seed, livestock, irrigation, or a store – comes with a clear business plan. Assets are part of a business strategy. They need to add profit and not cost. They must be maintained and financed by the farmers.

Require co-investment. Requiring people to co-invest is one way of avoiding them saying "yes" to anything that is offered.

Be clear about asset transfers. Never simply give assets to a community without clarity of ownership, a business goal and an operational or maintenance plan. **To do so is irresponsible.**

Lesson 6. Building a training plan

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Describe how to design a training plan.
- Create a training calendar using Microsoft Excel.
- Describe how to monitor training activities.
- List some exit strategies for the project.

Deciding where to start training

Based on the previous work, you have got to know the community, and you have decided which type of people to work with. You have helped them form groups.

It's now time to build a training plan. This lesson gives you some ideas on how to go about this.

You are probably working with several different communities. This lesson also describes how to provide training for them all in an efficient way.

Gathering project information

Before you begin to build your training program, start by gathering and reviewing information about your project. Key issues to prepare include the following:-

- Gather and review project information.
- Write down your training targets in terms of numbers of partners, locations and beneficiaries.
- Prepare a project calendar actual project starting date, seasons and timeframe
- Map locations where services such as training are to be delivered.
- Update staffing plan / organogram for the project, with roles and responsibilities.
- Create a table to check number of field agents required to provide the training services.
- Prepare schedules for field agents to train target farmers in each skills course
- Prepare a detailed curriculum and calendar for each field agent, that links training with seasonality and time frame of your project.

Reviewing the project design

To prepare a training program, the project managers should work with the partners to review the project documents with specific emphasis on targets in terms of services to be delivered, locations, staff roles and responsibilities and training schedules. The team can use the steps shown in **Figure 12**, to work through the project design information and use this data to work out how the individual field agents will assign time for training target farmer groups.

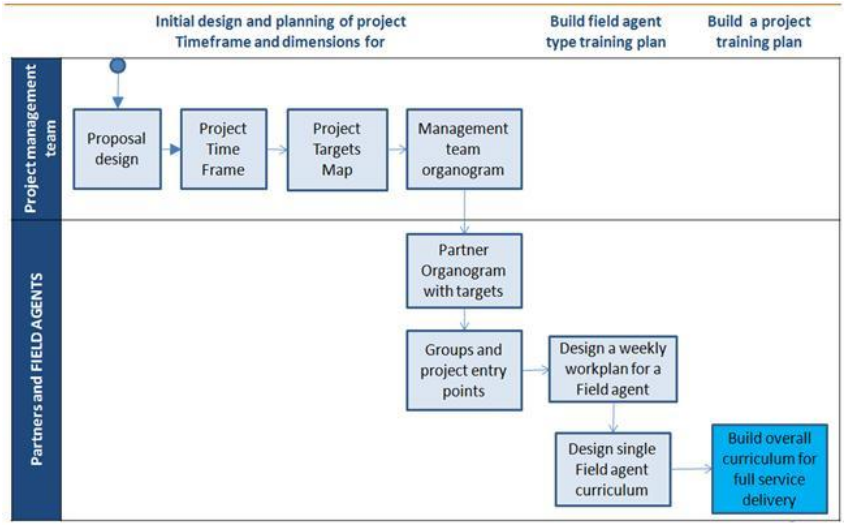


Figure 12. Business process diagram showing design of training program

Training is one of the most expensive investments and therefore it is important to design the training process, with clear tasks and targets. These targets must be realistic and the field agents and their supervisors must have a clear understanding of the expected outcomes from the training. The proposal should provide the general targets, in terms of types and numbers of client to be trained, locations where the training will take place and which partners operate in specific areas.

Project timeframe

Once on the ground, the project team should set up a project calendar and adjust dates for any activities that are bound by seasonality. The diagram below shows how to start a project training program, with reference to the farming season. The rains are shown by the blue filled cells in the spreadsheet and the growing season for the target crop being identified by green to yellow filled cells. At this location, the project is focused around one cropping season, from month 8 to month 11.

The project team can use the start date and seasonal production times to identify areas of time when specific types of training can be programed. In this case, because the project started in January, six months before the next rains, there is time to start with in-house training, followed by savings and loan development with the client groups, before the production season starts.

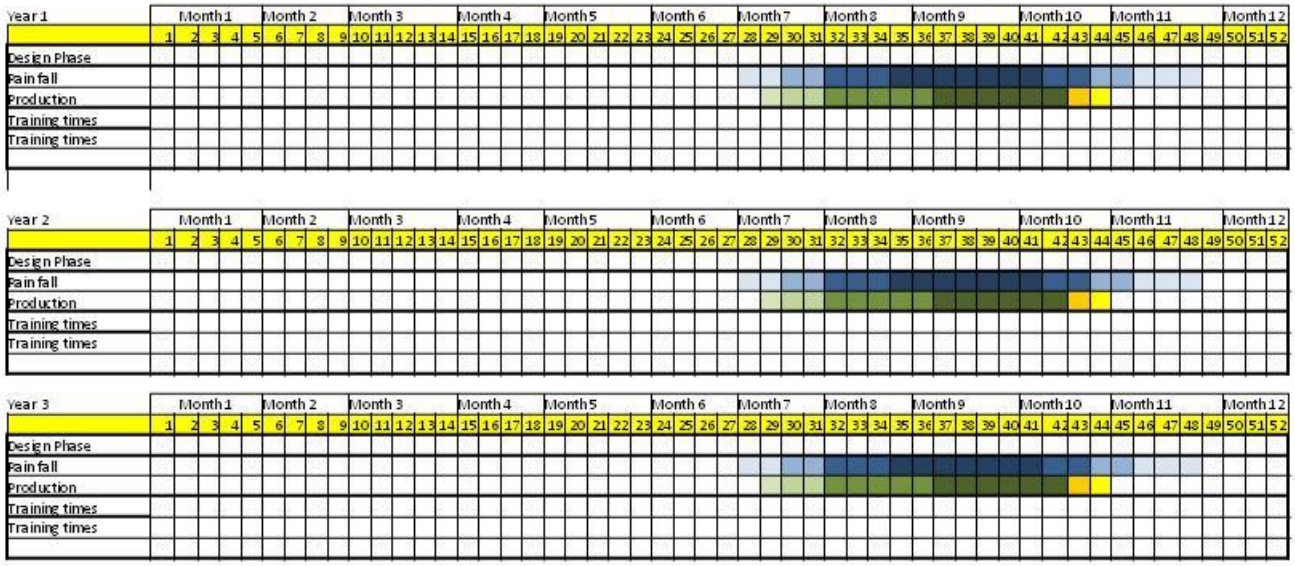


Figure 133. Integrating the training schedule with the project calendar and cropping season

The management team can use the seasonal calendar times as one of the key anchors for the timing of the skills training. This is an effective way of keeping the training focused on real life needs of the farming community.

Integrating skills with project targets

Having set some basic times for the training, the project teams should gather the information on targets in terms of the number of client, types of clients and the types of training services they should receive. Depending on the project design and the local seasons, projects may set up an initial training curriculum to train all clients in all the skills, whereas in other projects, different training curriculum may be set for the delivery of certain skills to different sub-sets of the total project client targets. At this stage in the planning process, keep the information general, as

shown in Figure 13, the community will receive three types of service training, including (i) savings and internal loans communities (SILC), (ii) farmer field schools (FFS) and (iii) marketing.

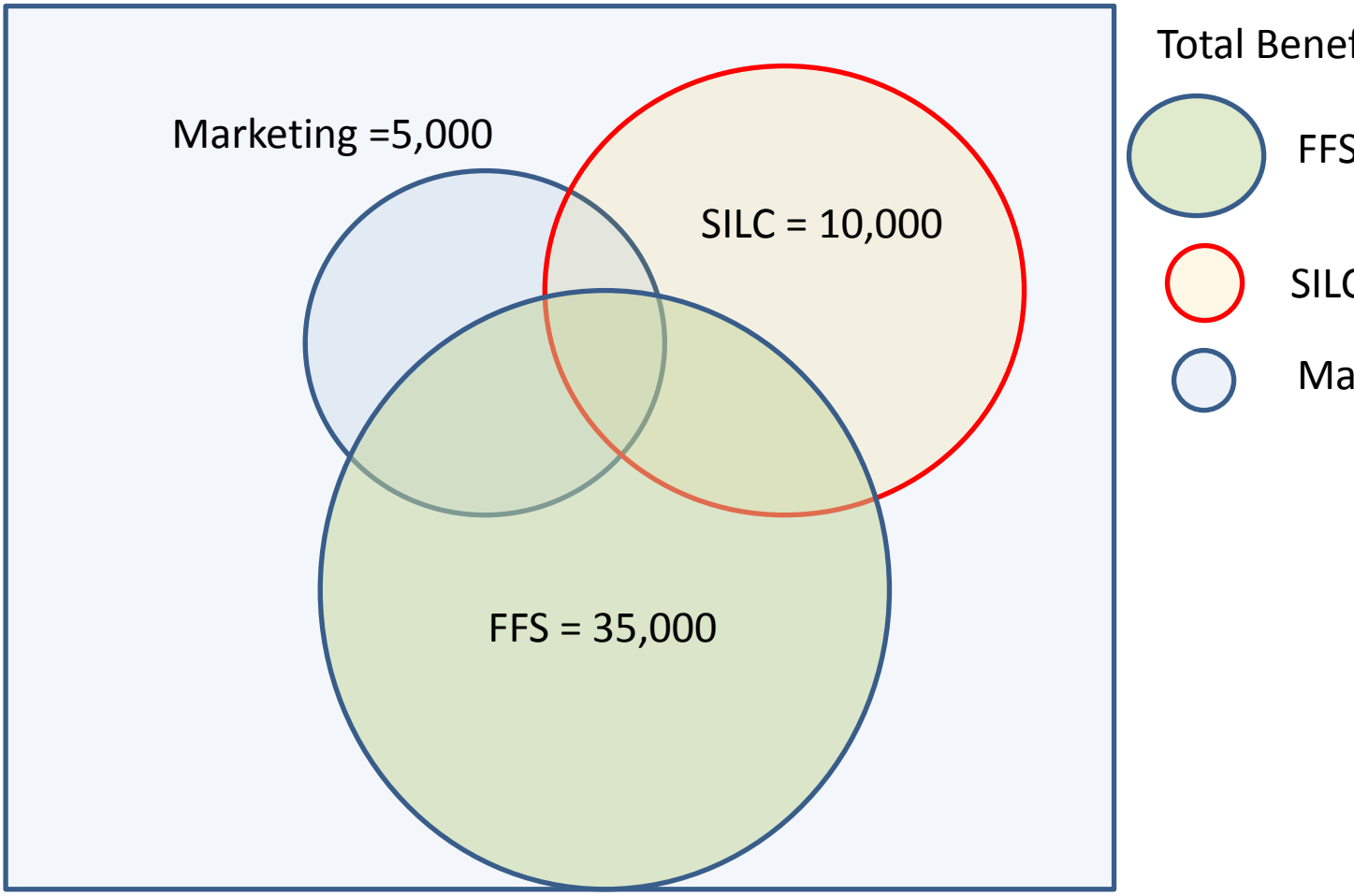


Figure 144. Mapping services against client target numbers

In this example, the majority of clients, 35,000 people, received training in production based natural resource management, through farmer field school training. The project also supported 10,000 clients in savings and loans, but only 5,000 farmers received training in marketing. There was some overlap in the skills training, but only a limited number of clients received training all the skills.

There are many reasons why a project may decide to support different levels of skills set training, depending on resources, time and needs. In the case described in Figure 13, the majority of farmers were food insecure and rarely sold surplus grain to the markets. The project therefore focused on upgrading productivity for the majority of farmers before providing training in marketing. For those farmers who had the assets and organisation to produce regular surpluses for sale within the first season of the project, the project staff were able to start support to market linkage.

In Figure 14, there were no figures on the number of farmers who will received more than one skill, this was because the project did not set up a registration process with people having unique identification numbers that could be used to cross check multiple training methods. When you

plan for multi-skills training it is important that farmers are registered into a general planning process, as shown below, to enable the project to analyze the effects of multi-skills training.

Registering clients and planning to integrate skills training

As the five skills set approach aims to integrate and monitor skills training with specific community members, it is important that systems are put in place to identify and track project clients at the start of the project. Having set training targets, the field agents need to register their clients with a unique identification number. This information will be used to plan multiple skills training schedules for specific farmers, within a household, so that the project staff can monitor who has received specific types of training during the project. This information will be set up by the field agents and monitored by the project supervisors and management team.

Although, registration systems and tracking of services can be done using paper forms, these systems become difficult to administer as projects go to scale. To support registration systems there are a number of digital tools that can be used to build digital records. Once registered, field agents can use mobile devices such as mobile phones, tablets and computers to record activities delivered to specific clients. This information can be mapped spatially and recorded over time. The ability to monitor the delivery of training programs to specific clients is important as this provides the basis for measuring service performance. If done correctly, the project staff will be able to assess the effectiveness of different combinations of training events on project outcomes such as food security, income and profit.

Control groups

As field based monitoring systems have become more sophisticated, it is becoming increasingly common for projects to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions against a control group. Control groups being people who do not receive any interventions. The requirement for control groups comes with growing trends towards investing in evidence based programming. If the project aims to use control groups, it is advisable that the project managers consult with a statistician at the start of the project to make sure that the number of control groups and treatment groups are of sufficient number to be able to show a statistical difference when analyzed. Typically, there should be as many control groups as treatment groups, Figure 15. The project team should map out the size of the control groups against the treatments to visualize the dimensions of this analytical approach.

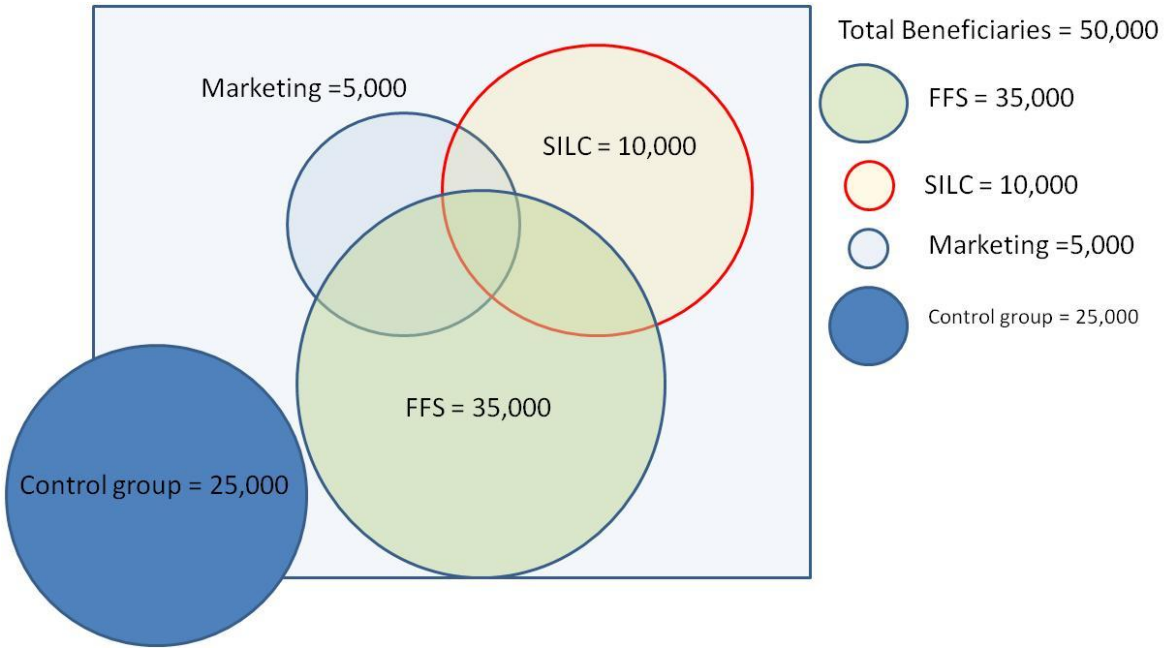


Figure 155. Use of control groups in project design

Spatial mapping

In addition to establishing numbers of clients and levels of training to be given, the project team should clearly identify the physical locations of clients and indicate the places where trainings will take place. Mapping the training events will help to co-ordinate training efforts, with financial budgets and monitoring activities. Developing and maintaining a visual map of the project, including sites for partners, farmer groups and training events will help to anchor the linkage between skills training, asset transfers and market linkage options.

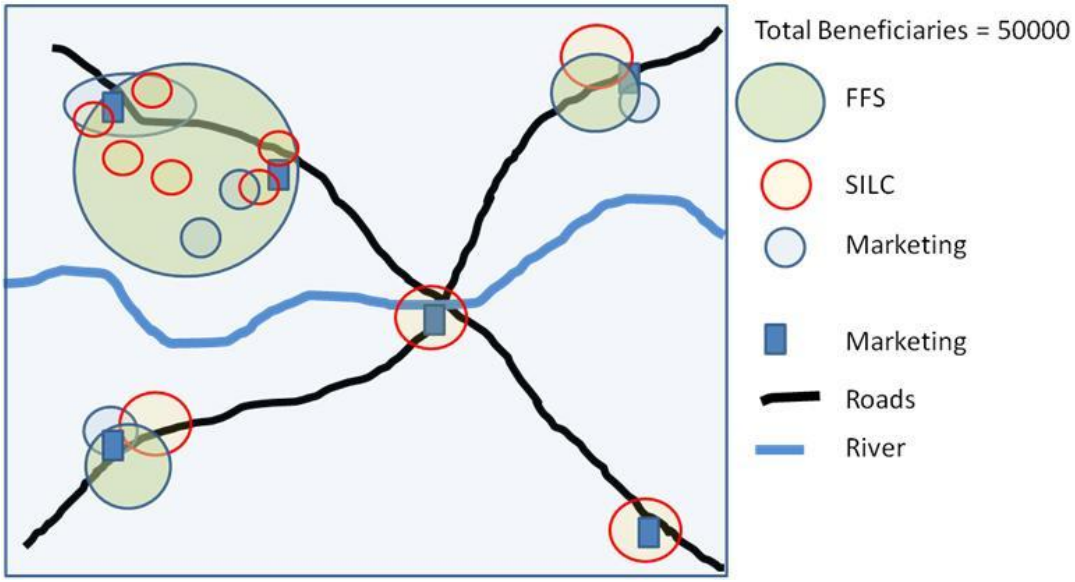


Figure 166. Mapping services with physical locations

The example shown in Figure 16, provides a visual overview of target villages, and the concentration of training and investments that are taking place at these locations. This type of information is particularly helpful in allowing team members to link physical locations with investments. This type of information is also helpful in working out logistics, such as how long it takes to get to certain locations, and also to monitor distances and costs of service delivery.

In the past, projects have developed these types of project intervention maps on paper maps, now it is possible to prepare and present spatial information onto digital mapping programs, using GIS (Geographic Information System) tools and methods. Standard types GIS / mapping tools include software programs such as Google Earth, and ESRI's ArcView. These programs can be used to plot, analyze and share spatial information. Combining plans for numerical targets with maps, provides a concrete reference point for project managers as well as field staff to gather and record basic project information, such as the activities in a detailed implementation / operational plan. As shown in **Figure 15**, the map of services should also include locations and survey work with the control groups, as shown in **Figure 17**.

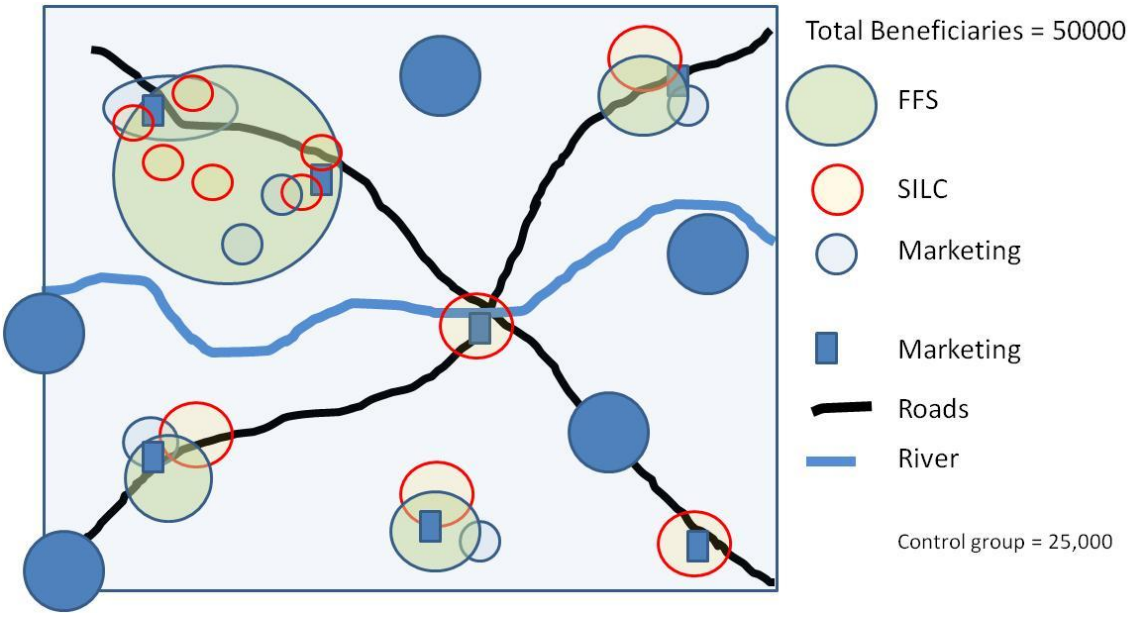


Figure 177. Mapping treatment services and control groups with physical locations

Project Staff Structures (organograms)

The next step in developing the training curriculum is to clarify the staffing structure. At the start of a project the implementation teams should review the staffing chart and write in names of people who will be responsible for activities within the various parts of the project. Filling in the staff structure, or organogram provides an opportunity to review tasks and responsibilities. This review process will also enable the project team to evaluate basic staffing structures such as the ratio of supervisors to partner staff and the ratio of field staff and farmer groups.

As the organogram is formalised, the project team should evaluate the in-house capacity of staff members. This initial assessment will help the team to determine and plan for training of in-house staff. Building the staff organogram, also enables the project team to assign field staff and

supervisors to specific task areas, as shown in Figure 18, and then assign specific staff to specific physical locations.

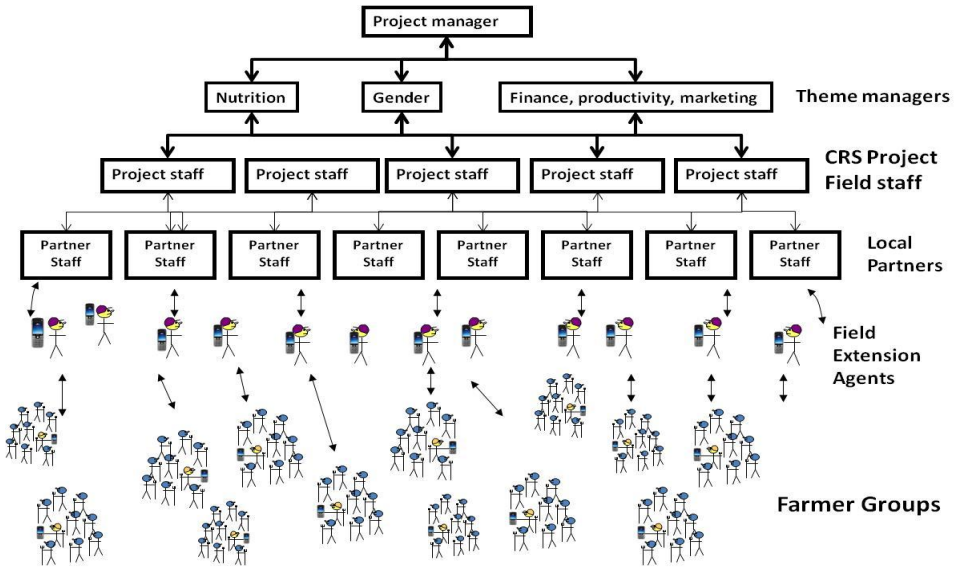


Figure 188. Project organogram showing links between project staff and partners

To help with developing detailed training programs, the project team should make decisions on the desired ratio of field agents to farmer groups and the duration of training programs that one field agent will provide to a farmer group. Depending on the gender based requirements of a project, care should be taken to have a representative numbers of male and female supervisors and field staff. Gender based field staffing is particularly important in being able to support the gender make up of the target community.

Working out required field agent numbers

Based on the target number of farmer groups the project intends to reach, and types of training services that will be provided over the course of the project, the management team must determine the number of field agents that are required to fulfil the project targets and tasks.

The project team should write up a clear scope of work, for the field agents with details of their training tasks and target numbers of farmers over the life of the project. The scope of work should also provide details on the number of skills that whether one agent will train clients in all skills, or whether certain agents will specialize in specific training tasks, such as financial services, marketing or natural resource management. If local volunteers will be part of the training force, this should also be indicated on the organogram.

When building the staff organogram, it is often useful to start by working out the training capacity for one field agent, and then multiplying this basic unit, to reach the required project targets. On the organogram, as shown in **Figure 19**, the diagram should indicate the number of field agents, and the tasks that each type of field agent will deliver.

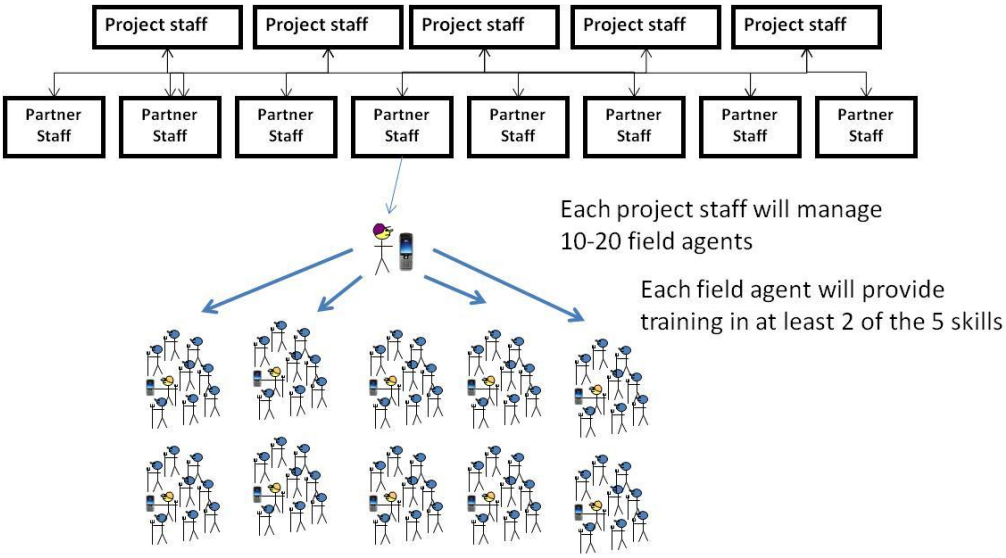


Figure 199. Detailed project organogram showing links between partners and field agents

To help with preparing the field level organisation, the project should create tables, such as shown in **Table 4**, to show the numbers of clients or farmer groups that each field agents is responsible for training. The training targets should be developed to show the targets over the course of the project.

Table 4. Excel spreadsheet calculation to show field agents to farmer numbers

	# districts	# partners	# Field agents / partner	# NEW Farmer groups per agent	# NEW Farmer groups per year	# of farmer groups / field agent / YEAR	Cumulative # of groups	# new farmers	# farmers
Year 1									25
1	District 1	1	5	5	25	5	25	625	625
2	District 2	1	5	5	25	5	25	625	625
3	District 3	1	5	5	25	5	25	625	625
4	District 4	1	5	5	25	5	25	625	625
Totals				20	100	20	100	2500	2500
Year 2									
	District 1		5	5	25	10	50	625	1250
	District 2		5	5	25	10	50	625	1250
	District 3		5	5	25	10	50	625	1250
	District 4		5	5	25	10	50	625	1250
Totals				20	100		200	2500	5000
Year 3									
	District 1		5	5	25	10	75	625	1875
	District 2		5	5	25	10	75	625	1875
	District 3		5	5	25	10	75	625	1875
	District 4		5	5	25	10	75	625	1875
sub-totals				20	100		300	2500	7500

The information in Table 4, shows that over the 3 year project, each partner is responsible for 5 field agents within a specified district. Each field agent will start with an intensive training of 5

farmer groups of approximately 25 farmers in year 1. In year two the field agent will work with an additional 5 farmer groups. In year three, the field agent will only provide maintenance support to the first year farmer groups, which will free up sufficient time to support another 5 farmer groups. This means that at the end of the three years, the field agent will have provided training support to 375 farmers.

Depending on the number of training modules to be delivered to the farmer groups, the project team may ask field agents to provide training in all 5 skills, or there may be greater specialisation of field agents. In the latter case, the field staff may only provide 1 type of training, but cover more farmer groups.

Once the project starts, it may be necessary to make adjustments in the field agent to farmer group numbers, based on distances, or numbers of farmers. In some cases field agents may be able to support more or less farmer groups, depending on farmer capacity and also distances between farmer groups. Any changes made to the training program, will need to be reflected in the training schedule information tables.

Format of the training guides

As part of the preparation in developing the training curriculum, the management team and field staff, should take time to review the content of the training guides. In the five skills set program the training materials are broken down into 9 basic guides, as shown below:-

1.0 Introduction

2.1 Savings and loans communities

2.2 Financial education

3.1 Natural resource management (theory)

3.2 Natural resource management (process)

4.1 Marketing basics (theory)

4.2 Seven steps of Marketing (process)

5. 0 Innovation

Within each guide, there are five elements.

1. **Lessons**, where the staff reads and learns specific content about a skills area
2. **Quiz**, where staff are checked about their comprehension of the lesson
3. **Staff exercises**: where staff get the opportunity to practise their new knowledge
4. **Field lessons**: which provide information about how to deliver the training of specific components of the skills with the target audience
5. **Pictures / laminates**: Pictorial information that is shown to target audience as part of the field lesson.

Having a sound knowledge of the contents of the training courses, will help managers and field agents to realize certain expectations, in terms of the duration of the training lessons and how they can be integrated over an 18-24 month period.

Reviewing the time required for each skill set course

The 5 skills training materials have been broken down into a series of training sessions. Each of these training sessions lasts from 1 to 3 hours. The information in **Table 5**, shows the contents of the Group management course, which comprises 12 field lesson plans. Each of these lesson plans takes approximately1 hour to deliver. These times are expected times, the actual times will vary, depending on the capacity of the field agent, the discipline of the groups and the learning capacity of the farmer group.

Table 5. Field lesson plans in each guide, with approximate times

Group Management Course	Time in minutes
Field lesson plan 1. Group Formation	60
Field lesson plan 2. Participation and inclusion	60
Field lesson plan 3. Leadership and management	60
Field lesson plan 4. Good Governance and management	60
Field lesson plan 5. Financial management	60
Field lesson plan 6. Identifying needs and opportunities	60
Field lesson plan 7. Developing an action plan	60
Field lesson plan 8. Monitoring and evaluating progress	60
Field lesson plan 9. Communication	60
Field lesson plan 10. Managing conflict	60
Field lesson plan 11. Negotiation	60
Field lesson plan 12. Networking and intergroup assocation	60
Total time for module	**720**

To complete the group training course, it is expected to take 720 minutes. Field agents may deliver one lesson at a group meeting or up to three lessons. The amount of lessons that can be delivered at one time will depend upon the planned duration of each field visit.

Practicing how to build a training timetable

Before going to the field and starting to build the actual training curriculum, it will be very useful for the project managers and field agents, to prepare an example training curriculum. The team should review the way they normally plan training schedules and then consider how these methods can be adapted to provide multiple skills training. The next section outlines how to plan for a multiple skills training program. The project team should read this information and then also test their ideas using the example in **exercise X**.

If a field agent's time is allocated as shown in **Figure 20**, then one field agent can provide training to up to 10 farmer groups per week and 9 hours per month. The field agent will visit each group for a period of 3 hours per week. This time sheet, provides for one entire week back at the regional office for each field agent. To map out the training schedule, the project team, can start by developing training blocks, based around a month schedule for one field agent. These building blocks can then be slotted into the annual calendar, as shown in **Figure 21**.

	Week 1					Week 2					Week 3					Week 4				
	M	T	W	Th	F	M	T	W	Th	F	M	T	W	Th	F	M	T	W	Th	F
Group 1	3					3					3					Office debrief, reporting and training				
Group 2	3					3					3									
Group 3		3					3					3								
Group 4		3					3					3								
Group 5			3					3					3							
Group 6			3					3					3							
Group 7				3					3					3						
Group 8				3					3					3						
Group 9					3					3					3					
Group 10					3					3					3					

3 Number of hours taught

Figure 20. Monthly Training building block for delivering training modules at farmer meetings

Using the weekly and monthly building blocks, the project team can build up a training program for a single field agent within an annual or two year training program. The annual training program will most likely require adjustments so that the training given, also supports the agricultural seasons. Also, the training program needs to take into account the needs of the target group.

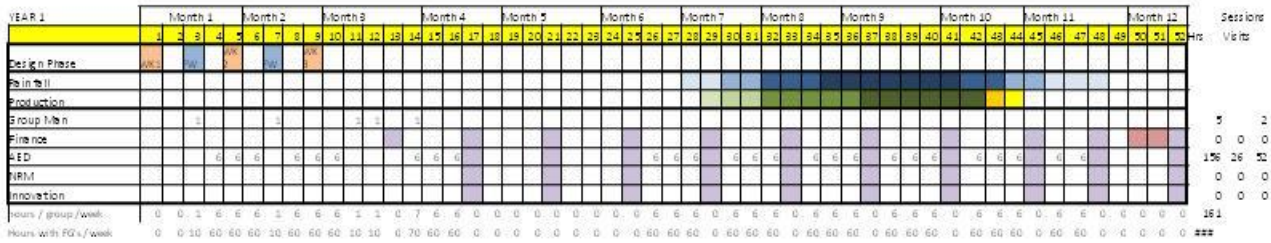


Figure 21. Annual Training or delivering training modules at farmer meetings

In some cases, farmers need production support, in others marketing support. For the more vulnerable farming groups, we have found that providing an initial training in savings and loans schemes, is an effective in building group cohesion, trust and a better understanding about how to use scarce financial resources. These are extremely useful skills that can support successful adoption of farmer field school work and market linkage.

Once the team has gained a better understanding of the project goals and targets and reviewed ways to build multi-skill training programs, the next step is to work with the target community to build the project training program.

Gathering information on the training needs of target groups

When building a training program, we have found that most communities have often received some sort of previous training support. The most common types of training support groups that are based on the following areas:

- Savings and loans
- Agricultural production
- Marketing

To help anchor the planned project training with the needs of the local community, the project supervisors and field staff should ask the farmers about their previous trainings, and also ask them what types of additional training is needed.

If most of the farmers are in groups that are **already skilled** in one area, such as production, the farmers may want to learn skills in a new area such as innovation or marketing. In other situations, the field agents may find that the farmers are not organized into groups, or that groups are very weak, it which case, it may be advisable to start the training program with savings and loans methods. Work with the community members to gather information on what type of skill they want to learn next. Discuss ideas with both men and women, or other targeted audiences in the group to ensure their needs are understood and that the most appropriate training programs can be developed to suit their needs.

Questions to ask

Some things to think of when planning a training needs assessment survey:

- What skills do most people **already have**?
- Which set of skills should the project **begin** with?
- What **order** should the skills training to be given?
- How many training **sessions** will be needed for each skill?
- **When** will training be given?
- Where are the best **venues** for the training?
- How will training sessions be **monitored**?
- How to measure whether the training is **successful**?

Building an overall training plan

Here are some more things to think of:

- How many groups should each field agent train?
- How to report progress, successes and challenges?

- Can the training materials be used as they are, or do they have to be adapted? Can the field agents adapt them, or should the project management revise them?
- Are there other training materials that are complementary?
- Do the community members need any other skills? What are they? How to provide them this training?

Training options

If the field agents are very experienced in the multiple-skills approach, the project manager may give them the flexibility to offer different types of skills training to each of the groups.

But in practice, this may not be possible. Field agents may not have the skills and experience they need, and for logistical reasons it may not be practical to offer each group a different type of training.

The semester system

It may be more practical to offer all groups the same type of training at the same time. In some cases different types of training can overlap, For example:

- **Months 1–6 intensive:** All groups have 2-3 hour training sessions per week in savings and loans
- **Months 6-12 monitoring:** All groups receive 30 minute sessions per week as follow up meetings on savings and loans
- **Months 6–12:** All groups have one to two hour training sessions in natural resource management. (Time this training to match with seasonal production.)
- **Months 10–24:** All groups are trained in intensive 3 hours sessions on marketing.

This “semester” system means that the field agents offer one (or maybe two) courses at a time, and these are the only courses offered during this period. There are some benefits in this approach:

- **One thing at a time.** Field agents can focus on one skill at a time, and they can learn the next skill before they have to train farmers.
- **Streamlined management and feedback.** Managers have to monitor only one or two courses at once. They can follow field agents more closely and provide more meaningful feedback.
- **Comparing progress.** Field agents can compare results across an entire project for a particular subject and get better support from each other and from their supervisors on a particular subject.
- **Monitoring of results.** It is easier to monitor the progress being made in a single skill. The project can measure knowledge uptake across the entire project or area, rather than group by group.

Practical considerations

The decision on which courses to offer also depends on the local situation and the season.

- **Natural resources first.** The land may be so degraded that farmers have to solve natural-resource problems before they can start work on production and marketing. For example if the irrigation system no longer works, the farmers need to fix it before they can grow crops effectively. If so, the training will focus on rehabilitating farm land. Once this is done, the farmers might be organized into groups to focus on three key issues: savings and loans, productivity enhancement and marketing.
- **Seasonal issues.** Farming usually depends on the rain. Crop planting, management and harvesting happen only at certain times of the year. Livestock production is also seasonal. Plan your training in natural resources management and marketing around this calendar.

Steps in building the detailed training calendar

As described earlier, the training for each skill is broken down into sessions of 1–3 hours. Field agents should be able to deliver two or three session with a group every month. The project team

will need to make a decision on the staffing structure, including, who trains which skills and how many groups one field agent can support. With this information the team needs to devise a schedule of visit times and the training duration for the target groups. Whether a field agent can visit more than one farmer group in a day will depend on the ability to travel between groups.

The information in Figure 22, shows how a field agent can allocate training sessions to 10 groups of farmers within a month. The field agent will spend 3 weeks in the field with the groups, and one week at the project office.

	Week 1					Week 2					Week 3					Week 4				
	M	T	W	Th	F	M	T	W	Th	F	M	T	W	Th	F	M	T	W	Th	F
Group 1	3					3					3					Office debrief, reporting and training				
Group 2	3					3					3									
Group 3		3					3					3								
Group 4		3					3					3								
Group 5			3					3					3							
Group 6			3					3					3							
Group 7				3					3					3						
Group 8				3					3					3						
Group 9					3					3					3					
Group 10					3					3					3					

3 Number of hours taught

Figure 20. Example of monthly breakdown of field agent training by one field agent

Training a group in a single set of skills may take between 3 and 15 months. For example, the **savings and loans** training is expected to take 15 months in all if the groups meet once a week:

- A **preparatory period** of 1–3 weeks
- A **training period** of 2 weeks to 2 months
- A **monitoring phase** of up to 11 months.

The lengths of training required for the other skills depend on the needs and abilities of the groups. It may be possible to skip certain lessons, or it may be advisable to spend more time on specific subjects where the group has special interest or needs more guidance. Refer to the manuals on each set of skills for details.

Integrating the training programs

If a project begins with training on savings and loans, you should first develop a plan for these lessons. Keep careful notes of what you have covered with each group so you do not miss or repeat lessons.

After (say) three months of intensive training on savings and loans, you can begin to work on the next set of skills. For subjects that have to be covered in certain seasons (such as natural resource management), make sure you cover them at the right time. For example, you should discuss how to control erosion during the dry season, when it is possible to build dams and dig trenches – not during the rainy season when the gullies are full of water, the fields are full of crops, and farmers are too busy to do any soil-conservation work.

The project team may want to work on a stepwise process to build the final training plan. We have used Micro-Soft Excel to build a basic training program, we use excel as this program enables the user to input time allocations for each training session and then calculate how many total hours of trainings are required.

You can plan a training program using a spreadsheet such as Microsoft Excel. Make 52 narrow columns, one for each week of the year (Figure 23). Label them with the names of the months. In one row, color in the cells that correspond to the **rainy season**. Use a dark color for when most rain falls, and a light color for when there is less rain.

Then do the same for the **cropping season**. Use a dark color to show when people are busiest with plowing and planting. Use a light color to show when the crops are growing, and there is less intensive work to do in the fields, such as weeding and applying fertilizer. Use another color to show the harvest time.

Decide when to have the regular meetings with field staff in the **office**. In Figure 23 this is every 4 weeks – it is marked in **grey**.

You can now start planning the training timetable for each farmers' group. For the first of the skill sets you plan to cover, type in the number of hours the field agent needs to spend each week with one group. For intensive training, this will be 3 hours a week, for less intensive training, allow 1 or 2 hours. Color the cells accordingly: dark for 3 hours, medium shade for 2, and light color for 1 hour.

In Figure 23, the first skill set is **Finance**, shown in **pink**. This starts off with 3 hours of training once a month, then becomes more intensive in Months 3 and 4 as the field agents visit the farmers' group every week. Later on, in Months 5 to 11, the finance training is less intensive as the visits focus on monitoring.

You can then add another row to plan the second set of skills (**Agroenterprise**, **purple** in Figure 23). This begins in Month 5 with intensive training, then becomes less intensive during the cropping season when farmers are busy, and gets more intensive in Months 10 and 11 when they are ready to sell their produce.

The third set of skills is **Natural Resources** (**green** in Figure 23). This training is most intensive during the cropping season because that is when it is possible to see what is happening in the field with growing crops.

The two columns on right side of Figure 23 show the number of hours of training on each topic, and the number of visits needed.

The bottom two rows in Figure 23 show the **number of hours** the field agent spends with each group, and the total number of hours the field agent spends (= the number of hours with each group multiplied by 10, since each field agent serves 10 groups in a week). These two rows show you when the field agents are likely to be busiest, and when they may have free time that they can use to catch up with activities that they have had to skip.

Expert tips

Use Excel's **conditional formatting** function to change the shading of a cell automatically when you type a value in.

Use Excel's **SUM** function to calculate the total **number of hours of training** for each row.

Use the **COUNTIF** function to calculate the number of **individual training visits** for each group.

In Figure 23, the project team starts by preparing a basic calendar. Onto this calendar the project team should indicate start dates, followed by seasonal events, that show when particular crops and livestock are produced.

# of Groups	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	October	November	Dec
Introduction												
Design Phase										Start here	Planning	Planning
Rain fall	Rainy Season							Rainy Season				
Production	Production season		harvest					Main production season				harvest
Group Man												
Finance												
Marketing												
NRM												
Innovation												

Figure 213. Basic curriculum framework, showing basic calendar and seasons

The project team can then map out general possible time allocations for the different training needs.

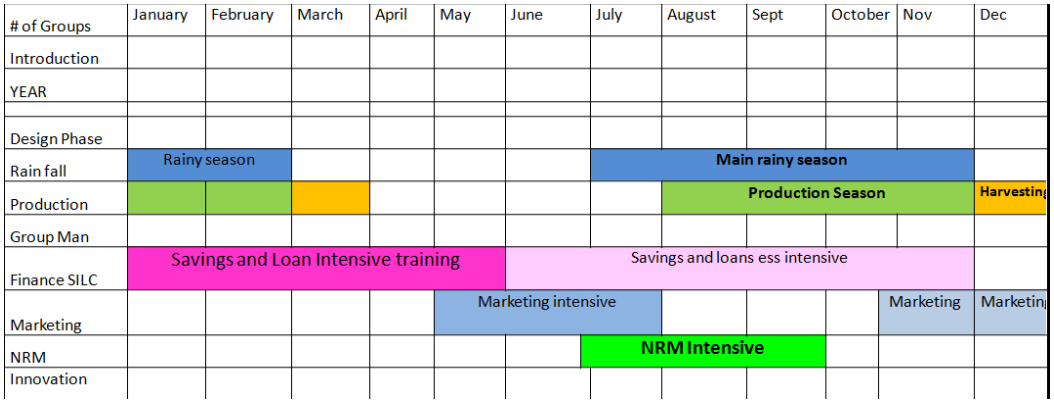
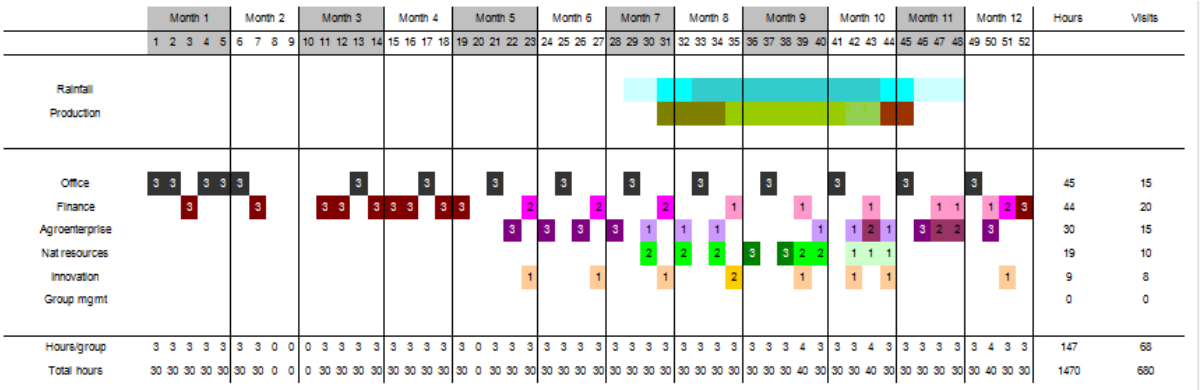


Figure 224. Basic curriculum framework, with calendar and block training periods

Finally, the team can put in actual time allocations for the training curriculum, making sure that there is sufficient time to implement the desired training process.

Planning a training program



You can **download** an example of this spreadsheet to adapt and use in your own planning from $$$WEBSITE?

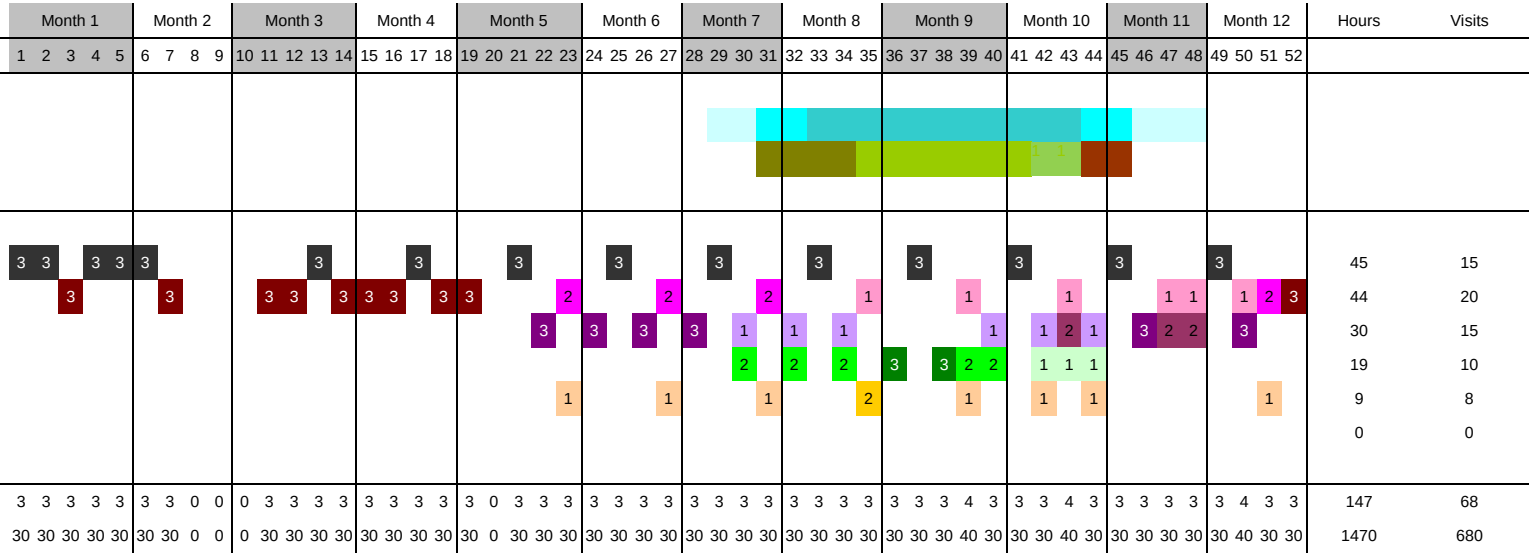


Figure 23. Example of a training plan for a farmers' group.

Monitoring and evaluation

Many projects monitor progress and evaluate results of a project by conducting detailed surveys of households. Monitoring project performance usually means asking field staff to collect data on number of trainings given to the community, recording the assets delivered and taking notes on any public works that the project has supported.

The evaluation surveys are typically done at two or three times during the project life, at the beginning, mid-term and at the end of the project. The survey at the beginning of the project is generally called a **baseline survey**, and the final survey is often called an **impact survey**.

The evaluation surveys are often complex. Collecting and analyzing data from many households takes a lot of time. These surveys are done by a specialist monitoring team and regular staff are often not involved.

We believe it is better to look at new ways of collecting less detail but to do monitoring more frequently, and to get the **field staff and community** involved. That way they can learn from the process and improve what they do.

Working on performance monitoring, that is the delivery of goods and services such as fertilizer and training can be done through paper forms or electronically. Some of the evaluation data can also be done with forms or on computers and getting the community involved in the evaluation work is important, as it will inform the field agents which project activities are working well and which need to be improved or changed.

Using computers to gather data

To help the field agent collect either monitoring or evaluation information, the project will need simple forms that the field agents can use to collect data as a part of their regular work. These forms can be on paper – or better, the field agent can type them into a computer in the field.

Using a computer has several advantages:

- The data can be entered in the field and do not have to be **retyped**, so avoiding mistakes.
- The data can be used to calculate **benchmark information** for farmers, such as production levels, skills levels, amounts of savings and loan levels, and profitability.
- This information can be **shared** with the farmers easily.
- The data can be **uploaded** automatically, avoiding the need for messy and time-consuming reporting procedures.
- The data can be **backed up** automatically, avoiding the risk of losing valuable information.
- Staff and managers can instantly see how the project is progressing. That makes it easier to **detect and solve problems** before they become too serious.

Monitoring changes in skills

It is important to keep monitoring simple and easy. You can use Form 3 to check on a group's progress regularly – say, every 6 months. Just circle (or click on) the most appropriate number in each column. Easy, simple, and quick!

Form 3. Form for evaluating the skills of farmers' groups

Group organization		Savings and loans		Natural resource management		Marketing		Innovation	
0	Group not formed	0	Group has no savings scheme	0	Group has no natural resources plan in place	0	Group has no specific marketing skills	0	Group is not testing new technologies
1	Group members receive training in group formation	1	Group receives training in Savings and loans	1	Group receives training in improved natural resources	1	Group receives Market training	1	Group receives training in Innovation and demonstration design
2	Group of 15-30 members registers with SUPPORT AGENCY / other	2	Group establishes rules of the savings and loans	2	Group reviews critical natural resource issues for crop production	2	Group elects a marketing agent	2	Group elects an innovation agent
3	Group defines clear purpose or vision	3	Group begins to save on a regular basis	3	Group has plan for upgrading productivity and sustainability	3	Market visits / study conducted	3	Group agree on type of technology for testing
4	Members have a written constitution or "set of rules"	4	Group maintains records and completes training	4	Group implements plan to upgrade natural resources on pilot basis	4	Group agree on selected product(s) for marketing	4	Demonstration plots established
5	Members elects committee posts, chair, secretary, treasurer	5	Groups agree on interest rate for loans and loan rules	5	Group reviews progress of natural resources pilot	5	Biz plan and implementation plan written	5	Final result of innovation test shared with group members
6	Groups meet on a regular basis	6	Groups initiate internal loans and maintain records	6	Group develops plan to adopt natural resources system	6	Profit and volume of Sales recorded for selected product	6	Plan for sharing technology agreed
7	Group keeps records of meetings	7	Groups share out savings	7	Group members invest in new natural resources technology	7	Farmers have good links with a buyer Collective marketing recorded	7	Adoption of new technology by >50% of members in their fields
8	Groups formation skill audit approved by field agent	8	Groups savings skill audit approved by field agent	8	Group natural resource skills audit approved by field agent	8	Groups marketing skill audit approved by field agent	8	Group innovation skill audit approved by field agent
9	Elected members are performing tasks well	9	Group savings increase on an annual basis	9	Natural resources technology is linked to technology / input supplier	9	Group scale marketing activities in same product	9	Innovation agent links farmers to business services supplier of new technologies
10	Group is stable for more than 2 years	10	Savings and loans used for re-investment in agroenterprise	10	Group scales natural resources upgrading across group member farms	10	Group use marketing skills in second product	10	Technology scaled to at least 80% of group members

Collating data

Using a computer makes it easy to collect and analyze data over time, and from different field agents. Table 4 shows the scores for one farmer group over five years of a project's life.

Table 4. Example of scores for a farmer group's skills over 5 years

	Group organization	Savings and loans	Natural resources management	Marketing	Innovation
Year 1	1	1	0	0	0
Year 2	1	3	3	4	2
Year 3	3	4	5	5	2
Year 4	5	7	5	7	3
Year 5	6	8	8	9	3

Be sure to set up data collection systems so that you can also analyse and present this type of data by gender, age group and wealth rank.

Presenting data

Presenting information in an easy-to-understand form is almost as important as collecting data. Figure 24 shows one way of presenting the data in Table 4. It shows immediately that:

- The group has made good progress over time from a very humble beginning. It is strong in marketing, natural resource management, and savings and loans.
- A weak point is in Innovation. The group has made little progress in this since the second year.
- Group organization is also relatively weak.

This type of presentation makes it easy to check progress and detect problems. Here, the manager, field agent and the farmer group should check why there has been little progress in innovation. Perhaps it is not necessary? Or perhaps there is a problem with the leadership of the group's innovation committee?

Figure 24. Changes in farmer group skill-set levels through time

Monitoring enterprises using Farmbook

CRS's **Farmbook** software makes it easy to monitor group enterprises. The field agent enters data into a computer. The data are then uploaded to a central database on the internet, where field staff and managers can check it and analyze it.

Farmbook covers a range of topics:

- Registering individuals and groups
- Preparing a business plan

- Calculating the profitability of an enterprise
- Keeping track of training and the transfer of assets
- Scheduling production.

Once the information is entered into Farmbook it can be processed and shared with a number of people associated with the project. The information can be used immediately by community members and farmers. The software lets field agents and farmers assess progress by checking figures against a benchmark and compare farmer groups with each other and across gender. They can use the information to see how to manage their business more effectively, and to help them make more informed decisions.

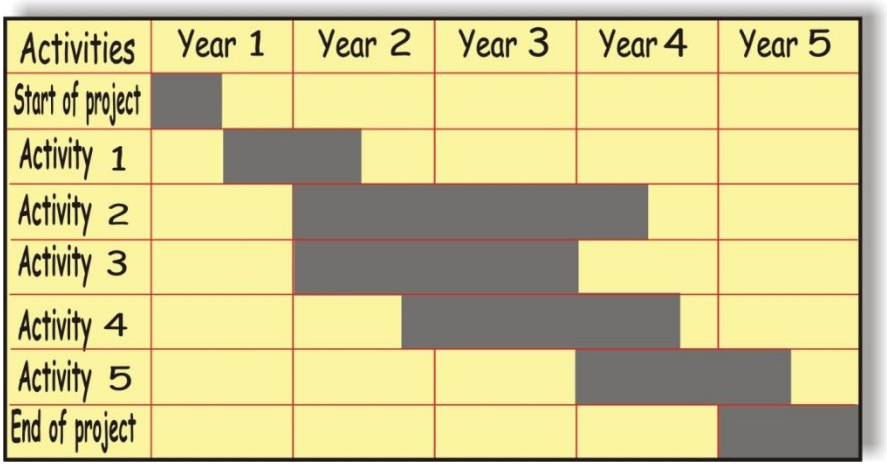
What happens at the end of the project?

Start your project with this thought… What happens after the project ends?

You need to think what will happen to the groups and their agroenterprises when the project ends. What happens when the field agents stop providing free or subsidized goods and services?

- Will local people have learned the key skills they need to manage a robust group?
- Have they learned the skills to plan and manage a profitable agroenterprise?
- Will they have access to sufficient financial resources to invest in the activities?
- Do they know how to save to support their agroenterprise?
- Will there be local services and service providers to supply essential services?

Exit strategies



Development projects are full of risks and uncertainties. So it is difficult to predict what will happen over a period of several years.

Despite this, it is important to plan right from the beginning what will happen when the project ends. How long is the project expected to last? What will happen to the groups that the project has established and trained?

Planning early on will help make sure that the groups will have the skills and capacity to continue without further support from the project.

Examples of exit strategies

Here are some examples of some exit strategies.

Support by existing service providers. During the project lifetime, farmers' groups build up agroenterprises. You link them to private-sector service providers such as input suppliers, traders, mobile banks, microfinance institutions and research agencies. The groups pay for the inputs and services that these provide. At the end of the project, the groups have firm ties with the service providers, and no longer need your help.

Helping community mobilizers set up services. The project starts by training gender-appropriate community mobilizers to provide services to farmers. At first, the project subsidizes part of their costs, but gradually the subsidy is reduced, and the mobilizers start charging larger fees. By the end of the project, the farmers are paying the full cost, and the mobilizers have established viable businesses to provide such services.

Continued support to service providers. The project stops providing support directly to farmers' groups, but continues to work with and support private-sector service providers. It supplies subsidized inputs via these providers for a designated period. The subsidy is reduced over time as the farmers learn to reinvest their profits in their enterprises.

Use of mobile money. Mobile phones and mobile services are spreading rapidly. In many countries, farmers use their phones to transfer cash, and can get new financial services such as micro-insurance and life insurance. Development organizations may consider using mobile phones to support credit and extension services. However, it's important to understand who has access to mobile money and how this will affect different target groups.

Note that all these exit strategies depend on careful planning beforehand. Do not start thinking about the exit strategy when it is too late!

Conclusion

You need to **plan training** carefully. You need to consider:

- The **aim of the project**: What has the project signed up to provide, do you have the skills and funds to do this at the target levels?
- The **needs of community group**: what types of training do the various target audiences (men, women, mothers, elderly, OVC, etc) want and need?
- The **practical considerations** of delivering training to several groups: what is practical from the project's point of view?
- What types of training have to be offered at **certain times of year** – for example, during the dry season when farmers can work on soil-conservation measures?

It may be necessary to compromise by offering certain types of training to several groups at the same time.

You should develop a **calendar** to guide the training activities. This calendar may cover the training to be delivered over the next two years.

A good **monitoring system** is easy and quick to use. It provides the field staff, project managers and community members with the information they need to monitor project performance. It enables them to detect problems early and make any changes necessary.

Baseline surveys should be done at the start of the project before any work has been implemented. The baselines survey should collect key information that will be used as a benchmark to measure change over the project period and in some cases many years after the project has ended.

Impact surveys, are a repeat of the baseline survey. These surveys are done to find out if the project work led to any measurable behavioural changes in the target communities after the project has closed. Large surveys can be complicated to administer, analyse and interpret and writing impact reports often requires specialised staff.

You must have a clear idea of the **exit strategies** right from the beginning.

Resource materials

Reference material

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KIT, Faida MaLi and IIRR. 2006. *Chain empowerment: Supporting African farmers to develop markets*. Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam; Faida Market Link, Arusha; and International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, Nairobi.

Kotler, P., and G. Armstrong. 2009. Principles of marketing. 13th Ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice-Hall.

Shepherd, A. W. (2007). Approaches to linking producers to markets. 13. Agricultural Management, Marketing and Finance, Occasional Paper. Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. Rome.

Useful webpages

Agriculture for basic needs. (Agricultura para necesidades básicas**).** Development project based on the 5 skills sets with success stories, handbooks and other materials in Spanish. www.a4n.com.sv

Alianzas de aprendizaje para el desarrollo empresarial rural en América Latina. A learning and knowledge space on rural enterprise development for Spanish-speaking countries. www.alianzasdeaprendizaje.org

microLINKS. A knowledge-sharing family of applications and tools designed to improve the impact of USAID microenterprise programs and activities. The latest information on microenterprise: best practices; proven approaches from USAID missions, partners, and practitioners; a library of documents, reports, and tools; and an environment that supports and enriches communities of practice. http://microlinks.kdid.org/

CRS agricultural program quality publications http://www.crsprogramquality.org/publications/tag/agriculture

Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services:
Extension systems in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Central America need to undergo significant change if they are to effectively serve the food security and economic development needs of resource-poor men and women farmers. New approaches must draw on full breadth of resources in public, private and civil society organizations and utilized available

advanced information and communications technologies. MEAS is a Center of Excellence that seeks to promote and support such endeavors.
http://www.meas-extension.org/home

Resource institutions

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Rural Infrastructure and Agro-Industries Division supports the development of entrepreneurship in agricultural support services. FAO member countries are assisted with appropriate policies, strategies and methodologies for strengthening agricultural support systems and the delivery of services as well as technologies for production and post-production activities. FAO has a dedicated web site on "Linking Farmers to Markets."

www.fao.org/ag/ags/index_en.html

www.fao.org/ag/Ags/subjects/en/agmarket/linkages/

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