

Skills farmers need for organizing and managing groups



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Introduction

Many small-scale farmers in the developing world learn how to grow crops and raise livestock in a very practical way: by working in the fields and by tending animals. They grow food for their families, and sell any extra to visiting traders or at the local market. But they have never studied farming in school. They have not learned how to earn more money by producing and marketing their produce in a better way.

This module aims to help you, **the field agent**, help groups of farmers find better ways to increase production and to market the output of their agricultural activities by working together in groups. It will help you facilitate locally-relevant learning sessions with farmers that wish to form a group or to strengthen a group that the farmers have already members of.

Farmers may wish to form a group for different purposes.

They may want to get together to pool their savings and lend money to their members, where the loans and savings will be used to buy agricultural inputs.

Or they may need to organize themselves to work together on activities that help conserve their natural resources, or to learn about new agricultural practices, or to experiment with alternative production technologies.

And finally they may see that by selling their agricultural products collectively they will increase the price they get and their income.

A well-functioning farmer group is one that has basic capabilities and procedures for internal democratic management. These include how to develop a shared vision, define common objectives, build mutual trust and responsibility, resolve conflict and sustain learning. The development of these skills builds solid groups.

As a field agent working with farmers to increase production and improve marketing, you will need a range of skills. These include:

- Group organization and management (this module)
- Financial management
- Marketing and agroenterprise
- Natural resources management for sustainable production
- Innovation

These five sets of skills are covered in separate modules in this series.

The farmers you work with will also need these skills. One of your tasks is to help the farmers learn and practice these skills so they can improve their incomes from agriculture.

Purposes of this module

This book has two main purposes:

- To help you learn about the essential characteristics of strong and cohesive farmer groups.
- Once you have mastered the knowledge and skills yourself, to help you lead farmers and other rural people through the process of group formation and management.

What type of farmer are we targeting?

This module is about how to help small-scale farmers in developing countries organize themselves into groups and what they need to do to ensure that the group is well managed.

We will assume that the farmers cultivate 1–2 ha (roughly 2–5 acres). They do not own mechanized tools, use little fertilizer and other inputs, and are not well organized. We also assume they have few links to formal financial institutions such as banks or microcredit institutions, and that they sell their produce mostly to informal traders or in the local market.

Of course you can also use the ideas in this guide with people in other situations: farmers with less land and whose principal sources of income come from selling their labor rather than from agricultural or livestock activities, or from taking part in non-farm income generating activities such as petty trading of agricultural products, food preparation and sale, activities that process farm products, etc. They can also be used with farmers who cultivate a larger area or who are slightly better off, or people who depend mainly on livestock for a living.

After learning about group organization and management...

After organizing themselves into a group farmers and other rural people will achieve their goals and objectives more effectively and efficiently. Each individual will participate with their time, skills, intelligence, money and energy and they will expect to benefit from these same inputs from the other members. The idea is that "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts".

If farmers and other community members come together to form groups that work well, last a long time, and treat people fairly, the livelihoods of those individuals and others in the community can be improved.

A functional farmer group ready for agroenterprise is one that has basic capabilities and procedures for internal democratic management. These include how to develop a shared vision, define common objectives, build mutual trust and responsibility, resolve conflict and sustain learning. The development of these skills builds solid groups.

What is in this module

\$\$\$

Learner objective

Following the module, the field agent will be able to:

- Explain the most important characteristics of a strong and cohesive farmer group
- Design and implement with farmers an action plan to establish a new or strengthen an existing farmer group
- Put into place a process for monitoring and evaluating that permits farmer groups assess their progress in meeting their objectives and make adjustments to improve their performance.

Time required to teach module

Each lesson in the two sub-modules is designed to be taught in sessions of 2 hours or less, for a maximum of 12 hours for Sub-module 1 and 10 hours for Sub-module 2.

Each of the above lessons contains the following parts:

- **The subject matter:** the knowledge and skills you need to be able to facilitate group organization and management processes.
- **Quizzes** to test your own knowledge.
- **Exercises** for you to practice your skills.
- **Farmer lesson plans** with teaching tips as a guide on how to help farmers master the knowledge and skills they need to organize and manage their groups.
- **Handouts:** Information materials to refer to or use in discussions with farmers. We suggest that you have them plastic coated so that they last longer. There are also forms that farmers can use in planning their marketing activities. You can photocopy these and hand them out to farmers during your training sessions.

How to use this book

As a learner

Read through this module 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, and picture how you would use the information and techniques described to help you work with farmers in organizing their groups. Imagine how you would use the Exercises. 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 did not get all the answers right, go back to review that section again before moving on to the next Lesson.

As a facilitator

Once you have read the materials in this book and passed the Quizzes, you will have gained useful knowledge that you can share with farmer groups.

You can use the information and Exercises in this book to plan how to work with farmers to develop their groups. Every farmer group and every situation is different, so this book does not try to tell you exactly what to. Instead, choose those items that you think the farmers need and can benefit from, and use this book as a basis for building your own series of learning events, or **lesson plans**, so you can pass this information on to farmers. Feel free to **adapt** the Exercises, Handouts 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 it is not you but the farmers who are gathering and analysing information and making decisions that will affect them. Your role is to facilitate their learning, not to do the job for them.

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

This book draws heavily on the following:

FAO. 1994. The group promoter's resource book: A practical guide to building rural self-help groups. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Rome.
http://www.fao.org/sd/2001/pe0303_en.htm

Learning online

If you are a CRS staff member or partner, you can also study the ideas in this book online. Contact your CRS supervisor for a **username and password**, then visit <https://crs.brainhoney.com> to register and start an online course.

The online courses use the same text, Quizzes and Exercises as in this book. Many of the tables are presented as **forms** that you can fill in online to help you record and analyze the data you have collected.

1 Working with groups

This module explains the advantages of working with groups to get organized for agroenterprise development. It covers:

- Lesson 1: Why work with groups
- Lesson 2: The role of the group promoter.

At the end of this Module you will have:

- Learned about the advantages of working with groups
- Understood your role as a field agent in promoting groups.

Target audience

This module is aimed at members of the project team, including the project leader, field agents, supervisors and partners.

The remaining modules are also aimed the project team, but are designed so you can teach them easily to the farmers and other rural people you are serving.

Lesson 1. Why work with groups?

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- List the advantages of working with groups for the development agency
- List the advantages of being a group member from the point of view of the farmer
- Explain the features of a successful group
- Describe the differences between new and existing groups.

As a group, we are stronger!

Working with groups or individuals?

Imagine you are designing a development program from scratch. You need to decide the best way to help a large number of farmers or other rural people improve their skills in some area – such as marketing or natural resources. Should you:

1. Identify **individual** farmers and entrepreneurs who are interested, and give them one-on-one training and other assistance?
2. Offer training for **temporary groups** of people who come together just for the course, then go their own separate ways afterwards?
3. Help interested people form more-or-less **permanent groups**, then give them the assistance they need?

Development organizations in fact use **all three** approaches:

- They work with **individuals** such as local leaders and innovative farmers, in the hope that they will influence their friends and neighbors.
- They offer courses on specific skills (such as financial management) for **temporary groups**.
- They help local people form **permanent groups** to deal with things like production and marketing.

This course focuses on the last of these: **permanent groups**. It discusses the advantages of such groups, how to help local people get organized and manage their own groups, how the groups can plan and implement activities, and how they can communicate, negotiate and manage conflicts.

Types of groups

When we talk about “permanent” groups, we do not mean they have to last forever. How long they should last depends on what they do.

- A **farmer field school** aims to help members learn better farming practices. It may last **one cropping season**, then disband.

- A **savings-and-credit group** helps its members save money and get loans. It must last for at least one loan cycle. But it will probably go through several cycles, and people may join or leave the group.
- A **marketing group** helps its members market their produce. It must last at least one production season, but if it is to be effective, it will probably be active for many years.
- A **farmers' association** is an alliance of different groups of farmers. It represents their interests to the government and other bodies. It will be a long-lasting part of the landscape.

Table 1 lists some types of groups that development organizations work with. In this course, we will focus mainly on those groups with an **economic** objective. Many other types of groups also exist, such as cultural groups, clan associations, security teams, and funeral associations.

Table 1. Types of farmers' groups

Type of group	Helps members...	Lasts at least...
Farmer field school	Learn new farming techniques	One season
Innovation group	Develop and learn new techniques	One season
Savings-and-credit group	Save money and get loans	One loan cycle
Production group	Grow crops and raise livestock	One cropping season
Processing group	Process produce	Several cropping seasons
Marketing group	Sell their produce	Several cropping seasons
Community group	Solve problems in the community	Several years
Resource management group	Manage water, the soil or forests	Many years
Cooperative	Buy inputs, sell produce	Many years
Farmers' association	Improve conditions for production and marketing	Many years

Why groups are good for their members

For a group to function, each member has to benefit from it in some way. Here are some of the ways they do this.

- **Buy cheaper inputs.** By buying in bulk, the group can get discounts from suppliers and share transport costs.
- **Get services and advice.** Extension agencies and many other organizations are often willing to serve groups, but not individuals. Farmers can share the costs of getting these services (such as travel costs).
- **Build their capacity.** Members can easily share information and learn from each other. New ideas spread quickly through meetings, training and working together.
- **Obtain financial services.** An individual farmer may not have enough money to open a bank account or qualify for a loan. A group can get such financial services, and can acquire the skills to use them.
- **Get better prices for products.** By marketing through a group, farmers can share the storage, processing, transport and selling costs. By selling in bulk, they can attract new buyers and negotiate better prices.

- **Share the work burden.** Group members can help each other with field work, harvesting, processing and administration. Members can focus on what they are skilled at, and leave other tasks to other members.
- **Do things not feasible for individuals.** Some problems can only be tackled on a large scale. Examples are controlling erosion in a watershed, managing irrigation, and filling a truck with produce.
- **Get empowered.** Groups can express their interests more effectively than individuals. They make it possible for members to negotiate, demand services, and lobby for policy change.

By sharing the costs among all members of the group, the cost for individual members is lower. In this way, small-scale farmers can get the benefits that are open only to large-scale farmers. These are often called **economies of scale**.

Strong groups are the basis of many rural development activities. They can act as local partners for development organizations – helping to channel various kinds of assistance to those who need it. But more important, they can become **self-driving engines** for growth in the community, independent of any inputs from outside.

Why development organizations work with groups

Development organizations like to work with groups for all the reasons above, plus some more...

- **Effectiveness.** People often learn better in groups, and group pressure stimulates individuals to change what they do – and to continue doing it in the future. Organized groups are likely to be more effective than the same number of individuals working independently.
- **Cost-effectiveness.** It is easier, quicker and therefore cheaper for a field agent to serve groups of farmers rather than the same number of individual people.
- **Scale and impact.** Groups make it possible to reach many more farmers than by serving individuals. That multiplies the potential impact of an intervention.
- **Task sharing.** Groups can take over certain activities, such as setting up demonstrations, doing simple tests, training and coordination, and spreading information to people outside the group.
- **Sustainability.** Group initiatives can be more sustainable than individual efforts. People can take turns at tasks, encourage each other, and help each other to get things right. If one person drops out for some reason, the rest of the group can still carry on.
- **Feedback.** Groups can give better and more useful feedback than individuals. That helps field agents and development organizations understand farmers' situations and improve the services they provide.

The costs of membership

For the members, being involved in a group costs time, effort, and perhaps money. They may have to:

- Attend meetings

- Do extra work
- Contribute materials
- Make long-term commitments
- Submit to the decisions of others
- Pay fees.

Members may agree to something at first, but find later they want to change it. For example:

- The group may agree to sell its crop to a buyer at a fixed price. But at harvest time, individual members may be tempted to sell to another buyer who offers a better price.
- The leaders may make decisions that some members disagree with.
- Individual members' circumstances may change. Members may move away, they may fall ill, or someone in the family may get married or die. Such events make it hard to remain committed to the group.

If they do not feel the benefits are worth it, they will vote with their feet: they will stop coming to meetings, miss work sessions, stop paying fees, or sell their produce to someone else. The group will shrink, lose money, and may eventually collapse.

To avoid such problems, it is important for the group to have realistic goals. Decisions and leadership must be transparent, and the group must bring clear benefits to its members.

[GRAPHIC NRM 205: Series of 5 individual scenes: same field agent talking to 5 individual farmers, looking progressively more tired, until in the fifth scene she is exhausted]

[GRAPHIC NRM 206: Small drawings of different types of groups: producers' association (with bags of grain), water management group (with irrigation water control gate), savings group (sharing money around table), processing group (with milling machine)]

Lesson 2. The role of the group promoter

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Explain the role and working methods of a group promoter
- Describe how to use participatory learning methods.
- Plan training for the group on group management
- Promote participatory group formation.

What does a group promoter do?

Helping farmers form groups is one of the most important tasks in rural development. Your goal is to build help them build strong groups that can:

- Run themselves and work on their own
- Develop their own initiatives, such as enterprises, savings schemes and conservation measures
- Be a strong basis for improving the livelihoods of people in the community.

Your role is not to do the work for the local people, but to act as a guide or facilitator. You should not treat the poor as passive recipients of assistance. Instead, you must work side-by-side with them, building up their confidence in their own abilities and promoting their self-reliance.

You have four basic roles:

- **Group advisor.** You help the group get started, and strengthen their abilities to lead, plan, organize and undertake profitable, financially sustainable activities.
- **Participatory trainer.** You help the members learn skills in innovation, natural resource management, marketing, finance, and group organization (see the [INTRODUCTORY COURSE ON THE FIVE SKILLS](#)).
- **Facilitator of linkages.** You promote communication between the group and development organizations and service providers, such as microfinance institutions, the extension service, input suppliers and the government.
- **Monitor.** You monitor the group's activities (and help the group monitor itself) to learn what problems it faces, adjust the interventions as required, and feed information back to your supervisor.

Qualities of a group promoter

To succeed as a group promoter, you must:

- Be committed to the goal of helping local people help themselves
- Be familiar with the problems that local people face

- Know (or be able to learn) the local language and culture
- Have skills in group organization (the subject of this course)
- Have skills in one or more of the other skills you will be working with the groups on (innovation, natural resource management, marketing and finance)
- Be friendly, open and able to listen and learn.

How many groups can you serve?

This depends on the situation, in particular the distance between the groups and the time needed to travel to each one. If they are reasonable close together, you may be able to visit two groups a day: one in the morning and one in the afternoon. In the initial stages, you will have to visit each group once a week. That means you can serve a maximum of **10 beginners' groups** at any one time.

The size of the group depends on what it does. A marketing group should have between **15 and 30 members** – and never fewer than 10 members. This number is manageable, everyone knows each other, and they should trust the other members.

If you serve 10 groups, that means you can reach a total of **150–300 members** at any one time.

If one person in each household is a group member, and each household has five members, you will be reaching perhaps **750–1,500 people** in all (Box 1).

Box 1. How many people can you reach through groups?

If you...

- Visit **10** groups a week
- Each group has **15–30** members
- Each household has **5** people

You can reach...

- At least: $10 \times 15 \times 5 = \mathbf{750 \text{ people}}$
- At most: $10 \times 30 \times 5 = \mathbf{1,500 \text{ people}}$

Groups go through stages

It will probably take several years for a group to get established and start to work independently. You will need to support it during this time, until it no longer needs your help.

Groups generally go through three stages (Table 2).

Table 2. Stages of group formation

Period	Length	What happens	Role of group promoter
Start-up	1 cropping season of market cycle	The group is formed, sets its vision, decides on rules, choose leaders, etc.	Initiating and leading: intensive involvement – at least once a week. Regular visits to get to know the farmers, learn about their farming systems, help identify

			market opportunities, plan the enterprise, and follow up on progress.
Consolidation	1–2 seasons or cycles	Group builds on initial achievements, establishes working procedures, engages in activities	Guiding and assisting. Less intensive and less frequent. Training on new skills, helping to solve problems.
Regular activities	2 seasons or cycles	Group has established firm relations with outsiders (such as buyers and input suppliers), and can resolve most problems itself. It requires only occasional support.	Advising and coaching. Preparing the group to work without you. Occasional visits as needed.

See the \$\$\$INTRODUCTORY COURSE in this series for more on how to plan training and other activities.

Duties of a group promoter

Much of your work in helping local people organize groups depends on the function (or functions) of the group. A savings-and-credit group has different needs from a group that sets up an enterprise or one that manages natural resources.

Here are some things you will need to do for all types of groups.

- Facilitate, not dictate
- Build trust
- Encourage learning and involvement
- Attend group meetings
- Organize training and workshops
- Help the group plan and implement activities, and solve problems that arise
- Visit and talk to group leaders, individual members and other people in the community
- Monitor and evaluate the group's progress
- Follow up on items discussed and decisions made.

Remember: you are a facilitator

Your job is to help the group become self-reliant – to manage its affairs on its own. Your role changes over time: from initiating and leading, to guiding and assisting, and finally to coaching and advising.

But initiating and leading, however, do not mean teaching or dictating. Local people have a lot of knowledge and expertise. You have to help them realize their hidden potential and gain the confidence to decide and do things on their own.

You must make it clear that you are a facilitator and advisor to the group, not a member. You cannot become a chairperson, secretary or treasurer, nor participate in the election of group leaders.

People may not be accustomed to this participatory approach. They may think they should listen, not speak. Help them by asking their views, listening to them and encouraging their involvement. Ask them questions; don't simply give them answers. They will gradually come to appreciate your style and approach.

The groups will need your services less and less as it progresses. Eventually you will need to visit only when they ask or to check on progress. Withdrawing is not easy, but it means that you have done your work well – and that is something to be proud of!

Building trust

You need to be seen as a friend and trusted guide for people in the community, not as an official or outsider who interferes with local cultures and habits. That means you have to:

- Always make yourself available to people in the community.
- Treat local people with friendship and respect.
- Get to know a wide range of people in the community, especially the members of the groups you are advising. Build relationships with community leaders, large and small farmers, input suppliers, traders, and local government officials.
- Not take sides in discussions or disputes. You should help people reach agreement: it is their decision, not yours.

Building trust among group members is also important. That means making sure that all group members meet their obligations, support one another, comply with the group's internal rules, adhere to the group's planned activities, or plan changes in a transparent way.

Some group members may have **hidden agendas**. Do not ignore these, but recognize them and discuss them openly. Try to create a democratic environment in which all the group members have a say in what the group does. Help the group develop internal rules and sanctions for rule-breakers, and to design a way to resolve internal conflicts.

Encouraging learning and involvement

A danger with groups is that a few members (usually the leaders) take over the running of the group, leaving everyone else behind. These leaders gain skills through training and experience. They may "hijack" the group and use it to their own advantage rather than to benefit all members.

It is not possible for all members to attend training. But you can avoid such problems:

- **Be inclusive.** Do not interact with only a select few group leaders, and ignore the rest.
- **Build a pool of potential leaders.** Ensure that as many members as possible learn the skills they need to contribute to the group.
- **Encourage openness and communication.** Encourage members to speak up during meetings and make their views heard. Help them communicate with and learn from one another.

During group meetings

Your role during meetings will change over time. At first, you will play a major role in organizing and running the meetings. Later, after the group is established, your role will

move behind the scenes, working with the leaders to make sure they know how to manage the meeting.

You should help the group leaders to:

- Choose an agenda beforehand with topics and priorities
- Allow flexibility to change the agenda if other topics arise during the meeting
- Report on the previous meeting and any other important group events
- Encourage members to participate in discussions, and prevent one or a few members to dominate the others
- Use participatory learning methods to provoke discussion
- Encourage decision making, but not push for particular decisions.

Training and workshops

Organizing and running training and workshops is an important part of your work with groups. You will act as the trainer or facilitator in some of these events. In others, you will ask outside specialists to provide the training.

In planning a training or workshop, you should decide on the participants, objectives and content or subject matter:

- **Participants:** Who should attend – group members, leaders, people from other organizations, or others?
- **Objectives:** What do you hope they will be able to do after they have taken part?
- **Content:** What subjects should be covered, and in how much detail?

You can then decide on the details:

- **Location and timing:** Where should the training or workshop take place? When, and for how long? Remember to choose a place and time when women will be able to attend.
- **Logistics:** What transport is needed? How about food, drink and accommodation?
- **Materials and equipment:** Think of things like training materials, flipcharts, markers, and tape. Do you need, a computer, projector and screen? Make sure there is electricity if you need it.
- **Information:** How will you invite participants? Do you need a printed schedule? What instructions will the resource persons need?
- **Monitoring:** Keep records of who attends, along with key information such as the group they belong to, their role in the group (leader, member), and their sex. You may need to ask someone to manage such records.
- **Funding:** How much will holding the course cost? Costs may range from zero (if it is part of a regular meeting) to quite substantial if you need to rent transport and rent a venue. Who will pay the costs? Can the participants (or their group) be asked to pay at least part?

See the \$\$\$INTRODUCTORY COURSE for more on planning a training curriculum.

Training subjects

Groups generally need to gain skills in **five broad areas**:

Innovation	Testing techniques so they can improve their production	See the course on <i>Promoting innovation</i>
Natural resources	Improving their management of the soil, water and other natural resources	See the courses on natural resource management <i>Basic concepts and strategies</i> <i>Tools for planning and implementing participatory NRM projects</i>
Marketing	Selling products to a particular market	See the courses on <i>Marketing basics</i> <i>Seven steps of marketing</i>
Finance	Managing, saving and investing money	See the courses on <i>Financial education</i> <i>Savings and internal lending communities</i>
Group organization	Organizing as a group so it can benefit its members	This is the subject of the rest of this course.

In addition, the group may need training in other topics, such as literacy and numeracy, leadership, production and processing methods for specific crops and livestock, nutrition, health and hygiene (including dealing with HIV), community development, non-farm income-earning skills, and gender issues.

Make sure you evaluate the group's needs first, so you can tailor the training to its particular situation.

Supporting group activities

The group will need your guidance to plan and manage its activities. Here are some things you may need to do:

- Identify and prioritize needs, and help the group choose a solution
- Help the group plan how to put the solution into practice
- Help develop a work plan, and make sure it is implemented
- Discuss problems and try to help the members solve them
- Arrange visits to other groups or to information sources such as markets and research institutes so the group can learn and share ideas

Individual discussions

Not all of your work will be with the group as a whole. You may also need to meet individuals or subgroups. For example, you may need to:

- Meet with group leaders to help them learn how to manage the group in a participatory way
- Work with subgroups of members (such as women or young people) to contribute to the group or to overcome conflicts

- Meet outsiders such as input suppliers or traders to explain the group's purpose and explore collaboration.

It is best to be transparent about such meetings to avoid people becoming suspicious about your role. Remember also that your is to enable the group to work on its own. So while you might make the initial contacts with a potential buyer, say, make sure that the group leaders are active participants in all meetings and negotiations. Ensure that one or more group members are present whenever you deal with development services, commercial partners or government officers.

Monitoring activities

Monitoring has two main purposes: it helps the group, and it gives you and your development organization information you need.

- **For the group:** It enables the group to check on its progress and to make adjustments as required
- **For the development organization:** It tells you and your colleagues whether your interventions are effective, and helps you improve them.

Monitoring is important to detect problems early before they get out of hand. Be proactive in solving problems.

Here are some things you will need to do for monitoring:

- Help the group identify **indicators** (things to measure)
- Ensure that the findings are analyzed and **fed back** to the group so it can improve its activities
- Monitor the **work plan** and follow up on any problems
- Monitor members' **attendance** and activities during work times
- Check **group records** and make sure they are complete and up-to-date
- **Report** on progress to your organization.

Writing reports

Regular reporting on each group is important for several reasons:

- It enables you to keep track of your inputs and the achievements of each group. Don't rely on your own memory – if you are managing several groups, it is easy to forget something or get your facts mixed up!
- It lets your colleagues and supervisors check on progress and identify problems quickly
- It lets someone else take over your work if you are ill or move elsewhere (or are promoted!)

Your organization may have a standard format for reporting. If so, use it. If not, here are some things to include in a report about a training or workshop:

- The topic and why it was chosen (the need and objectives)
- The date and place of the training

- The names and contact details of the organizer and resource persons
- The names of the participants, plus details such as age, sex and group membership
- A brief description of each topic
- Recommendations and evaluation.

Withdrawal of the group promoter

When and how should you begin to gradually withdraw from your groups? Disengaging is a delicate process and depends on how fast each group develops. It takes 3–5 years for groups to achieve complete self-reliance. Once a group is capable of gaining access to government and NGO services, can negotiate with input suppliers and buyers, and can take initiatives without your assistance, you can gradually withdraw to concentrate on serving other more needy groups. You may need to make only occasional return visits to ensure that progress continues.

It may be useful to help several groups form a federation, or join an existing federation. These second-order groups can gradually assume many of your responsibilities. You can then focus on helping the federation serve its member groups, rather than working with each group separately.

2 Organizing and managing a group

Lesson 3. Entering the community

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Describe how to enter the community and the types of information to gather
- List various ways to identify potential group members
- Describe how to ensure that women, young people and the disadvantaged are included.

Enter the community

The first and most important task of a group promoter is to gain acceptance by the community as a whole. This can be quite difficult and can take time. So start slowly, with small steps.

Prepare yourself. Find out about the community and its leaders from other development workers and government officers. Who lives there? What do they do for a living? What are the community's main problems? What organizations help the people?

Introduce yourself. It may be necessary to obtain first the support of local leaders. Go to the elders, chiefs or other influential people in the community. Tell them about the aims of the project – that it will try to help people improve their living conditions. Ask the leaders to organize a meeting to introduce you to the local people.

Explain the project. Explain the project idea to the meeting. Describe the aims and methods, and ask people how best you can help them. Explain what you can do, and what you cannot do. In particular, make it clear that you will not be giving free handouts of money or inputs. Say that people will have to do the work themselves, and that your role will be to help them do this.

Gather basic information

You can gather information about the community and its problems in several ways:

- **Participatory rural appraisal** methods such as mapping, transect walks, seasonal calendars and matrices. Choose the methods to give you the information you need, and adapt them as necessary (Table 3).
- **Individual interviews** with members of the community, as well as key actors such as input suppliers, potential buyers and government officials.
- **Focus group discussions** with community members. It may be a good idea to hold discussions with men and women separately to make sure that the women have the opportunity to voice their opinions.
- **Aerial photos** such as Google Earth. With global positioning equipment, you can use software to show locations on a map.

- **Secondary information**, such as government data about the area, and reports by your organization or other development organizations working in the area.
- **Formal surveys** to gather baseline information about the area.
- **Direct observation.** You can learn a lot about the community merely by keeping your eyes and ears open. Talk to people, watch and listen carefully, and ask questions. That will lead to more questions, and perhaps potential solutions:
 - Maize with purple leaves is probably suffering from phosphorus deficiency (where can people get fertilizer?)
 - A truck picking up watermelons shows that farmers are selling produce (who is the trader? where is the truck delivering to?)
 - Someone with a notebook visiting houses may be a loan collector (is there a problem with credit?).

Table 3. Participatory appraisal methods

Method	Approach	Use
Mapping	Local people to draw a map of their community, showing key features and problems	Understand the local geography and issues such as land ownership, farm production, soil and water problems
Transect walk	Local people walk through the community, noting important features and problems. Draw a cross-section showing these items	Identify natural resources and relationships with farm production
Seasonal calendar	Ask local people to draw a calendar showing the rainfall each season, the crops grown, livestock raised, labour uses, health problems, etc.	Understand the farming system and changes throughout the year
Historical timeline	Older people describe the history of the community and the former status of farming and natural resources	Understand the community history and long-term changes affecting it
Daily timetable	Men and women describe what they do each hour of the day	Show the tasks of men and women, identify problems and opportunities
Venn diagram	People identify organizations that affect them, and map the relationships among them	Understand the institutional landscape, identify key actors
Matrices	People list items (such as crop types), then describe them according to certain criteria (such as ease of production, yield and profitability)	Systematically compare alternative crops, livestock, trees, enterprises, etc.
Ranking	People list items and rank them according to certain criteria	Prioritize and select among a set of alternatives

What types of information?

What kinds of information should you collect about the community? At first, you need a broad understanding of the community and the situation it is in. Later you can focus in on those areas that you need to concentrate on, and that the local people feel are important.

People may be reluctant to give you certain information. How much land a person owns, or how many animals they have, may be sensitive issues. It is often easier to ask indirect

questions, such as “How much maize or rice did you produce last year?” From the answer you can probably estimate the size of the landholding by yourself.

Cross-check the information from different sources to make sure that it is accurate. For example, government data may say one thing, but local people may say another. They are unlikely both to be right!

Make sure you get information from (and about) all the different types of people in the community: poor and better-off, men and women, young and old, landowners and landless, crop farmers and livestock raisers, farmers and traders.

Identify your target group

Projects have specific goals for who they aim to help: women, or young people, or cotton farmers, for example. You should make it clear from the outset who the project can help.

You can identify people who fit your criteria in various ways:

- **As the local authorities for help.** They often have a clear idea of who is who in the community. They may be able to nominate people to join the group. Be careful, though: in some places, social divisions such as ethnicity and caste may mean that certain groups of people are automatically omitted
- **Wealth ranking.** Ask a group of local people to sort people into categories by wealth (better-off, poor, very poor, etc.). You may be able to get a list of households from the village chief or local authorities.
- **Land size.** Land is usually the most important asset in a farming community. You can ask farmers to group themselves according to how much land they have. Other criteria may be the type of house (thatched roof, tiles or metal roof?), access to irrigation, or number of animals in a herd.
- **Food security.** You can divide households into groups according to whether they always have enough food to eat, go short for 1–2 months of the year, or go short for longer periods.
- **Gender, age and HIV status.** You can select women, or young people, or people living with HIV.
- **Self-identification.** In a community meeting, you can ask people who fit your criteria to step forward. For example, “households who farm fewer than 2 hectares of land and who are interested in keeping chickens”.

Some of these questions may be sensitive or taboo. Many herders will not say how many cattle they have, and people may be reluctant to say they are HIV-positive. So be careful: if you are not sure, get local advice about what questions you can ask.

Who to include?

Perhaps the biggest risk in development work is to end up working with the richest, best-educated and most articulate people. The group may turn out to be very successful.

But such people are probably not in your target group. Among all the people in the community, they are the ones who **least** need your help: they are perfectly able to help themselves. Is serving them what you are supposed to be doing as a development worker?

Instead, you probably need to target people further down the social and economic ladder. They are not in a position to break out of the cycle of poverty on their own, but can do so with a little help from you.

On the other hand, your target group is not necessarily the poorest of the poor. Depending on your project, it may be better to start off with slightly better-off farmers who can benefit from the project's interventions. Marketing, for example, depends on producing a surplus that can be sold – which the poorest people are unlikely to have. The poorest people can benefit in other ways from the project; for example, they may be able to work as wage labourers for members of the marketing group.

Richer, better educated people may want to join the group because they think they can benefit from it. They may be able to contribute to it too – for example, they may have valuable skills (such as book-keeping or trading knowledge). But be careful of **elite capture** – where the better educated people use the group for their own purposes rather than in everyone's interests.

If the group is aimed at the poorest people, better-off people quickly realize that they cannot benefit from it, so lose interest. For example, they may find the activities dull and not worth their while: they can earn more doing something else.

Sometimes the community leaders want to be involved, even if they are not members of your target group. You may wish include them to gain their support and so they can provide role models for the group members. Or perhaps you can find suitable roles for them (such as “group advisor” to benefit from their services without including them in the group itself.

Talk to women

Women and men often have different roles in society. This varies from place to place. For example:

- **Women** may be responsible for the household, child care, gardening and looking after small animals (such as goats and chickens). They also often do tasks such as weeding and milking. They may do the majority of the work on the farm, especially if the men are away.
- **Men** may take care of large animals, do heavy work in the fields, and be away for much of the year earning money in the town.

That means that women and men have different ideas, skills and knowledge. They face very different problems and have different interests.

Women may face big barriers in society, which make it hard for them to become members of a group, attend meetings and take part in training:

- They may be expected to follow the views of their fathers or husbands.
- They may be shy or afraid of expressing their real views, especially in mixed gatherings.
- They may not be able to attend meetings because of their household duties (you cannot come to a meeting if you have to cook the evening meal and look after children at the same time).
- They may not be allowed to talk to men other than their relatives. Or they may feel uncomfortable talking to a male stranger.

- They may not be able to travel, especially at night.
- Many women are not as well educated as men. In some countries, only a few women in rural areas are literate. Many girls have to give up their education in order to get married.

How to help women

That makes it hard for male field agents to work with women (and for women field agents to work with men). Some suggestions:

- **Work as a team.** A pair of field agents – a man and a woman – can work together in the community
- **Talk to groups of women separately.** Women may feel freer to talk if there are no men around.
- **Schedule meetings so women can attend.** The best times and places will depend on the situation. Ask women where and when would suit them best.
- **Encourage women to participate.** Go out of your way to enable women to take part in discussions. Have a special seating area for women (not right at the back!). Encourage them to bring young children to meetings. During meetings, give them a chance to speak.
- **Form separate women's groups.** In some societies, separate women's groups are the only way to ensure their involvement. Groups of women can be very effective, especially in managing money and handling familiar subjects.
- **Build women's confidence.** You can build women's confidence in many ways: through role models, specific training, giving them responsibilities, and merely listening to and encouraging them.
- **Sensitize the men.** Men often do not realize that they are dominating the proceedings. Help them understand the situation and potential of the women, and help them understand that if the women are heard, the whole family and community will be better off.
- **Set targets and quotas.** You can set a target (say, 40%) for the number of women members of a group or participants in a training course. A group may also decide that at least so many of its officers must be women (for example, 2 out of 5).
- **Avoid overburdening women.** Be aware of the danger of adding yet another burden to an already heavy workload. Women often have to do boring, repetitive tasks.

Talk to young people

Young people – teenagers and young men and women – also face many problems. They are often better educated than older people, and have a broader outlook and bigger ambitions. But they lack opportunities in traditional society: their voices are not heard, they have no land, animals or capital to work with, and they are not allowed to make decisions on their own. Many (especially young men) move to the cities in search of a better life. Girls and young women tend to have fewer opportunities than boys and young men.

Orphans (often those whose parents have died of AIDS) and vulnerable children face particular problems.

You can use many of the same techniques as for women to help young people become valued members of a group, or to form their own groups.

Remember the poorest and most disadvantaged

People who are ill or disabled are often the most disadvantaged people in a community. Find out who they are, where they live, and what problems they face. People living with HIV and AIDS orphans may be particularly in need.

Try to find ways to help such people. For example, you might consider helping a group of people living with HIV to grow nutritious vegetables and sell the surplus. Or help organize a group that sets aside some of its profits to pay for the school fees of orphans.

Lesson 4. Forming a group

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Describe the principles of forming a group
- Explain how to help farmers form a group
- List the six building blocks of a group.

Build on existing groups

Rather than try to form new groups, you could try to work with groups that already exist in many communities. This saves time and builds on local skills.

Types of groups may include farmer field schools, adult literacy groups, women's groups, youth groups, and village savings-and-loans groups. See the courses listed in Table 4 for details on how to start and work with the types of groups.

Table 4. Where to find details on different types of groups

Type of group	See this course
Farmer field schools	<i>Tools for planning and implementing participatory NRM projects</i>
Agro-enterprise groups	<i>Seven steps of marketing</i>
Savings groups	<i>Savings and internal lending communities</i>
Innovation groups	<i>Promoting innovation</i>

Principles of group formation

If there are no groups in the community (or if the existing groups are not suitable), then you will need to help local people start a new one. Here are four principles to follow in forming a group:

The group should be small. The ideal number of members depends on the type of group.

- A group focusing on **production** should have between eight and 15 members.
- A **marketing** group may be larger: between 15 and 30 members.

In a small group, everyone has the chance to speak and contribute. Small groups are less likely to be divided by arguments or dominated by a minority.

The group should be homogeneous. Members should face similar economic conditions and have close social affinity. That reduces conflict within the group: members with similar backgrounds are more likely to trust each other, work together, and accept joint responsibility for their activities. A group consisting of only small-scale farmers is more likely to be successful than one with many small farmers and a few large ones.

Sometimes, however, such people may bring relevant knowledge or contacts to the group. They should be admitted as long as they are willing to participate equally and do not try to exploit the others.

The group should have a common interest. All the members should be interested in the same thing: marketing rice, for example, or raising and selling chickens. A joint group of rice farmers and chicken raisers has no common goal, so is unlikely to be successful.

The group should have clear objectives. The group should agree on a limited set of achievable objectives – such as marketing rice or chickens, stopping erosion on a hillside, or managing an irrigation scheme. These objectives often include making money from a specific type of activity. Earning money means success and builds the group's self-reliance.

The groups should be voluntary and democratic. Members should decide who can join their group, who will lead them, what rules they will follow, and what activities they will undertake. Decisions should be taken by consensus or a majority vote.

Take it slowly – but not too slowly

Forming a viable, stable group takes patience and time – usually 2–6 months to begin with. After that, you will need to work with the group for several more months or years to help it consolidate its activities. Do not push the group along too quickly: learning the skills and getting used to working together takes time. But avoid long delays, which can dampen the members' interest and enthusiasm.

Call a meeting of potential group members

Invite people in your target category to discuss their situation and expectations, and to explain what you can do to assist them.

Choose a time and place convenient for both men and women (or organize separate sessions for women).

The meeting should discuss general ideas only. You should start the discussion, but then encourage people to speak freely. Sometimes it will take a while to get discussions started. The poor (and especially women) may not be used to your approach: usually they only listen at meetings. So, ask questions and encourage them to participate in the discussion.

Ask the people about their problems and needs. Ask them how they try to solve these problems and fulfill their needs.

Tell the participants how you can help, your aims, the focus on participation and the methods you will use.

Discuss the group approach

Explain your focus on groups. Explain that a self-help group is made up of like-minded people who work together for a common purpose. All members should be involved in the group's decisions and activities. Explain to them that successful groups have certain common features:

- Members have common interests.
- Members decide on their objectives, then work together to achieve them.
- The group writes the constitution and agrees to abide by it.
- The members elect a committee to manage the group.

- The members hold regular meetings, take part in discussions and make decisions. They take part in activities, save money as a group, and keep records
- All members share the benefits of belonging to the group.

You can explain the benefits of participatory groups by comparing them with other forms of local cooperation. These include informal groupings (such as mutual assistance societies) and formal organizations (like cooperatives). What are the aims of these other organizations? Who participates? What roles do they play? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the organizations?

Explain that in a participatory self-help group, all members benefit from their combined skills and resources.

Overcoming suspicions about groups

People may be suspicious of groups and reluctant to join. They may have good reasons for this:

- In the past, the government imposed cooperatives on farmers, who had little say in how they were run, and saw few benefits from them.
- The poor often have heavy workloads and poor health, so have little time and energy left. Their low level of education and isolation cuts them off from new ideas.
- The poor are usually dependent on big farmers and traders. They are used to leaving decisions to such people. Powerful local people may see the group as a threat.

You can overcome such suspicions in various ways:

- Explain the advantages of belonging to a group: members can produce and earn more, help each other, and get support from the project and the government.
- Explain that forming a group is required by the project. If people do not want to join together in groups, then you will not be able to help them.
- Explain that the group's members – not the project or the government – will decide what to do.
- Try to win the support of traditional leaders and local officials. Explain the objectives and show how the community as a whole will benefit. That will bring extra wealth and business into the community and prestige for its leaders.
- Do not force people to join a group! Membership must be voluntary. It is better to start with a few members. Once people see how the group is successful, they will want to join.

Help participants select a focus

Invite the people at the meeting to select one or more areas that they wish to focus on. This may be in marketing their produce, overcoming natural resource problems, saving money, or finding solutions to technical problems in farming.

Different groups may choose a different focus. They may be general or specific. Examples of **general goals**:

- Improving their crop yields

- Improving their income from farming.

Goals may also be more **specific**, such as:

- Improving crop yields by reducing erosion and restoring soil fertility on a particular hillside.
- Improving income by marketing maize to traders in the capital city.

Ask the participants to be as specific and as realistic as possible. What type of produce do they want to sell? What is the problem with natural resources (soil erosion, low soil fertility, lack of water, lack of firewood...)? What farming problem needs to be solved? “Overcoming poverty” is vague and may be unrealistic. “Earning more money from selling soybeans” is specific and more feasible.

Visioning

One way to help people select a focus is through a process called **visioning**. This involves asking them to imagine what their group (or village or enterprise) will look like in the long term (say, in 10 years’ time). Once they have answered this, ask them what

In one of your first meetings with a group, you should identify the members’ vision for their farms and communities. Then ask them what activities they need to undertake to reach this long-term vision.

You then repeat the exercise for activities in the medium term (5 years), and then the short term (next year).

See EXERCISE \$\$\$ for how to do this.

Setting priorities

Get them to put the problems in order of priority. If everyone agrees on a single priority, that becomes the goal of the group. If different people have different priorities, consider helping them to form two or more separate groups.

Identify group members

Identify those who would like to become founding members of a group that aims to reach the goals they have just defined. If too many people want to join, suggest they form two or more groups, focusing on different goals (maize, livestock raising, etc.), or people living or farming in different areas.

Choose a name for the group

The members should choose a name for the group, ideally in the local language. Some ideas:

- **Ideals:** Unity, Working together, Prosperity
- **Commodities and activities:** Rice marketing group, Maize millers, Water users’ group
- **Locations:** Bondo Village Association, Teso Community Group.

Make sure the name is not too limiting. The Village Maize Marketing Group may have to change its name if it starts selling soybean as well as maize!

Formally create the group

Once these things have been discussed and agreed on, it is time to formally create the group. Write the names of the founder members in a list, and ask them to add their signatures. Get the village chief or local leader to witness the event.

Discuss the building blocks of a self-help group

Explain the six elements or building blocks in a successful group. These are:

- **Participation.** A group relies heavily on its members' commitment and active participation. Members make the decisions and then put them into effect. Imagine the group is a train, in which everyone takes turns at pulling the carriages along.
- **Leadership.** A group needs good leaders. The leaders are chosen by the members, and they are accountable to the members for their actions. The group should decide on several leadership positions (such as chairperson, secretary and treasurer) and elect people to fill these positions.
- **Governance.** The group needs to decide how it will govern itself. The best way to do this is to draw up written constitution, along with bylaws or rules that govern day-to-day procedures. These rules help the group avoid internal conflicts and make the responsibilities of each member clear. A written constitution is also necessary to register the group with the authorities.
- **Regular meetings.** The group will hold regular meetings of members to make decisions, elect officers and check on progress. The meetings should follow a set procedure, and should give a chance for everyone to make their opinions heard.
- **Record-keeping.** Records help everyone remember what has been decided. They are very important in monitoring and evaluation.
- **Financial management.** The group will have to manage money – membership fees, income from savings schemes and marketing activities, and grants or loans. The management must be accurate, transparent and credible to retain the members' trust.

Each group has to decide for itself how it wants to manage these building blocks. We deal with each one in turn in the following lessons.

Lesson plan 6. Choosing the type of group

This exercise helps the project team to work with the community and the community leaders to choose an entry point for the 5 skills set development project and outline their initial activities.

The idea is not to dictate to the local community what they should do, but to evaluate the situation and narrow down the range of possibilities to those that are realistic. There may be only one realistic entry point; there may be several alternatives to choose from; or the entry point may be a combination of several of those considered here. Decisions on the entry point are likely to be decided based on the project proposal document, local conditions and the wishes of the community.

This exercise may be run stages,

- a discussion with the project team, partners and possibly the donor

- focus groups with target community / communities to collect any relevant information
- review of existing community organizations, with additional information from the community, in preparation for a decision on where to begin with different farmer segments.

Objective

To identify the most suitable entry points for the team to start helping the local community develop goals, groups and visions for development.

Equipment needed

Large sheets of paper, marker pens

Expected outputs

Decisions on the types of groups that will be developed, and the target members.

A list of initial steps to undertake for each of the possible entry points.

Time

2-3 hours with one or more sessions.

Preparation with project team

Write the three possible group starting points (**Error! Reference source not found.**) on a large sheet of paper so everyone can see it. Identify important gaps in knowledge about the community that may help influence a decision. Project team may be required to gather information from target community and target farmer types to make a clear decision.

Suggested procedure

Bring together the project team and any information you have gathered about the local community.

Discuss with the group which of the group starting points are relevant for the community. Eliminate those that are not relevant.

Discuss the situation in detail, identifying the situation and outlining the preliminary steps the team would need to take in order to form or strengthen these groups. Note these on the large sheets of paper.

Discuss which type of group is likely to be the most promising for the target community members.

Summarize your findings on **Error! Reference source not found.**

If additional information is required, the team should identify, what information is required, and then a focus group with farmers needs to be done with farmers to gather missing information.

Follow on meeting to finalize specific types of groups that the project will begin the process with and criteria to be used for the target group members.

Questions to stimulate discussion

What decisions have already been made (e.g., in terms of focus on a particular type of group)? What constraints are there (budget, time, staff skills, etc.)?

Are the farmers organized? Might existing groups be adapted to take on 5 skills set activities?

What major problems do the farmers face? What opportunities might they have for improving their production and marketing?

What disadvantaged groups are there in the community (such as women or the landless)? Should they be the focus of the project? How might they be involved?

What types of assistance would the community need? What kinds of investment are required?

Will the project need to invest in some natural resource infrastructure investments prior to starting with production and 5 skills set?

Notes

If you are working with several communities, you may break the team into smaller groups to discuss each one.

Table 5. Five skills set development entry point form

Name of group		Location	Date	Field agent
Type of group	Situation and focus	Identify situation	Outline preliminary steps	
1 Production and natural resource management	Critical natural resource management upgrading or production improvement			
2 Start with savings and loans	Help farmers to learn basic skills in group formation, savings and internal loans. Start 5 skills set after one year of financial training			
3 Agro-enterprise group	Have farmers selected a product, are groups formed, what other skills do these farmers need?			

Lesson plan 5. Farmer segmentation

Picture of farmer segments.

Selection methods

Wealth ranking

Farm size

Meeting face to face

[GRAPHIC NRM 207: Group of 4 men and women farmers, each with a thought bubble above his/her head: (1) tree seedling in pot, (2) small dam across gully, (3) making mats from reeds, (4) picking fruit from tree]

Lesson Plan 6. Visioning

Objective

Equipment needed

- Flip chart or large piece of paper, marker pens
- Paper and pencils.

Expected outputs

Time

Preparation

Suggested procedure

Through visioning, the farmers imagine what they would like to achieve within the 5 skills in the long term, then decide what steps to take in the short term to achieve this.

Objective

To set a desired future for the farmers group.

To identify the steps the farmers 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

Ask the farmers to summarize their current production situation (type and amount of product produced), their post-harvest handling (drying, storage, packaging) and marketing activities (buyers, sales agreements), and the business services (input suppliers, microfinance institutions, etc.) they currently use. Summarize these on a sheet of paper under the headings “production,” “post-harvest,” “marketing,” and “business services.”

Ask the farmers to imagine what they would like their enterprise to be like in the **long term**, in 10 or 15 years’ time. What will they be producing? How much of the product, and at what

price? How will they be producing it? How will they market it, and who will they sell it to? List these goals on a second sheet of paper under the same headings.

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? Install irrigation? Expand the group membership? Build a processing shed or storage warehouse? Get a loan from the bank? List these activities on another sheet of paper.

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.

Now get them to repeat the exercise for **short-term activities**, to do in the next year or 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.

Mark which activities they can do themselves with their existing resources, and which will require external support.

Summarize the results of the discussions and notes in **Error! Reference source not found.**

Remember that men may have different ideas from men and different segments of the community may have different outlooks and aspirations. When working with a community it is useful to work on visioning with a men's focus group and a women's focus group, so that you can get an idea of the hopes and aspirations of these groups.

Questions to stimulate discussion

- What is the vision of the farmer groups?
- What can they achieve within a 2 or 5 year timeframe?
- How do they get from where they are now to where they want to be?
- What assets and knowledge do the farmer groups need in order to achieve their goals?
- What skills do they have already?
- What are their first, most critical priorities?

Production

What area of land will each farmer plant? How many animals will each farmer keep?

What tools and equipment will we use?

When do we need to plant crops (or breed animals)?

What management practices do we need to change: seed type, variety, planting density, weeding methods, fertilizer application, irrigation usage, etc? For livestock, what are the breeding, feeding, veterinary care and housing we need?

How will we monitor production to make sure we get the right amounts and quality?

Post-harvest handling

How will we harvest the product? When? Who will do the harvesting?

How will we store the product? What facilities will we need?

How will we sort grade, package and label the product?

Marketing

How will we identify buyers? How will we market the product? Who will negotiate on behalf of the group?

What transport will we need? What will the delivery schedule be?

What price range will we negotiate for? What should the payment terms be? Do we need a bank account? Who will be the signatories for the account?

How will the money be shared in the group?

How much of the profit will we invest, and what will we invest in? How will we save money in order to invest?

Business development services

What business services will we need? Input supplies, technical advice, financial services, marketing services, transport, etc?

Which services are the most important?

Which services need to be strengthened?

Which services do we need to pay for? How will we pay for them?

Table 6. 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)
Production					
Post-harvest					
Marketing					
Business services					

Table 7. Visioning from current to a desired state, Mshika Farmers Group, Tanzania

“On the side of the river”	“The stepping stones across the river”			“On the other side of the river”
Where we are today	Activities for getting where we want to go:			Where we want to be
	Short term	Medium term	Long term	
Sell traditional products Income from maize is low value, few high-value options Production of most income crops sold at low prices by individuals	Reorganize group and start a savings and loan process Review natural resource options, focus on irrigation survey Undertake a	Work with other savings groups and link to external / formal loan agencies Gain advice from research station on production	Provide annual business plans to lending agencies to access formal finance Work with community to improve watershed	Regular access to formal lending options to finance enterprise options Produce a range of higher value crop/livestock products Find an alternative to coffee Sell at least 10 tons of

<p>Partners not well organized</p> <p>Farmers not using savings or loan methods</p> <p>Farmer plots have low fertility, do not have access to irrigation or fertilizer</p> <p>Group not organized for business, no links to service providers for input/output markets</p> <p>No experimentation done by the community</p> <p>No record keeping by the group</p> <p>No plans to use local assets and organizations</p>	<p>market survey for selected income products</p> <p>Obtain seed of new varieties; multiply seed of new varieties</p> <p>Reorganize group structure to accelerate benefits of innovation</p>	<p>Gain advice from specialized NGO on local irrigation options</p> <p>Start to test new technologies as part of group learning</p> <p>Plan for higher value market options</p> <p>Register group, seek links with other groups with similar interests</p>	<p>management</p> <p>Seek links with other collective marketing groups</p> <p>Strengthen links to local service providers</p>	<p>beans to a known buyer</p> <p>Select the best bananas for market and sell to local hotels</p> <p>Group well organized, with functional committees for marketing, credit, and experimentation</p> <p>Group linked with service providers and other production groups</p> <p>Group maintains regular production and financial records to evaluate its own performance</p>
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Lesson 5. Participation

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Discuss the rights and obligations of group members
- List ways in which members may contribute to the group
- List the desirable characteristics of a group member
- Describe how to promote participation in the group.

Rights and benefits of membership

Group members have certain rights and benefits. They may:

- **Voice their opinions about the group and its activities.** The group's direction and decisions must reflect the will of the members, not of the leaders alone.
- **Make decisions jointly.** The group must be run democratically, with decisions made by consensus or through a vote. Everyone has a voice and an equal vote.
- **Become leaders of the group.** Each group member may be elected to a position of responsibility in the group.
- **Benefit from the group's activities.** Each member can benefit from activities such as training, cross-visits, information services, shared work, cheap inputs, and loans.
- **Share the profits from the activities.** Each member can share the profits from the group's savings-and-credit activities, production and processing work, and marketing efforts.

Members' duties and obligations

Members also have various duties and obligations towards the group. They must agree to:

- **Abide by the group constitution and rules.** Once the rules are agreed, members must agree to follow them. If they break the rules, they will be fined (or given some other penalty).
- **Attend meetings regularly.** The group depends on members' active participation. That means taking part in meetings and discussions.
- **Elect the group leaders.** The group leaders must represent the members. They are elected, not imposed on the group from outside.
- **Pay a membership fee.** The group decides on a fee that members must pay.
- **Contribute labor and materials when required.** The group may call on members to contribute labor and materials for joint projects. For example, it may require members to help construct a building, plant trees, or build a dam to prevent erosion.

- **Make regular contributions to the group savings fund.** Many groups run a savings-and-credit scheme. Members of such schemes must agree to contribute an agreed amount regularly, and to repay their loans promptly and in full.
- **Market their produce together.** Marketing groups pool their produce so they can sell it at a better price. They may negotiate this price with a buyer beforehand. Individual members must agree to these arrangements and sell their produce through the group, even if another buyer offers a better price.
- **Help other members when in need.** Group members may need help from time to time. Other members should be ready to help them if necessary.

Types of contributions

Members may contribute to the group in various ways:

- **Fees.** Members may be required to pay a regular annual membership fee.
- **Labor.** Members may be required (or requested) to work for a certain number of days a year on common projects. Marketing groups will need people to receive grain and other produce, check the quality, carry bags, and do the paperwork.
- **Expertise.** Members may offer expertise such as accountancy, marketing skills, diagnosis of crop and livestock problems,
- **Land.** Members may make their land available on a short-term basis (e.g., for crop tests), or permanently for common facilities such as irrigation or processing.
- **Materials.** Members may provide materials such as wood, stone, sand or cement for building.
- **Equipment.** Members may offer the use of computers, mobile phones, vehicles, tractors or farm tools.
- **Meeting facilities.** Individuals may allow the group to use their houses or farms for meetings. If there is no village meeting hall, meetings could be held in each member's house in rotation.
- **Refreshments.** Members may prepare food and drinks for people during meetings and work days. Participants may be asked to pay a small fee for refreshments at meetings.
- **Cash.** Instead of providing items in kind, members may choose to make a cash donation to the group.

The group should make it clear the rules for such contributions. Are they voluntary or compulsory? Are they in addition to, or instead of, the regular membership fees? Which services should be paid for? What happens if someone refuses to contribute? What happens if someone's equipment is damaged while the group is using it?

An ideal group member

Groups function best if they can take advantage of each member's skills, interests and experiences. Together, the members can achieve more than they could from working alone. That makes the group stronger than the sum of its parts.

Here are some traits of an ideal group member:

- Good communicator, not afraid to contribute to discussions
- Good listener, open to other people's ideas
- Trustworthy and honest
- Cooperative, not argumentative
- Solving problems, not creating problems
- Patient and persistent
- Confident and positive
- Original, creative
- Respected in group and community
- Fair and considerate of others
- Hard-working and enthusiastic
- Willing to contribute knowledge and skills.

Participation

The group should be run in a participatory way. That means:

- Working together and building relationships among individual members, especially across gender and ethnic boundaries
- Sharing responsibility.
- Each member learning from and contributing to the group as a whole.
- Listening to and valuing different views.
- Making decisions together, if possible by consensus.

How to promote participation

Not everyone feels comfortable in a group. Some are shy and do not speak up easily – especially in a language other than their mother tongue. They may be reluctant to challenge authority, and feel they cannot change things. Or they may fear a loss of status and influence. Other people dominate discussions or do not listen. Many find it difficult to make the compromises needed to reach an agreement.

You can promote participation in various ways:

- Help people feel comfortable by using an informal style.
- Use games and role-plays to get people relaxed and willing to contribute.
- Have people seated in a circle rather than in rows facing the front.
- Guide the discussions: introduce the session, structure the discussion and summarize regularly.
- Make sure that everyone has a chance to speak. Invite people who have not yet said anything to do so.
- Ask, probe and listen: “what do you mean?”, “why do you think so?”

- Give people enough time to express their opinions, and ask others to listen
- Keep the language simple and practical. Avoid jargon and “development speak”. Don’t say “what is the cause of widespread erosion?” Instead, ask “why is the soil being washed away?”
- Acknowledge everyone’s views and opinions.
- Stimulate creative ideas.

Make sure that the group leaders also use such techniques. If necessary, give them some guidance on how to facilitate meetings in a participatory way.

[GRAPHIC NRM 204: Group of men and women farmers. One of the farmers standing up with flip chart, talking to group. Field agent looking on. Several people talking, all looking happy. Drawing of slope with erosion control structures on flip chart]

Advantages and disadvantages of participation

Participation has many advantages:

- The decisions and activities reflect the will of all members, not just a few leaders.
- The members support and are committed to the group’s decisions and activities.
- The results are likely to be effective and sustainable.
- It gives people a sense of identity and unity.
- They gain a feeling of empowerment.

Participation does have disadvantages, though:

- It takes more time than more directive approaches.
- It puts responsibilities onto people’s shoulders.

Quiz for Lesson 2

1. Fostering participation is time consuming and is rarely worth the effort.

- A. True
- B. False

Correct answer: B. While it is true that ensuring that as many members of a group participate actively is time consuming, the final results are usually better and more sustainable in time.

2. Why is participation of group members important for the good functioning of the group?

Select all that apply.

- A. It helps share responsibilities for important tasks.
- B. It builds ownership of the plans and activities of the group.
- C. It makes the leader feel important.
- D. It makes the group members feel that they are important and their ideas are useful.

Correct answers: A, B and D. Ensuring active participation of all group members is not for making the group leader feel important.

3. What inhibits people from participating actively in group activities?

Select all that apply.

- A. Not enough time.
- B. Unclear about the benefits of participating.
- C. Lack of self-confidence
- D. Feel marginalized by the process

Correct answer: A, B, C and D. All these can influence a person's participation in a group.

4. What personal qualities make participation in groups more successful?

- A. Argumentative
- B. Open to other people's ideas
- C. Impatient
- D. Self confident
- E. Constructive
- F. Critical

Correct answer: B, D and E. Qualities that contribute positively to group dynamics and fosters participation by others are those that strengthen a group.

Farmer Lesson Plan 1

Objective

Equipment needed

Flip chart or large pieces of paper, marker pens

Expected outputs

Time

Preparation

Suggested procedure

Guiding questions:

1. What does participation mean to you in the context of a group setting? Provide three or four examples of how or why participation has occurred in activities that you have been involved in.
2. In your experience, what have been advantages and disadvantages for communities who have participated in a group effort that was related to their own development or community change?
3. In your experience, what have been the barriers to participation and what have been ways in which participation has been encouraged?

Lesson 6. Leadership and management

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Describe the desirable characteristics and skills of a group leader
- List the types of leaders and officers a group should have, and the functions of each
- Describe how leaders should be chosen, and how long their terms of office should be
- Elect leaders and choose people to fill management positions
- Describe how to hold leaders and members accountable for their actions.

Leadership

To work well, a group needs a management committee made up of a chairperson, secretary and treasurer, and perhaps other officers. In many groups the most open or outgoing members are chosen as chairperson and secretary. However, other members may also have hidden but valuable skills. All the skills and abilities of the individual members should be used as far as possible. A group can exploit these abilities by rotating the leadership positions among the members.

Qualities of a good leader

Good leaders have many personal qualities. Here are some of them:

- **Exemplary character.** A leader must be honest and impartial and must earn the trust and respect of others. They trust the leader to take responsibility for the group.
- **Vision.** Vision gives direction and builds cohesion among the group members. People trust a leader who knows where they should go and how to get there.
- **Enthusiastic.** Leaders must inspire and motivate the group members, and must convince outsiders about what they do.
- **Team player.** At the same time, leaders must be part of a team working towards the group's goal. Good leaders work well with other people, and lead by example.
- **Confident and purposeful.** People look to a leader for leadership. That means ability to make decisions, an ability to inspire confidence in others, and the talent to draw out the best efforts of the team and to get things done well.
- **Good communicator.** Leaders must be able to communicate well with the group members. They listen to what everyone says (not just to a few people), and explain themselves clearly.
- **Calm, focused and analytical.** Good leaders manage crises by staying calm, and keeping the main goal in mind. They break down a task into manageable steps to make it progress easier.
- **Knowledgeable.** Good leaders do not need to be experts. Rather, they must have a good understanding of the problems that group members face, and should have ideas

on what the solutions might be. They can draw on other people for the specific skills needed to solve the problem.

- **Participatory.** To lead a group of farmers, a leader must make it possible for all the members to voice their ideas and contribute to the group's goals.

Leadership styles

There are many different types of leadership. Some are better in certain situations; others are more suited to other circumstances. Sometimes it is useful to combine styles. Here are three of the main styles.

- **Leaders who command.** They make decisions on behalf of the group, and allow little or no discussion with group members. This may be necessary in times of trouble, but normally it does not encourage the group to grow in confidence and skills.
- **Leaders who consult.** These leaders encourage discussion, and then make a decision on behalf of the group.
- **Leaders who enable.** These leaders set certain limits, but enable members to discuss and make their own decisions within these limits. This is also known as **participatory leadership**.

Participatory leadership is not appropriate for all groups or all occasions, but it is particularly important for working with communities and smallholder farmer groups. Let us look at it in more detail.

Watching geese flying

Have you ever seen a **flock of geese** flying in a V formation? Why do they do this?

Because it makes flying a lot easier. A flock of geese in a V formation can travel hundreds of kilometers without resting. A single bird on its own can fly only a little more than half that distance.

As a bird flies along, its wings create turbulence in the air. Each bird except the leader uses the turbulence from the bird ahead to support its weight. That makes flying easier.

The leader has no one in front to provide lift, so leading the flock is hard work. Because of this, the birds swap leaders regularly. That way, none gets too tired, and they can all fly a long way.

The birds honk to encourage each other and to tell each other where they are. If one bird falls behind, several others stay with it to protect it. They stay together until they can fly on or join another flock.

Long-distance runners and **cycling** teams use similar principles when racing. They keep close behind each other so they can cut through the air more easily. They change over leaders regularly, and help each other if necessary.

What is participatory leadership?

Participatory leadership is like the flying geese. All members have the same chance to participate, and all members can become leaders. Elections to change leaders take place

regularly. Rotating the duties gives all members a chance to develop their leadership skills. That makes the group more effective and promotes further participation.

Participatory leaders encourage everyone to be fully involved in the group affairs by keeping them informed, by delegating tasks, and by having open discussions.

Like a shepherd

We can also think of participatory leadership as “shared leadership” or “leadership from behind.” The leader has to be comfortable sharing power and responsibility. He or she must be able to see the potential in ordinary people to lead, make decisions and make meaningful contributions. It is based on the principles of **partnership** and **collective effort**.

“A leader is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind.”

Nelson Mandela. Long Walk to Freedom

Participatory leaders create an environment where all individuals are engaged, and where the group’s collective talent is tapped by having everyone take the lead at some point.

Advantages and disadvantages of participatory leadership

Participatory leadership has many advantages:

- Group members are more satisfied
- They have a chance to develop their skills
- They are motivated to work hard

But it also has disadvantages:

- If something does not work out, who is responsible?
- Participation takes time. That may be a problem if something has to be done quickly.

Who can become a leader?

Anyone in the group with the right skills can become a leader. Literacy and numeracy are important, though: it’s difficult to be a treasurer if you cannot add up, or a secretary if you cannot read and write. It is possible (though more difficult) to become a chairperson without being able to read.

Officers

The group leaders should be given specific tasks. The number and type of officers, and their specific responsibilities, will depend on the nature of the group and the specific situation. They may change over time as the group matures and takes on new tasks.

A group will need some (or perhaps all) of these officers:

- Chairperson
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Production coordinator (lead farmer)
- Marketing coordinator

These make up the group's **management committee**

In addition, the group will also need two or more **auditors**.

A group may also appoint other officers, such as a vice-chairperson, communication officer or warehouse manager.

The roles and responsibilities of each officer should be clear. The positions and duties of the officers should be included in the group's constitution. Here are some suggestions for their duties.

What are the duties of a chairperson?

The chairperson leads, coordinates and represents the group. He or she:

- Coordinates the group's and the officers' activities
- Organizes meetings and review sessions
- Chairs meetings and summarizes them at the end
- Encourages participation by all members in discussion, decision making and work
- Ensures the group constitution is followed
- Ensures that the secretary and treasurer do their jobs
- Ensures members pay their contributions as agreed
- Delegates work and assignments
- Ensures that the work plan is followed
- Maintains harmony in the group
- Represents the group at meetings with others.

What are the duties of the secretary?

The secretary manages the group's correspondence and records. He or she:

- Writes the agenda and minutes, and keeps a record of attendance at meetings
- Maintains the list of members, the constitution, bylaws, business plan, and other important documents
- Reads aloud the minutes of meetings
- Deals with communications to and from the group
- Assists the chairperson.

What are the duties of a treasurer?

The secretary manages the group's money. He or she:

- Safeguards and manages the group's money
- Keeps the financial records of the group
- Reports to the members about expenditures and receipts, and the balance available in cash or at the bank
- Receives money on behalf of the group, and gives receipts for the money received
- Keeps the cash book and the receipts of purchases, sales and received money
- Counts the money kept by the group, in the presence of the members
- Reports to the members on the group's financial situation.
- Prepare financial records as required by outside organizations, such as donors, banks or the government.

What are the duties of a production coordinator?

A group that grows crops, raises animals or processes products will need someone to coordinate these activities. The production coordinator or lead farmer:

- Ensures that the members have the knowledge and skills they need to produce the product
- Arranges for members to get the seed and other inputs they need
- Coordinates the timing of planting and harvesting (or for livestock, of insemination) among the members
- Manages the members to work as a group when required on common tasks such as terrace building, erosion control and irrigation
- Coordinates production targets
- Keeps records about production targets and actual production figures.

What are the duties of a marketing coordinator?

A group that focuses on marketing should have someone to coordinate this activity. He or she:

- Coordinates the delivery of the output to a common collection point
- Arranges for the produce to be dried and stored (if necessary) while awaiting a buyer
- Ensures that the produce is sufficient quality and quantity
- Identifies potential buyers and negotiates the sale of the produce
- Manages the sale and handover of the produce
- Keeps records about marketing targets, profits and actual amounts sold.

What are the duties of an auditor?

The treasurer has to report to the members on the group's financial situation. He or she may also have to prepare accounts each year for the government. In some countries, the law requires that the group accounts are checked by two other group members (someone other than the treasurer and the other officers). At the end of every year, these auditors:

- Check the accounts prepared by the treasurer to make sure they are accurate
- Check the amount of money the group has in its bank account or savings box
- Signs the accounts to state that they are accurate.

The auditors are not members of the group's management committee.

Forming a management committee

All of the leaders (except the auditors) are members of the group's management committee. The committee meets regularly to coordinate the group's activities. The committee is coordinated by the group chairperson.

Each person in the management committee has his or her own tasks and responsibilities. For day-to-day activities, they get instructions from the management committee, and they report to the management committee on their work.

The management committee is responsible to all of the members of the group. It reports to the general assembly during the annual general meeting. This is when the officers are elected, and when they get instructions for the next year.

Electing leaders

Each of the officers should be nominated and democratically elected by the group members. Normally, elections for each position are held on an annual basis.

Before the election, the members should evaluate the officers' performance. If the officer has not performed well, he or she should be replaced.

For someone to be elected, three things must happen:

- Another member must **nominate** the person for the position.
- The person nominated must say he or she is **willing** to stand for the position.
- The group must **elect** the person to the position.

Two or more people may be nominated for and stand for the same position. The person with the most votes is elected.

You should make sure that the individual officers understand their duties. Give them training or coaching as required. Once the group is established, the previous incumbent can help train his or successor.

How often should leaders be changed?

Rotating leadership frequently provides all members with the chance to develop their organizational and leadership skills. But changing leaders frequently can be unsettling and make long-term planning difficult. A balanced approach is needed.

Depending on the particular group activity, the leadership could be changed each month, each season, or each year. In most groups, the leaders are elected each year.

How long the officers hold their positions should be written into the group's constitution. The constitution should also state whether someone may be re-elected, and how long an individual may hold the same position.

Professional managers

As it grows, the group may find that the members do not have the skills, ability or time to do certain tasks. For example, a savings-and-loans group may find it needs an accountant to manage its funds. A marketing group may need a professional warehouse operator or marketing manager.

There are two possible solutions to this:

- Have one or more members trained in the skills required.
- Hire a professional to do the job.

Training members to do the job. This approach can be problematic:

- It can be difficult to find a suitable training course.
- There may be no group members who are willing or suitable for training.
- Training someone may be costly and time-consuming.
- It may be unrealistic to try to train someone in all the skills needed.
- The trainees may be tempted to use their skills to get a job elsewhere.

Hiring a professional. This is often the better option.

- A professional can be expected to have all the skills needed. No extra training is needed.
- The professional is paid a salary, with the level based on performance or results.
- The position is subject to oversight by the group's management committee.
- The job may be part-time if necessary.
- If the professional does not perform adequately, he or she can be replaced easily. Doing this is much harder with a member who has been specifically trained for the job.

The professional manager sits on the management committee and reports to it.

Quiz for Lesson 1

1. Which is the best style of leadership?

- A. Leaders who command.
- B. Leaders who consult.
- C. Leaders who enable.
- D. A combination of styles depending on the situation.

Correct answer: D. Different situations will require different leadership styles. The leader will learn through experience which style is most appropriate for which situation.

2. A good leader has the following characteristics.

Select all that apply.

- A. Confidence.
- B. Arrogance.
- C. Focus and analytical.
- D. Bossy.
- E. Aggressive.
- F. Composed.

Correct answer: A, C, F.

3. Which statement or statements best describes a good leader?

- A. A good leader controls what each group member does and takes all the decisions.
- B. A good leader instils confidence in others by delegating tasks among group members.
- C. A good leader has no need to listen to the opinions of others because he or she was selected because of their superior knowledge and skills.
- D. A good leader participates in group tasks and does not mind getting his or her hands dirty.

Correct answer: B and D.

4. To be a good leader a person must be an expert who has deep technical knowledge of farming.

- A. True
- B. False

Correct answers: B. It is not necessary for a good leader to be an expert. It is important is that he or she is able to enlist support from within or outside the group to identify problems and appropriate solutions.

Farmer Lesson Plan 2. Discussing leadership styles and qualities

Objective

- To explain why leadership is important by using farmers' own experience of observing and interacting with leaders in their everyday life.

Equipment needed

Flip chart or large piece of paper, marker pens

Expected outputs

- Farmers' can identify different leadership styles and the characteristics that a good leader should have

Time

40 minutes

Preparation

None

Suggested procedure

1. Dialogue and brainstorm on qualities of effective leadership.

- a. Ask the group to think about a leader that they admire who is *outside the group*. This could include leaders at national, regional, and local levels.
- b. Without naming any names, ask about several qualities that they feel makes this leader effective, or the reasons why they admire this person. Summarize the responses on a flip chart so that all participants can see.
- c. Then enquire what are the disadvantages if these “good” qualities are absent in a group of people. Note the responses on the flip chart.
- d. Follow-up by asking if, in their experience, is it more common to have one person who has all the necessary qualities or are there two or three people who have some of the necessary qualities who lead together. Discuss what would be the advantages and disadvantages of this arrangement?

2. Introduce new knowledge.

- a. Suggest, by referring to the list and examples offered in the above activity, that different qualities in leaders exist. In addition, one can also think of *types or styles* of leaders/leadership. Introduce the three styles: Commanding, Consulting, and Enabling. Emphasize that one style of leadership is not best for every group or every task. Each style might be appropriate for a particular situation and leaders may switch between styles depending on the group dynamics and needs.
- b. Continue the brainstorming dialogue by asking members to share their ideas and experiences with different styles of leaders. Supplement discussion with input on leadership styles as needed.
- c. Emphasize the type of leader who *enables* group members to contribute to the decision-making process and share in tasks and responsibilities. Refer to this type of leadership as participatory or shared leadership.
- d. Ask the group what style of leadership might best work for their group or if/when participatory leadership might work for them. What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of participatory leadership?
- e. An effective participatory leader requires good facilitation skills. Discuss the role of a facilitator and what makes a good facilitator. Guiding questions might be:

- Think back about your experiences in school as a youth (or other times when you were being taught) compared to group meetings as an adult. What are some of the differences between teaching and facilitation?
- What is the role of a facilitator, when is this skill useful?
- What are some of the challenges of facilitation?

Lesson 7. Governing the group

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- List the elements of good group governance
- Describe the function and parts of a constitution
- Write a constitution for the group
- Give examples of bylaws and internal rules

Aspects of good governance

Good governance includes:

- **Regular, independent elections.** Group members periodically choose officers to lead the group.
- **Term limits.** These restrict how long a person may serve in the same office.
- **Transparency.** All information is open and freely available to all. For example, group meetings are open to all members, financial records may be reviewed by any member, and rules and decisions are open to discussion. When activities or decisions are transparent, it is more difficult for individuals to take advantage in their own interest.
- **A constitution.** The group should have a constitution that sets out its goals, functions and basic rules.
- **Bylaws.** The group may also decide on bylaws (internal rules) to say how it does particular things.
- **Record keeping.** Good records help the group monitor its progress, review discussions and agreements, keep track of expenses and earnings and prepare financial reports.
- **Good communication.** Good communication among group members helps them to participate in group activities and decision-making.

This Lesson focuses on the constitution and bylaws.

Why a constitution?

A **country** needs a constitution and a set of rules that describe how its government operates. These documents tell the leaders and the citizens what they can and cannot do. Without such documents, there is nothing to prevent the powerful people in government doing what they want. That is bad for the citizens, bad for the economy, and bad for society as a whole.

A **farmers' group** also needs a constitution, for many of the same reasons. It describes the group's goals, tells the groups' leaders what powers they have, and sets the rules for managing the group and its assets.

In many countries the law requires a group to have a written constitution for it to be registered officially with the government.

A constitution is like the **foundation of a building**. Without a strong foundation, the building is likely to collapse. Without a good constitution, the group is likely to fail.

A constitution is also like a **map**. There will be times when a group faces problems or challenges. The constitution is the map that the members can use to remind themselves where to go. When they get to a fork in the road and need to make a decision, they can look at the map to see where to go.

Why is a constitution necessary?

A constitution provides a clear and consistent set of guidelines to define each member's rights and obligations to the group. The constitution is meant only for the benefit and use of the members. It is made by the members and can only be changed by the members in the general assembly.

In many countries, a formal constitution is required to register an organization with the authorities and to open a bank account.

Development organizations may also require a group to have a written constitution before they can work with it.

Parts of a constitution

There is no blueprint for a group constitution. It should be made step by step, and tailored to the particular needs of the group. The first draft is made when a group is formed. Rules can be added or changed as new issues arise.

Groups often borrow a constitution: indeed, many development agencies have standard formats that groups can copy. While these may be a good basis, the group should consider them carefully and adapt them to their own needs. A constitution that is just borrowed wholesale is unlikely to reflect the group's own purposes.

Parts of a constitution

Table 8 lists some items to consider including in the constitution. You should help the group discuss these, and add to or subtract from them as required.

Some of these rules can be set as bylaws rather than included in the constitution. In general, it is best to keep the constitution general and vague to allow sufficient flexibility. The details can be filled in by bylaws.

Table 8. Possible items to include in a constitution

Item	Issues for discussion
Goals and functions	
Name of the organization	If the group has not yet chosen one, now is the time to do so.
Basic information on the group	The group's location, when it was formed, registration date and contact information.

Objectives of the group	The group's goals and how it aims to achieve them. They should be specific enough to guide the group, but broad enough to allow for change over time.
Functions	The group's specific functions, such as the activities it performs or services it provides. This section may also state whether the group may: Raise funds Employ staff Lease, hire or purchase property Run savings-and-loans schemes Make a profit Liaise with other organizations. It is best to start with a broad range of powers, to avoid having to add things later.
Members	
Membership	Who may join the group (e.g., farmers who live in a particular village), the conditions for membership, and the rights and responsibilities of members.
Contributions	Whether members have to pay a fee to join the group, and whether there is an annual fee. (The level of the fee can be decided on at the annual general meeting, and does not have to be written into the constitution.)
Governance	
General assembly	The composition of the general assembly, how frequently it meets (usually once a year), and its rights and responsibilities.
Management committee	The types of posts in the management committee, the duties of each member of the committee, how the committee members are chosen, and how long someone may hold a particular position.
Election procedures	How often elections take place, and what procedure will be followed.
Decision-making	Who makes what decisions, and how the decisions are made (e.g., by consensus, or majority vote)
Meetings	The frequency of meetings, the number of members needed for decisions, whether members must attend, and the penalties for non-attendance.
Records	How records of meetings and decisions will be kept.
Disciplinary actions	The penalties to be imposed on members of the management committee or normal members if they do not fulfill their responsibilities (e.g., fines, expulsion from the group).
Review of the constitution	When and how the constitution may be reviewed and how amendments can be made.
Dissolution	How the organization can be wound up, and what happens to its assets if this happens.

Check with the authorities

Before the group approves the draft constitution, it is a good idea to check it with the relevant government authority.

- To register as a cooperative, the law will require a group to fulfill certain requirements.
- The law may prohibit a group registered as a non-governmental organization from paying members (such as the officers) for the work they do.

It is best to check things like this first to avoid difficulties later.

Keeping the constitution

At least two copies of the constitution should be made. The secretary keeps one, and the other may be lodged with the village chief or the local authority.

The relevant government ministry may require a copy of the constitution if the group is registered with the authorities.

A bank or microfinance institution may also need a copy of the constitution if the group takes out a loan.

Bylaws

Bylaws are internal rules that the group sets for itself. The constitution gives the big picture; the bylaws fill in the details. For example:

- The **constitution** says that members will be penalized for not attending meetings
- The **bylaws** set the type of penalty (e.g., the amount of a fine), and whether a member who gives a good reason beforehand for not attending is excused from the fine. If a member does not attend three meetings in a row, he or she may be asked to leave the group.

The group should decide on its own bylaws, and all members should understand them well. They should cover aspects such as:

- The number of members allowed in the group
- The level of membership fees
- The frequency of meetings each month
- How officers are elected
- The duration of posts
- How to share costs
- How records will be kept
- What action to take if a member does not comply with one of these rules.

Penalties are generally in the form of small fines. The bylaws set the amount of these fines.

Registering the group

The management committee should find out beforehand what the requirements are for registering the group with the authorities. You can help them contact the relevant officials and fill in the paperwork.

The group will also have to register with your development organization. Table 9 gives the type of information required by CRS.

Table 9. Farmers' group sign-up sheet

Name of group	Location	Date	Field agent
The farmers' group			
Registration (tick one)	New group <input type="checkbox"/>		Existing group <input type="checkbox"/>
Name of group			
Country			
District			
Village			
Diocese			
Phone number of group			
Number of members	Male:	Female:	Total:
New group?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>		No <input type="checkbox"/>
Year group was formed			
Year group started work with CRS			
The area where the group farms (from GIS)			
Elevation (meters)			
Longitude (decimal degrees)			
Latitude (decimal degrees)			

Quiz for Lesson 3

1. Good governance includes the following:

Select all that apply.

- A. Term limits on Management Committee positions
- B. Financial records and meeting notes kept private with limited access by members
- C. Leaders selected by the village authorities
- D. Only minutes of General Assembly meetings are required, not of weekly meetings
- E. Frequent communication by the group leader and members of the Management Committee to members

Correct answers: A and E.

2. Match the style of decision-making to its correct description

- A. Consensus 1. The number of votes a member has depends on the contribution he or she has made.

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| B. Democratic | 2. All members must agree to make a decision. |
| C. Proportional | 3. All group members get one vote. The majority wins. |
| D. Committee | 4. The leader has control over all group decisions, with or without consultation with members. |
| E. Executive | 5. Decisions are made by a Management Committee. |

Correct answers: A2, B3, C1, D5, E4.

3. A constitution provides a roadmap about the direction a group wants to take and can be consulted when questions or problems arise. Identify the section of the constitution where each piece of information can be found.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| A. What cash or in-kind contributions members have to make? | 1. Basic information on the group |
| B. What happens if money gets lost or stolen? | 2. Goal and objectives of the group |
| C. Date of formation and date of registration | 3. Governance |
| D. Who can propose an amendment to the constitution? | 4. Election procedure |
| E. Methods to achieve group goals | 5. Decision-making |
| F. Reasons a person should pay a fine. | 6. Contributions |
| G. Percentage of members needed to be present for a decision. | 7. Discipline |
| H. What will be recorded by whom? | 8. Records |
| I. Rights and responsibilities of members | 9. Review and amendments |

Correct answers: A6, B5, C1, D9, E2, F7, G4, H8, I3.

Farmer Lesson Plan 3

Objective

Equipment needed

- Flip chart or large piece of paper, marker pens
- Paper and pencils.

Expected outputs

Time

Preparation

Suggested procedure

Guiding questions:

1. How have groups that you have been a part of in the past been governed? What were the main challenges to effective group governance?

2. What is your experience in working with groups with and without constitutions? Was there a difference in the group's functioning?
3. What are the main elements of the current group's governance style? Is this effective from your perspective? Why or why not?

Lesson 8. Holding meetings

After this lesson you will be able to:

- List the types of meeting the group may hold, along with the purpose of each type
- Describe how to hold a meeting of the group
- Describe how decisions can be made.

Types of meetings

The group may hold various types of meetings. Table 10 shows the most common types:

Table 10. Types of meetings

Open to all members	Regular meetings Annual general meetings Extraordinary general meetings
Open to only some members	Interest-group meetings Committee meetings Informal meetings

Regular meetings

These are held at regular, frequent intervals: every week, every two weeks or once a month. They are chaired by the chairperson. The members meet to discuss and plan activities and allocate tasks. The nature of the meeting will depend on the type of group:

- A **savings group** will meet so members can pay money into a savings scheme, request a loan, or repay interest on a loan.
- A **marketing group** will meet to coordinate harvesting and delivery of produce to the group's collection center, discuss product quality, and plan sales of output.
- An **innovation group** will meet to plan and check on experiments and analyze the findings.

The group may hold regular meetings only at certain times of the year (such as around harvest-time), and meet less frequently during other seasons.

General assembly (annual general meeting)

The officers and management committee are in charge of day-to-day running of the group. They are responsible to the **general assembly**. This is the group's highest decision-making body. It is a meeting of all the group's members, and normally meets once a year at the annual general meeting.

The annual general meeting is the most important meeting each year. It normally takes place at the end of the production or marketing season. At the annual general meeting:

- The **chairperson** and other officers report to the members on the group's activities and achievements during the previous year.

- The **treasurer** reports on the group's financial situation.
- The **auditors** report whether the treasurer's accounts are in order.
- The **members** elect the officers for the coming year.

Extraordinary general meetings

Urgent topics sometimes come up that needs the members' agreement, but the next annual general meeting is too far in the future. The chairperson may call an extraordinary general meeting so the members can discuss it.

Interest-group meetings

The group may contain several smaller interest groups, each focusing on separate issues. A marketing group, for example, may have separate subgroups dealing with groundnuts, maize and beans. Each interest group meets separately to coordinate their activities. They all come together a few times a year to plan and coordinate the activities of the group as a whole.

Committee meetings

The management committee meets regularly to plan and coordinate activities. A large group may have subcommittees to deal with specialist subjects, such as inputs, marketing or water management.

Informal meetings

The chairperson may also call informal meetings of a few regular members or members of the management committee. These meetings can be useful to solve problems or get the participants' opinions. But they are not official meetings, so they cannot make decisions on behalf of the management committee or the group as a whole.

The importance of attending meetings

Group meetings are the most important place for discussions, learning and decision making. Members who do not attend meetings cannot participate properly in the group. If a member cannot come to a meeting, he or she should say so in advance, and give a reason.

If members stop attending meetings, you should try to find out why.

- Members may stay away because they cannot afford to pay the membership fee. In that case, the group should discuss whether the fees should be reduced.
- Members may think they do not benefit from meetings. Perhaps the format, length or frequency of the meetings needs to be adjusted. For example, maybe meeting every other week is enough. Or a meeting can be combined with a training session to make it more attractive.

Maintaining group unity and commitment is important. That may require adjustments in the group's objectives and how it achieves them. The members' interests can change, and the group must adjust if it is to be a success.

When and how often to meet

Meetings should be scheduled on days, at times and at locations that are convenient for both male and female members – and for you as the group promoter. Frequent meetings (every week or two weeks) are desirable during the early stages. Stress the need for members to attend these meetings regularly. The group may decide to fine people who do not attend.

Attendance

At each meeting, the secretary has members sign an attendance sheet (or ticks off their names on a list) as they arrive.

If the group has decided to fine people who miss meetings, the secretary or treasurer collects the fines from the non-attendees.

Table 11 shows a sample attendance sheet.

Table 11. Sample attendance sheet

Meeting date	3 Oct 2012			10 Oct 2012		
Member's name	Present	Fined	Amount paid	Present	Fined	Amount paid
Ms D	✓			✓		
Mr N	✓			✓		
Ms S	×	✓	20	✓		
Mr G	✓			×	✓	20
Mr T	×	✓	20	✓		
Total	3✓		40	4✓		20

Procedure during meetings

Meetings of the management committee or the whole group should follow a standard procedure.

Before the meeting. The chairperson and secretary invite members to the meeting and inform them of the date, time, location and purpose.

The chairperson and secretary plan a meeting agenda. They should inform people beforehand if they will be required to present a report. They should write the agenda on a piece of paper or a blackboard so everyone can see it.

At the meeting. Where possible, the members should sit in a circle, so everyone can see and hear what is being said, and has an equal chance of contributing.

The group chairperson facilitates the meeting following the agreed agenda. Table 12 gives an example of the agenda for an annual general meeting. Regular meetings will be shorter and less formal than this.

If there is a danger of the meeting lasting too long, the chairperson may appoint a timekeeper to remind speakers when their time is over.

The secretary takes notes of the discussions and any decisions made.

After the meeting. The secretary writes up the minutes and submits them to the chairperson.

The chairperson follows up with the people responsible to make sure that any decisions made are put into effect.

Table 12. Example of annual general meeting agenda

Place	Village hall, Bukedea	Date	13 January 2013
Time	Item	What to do	
17:00	Welcome and opening	The chairperson welcomes the members and opens the meeting.	
17:05	Agree on the agenda	The chairperson briefly describes the agenda and asks if there are any changes or additions. Large items can be included in the main part of the meeting. Smaller items can be put under "any other business" towards the end.	
17:15	Minutes of previous meeting	The secretary reads out the minutes of the previous meeting. The members are asked to comment on and approve the minutes.	
17:30	Report by chairperson	The chairperson reports on the group's activities since the last meeting.	
17:45	Report by marketing officer	The marketing officer reports on marketing activities.	
18:00	Report by treasurer	The treasurer reports on the group's financial activities and status.	
18:15	Election of officers	The group elects officers for the coming year.	
18:45	Guest speaker	If there is a guest speaker, the chairperson introduces them and invites them to speak.	
19:15	Any other business	The group discusses any other items that have arisen.	
19:30	Close	The chairperson thanks the participants and closes the meeting.	

Decision-making methods

A group may make decisions in various ways. The five main types of decision-making are:

- **Executive.** The group leaders have ultimate control over all the group decisions. They may seek advice and input from the group members, but they are not necessarily bound by the immediate desires of the rest of the group.
- **Committee.** Decisions are made by a small group of people. Normally this is the management committee. Larger organizations may have a board of directors. Other bodies, such as the village elders, may also make decisions that affect the group. The members may or may not be democratically elected.
- **Proportional.** The group members may contribute different amounts of money or other resources to the group. Their votes are weighted to reflect the amount they have invested. In a cooperative, for example, someone who owns a lot of shares gets more votes than someone who owns just one share.
- **Democratic.** Each group member gets one vote on all issues that are deemed vote-worthy. The majority vote wins.
- **Consensus.** All group members must agree in order to make a decision. This may be a good option for group unity and inclusion, but one person can block a decision from being made. Instead of requiring a unanimous decision, members can decide they can live with a particular decision, so choose not to block it.

Which is the most appropriate method? That depends on the situation (Table 13). Groups will need to decide which type of decision-making procedures they want to adopt.

Table 13. How to make decisions?

Type of decision	Examples of when it is appropriate
Executive decisions are needed if a decision has to be made immediately	Buying and selling products Day-to-day management
Committee decisions are good when a decision is needed fairly quickly and it is impractical to gather all the members' opinions	Setting weekly targets Planning activities
Proportional decisions are appropriate where different members have invested different amounts in the group	Deciding what to do with money invested
Democratic decisions are best where the approval of the majority is needed, but full agreement is not absolutely necessary	Guiding the overall direction of the group Setting overall targets Electing officers Approving the group accounts
Consensus is best when everyone's agreement is needed	Changing the group's constitution

Lesson 9. Keeping records

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Describe the types of records the group should keep.
- Describe how a group should keep records

What is record-keeping?

It is important for group members to know what actions have been taken by the group, and what or how much has been bought, sold or repaid. The information may be about the group's organization, activities and income.

Why is record-keeping important?

The group should keep records for several reasons:

- They help members remember what has happened and what decisions have been made. Well-informed group members are likely to make better decisions than misinformed members.
- They provide information for the group and its supporters to monitor progress.
- They help avoid misunderstandings among members and with supporters and business partners
- They may be required by the government, banks or other organizations.

Developing the ability to keep records

Record-keeping means gathering information about the group, writing it up, and keeping it for future reference. Like other aspects of group formation, developing the ability to keep records is a step-by-step process.

Discuss with the members what records are important to keep. Start with the names of the group and its members and incoming money. Later, the group should start recording the minutes of meetings.

Remember that all members – even those who cannot read – need to be able to understand the records. So the records should be as simple as possible. If some members cannot read, the records can use symbols rather than words.

What types of records should the group keep?

The group should keep various types of records. The exact types will depend on the nature of the group. Table 14 gives some suggestions:

Table 14. Types of records and other documents

Basic documents	The group's constitution Bylaws Registration documents.
Meetings	Attendance at meetings and training courses Minutes of meetings
Membership	List of members Membership fees paid
Plans and activities	Reports to donors and other supporters Business plans Annual activity plans Quantities of produce produced and sold Progress monitoring Evaluation reports
Technical documents	Training materials Reference materials
Financial records	Membership fees paid Loans made and interest received Savings deposited by members Bank account details Bank statements Cash book Invoices and receipts Financial reports

What do records look like?

Here are some sample formats for records.

List of members

The group needs to keep a list of members, their contact details, and whether they have paid their membership fees. Table 1 gives an example. Add rows and columns as required.

Table 15. Example of a list of members

Member no.	Given name	Family name	Address	Mobile phone	Land area	Date joined	Fee paid		
							2013	2014	1015
1	Joshua	Odinga	Beso village	0123 456 789	3 ha	3 Jan 2013	20		
2	Henrietta	Abdallah	Beso village	0123 987 654	1.5 ha	3 Jan 2013	20		
3	Mary	Mascarenhas	Beso village		1 ha	15 Jan 2013	20		

Minutes of group meetings

The secretary is responsible for writing the records of group meetings. These should be kept simple: there is no need to make a note of everything that everybody says. Just note the subjects discussed and decisions or conclusions made. Box 2 gives an example.

Box 2. Example of group minutes

Minutes of weekly group meeting

Date: 3 Jan 2013, 17:00

Agenda

Training. The training course on marketing maize will be held on 15 Jan. All members are invited. Venue: Joshua's farm, 15:00.

Purchase of inputs. Mary reported that the seeds will arrive on 12 Jan. They will be sold at cost, plus 5 shillings per bag extra for the group fund.

Sale of maize. Henrietta reported that the last of the season's maize has been sold. In all, 35 bags of maize were sold at 50 shillings a bag. All members have been paid. The profit of 300 shillings has been paid into the group fund.

Who is responsible for record-keeping?

The group will need at least a few members with basic literacy and numeracy skills to maintain written records.

The management committee is responsible for keeping the records:

- The **group secretary** is the main officer responsible for keeping records about the group, decisions made.
- The **treasurer** is responsible for keeping financial records.
- Other officers, such as the **marketing** and **production coordinators**, are responsible for keeping records about their areas of responsibility.

At the same time, promote a recordkeeping system (based on memory) in which all group members, regardless of literacy, can participate. This will help promote transparency and accountability.

The records should be **transparent**: they should be open for all members to check at any time. That helps ensure that the officers keep them properly, and that the officers do not cheat. This is particularly important to avoid corruption.

Record-keeping should be done on a regular basis (i.e., daily, weekly or monthly), or whenever meetings are held or activities take place.

How to keep records

Computers. Computers are wonderful tools for keeping records, but they are expensive and require electricity and things like a printer and toner. Few communities have them, or the skills to use them. If the group uses a computer to keep its records, it should:

- Keep the software updated and protect the computer from viruses.
- Keep the computer safe from water, dust and thieves.

- Make a back-up copy on CD-ROM or flash drive.
- Print out a copy of all records as a permanent backup.

Typewriters. Some communities have typewriters that can be used to type up records. Use carbon paper to make copies.

Handwritten. Most groups write by hand on paper. Use exercise books for important records: they are sturdier and less likely to get lost or out of order than loose-leaf sheets. Exercise books (or special ruled ledgers) are vital for financial records, as individual loose-leaf sheets can get lost.

How to store records

Information about agreements, assignments and finances are important. Care should be taken not to lose them.

Keep records in a safe place, away from water, termites and children. A biscuit tin with a tight lid is a good choice.

For important records, make a copy and store it in a different location (such as someone else's house) in case of fire or theft.

Lesson 10. Financial management

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Explain why people should pay a fee to join the group
- Explain the four parts of a simple accounting system
- Record transactions in a cash book
- Describe the advantages of opening a bank account for the group.

Membership fees

Membership fees are regular payments made to the group in cash by group members. They are important for several reasons:

- They help cover the group's costs – from small expenses such as writing materials and transport, to larger expenses such as the money the group needs to start up an income-generating activity.
- They ensure that people who join are committed to the group.
- They encourage unity, since all members do something visible for the common good of the group.
- They are a form of insurance which cushions a group's enterprise from unforeseen difficulties or provides emergency assistance to group members in time of need.

People may be reluctant to pay membership fees for several reasons:

- They say they cannot afford it.
- They do not think the money will be put to good use.
- They do not see the need for fees.

It is important to specify in writing what the group funds will be used for – and what they cannot be used for. Can the funds be used to cover emergency medical expenses? A wedding? Can the money be given to needy members as grants? Can it be loaned out to members, to be paid back with interest?

Level of fees

The group should decide on the level of the fees. The fee should be enough to put together a useful sum of money, but not so much that the poorest potential members cannot pay.

The group may decide to excuse certain members (for example, the poorest people, orphans or people affected by HIV) from payment, or charge them a reduced fee. It may decide to allow people to make contributions in kind (labor or materials) rather than cash.

Membership fees are not the only way the group can raise money. Other methods include sale of produce and services, savings activities, grants and loans from donors, and government support.

Paying fees

Every member should be obliged by the group constitution or bylaws to pay a fixed amount to the treasurer. Payments may be each week or month (e.g., in savings-and-credit groups), or quarterly or once a year (for other types of groups). The size of the contribution must be set with the agreement of all members and will depend on the proposed use.

The treasurer must give receipts and keep proper records of each member's contributions.

Table 16 shows one way of keeping records of membership fees in the **members' register**.

Table 16. Members' register

Member's name	5 Jan 2013		12 Jan 2013		17 Jan 2013	
	Amount	Balance	Amount	Balance	Amount	Balance
Diane	10	40	10	50		
Narayan	15	25	10	35		
Susan	10	30	5	35		
Godfrey	10	20	10	30		
Theresa	5	5	10	15		
Total	50	120	45	165		

Keeping accounts

The treasurer looks after the group's money, and reports to the group on any expenditures and the current cash balance. If some money was spent, he or she must document how much was spent, and for what purpose. If the money is lent out, the treasurer must document the size of the loan, to whom it was lent, and when will it be paid back.

A simple accounting system

A simple accounting system consists of four things:

- A lockable **cash box**
- A **cash book** where all incoming and outgoing amounts are documented
- A **bank book** (if the group has opened a bank account)
- **File folders** to hold receipts and other documents in chronological order. The group will need one folder for the cash receipts, and another for the bank receipts and statements.

The cash box

The cash box is where the treasurer keeps the group's money, a bank book or bank card, and any receipts that have not yet been filed. It must be kept locked, and the key must be kept in a safe place.

There are various ways to make sure the contents of the cash box are secure:

- The treasurer is allowed to open the box only at group meetings, in front of the other members.

- The treasurer is allowed to open the box only in the presence of at least one other member.
- The treasurer keeps the cash box, but someone else keeps the key. Both must be present to open the box.
- The cash box can be fitted with two or three locks, each with a separate key. Different people keep the keys, so they must all be present when the box is opened.

The money in the cash box, and every time money is put into it or taken out of it, are recorded in the **cash book**.

The cash book

The cash book can be a simple school exercise book with lines ruled on each page. The treasurer records every time money is put into or taken out of the cash box on a new line in the cash book.

Table 17 gives an example.

- **Line 1** shows the amount that was in the cash box at the beginning of the year. This is written in the **Balance** column.
- **Line 2** shows that the fees of 20¢ from 15 members were put into the cash box. The amount paid into the cash box was 300¢. This figure is written in the **Payments in** column. The new total in the cash box is written in the Balance column. The members' names and the amounts they have paid are noted in the **members' register**.
- **Line 3** shows that the group sold 20 bags of maize at 50¢ each, totaling 1,000¢. This figure is written in the Payments in column, and the new total (1,550¢) goes in the **Balance** column.
- **Line 4** shows that the group bought 20 empty sacks at 5¢ each. The treasurer took 100¢ out of the cash box to pay for these. This amount goes in the **Payments out** column.
- **Line 5** shows that the treasurer deposited 1,000¢ in the bank. This was taken out of the cash box, so is recorded in the **Payments out** column. (It will be recorded separately in the bank book as a payment in.)
- **Line 6** shows that Mary, the group's marketing officer, went to market to negotiate with traders there. The treasurer took 10¢ out of the cash box to pay for her fare.
- **Lines 7–9** show that the group withdrew money from the bank, put it in the cash box, then the next day used it to buy seed and fertilizer.

Table 17. Example of a cash book

No.	Date	Item	Payments out ¢	Payments in ¢	Balance ¢
	2013				
1	3 Jan	Cash balance from last year			250
2	5 Jan	Membership fees 2013: 15 members x 20¢		300	550
3	6 Jan	Sale of maize: 20 bags x 50¢		1,000	1,550

4	7 Jan	Sacks: 20 x 5¢	100		1,450
5	8 Jan	Deposited in bank	1,000		450
6	10 Jan	Fare for Mary's trip to market	10		440
7	15 Feb	Withdrawn from bank to pay for seed and fertilizer		2,000	2,440
8	16 Feb	Seed	500		1,940
9	16 Feb	Fertilizer	1,500		440

The bank book

If the group has a bank account, it should have a separate book to record bank transactions. This is managed the same way as the cash book (Table 18).

Table 18. Example of a bank book

No.	Date	Item	Payments out ¢	Payments in ¢	Balance ¢
	2013				
1	8 Jan	Balance from last year			1,250
2	8 Jan	Deposited in bank		1,000	2,250
3	15 Feb	Withdrawn from bank for seed and fertilizer	2,000		250

- **Line 1** shows the balance brought forward from the previous year.
- **Line 2** shows that the treasurer deposited 1,000¢ (remember, she took this out of the cash box and recorded it in the cash book).
- **Line 3** shows that the group withdrew 2,000¢ from the bank to buy seed and fertilizer.

Using pictures rather than words

If many of the group members cannot read and write, they may find it difficult to understand accounts like the ones described above. It is possible to use pictures instead of (or as well as) words in the cash and bank books (Table 19).

Table 19. Cash book with pictures

No.	Date	Item	Payments out ¢	Payments in ¢	Balance ¢
					
	2013				
1	3 Jan	Cash balance from last year 			250
2	5 Jan	Membership fees 2013: 15 members x 20¢ 		300	550

3	6 Jan	Sale of maize: 20 bags x 50¢			1,000	1,550
4	7 Jan	Sacks: 20 x 5¢		100		1,450
5	8 Jan	Deposited in bank		1,000		450
6	10 Jan	Fare for Mary's trip to market		10		440
7	15 Feb	Cash withdrawn from bank to pay for seed and fertilizer			2,000	2,440
8	16 Feb	Seed		500		1,940
9	16 Feb	Fertilizer	NPK	1,500		440

The file folder

When money is taken from the cash box or bank, there has to be a piece of paper to show who took it out and how it was used. This can be a receipt from a trader or a shop. Some traders and shops give receipts automatically. If not, it may be necessary to ask for one. If there is no receipt, the person who makes the purchase should write the date, item and amount on a slip of paper, and sign it.

The treasurer puts all these receipts in a file folder in chronological order. The best choice a ring binder: punch holes in the receipts to put them in the binder, with the oldest receipts at the bottom and the newest at the top.

On each receipt, the treasurer should write the same number as in the cash book or bank book.

- Figure 1 shows an example of a receipt that the input supply store gave when the group bought some sacks to hold grain.
- Figure 2 shows a receipt that the treasurer wrote when withdrawing money from the cash box to deposit in the bank.

It is best to file the receipts straight away, as soon as they come in. If this is not possible, then the treasurer should set aside some time to do it regularly, perhaps once a week. This job is important: do not delay it until there is a big pile of receipts to deal with.

Checking that the cash box and cash book agree

The treasurer should check regularly (perhaps once a week) whether the amount of money in the cash box is the same as the latest balance stated in the cash book. If it is different, the treasurer must find out why:

- Has someone forgotten to write a receipt for some money they have taken out or put into the cash box?
- Is there a mistake in the arithmetic in the cash book? (Add them up again.)
- Is there a mistake in the amounts written in the cash book? (Check the receipts to make sure the amounts are correct.)

- Is the money counted correctly? (Recount it to make sure.)
- Has someone taken money out of the cash box without authorization? (Who might have done this?)

Checking the accounts

Every three months, or at the end of the year, the **treasurer** must check the accounts. The receipts and amounts in the cash book and bank book should all match.

- There should be a receipt for every line in the cash book or bank book.
- The dates and amounts must match.
- The balance recorded in the cash book must match exactly the amount actually in the cash box.
- The balance in the bank book must match exactly the amount in the bank statement and the sum of the amounts of all respective receipts.

At the end of the year, the **auditors** must carefully check all the receipts and balances to make sure everything is correct.

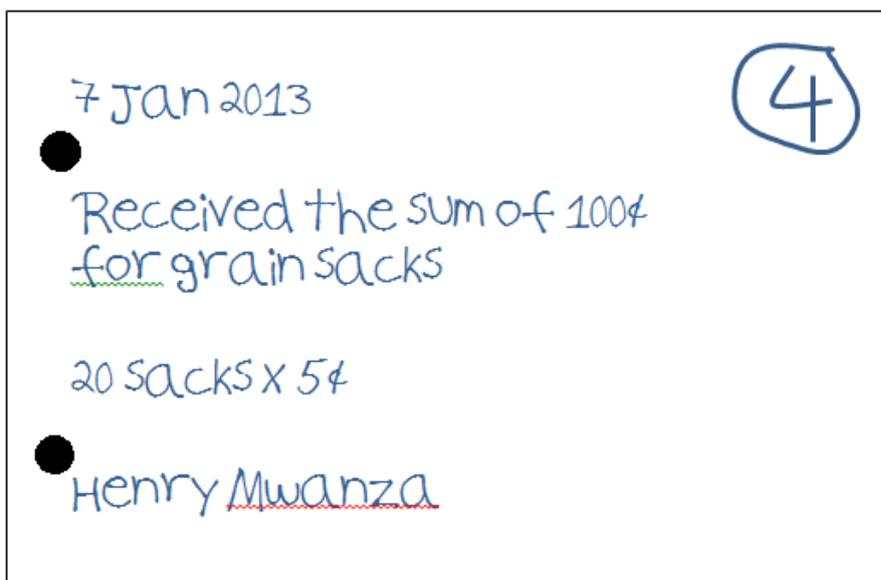


Figure 1. Sample receipt for grain sacks

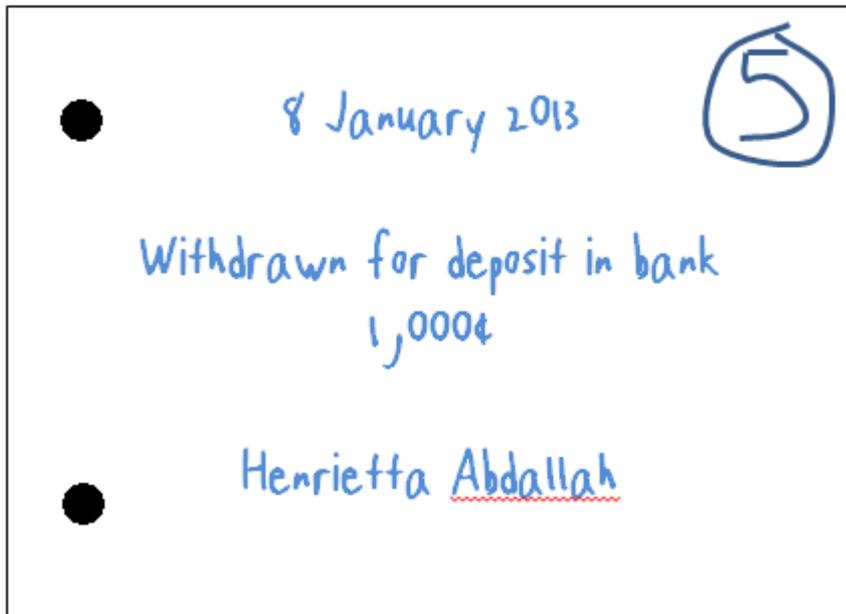


Figure 2. Sample withdrawal slip

Opening a bank account

If the group handles a lot of money, it should open a bank account. This is a good idea for several reasons:

- Money in a cash box in someone's house can be stolen. Money in the bank is safe.
- Money in the bank can earn interest.
- A bank account can be used for business transactions, such as buying inputs and selling farm produce.
- Donors can pay money into the bank account.

To open a bank account, it may be necessary to register the group first with the government.

If the group opens an account, at least two members (normally the treasurer and the chairperson) must sign for any withdrawals from the account.

Arrange a visit to the nearest bank or microfinance institution. Ask the manager to explain the procedures and advantages of saving money at the bank. The manager can also explain how to get a loan.

Savings and credit schemes

The group may run a savings-and credit scheme. If it does this, the money should be held separately from the group accounts. There should be a separate book for members' contributions and for loans.

See these courses for more information on how to manage finances:

- **Financial basics**
- **Savings and internal lending communities.**

Paying by mobile phone

In some countries, it is now possible to transfer money by mobile phone. That avoids the need to carry around lots of cash to make payments. Members can also pay their membership fees, contribute savings, and get loans using their mobile phones.

If the group uses this facility, it is important to keep track of it in the same way as any other type of money. Keep a separate record book for transfers into and out of the group account by mobile phone.

Regulations and tax

The group must make sure that its financial procedures are as required by the law. The procedures for a cooperative or NGO may be different for an organization registered as a business.

In some countries, the group may have to pay tax for certain types of activities. The treasurer should find out the tax rules to make sure the group complies with the law.

More information

The following also has details on how to manage finances:

Meijerink, R. 1994. Simple bookkeeping and business management skills for small scale entrepreneurs: Facilitator's guide. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Africa Regional Office. RAFR/WID/002/94.
www.fao.org/sd/erp/toolkit/BinaryDownloaderServlet.pdf

3 Planning and implementing activities

Lesson 11. Developing an action plan

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Enable the group to analyze problems and identify possible solutions
- Decide on a plan to solve the problems.

From vision to action plan

So far, the group has identified its focus, and has got organized. But it has not yet planned any activities. This Lesson is about how to help them do this. It consists of these steps:

- Analyzing problems and identifying possible solutions
- Prioritizing solutions
- Planning activities
- Checking the feasibility
- Developing an action plan

Analyzing problems and identifying possible solutions

The group probably faces a number of related problems. For example, members may say that their maize yields are low, the price is low, and there is only one buyer for their grain, so the farmers have no choice but to accept the price that he offers.

How can you help them find a way to solve these problems?

A problem analysis chart is one way to do this (Table 20). This chart enables people to analyze the problems they face and identify the causes. They identify what they currently do to try to overcome the problem, and come up with possible solutions.

Individual group members may be able to put some of these solutions on their own. For example, they may be able to apply manure to their maize fields to improve their grain yields.

Some of the solutions may require the group to collaborate. For example, they could approach a microfinance institution to get a group loan so they can buy fertilizer in bulk.

Table 20. A completed problem analysis chart

Problems	Causes	What do people do now?	Possible solutions (what could be done?)
Low maize yields	Low soil fertility Lack of fertilizer	Buy fertilizer if farmer has money	Get loan to buy fertilizer Apply manure
Low maize	Low grain quality	Hand-shelling	Buy maize sheller as a group

price	Maize not dried well	Sun-drying Store in house	Dry and store in warehouse until market price goes up
Only one buyer	Agreement among buyers not to compete	Forced to sell to buyer and take price offered	Sell in bulk Contact other buyers by phone Transport to town

Prioritizing solutions

Some of the solutions will be feasible; others are less feasible. The group should prioritize the solutions according to their potential payoff, the likelihood of success, and the cost. They should then choose one or two solutions to put into practice.

It is not possible to solve all the problems at once. Instead, the development agent should help the group select the solutions that are most practical, and that they can solve quickly and easily. That will give the group the confidence enough to tackle larger problems.

You can also help the group by:

- Suggesting solutions based on your training and experience.
- By linking the farmers with outsiders who have the required skills and expertise (such as researchers or other development agents).
- By arranging visits by groups of farmers so they can see how other farmers have dealt with a similar problem.
- By helping the farmers test a new technology on a small scale so they can see if it is relevant to their needs.

Remember, it is not your job to decide what the group should do. That is for the group to decide for itself.

Making an action plan

The group must now plan exactly how to do what it wants to do. They should write a plan showing the following:

- **Date and time.** The date the activity will begin, how long it will take, and when it will end.
- **Activities.** This is what the group wants to do: the specific activities needed to put the solutions into effect.
- **Person(s) responsible and participants.** The names of the individuals who will lead the work, and everyone who will participate, along with their roles (such as “Claudia will bring sand,” “Tom will provide refreshments”).
- **Location.** Where the activities will take place.
- **Inputs required.** The cash, materials, labor and other inputs needed.
- **Budget.** A good estimate of the costs or resources required to achieve the activities, and where the resources will come from to implement them.
- **Details.** Any further information needed.
- **Monitoring.** How to make sure that the work is progressing – and if not, why not.

Drawing up a plan

Writing the plan in the form of a table or calendar helps make sure nothing is forgotten (Table 21).

Table 21. Example of an action plan

Date, time	Activities	Persons responsible	Participants	Location	Inputs required, budget	Details
When?	What?	Who manages?	Who does it?	Where?	With what?	
15 Feb	Production planning meeting	Abraham	All members	Village hall		Plan production for next season. Work out inputs needed
22 Feb	Negotiate loan	Sylvia, Abraham		Bank		Negotiate loan for inputs
1 Mar	Buy seed and fertilizer	Sylvia, Abraham	George	Input dealer	Bank loan, George's pickup	Purchase inputs in bulk
2–10 Mar	Distribute inputs	Mary, Abdallah	All members	Mary's barn		Keep records of amounts distributed

Setting targets

For each type of activity, the group should set itself some targets.

- For an egg-laying enterprise, how many hens do they want to keep? How many eggs do they aim to produce each day?
- For a grain mill, how many sacks of maize do they aim to mill in a week?
- For an erosion-control project, what area of hillside do they want to terrace? How many meters of terrace do they want to construct?
- For a savings-and-loans scheme, how much savings do they want to accumulate? How many loans, of what amount, do they want to distribute? What interest rate will they charge?

The targets should be ambitious but achievable. Setting a target that is too high will cause disappointment when the group falls short. Setting one that is too low will not bring the benefits that the group is capable of.

Setting targets is important because it gives the group something to aim for. Reaching a target gives the group a sense of achievement. And the targets are important in monitoring and evaluation.

Lesson plan \$\$\$ Problem analysis chart

This exercise allows the group to analyse problems the community faces. It shows where the constraints faced by different people overlap, and where they differ. It allows them to discuss the causes of the problems in detail, as well as what people currently do to deal with them.

The exercise reveals whether people have already tried to solve a particular problem, and why they succeeded or failed.

The exercise also looks at ways to solve the problems. At least two or three technical specialists from outside, such as extension officers, NGO workers or researchers, should be invited to participate as well. They can make suggestions, and advise whether the farmers' ideas would work. While the group may have very good ideas about what they need, they may not know enough about how to fulfil these needs.

Learning objectives

Analyse problems in a systematic manner.

Timing

Early in the farmer field school, when land and water management problems and opportunities are being identified, after ► Exercise 2.7 Identifying farming problems and constraints.

Preparation

Based on the problems identified in ► Exercise 2.8 Identifying problems at different times of year and Exercise 2.9 Problem tree, invite relevant specialists to attend the session.

Duration

Several hours.

Materials

Large sheet of paper, marker pens (or blackboard and chalk), diagrams and charts produced during previous exercises.

Adapted from

Jordans (1998), FAO (2000), and Wilde (2001)

Steps

1. Prepare a problem analysis chart (► Table 2.2). In the leftmost column, write the main problems identified in the previous exercises. Explain which groups identified which problem, and point out any overlaps.
2. For each problem, write the causes that the group have identified the second column. Ask if anyone, including the outsiders, has anything to add.
3. Ask the group to explain what they currently do to cope with each of the problems. List these in the third column.
4. Ask them to suggest ways to solve each problem. List these ideas in the last column. Give both the farmer field school members and the outsiders a chance to speak.

Questions to stimulate discussion

- Did the outsiders identify extra causes of the problems? What are they?
- What do people currently do to deal with the problems? What are the effects on women and on men?
- How might the problems be overcome? What possibilities did the community members suggest? What did the outsiders say? Which can be done by the local people themselves? Which require external assistance?

Notes

Consider involving the whole community in this exercise. Make sure that different segments of the community are present: men and women, young and old, well-off and less well-off. Before starting the problem analysis, members of the farmer field school should present to the plenary the results of previous exercises.

You can divide the participants into smaller groups. Ask each group to focus on a particular set of problems or rows in the chart. When they have finished, get them to present their results to the plenary. Summarize all the groups' results in a single chart.

Adapted from Wilde (2001)

Lesson plan \$\$\$. Problem tree

A problem tree enables farmers to identify the root causes of problems they face, and to judge which of the various causes is most important. That will allow them to identify potential solutions that are likely to work, rather than merely addressing symptoms.

Learning objectives

Understand the causes and effects of individual problems.

Identify the root causes of problems.

Timing

Early in the farmer field school, when land and water management problems and opportunities

are being identified, after ► Exercise 2.7.

Preparation

Based on the problems identified in ► Exercise 2.7, invite relevant specialists to attend the session.

Duration

1–2 hours.

Materials

Pieces of A4 paper; cards or small pieces of paper, say 15 x 21 cm (1/2 A4 size); marker pens, thin sticks (e.g., bamboo canes).

Adapted from

Galpin et al. (2000) and Anyaegbunam et al. (2004)

Steps

1. Ask the participants to list the main problems they face that are related to soil and water management (this is the output from ► Exercise 2.7).
2. Ask the participants to select one of the problems for one of the farming systems in the community. Write it on a piece of A4 paper and put it in the middle of an open piece of ground.
3. Ask the participants to think of what effects the problem has. For example, if “erosion” is the problem, the effects might include “loss of topsoil”, “declining crop yields”, and “silting of canals”. Some of these effects may already have been listed as separate problems in ► Exercise 2.7.
4. Ask them to write the effects on cards – one card per effect. Ask them to put the cards on the ground on one side of the paper with the main problem. Use the sticks to show the relationships between the problem and each of the effects. Write more cards and add them to the diagram to show further effects of the effects (e.g., “flooding” as a result of “silting of canals”). Your diagram should now look like the branches of a tree, with the initial problem as the trunk, and the effects as branches and twigs.
5. When the group has finished the effects side, move to the other side of the initial problem. Ask the group to think of the causes of this problem – why it occurs. For example, as causes of “erosion”, they might think of “uncontrolled grazing”, “heavy rain” and “bare fields”.
6. Again, ask the group to write these causes on cards, and to put them on the ground with sticks to link the causes to the problem. You are now putting together the “roots” of your tree.
7. Ask what in turn why each of the causes they have just added occurs. For example, they may say the “bare fields” are caused by “lack of crop seed”, “lack of mulch” and “dry soil”. Get these ideas written on cards, and ask the group to add them to the diagram.
8. Again ask “why” for each of this new set of causes. Continue adding more cards to the diagram to represent new causes. Make sure that each cause is written only once: you can add sticks to link it to other roots of the tree.
9. When the participants feel that everything has been covered, step back and look at the whole diagram. Ask the participants to make any further changes they feel are needed.
10. Ask the participants to look at the cards at the edge of the diagram, without any identified causes. These are the root causes. If the logic of the diagram is correct, solving these root causes will overcome the other problems. Discuss possible solutions to these root causes with farmers. Which are outside the farmers’ control? Which can they do something about? What solutions can they suggest? For example,

for the root cause “poor soils”, they might suggest “apply manure” or “grow legumes”.

11. Repeat this process for the other major problems identified in ► Exercise 2.7 that have not yet been covered in this diagram. Make sure they cover all the major land uses in the community.
12. Copy the final diagrams onto paper to make a permanent record.

Notes

Instead of using cards and sticks, the participants can draw on the ground, a blackboard or a large piece of paper. However, that makes it more difficult to change part of the diagram as they are working.

Once the participants know how to do this exercise, you can break them into smaller groups and ask each to analyse one of the other problems identified in ► *Exercise 2.7*. When they have finished, get them to present their diagrams to everyone and explain their reasoning.

It should become clear during the session that solving one problem will automatically solve other problems too, perhaps even on other land types. Many of causes of low productivity stem from the socio-economic, organizational, infrastructural, credit and marketing environments.

Consider the causes of these problems too, but focus mainly on the technical issues, as the farmer field school can test ways of dealing with these.

Lesson 12. Implementing activities

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Describe how to implement the plan
- Describe how to overcome problems that arise.

Implementing activities

Everything has been planned, and people know what to do. All that needs to happen now is to put the plan into action. Easy, isn't it?

Unfortunately, no: it is not likely to be quite that easy. This Lesson covers the following aspects:

- Assigning tasks and responsibilities
- Making sure the plan is followed
- Holding coordination meetings
- Dealing with problems

Assigning tasks and responsibilities

For each task, someone has to be responsible for making sure it gets done. If this is not yet in the action plan, it has to be worked out. The burden must be shared fairly, and everyone should be happy with their tasks and when they have to do them.

For regular tasks, the group can draw up a roster showing who is responsible for the task on a particular day (Table 22). Members may swap tasks or dates, but have to inform the person in charge to avoid misunderstandings.

Table 22. Maize mill duty roster

Person in charge:	Susan (phone 0123 456 7890)	
July	Members on duty	Special duties
Mon 3	Mary, Abraham	
Tue 4	Diane, Narayan	Maintain machine
Wed 5	Susan, Abdallah	Buy fuel
Thu 6	Theresa, George	
Fri 7	Godfrey, Henrietta	Clean building

Making sure the plan is followed

Someone in the group has to make sure the action plan as a whole is being followed. This may be the chairperson, or (depending on the tasks) the production or marketing coordinator. The group should meet regularly to coordinate activities and agree on changes as needed.

Members need to know who is to do what, when to do it, and how to do it. It is easy to forget things, so they may need to be reminded about a particular job. The task coordinator or secretary may need to do this.

For jobs that require particular skills, the group should make sure that an expert in that skill is on hand. For example:

- **For people running a mill:** how to run the equipment.
- **For members selling produce in a market stall:** the prices to charge and how to record the income.
- **For a work team planting trees:** how to plant the trees at the correct depth and spacing.

Holding coordination meetings

The group (or the subgroup assigned with the task) should hold regular meetings to coordinate activities. These should focus on the task at hand, and aim to ensure that it is done smoothly and efficiently.

The meetings may be informal, but they should still follow a set procedure, like the regular group meetings (see the Lesson on *Holding meetings*). The decisions should be written down as a reminder.

Leadership

Developing a vision and planning activities are exciting for the group members. But when it comes to normal, everyday activities, things get less interesting. People may start arguing about mistakes and responsibilities. They begin to complain about the work, start to cut corners, or lose interest and drop out.

Good leadership is especially important during such times. A good leader:

- Inspires members to continue working on dull, uninteresting tasks, when the reward is still a long way off.
- Reminds people of the goals and the need for diligence and hard work to achieve them.
- Leads by example, with enthusiasm and hard work. Group members are likely to copy what a lazy leader does, not what she or he says.
- Ensures that the members continue to make decisions and feel responsible for the success of the activity.
- Resolves problems and disputes before they get out of hand.

Dealing with problems

Many things may interfere with the plan. Some of these may be under the control of the group:

- If illness prevents someone from doing the work, another member can do it instead.

Others may be beyond the group's control:

- Bad weather may cut yields or disrupt the harvest.

In either situation, the members must find a way of overcoming the problem, or at least of reducing its impact.

If the members cannot solve a problem by themselves, they should refer it to the group's officers, who may need to refer it to the group as a whole at the next meeting.

Finding solutions to problems

Ideas to solve problems may come from many different sources:

- **Development agent.** You may be able to suggest solutions based on your own skills and experience.
- **Indigenous knowledge.** Individual group members may already have the skills and knowledge required. Many traditional practices exist because they have been tried and tested over many years.
- **Innovative members.** Every community has a few people who like to try out new ideas. The group should draw on their skills and willingness to take risks.
- **Cross-visits.** The group could visit a neighboring community to see how they deal with a problem.
- **Outside specialists.** The government extension service, input suppliers, traders, researchers or other development agents may be able to assist.
- **Reference materials.** Your organization may have a library of reference materials with information or ideas on how to solve problems.
- **Social networking and the internet.** Smartphones and computers make it easy to check websites or to ask other people for information.
- **Training.** It may be possible to arrange a special training course about a specific subject.
- **Experiments.** Some problems can be solved by experiments that the group does itself. For example, members can test several crop varieties to find out which grows best on a particular soil.

See the course on *Promoting innovation* for more ideas on how to identify and solve problems.

Keeping records

Records are an important management tool. They show what has been done, what inputs have been used, how much has been sold, and what the results were. It is particularly important to keep records of work and marketing plans, money coming in and going out, inputs, and products produced and sold.

You can help the members decide what must be recorded, and suggest ways of doing it. The fewer and simpler the records, the better.

Records are particularly important for certain types of information:

- **Regular activities.** A chicken enterprise, for example, should have a list showing whether the hens have been fed each day and how many eggs were laid. That shows

whether particular tasks have been done and how much feed has been used. A fall in egg production can indicate a problem with the birds' health (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

- **Activities where many people are involved.** Where different people are responsible for doing a task on different days, they need a way of communicating with each other. Has a particular job been finished? What problems were encountered? What needs to be done next?
- **Handling expendable items.** The group should keep track of expendable items such as fertilizer, seed and agrochemicals. This helps prevent theft or misuse, and alerts the person responsible when new supplies have to be bought.
- **Recording money.** It is important to keep records of how much money comes in and goes out. Financial records help keep people honest, protect them from false accusations, and make sure that the business is well-run.

Table 23. Example of records for an egg-laying enterprise

Date	Hens	Feed	Water	Eggs			Comments
				Actual	Expected	Excess / shortfall	
1 Aug	20	2 kg	✓	20	20	0	
2 Aug	20	2 kg	✓	17	20	-3	3 hens look ill
3 Aug	20	2 kg	✓	14	20	-6	5 hens look ill: watery eyes

Records are also important for monitoring and evaluation. We will look at this in the next Lesson.

Lesson 13. Monitoring and evaluation

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Establish ways the group can monitor its own activities (and the field agent can monitor the group)
- List the indicators the group can use to measure its progress
- Describe how members (and the group as a whole) can learn and improve how it works.

What are monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring means:

- **Record-keeping.** Keeping regular records of group decisions, actions and finances.
- **Checking progress against plans.** Checking that actions are taken according to the action plan.
- **Adjusting activities** to make sure they will achieve the group's goals.

Evaluation means:

- **Looking back** on the activities to assess whether the group has achieved its objectives
- **Identifying ways to improve** its activities.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation

In a farmers' group, all the members are responsible for planning and implementing activities. So everyone is also responsible for monitoring and evaluating those activities. That will make it possible for the group members to solve their own problems. This is called **participatory monitoring and evaluation**.

The group members should decide themselves what areas they will monitor and evaluate. They should collect the data themselves, analyze the results and use those results to improve their group.

What to monitor

Many aspects of the group and its activities should be monitored:

- Attendance and participation at meetings
- Sharing of responsibilities
- Financial records
- Distribution of benefits
- Progress toward self-reliance.

It is up to the group members themselves to decide what aspects would be useful for them to monitor and evaluate.

What to monitor and evaluation depends from the plans and targets that the group has made. For each activity or target, help the group select one or more **indicators** (something that can be observed or measured) (Table 24).

Table 24. Examples of simple monitoring and evaluation questions

If the group planned to build an irrigation canal:		
Has this actually been finished?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is it being used?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the water reaching the fields?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, all	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, but only some <input type="checkbox"/> No
If the group runs an enterprise:		
How many kilograms of produce has it sold?	Kg:	
How much profit has the enterprise made?	\$:	
When the group holds meetings...		
How many members attended the last meeting?	Men:	Women:

Comparing progress against targets

When making the action plan, the group will have set targets for each activity it plans. Help the group develop simple charts to monitor progress and problems.

- List the plans for a given period of time in the first column.
- Meet with the members again at the end of the period. Write the date of the follow-up meeting on the top of the second column.
- Ask the members whether they are happy or unhappy about the results of each planned task. Discuss problems and constraints they encountered.
- Once the members have reached agreement on the results, ask them to draw in the third column a symbol (such as a smiley face) representing their judgment.
- Discuss what they can do differently next time.

Table 25 gives an example of this type of chart.

Table 25. Monitoring chart for purchase and sale of chickens

Task (1 Aug)	Result (by 1 Oct)	Score	Comments
Buy 100 chickens	Bought	☺	
Vaccinate new chickens	50 vaccinated	☹	Shortage of vaccine
Sell 100 chickens	80 sold	☹	
Hold 2 meetings	Meetings held	☹	Only 5 out of 9 members attended

Elements of monitoring

We have already seen an example of monitoring: the egg-laying enterprise in the previous Lesson (Table 26). This includes the following monitoring elements:

- **Regular recording** of information (every day)
- Monitoring of the **number of hens** (have any died or been stolen?)
- Monitoring of feed and water **inputs**
- Monitoring of **outputs** (the number of eggs produced)
- A **comparison** of the actual output against a **target** (20 eggs a day)
- A recommendation for **action** to solve a problem (check with the paravet).

Table 26. Example of records for an egg-laying enterprise

Date	Hens	Feed	Water	Eggs			Comments
				Actual	Expected	Excess / shortfall	
1 Aug	20	2 kg	✓	20	20	0	
2 Aug	20	2 kg	✓	17	20	-3	3 hens look ill
3 Aug	20	2 kg	✓	14	20	-6	5 hens look ill: watery eyes. Check with paravet!

Using a calendar to record information

For certain types of activities, a calendar can be a good way to record what has happened. Table 27 shows how an egg-producing group might record the number of eggs produced and sold each day. The number of eggs can be added up at the end of each week and month.

Table 27. Calendar for recording egg production and sales

January									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Week
Produced	○	35	34	37	32	35	36	34	243
Broken	⌚	1			2				3
Consumed	🍳	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	42
Sold	🛒	28	28	31	24	29	30	28	198
Income	₺	84	84	93	72	87	90	84	5.94
		6	9	10	11	12	13	14	Week
Produced	○								
Broken	⌚								
Consumed	🍳								
Sold	🛒								

Income	₺								
		15	16	17	18	19	20	21	Week
Produced	○								
Broken	⌚								
Consumed	🍳								
Sold	👤								
Income	₺								
		22	23	24	25	26	27	28	Week
Produced	○								
Broken	⌚								
Consumed	🍳								
Sold	👤								
Income	₺								
		29	30	31					Week Month
Produced	○								
Broken	⌚								
Consumed	🍳								
Sold	👤								
Income	₺								

Summarizing information

At the end of each week (or month, or production period), the data can be summarized to make it easier to see trends, distribute profits, and plan for the future.

Table 28 shows a summary of the eggs sold each month, and the amount of money that can be distributed to each of the members of the group.

Table 28. Records of eggs produced and sold

		Jan	Feb	Mar
Eggs produced	○	1295	1341	1348
Broken	⌚	2	0	3
Consumed	🍳	228	276	252
Sold	👤	1065	1065	1093
Income from sales	₺	3000	3600	3600
Income per member	₺ 👤	500	600	500

Using symbols instead of numbers

Members with little or no formal education may find it difficult to use numbers to monitor activities. They can use little drawings or symbols instead (Table 29).

Table 29. Using drawings and symbols

Symbols		Numbers	
Eggs produced			1
Broken			2
Consumed			3
Sold			4
Income from sales			5
Income per member			10
			12

Smiley faces or numbers can be used to measure satisfaction (Table 30).

Table 30. Measuring satisfaction

Frowny and smiley faces	Numerical scale
 = unhappy	1 = very unhappy
 = neutral	2 = unhappy
 =happy	3 = somewhat unhappy
	4 = neutral
	5 = somewhat happy
	6 = happy
	7 = very happy

Self-evaluation

It is not easy for people to evaluate themselves. But doing so can be a positive exercise which allows the members learn from each other. Try to use simple methods for evaluation, which the members can do themselves.

One method is to ask a series of questions with four possible replies (Table 31). It is important that all members agree on the final answer. A series of such questions can be used to measure the group's progress over time. The purpose of the exercise is to help the group to improve itself – not to provide data for others. The group members then have to agree among themselves which answer comes closest to their opinion.

It is important that all members agree on the final answer. A series of such questions can be used to measure the group's progress over time. The purpose of the exercise is to help the group to improve itself – not to provide data for others.

Table 31. Examples of self-evaluation questions

To measure	Sharing of responsibilities within the group
What to ask	How widely are responsibilities for group activities shared?
Possible responses	3 = Most or all members have responsibility as officers, committee members, activity leaders or other roles 2 = Many members have such responsibility 1 = Some members have such responsibility 0 = Only a few members have such responsibilities.
To measure	Sharing of work among group members
What to ask	How is group work shared among members?
Possible responses	3 = Group work is clearly and fairly shared among all members 2 = Group work is carried out by most members 1 = Group work is done by some members 0 = Group work is not clearly or fairly shared.

Looking back and looking forward

Each year, the group should look back at what it has done, and look forward to the future. Some questions they might ask:

- Are they satisfied with the year's activities? What went right? What went wrong? Do the members want to continue? How can they improve their work?
- How much have they earned? How much is needed for reinvestment? What should be done with the balance? Should it be distributed among the members, or saved?
- What is the outlook for the next year? What should they do in the next year? Should they repeat the activities they did this year, expand them, or do something new?

The answers to these questions will help the group plan the next year's activities. The group can repeat the steps in Lessons 11 and 12 to draw up the next year's plans.

4 Communication and networking

Lesson 14. Conflict and negotiation

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Describe why conflict within the group can be good
- List the five steps in collaborative negotiation.
- Explain the difference between compromise and consensus
- Suggest some things to think of when negotiating with traders.

This Lesson is based on a Cornell University course on group management, CRS (2010), Warner (2001) and Robbins et al. (2004).

Conflict is natural and inevitable

Disagreements and conflict (we call both “conflict” here) are a natural part of any organization – indeed, of life. Individuals have different interests and priorities. They may compete for resources such as grazing land, irrigation water or the right to gather firewood. They may disagree over what activities to do, how to manage them, and how to share the benefits. They may suspect each other of taking advantage of the other’s goodwill and hard work, and of not contributing their fair share to the group. Such feelings can be very harmful.

Conflict can be good!

But a certain amount of conflict can be **good for the group**. If people have different opinions – and are prepared to voice them – then the group has more options to choose from. It can weigh up the options and choose the best one.

So the question is not how to remove conflict, but to:

- **Handle it** so it does not harm the functioning and dynamics of the group
- **Harness it** so the group as a whole benefits.

Types of conflict

The group promoter may have to help groups overcome two types of conflicts:

- **Internal conflicts** among the group members
- **External conflicts** between the group and other parties (such as business partners or other groups).

Conflicts may arise in many different areas and have many different causes. They may be simple (a disagreement over the price of a product) or complicated (disputes over land rights). They may have a long history (a feud between neighbors) or come out of nowhere. They may be trivial (an argument about the name of the group) or important (what should the

group focus on?). They may involve two or more “parties” (individuals or groups with differing positions).

Negotiation from a basis of power

Negotiations are often approached from a power point of view. The party in power does everything they can to get their own way. The result is that one party is satisfied, but the other is frustrated. The conflict remains and will probably appear again.

This is bad for a farmers’ group that relies on mutual goodwill and feeling of common interest. If the powerful group members always win, then the less powerful people will stop cooperating. This may undermine the smooth working of the group, and the group may even break up.

Collaborative negotiation

Collaborative negotiation aims for an agreement where everyone wins and nobody loses. All the parties explain and reason their interests, propose satisfactory solutions, and are prepared to renounce some of their interests (but not all of them). Communication plays a very important role. The negotiation process involves discussing and reducing tension.

In collaborative negotiations, all parties agree to make concessions. But these concessions make it possible to maximize the total benefit, solve the conflict, and set a positive precedent for the future.

Facilitation

Collaborative negotiation can work with or without a neutral facilitator. There are three basic patterns:

Direct face-to-face negotiation. There is no facilitator. One or more of the parties understands the principles and practices of consensus building, and has undertaken the necessary conflict analysis.

Partial facilitation (brokering). One of the parties facilitates negotiations between itself and the other parties. This facilitator may be seen as partial to one cause or another, but nevertheless is acceptable to all. Options for managing the process include:

- **Rotational, one-on-one facilitation:** the facilitator negotiates with each party in turn.
- **Workshop:** all parties negotiate together under the facilitator’s guidance.
- Some **combination** of the above options.

Impartial third-party facilitator. The parties agree to allow a neutral facilitator to facilitate negotiations. This person may be known to the parties (an insider) or not known (an outsider). The same options for managing the process apply as above.

Five steps in successful negotiation

Collaborative negotiation consists of five steps:

1. **Analyze the situation.** Before starting the negotiation, analyze what the various parties want to obtain, and the goals and strategies that will be adopted. Identify areas where concessions are possible (and not possible), and where compromise is possible.

The parties should try to find out all they can about the opposition's motives and situation.

2. **Set the rules.** Both parties sit together to define the negotiation rules and steps to follow. They discuss the timelines, negotiators, methods or issues.
3. **Explain the interests.** The parties explain their proposals and points of view about the problem. They clarify, reinforce and justify their original requirements. This is an opportunity for sharing information and justifying interests, not necessarily to confront the other party.
4. **Bargain and reach agreement.** This is a critical step that is often full of tension. The parties give their proposals and alternatives and try to reach an agreement. At this stage, they have to offer concessions to find a solution that will satisfy all the parties involved.
5. **Make a commitment and formalize the agreement.** The end stage means the formalization of the deal that has been reached by both parties. The agreements reached are usually recorded in a formal document or a contract that is signed by all the parties. This document ensures that parties can't forget the commitments made and helps them to develop what was agreed.

Compromise is good. Consensus is better

Compromise is not the same as consensus (Figure 3).

- In a **compromise**, at least one of the parties has to forgo something: they end up feeling they are the losers.
- In a **consensus**, a solution is found that benefits all the parties. Everyone wins. This is the **win-win solution** where everyone gains and nobody loses.

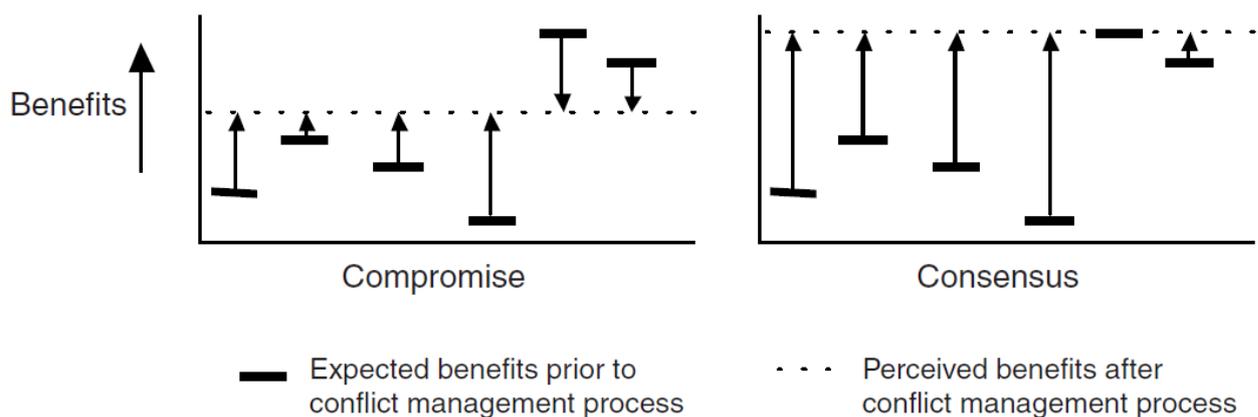


Figure 3. *Compromise is not the same as consensus*

An example of a consensus

The Happy Chicken Marketing Group wanted to sell eggs to a trader from town. The group members wanted **4¢ per egg for 500 eggs a week**, but the trader offered only **3¢ per egg**.

They could agree on **3.5¢ per egg**, but that would mean that both would have to **compromise**: the trader would have to pay more than he wanted, and the Happy Chicken group would earn less than they had hoped (Table 32).

Instead, they found a **consensus** where both won: instead of 500 eggs, the egg producers agreed to supply **600 eggs** a week at a price of **3.5¢**.

- The trader was happy: he had more eggs to sell in town.
- The producers earned more (2,100¢) than if they had produced 500 eggs at 4¢ (2,000¢).

Table 32. Reaching a consensus on egg marketing

	Eggs/week	Price per egg	Total
Trader's initial position	500	3¢	1,500¢
Happy Chicken Marketing Group's initial position	500	4¢	2,000¢
Possible compromise	500	3.5¢	1,750¢
Consensus agreed	600	3.5¢	2,100¢

This consensus was possible because the trader and the group both realized that they were not really interested in the price per egg. The trader was more interested in the **number of eggs** he could trade. The Happy Chicken group was interested in its **total income**.

The benefits of collaborative negotiation

There are always **various ways** to solve a conflict. When the parties involved communicate, understand and try to accommodate each other's interests, they can reach a mutually satisfactory solution.

Using a collaborative approach to deal with conflicts can represent an opportunity to **improve the group**. Groups can become stronger when members on opposite sides of a conflict communicate openly with one another and try to understand one another's viewpoints, interests and circumstances. The group can thereby reach a common agreement to a conflict. A common agreement means a solution that is satisfactory (and transparent) to the majority of the members rather than to just a few.

Good **negotiation skills** are important in the group, in business and even in the home. Negotiations following a collaborative approach allow outcomes without losers. These outcomes, reached through concessions and compromise, set positive precedents for the future, and can maximize the total satisfaction (and earnings) of the parties.

Negotiating with traders

Groups that market their produce will have to negotiate with traders about prices, the quantity and quality of produce, delivery dates, payment terms, and many other issues.

Traders know many tricks they can use to get the highest profit for themselves. They may not tell the truth about the market price. They may claim the quality of the goods is not up to standard. They may threaten not to do business with the farmer unless the farmer agrees to a lower price. They may collude with other traders so that all the traders in the area offer the same, low price.

But **farmers** also have their own tricks. They may put the best produce at the top of the bag, and the worst at the bottom. They may add stones or sand to sacks to increase their weight. They may mix good-quality with inferior products. They may agree a price with one trader, then sell to someone else. They may accept credit from a trader, then refuse to repay the loan.

When both sides use such tricks, they do not trust each other and treat the other with suspicion. This is not a good basis for a long-term business relationship.

Instead, both sides should realize that both sides should benefit from the relationship. If they are able to reach consensus

Ideas for farmers when negotiating with traders

- **Get accurate, up-to-date information** about the market and prices. This is increasingly easy using mobile phones and information services such as radio broadcasts.
- **Maintain contacts with several traders**, and check all their prices and terms before agreeing to sell.
- **Always have alternatives**: selling to someone else, storing the product rather than selling it immediately, processing it to raise the value.
- **Be a reliable supplier**. Once an agreement is reached, do not break it!
- **Think long-term**. The long-term loss in reputation from breaking an agreement is more serious than the short-term gain from higher prices.
- **Sell as a group in bulk**, rather than as individuals. Agree among the group beforehand how much produce to sell. Have each farmer deliver the agreed amount to the group's warehouse beforehand.
- **Sell part first**. If the group is not fully satisfied with the price offered by one trader, then sell half the stock to this trader, then look for another trader who might offer a better price for the remaining stock.
- **Find ways to boost value**. Look for ways to earn more by improving the quality, processing the product, or producing off-season.
- **Look for win-win solutions with traders**. Work out how both the farmers and the trader can benefit
- **Build mutual trust between farmers and the trader**. This is easier if the group sells to the same trader each year, rather than switching from one to another.
- **Learn from your mistakes**.

Sales contracts

The farmers' group may enter into a contract to supply a trader with a particular product. The contract will specify the quantity of product, its quality, the price, the delivery dates, the payment terms, and other details. The contract should be signed by the group representative and the trader, along with an independent witness.

The price and quantity may be flexible. For example, the price may depend on the market price announced by an information service. The quantity might vary between a maximum and minimum.

Such a contract lets the farmers plan ahead more easily. But there is no point in entering into such contracts, if the trader is unreliable or if the contract cannot be easily and cheaply legally enforced.

The group must be strong enough to ensure that all the members comply with the contract agreement. If a member does not deliver the agreed amount and quality, he or she should be penalized.

All such contracts should have a **force majeure clause**. This frees the farmers from the contract obligations if there are factors out of their control, such as bad weather or plant disease.

Lesson 15. Communication

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Describe how to communicate within the group
- Describe how to communicate with partner organizations (reporting, feedback)
- Describe how to lobby government authorities.

This Lesson is based in part on a Cornell University course on group management and CRS (2010).

Good communication

Communication among members is very important. Poor communication can create friction and misunderstanding, while good communication strengthens relations between members. Communication needs to be two way: group leaders should discuss the group's affairs with the members, and the members should discuss freely with their leaders. Working together as equals in the group helps to build confidence and cooperation. This, in turn, makes the group successful.

Audiences for communication

A farmers' group has several major **audiences** (people or groups it wants to communicate with) (Figure 4):

- **Influential organizations:** the government (relevant ministries and local authorities), donors and supporters such as international and national NGOs
- **Financial services:** Banks and microfinance institutions
- **Business partners:** Potential and actual customers, traders, input suppliers
- **Peers:** Other farmers and community members, potential members, other farmers' groups
- **Internal:** The officers and members of the group itself.

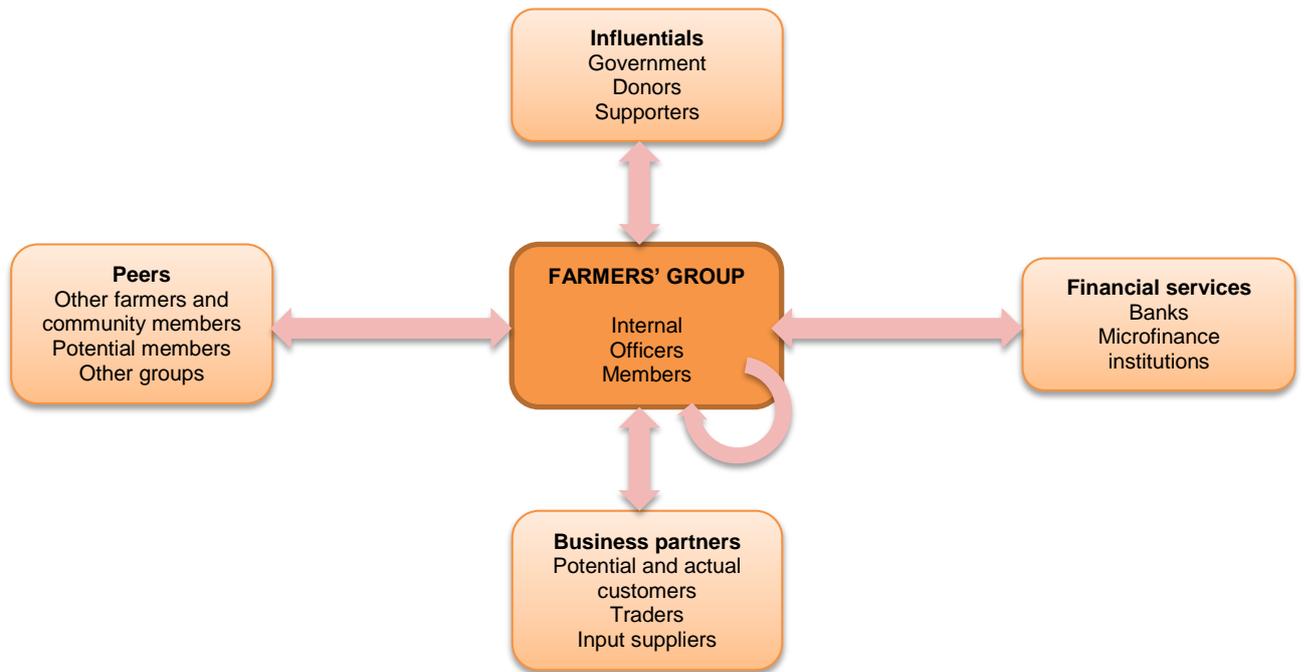


Figure 4. Five types of audiences for a farmers' group

Different audiences, different messages

Each of these audiences has different needs and interests (Table 33).

When communicating with each audience, the group (or the officers responsible) should remember what type of information that audience needs.

That does **not** mean telling the audience what they want to hear. Instead, it means thinking of the audience's needs, and making sure the messages are relevant to those needs.

Table 33. Different audiences, different information needs

These audiences...	Want information about...	Types of information to provide
Influentials The government (relevant ministries and local authorities), donors and supporters such as international and national NGOs	The group as a whole: its constitution, functioning, achievements, sustainability, and the problems it faces.	Registration documents Constitution List of members Meeting minutes Annual evaluation
Financial services Banks and microfinance institutions	The group's financial situation, its business plans, its profitability and ability to repay loans.	Financial reports Business plan Production and marketing reports
Business partners Potential and actual customers, traders, input suppliers	The type and amount of crops and livestock the group produces, the quality of the output, delivery dates, and prices.	Production plans Production levels Contracts
Peers Other farmers and community members, potential members, other farmers' groups	How the members benefit from the group's activities, how it is organized, and whether they can benefit by joining the group or working with it.	Activity plans Constitution, bylaws Benefits per member
Internal audiences The group's officers and members	The group's plans, activities, achievements and outputs. They need skills and information they can use to improve their work and the group's effectiveness.	Activity plans Monitoring information Skills training

Communicating with outsiders

Communicating with outsiders (influentials, financial services and business partners) is mainly the task of the group's officers.

- The chairperson and secretary, for example, are responsible for providing the government and supporters the information they need.
- The marketing coordinator is responsible for negotiating with traders.
- The production coordinator handles negotiations with input suppliers.

Normal members may also talk to these outsiders, of course, but they are not empowered to make any decisions or commitments on behalf of the group.

Communicating with peers

When it comes to communicating with peers, the normal members are more important. They tell their friends and relatives about the group and its work. They pass on new ideas and skills, and encourage them to try them out.

If the members are happy with the group, the news will spread quickly, and many other people will want to join, form their own groups, or copy the successful approach. This is an important way that new ideas spread and rural areas develop.

Internal communication

Proper communication among members of the group is just as important as communications with outsiders. Rural people are often very good at passing on information to each other. But when it comes to group activities, this communication must be conducted in a very systematic way. A list of members should be used to make sure that each farmer is regularly contacted to keep them and the group fully informed about all activities.

Each member has to be informed about the date, place and time of meetings. If they are unable to attend, they must be informed about the decisions made.

Members of a marketing group must keep the group informed about their expected production, harvesting dates and any delays or difficulties they encounter. This is especially important if the group has a contract to supply a particular amount of a product to a buyer.

Some groups appoint a **messenger** whose job it is to inform members about activities and to gather information from them. This is not a problem if the group is small and everyone lives within easy reach: the messenger can reach them all on foot or a bicycle.

Communication is two-way

Communication involves sharing information and learning by both parties. The group should not only try to explain what it does to its audiences, but also learn something from them.

The group should try to learn about others' needs and to explore new opportunities. For example, a trader visiting a maize demonstration may express interest in the peanuts grown in the area. That may lead to a new line of business for the group.

Meetings and records

Meetings are vital for communication among group members. They enable the officers to learn from the members, and explain issues and get their opinions. So it is important that all members attend meetings. Meetings should be short and well-run, so everyone has the opportunity to hear the news, express their views and contribute to decisions. See Lesson 8 for more.

Records should be **open and transparent** so anyone can check on decisions and the status of the organization and its activities.

Demonstrations, cross-visits and open days

The group can help spread ideas by arranging demonstrations, cross-visits and open days for outsiders to see the results of their work.

Groups that test new crop varieties or techniques can arrange for the group members to view progress. They can time such visits to coincide with particular stages of the production cycle: planting, flowering or harvest (for crops), lambing or calving time (for livestock), or when processing is at its peak (for products such as honey or fruit).

Group members can volunteer to give demonstrations or informal presentations on how to do something, or the benefits of a particular technique.

The group can invite outsiders, such as supporters, government officials, potential customers or other groups, to such events. They are a good opportunity to gain a reputation in a particular area and to attract support, customers and imitators.

The group members can also go on cross-visits to other farmers' groups, as well as to information sources such as research institutes, markets, processing plants and potential customers.

Mobile phones

Mobile phones are a good way for the officers to contact members, and for members to keep in touch with other. The group secretary can send messages by mobile phone to remind members about meetings, work days, or other events.

Mobile phones are also useful for finding out prices and arranging purchases and sales.

- Before, farmers had to wait for a trader to come to the village, then had to accept the price he or she offered.
- With a mobile phone, they can find out the going price beforehand, compare the prices offered by various traders, and agree on a deal – all without anyone having to travel anywhere. That is more efficient for both farmers and traders.

Mobile phones can be used in at least four different ways:

- **Voice calls.** People can call to find out prices or arrange deals.
- **Text messages, or SMS.** People can send and receive short messages to each other. In some countries they can subscribe to a service that sends them a message on demand with the latest prices, or with advice on production.
- **Web-based services.** Smartphones can access the internet, or use special programs (“applications”, or “apps”) to get information. Market information services in some countries now offer various types of information in this way.
- **Money transfer.** In some countries, mobile phones can be used to transfer money. That is quicker, more convenient and safer than carrying around cash.

Radio

Many radio stations have realized that farmers make up a large part of their listeners, so they broadcast programs they are interested in, such as weather forecasts, market information and technical advice.

Community radio stations in many countries broadcast programs that are locally relevant. Farmers' groups (or the development organizations that support them) can contact such radio stations to give them feedback (Are programs broadcast at the right time? Are they in a suitable language?), and to lobby for programs on the issues that the groups are interested in.

Computers and the internet

Computers are very useful for many reasons: keeping records, preparing reports, managing information about the group, storing photographs, sharing information, sending emails, and getting information from the internet.

But computers and the internet need certain things:

- **Equipment:** the computer itself, a printer, a modem (or a mobile USB dongle to plug into the computer).
- **Software:** some of this is free (or comes with the computer), but some may have to be paid for. Do not forget antivirus software.
- **Infrastructure:** electricity, a phone line (or mobile network access).
- **Skills:** literacy, the ability to type and use the computer and software.
- **Services:** an account with an internet service provider, and someone to repair or upgrade the computer when it breaks down (which it will eventually).
- **Supplies:** printer cartridges, paper
- **A safe place:** Somewhere dry, dust-free and secure to keep the computer and supplies
- **Money:** to pay for all of the above.

If none of the group members has a computer, perhaps someone else in the community does who would be willing to let the group use it. Or maybe there is an internet café nearby where the group members can rent a computer (and internet access) by the hour.

Buying a computer is probably a good idea only if the group needs to communicate by email regularly with customers or suppliers. Otherwise, a mobile phone is probably sufficient.

Photographs

A picture can be worth 1,000 words! Many mobile phones now have built-in cameras. They make it easy for members to take and share photographs and even video. Photos can be useful for sharing information among members, and for communicating with donors and other supporters.

Some ways to use photos:

- **Important events:** photos are useful documentation.
- **Technical photos:** take photos of pests or diseases to check with an extension worker.
- **Training courses:** the photos can remind participants of the course content, and can be used to train others.
- **Fundraising and marketing:** photos can show the group members, production activities, processing facilities and amounts of stored produce.
- **Members:** take photos of individual members.

Lesson 16. Helping groups grow

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Suggest ways that groups can grow, add activities and spread their risk
- Describe some ways of measuring the group's self-reliance.

This Lesson is based on FAO (1994)

Self-reliance and sustainability

Once the group has been formed and has developed its own rules, record-keeping system and income-generating activities, your role as development agent changes from initiator and active participant to assistant and advisor.

As the group matures, the members will learn how to work together more efficiently. They will become better at planning, keeping records, managing money, selling products, or whatever else they do. If all goes well, they will gain benefits and earn bigger profits that they can share and use to reinvest in their activities.

Your goal now is to guide the group towards self-reliance and sustainability. The members will develop and refine how they manage the group: the record-keeping system, the constitution, plans and activities.

In the beginning you will spend a lot of time with the group. But after 2 or 3 years your assistance will be reduced to irregular visits to monitor progress and to discuss new problems and issues. At this advanced stage, you can still help the group in a number of important functions.

Expanding and diversifying existing activities

The members may decide to expand or to diversify their current activities. But this may increase their risk: if a marketing group invests in producing and selling eggs for the local market, what happens if the price of eggs there suddenly falls?

They can spread the risk in several ways:

- **Sell the same product to different markets.** For example, they could start selling eggs to restaurants in town.
- **Diversify into related products or activities.** They could start producing and selling baby chicks, or grown chickens for meat.
- **Diversify into new products and markets,** using the expertise they have learned. For example, they could start raising groundnuts for sale, or process groundnuts into peanut butter.

Similar considerations apply to groups that focus on other issues.

- A **savings group** may want to get a bank account to improve its services to members and reduce the risk of having a lot of cash around.

- A **natural resources group** will need to maintain the irrigation and erosion-control structures it has built already, as well as expand them into a new area.
- An **innovation group** may choose to test several different crops.

Before they expand into these new areas, the group should consider the implications.

As with any enterprise, a **feasibility study** is essential beforehand. The group should investigate things like:

- Is there a market (ask customers or try to sell a few new products)?
- Does the group have enough time and resources?
- Do tasks need to be divided?
- Can the group manage a bigger loan?

Achieving **financial sustainability** goes together with reaching group sustainability. The key to sustainability is in reviewing plans and adjusting them wherever necessary.

Adding activities

They may wish to add other activities. Here are some possibilities:

- **Savings and credit.** The group could start running a savings-and-credit scheme for its members. See the courses on *Savings and internal lending communities* and *Financial education* for details of how to do this.
- **Marketing.** The group could start producing and selling crops or livestock. See the courses on *Marketing basics* and *Seven steps of marketing* for more.
- **Natural resource management.** They could address problems in managing natural resources such as soil and water. The courses on *Natural resource management: Basic concepts and strategies* and *Tools for planning and implementing participatory NRM projects* have ideas on how to do this.
- **Innovation.** They could test ways to improve their agricultural production. The course on *Promoting innovation* has more.

Members may also decide to focus on other areas. There are many possibilities:

- Building **community infrastructure** (e.g., schools and grain stores)
- Building **individual infrastructure** (e.g., tanks to harvest rainwater, household biogas plants)
- Trying to secure **land rights**
- Supporting **less-fortunate community members** (such as orphans or people affected by HIV).

You can put the groups in touch with people or organizations who can help them.

Adding members?

As the group becomes more successful, other people may want to join. It is better not to let the group grow too big, though, as many of the advantages are lost if there are more than about 30 members:

- Individual members do not know each other as well, so they lose mutual trust.
- The group becomes harder to coordinate
- Members are more likely to have different interests, so conflicts become more likely
- Existing members may think the newcomers are taking a free ride on their hard work and initiative.

Rather than letting the group grow too big, here are several options:

- Split the group into two, and allow newcomers to join either one.
- Start a completely new group for the newcomers. The old group can act as advisors and mentors to this new group.
- Divide the original group into smaller units of three or four members each, and have these act as the nucleus of new groups.

Building confidence and self-esteem

You can help strengthen the group members' confidence and self-esteem by recognizing their knowledge and skills and the positive aspects of their group or enterprise. But you should also help them recognize weaker points as well.

It can be difficult to discuss low achievement or bad performance, especially in the presence of outsiders. Some members may feel threatened and try to hide what went wrong or blame others. Therefore, emphasize that setbacks or failures should be seen as useful lessons that help the group avoid further failures and to improve its performance. Such a positive approach helps maintain and build self-confidence.

Measuring self-reliance

Building sustainable self-help groups takes time. As a group promoter, you play a pivotal role in initiating and sustaining this learning process in its initial phases. However, it is vital that you recognize when groups have reached a point of self-sustainability and no longer require your assistance.

The groups can use a number of indicators to measure their progress. These include:

- **Regularity of group meetings and level of member attendance.** If meetings take place regularly and attendance is high even if you are not there, the group is obviously highly motivated and well on the way to achieving self-reliance.
- **Shared leadership and member participation in group decision-making.** Groups that share leadership responsibilities and in which there is a high level of participation in decision-making learn more quickly and develop a broader leadership base. Groups dominated by a minority are unstable and vulnerable to leadership crises.
- **Continuous growth in group savings.** Group saving is a key measure of members' faith in and financial commitment to group activities. It is also a good indicator of the profitability of the group activity. Groups which do not save, or save very little, are less likely to achieve sustainability.
- **High rates of loan repayment.** A group's capacity to repay loans on time is an indicator of group financial discipline and the profitability of its income-generating activity.

- **Group problem-solving.** A group which solves problems and takes initiatives on its own has a high level of member confidence.
- **Effective links with development services.** The self-reliance of a group also depends on its ability to maintain links with government and NGO development services.

Table 34 gives a checklist of requirements for a marketing group. You can adapt this for other types of groups.

Table 34. Checklist of requirements for marketing group

Name of group		Location	Date	Field agent
Category	Things to check for	Achieved?	Notes	
Group size	15–30 members	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Members	Self-selected	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Similar backgrounds	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Vision	Clear business goals	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Strong unity of purpose	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Strong sense of ownership	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Leadership	Elected positions	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Regular elections	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Members evaluate performance	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Meetings and records	Regular meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Decisions documented	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Financial records in order	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Bylaws	Rules clear and agreed	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Rules enforced	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Constitution	Written constitution	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Business plan	Business plan prepared	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Business plan followed	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Review at end of production cycle	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Plan adjusted as needed	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Internal savings and lending	Scheme established	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Savings generated	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Loans disbursed	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Loans being repaid	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Relationship with support agency	Clear understanding of relationship	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Regular meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Trust established	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Lesson 17. Second-order associations

In this lesson

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Explain the advantages of networking with other farmers' groups (lobbying, exchange of information, gaining new skills, identifying new opportunities)
- Explain how a second-order association works.

This Lesson is based in part on FAO (1994 and 2001).

Several groups, common goals

As groups develop, they eventually face problems or challenges that a single group cannot solve alone. Several groups in an area may realize that they have common interests and goals. By linking up they can all benefit.

- They may be working on the **same issue** (such as controlling erosion)
- They may be producing and marketing the **same commodity** (maize or fish).
- They may have an interest in the **same resource** (an area of grazing land or a stream with water that can be used for irrigation).
- A group of farmers may **sell their output** to another group that processes it.
- Even if they are working on different commodities in different areas, the groups may still face **similar problems**: bad roads, poor market infrastructure, or an unresponsive local government.

Promoting cooperation among groups

To help them grow stronger, encourage the groups to exchange ideas or products, solve problems, get outside support or coordinate activities. Linkages between the groups can also protect individual groups against political or economic difficulties.

Cooperation is usually informal at first. Groups may visit each other to share ideas and learn from each other. They then start to cooperate in other ways: jointly marketing produce, forming a joint savings-and-credit group, or working together on joint projects.

If a group grown too big and has given birth to new groups, then such cooperation may be easy because the original members all know and trust each other. Bringing groups that do not have this shared history is more difficult, as each has developed separately and has its own way of doing things.

Forming a second-order association

As they get to know each other and collaborate more, the groups may decide to create a formal second-order or umbrella association.

Such an association is more powerful than single groups.

- It has more bargaining power with traders and input suppliers

- It is an attractive partner for government and development agencies
- It can bring together the capital and resources needed to build facilities (such as a warehouse) that benefit everyone.
- It can do things that would be impossible for a single group, such as arranging training courses, building infrastructure, lobbying the government, accessing markets, obtaining credit, and providing information services for its members.

But a second-order association is also more complex than a farmers' group, and requires greater management skill, especially if it has many activities. Some associations concentrate on obtaining economic benefits for member groups, such as access to credit, inputs and markets. Others have social aims, such as building schools, health centers or other community services.

A second-order association represents its constituent groups and must be accountable to all group members. It should have a facilitating, coordinating and educational role and become a source of technical assistance, economies of scale and guidance. It can eventually perform many of the functions of group promoters or field agents.

Decision-making committees of a second-order association

As with the individual self-help groups, an association needs leaders and organization. It should have three major decision-making committees:

- A general assembly of members
- An executive committee
- A management committee.

The general assembly of members. This should be the main decision-making body, made up of all the members of the groups that belong to the association. This assembly should meet once or twice a year to decide on important matters such as new activities and any changes to the association rules or constitution that will affect all members.

The executive committee. This committee consists of one or more representatives from each of the member groups. It should meet every one to two months to review the association's performance. The representatives from each group relay information and decisions between their groups and the association (Figure 5).



Figure 5. From first-order marketing groups to a second-order association

The management committee. This committee has a chairperson, secretary and treasurer who represent and manage the association on a day-to-day basis. If the association has many responsibilities and duties, it may also be necessary to have a vice-chair and sometimes a volunteer or paid “manager” to assist them. If needed, additional subcommittees can be added – for example an education or marketing sub-committee.

Constitution and records

Like the farmers’ groups, the association should have its own constitution, bylaws, and record-keeping procedures.

The management committee should report regularly to the executive committee and to all member groups on its activities and transactions. The committee must conduct its affairs in a transparent manner, and it must maintain the trust of its member groups.

Do not form an association too soon

A strong association is made up of strong groups. Trying to form an association while the individual groups are still weak is counter-productive: the association will be weak, and your attention will be distracted away from helping the groups get stronger.

So go slowly! Concentrate first on strengthening the individual groups. Then introduce the idea of a second-order association, the role it might play in solving problems, and the potential benefits – and costs – of inter-group cooperation.

The need for second-order associations will develop gradually as potential member groups become convinced of the benefits. This typically occurs at the end of the second or beginning of the third year of group development.

Size of associations

Second-order associations with few member groups (say three to 10 groups) seem to work better than those with larger memberships. Also, associations whose member groups are within easy walking distance of each other do much better than if the groups are spread over a wide area. Large distances between groups make communication more difficult and discourage members from taking part in decision making.

Paying for association activities

What services will the association provide, and how will they be funded? Associations need a lot of voluntary support from member groups and elected officers. But they also need to have an income in order to grow and to serve the interests of their members. Money is needed to pay the running costs – for example, pens, record books or an emergency fund for providing short-term loans to deserving members or groups in time of need.

This money can come from group contributions, fees for services to members, and profits from association activities. Paying membership fees is not only an important contribution to the association in financial terms. It also represents an important vote of confidence in the organization. If member groups choose to pay their dues, they generally do so because they feel they get some service in return. If members do not pay, it normally means they are dissatisfied with the association.

Farmer cooperatives

Cooperatives are more formal organizations that typically have full-time staff and offer their members more services:

- Access to new technologies such as (seed, fertilizer, agro-chemicals, irrigation)
- Access to veterinary services
- Access to basic inputs at lower market costs, based on bulk purchase
- Extension service support for production
- Financial support for loans and profitability analysis
- Storage and crop conditioning facilities
- Market information (spot prices and market trend data)
- Market support (finding buyers and making collective marketing arrangements)
- Providing access to loans, insurance and warehouse receipt options
- Support for certification.

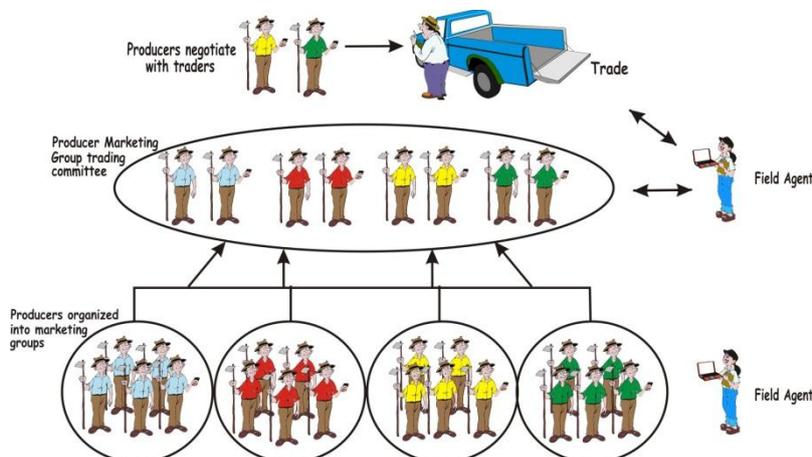
Some cooperatives also provide social services:

- Access to medical clinics
- Adult education
- Basic infrastructural projects (water, sanitation, market access roads, transport).

These services may also be open to non-members, but members get preferential rates.

To join a cooperative, a farmer usually pays a one-time or annual membership fee, and is also asked to buy shares.

Third-order associations



Several cooperatives may be organized into unions:

- Farmers' groups (20–30 members)
- Cooperatives (10–30 farmer groups)
- Cooperative unions (4–5 cooperatives).

Because they serve so many farmers and are a place where farmers can learn and get information, cooperatives can be a very useful way to scale up the agroenterprise approach.

Where they are well managed, cooperatives generally improve the lot of their members. Millions of farmers support and are empowered by the cooperative movement.

But in some countries mismanagement of cooperatives has left many with a bad reputation. Some cooperatives are imposed by the Government. They are sometimes controlled by elites or politicians. Where farmer's groups have been manipulated for political purposes, many are corrupt or inefficient.

So farmers may be suspicious of cooperatives, and in some areas, it may be challenging to promote them. Make sure that any organization that claims to support farmers is both honest and provides services that promote the farmers' position. All such organizations should be audited regularly to check their performance and cost-effectiveness.

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