



Farmer Led Documentation

For Sustainable Agriculture and Natural
Resource Management

About Farmer Led Documentation (FLD)

It is increasingly clear that successful development of Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management depends on the effective interaction between knowledge and experiences of local farmer communities with expertise of development agents. Development organisations are therefore documenting and sharing local knowledge as an important part of the development process. In many cases, however, this is done in an extractive mode, where outsiders control the process and local knowledge and experiences are stored in their offices. There are, however, isolated experiences with what is called Farmer Led Documentation (FLD) as an empowering process in which local communities take the lead role in the documentation process. FLD ensures that relevant experiences and good practices at the community level are visible as a starting point for further farmer-led agricultural development.

FLD amplifies the voice of farmers to express knowledge, experiences and practices in their own words and their own vision.

Putting FLD into practice

In general terms, documentation is a process and is the written, visual, audio and electronic information about for example a place, an object, a practice, a product or an event for the purposes of learning, and/or sharing or for recording intellectual property. Traditionally, documentation is a top down practice whereby technical experts (writer, video crew, photographer etc) carry out the process and decide on the method, purpose and audience. In contrast, with FLD, farming communities take the lead role in the documentation process. The results are used by community members for purposes of internal learning (within the community) and exchange between communities (horizontal sharing) and communities, development agents and policy makers (vertical sharing) (PELUM, PROLINNOVA 2006).

There is a growing interest by development agents in farmer-led documentation. However, there is little known of for example:

- ◆ The best designs of such documentation processes.
- ◆ The available and appropriate communication tools and media to be used for farmer-led documentation.
- ◆ How farmer-documentation has led to knowledge spread and a wider development process.
- ◆ How FLD has ultimately led to livelihood improvements.

PELUM (Participatory Ecological Land Use Management) Uganda, PROLINNOVA (Promoting Local Innovation) and Oxfam Novib organised a 5-day exchange and capacity building workshop on FLD for Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (NRM) from 6th–10th November 2006 in Kampala, Uganda, to explore the practice of FLD.



Workshop participants, who came from Bolivia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mexico, The Netherlands, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The workshop facilitated exchange between representatives of PELUM, PROLINNOVA and Oxfam Novib partners as well as other organisations involved in FLD and Natural Resource Management and reinforced their capacities for local community-led knowledge mobilisation and sharing. At the end of the workshop, participants prepared realistic action plans regarding the intergration of elements of FLD in their own activities and organisation programmes.



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(1) Yusuf Kiwala from Uganda presenting NAADS' experience of FLD (2) Nicholas Madondo from South Africa sharing Farmer Support Groups' experience of FLD (3) Field visit to NAADS farmer group in Mukono District, Uganda (4 & 5) Workshop participants discussing the practice of FLD.

Key findings from the workshop

Principles

FLD is farmer driven, in that farmers are involved from the beginning and they decide on the purpose, if and when and how to document. It is a participatory method which promotes gender equality and is inclusive so that all members of the community participate. FLD to be of benefit to farmers and integrated into their on-going activities.

Underlying assumptions

Farmers consider information to be a valuable resource, farmers' experiences and practices are of use to others and, farmers are capable of expressing themselves and making their experiences/practices explicit.

Benefits

FLD empowers farmers to be able to speak about their issues/concerns and experiences, to preserve and share local knowledge, to attract external attention for their concerns. Documentation and exchange activities – if organised well – to be of some (direct) benefit to the participating farmers, e.g. facilitating their marketing efforts.

The documenters also learn from the process of FLD in terms of gaining new skills and insight into the practice of FLD in terms of what works and what doesn't.

For whom & By whom

Those taking the initiative (coming up with the approach and providing support) and those implementing the actual documentation (writing, drawing, and filming) are not always farmers. However, in order for a documentation process to be truly farmer-led, the decisions regarding if, when and how to document should be made by the farmers themselves. Leaving the lead at the farmer level while aiming for full involvement of all groups, including marginalized, can be a challenge for development workers but should be encouraged.

FLD products can be for farmers' use, for policy makers, research networks, government, NGOs, farmer unions associations, development workers etc.

How it is done

To start documenting, all stakeholders (farmers, NGOs etc) need to be introduced to the concept of FLD and their capacities in using the various documenting techniques need to be strengthened. Stakeholders can conduct a base line survey in order to initially establish existing information systems, infrastructure, learning culture etc.

Documentation can be in the form of written text, drawings, still photography, video and audio recordings. Being open minded towards the communication methods – both traditional and modern processes and tools – that are most appropriate for the context within which farmers live and work is important.

For purposes of feasibility and sustainability of the documentation activities, farmers are to be encouraged to begin with using existing available tools. The documentation to be done by individual farmers or farmer groups, but the process can be encouraged or facilitated by NGOs and technical experts as required by the community.

What can be documented

There is a great variety of what can be documented, from best practices and experiences to meetings and economic data.

Cultural information is sensitive and community members may not be willing to share. Farmers may be willing to share information about their problems and solutions that they propose, but farmers' willingness to share information on their practice and skills requires an element of trust. There may be a need to clarify that the knowledge belongs to someone and will be attributed to the source; protection of farmer knowledge (intellectual property rights) is of importance.

Conditions for success

FLD should be driven on the needs and ideas of the whole community. There needs to be policy support for the institutionalisation of FLD. Sufficient resources need to be allocated/obtained, if possible by or with contributions from community members themselves.

Sustainability

There is a need for linkage with existing structures for documentation and learning as well as integration into commercial income earning activities. Selected FLD approach to match the available resources. Farmers need to own the process and its products.

Some FLD examples presented at the workshop

Using photography and weather instruments: Farmer Support Group, South Africa

In this method, farmers are using still photography and weather instruments to record weather conditions (rainfall and temperature), different growth stages and harvesting and to monitor and evaluate their activities such as land preparation and planting.

In the opinion of the farmers, documentation through pictures is good to maintain memories of the past and as encouragement to continue good practices. It helps illiterate people, since it is easy to make and watch pictures. Through the photographs, farmers can easily recognize if a plant has a problem and how they should act upon that. The pictures can be used as a learning tool in farmer-to-farmer extension.

Community Libraries: Africa 2000 Network (A2N), Uganda

A number of community libraries have been set up in Kabale District to facilitate information flow among the farmers. Farmers have been encouraged to openly share the information they have on new and improved farm technologies for sustainable agriculture. This is especially encouraged when farm visits have been conducted. The farmers have become trainers and facilitators of other farmers.



Photo source: A2N
A farmer sharing information that is available in a community library with a visitor.



Photo source: A2N
An example of record keeping by farmers

Farmers have documented their experiences and have been able to share them with others. The farmers have also been advised to document and keep records of every innovation for sharing and for future reference.

Collection Exchange on Local Agriculture Content (CELAC): National Agricultural Advisory Services Secretariat (NAADS), Uganda

NAADS is utilizing ICTs, such as radio and mobile phones to ease the process of knowledge sharing through the CELAC approach whereby community based facilitators/knowledge brokers work between village and parish level and connect farmer groups with others. Knowledge forums are interactive local meetings where farmer groups convene. CELAC members document meeting outputs but do not

interfere. Relevant local knowledge coming from these meetings is stored in a central database and distributed via mobile phone text messages, in audio format via community radios and through periodic newsletters distributed among community libraries.

Participatory Video: Association of Church Development Projects (ACDEP), Ghana

In Ghana farmers are involved in filming their experiences and practices. They determine what is to be filmed, where the activities are to be filmed and who will conduct the interviews. These processes are however, facilitated by the extension staff, while a professional video crew carry out the shooting. The video documentation has successfully been carried out in 15 communities in Northern Ghana. The communities were enthusiastic about using participatory video as a means to enhance their learning and share their experiences.

Photo source: Wim Hemstra, Kompas



Women from Kalbeo, northern Ghana, working with the NGO CECIK (Centre for Cosmvision and Indigenous Knowledge), filming their own technology related to basket weaving. Insight provided the training.

Using Digital Cameras: AGRECOL Andes, Boliva

In this case, videos, digital cameras, sound tapes and digital slideshows are used by the farmers and communities to collect, edit and spread good practices. In Bolivia, this method has led to a procedure of self financing for communities to establish video/sound centres for collection and distributing information.

Photo source: AGRECOL



Men and women from Ayllu Majasaya Mujlli from the Tapacari County in the department of Cochabamba attending a computer training workshop.

Photo source: AGRECOL



Farmers practicing the use of the digital camera to document their experiences at the Ayllu Majasaya Mujlli from the county of Tapacari in the department of Cochabamba.

Experiences have shown that it is important that a central core of specialists within a community is given sufficient training in the use of the various tools (video recording, digital cameras etc) to allow effective collection of the communities' experiences and knowledge. Digital cameras have been found to be one of the most effective means of documentation as they are simple to use and a photo taken by a farmer needs no further elaboration as the message does not need to be translated or shaped according to a given structure.

Way forward

The participants of the workshop and their organisations are in the process of integrating FLD into their programmes and/or are initiating new FLD activities and pilots. Information on these activities is available from PELUM Uganda or PROLINNOVA .

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A workshop report, other dissemination products and links to further discussions on FLD are available from the Prolinnova website at www.prolinnova.net/fld.php, at the Oxfam Novib KIC Portal www.oxfamkic.org and from the PELUM website at www.pelumrd.org

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Photo on the front cover: Small producers from the Council of Empowerment for Ecologic Agro and Animal Husbandry Sacaca, documenting their experiences. Sacaca, North of Potosí, Bolivia. **Photo source:** AGRECOL