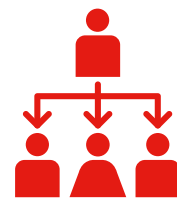


A group of women, likely in Ethiopia, are sitting on the floor. They are wearing traditional headwraps and patterned clothing. In front of them are several pieces of paper with hand-drawn diagrams and text. One diagram shows a house with a roof, and another shows a house with a chimney. The text on the papers includes "LOYER", "BIENS", "FANTE", and "FANTO".

”

“Once we helped show our community how to prioritise problems and use local knowledge and experienced farmers to demonstrate the new ideas, the community has gone from strength to strength and have tackled problem after problem. I don’t think it will ever stop!”

Red Cross Volunteer in Ethiopia



Lead Farmers and Demonstration Farming

The community identifies common farming problems and works with local ‘lead farmers’ to find ways of overcoming them. The community tests different ways of solving the problems and then demonstrates the best solutions to others in the community.

The aim is to make the most of locally available skills and knowledge to empower farmers to implement their own decisions in their own fields. It is all about self-help – communities helping each other. The same approach can also be used for livestock, poultry or any other problems.

What does the activity look like?

The activity involves regular community meetings where the community identifies a small number of common farming problems and then selects people who are trusted farmers, good growers, and considered to be very knowledgeable on these subjects. The people selected are known as ‘lead farmers’ (some people call them ‘model’ or ‘champion’ farmers or growers). The volunteer then works with the lead farmers, preferably with help from local extension officers, to identify a small number of farming methods that they think will address the community’s main farming problems.

Each lead farmer is then assigned a small group of community members (up to 20 maximum) and will teach them how to use the good farming methods to address their problems.

Photo: Tanzania, 2015 © Manon Koningstein/CIAT



What are the main benefits?



Only needs local knowledge, skills and resources.



Makes the most of local knowledge and encourages linking to government extension services.



Addresses locally identified problems with locally available and appropriate solutions.



Helps people grow more food and crops to feed their families and sell for income.



Helps to empower people and give them self-respect.



Helps communities tackle the changing climate conditions they are facing.



Preparations

Timing tips

- ✓ The activity will continue for at least one planting season but probably over several. It will depend on the problems identified by the community. Ideally the activity should cover the whole farming process, from selecting the seeds to post harvest management and marketing of the produce.
- ✓ Groups can start to tackle other problems together (pests and diseases, livestock, income generation, savings and loans, storage and post-harvest management, etc.). Each group and individual should be encouraged to train another person or group so that the new ideas are spread to everybody.
- ✓ You can start at any time of year but try to choose a time of day or year when people are not very busy. Start planning well before the planting season, so groups are ready to start new practices in a new planting season.



Photo: Uganda, 2010 © HortCRSP/Flickr

What does the volunteer need to do before the activity can start?

In addition to the usual start-up activities in the 'Essential Guidance' section in the Introduction of this handbook, the volunteer should:

1. Talk to local extension officers and other knowledgeable farmers.
2. Use the guidance on managing groups in the 'Essential Guidance' of the Introduction to this handbook to prepare and think about farmer group formation.
3. You may need to work with lead farmers, local extension officers, or local schoolteachers, to plan how to teach community members through a combination of training sessions and demonstrations in the field.

How to avoid risks

- Many people do not have much spare time or resources to do additional activities. Try to start with smaller, easier or cheaper activities and build up to larger ones.
- Lead farmers might not be very good or confident at explaining new ideas. Perhaps organise 'lead farmers' into pairs, so they can help each other.



How to implement the activity?

Step 1	Community meeting to find out who is interested in taking part
Step 2	Community meeting(s) to select which agricultural problems to address
Step 3	Community meeting to select lead farmers
Step 4	Meetings between volunteers, extension officers and lead farmers, to identify solutions to community problems
Step 5	Meetings between volunteers, extension officers and lead farmers, to plan how to teach and demonstrate the new ideas
Step 6	Community meeting to form groups to work with each lead farmer
Step 7	Regular training sessions
Step 8	Field demonstrations
Step 9	Practicing new ideas
Step 10	Follow-up
Step 11	Spreading the ideas
Step 12	Visibility





Step 1: Community meeting to find out who is interested in taking part

Start the meeting by summarising the activity. Explain to people that you are keen to form a group of lead farmers who test different farming practices and demonstrate the best solutions to others in the community. For guidance on how to organise a community meeting to form a lead farmer group, see 'Essential Guidance' section in the Introduction to this handbook and Step 1 and 2 in Section 5 'Improving Farming Practices'.



Photo: Chad, 2019 © George Osodi/British Red Cross

Step 2: Community meeting(s) to select which agricultural problems to address

Use the advice in Section 5 to discuss the main causes of crop losses and other farming challenges and identify potential farming practice solutions.

Try to make sure you involve lots of different types of people including men, women, young, elderly and people with disabilities. Older community members may remember crops that used to be grown that may withstand or tolerate the difficult conditions now being faced.

If you have access to large sheets of paper or posters, then it will help to write the problems down. Otherwise you can write each problem on a small piece of paper and then use these to ask the community to come to an agreement on which problems are the most important or 'priority' problems to address. There is a general description of how to do this in the 'Community Action Planning' section of the handbook Introduction, and Step 3 of Section 5.



Photo: Uganda, 2014 © S. Truelove/aptuk.org

Farming problems are discussed, agreed and written on pieces of paper and then prioritised (see Section 5 'Improving Farming Practices' for a step by step guide).

It could be helpful to organise field visits with members of the community before the meeting, to observe and discuss farming and crop loss problems and identify potential solutions. The volunteer should keep notes of what is discussed and agreed.

If the community is facing a lot of crop loss problems that are climate related, such as unpredictable rains, droughts, floods, cyclones, or other weather-related crop problems, the volunteer may decide to look into the stresses and hazards and their underlying causes in more detail by following the Steps 3 to 5 in Section 5 of this handbook.

Photo: Lesotho, 2019 © Matthew Carter/IFRC



Or, the volunteer could discuss with people which crops can and can not tolerate difficult conditions well, such as drought, flood, hail or high winds. This may help communities decide what types of problems they would like the demonstration farmers to talk about. Use the table shown below to capture this information.

1. First ask communities to list all the key crops grown by the community.
2. List the main factors that affect the growth of these crops (problems and stresses) and then list additional factors they think need to be considered and discussed.
3. Ask people to describe the strengths and weaknesses of each crop against the factors they have identified.
4. People can either grade with a number from 1 to 5, (1 weak and 5 strong) or discuss each point and the volunteer take notes.



Framework to discuss which crops and which problems to address

	Resilient to which of the problems identified?	Vulnerable to which stresses identified?	Fast growing?	Pest or disease resistant or not?	High, medium or low cost to produce?	Profitability or income generating capacity?	...
Maize							
Beans							
Sesame							
Cassava							
....							
Total score or overall comments							

Key crop factors to discuss

List locally produced crops

Step 3: Community meeting to select lead farmers

It is important that the community select the people they think are the best farmers and that they trust, to become the 'lead farmers'. The volunteer should also try to keep notes of what is agreed. Be clear on the commitments expected from the lead farmers, discuss with them and agree the minimum activities they will have to do and the duration of their commitment.

Lead farmers must agree to give their time and share their knowledge and may be asked to use their plots for demonstration, so the members of the group can visit the plots to learn.



Photo: Zimbabwe, 2019 © Jordi Matas/BRC

Step 4: Meetings between volunteers, extension officers and lead farmers, to identify solutions to community problems

Take each of the problems for each crop identified by the community and come to a decision on what needs to be taught and demonstrated, and who is best to teach each subject. There may be some topics that only one or two lead farmers have knowledge and experience of, so they should teach and demonstrate this to the other lead farmers first. Or, the lead farmer group could choose to specialise in one subject, so that each lead farmer teaches the same subject to each of the farmer groups.

Step 5: Meetings between volunteers, extension officers and lead farmers, to plan how to teach and demonstrate the new ideas

If lead farmers can write, then they may find it useful to have a notebook to keep notes. The volunteers should also try to keep notes of what is jointly agreed the teaching methods, how long this would take, where it would be done, and what resources would be needed for the teaching.

Step 6: Community meeting to form groups to work with each lead farmer

It is better to let people decide for themselves which lead farmer they prefer to work with.

A small group should be no larger than 20 people per group. If the groups are bigger they become difficult to manage. In the groups, agree how much time the group members are expected to spend on the learning activities, and what kind of commitment they are expected to make.

Step 7: Regular training sessions

Regular training sessions where lead farmers explain to groups of farmers how to address a problem.



Photo: Zimbabwe, 2019 © Jordi Matas/BRC



Step 8: Field demonstrations

The volunteer or lead farmer's field or plot is usually used as a demonstration plot, where the farmer groups can test the proposed ideas and observe good practices. Some groups identify a 'community plot' that they can all work on together. However, this can have complications around ownership and sharing that need to be carefully managed.



Photo: Congo, 2010 © Remi Nono-Womdim/FAQ, Flickr

Step 9: Practicing new ideas

The community farmers then help each other or work on their own plots to test and implement the new ideas. Advise them to test the new ideas on a small area of their land before adopting them on a larger scale. Divide a plot into four equal squares and test four different practices to compare which one works best.

The lead farmers support the community farmers until they are familiar with the techniques and able to do the new methods by themselves. The lead farmers then works with new groups.

Step 10: Follow-up

Try to monitor whether there are some people who are not understanding the improved farming practices very well. If some people drop out, ask them why this happened so you can try to find ways to improve their experiences. Volunteers and lead farmers should try to visit the group member's plots to observe and see if the group members are applying the new methods and knowledge correctly. Remember, it may just be that the idea does not suit that person, or the soil type and conditions they have on their farm.



Step 11: Spreading the ideas

Follow the instructions on ‘How to spread ideas’ in the Introduction of this handbook to encourage farmer groups to tackle new problems and pass on their new skills to others in their community and eventually to people in neighbouring communities. When the farmers are successfully trained, they can nominate new lead farmers from within their own groups who can continue to train the group and start training new groups.

Step 12: Visibility

When resources are available, it is useful to have a simple sign with information placed on the plots where new ideas are being demonstrated. This can help other people to see and understand the new ideas and improved methods of farming being demonstrated.



Photo: Zimbabwe, 2018 © British Red Cross

Put up simple signs on the demonstration plot so that people who are interested can read what the activity is demonstrating.



Things to watch out for

- ⚠ If groups identify a communal 'demonstration plot' to work on together, they will need permission from the landowner.
- ⚠ Working together needs co-operation and agreement around sharing tasks and tools and sharing the crops grown between the group members.

Top tips

- ✓ Get local extension officers involved as early as possible and as much as they can in all the steps.
- ✓ Let people choose which other people they want to work with in groups.
- ✓ Encourage people to test the ideas in a small way first.
- ✓ Encourage successful groups to move on to addressing other problems e.g. livestock, poultry, savings and loans etc.
- ✓ Adults learn better when they see something and have a go for themselves. Make sure you include lots of observation and practise and discuss what works and what does not work as well.
- ✓ Consider organising a ceremony or activity so that after each success, results can be observed and celebrated. Invite members, local leaders, authorities and even other neighbouring communities, and also people that did not participate to come and see the results. This could motivate other farmers to get involved.
- ✓ It has been found that groups work well when they include a good mixture of people (including women, young people and older people) with different ideas, interests, perspectives, skills and experience.



Photo: Congo, 2007 © Remi Nono-Womdim/FAO, Flickr

Spread the ideas further by organising demonstration sessions for school children.

Links to other sections in this handbook

This method of identifying problems and demonstrating solutions can also be used to address livestock or poultry problems, or preparing and responding to risks and disasters.

You can encourage groups to take on any of these other group related activities:



Section 1
Gardens



Section 2
Compost



Section 3
Shaded Seedling Nurseries



Section 4
Homemade Liquid Fertilisers



Section 5
Improving Farming Practices



Section 7
Water Harvesting and Conservation



Section 10
Reducing Fuel for Cooking



Section 11
Early Warning and Early Action



Section 12
Savings and Loans Associations

Resources and skills needed



What resources are needed to run the activity?

This activity relies on the experience of local farmers and should involve the resources, land, tools and seeds that people already have as much as possible.



Approximate costs

Depends on the activities selected.



What skills or knowledge do volunteers need?

No specialist knowledge, just the confidence to talk to local extension officers and bring people together to discuss matters in community meetings.



What skills do participants need?

Not specialist skills but willingness to learn and try new methods.



What needs to be monitored or followed-up?

Regular follow-up by the lead farmers and volunteers, to check whether the ideas are working and whether farmers are following the new ideas correctly.