CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

Organizing and Managing Farmers Groups
Part 2: Planning and Communication

A SMART Skills Manual

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Skills for Marketing and Rural Transformation (SMART skills)

SMART Skills manuals:

- Introduction to SMART skills for rural development

- Organizing and managing farmer groups

- Understanding natural resources

- Managing natural resources

- Marketing basics

- Seven steps of marketing

- Promoting innovation

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Purpose of the SMART skills series

To introduce you to the following five skill areas:

- Group organization

- Natural resources management

- Finance

- Marketing

- Innovation

Manual content

Two modules:

- Planning and implementing activities

- Communication and networking

Module 3:
Planning and implementing activities

Module content

Module 3 describes how to help the group plan, implement and monitor its activities. It covers the following content:

- Lesson 11: Developing an action plan

- Lesson 12: Implementing activities

- Lesson 13: Monitoring and evaluation

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Lesson 11:
Developing an action plan

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Outcomes

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.

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Overview

Lesson 11 covers the following content:

- From vision to action plan
- Identifying and analyzing problems
- Identifying possible solutions
- Prioritizing problems and solutions
- Checking the feasibility
- Developing an action plan
- Setting targets
- SMART targets

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From vision to action plan

Moving from a vision to planning activities involves:

- Identifying and analyzing problems

- Identifying possible solutions

- Prioritizing problems and solutions

- Checking the feasibility

- Developing an action plan

Problems and solutions
Prioritizing solutions,
Activities,
Feasibility,
Action plan

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Identifying and analyzing problems

A **problem analysis chart** is one way to work out the causes and solutions of problems.

A problem analysis chart has the following sections (columns):

- Problems
- Causes of the problems
- What do people do now?
- Possible solutions: What can be done?
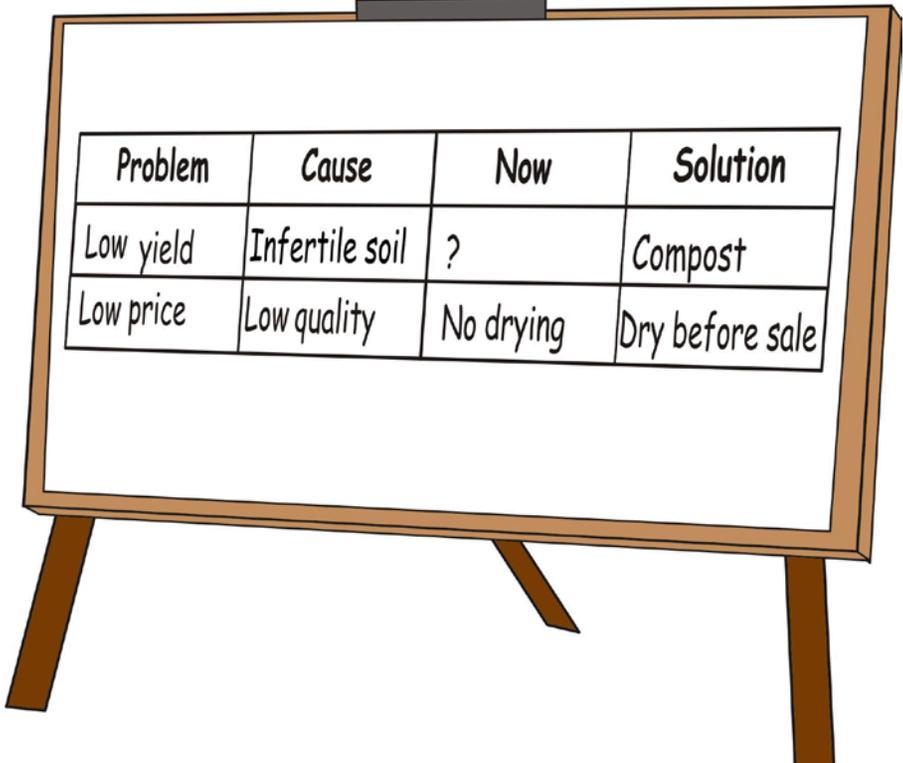
Problem	Cause	Now	Solution
Low yield	Infertile soil	?	Compost
Low price	Low quality	No drying	Dry before sale

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Identifying possible solutions

Help the group to identify solutions by:

- Suggesting solutions based on your **training and experience**
- Suggesting solutions that your **project can support**
- **Linking the farmers with outsiders** with the required skills and expertise, e.g. researchers and other development agents
- **Arranging visits** by groups of farmers so that they can see how other farmers deal with similar problems
- **Helping the farmers to test a new technology** on a small scale

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Prioritizing problems and solutions

Prioritize problems by:

- Selecting the problems that are highest priority and can be solved quickly and easily

Prioritize potential solutions in terms of their:

- Feasibility
- Potential payoff
- Likelihood of success
- Cost
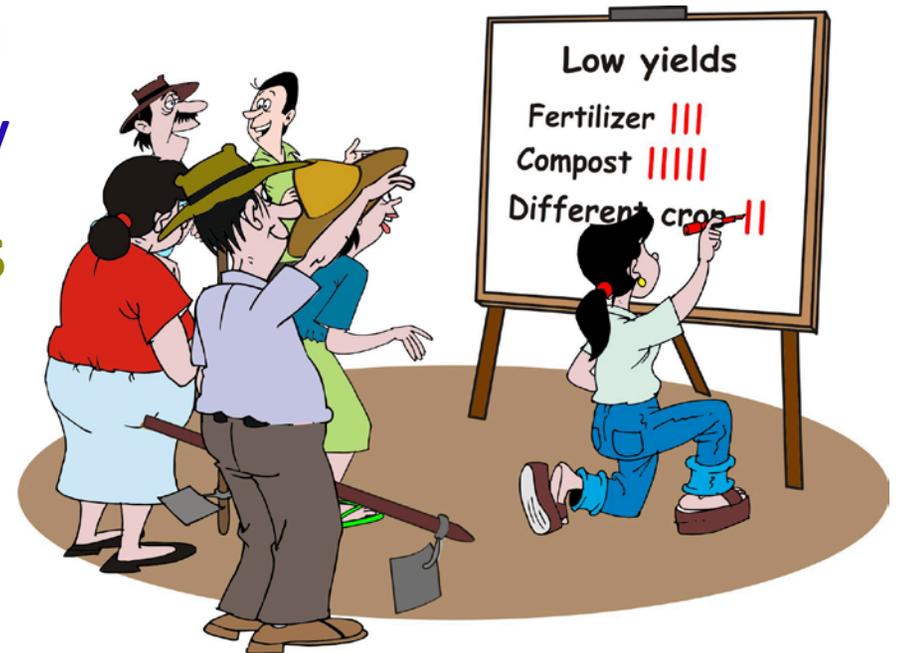
Checking feasibility

- Remind the group to draw up plans and set **targets that are feasible.**

- If the group is too ambitious, it is bound to fail.

- It is better to **start with easy tasks and targets** and then **move on to more difficult ones later.**

Remember:

It is **not** your job to decide what the group should do. That is for the group to decide for itself.

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Developing an action plan

Write a plan that shows:

- **Dates and time** of the activities that put solutions into effect
- **Responsible persons**
- **Participants**
- **Location:** Where will the activities take place
- **Inputs required:** Cash, materials, labor, etc.
- **Budget:** Estimate of costs and resources
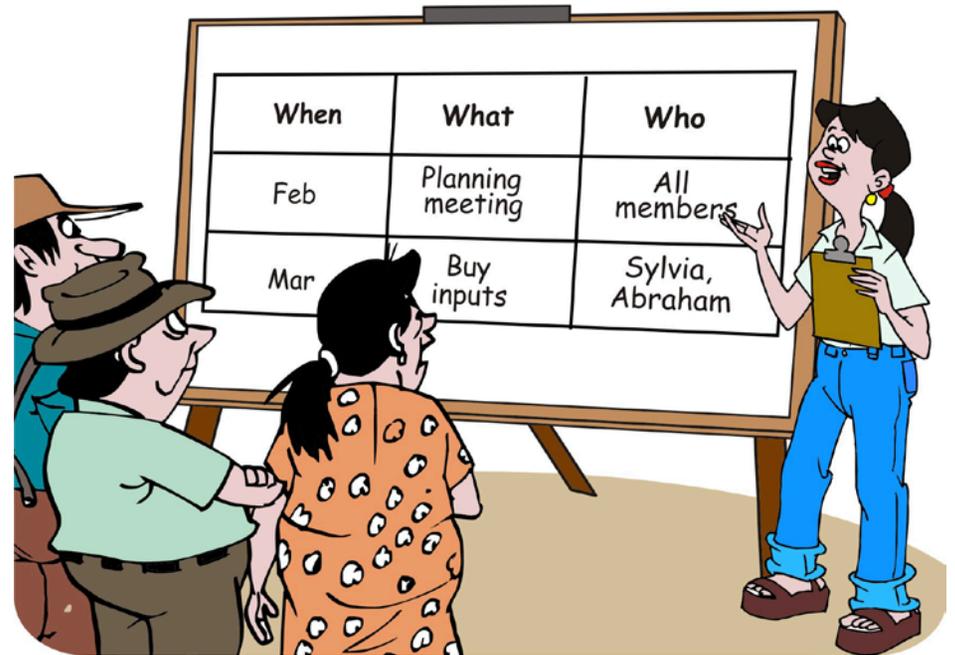
Setting targets

- **Set a target for each type of activity,** so that **the group knows what it aims for.**

- **Reaching targets** gives the group a sense of **achievement.**

- **Targets are important in monitoring** and **evaluation.**

- Targets must be **ambitious** but **achievable.**

SMART targets

S	Specific:	Says exactly what is to be done.
M	Measurable:	Stated in numbers.
A	Achievable:	Realistic and within the group's ability.
R	Relevant:	Related to what the group wants to achieve.
T	Time-bound:	Indication of when will it be achieved.

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Lesson 12:
Implementing activities

Outcomes

After this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe how to implement the plan.

- Describe how to overcome problems that arise.

Overview

Lesson 12 covers the following content:

- Assigning tasks and responsibilities

- Making sure that the plan is followed

- Holding coordination meetings

- Leadership

- Dealing with problems

- Finding solutions to problems

- Keeping records

Assigning tasks and responsibilities

- Someone has to be responsible for each task.

- The **burden must be shared fairly.**

- For **regular tasks,** the group can draw up a **roster** showing who is responsible for the task on a particular day

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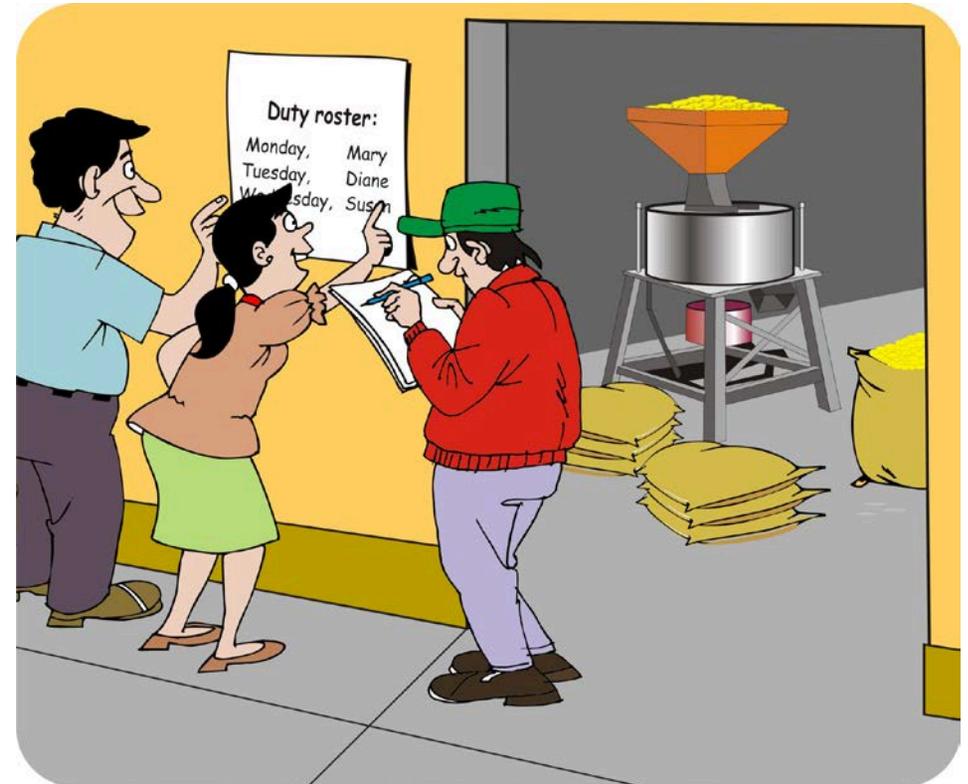
Making sure the plan is followed

- The **chairperson** or the **production** or **marketing coordinator** can **make sure that the plan is followed.**

- Members need to know who is to do what, when to do it and how to do it.

- The group should make sure that it has an **expert** for jobs that require particular skills.

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Holding coordination meetings

- The group should meet regularly to **coordinate activities** and agree on **changes** as needed.
- The meetings should **focus on the task at hand** and ensure that the task is performed smoothly and efficiently.
- The **decisions should be written down.**
- The members should draw up a **list of further actions** to be taken.

Leadership

Good leadership:

- **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 hard work** to achieve them.

- **Leads by example**, with **enthusiasm** and hard work.

- 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

Problems under the group's control:

Illness preventing a group member from doing the work

Dealing with problems (Continued)

Problems beyond the group's control:

Bad weather cutting yields or disrupting the harvest

Group members must find a way of:

- **Overcoming** the problem; or
- A least of **reducing its impact.**

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Finding solutions to problems

Sources of solutions to problems:

- The development agent
- Indigenous knowledge
- Innovative members
- Cross-visits to neighboring communities
- Outside specialists
- Reference materials
- Social networking and the Internet
- Training
- Experiments

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Keeping records

It is particularly important to keep records of the following types of information:

- Regular activities

- Activities that involve many people

- Handling expendable items

- Recording money

Lesson 13:
Monitoring and evaluation

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Outcomes

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.

Overview

Lesson 13 covers the following content:

- What are monitoring and evaluation?
- Participatory monitoring and evaluation
- What to monitor
- Comparing progress against targets
- Elements of monitoring
- Using a calendar to record information
- Summarizing the information
- Self-evaluation
- Evaluating service providers

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What are monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring means:

- Record-keeping
- Checking progress against plans
- Adjusting ongoing activities

Evaluation means:

- Looking back and assessing if the group has achieved its objectives
- Identifying ways to improve future activities

Monitoring:
  What are we doing?
  How can we do it better?

Evaluation:
  What did we do?
  What can we do better next time?

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Participatory monitoring and evaluation

Participatory monitoring and evaluation = All group members being responsible for planning and implementing activities and for solving their own problems.

Group members should:

- Determine what areas to monitor and evaluate
- Collect the data themselves
- Analyze the results themselves
- Keep record of the information (which is usually done by the secretary)

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What to monitor

Aspects of the group and its activities that can be monitored:

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

Comparing progress against targets

Develop simple charts to monitor progress:

- List the **plans for a given period** in the **first column.**

- Write the date of the **follow-up meeting** on the **top of the second column.**

- Discuss **problems** and **constraints** that the group has encountered.

- Discuss what they can do differently next time.

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Comparing progress against targets (Continued)

Develop simple charts to monitor progress (Continued)

Once the members have reached agreement on the results, ask them to **draw in the third column** a **symbol representing their judgment** (e.g. a smiley face).

Elements of monitoring

- **Regular recording of information** (every day)
  Using a **calendar** is a good way of recording the information

- **Monitoring of the results** (e.g. the number of hens)

- **Monitoring inputs** (e.g. feed and water) and the **outputs** (e.g. the number of eggs produced)

- A **comparison of the actual output against a target** (e.g. 20 eggs a day)

- A **recommendation for action** to solve a problem

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Summarizing information

At the end of each week (or month, or production period), the data can be summarized to:

- Make it easy to see trends

- Distribute profits

- Plan for the future

Using symbols instead of numbers: Examples

Eggs produced	
Eggs broken	
Eggs consumed	
Eggs sold	

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Self-evaluation

- The **purpose of self-evaluation** is to help the group to improve itself.
- **Use simple methods for evaluation,** which the members can do themselves, e.g. **asking a series of questions** with **four possible replies.** All members have to agree on the final answer.
- **Use a series of such questions** to measure the group's progress over time.

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Looking back and looking forward: Questions

- Is the group satisfied with the year's activities?
- What went right and 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?
- What is the outlook for the next year: Should they repeat the activities they did this year; expand them; do something new?

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Evaluating service providers

Service providers include:

- Input suppliers
- Financial services
- Traders
- Business partners
- The group promoter/field agent

The group has to decide if they are happy with the services that they have received from these service providers.

Module 4: Communication and networking

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Module content

Module 4 describes how to help the group handle the relationships among its members and with outsiders. It covers the following content:

- Lesson 14: Conflict and negotiation

- Lesson 15: Communication

- Lesson 16: Helping groups grow

- Lesson 17: Second-order associations

Lesson 14:
Conflict and negotiation

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Outcomes

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 things to think of when negotiating with traders.

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Overview

Lesson 14 covers the following content:

- Conflict can be good
- Types of conflict
- Resolving conflict
- Collaborative negotiation
- Basic patterns of facilitation
- Steps in successful negotiation
- Compromise and consensus
- Negotiating with traders

Conflict can be good

Conflict is **natural** and **inevitable.** It can also be good for the group, in that it gives the group more **options** to choose from – particularly if people are prepared to **voice** their **opinions.**

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Conflict can be good (Continued)

The question is:

- Handle conflict so that it does **not harm the group dynamics**

- **Harness** it so that the **whole group benefits** from the conflict

Areas and causes of conflict

- Conflict can be **simple** (e.g. a disagreement over the price of a product) or **complicated** (e.g. disputes over land rights).

- Conflict can have a **long history** (e.g. a feud between neighbors) or come out of nowhere.

- Conflict can be **trivial** (e.g. an argument about the name of the group) or **important** (e.g. the focus area of the group).

- Conflict can involve **two or more parties** (individuals or groups with differing positions).

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Types of conflict

- **Internal conflict:**

  Conflict among group members

- **External conflict:**
  Conflict between the group and other parties

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Resolving conflict

If the **chairperson** cannot resolve the conflict, it may be necessary to bring in **outsiders, for example:**

- The facilitator or group promoter
- Traditional leaders
- Conflict resolution specialists
- Legal channels

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Collaborative negotiation

- Collaborative negotiation aims at reaching **agreement where everyone wins. All the parties:**
  - Explain their interests
  - Propose satisfactory solutions
  - Are prepared to renounce some of their interests
- **Communication** plays a very important role.
- The negotiation process involves **discussion(s)** and **reducing tension.**
- In collaborative negotiations, **all parties agree to make concessions.**

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Face-to-face facilitation

One of the parties facilitates negotiations between itself and the other parties.

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Face-to-face facilitation: Options

Options for managing the face-to-face facilitation 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 two options**

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Impartial third-party facilitation

- The **parties agree to allow a neutral facilitator** to **facilitate negotiations.**

- This person may be an **insider** – a person known to the parties – or an **outsider** (i.e. person whom the parties do not know).

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Five steps in successful collaborative negotiation

1. **Analyze the situation**

2. **Set the rules:** Issues; timelines, methods; negotiators

3. **Explain the interests:** Proposals; points of view of the problem; requirements

4. **Bargain and reach agreement:** Critical step that is often full of tension

5. **Make a commitment** and formalize the agreement

Negotiation:
1. Analyze situation
2. Set rules
3. Explain interests
4. Bargain and agree
5. Commit

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Compromise and consensus

- 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.

Compromise = ☹ + ☺ = 😐
Consensus = ☺ + ☺ = 😃

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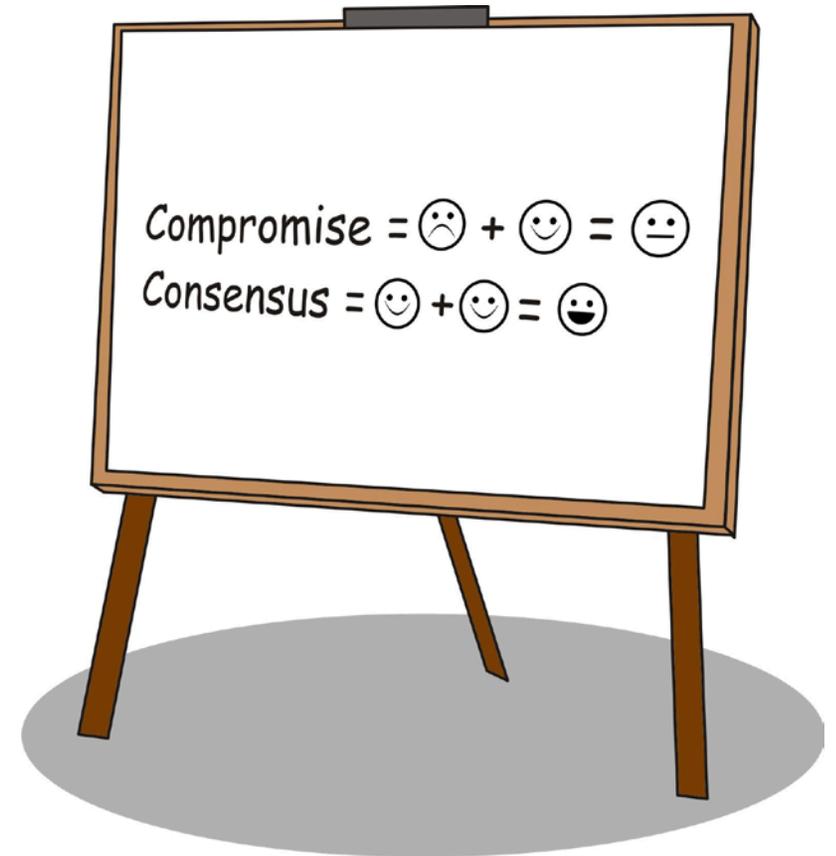
Benefits of collaborative negotiation

- 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 **communicate openly** and try to **understand one another's viewpoints** and interests.
- In this way, the group can reach a **common agreement to conflict.**

Negotiating with traders

Groups that market their produce have to negotiate with traders about:

- Prices
- Quantity and quality of produce
- Delivery dates
- Payment terms

Both traders and farmers use their own **tricks** to get the highest profit for themselves.

The **two sides should trust each other** and realize that they **both should benefit** from the relationship.

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Negotiating with traders: Farmers' tricks

- Putting the **best produce at the top of the bag** and the worst at the bottom
- **Adding stones or sand to sacks** to increase their weight
- **Mixing good-quality with inferior products**
- Agreeing on a price with one trader, then sell to someone else
- **Accepting credit** from a trader, then **refusing to repay the loan**

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Ideas for farmers when negotiating with traders

- Get accurate, up-to-date information
- Maintain contacts with several traders
- Always have alternatives
- Be a reliable supplier
- Think long-term
- Sell as group in bulk
- Sell part first
- Find ways to boost value
- Look for win-win solutions with traders
- Build mutual trust between farmers and the trader
- Learn from your mistakes

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Sales contracts

The sales contract specifies:

- Quantity quality, the price of the product
- Delivery dates, payment terms and other details

The contract should be signed by the **group representative** and the **trader,** as well as an independent **witness.**

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Sales contracts (Continued)

There is no point in entering into contracts if:

- The trader is unreliable; or

- The contract cannot be legally enforced.

All contracts should have a **force majeure clause,** which frees the farmers from the contract obligations if there are factors out of their control.

Lesson 15: Communication

Outcomes

After this lesson you will be able to:

- Describe how to communicate in the group.

- Describe how to communicate with partner organizations (reporting, feedback).

- Describe how to lobby with government authorities.

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Overview

Lesson 15 covers the following content:

- Good communication
- Audiences and messages for communication
- Communicating with outsiders and peers
- Internal communication
- Communication is two-way
- Meetings and records
- Demonstrations, cross-visits and open days
- Mobile phones and radio
- Computers and the Internet
- Photographs

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Good communication

Good communication **strengthens relations between group members.**

Working together as equals in the group helps to build **confidence** and **cooperation,** which, in turn, **makes the group successful.**

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Good communication: Two-way communication

Communication needs to be two way:

- Group leaders should discuss the group's affairs with the members
- Members should discuss freely with their leaders.

Audiences for communication

- **Influential organizations:** Government; donors; supporters (e.g. international and national NGOs)

- **Financial services:** Banks; microfinance institutions

- **Business partners:** Potential and actual customers; traders; input suppliers

- **Peers:** Other farmers; community members

- **Internal audiences:** Officers and group members

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Different audiences, different messages

Audience	Types of information
Influential persons:	Registration documents; constitution; list of members; minutes; annual evaluation
Financial services:	Financial reports; business plan; production and marketing reports
Business partners:	Production plans; contracts
Peers:	Activity plans; constitution; bylaws
Internal audiences:	Activity plans; monitoring information; skills training

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Communicating with outsiders

	The **chairperson** and **secretary** provide 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**.

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Communicating with peers

Rural people are often very good at passing on information to each other, but when it comes to **group activities,** the communication must be conducted very **systematically.**

Communicating with peers (Continued)

**Group members must be informed about:**

- Date, place and time of meetings
- Expected production and harvesting dates

Some groups appoint a **messenger** to inform members about activities.

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Communication is a two-way process

- Communication involves **sharing information** and **learning** by both parties.

- The group should try to **learn about others' needs** and to **explore new opportunities.**

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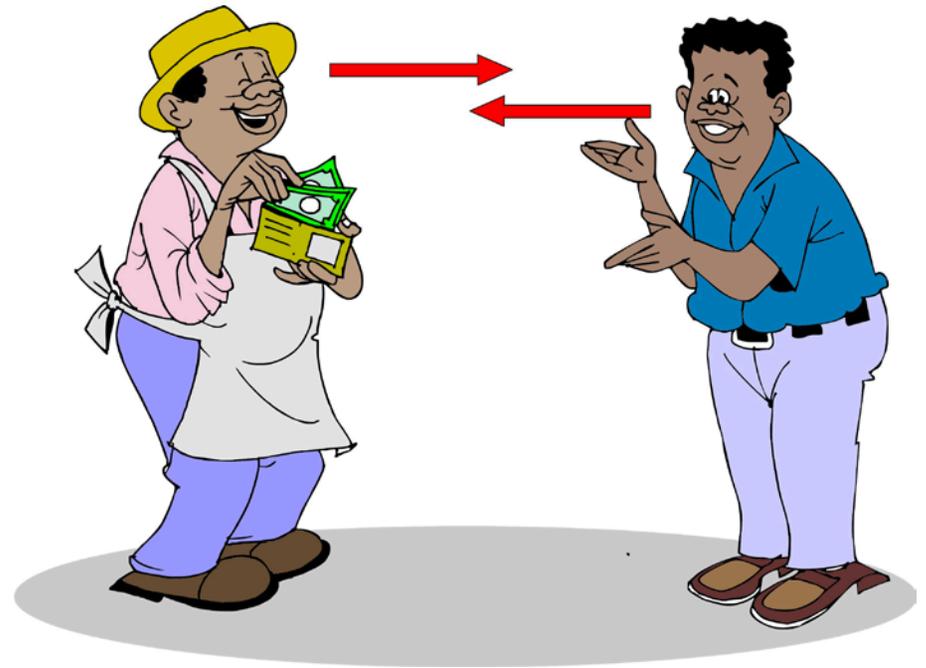
Meetings and records

Meetings:

- Enable the **officers to learn from the members**
- **Explain issues** and get their opinions
- Give everyone the **opportunity to hear the news**
- Express their **views** and **contribute to decisions**

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Meetings and records (Continued)

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

Demonstrations, cross-visits and open days

- **Demonstrations, cross-visits** and **open days** can be arranged for **outsiders to see the results and progress of the group's work.** Such visits should be planned to **coincide with particular stages of the production cycle,** e.g. for crops: planting, flowering or harvest.

- **Group members can volunteer to give demonstrations** or informal presentations on a particular technique.

- Group members can go on **cross-visits to other farmers' groups,** research institutions and markets.

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Communicating via mobile phones

Mobile phones can be used in the following ways:

- Voice calls
- Text messages (SMS)
- Social media (Facebook and Twitter)
- Sending feedback to service providers
- Web-based services
- Money transfer

Radio

- Many **radio stations broadcast programs that interest farmers,** e.g. weather forecasts, market information and technical advice.

- In many countries, **community radio stations** broadcast programs that are locally relevant.

- Farmers' groups can contact such radio stations to give them feedback on programs.

Computers and the Internet

Computers and the Internet require:

- Equipment
- Software
- Skills: Computer literacy
- Services
- Supplies
- A safe place
- Money
- Infrastructure: Electricity; a phone line or mobile network, etc.

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Photographs

Many **mobile phones have built-in cameras,** which makes it easy for members to take and share photographs and even video.

Photos can be used for:

• Important events
• Technical photos
• Training courses
• Fundraising
• Marketing

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Lesson 16:
Helping groups grow

Outcomes

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.

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Overview

Lesson 16 covers the following content:

- Self-reliance and sustainability

- Expanding and diversifying existing activities

- The feasibility study

- Adding activities and adding members

- Building confidence and self-esteem

- Measuring self-reliance

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Self-reliance and sustainability

As the group matures, the members will:

- Learn how to work together efficiently
- Get better at planning, keeping records, managing money and selling products
- Gain benefits and earn bigger profits

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Expanding and diversifying

Expanding or diversifying current activities may increase the group's risk in the following ways:

- Selling the same product to different markets

- Diversifying into related products or activities

- Diversifying into new products and markets, using the expertise they have learned

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The feasibility study

Before expanding to new areas, the group should do a feasibility study to investigate:

- Is there a market

- Does the group have enough time and resources?

- Do the tasks have to be divided?

- Can the group manage a bigger loan?

Adding activities

The group may want to consider the following possibilities:

- Savings and credit
- Marketing
- Natural resource management
- Innovation
- Focusing on other areas, e.g. building community infrastructure; securing land rights; supporting less-fortunate community members

Adding group members: Disadvantages of groups becoming too big

Disadvantages of group becoming too big:

- It becomes harder to coordinate the group.

- Members are more likely to have different interests' so conflict becomes more likely.

- Existing members may think the newcomers are taking a free ride on their hard work and initiative.

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Options for adding group members

The following are options if the group grows too big:

- **Split the group into two** and allow newcomers to join either group.
- **Start a completely new group for the newcomers,** while the old group acts as advisors and mentors to the new group.
- **Divide the original group into smaller units** of three or four members each.
- **Divide the group into smaller sub-groups** that work together in an association of groups or as a cooperative.

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Building confidence and self-esteem

- Recognize group members' knowledge and skills and the positive aspects of their group or enterprise
- Help them recognize weaker points, but be sensitive about discussing low achievement
- Emphasize that setbacks or failures should be seen as useful lessons that help the group avoid further failures

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Measuring self-reliance

Use the following indicators to measure progress and self-reliance:

- Regularity of group meetings
- Level of member attendance
- Shared leadership and member participation in group decision-making
- Continuous growth in group savings
- High rates of loan repayment
- Increasing re-investment
- Group problem-solving
- Effective links with development services

Lesson 17:
Second-order associations

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Outcomes

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.

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Overview

Lesson 17 covers the following content:

- Several groups, common goals
- Promoting cooperation among groups
- Forming a second-order association
- Decision-making committees of a second-order association
- The general assembly of members
- The executive and management committee
- Constitution and records
- Paying for association activities
- Farmer cooperatives
- Third-order associations

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Several groups, common goals

Groups with common interest may:

- Be working on the **same issue** (e.g. controlling erosion).
- They **may be producing and marketing the same commodity** (e.g. maize or fish).
- **Have an interest in the same resource** (e.g. an area of grazing land).
- **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, e.g. bad roads, poor market infrastructure.

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Promoting cooperation among groups

Encourage groups to:

- Exchange ideas or products

- Solve problems

- Coordinate activities

- Get outside support

Forming a second-order association

A second-order association:

- Is **more powerful than single groups**
- Can **bring together the capital** and **resources** needed to build facilities
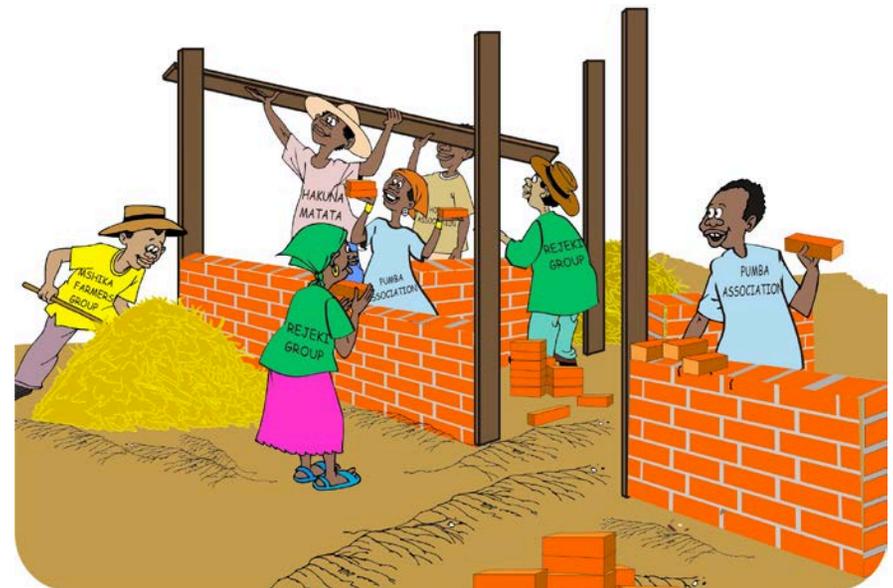
Forming a second-order association (Continued)

A second-order association:

- Has **more bargaining power with traders** and input suppliers
- Is **an attractive partner for government** and development agencies

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The general assembly of members

The general assembly should:

- Be **made up of all the members of the groups** that belong to the association
- Be the **main decision-making body**
- **Meet once or twice a year** to decide on important matters, e.g. new activities and changes to the rules or constitution

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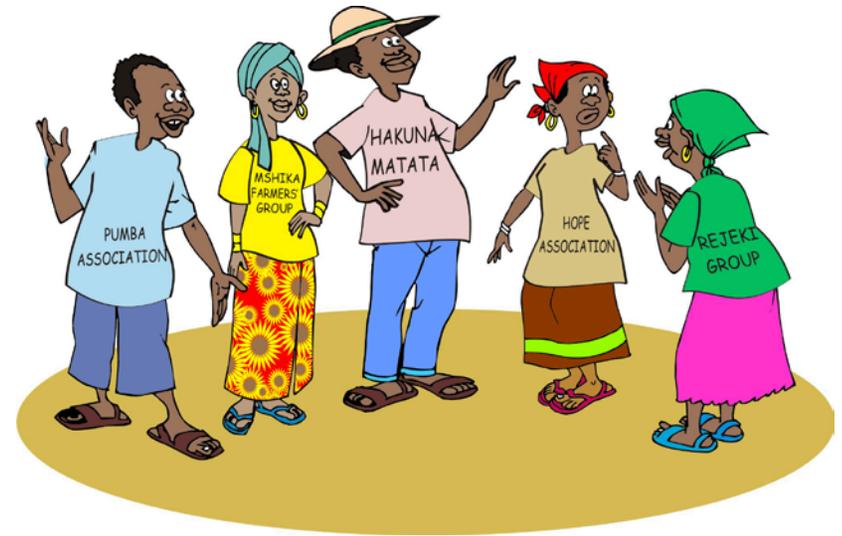
The executive committee

- **Consists of one or more representatives** from each of the member groups.

- **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.

The management committee: Structure

- The Committee has a **chairperson, secretary** and **treasurer,** who represent and manage the association on a day-to-day basis.

- It may also **be necessary to have a vice-chair** and sometimes a **volunteer** or a paid "manager" to assist them.

- If needed, **additional sub-committees can be added,** e.g. an education or a marketing sub-committee.

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Management committee: Reporting structure

The management committee should report regularly on its activities and transactions to:

- The executive committee

- All member groups.

The committee must:

- Conduct its affairs in a transparent manner

- Maintain the trust of its member groups

Management committee: Constitution and records

The association should have its own:

- Constitution
- Bylaws
- Record-keeping procedures
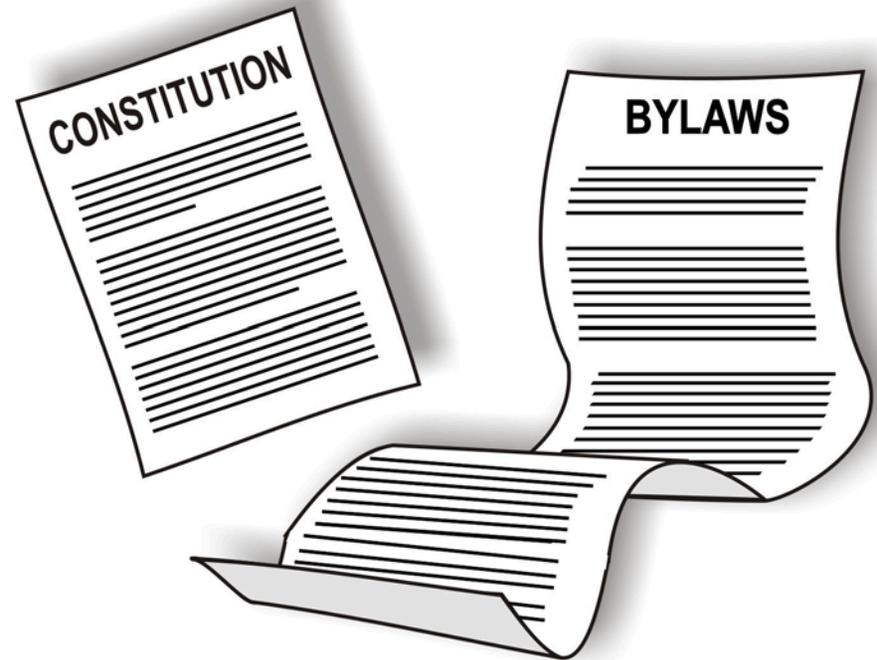
Size of second-order associations

- Associations whose **member groups are within easy walking distance of each other** do better than groups spread over a wide area.

- Small second-order associations, with a **few member groups** (e.g. 3–10 groups), are recommended.

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Size of second-order associations (Continued)

Large distances between groups:

- Make communication between groups more difficult

- Discourage members from taking part in decision-making.

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Paying for association services

Associations need income to:

- Grow

- Serve the interests of their members

Money is needed to pay the running costs, for example:

- o Pens

- o Record books

- o An emergency fund

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Paying for association services (Continued)

The money for paying for association services can come from:

- o Group contributions
- o Fees for services to members
- o Profits from association activities

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Farmer cooperatives

Farmer cooperatives offer their members:

- Access to new technologies, veterinary services and basic inputs at lower market costs

- Extension service support for production

- Financial support for loans and profitability analysis

- Storage and crop conditioning facilities

- Market information and support

- Access to loans, insurance and warehouse receipt options

- Support for certification

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)

Module summary

In this module, you have learned:

- Analyzing problems, identifying solutions and developing action plans

- Implementing the action plan and overcoming problems

- Ways of monitoring group activities and progress

- Managing conflict by means of collaborative negotiation

- Communication within the group and with partner organizations

- Networking with other farmers' groups

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