



***Linking Local Learners:
Building Knowledge
Management Strategies
for Effective Rural
Development in East
Africa.***

*Progress Report.
Activities from January to
April 2006.*

April 2006

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SUMMARY

Linking Local Learners (LLL) is a learning methodology which combines face-to-face action learning with online peer-to-peer sharing of ideas. LLL provides an operational tool for building a knowledge management strategy among rural people. LLL allows local actors to exchange experiences by including modern ICTs in their dealings with each other, and thereby generate relevant content for their development efforts. The ICT technologies are evolving very dynamically alongside the efforts of this program. Considerable potential exists for the integration of market services and ICT services. Our field study concluded that rural ICT centres can become sustainable if: 1) the level of awareness of the general population of the potential benefits is raised, and 2) there is sufficient reliable and relevant local content. An interaction with the telecom industry needs to be sought in order to ensure that the real needs are properly understood by the designers of the equipment, the software programmers and the infrastructure operators.

So far a training resources CD has been produced that allows practitioners to grasp and implement the Linking Local Learners methodology and read up on success stories and links. Results from a recent assessment workshop have pointed out the large potential impact that can be achieved by linking up groups of learners all concerned with improving market linkages over an exchange platform and tapping into the dynamics of the mobiles and SMS. What has also become obvious is that energy for learning among farmers and service providers is concentrated where the biggest income can be generated: in this case making market transactions more efficient. The large income margins that have been generated by more efficient linking have convinced several District-level groups who broker these linkages to consider going commercial and establish themselves as Rural Service Companies. Two workshops following similar lines conducted in Uganda have resulted in strong commitments at the farmer, district and national level to better organize the learning and exchange for increasing efficiencies along the marketing chains, or even build new chains.

The learning teams presently active and taking care of the continuing exchange are “Demand Driven Services”, “First Mile Market Linkages” and “Information and Communication Enterprises”. The three teams pool their knowledge at www.linkinglearners.net. The focus of effort is on developing the mentoring capacity in these teams in order to achieve local competence in mentoring and generate the relevant stories and debates that push along the peer-to-peer learning on topics that interest the learners, be they farmer groups, district level fledgling Rural Service Companies, or project field-staff. Current learning topics include, but are not restricted to: a) how to maximize adding value to raw produce, b) how to find new customers like processors and big buyers, c) how to prepare market information for sharing using mobile phones and internet, d) how to get loans from microfinance institutions, e) how to organise and run effective warehouse receipt systems and savings and credit societies, e) how to run business platforms to sustain and grow market chains, and f) how to set up a Rural Service Company. A set of stories and briefings are already available on the website, and others are continuously added. They serve both as endpoints and as starting points for learning debates. The internal organization of the program is established through coordination meetings and of course online exchange between ISG, Agridea and FAO. The strategic and conceptual efforts are such that they will inform the design of a larger program envisioned by IFAD to build knowledge management strategies for effective rural development.

1. Linking Local Learners Training Resources CD

Starting in January and continuing through to March Clive Lightfoot and Anne Dennig worked on producing a training resources CD. The training resources are designed for local resource persons to train others in their organizations or programmes and also be able to respond to local requests for training within their countries. The CD covers the complete field of Linking Local Learning methodology; both face-to-face action learning processes as well as the internet supported peer-to-peer learning process. Topics covered include concepts of linked local learning, organization for learning, sharing over the internet, facilitating learning workshops, and practices for local learning in improving market linkages and improving demand driven services. The trainers using the CD are provided with guidelines, slide shows and handouts as well as templates and further reading. A copy of the CD is provided so only titles of the sections and training guides included on the CD are given below.

MAIN SECTION	SUB SECTION	TRAINING GUIDES
Concepts of LLL	Principles	Understanding the Principles of Linked Local Learning
	Behaviour	Developing Codes of Conduct on Learning Behaviour
	Linking	Understanding Important Links for Successful Linked Local Learning
	Process	Understanding the Local Action Learning Process
Practice of local learning	Vision	Developing Farmers' Future Visions for their Farms and Village Developing Service Providers' Future Vision for Responsive Services Identifying Current Challenges in Marketing Developing Key Players' Future Visions for Improved Market Linkages
	Ideas	Identifying Local Actions and Farmers' Service Demands Identifying Practical Ideas for Improving Market Linkages
	Partnerships	Identifying Farmer and Service Provider Partnerships for Action Building Partnerships for Improved Marketing
	Reflection	Reflecting on Environmental and Economic Impact of Local Action
Organization for learning	Learning groups	Organizing a Local Learning Group
	Communication plans	Identifying Ways of improving Local Access to Modern Communication Technologies
	Documenting experiences	Writing Up Learning Experiences and Impacts

Sharing peer-to-peer	Internet learning service	Understanding the LLL Internet Learning Support Service
	People and contact tool	Using the Internet Learning Support People and Contact Tools
	Discussion tool	Using the Internet Learning Support Discussion Tool
	Library tool	Using the Internet Learning Support Library Tool
	Search tool	Using the Internet Learning Support Search Tool
Facilitating learning workshops	Planning & managing	Planning a Learning Workshop Preparing for a Learning Workshop Developing a Learning Framework
	Facilitation skills	Enhancing Facilitation Skills
	Quality control	Understanding Participants' Expectations Monitoring Participants' Moods Participants' Evaluation

So far one hundred copies have been distributed to potential resources persons in Tanzania and fifty copies in Uganda. A further fifty copies will be distributed to those involved in the LLL work in Kenya including the participants of the FAO Rural Knowledge Network project. Some twenty copies have been distributed to interested people or institutions including IFAD staff.

2. Linking Local Learners Assessment Workshop Tanzania.

From March 22nd to 24th sixty one participants of the AMSDP who had been involved in the 'First Mile' Project came together in Morogoro to assess the project. The participants, who were mainly members of the district core groups, were asked to assess how face-to-face action learning and peer-to-peer internet exchanges implemented in the First Mile Project improved small holder farmers access to markets and market information. The workshop was facilitated by Clive Lightfoot, Ueli Scheuermeier and Anne Dennig. We are pleased to report that Nathaniel Katilina, Programme coordinator, Vincon Nyimbo, Agricultural Marketing Specialist, Zipphora Mwakajwanga and Marwa Moses, Zonal Commercial Officers of the AMSDP programme agreed to provide leadership in Tanzania for the Knowledge Management Strategies work. Details of the assessment workshop can be found in the proceedings so only a short summary is reported here.

2.1. Objectives of the Assessment Workshop

The objectives of the workshop were to assess how face-to-face action learning and peer-to-peer internet exchanges implemented in the First Mile Project improved market linkages and access to market information. The assessment focussed on the extent to which these activities opened up new opportunities, reduced transaction costs in marketing; and increased use of modern ICT's for business. The workshop also identified innovations, or best practices, in marketing generated action plans on how innovation in marketing services can be sustained.

2.2. The Workshop Process

The workshop ran over three days from Wednesday 22nd March to Friday 24th March. It proceeded first to look at what has been achieved by the district core groups over the twelve months of the first mile project. It then went on to identify and document the innovations or best practices that were of interest to the participants. For the second half the workshop

focussed on what district core groups needed to learn to develop successful rural business. And finally to develop action plans to make sure that core groups gain the capacities they need to operate as commercial businesses before 2009.

The main business of the first day saw district groups prepare posters of their achievements since the beginning of the first mile project in June 2005 covering the: a) development of the district learning networks, b) development of market chains, c) changes in volume of commodities marketed and incomes of producer groups resulting from this, and d) the changes in access to the internet. In the afternoon the posters were displayed to enable exchange between groups in a 'trade fair' exchange session. Each district agreed to have one member man their stall while the others visited all the other stalls to gather information. After the 'fair' each district decided on the two topics they would like to learn about most from the district stalls they had visited. Their two requests went into a 'drop box'.

The 'drop box' contributions provided the focus for mixed discussion groups on the second day. Each discussion group prepared posters of best practices in the following topics:

- How to form and strengthen core groups and networks
- How to Establish and Operate a Market Centres Network
- How to organize or start warehouse receipt system and SACCOS
- How to negotiate deals with big traders/processors
- How to Operate a system with Mkulima Shushushu
- How to start marketing new commodities.

In the afternoon participants returned to their district groups and discussed what they needed to learn to operate a commercial service in marketing in their district. In plenary each district read out their list of learning needs. Each need was recorded on flip charts developing a matrix of learning needs by districts.

The matrix of learning needs by districts was used to structure the development of action plans on the last day. Teams for the preparation of action plans on top priority learning needs were then formed. Action plans were prepared recognizing that others not in the group would also want to learn the same topic. Participants developed a 'learning contract' between themselves to ensure they shared their experiences through the internet. The last session of the assessment workshop led by the AMSDP staff reviewed what steps would be necessary to set up private commercial Rural Service Companies in the Districts. AMSDP made clear that there are a number of options on the type of company that could be set up. These options could include: Sole proprietor, Partnerships, Limited Company or commercial arm of an NGO. Some of the important steps that district core groups would have to go through were identified as follows:

- Explore options for structure of the RSC with AMSDP and District Trade/Commercial officers
- Seek technical assistance on preparation of business enterprise
- Seek legal advice on registration process requirements (like office location, etc).
- Promote and raise awareness of your business idea.

The workshop closed with speeches from the observers from Uganda, Peru and IFAD.

2.3. Outputs of the Assessment Workshop

Outputs of the group work undertaken during the assessment workshop clearly showed a) the level of development of core groups and their networks in each district, b) the current access and ideas to improve access to the internet in each district, c) the level of development of market chains in each district, and d) the impact on marketed production and producer group incomes in each district.

Six best practices were documented by experienced districts as follows:

- How to negotiate deals with big traders or processors by Muheza and Songea districts
- How to form and strengthen core groups and networks by Babati district
- How to organize or start a warehouse receipt system and SACCOS by Mbarali and Hai districts
- How to establish and operate a market centres network by Babati district
- How to start marketing new commodities by Arumeru and Hai districts
- How to operate a system with mkulima shushushu by Mufindi district

Learning needs were identified by members of each district team and action plans were developed by the cross district teams for meeting their learning needs in the following topics:

- How to prepare market information, documenting and sharing using mobile phones and internet
- How to prepare a business plan for a rural services company and key players in the chain
- How to get loans from microfinance institutions for developing market chains
- How to organise and run effective warehouse receipt systems and SACCOS
- How to set up business platform to sustain and grow chains
- How to extend the network in the district
- How to organise and run a rural service company

Next steps to follow up on the action plans for learning were developed by the cross district teams. The final output was the participants' own evaluation of the workshop. Details of all these outputs can be found in the proceedings of the assessment workshop.

3. Field Study on Viability of Rural ICT Centres

Galin Kora of Gartner Lee Ltd, Canada, conducted a field study in Tanzania from March 20th to 28th with local consultant Mark Farahani of Kilosa District on the viability of commercial rural ICT centers in Tanzania. The field study included interviews in Dar es Salaam with Costech and other telecoms industry representatives as well as a field trip to Morogoro and Kilosa to see rural commercial internet cafés and interview local authorities. The consultants were asked to look at: a) the challenges in setting up and running a commercial internet café in rural areas, b) strategies for closing the firstmile gap particularly what can be done to link SMS to internet databases, and c) how local government IT strategies can foster private commercial ventures in rural knowledge management services. A full report of the field study has been provided and it can also be found on the www.linkinglearners.net website. Only conclusions of field study are reported below.

3.1. Sustainability of Rural ICT Centres

Rural ICT centres can become sustainable given time and appropriate support. The time needed will mainly depend on two factors. First, the level of ICT awareness of the general population both in terms of using the ICT based tools and the potential benefits of the ICT tools. The second factor is the presence of reliable and relevant local content.

In order to transform rural peoples access to computers and Internet into meaningful and sustainable usage, there is a need for raising awareness of: a) the presence of the ICTs in the community (to be addressed through the promotion of the ICT centre), b) the use and the benefits of ICTs (to be addressed through training, information sessions), and c) the existence of reliable and relevant local content (to be addressed through promotion, information sessions, etc). Being new types of businesses in the rural areas, the rural ICT centres will need some initial financial support (i.e. easy access to loans, financial incentives, etc.) and at the same time will need guidance and advice.

3.2. Role of Local Government

The government can play a positive role in the introduction of ICT centres in the rural areas in different ways. These could include, but not be limited to:

- Policies and regulations (e.g. use of VoIP, providing incentives for service providers to provide services to rural areas, facilitate dissemination of information between different rural and non-rural ICT centres, etc),
- Encourage and support the creation of public-private partnerships (i.e. where possible and feasible, purchase bandwidth from the local ISP), and
- Promote the use of ICT tools in all aspects of life (i.e. leading by example, providing different e-Government services, etc.).

3.3. Mobile Phones and SMS

Due to their relatively low cost and accessibility, mobile phones and SMS could play a role in providing various services in rural areas. In order to increase their use, attention should be focused on:

- Providing better and more reliable coverage,
- Providing micro-financing schemes to facilitate the purchase of mobile phones,
- Training the potential users on how to access different services through mobile phones and SMS, and
- Providing alternative power solutions to increase the reliability of mobile phones.

4. LLL Trade Fair Workshops in Uganda

From April 10th to 21st Clive Lightfoot and Anne Dennig visited Uganda to assess the activities and impact of local learning groups in NAADS, Farmer Field Schools, UNFFE and DATICS. After the first meeting in Kampala it became very clear that NAADS and the Farmer Field Schools had been most active and were most committed to building a knowledge network in Uganda focussing on improving market linkages. The meeting requested that we conduct two ‘Morogoro Trade Fair’ style workshops one in Soroti and one in Bushenyi. The objectives of these ‘Trade Fair’ Workshops were to a) review the level of development of marketing chains in the district, b) derive the way forward for strengthening of marketing chains in the district, and c) document and share success stories and experiences

of Associations in the district. Following the workshops on the 13th to 14th March in Soroti and 19th to 20th March in Bushenyi we added UNFEE district branch offices to the learning team in Uganda. NAADS not only arranged for the two workshops including covering all local costs but also agreed to provide long term logistical support to Knowledge Management work in Uganda.

Of greater significance is the commitment of NAADS at secretariat and district levels to support the development of market linkages. NAADS District coordinators agreed to: a) organise core teams of five to eight members including traders, service providers and higher level farmer association representatives, b) train core team and association information person in LLL, and c) circulate results of the workshop trade fair. The NAADS Secretariat said they would: a) review district action plans and brief the NAADS secretariat, b) identify interventions at the secretariat level, c) formulate NAADS activity plan and financing, and d) organise a follow up workshop in June/July. A draft of the NAADS plan and budget has been provided separately. Proceedings of the two workshops have been provided and they can also be found on the www.linkinglearners.net website. Only summaries of the two workshops are reported here.

4.1. Workshop on Strengthening Market Linkages in Soroti.

On April 13th and 14th thirty eight participants including representatives from FAO Farmer Field Schools, Farmer Associations: Gweri Dairy Farmers Association, Abuket Sweet Potato Association, Dakabela Rural Women Development Association, Teso Tropical Fruit Growers Association, UNFEE Soroti District Farmers Association, NAADS coordinators at district and sub-county levels as well as chairperson of sub-county Farmer Forums, and service providers: Vaqua Inter Consult, Teso Private Sector Development Centre, ARK Development Services, SODIFA, Cross Jordan Foundation and the Department of Agriculture met at the Uganda Flying School in Soroti for a workshop on strengthening market linkages. This workshop was organized by Charles Aben, NAADS coordinator in Soroti District and John Wakikona from the NAADS secretariat. The workshop was facilitated by Clive Lightfoot and Anne Dennig with the assistance of James Okoth of the FAO Farmer Field Schools Network in Uganda.

The workshop participants examined the existing marketing situation for the four associations represented: Orange, Dairy, Sweet Potato and Honey. They came up with ideas to strengthen their marketing and developed action plans in the following areas:

- How to find and link up with processors, wholesalers and big buyers
- How to improve the quality of the products
- How to prepare a business plan to get the equipment needed
- How to strengthen our higher level associations
- How to organise collective marketing strategy for the association
- How to maximize adding value to our raw product including packaging and labelling
- How to set up a market information system

Each association identified the way forward for Higher Level Associations as follows:

- The Sweet Potato Association will: a) strengthen the membership of the Association through subscription by new groups and individuals, b) find alternative market for the dried sweet potato chips, c) improve on packaging and labelling of all the sweet potato products, and d) revamp and strengthen the existing leadership of the Association.

- The Oranges Association will: a) convene meeting of all Citrus growers from the different sub counties, b) recruit other members into the Association from those who have not joined the Association but are involved in Citrus growing, and c) set up a committee that will work on the Action Plan developed at the workshop.
- The Milk Association will: a) hold a meeting of association members to review action plan developed at workshop, b) Collect funds to construct two milk collection centers, c) follow up with NUSAF on proposal for milk cooler purchase and installation.
- The Bee Keepers Association will: a) review the organisation of Soroti Integrated Honey Bee Keepers Association (SIBA), b) finalise the substantive leadership of SIBA, c) put a three year business plan in place, d) establish information contact points and functional offices, e) increase emphasis on payment of registration of more members under SIBA, f) ensure adoption of improved methods of bee keeping for quality products that can earn better market.

4.2. Workshop on Strengthening Market Linkages in Bushenyi

From the 19th to 20th April 1 thirty four representatives from producer groups of honey, milk and Banana/Plantains along with NAADS District and sub county coordinators, NAADS sub county farmer forum chair persons, District Commercial Officer and Agriculture Officer and Service providers: MOFATE, BUDFA, KBFA, ASASURIDE participated in a workshop at West Ankole Diocese Training Center in Bushenyi District. The workshop was organized by John Wakikona NAADS enterprise development advisor and Patrick Kamwezi, NAADS coordinator in Bushenyi District and his staff. The workshop was facilitated by Clive Lightfoot and Anne Dennig with the assistance of Charles Aben from NAADS.

The participants examined the existing marketing situation for Banana/Plantain Producer groups, Dairy Association, and Honey Association members and came up with the following ideas to Strengthen Marketing for their Higher Level Associations:

- How to strengthen associations for joint and common marketing.
- How to add value to raw products and diversifying product range.
- How to improve the quality of the product.
- How to improve packaging materials, containers and labels.
- How to get processing equipment.
- How to develop more formal contractual agreements with big buyers.
- How to find new customers in supermarkets and exports.

Each association developed action plans for strengthening market chains and first steps for their associations as follows:

- The Honey Association will first: a) sensitize their members on joint marketing, b) develop business plan to mobilize resources for proper offices and communication equipment, c) conduct data gathering tours of members, and d) conduct a study visit to Soroti on beehive making.
- The Dairy Association will first: a) continue with its on-going market research, b) circulate business plan to potential investors, c) Procure needed processing equipment, and d) begin production of yoghurt.

- The Banana/Plantain Producers will first: a) sensitize farmer groups about joint marketing, b) request sub-county farmer fora to convene meeting of growers to start getting organised in marketing, c) identify pilot sub-counties to start joint marketing, and d) conduct market intelligence visit to Kampala.

5. Mentoring Local Learning Groups

Online mentoring using the internet learning support tools on the LLL platform at www.linkinglearners.net of local learning groups in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania is organized into three Communities of Practice as follows: Demand Driven Services, First Mile Market Linkages, and Information and Communication Enterprises. Mentoring involves weekly coaching of local learners and resource persons on: a) priority learning areas, b) documentation of experiences, impacts and good practice. Some thirty seven new contact persons have been registered on the first mile team most of whom are members of the AMSDP district core group networks of producers, traders and processors. Eight farmer groups from Kilosa have been registered to this team as well. Following the visit to Uganda fourteen people, mostly from farmer associations, NAADS or private service providers have been registered. Four new learning areas have been added to the demand driven services team following workshops in Uganda. At the assessment workshop last March in Tanzania seven new priority learning areas were added to the first mile market linkages team.

5.1. Demand Driven Services Team

At the recent LLL workshops in Soroti and Bushenyi Districts in Uganda on strengthening market linkages the participants decided they wanted to learn “how to maximize adding value to their raw produce”. Over the next six to nine months the various producer associations in Soroti will focus on the following activities:

- Sweet potato and Dairy Associations will in March and April contact local private lab to get product composition test for UNBS on sweet potato flour and milk products.
- Sweet potato and Dairy Associations will in March and April get information for labels (Names Orgn, dates Trade marks).
- Sweet potato, Honey and Dairy Associations will in April to June identify types of packaging material that is suitable for each product and find out quantity and size required by the processors or consumers.
- Sweet potato Association will in April to June identify the appropriate apparatus required for sealing packages for sweet potato products.
- Sweet potato Association will in April contract technical person to train members on post harvest handling and storage.

In Bushenyi the Banana and Plantain Marketing Association executive committee and farmer groups will from July to December: a) carry out training on quality control practices starting in the field; b) conduct market research on values of packaged products; c) check on standardization and certification with UNBS; and d) acquire equipment like sealing machine, labelling machine and weighing scales with the appropriate packaging materials. While BATA the Bushenyi Apiculture Trust Association executive committee will:

- Conduct market research.
- Acquire modern packaging materials and labels.
- Mobilise resources/funds.

- Establish SACCOS.

Dairy, Sweet Potato, Orange and Honey associations wanted to learn “how to improve the quality of their product. Dairy Association members will ensure high quality milk determined by: white colour, density, butter fat content, no smell, sweet taste and UNBS standards compliance. In order to achieve this, the executive committee will mobilise funds with NUSAF, select a site and hire contractor to install cooling plant, while the members will:

- improve health and nutrition of milkers by correct disease and parasite control, provide balanced nutrition and observe hygiene & sanitation.
- purchase of proper packaging materials for yoghurt and ghee making.
- mobilize funds to purchase good crates and packs for their milk.

Sweet Potato quality is determined by uniform colour and size, pest & diseases free, absence of chemical residues and UNBS compliant moisture content. Individual members will ensure high quality by selecting proper size tubers and using quality slicing machines for correct thickness of slice. Meanwhile the Association executive will purchase good quality packaging paper for use by the members and make available to members the newly constructed warehouse.

Members of the Soroti Orange Association will ensure high quality fruits through correct variety selection, proper budding and selecting only ripe fruits at harvest. They will also use proper sorting and grading techniques using only correct sizes of fruits. The executive committee will purchase recommended materials for packing fruits for use by all members and purchase good crates for transportation of fruits.

High quality honey determined by dark brown colour, honey smell, and 80% Brix by UNBS refractometer if members provide: a) storage of comb honey that is free from insects, and b) storage of liquid honey at 37°C with no direct light and free from any scent. Soroti Honey Association executives will promote use of quantity bottles at standard capacities and standard levelling. Activities of BATA to ensure quality in Bushenyi are to:

- Hold sensitization meeting with members.
- Prepare Business plan for determining resource mobilization strategy.
- Develop local capacity to construct modern beehives Langstroth, Dadant types.
- Purchase equipment, refractometer, clothing, hive tools, air tight buckets for honey storage for members.
- Construct storage facility.

Most associations in Soroti and Bushenyi wanted to learn “how to find new customers like processors, wholesalers and big buyers”. To do this they decided to taken on the following activities:

- Association leadership and members at Sub county level identify the production potential of all their members.
- Associations will form a leadership committee to carry out the partnership negotiations.
- Leadership committee get information from news papers, radio and media houses, stakeholders’ in our market chain and from the internet on potential new customers.
- Association secretariat follow up with contacts on new customers.

- Association secretariat convene regular meetings with members to decide on next steps.
- Leadership committee negotiate with designated new customers like processors, wholesalers and big buyers.

Many associations want to increase the profits of producers by processing their own crops. Learning “how to get the processing equipment needed” is a priority learning topic. Getting into processing is a big step so for most it requires the preparation of a business plan. Activities for specially appointed committee members to prepare a business plan were as follows:

- Survey available of equipment and consult on durability of equipment and appropriateness by interviewing potential suppliers, people already with knowledge on equipment. Surf for information from manufacturers on internet.
- Find technical experts in Business Plan preparation and conduct stakeholders consultative meeting.
- Gather information needed in Business Plan and conduct stakeholders consultative meeting.
- Write draft Business Plan with assistance from consultants.
- Present the draft Business plan for approval by the General Assembly of Association members.
- Write up the Final Business Plan.
- Share the Business Plan for possible funding with donor projects, Government programmes (NUSAF), and local financial Institutions.

Bushenyi Dairy Cooperative Union (BUDICU) have already prepared their business plan and are now ready to conduct the following activities:

- Identify and specify type of equipment: pasteuriser, manual scaler, alloy milk cans, buckets, packaging materials, cooler box.
- Contact the supplier: Snowmans food and technical services.
- Enter contract agreement with the supplier ‘Snowmans’ to supply the equipment.
- Procure, install and commissioning of the equipment with ‘Snowmans’.

5.2. First Mile Learning Team

At the end of the LLL assessment workshop AMSDP District core group members discussed what they needed to learn to ensure that the impact they had achieved would be sustained in the long run. They agreed that sustaining the impact beyond the life of the AMSDP would require the establishment of commercial rural services companies. They realized that their network of clients or customers would have to grow significantly. New skills in how to prepare business plans and how to access loans would also have to be learned. How they proposed to go about learning these things over the next six months is explained below:

- How to prepare market information for sharing using mobile phones and internet: Core groups, market chain key players will a) identify sources and types of information needed, b) document key information, and c) share of information among market centres and key players.
- How to prepare a business plan for a rural services company: District Focal Person’s, Partner Agencies and other core group members will a) search for information on how

to prepare business plans, b) prepare a business plan for interested key players in a market chain, and c) share experiences and results of business plan with other districts.

- How to get loans from microfinance institutions for developing market chains: Core groups and key players will: a) contact microfinance bodies to know their working procedures and policies, b) organize workshop for all stakeholders working on microfinance and market chains, and c) exchange experience among the districts concerning microfinance assistance.
- How to organise and run effective warehouse receipt systems and SACCOS: Partner Agencies will: a) gather information from areas which have experienced and achieved the warehouse system, b) find out conditions for running strong SACCOS in consultation with ACE and AMSDP, and c) arrange study tour to places which have successful warehouse receipt systems and SACCOS.
- How to run business platforms to sustain and grow market chains: Core groups will a: undertake rapid market analysis to identify key market chain actors, b) convene one business platform meeting involving all concerned stakeholders, c) follow up and monitor progress and c) conduct an evaluation of performance of business platform.
- How to extend the network in the District: District Focal Persons and Partner Agencies will: a) identify stakeholders in the district through questionnaire and face to face meetings, b) identify means of communication between network members ie. Cell phones, billboards, c) document and share information between network members using mobile and internet, and d) monitor and evaluate network performance.
- How to set up a Rural Service Company: Core group members will: a) conduct a survey on ICT providers/existing ICT business to identify viable partners, b) identify interested people/individuals to start up a services company, c) convene stakeholders meeting in the district and discuss the possibility of partnership or other form for the company, d) form a working group to establish a rural services company, and e) consult and register the business and acquisition of a TIN number, tax clearance, licence, etc.,.

The district core groups involved in developing the action plans reported above decided to adopt a learning contract between them. They agreed that a special code of conduct for their behaviour was needed to ensure successful peer-to-peer learning. The code of conduct included the following commitments:

- Aim for monthly and weekly exchange over the internet
- Share any information that you think other districts will might find useful
- Share your plans for making trials
- Share achievements of each activity
- Respond to the questions from other groups
- Make sure that you make real experience in the learning area on a small scale at first
- Make “wake up” call to Districts who are not responding on the exchange schedules
- Organise a reflection process by the end of the action learning period.

6. Circulation of Briefs, Interviews and Stories

During the visits to Tanzania and Uganda Anne Dennig took five interviews in Tanzania and nine in Uganda. Ten of these interviews and photographic record provided the basis for the following stories:

- Higher Quality Brings Higher Prices the Nkasi Sardine Story by Salvatory Mayoka and Pirmim Matumizi, Nkasi District Core Group, Tanzania.
- Adding Value to Plantains the Banana Wine Story by John Kapanze, Bushenyi, Uganda.
- Organizing Beekeepers the Story of Connoisseur Honey Association in Bushenyi by Elly Mugisha, Manager Connoisseur Honeys, Nyakabirizi, Bushenyi, Uganda
- Organizing Small Holder Milk Production the BUDICU Union Story by Steven Ndiango, Secretary Manager of Budico Union, Bushenyi, Uganda
- Getting a Dairy Association Going the Story of Gweri Dairy and Mixed Farmers' Association by Nelson Omoding, Gweri Dairy & Farmers Association, Soroti, Uganda.
- Marketing the Challenge of Fruit Growers in Soroti by Charles Sorawera, Teso Tropical Fruit Growers, Soroti, Uganda.
- Private Sector Support to Honey Producers in Soroti District by Dan Edepu, TESO Private Sector Development Centre, Soroti, Uganda.
- From Farmer Field School to Association the Story of Abuket Sweet Potato Association by Eugene Ekinyu, Abuket Sweet Potato Association, Kyere, Soroti, Uganda.
- Women's Organization to Access Markets the Dakabela Rural Women's Development Association Story by Winnie Asege, Dakabela Rural Women's Development Association, Soroti, Uganda.
- Agricultural Modernization the NAADS experience in Asuret Sub-County by John Onangole, NAADS coordinator, Asuret Sub County, Soroti, Uganda

All these stories are soon to be made available on the www.linkinglearners.net website.

Two briefing notes have been prepared and circulated to the donors of the Neuchatel Initiative by Clive Lightfoot. The circulation has been increased to include a wide range of institutions in East Africa as well as outside that have expressed interest in Knowledge Management Strategies for rural development. Full versions of these briefings can be found on the www.linkinglearners.net website, so only a short introduction is provided here. Two more are being drafted. One highlights the new learning areas in the Demand Driven Services and First Mile teams, and the other announces the availability of the LLL training resources CD.

6.1. Briefing Note 12: Current Status and Achievements of Linking Local Learners.

Linking Local Learners (LLL) is a learning environment which combines face-to-face action learning with online peer-to-peer sharing of ideas. Local learning groups of some ten to twenty people who live and work in the same place use this learning environment to improve their own activities and realize their future visions. They exchange their ideas and experiences with similar groups in other places online. They also coach and advise each other as peers on how they can be more successful in their activities. Linked local learning groups make

progress because they pool their ‘doledge,’ or competencies to do things, with so many others. Collectively, linked local learning groups form a virtual knowledge network. Linking Local Learners (LLL), the internet learning support platform, currently has some one hundred and seventy six registered learners in its three virtual “Communities of Practice”. The largest COP “Demand Driven Service” is shared by eighty eight members who are improving the practice of establishing demand driven agricultural services to small farmers. It operates in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania where demand driven services have become a key agricultural policy for their governments. Operating in the same countries the smallest COP “Information and Communication Enterprises” has thirty two members improving the practice of setting up and running local internet cafés and farmer news services. “First Mile”, the second largest COP, has fifty six members whose practices is improving market linkages. It only operates in Tanzania.

6.2. Briefing Note 13: Emerging Ideas on Commercialization of Support Services

Most strategies for sustainability rely on government and NGO operated services with a commercial potential to become privatized. The private commercial providers are expected to sustain themselves through a combination of cost sharing with the public for taking care of any public interest, and fully paid services for purely private benefit. Most of the strategies contemplated by public agencies depend heavily on the public purse to survive. There are payments to farmers, payments to civil servants leaving their positions to join the private sector, and payments to bureaucrats to manage the privatization. A further weakness of these strategies is that they contain too few incentives for NGO or government employees to consider going private. “Privatization” therefore needs a new paradigm. A paradigm that would make sure that: a) services start off as private enterprises from the very beginning; b) whatever services can be commercially viable operate as for-profit enterprises only; c) services to the disadvantaged should still be offered on a private basis with the public interest being ensured through private-public partnerships; and d) a private business exists to back stop and upgrade the capacity and competence of service providers.

7. The Project Coordination Team Meetings

A meeting of the Knowledge Management Strategies project coordination team was held in Rome at IFAD and FAO from April 25th to 28th. The meeting was attended by Clive Lightfoot, Ueli Scheuermeier and Kevin Gallagher representing ISG, Agridea and FAO respectively. Both CTA and the Danish Agricultural Advisory Service have withdrawn from the coordination team as they have no funds to support their participation. Being in Rome the opportunity was taken to engage in lengthy discussions with FAO as well as IFAD staff working in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. The meeting included a presentation of the ‘First Mile’ project to interested IFAD staff on Friday 28th April.

7.1. Decisions of the First Coordinators Meeting

The meeting was opened with discussions to clarify the work plan and budget of the project as well as the roles and tasks of the coordinators. The coordinators agreed on the deliverables and deadlines. Changes were made to the schedule of activities concerning the assessment visit to Kenya and the next coordinator meeting. It was decided that the Kenya assessment visit would take place at the same time as the FAO Rural Knowledge Network project inception workshop. The date for the second coordinators meeting would also be confirmed at that workshop.

It was decided that the roles for mentors would be to: a) guide and encourage learners to participate in discussions on relevant learning topics, b) suggest links to other experts who can help the learning group, c) suggest links to sources of information on other websites, d) edit and encourage groups to write up their experiences, good practice, and impact stories, e) identify and solve second generation problems in use of internet learning support service, and f) identify and engage new learning groups especially those of marginalized people and women farmers. The following allocation of learning groups was decided:

- Kevin Gallagher will mentor the Farmer Field School groups in Kenya with Godrick Khisa in Kenya James Okoth in Uganda and Thomas Julianus in Tanzania.
- Ueli Scheuermeier will mentor the Firstmile and ASPS groups in Tanzania with Mark Farahani.
- Clive Lightfoot will mentor the NAADS with John Waikikona and Charles Aben in Uganda.
- Clive Lightfoot will mentor the Farmer groups in Kenya with James Kanye.

Each week mentors were expected to read all updates in all learning areas their groups are involved with, as well as clean up and reorganize discussion threads of their learning areas. On a monthly basis mentors should formulate and email suggestions including expert contacts and URLs to useful websites and assist groups write up their stories. They should also summarise discussion in their learning topics when necessary.

A meeting was held with Kevin Gallagher, Peter Kenmore and Stephen Rudgard at FAO on Wednesday 26th on the implementation of the Rural Knowledge Network project. We agreed that the two projects should work closely together. A start on this would be made by combining the KMS assessment visit to Kenya with the RKN inception workshop. We also discussed modalities for us to undertake the main international contracts on:

- Participatory field-level assessments of small-holder information needs through analysis of the decisions and actions they take on their farms (building on the information and knowledge emerging from the Farmer Field School and other projects).
- Internet support to provide email based communication forums and various training activities for stakeholders. Contract staff should participate in various national and regional workshops.

A meeting was held with Ides DeWillebois and Louise McDonald on the next steps for the continuation of the First Mile project in Tanzania on Thursday 27th. It was recognized that the ball was now with AMSDP and it was up to them to suggest a new set of activities for the first mile project. Once their suggestions are made then IFAD will contact us for the preparation of an appropriate proposal for IFAD to submit to the SDC for funding. In the meantime it was agreed that we would use Knowledge Management Strategies project resources to respond to AMSDP request for further mentoring support for learning areas emerging out of Morogoro assessment workshop.

Interactions on Thursday and Friday with IFAD staff resulted in the following decisions:

- We would share KMS and FAO RKN project documents with Marian Bradley and inform her as soon as a date was set for the RKN inception workshop in Kenya so that invitations for IFAD programme partners in Kenya to attend the inception workshop could be made.
- Our meeting with Miriam Okong'o informed her of the role NAADS is playing in providing leadership to the KMS activities in Uganda. Miriam informed us of developments in the planned Agricultural Marketing and Agricultural Processing Support Programme. It was decided that the LLL work had produced experiences that could be incorporated into the new programme.
- We met with Mohamed Manssouri and Norman Messer who expressed interest in inserting LLL into the Ghana Roots and Tubers SME programme. Suggested next steps were for contact to be established between us and the Ghana PDIP as well as a visit for the PDIP team to the AMSDP in Tanzania. Should the Ghanaians show interest then we would participate in the project inception workshop.
- Raul Hopkins expressed an interest in us providing local learning support to FIDAMERICA around the themes of market access and ICT use.

7.2. First Mile Project Presentation

Clive Lightfoot and Ueli Scheuermeier presented the following highlights of the First Mile Project:

- Impact on the ground and future potential highlighting: a) increased production due to better marketing, b) 1.8 Mio USD more earned by farmers in 9 months, and c) best practices developed.
- Underlying factors for this success highlighting: a) sharing across Districts, b) key institutions warehouses & SACCOS, c) establishing core-groups that do the market research, identify key players, convene business platforms, and broker along chains, d) the “mobiles” explosion in East Africa, and e) market chain conceived as a cooperative effort instead of everybody cheats everybody.
- How to get it started highlighting: a) get a core-group going of 3-5 entrepreneurially minded people, b) core group sets up its own learning connections for its R&D with experienced core groups in other districts, c) core group decides which commodities to start with and analyses the chains, d) core group contacts farmer groups (and their associations) and other key players along the chain and convenes key players for defining common vision and action plan.
- What do we know about sustainability, upscaling and replication highlighting the findings that: a) core groups must operate as commercial entities, b) core groups must be linked into a learning network of core groups, c) core groups must include or partner with local ICT providers, d) core groups must build strong networks of producers and chain-actors, e) core groups must have advertising concept involving radio, website, and trade fairs, f) backup must be organized from national level, g) policy environment must be conducive for private commercial operations, and h) public funding agencies must engage in “Local Public-Private-Partnerships” for incubating the emergence of commercially viable core-groups.

7.3. Postponed Field Assessment Visit to Kenya.

The field visit to Kenya planned for 1st to 10th May has been postponed. The visit will now take place at the same time as the inception workshop of FAO's Rural Knowledge Network Project. The field visit will still assess the activities and impact of local learning groups in Farmer Field Schools, KENFAP, LISSA and Mount Kenya Farmers Network in Kenya. Still included will be trips to assess the activities of LISSA in Limuru and the Mount Kenya farmers' network in Nyeri where consultants will record changes on the ground through pictures and taped interviews. An opportunity will also be created to provide local mentors with a refresher course on using the LLL platform and the new Training Resources CD.

7.4. Challenges Ahead

As we look forward to implementing the second half of the project we see a number of challenges that we can only begin to address in the next six months. The first of these is how to increase capability of local mentors to use the training resources CD effectively given that they have only received a brief introduction to its contents and not the 'hands on' training originally planned? We need to make a step ahead on this or else the detailed mentoring will continue to depend too much on expensive outside facilitators. We need to be able to retreat one step back into a role that supports local mentors as opposed to doing their work. Linked to this is the challenge of finding the right people for local mentors. Finding those who are willing to learn how to continue to provide these services on a sustained commercial basis has been too much a hit and miss process. This is the sustainability strategy that we need to explore and test for continuing to operate the crucial functions of mentoring in Knowledge Management Strategies.

So far, innovations in approaches have largely been exchanged in face-to-face settings when actually exchange could be much more efficient and effective for scaling up if it were enhanced with online-peer exchange. This appears to be a mindset challenge. The jump from sharing in the deeply entrenched workshop manner to a more open-ended asynchronous type of sharing has still to occur for many local learners. We need to work on the capability of local learners to document and share over the internet the results of the action plans they have set for themselves.

A further but related challenge is how to scale up the documentation of experiences and stories by engaging local journalists and developing links to radio stations. Local radio, SMS and internet probably have a huge untapped potential for creating the locally relevant content that is so important for allowing villagers and service providers to create their own income generating ventures. However, radio, internet and SMS alone are very limited. It is the synergies between the three that can make the impact with villagers. Cooperating with the radio people is a must. What goes on the air depends on good local journalism which in turn depends on good relevant experiences. We need to seek opportunities to experiment with such cooperation.

Lastly, though not within the remit of this project, we see the need for interaction with the telecom industry to ensure that the needs identified in LLL experiences are properly understood. Already we observe that serious misconceptions exist in the industry of the way villagers use ICTs and about their potential future communicational needs, and certainly also in the operational requirements for running the equipment on a sustained basis. We need to seek opportunities for these interactions to occur.