

Title of the Grant: Building Knowledge Management Strategies for Effective Rural Development in East Africa

Recipient: International Support Group (ISG) - a non-profit association registered in the Netherlands (Reg N^o: V508021 Chamber of Commerce, Eemland, Netherlands).

Collaborating Partners: the Swiss Centre for Agricultural Extension and Rural Development (Agridea), UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Danish Agricultural Advisory Service (DAAS), the Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA)

Countries Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania

Objectives of the Grant: The ultimate goal of the project is to see that poor farmers in East Africa have improved access to services and markets. In order to achieve this, the project's immediate objective is to enable groups of farmers and service providers in East Africa to exchange ideas and experiences on how to improve access to services and markets. The following outputs will contribute to achieving the objective:

- Useful exchanges between farmers, service providers and project staff using the internet. Including a knowledge management system for linking local learners operating, and at least 100 groups exchanging experiences.
- A local capacity for up-scaling peer-to-peer learning in East Africa region. Including a number of local trainers certified, and training resources being used by local trainers
- Donors and governments understand how to support learning approaches and policy implications. Including concepts and operations simplified for general presentation and increased donor and government interest in peer-to-peer learning

Rationale for IFAD: IFAD's Strategic Framework and the Regional Strategy for Eastern and Southern Africa emphasize the importance of farmers and their organizations gaining the skills, knowledge and organization to access ideas and experiences that help them reduce their poverty. One of the elements for achieving this is to enable farmers to develop their own approaches to knowledge networking. The proposed project provides an important model of such a network and, critically, one that is focused on, and owned by, groups of small farmers. It will inform and contribute to the operationalisation of the soon-to-start up TAG-financed Rural Knowledge Network; it will add value to ongoing IFAD-supported projects and programmes in the region, to which it will link up; and it will provide important lessons to the Division for future programme design and for the emergence of its broader knowledge management strategy.

Within the framework of the Neuchatel Initiative (of which IFAD is a member), PF joined SIDA, DANIDA, the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) and the World Bank, to explore the issue of demand-driven services for small farmers in East Africa. Building upon earlier work on local learning in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania by ISG, together with the Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation (CTA), FAO and DANIDA, in 2004 IFAD made available limited funds to ISG to pursue a pilot initiative aimed at promoting action learning methods based on peer-to-peer exchange amongst involved farmers and service providers. The initiative, which fitted within the larger, multi-donor initiative (and was initially funded for a one year period), sought to support each of these groups: assisting them to develop into 'learning teams'; training their representatives in the use of computers; and mentoring web-based learning and communication between groups through the dedicated website [www.linkinglearners.net].

A total of 71 (50 men and 21 women) representatives of local learning groups (drawn from larger groups of farmer field school or self help groups, or government, NGO or private service organizations) were trained in basic computer use. Following the training, the groups, which range in size from 10-30, meet for the most part on a monthly basis. There are thus a total of 1200-1500 individuals effectively participating in the LLL process. Most of the groups access the internet at internet cafés, at their own expense, and on average once a week. A number of groups are now planning to purchase their own computers / establish their own internet cafés. None of the groups were supported directly by IFAD or any other donor. Many, however, did get support through on going projects that IFAD has funded, including the FAO-initiated farmer field school programme for East Africa and the NAADS programme in Uganda.

The website, based on one developed by the Swiss NGO Helvetas, is ultimately intended to be accessible via a range of other websites (e.g. NAADS, KENFAP, etc). The website is made up of three separate elements: an e-mail facility (the 'People' tool); a discussion forum (the 'Discussion' tool), and a data base (the 'Library' tool): it is the first two that are the most used by groups members, and there is currently an active dialogue going on in a range of key areas identified by the groups themselves. Priorities include topics such as how to raise funds for farmers group activities, how to sustain farmers groups, and how to increase access to markets.

The initiative is much appreciated by participants, on one hand as a vehicle for learning and for exchange of information and experiences between groups; but on the other, as an empowering process. Participants are excited at using computers, at being able to access information from the world wide web, and at being able to communicate with each other (many of the participants had never used a computer prior to the training). A first assessment of this peer-to-peer learning approach by the users themselves showed considerable promise for involving farmers and service providers in knowledge management.

PF considers that this peer-to-peer learning approach needs further trial and application in a wider range of programmes. The proposed support, as well as that provided by the other partners in the larger programme, will link up to a range of projects and programmes including, in Uganda the National Agricultural Advisory Services project (NAADS), the District Development Support Project (DDSP) and the proposed Marketing Support Programme; in Tanzania the Agricultural Services Support Programme (ASSP) and the Agricultural Marketing Systems Development Programme (AMSDP); and in Kenya the South Nyanza Community Development Project (SNCDP). At the same time, the evolving experience is expected to feed into the TAG-financed, FAO-implemented East African Rural Knowledge Network which is due to start shortly, and which is likely to require substantial redesign to maximise its effectiveness.

Workplan and Schedule of Activities:

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 organized into three Communities of Practice as follows: Demand Driven Services, First Mile Market Linkages, and Information and Communication Enterprises. Weekly coaching of local learners and resource persons on: a) current discussion topics, b) documentation of impact statements, and c) documentation of good practice. In addition to coaching will address demand from local learning groups for more key players to become

proficient in the use of the internet learning support service. Updating of LLL website, registration of new learners and updating of contacts database, organization of discussion threads and management of electronic library including preparation of discussion summaries. The estimated level of effort is approximately eight person days per month. Across all three teams we have a target of at least 200 groups exchanging experiences in at least 15 ongoing discussions producing some 50 documented contributions to the library.

Schedule: March to August.

Deliverables: Summaries of discussions and database of library documents on impact and practices, and contacts on Demand Driven Services, First Mile Market Linkages, and Information and Communication Enterprises team hosted at the LLL platform www.linkinglearners.net and accessible through IFAD website.

Develop Training Resources CD: Prepare a training resources CD for local resource persons to train others in the LLL methodology covering both face-to-face action learning processes as well as the internet supported peer-to-peer learning process. Training resources to comprise of guidelines to trainers, Slide shows and Handouts for trainees, as well as Templates and further reading for trainers. Topics covered in the CD are 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.

Schedule: January 1st to March 15th.

Deliverables: 200 copies of Training Resources CD.

Field Assessment Visit to Kenya: Field Visits to assess activities and impact of local learning groups in Farmer Field Schools, KENFAP, LISSA and Mount Kenya Farmers Network in Kenya. Visit to comprise of trips to assess the activities of the learning groups of the Farmer Field Schools in Kakamega, LISSA in Limuru and the Mount Kenya farmers' network in Nyeri. Provide local mentors to all local learning groups with a refresher course on using the LLL platform and the new Training Resources CD. During the visit consultants will record changes on the ground through pictures and taped interviews as well as arrange for Kakamega Farmer Field School Network to provide long term logistical support to Knowledge Management work in Kenya.

Schedule: May 1st to May 10th.

Deliverables: Assessment report drawing from the field visit experiences as well as feedback obtained during the LLL mentor training.

Assessment Workshop and Field Visits to Tanzania: ISG in consultation with AMSDP and IFAD will develop a design for the user's assessment workshop and prepare materials for the workshop. They will facilitate the workshop for the staff of AMSDP and representatives of the learning groups involved in the project from 22nd to 24th March 2006. Participants invited to the assessment include three person teams selected by AMSDP to represent core team, farmer groups and key players from each of the fourteen districts. Invitations will be made to the six new districts in the northern zone not involved in the project to send a representative to observe the final day of the workshop. In addition to these, other observers to be invited for the closing day include donors, government, private banks and industry. The overall assessment question to be addressed is: How did the internet supported local learning package of practices improve market linkages and access to information about markets and marketing? Sub questions to this are: To what extent did 'firstmile' reduce the transaction costs of marketing or reduce market inefficiencies or exploitation? To what extent did 'firstmile' increase use of modern ICT's for market business use? In making their assessments users will

be asked not only to examine their actual impact but also their potential for impact within their districts. The process for the assessment workshop will be as follows:

- Day 1: Plenary presentations and discussions by each district team on both the extent to which firstmile project expectations have been met, as well as their potential from the perspectives of the different key players (core group, producers, other key players).
- Day 2: Brainstorming in groups to analyze potential for: 1) reducing transaction costs in marketing, 2) reducing market exploitation and inefficiencies, 3) increasing use of modern ICT's for business, and an open space to brainstorm topics emerging from the workshop itself.
- Day 3. Plenary debate on good ideas on how the potentials identified can be realized in a sustainable manner beyond 2009.

Following the assessment workshops visits will assess activities and impact of local learning groups involved in the Demand Driven Services team in Morogoro and Mbeya regions, including the Farmer Field School groups from Kagera, and local learning teams involved in the First Mile Market linkages team in Arusha. During the visit consultants will record changes on the ground through pictures and taped interviews as well as arrange for AMSDP/ASSP? to provide long term logistical support to Knowledge Management work in Tanzania.

An information and communications consultancy will also be combined with this visit. The consultant will explore in Dar es Salaam with Costech and other telecoms industry representatives as well as make a field trip to rural commercial internet café in Kilosa the following:

- Setting up and running a commercial internet café. What are the questions that need to be clear before starting an internet cafe? What is required for sound market research and sound business plan development? What are the data requirements for these?
- Strategies for closing the firstmile gap. What can be done to link SMS to internet databases like our www.linkinglearners.net service? How to use the SMS to cross the first mile?
- Key points for local government (Districts) IT strategies. How district IT strategies can foster private commercial ventures in rural knowledge management services?

Schedule: March 19th to March 31st.

Deliverables: An assessment report drawing on the proceedings of the workshop and the field visit reports including a report on the information and communications consultancy.

Field Visit to Uganda and training of IFAD Programmes: Field visit to assess the activities and impact of local learning groups in NAADS, Farmer Field Schools, UNFFE and DATICS. Visit to comprise of a two day meeting with representatives from IFAD programmes NAADS, AMPT and DDSP as well as UNFEE, DATICS and FFS. Meetings will arrange for NAADS to provide long term logistical support to Knowledge Management work in Uganda. During the visit to NAADS and FFS learning groups in Soroti District consultants will record changes on the ground through pictures and taped interviews.

A three day training of trainers course in how to use the new LLL training resources CD to build local capacity to facilitate local action learning processes as well as internet supported peer-to-peer learning follows the field visits. Participants to be selected from resource persons serving IFAD supported programmes as follows: NAADS, AMPT and DDSP. Training to be organized and hosted by the NAADS at the Global Learning Centre at the Ugandan Management Institute in Kampala. Target of training at least 20 resource persons from IFAD programmes and 5 resource persons from the FFS.

Schedule: April 10th to April 21st.

Deliverables: Assessment report drawing from the field visit experiences as well as the proceedings of mentor training course.

Circulation of regular briefs to donors and governments: Prepare briefs in the form of short policy notes, impact statements, and interviews with local learners on topics of wide significance emerging from the peer-to-peer dialogue of local learning on how to improve demand driven services, market linkages and local information and communication enterprises. Target of producing and circulating to donors and governments at least 40 briefs.

Schedule: January 1st to July 30th.

Deliverables: 12 policy briefs, 10 impact statements and 18 interviews.

Convene meetings of the coordination team: Meetings of the Knowledge Management coordination team comprising ISG, Agridea, FAO and other interested collaborating organizations namely CTA and DAAS. Coordinators to discuss and develop inputs for the mid term and end of project reports. Target for three meetings as follows: first meeting in Switzerland at the start of the project, at mid term in Rome and the end of the project meeting in Rome.

Schedule: April 27th- 28th; June 12th -13th; and August 1st-2nd.

Deliverables: Mid term project report and Final project report.