

## 2 | Farmer-led documentation

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Documentation can be defined as a process to capture information – in written, visual, audio and/or electronic form – about, for example, a place, an object, a practice, a product or an event for the purposes of learning and/or sharing or for recording of intellectual property.

There is increasing acceptance of the relevance of local knowledge, capacities and experiences in the design and implementation of rural and urban development programmes, as evident from the rapidly expanding literature on participatory development and research approaches. However, the study and documentation of these has remained largely in the hands of development professionals. Local realities are often framed, analysed and understood through the eyes of outsiders, leaving the local people as bystanders who simply provide information and data for others to record. The different and rich forms of expression and documentation used by local people are rarely recognised and harnessed.

In farmer-led documentation (FLD), outsiders recognise the inherent capacities of local people in documenting their own experiences. They stimulate a process in which local communities take the lead in documentation and use the results for purposes of internal learning and exchange within and between communities, and with others such as development workers, researchers and policymakers. FLD ensures that relevant experiences and good practices at the community level are made visible and thereby contribute to furthering the agenda of farmer-led agricultural development.

There are various reasons for encouraging farmers to do their own documentation or to take the lead in joint documentation with other stakeholders. FLD helps to mobilise and make explicit the knowledge and experiences of local people based on their own rationale – an aspect that could be missed out when the documentation process is controlled by outsiders. The authenticity of the information and messages coming out of FLD, expressed in the words and concepts of those directly involved, particularly in the case of audiovisuals, tends to be more convincing to recipients, both within and outside the communities. At a deeper level, FLD strives to strengthen the capacity and confidence of communities to reflect on and improve their situation and to communicate these efforts more widely, strengthening their position in collaboration and negotiation with development support agencies and the government at large.

The bottom line, however, is that FLD should be of interest to farmers themselves, an issue sometimes overlooked by FLD enthusiasts. What interest do farmers have in documentation? Do they want to preserve traditional knowledge? Do they want to communicate their needs to external stakeholders in an effective way? Are they looking for better ways to share their experiences and innovations with other farmers and support agencies? Reflecting on such questions with communities is important for development practitioners who wish to promote FLD.

There are no limits to the type of documentation tools and methods one can use in FLD. Traditionally communities have often kept "records" of important events or knowledge through stories, dances, drawings or songs. More recently, developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) have made digital video/photo cameras very accessible both in terms of costs and user-friendliness and the mobile phone has become a major communication tool. In practice, it is the increased accessibility of ICT-based documentation tools that has spurred the interest of development practitioners in FLD, as is evident from the cases in this and other publications (see Annex 2).

As in all discussions on participatory approaches, the use of the concept "farmer-led" merits further analysis. The concept means different things to different people. In analysing the concept of participation in general, four levels or forms are often distinguished (Biggs 1989):

- Contractual: Outsiders use the facilities and/or resources of local people for carrying out activities
- Consultative: Outsiders consult local people to identify issues and experiences and then carry out activities
- Collaborative: Outsider and local people work together in the design and carrying out of the activities as equal partners
- Collegial: Outsiders encourage and support activities carried out by local people themselves.

From the description of FLD above, it is clear that the ambition is to initiate a process that is at least collaborative to start with but strives to be collegial. It should move away from researchers, development agents or media people taking photos, making video or audio recordings or writing stories about farmers, and move towards farmers doing such documentation themselves or, at least, having the first and final word as to what is depicted and quoted, and how. This does not mean that documentation activities in the consultative mode are not useful or effective. On the contrary, they can and do play a major role, depending on the purpose and context of the documentation process. But the challenge for proponents of FLD is to ensure that the process becomes collaborative or even collegial, whilst reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of FLD in comparison to documentation of local experiences by outsiders.

In this context, FLD practitioners should not forget that farmers are themselves developing new forms of documentation without outside support. These could be variations on traditional forms or even more modern forms of communication. Recognising and supporting such endogenous forms of documentation in the process of FLD would actually put farmers in the leading role right from the start and facilitate collegial participation in the process.

## **PROLINNOVA's experiences in FLD**

Partners of the PROLINNOVA network give high importance to the study and documentation of local innovators, their innovative practices and the process of innovation. Initially, this process was mainly in the hands of the partners, who led

the documentation process. The network was challenged to review this situation for the first time during its international partners meeting in 2004. A staff member of Insight – an NGO involved in people-centred documentation – presented how, in well-facilitated participatory video (PV), farmers can have a much larger role in the study and documentation of local experiences. After this event, PROLINNOVA and Insight collaborated in a number of joint activities to increase awareness of PV within the network, including a joint international PV capacity-building workshop in Ghana and the publication of a handbook on participatory video (Lunch & Lunch 2006).



Farmers learning to use a video camera during PV training in North Ghana (photo: Chesha Wettasinha)

Work by Agrecol-Andes (a partner in PROLINNOVA-Andes) in collaboration with the International Institute for Communication and Development, giving farmers and communities a central role in documenting their own experiences using modern ICT-related technologies (Piepenstock A et al 2006), won the Yeomans Award for Local Content in 2005. This made others in the network realise that there could be a range of approaches and methods that fundamentally reverse the roles in documentation. It encouraged them to initiate a journey to explore such approaches and methods which was referred to within PROLINNOVA as FLD.

In early 2006, the network found eager partners in PELUM-Uganda (Participatory Ecological Land-use Management network – Uganda Chapter) and the Netherlands-based NGO Oxfam Novib in this journey. As a first step, the partners searched internationally for experiences that were in some way affiliated to the dynamics of FLD and brought representatives from the relevant organisations

together in an international review and capacity-building workshop in Uganda. This led to the first joint publication on FLD, *Farmer-led Documentation for Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management* (PELUM-Uganda 2007), which focused on the main principles and assumptions of FLD, its benefits and key actors, methods and tools as well as issues of sustainability.

Soon after the workshop, PELUM-Uganda and Oxfam Novib called on their partners to use FLD in their own programmes through a number of funded pilot activities. This call was well received and a number of pilots were undertaken. Table 1 summarises the features of the six main pilots.

**Table 1: FLD pilots 2007-09 by PELUM-Uganda and Oxfam Novib partners**

Lead partner	Country	Years	Focus of FLD and tools used
Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmer's Forum	Zambia	2008	Digital photos and notebooks for documenting conservation-farming experiences to adapt to climate change
Ugunja Community Resource Centre	Kenya	2009	Videos, photos, notebooks and a register for documenting farmer innovation in soil fertility management
Rural Empowerment Network	Uganda	2007	Digital photos to create farmer-relevant documentation on agriculture in Kayunga District, linked to a question-and-answer service
Laela Institute of Sustainable Agriculture	Tanzania	2008-09	Digital photos, audio recordings and write-ups to document and promote local farming innovations
Green Living Movement	Zambia	2008-09	Audio-recording of stories told by elders; photos, videos and drawings where necessary to document knowledge on values and uses of forest plants and resources
Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns	Uganda	2009	Writing with drawings, singing and dancing to document local seed-management systems

Partner organisations involved in these pilots reviewed and documented their experiences in FLD through a writeshop in Uganda in 2008. The publication that resulted from this writeshop – *Farmer Led Documentation and Knowledge Sharing: Case Studies from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia* (PELUM-Uganda 2010) – added to the growing body of evidence and insights on FLD. It concluded that several major steps had been taken in developing the FLD approach towards a social process that brings farmers together to deal with situations relevant to them within their own local context. It also identified further challenges in terms of linkages with existing structures and ongoing community/ extension work, the match between tools and resources, and farmers' ownership of the FLD process as well as its products. It pointed out that those farmers involved in FLD through information sharing, fact finding, knowledge generation and dissemination had become a point of reference for the whole community, as they had gained better insights into the community's situation, needs and solutions.

With funding support from the Dutch Directorate for International Cooperation (DGIS), PROLINNOVA network partners were able to continue exploring the potential of FLD through a number of pilots undertaken in the period 2007-10 (Table 2).

**Table 2: FLD pilots by PROLINNOVA partners**

Lead partner	Country	Years	Focus of FLD and tools used
Réseau MARP	Burkina Faso	2010	Photos using conventional cameras and videos of farmer presentations to document farmer knowledge and innovations
Mekelle University	Ethiopia	2008-10	Video films for television broadcast, audio-recordings for radio broadcast and digital photos for documenting innovations by women in Tigray; Photos using conventional cameras for documenting experiences of farmer groups involved in piloting local innovation support funds in Ambo
CRESA and INRAN	Niger	2008-10	Storytelling, use of photo and video cameras and farmer magazine to document farmer innovations and farmer-led joint experiments

Lead partner	Country	Years	Focus of FLD and tools used
Farmer Support Group	South Africa	2007-10	Three sequential pilots in using digital photo cameras for documenting farmer innovations or experiences and spinoffs; participatory video with livestock keepers
University of Sennar	Sudan	2009-10	Digital photos and drawings by farmer group together with local innovator to document innovative well design for sharing with other farmers

## Cases in this booklet

The next five chapters of this booklet describe the FLD pilots undertaken by PROLINNOVA partners in five countries. In Burkina Faso, the pilot was a relatively short one. The lead partner was joined by two farmer organisations that were interested in documenting their own knowledge and innovations. A combination of photo and video was chosen for the documentation. Farmers used conventional photo cameras to take photos and compiled these in photo albums that were used in sharing their innovations with peers. The stories narrated by two farmer innovators using their photos were captured on video by a professional.

The case in Ethiopia covers a longer timespan. An FLD team consisting of development and media professionals assisted several women innovators in Tigray Region in documenting their innovations using audio and visual tools. The same team also supported a group of farmer innovators in Ambo (Oromia Region) involved in piloting local innovation support funds to document their experimental work.

The case of FLD from Niger is more comprehensive. Here, farmers' interest in documentation emerged from their engagement in joint experimentation and adult literacy. In this case, FLD tried to combine both traditional (storytelling) and modern (use of photo/video cameras) methods of documentation. The FLD process led into the making of a farmer innovation magazine in two local languages.

The pilot from South Africa focuses on the use of digital photo cameras for FLD. The lead partner, Farmer Support Group, engaged in three sequential short FLD pilots, each involving a different group of farmers in a different context. The case study documents how the FLD approach is finetuned, building on the lessons from each consecutive pilot.



Farmers review each other's photos during an FLD workshop in South Africa (photo: Brigid Letty)

Finally, the case from Sudan focuses on one farmer innovation, a locally-developed well design. The farmer-cum-artisan together with a group of interested people was trained in using a digital photo camera. They then documented this innovation in detail and used the photos for sharing with other farmers.

In most cases, the local support teams were familiar with participatory approaches in general, but were facilitating FLD for the first time and were therefore experimenting with the approach, learning along the way. The pilots largely depended on external funding that was limited in volume and available for relatively short periods of time.

## Beyond the pilots

The experiences with FLD in five countries are the main focus of this publication. But it is important to note that both in these five countries as well as elsewhere in the PROLINNOVA network, examples of FLD initiated by farmers, partner organisations or the country networks abound. Farmers invited to share experiences during farmer innovation fairs and exhibitions in countries such as Nepal, South Africa and Ethiopia used photos and posters of their work. Partner organisations in countries such as Ghana, Niger, Nepal and South Africa supported FLD activities on their own account, as shown in the example of Box 1 as well as the PV case in South Africa (see Box 2 in Chapter 6).

### **Box 1: Self-supported FLD initiatives of Ecoscentre, Nepal**

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Ecoscentre is a partner of PROLINNOVA-Nepal and works with local communities in Chitwan district in participatory agricultural development. In their efforts to promote local innovation, development workers of Ecoscenter have been identifying and documenting the experiences of men and women innovators for several years. But they felt that giving the innovators a stronger stake in the documentation process would not only enhance the innovators' ownership and self-confidence, but would make the products more convincing for others.

Considering the fairly low levels of literacy that still prevail in rural Nepal, Ecoscenter decided to introduce FLD using audiovisual tools such as video and photo. In the case of photo, the innovators were given a short orientation on the use of a digital camera by Ecoscenter staff after which the camera was handed over to the community. The innovators continued to use the camera and take pictures of their work. Several innovators who had themselves been documenting their work using mainly drawings and notes began to use photos, too. In the case of video, Ecoscenter staff supported the innovators to make short films of their work, but the camera remained in their custody.

Some of these innovators were given further training in FLD through a workshop organised by PROLINNOVA Nepal. Ecoscenter continued to support them after the workshop, reviewed their work and gave them tips for improvement.

Most of these farmer innovators are now using digital photography confidently. Some of them have even bought their own digital cameras. They are using the photos for sharing their work within and beyond their communities. Some of them have used the photos to make posters which have been displayed at various events such as exhibitions and innovation fairs. Others have used the photos in community training workshops. Students and teachers of the Institute of Agriculture and Animal Sciences in Chitwan have interacted with the innovators and used their photos in study/teaching material.

Moreover, evidence on spontaneous forms of farmers' own documentation without outside support continues to grow. From line drawings that are mounted on the wall of a farmer's house, to poems that are written (see box in Ethiopia case) and recited to laud the achievement of a farmer or community, to photos made using mobile phones – the examples are plentiful and diverse.



## References

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