

3 | Combining photos and video in farmer-led documentation in Burkina Faso

Réseau MARP

Between December 2009 and February 2010, Réseau MARP, an NGO member of PROFEIS (Promoting Farmer Experimentation and Innovation in the Sahel) and PROLINNOVA Burkina Faso, experimented with farmer-led documentation (FLD), with the aim of supporting farmers in documenting their own innovations. The pilot activity focused on two farmer groups in Toéghin in Bazèga Province in central Burkina Faso that had developed interesting local innovations. The male farmer group Wend-raabo had developed a salt lick for livestock and the female farmer group Sugri-nooma had developed ways to control parasites in chickens.

Preparations and training

The FLD facilitation team consisted of two Réseau MARP staff members, a professional photographer and a video expert, as Réseau MARP had already envisaged that the FLD pilot would involve a combination of photography and video, with farmers taking the leading role. The process started with a one-day meeting in Toéghin, where the Réseau MARP team introduced the FLD concept and objectives to the two farmer groups and facilitated joint planning of how they would learn and apply photography and video skills in documenting their innovations. Each group selected three members to be involved in the pilot. The media specialists then trained the selected farmers for two days in the basic steps of developing a film scenario and using a simple, analogue photo camera.

Documentation according to farmers' scenario

After this training, the farmers took 7-10 days to brief their peers and to prepare for the documentation. The members of each group jointly analysed their innovation and identified key aspects that needed to be captured on film. On this basis, they developed a scenario for taking photos. The media specialists reviewed the two scenarios and helped the farmers pre-test them. Then the farmers themselves, with only limited assistance from the professional photographer, took pictures of all steps and features of their innovation, according to their own scenario. For Réseau MARP's own documentation and learning, the cameraman simultaneously captured this process on video. After the photos were developed and printed, the farmer photographers used them to present and explain their innovations to other farmers. The cameraman also captured this process on video. After two rounds of editing, incorporating also the results of the pre-test with the farmers, Réseau MARP made a DVD with a video film that captured the stories of the two local innovations, based on the farmers' own photos and expressed in the farmers' own words, and following their own logic for documentation. Ten copies of this DVD were made. In addition, each group of farmers decided to keep their photos in an album to make it easier to share the information with others.

Challenges

The FLD piloting faced some challenges and limitations that would need to be given attention in scaling up this approach:

- Not having any manual for this new approach to documentation, the facilitation team sometimes struggled to know how to proceed and had to develop activities "on the spot", i.e. to be innovative themselves;
- Because the time for preparing and pre-testing the scenarios was quite limited, some important local actors and aspects of the innovations were omitted by mistake;
- The process led the farmers to focus their documentation on describing the development and functioning of the innovation, giving limited attention to the results of the innovation and its impact on their livelihood;
- At some point, the farmers seemed to keep some details about the innovation to themselves; this may indicate that they wanted to protect their intellectual property rights;
- The limited amount of resources available for the FLD pilot did not allow the facilitation team to give as much coaching and follow-up to the farmers as might have been needed.

Achievements

This FLD pilot reinforced existing interest among members of the farmer groups to document their own knowledge and innovations for wider sharing. It increased their capacities to do this. Some of the observations and achievements made in the process were:

- Handling the camera and systematically planning the picture-taking according to a scenario did not pose a problem to the farmers;
- The process of farmers presenting their innovations in the local language, supported by their own photos, allowed them to control the documentation process and zoom in on aspects they found most relevant;
- The two photo albums and ten DVDs that came out of this FLD pilot are good tools for sharing information on the local innovations and encouraging other farmers to replicate or adapt them;
- Most importantly, the FLD process has reinforced among the farmers the notion that their innovations matter and has encouraged them to continue their own innovative research.