

Farmer Led Documentation : Report of a pilot in Potshini in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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1. Introduction

The smallholder farmer in Potshini piloted the use of photography for documenting their own activities and experiences. These activities were facilitated by the Farmer Support Group (FSG), the Community Development and Outreach Division of Centre for Environment, Agriculture and Development at the University Of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. FSG assists farmers and other land users, especially women and the poor, and development practitioners, in sustainable and productive natural resource management, institutional development, and entrepreneurship. FSG uses participatory and innovative methodologies in education, training, advice, technical support, and partnerships. FSG is part of Prolinnova, a global network of institutions that seek to develop the use of Participatory Innovation Development (PID). The piloting of the farmer led documentation (FLD) is one way of documenting PID.

Potshini is a sub-ward of Okhahlamba Local Municipality which is one of five local municipalities under Uthukela District Municipality in KwaZulu Natal. The area falls under the traditional leadership of the Amangwane Tribal Authority.

Various institutions are working in Potshini on issues related to agriculture and natural resource management. FSG implements the outreach component of the Smallholder System Innovation (SSI) project which is involved in watershed management. Through the outreach program of FSG in Potshini, farmer led groups (FLG) consisting of 64 members were formed. Through these groups, farmers share and experiment with new technologies in farming, including experiments on different water conservation technologies. The FLG contribute in different social and institutional developments. In its activities FSG collaborates closely with the Extension Officers of the KwaZulu-Natal provincial Department of Agriculture (DoA). The DoA has also formed farmers groups in Potshini, in addition to the two groups that FSG formed. Farmers actively participate in the development projects but their participation during the documentation process is limited. This is largely due to their low literacy rates. The downside is that, even though those participating in the project acquire knowledge on what they are involved in, little knowledge is passed on to those that are not participating, particularly the future generations.

The weakness in the participation of farmers with the documentation of development process is a global phenomenon. To partly address this problem, in December 2005, Prolinnova SA organized the PID workshop in Limpopo where farmers who were participating were introduced to the concept of FLD using photography. FSG staff members and two farmers from Okhombe participated in this workshop. This was a first step in the dissemination of the FLD in Okhahlamba region in KwaZulu Natal.

When PELUM, PROLINNOVA and Oxfam NOVIB organized a 5-day exchange and capacity building workshop on FLD in November 2006, FSG sent a farmer, Nicholas Madondo from Potshini to participate in the course. During the course, participants developed workplans which they presented to the workshop. On the basis of the proposed workplan, PELUM invited the participants to apply for financial resources to pilot the FLD in their area. With assistance from FSG facilitators, Mr Madondo developed a proposal and presented it to PELUM for funding.

2. Awareness meeting

It is standard practice in the development projects that FSG implements that any farmers who attend a cross visit or training workshop gives a feedback to his/her peers. Therefore, following his attendance of the FLD training workshop in Uganda, Mr Madondo had already started to report back to his peers in the FLG of Potshini.

This feedback continued as part of the SSI project during the regular sessions which the groups had. In addition, with the approval of the funding for the project, FSG and Mr Madondo conducted an awareness process to ensure that all members were aware of the pending project and its objectives.

The official awareness meeting was held on the 17th of May 2007. Some 40 farmers from Potshini attended. In addition two farmers from Okhombe who had gained experience with photography were invited to share their skills on taking photos, which they had learnt during a PID workshop in Limpopo province, SA. Two extension officers from DOA were also in attendance.

It was agreed that as the project was farmer-led, the objectives of the awareness workshop were:

1. To announce the approval of the FLD proposal

2. To raise the awareness about the FLD and its possibilities to enrich farmers practices.
3. To Invite the other role players to be involved in the process of FLD e.g. DoA
4. To discuss strategies and rational for distributing the cameras once acquired.

The meeting also looked at the concept of FLD was introduced to farmers and stakeholders to decided on what to document, when, where and for what purpose. Farmers were also taken through the process that would be involved in the project, i.e., from reporting to sharing, be it amongst themselves or with development agents or farmers from other areas. This was to ensure that farmers fully understood that the cameras were not a mere donation but that the sponsors wanted some lessons to be drawn following the implementation of the pilot project. Therefore, it was necessary that farmers fully understood their obligations when they agreed to participate.

Following a discussion, it was agreed that FLD would serve the following purposes:

- enable farmers to keep valuable knowledge and practices for next generations.
- promote learning and sharing of experiences between farmers themselves and also the service providers
- empower farmers to be able take their own decision based on their own experiences using their own documentation as a record of the previous experiences.

Although photography was to be used in the project, it was noted that it was one of the several ways of documenting farmers' experiences. Other options for documenting identified were songs, drawings and story telling. Nevertheless, these were not the focus of the project.

Other issues highlighted during the inception meeting were that it was overdue for farmers to document their own activities. Documentation allows for farmers to effectively participate in planning of activities to be undertaken and allows then to make an input into the scope of the documentation of any projects implemented.

3. Decision on what to document

In understanding this project, the farmers agreed that documentation could farming knowledge and also document the cultural knowledge. Such documentation would allow the future generation, to have a source of knowledge about things that were happening before. Women thought that the documentation would inform future generations about the important role they played, in the development of the family or the community and how they solved problems, be it technical (e.g. pests and diseases) or social.

Regardless of the broad nature of activities that could be documented, the meeting generally felt that they could prioritize documentation of the activities they were undertaking in the gardens as this was an activity at the core of the SSI project with which the FLG were engaging. The worse restriction of the activities which could be documented was considered ideal for facilitating learning from each other and from the pilot.

4. Stakeholders

FSG has collaborated closely with the Department of Agriculture. DoA expressed its commitment to the project as they realized its importance in the development process.

During the workshop, Mr Xaba, a farmer from Okhombe shared his experience on documentation with the workshop. He was already involved in documenting using photography for about a year. He indicated that he was mainly documenting livestock and grazing issues. He shared with the group some photographs on pasture conditions, before and after being over grazed. His photos were linked to the condition score of the animals i.e. thinner cattle on poor pasture and visa versa. He indicated that he was using the photographs to generate policy discussions at the tribal authority level. Presenting the pictures to the meeting of the tribal authority allowed him to influence the decisions about grazing. In so doing, he was hopeful that he influenced the chief's attitude and decisions on grazing issues .

5. Camera distribution procedures

The project had a budget for 12 cameras. The cameras were obviously not enough for everyone to have one. Therefore the meeting discussed the distribution of the cameras, in such a way that everyone could participate in the documentation. Two issues were considered as critical in deciding how to distribute the cameras, i.e., the participation of the groups in the SSI Project and the difference in the membership of each of the two FLGs. It was resolved that the two FLGs would share the cameras equally, i.e., six per group. The decision on how many members would share each camera was left with the learner group leaders. In the end, the groups decided on having a maximum of six to a minimum of three farmers per camera. The number of photographic films were allocated on the basis of the size of the group per camera. All films would be handed to Mr Madondo for processing.

The cameras were distributed in early June 2007. A session was also held on the art of taking photographs. Twelve cameras and forty albums were distributed. The limited activities in the gardens during the winter meant that no photographs were taken. The few pictures that were

taken showed goats feeding in the gardens, a common problem in the area in winter. Only few farmers took pictures around this time as most of them are of the idea to have a good picture of their gardens.

Farmers that were sharing the cameras agreed that each one would take a maximum of three photographs each time in order to leave space for others. After taking the three photographs, the camera would be taken by the next farmer. Some bottlenecks developed in this process as some farmers would take time to shoot their three photos. This was holding back the documentation process. Therefore, this was amended during the second report back meeting when it was resolved that each farmer would shoot five photos per film. Members could also negotiate with the group to use more shots in the films if they could justify the need.

6. Feedback Meeting

According to the plan the documentation was to start in June 2007 with the winter crop. The severe drought prevailing in the 2006/07 season meant that there was virtually no activity in the gardens during the winter period. Farmers were keen on documenting activities in the gardens and they had to wait for rainfall, after which they would then plant in the gardens.

When first photos were developed the learner groups met to feed back their first experiment. The first meeting was interesting as everyone was eager to see, for the first time, their performance in taking photographs. Some challenges were noted in the manner in which photographs were being shot. In some instances photos taken were out of focus or without subject. The meeting motivated those who had not yet started taking photographs to do so as they had witnessed what their friends had done, and realized that there was not penalty for taking bad photographs.

Potshini farmers are members of Sibusimpilo Farmers Forum, which is a regional grouping of farmers participating in PID activities with FSG and other stakeholders. FLD activities were presented to this forum. Farmers from outside Potshini who are members of Sibusimpilo showed interest of documenting using photography. The farmers' forum was the first step towards dissemination since it is attended by almost all who are involved small scale farming.

7. Dissemination workshop

The dissemination workshop was held on the 22nd of October 2007. Farmers from Busingatha, Obonjaneni, Okhombe attended. The Department of Agriculture was also represented.

The purpose of the dissemination workshop was for everyone who participated in the FLD pilot project to share their experiences. Farmers would share their experiences with each other and with the development agencies that they work with. Farmers had been invited from other areas outside the pilot site, e.g., Amazizi Tribal Authority. By sharing with DoA were hoping for the buy in by the department as they are permanent stakeholder in the communities. Farmers aimed to demonstrate the results and sell the idea of documentation to other farmers.

Five farmers prepared poster presentations on the wall of the workshop venue. The posters showed how they documented and how it helped them. It was felt that the presentations by the five farmers would be sufficient to generate enough discussions amongst the workshop participants. Table 1 summarises the results of the farmers' poster presentations.

Following the poster presentations, the participants were invited to discuss and ask questions about the implementations of the FLD pilot. Questions that were asked included the issue of how farmers prioritized what they were going to photograph. It was noted that the decision of priority rested with the farmers, just as in decision making during farming. An analogy was given with selecting seed, where one only selects seed that will give big healthy plants. In photography, it has to be something different and worth documenting.

One farmer added that since he started documenting its easier for him to ask for help either on his livestock or crop diseases as he just takes the photograph showing the problem to the extension officer.

Table 1. Farmer's presentation and discussion

Name	<i>Mrs Sizakele Mduba</i>	<i>Gogo Bhengu</i>	<i>Mr Xaba (Okhombe)</i>	<i>Mrs Phumelele Dlala</i>	<i>Mr John Mabaso</i>
Documented	Garden	Garden	Livestock	Garden Family photo	Garden
Specification	History of her garden	New type of garden Tower garden	Health Issues	Crop protection from rats and birds	Garden produce
Highlights	Different watering techniques	Uses grey water	Twins (Calves)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have sold veggies and seedlings • Husband hands crafts 	Growth of his garden
Problems	Scarcity of water	Lack of fencing	Burning of grazing camps (No food for livestock)	Cabbage infested with aphids.	Livestock breaking into his garden

8. Evaluation

As a way of evaluating the FLD pilot, farmers were asked what they would change if they had a chance to start the pilot all over again. The following were the responses from the farmers:

- Request for more training on camera use and handling
- Buy many cameras so that individual members can have their own cameras. Farmers noted that it is not good to share a camera as no one takes responsibility when it is broken.
- Use digital cameras since they do not require films. The issue of availability of computers for storage was not discussed.

9. Way forward

For the way forward, farmers discussed what was going to happen when the project ended. Farmers agreed that each group of five farmers sharing a camera should fundraise using the first camera and end up with enough cameras for each member in the group. Farmers will also buy films to continue documenting and reporting the progress at Farmers' Forum. They requested further training on how to handle cameras, particularly changing the film as there is a possibility of films being damaged during the process of loading.

10. Highlights

- FSG assisted the Potshini FLGs to get a donation of a digital camera from a local agro-dealer. Such efforts of getting more cameras will be continued.
- Prolinnova SA team has visited the pilot site during implementation.

11. Challenges

Still cameras were used in the pilot project. This posed a challenge as such cameras are running out of stock on the market. Sourcing the required number of cameras was a challenge and led to a delay in the initiation of project activities.

Photos



Mr Madondo with one of the cameras used in the pilot



A table used during the evaluation of the photographs taken by farmers



A farmer in the process of documenting using a camera