

CA for SARD

Ground working

for

**Conservation Agriculture Farmer Field
Schools**

Guide for Facilitators and Farmers



Martin Bwalya, January 2007

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Reference material/s:

- i. Hope, A and Timmel, S (1990); Training for Transformation. A hand boo for community workers. Books 1, 2 and 3.

List of Acronyms

ACT	African Conservation Tillage Network
ASDP	Agricultural Sector Development Programme
ASDS	Agricultural Sector Development Strategy
CA	Conservation Agriculture
CA-FFS	Conservation Agriculture Farmer Field Schools
DALDO	District Agriculture and Livestock Development Officer
DAP	Draught Animal Power
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFS	Farmer Field School
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HQ	Headquarters
ICRAF	International Centre for Research in Agro-forestry
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IIIWCCA	Third World Congress on Conservation Agriculture
KARI	Kenya Agricultural Research Institute
KEN	Republic of Kenya
MAFS	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (Tanzania)
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture (Kenya)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OiC	Officer-in-Charge
SARD	Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development
SARI	Selian Agricultural Research Institute
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SSA	Sub Sahara Africa
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
ToR	Terms of Reference
URT	United Republic of Tanzania

1. Introduction

The Farmer Field School (FFS) is a participatory and interactive approach to social learning. It is an approach that puts together set of principles and techniques meant to systematically enhance farmers' abilities to investigate, analyse, innovate and learn improved farming practices. The initial subject in the evolution of the FFS approach has been the Integrated Pest Management (IPM). However, the approach has also evolved to be useable for various other community driven issues. The African Conservation Tillage Network (ACT), through implementation of the FAO funded regional (Kenya-Tanzania) conservation agriculture project is one of the initiatives that has pioneered the adaptation principles and techniques of the FFS approach to the promotion of conservation agriculture practices.

The objective of FFS is to build farmers' capacity to analyse their production systems, identify problems, test possible solutions and eventually adopt the practices most suitable to their farming systems. The knowledge acquired during the learning process enables farmers to adapt their existing technologies to be more productive, profitable and responsive to changing conditions, or to test and adopt or adapt new technologies.

One key benchmark in setting up FFS in a community is a process referred to as "ground working". This Booklet is designed and presented to help FFS facilitators and farmers/FFS group members to understand the concept of ground working and to appreciate key steps and elements for undertaking a successful ground working exercise.

The Booklet discusses what and why ground working and presents key principles and elements/features to help Facilitators and lead farmers guide the ground working process in building up to establish FFS Groups. It is important to realise and appreciation from the on-set that the guidelines are NOT a step-wise menu about a process that is linear, BUT key principles that will help define an inclusive and interactive process also ensuring that key decision points/issue are objectively and transparently discussed.

Box 1: Ground working exercise is important and has to be done RIGHT including giving the process the TIME required. The Ground working exercise defines and is key part to building the very foundation for the FFS Group.

2. What is ground working and Why ground working

Ground working is literally the building of a "foundation" for the Farmer Field School. Therefore, it is important that this is properly done and that key cornerstones are achieved – a weak ground working exercise means a weak foundation for the ground and has been guarantee for failure of the ground (a building with a weak foundation will not stand the test of time).

The ground working exercise is expected to:

- i. ensure that the intervention (both in content, i.e. CA and in approach/process, i.e. FFS approach) is locally understood and has local ownership especially by those that become group members
- ii. ensure that the intervention is understood and supported by local leadership from traditional systems through to civic authorities and district/area agriculture officers

- iii. that the group and interest/willingness to participate (at community as well as individual household level) is based on felt/expressed and shared commitment to respond to common problem
- iv. that there is clarity and common understanding on the farmers (FFS group members) roles and responsibility and desired own commitment to drive the process
- v. allow communities and individual households/farmers to make the decision to following the CA-FFS learning approach

The ground working exercise is inherently a participatory process undertaken and requiring active and reflective participation of the community/potential FFS group members. Table 1 gives key cornerstones in the ground working exercise.

Table 1: key cornerstones in the ground working process

Cornerstone	Who is responsible/Who is involved	Remarks
1. Support from local civic and traditional leadership enlisted	Facilitators and Project staff; Local agricultural and rural development Officers	Ensuring that the area Agriculture Office understand and buy-in the initiative is important
2. Identifying the location and target group	Facilitators and Project staff; Local agricultural and rural development Officers; farmer/group leaders	Based on preliminary information/ understanding that CA and FFS interventions have potential to contribute to the development thrust in that area
3. Enlisting local interest and willingness to engage in CA adaptation/adoption and application of the CA-FFS approach	Facilitators and Project staff; Local agricultural and rural development Officers; farmer/group leaders	
4. Garner the interest and willingness into standard learning groups (i.e. FFS groups)	Facilitators and Project staff; Local agricultural and rural development Officers; farmer/group leaders; community/potential group members	
5. Stocktaking; Problem identification and analysis	Facilitators and Project staff; Local agricultural and rural development Officers; farmer/group leaders; community/potential group members	Could be informed by assessment of previous and current related initiatives; inventory of stakeholders; exercise to ground local appreciation of agriculture in socio-economic undertaking of the community
6. Building/strengthening group dynamics, governance and value addition	Facilitators and Project staff; and FFS group members	
7. Define of group's own road map in the adoption of the CA-FFS approach in adaptation of CA practices	Facilitators and Project staff; and FFS group members	
8. Formal registration of the group	Facilitators and Project staff; and FFS group members	

Process not linear: As mentioned above, this exercise to take on the cornerstones given in Table 1 is by no means a linear stepwise process. Whiles some cornerstones may well be preliquisit for others, there will be many cases that activities to achieve some of these cornerstones do run co-currently and actually mutually interacting.

3. Implementation of the ground working exercise

3.1 Deciding on target village/area

This is done at Project level. However, it is useful that both the Project staff and key players in the location targeted including the group facilitators well appreciate the basis for the decision to select the area/community.

This should, at the minimum, relate to:

- i. clear and possibly documented evidence on the problem of land degradation and its impact/implication on farm productivity and agriculture performance in general
- ii. noted potential for interventions on CA-FFS to make a difference on agriculture productivity and in the livelihood parameters (food security and income generation) among the participating households/communities
- iii. willingness of local farmers and possibly existence of already charged farmers groups willing/open to taking up the CA-FFS approach is added advantage

3.2 Enlist local community's interest and willingness

At this stage, participation and direct involvement of the local general population start to be critical and important. The primary objective at this stage is to ensure that the general population is objectively informed about the Project intervention (about CA and about the FFS approach). It is important that real issues and challenges are highlighted here in their correct context to avoid farmers being disillusioned in their decision to join the CA-FFS.

Suggested strategies and action: This aspect can be done in two main ways:

- i. targeted awareness/information support, whereby possible opinion leaders and strategic local individuals are targeted with information to enable them make their own decisions but also to support others in the community on understanding what is involved
- ii. one or a series of general awareness meetings open to all community members.

These meetings whether with individuals and groups are in principle not about convincing someone to participate, BUT about providing information in an interactive manner (allowing the farmers to reflect and ask questions) to enable them make informed decisions and the commitment to participate in the CA FFS programme. Though organised locally, i.e. by local facilitators, specialists/experienced persons, who can include lead CA-FFS farmers from other communities, can be invited to discuss/present their experiences. Written information materials on CA and on the FFS approach can also be distributed.

This exercise will end an invitation for those interested and willing to participate in the CA-FFS programme, as learners/innovators, to “come back” for more focused subsequent processes/steps.

3.3 Building local ownership

This is important in ensuring local support for the initiatives and including support for efforts of participating farmers/communities in dealing with environmental and natural resource issues, which often go beyond the farm or even community boundaries.

This also underlines the fact that adoption of conservation agriculture practices is a development issue with direct implications for livelihood and development objectives. This helps build the “institutional home” for the intervention – an element important for the

sustainability of the efforts. Therefore, this aspect involves discussions with key local leadership institutions and persons to ensure:

- i. local agriculture, civic and general development authorities understand the intervention and are aware how this CA-FFS intervention/project relate to and complement their own objectives/responsibilities
- ii. possible roles and responsibilities for these authorities in the implementation of the project are identified and streamlined in the Project implementation

This would include identification aspects, processes or establishments in the local set-up that would be support/complement implementation of the CA–SARD project. For example, Village Headmen/Women would be important players in mobilising of their people and in lobbying for CA and FFS.

Box 2:

The FFS Approach is a knowledge-based, Knowledge-driven process.

The FFS approach distinguishes KNOWLEDGE and INFORMATION as key and central “products” in empowering farming and rural communities in developing FARMING as basis for in their efforts to meet livelihood needs (food security, poverty alleviation, etc...) and driver for socio-economic growth.

The Project, i.e. CA-SARD should establish and manage mechanisms within each target village/district to provide feedback and inform the local authorities on an on-going basis on Project implementation.

3.4 Stocktaking, problem identification and analysis

This is about allowing farmers/community members to define and better understand their own environment/circumstances – from physical through to cultural, socio-economic issues. It is critical to here realise that this exercise is more about farmers/community “telling its own story” – i.e. description and an understanding from the local community’s own perspective.

A variety of participatory techniques are available which could be used to engage the local community in this exercise. It should, however, be noted that “direct interviews” have proven as the least useful in this exercise.

The participatory exercises used should help and facilitate the farmers (normally in small groups) to deal with/describe their environment under the following headings. The facilitator in this process should be aware that farmers/community members participating may not agree or have same perception about certain issues and do not necessarily need to agree on everything. The important point would be to ensure that all issues, perceptions, which the group or some members of the group feel strongly about are captured.

1. Defining the local area profile

- i. Physical (geographical location, roads, rivers, other physical land marks)
- ii. Climate (rainfall, temperature, also explain the trends and patterns over time)
- iii. The peoples (settlement type, average size of h/hold, population size/type – i.e. age segregation, culture-traditions, people’s main occupations including pass-time, etc...)
- iv. Infrastructure (transport – road network, etc...; communication; etc...)
- v. Agriculture (crops, livestock, field sizes, types of implements used/owned, etc...)

- vi. External inputs/interventions (development programmes, agric. Inputs, interaction with urban centre, markets) survival strategies
 - vii. Local institutions dealing with (a) development (b) conflict resolution (c) community decision making (d) etc...
 - viii. Existing farmer groups or other groups that communities are part to (why these groups, how are they sustained, etc...)
 - ix. Land ownership and decision making on land related matters (e.g. communal grazing)
 - x. Gender based stratification in roles and responsibilities
 - xi. Food security (months of food insecure per year)
2. Agriculture production/productivity - past and present status/trend
- i. Extent of agriculture as a source of livelihood/income for the local community
 - ii. Crop-livestock extent
 - iii. Extent/level of access to external inputs (fertilizers, implements, irrigation, etc...). Hired, owned, etc...
 - iv. Main crops and crop outputs 20, 10 years ago
 - v. Develop a labour use profile – over a one-year period (actual as far as they can remember for a few households)
3. The Problem and Problem analysis
- i. Can the level of agricultural output/productivity be better
 - ii. Factors responsible for poor/low agricultural performance – done through a “Problem Tree” analysis
 - iii. What things in the farmers’ lives (livelihood) are affected by poor/low crop/agriculture production
 - iv. Land degradation and agricultural performance
 - v. What factors (listed in order of priority) cause poor/low agriculture production/productivity

3.5 Developing and agreeing on the road map

It is important for both Facilitators and the community to recognise that establishing a CA FFS Group reflects a decision by the community on the MEANS, i.e. about HOW, the community wishes to proceed in collectively dealing with the PROBLEM as defined and understood by community members.

Therefore, the ROADMAP, developed is about establishing and managing the CA FFS Group as a means to collectively learn and innovate solutions to poor/declining productivity, on one hand, and degrading environment, on the other.

3.5.1 Group dynamics and governance

Understanding that establishing the “school” in this context goes well beyond opening a bank account or having a constitution or getting formal government registration. The whole process of ground working is also expected to contribute to defining and consolidation the group/s in terms of:

- ✓ defining common interest and purpose
- ✓ strengthening cohesiveness
- ✓ members defining for themselves the value of belong to the group,
- ✓ leadership and governance issues

“School” should be facilitated at an early stage to discuss issues about group organisation, leadership, decision making and any other matters that the group would feel important to strengthening their relations and learning as a group. It is not necessary that the group finds answers at this stage, but it is important that the group identify key issues that will underpin or challenge group’s organisational stability, cohesiveness and teamwork).

3.5.2 *Setting up the “school”, the group and group learning*

This relates to both organisational and governance issues as well as ensuring a learning and knowledge/information sharing environment.

- i. Supporting the interested community members to establish the “school”:
 - Membership:
 - Total member of between 20 and 30. If group is larger, a second school should be considered
 - Gender balance
 - Governance arrangement:
 - deciding and setting up leadership structure including criteria for nominating/electing leaders
 - transparent decision making process
 - embracing transparency and accountability values in the “way the group will operate”
 - rules of engagement (“school” moderation and self-regulating rules)
 - Support in leadership and “school” management skills and values (leadership training, record keeping, managing collective decision-making, managing public/group funds/resources, group dynamics, etc...)
 - Establish and clarify how the “school” efforts will link to and support local civic and development initiatives and processes (e.g. ensure good linkages to the village civic and traditional leaders)

- ii. Selecting and managing the group learning plot (inherent and key feature of the “school”)
 - identifying and securing “school” learning field (plot)
 - size of the plot (large enough to allow comparative experimentation)
 - ownership / long term use (at least undisturbed during the group’s complete learning period)
 - location and accessibility
 - quality of the field (reasonable and realistic)

- iii. Roles and responsibilities for the group facilitators: It is important that there is an open discussion and all have a common understanding of the relationship between the group and their Facilitator (including clarity on the Facilitator’s value addition roles and responsibilities in the facilitating the “school” processes

Box 2: Whiles group constitution, formal registration with government and opening bank account are recognised as important elements in enhancing consolidation in group dynamics, these SHOULD NOT be taken as pre-conditions for the CA FFS group to operate.

Facilitation should, actually support the group in progressively evaluating and deciding on need for such and accordingly responding as and when need dictates so.

A “farmer group” and a “farmer field school group”: What is the difference?

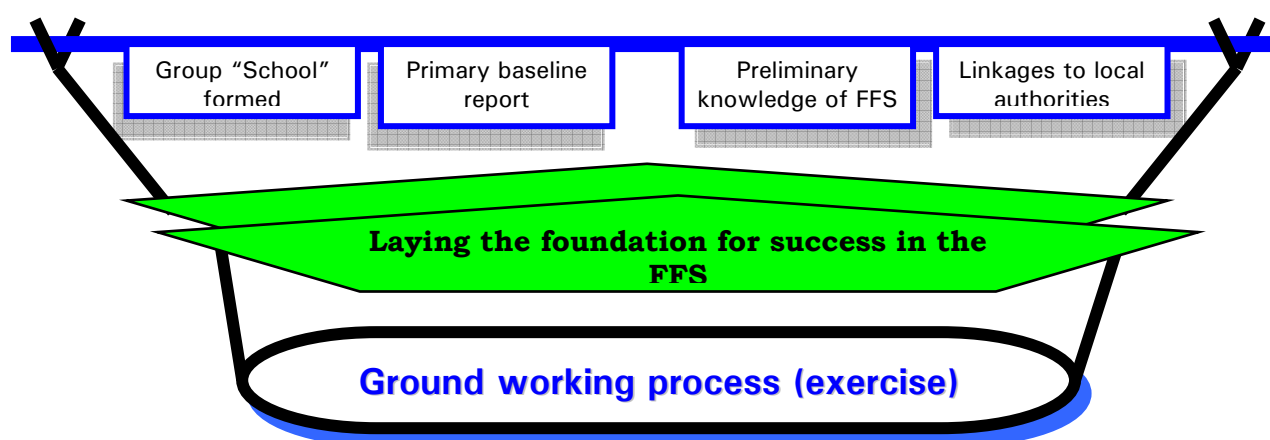
4. Moving out of the ground working process / Building on the gains from the ground working process

4.1 Key products of the Ground working exercise

In facilitating the process further, it is important to “take stock” and allow both the farmers (now members of the CA FFS) and their facilitators to agree and recognise (and be satisfied) on the key outputs of the ground working process.

The main outputs to look for are:

- a) “School” is formed
- b) Baseline report
- c) Common understanding on the Problem and causes
- d) Linkages to local authorities



- a) **“School formed”**: While physical set-up of the group (members, leaders, self-regulating rules, etc...) is important, the evaluation at this stage should consider how much the evolving group is driven by shared vision, collective responsibility and desire to “act”. This should consider how much the group was embracing principles and values for a coherence, mutual respect and social learning.
- b) **Primary baseline report**: This is a report of especially the farmers/community views/assessment and diagnosis of their environment and analysis of problems (means that the process to undertake the ground working should also arrange and ensure comprehensive report of the outputs). The report gives a comprehensive (from farmers/community’s perspective) diagnostic assessment of the situation. This include some basic data and its interpretation on key parameters such as production, productivity, availability and accessibility to farm inputs including labour, markets, etc.... Contributes to defining the “Year Zero” scenario, which is important as a “reference point”. Among the key components of the Baseline Report is:
 - i) **Stocktaking/diagnosyic description** of the local physical and socio-economic situation and trends, and
 - ii) **Problem/s and related effects and causes**: defined around the central problem of poor/declining farm productivity with locally felt consequences in terms of food insecurity and poverty (effects) and degradation in the land-water resource (causes). It is also important as part of the outcome at this stage that farmers well identify with the problem/s and solutions defined and see the relevancy in the context of their own lives, need and aspirations.

- c) **Preliminary understanding of the FFS approach:** Participating farmers will have been introduced to the concept and application of the Farmer Field School Approach. At this stage farmers should be showing some preliminary understanding of the concept and related tools for its application
- d) **Linkages and support from local leadership:** One other key output is that the local leadership (civic and tradition) recognise and support the initiative both in terms of conservation agriculture and in the FFS approach. There should be clear demonstration of a buy-in process.

4.2 Moving post the Ground working exercise

The main components to guide and drive the post ground working are:

1. **the CA FFS curriculum:** This is initially refined to ensure that it responds to the group's learning needs and especially clearly and directly supportive in dealing with the problem/s identified
2. **Designing and implementing the on-farm experimentation process (innovation and learning process)** based on a small number of "treatments" based on the problem identified and solutions, on one hand, and the principles of conservation agriculture, on the other hand.
3. **The CA-FFS Monitoring and Evaluation-Learning tool** which complemented by the EASA allows the farmers (school members) to ground their learning in real-life processes within their own lives and environment.

The CA FFS curriculum booklet covers these three aspects in detail.

Annexes

Annex 1: Facilitators – roles and responsibilities

The Farmer Field Schools concepts is also by its very definition calls for radical change from the conventional Agriculture Extension/Research staff TO facilitators with emphasis on knowledge and social learning as opposed to material inputs (in the conventional type).

This for many, both staff themselves and their supervisors is a difficult adjustment to make. Many cases/instances were noted in CA-SARD Project with staff “insisting” on being “teachers” with responsibility to educate the “ignorant and irrational” farmers. With the critical need and roles for facilitators in supporting the learning processes, poor facilitation can greatly influence the very success of the FFS group.

Therefore, with many of the serving Agriculture Extension/Research staff trained and worked under the conventional extension functions, two issues have been identified as cardinal in the selection and preparing field staff to come in as facilitators to the FFS groups. The two issues are:

- i. Training / Re-training
- ii. Supportive work arrangements
- iii. Clear Terms of reference

- i. Training / Re-training: Initial training for selected facilitators is simply essential in preparing the nominated staff for their work. Two important aspects in this training are (a) ensuring that the staff get the basic understanding of the FFS approach – from the concept through the FFS principles to techniques in realizing the FFS approach as a social learning tool. The training should also help the staff appreciate facilitation and distinguish it from mere common extension work. After this training, the staff should see themselves into building a NEW RELATIONSHIP with their farmers.

Experiences in the CA-SARD also showed that the front-line staff (facilitators) benefited greatly from (b) technical training, as the second aspect in the training. Building relevant conservation agriculture/natural resource management knowledge and competencies among the staff was important in enabling them gain the desired confidence and knowledge and hence well able to understand and respond to related farmer needs.

Whiles one-time initial training is important and can be very useful, the Project/Programme should plan and build in on-going training support to the staff/Facilitators. This is also done on the appreciation that demands made on the staff/facilitators in facilitating FFS should can be radical and difficult on some staff, having been used to something, often, quite the opposite.

- ii. Clear Terms of reference

Without clear and widely acknowledge and uniform terms of reference, it was difficult to assess deliverables as well as effectiveness and efficiency in the work of the Facilitators. This also brought difficulties in their relationships with the supervisors. Therefore, additional to training and on-going training support, terms of reference for all front-line key supporting staff are simply essential.

The CA-SARD Project identified the following as key front-line support staff and outlined their Terms of Reference as below:

Staff: District Coordinators

Terms of Reference

- Coordinate and support the Village Facilitators in formation and maintenance/existence of FFS groups
- Immediate supervisors for the Village Facilitators (should aim to visit/meet the Village Facilitators under their district and provide necessary guidance and support)
- Monitor the work and performance of the Village Facilitators
- Provide on-the-spot technical and management backstopping and training to the Village Facilitators
- Facilitator and provide direct support and backstopping in the execution of the M&E
- Link village facilitators and National facilitators
- Link CA SARD Project with other CA initiatives and other projects in the district.
- Link CA SARD Project with District council and Government.
- Ensure village facilitators write and submit monthly report not later than 30th of every month
- Translate broader CA-SARD aims and objectives in the implementation of the Project at group/village level
- Coordinate and facilitator linkages and collaboration among the FFS groups in the district and beyond
- Ultimately responsible for project performance in the district

Staff: Village Facilitators

Terms of reference

- Manage and support farmers on formation and actual running of the FFS classes
- Link between Farmers and District/National Facilitators
- Provide technical support in backstopping of FFS and CA
- Facilitate farmer empowerment through training and increased access to information
- Linking FFS group with other initiatives such as marketing.
- Link FFS group with other FFS groups in the district
- Support functioning of FFS group (banking, record keeping)
- Execution and group level management of the M&E process
- Write and submit monthly reports to District facilitator not later than 26th of every month
- Technical support on CA in farmers' learning sessions
- Link to Village government and civic leadership
- Identify and communicate to District/National Facilitators farmers technical backstopping needs

Within the context of the Project, the Terms of Reference can also stipulate the staff's conditions of work. Clarity and transparency on this matter helps to level staff's expectations.