

Module 5: Producer groups (farmer to farmer)

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Main objectives of the module:

By the end of the session, participants will be better able to:

- Understand the alternative forms of producer cooperation
 - Recognise the distinctive commercial and organisational nature of producer groups
 - Recognise opportunities for the further growth and development of producer groups
 - Follow a step by step procedure for the development of groups
 - Understand the most important criteria for the effective management of groups
 - Organise farmers and assist in group planning and consensus decision making
 - Understand participative advisory and support techniques
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5.1 What is a producer group?

A producer group is an enterprise voluntarily owned and controlled by the people that use it – individual farmers. It is established and managed in order to meet the mutual needs of its owner members.

According to their business objectives, producer groups can be broadly divided into four types:

- ❑ *Input supply groups.* These are established to reduce overall costs either through sharing resources, such as machinery or jointly purchasing inputs. These groups may be highly diversified in terms of crops and commodities.

Case Study 22 Cooperativa Euro-ortofrutticola Del Trigno provides an example of a group that buys the input supplies on behalf of 1200 members at discounted prices. **Case Study 23 Eastern Agri-link - Essex and Suffolk machinery ring** is one example of a family of machinery rings covering the whole of the UK and provides benefits for its members primarily by reducing machinery usage costs.

- ❑ *Service groups.* These are mainly established to enable producers to get better access to credit, finance or insurance

These groups are established for the purpose of solving specific farmer support problems such as securing access to loans, insurance or advisory services. Many credit institutions and insurance companies prefer to deal with groups and not with individual farmers. Individuals sometimes have limited possibilities for providing collateral compared to a group of farmers that are prepared to accept joint liability. Charges paid to the bank are divided between the members and so reducing overall cost and risk.

- ❑ *Marketing groups.* These often specialise in a single commodity, opt for value-added products and target expanding markets.

Joint purchase of equipment can help a group of farmers to “add value” to their production and so generate new market opportunities. **Case Study 14 Sjenica Wool Marketing** shows that by purchasing simple hand operated wool baling equipment and sorting and compressing wool into dense packs a group of small sheep farmers have been able to add value to a basic raw material and exploit an export marketing opportunity.

Case Study 24 Camgrain Storage has the aim of maximising the marketing potential of member crops by acting as an extension to, or replacing, on farm storage of grain and including grading, drying, dampening and segregation technology.

Some groups aim to promote regional or national brands through joint promotion. Examples include **Case Study 10 Cheese from Wales**, a marketing co-operative that aims to ‘deliver a taste of Wales to the world’ and **Case Study 21 Tastes of Anglia** a cooperative of farmers and food producers with 247 members and with the aim of

promoting food fine food and drink produced in six Eastern counties of the United Kingdom.

- ❑ *Production groups.* Agreeing to jointly cultivate and harvest production of specific varieties and types and sometimes under a specific buyer contracts aimed at a specialist market.

Case Study 15 Bioagroturismo la Porta dei Parchi is an example of a 9 member cooperative farm involved in a range of activities and including the joint production of organic sheep.

Groups that fall into more than one category from the above are often termed *multi-purpose* and over a number of years can grow to considerable economic size, such as **Case Study 13 Orto Sole** and **Case Study 22 Cooperativa Euro-ortofrutticola Del Trigno** in Italy.

In some countries *cooperatives of cooperatives* have formed and in order to provide national and international representation. **Case Study 26 Keosoe** is an example of such a cooperative. Keosoe has a basic aim of representing Greek the political and trade interests of Greek viniculture cooperatives at national and international level. It comprises of 32 Greek wine cooperative members from throughout Greece.

Exercise: Complete the following exercise to illustrate the structure and purposes of different types of producer groups. In this particular case a group established for machinery sharing and a group established to deliver marketing services to its members

Circulate the table below (uncompleted) to course participants. Divide participants into two groups. Instruct the first group to fill in the left hand part of the table only, i.e. they will act as a group set up for machinery sharing purposes. The second group will fill in the right hand part of the table, i.e. they will act as a group set up to assist the members in the marketing of their agricultural produce. Afterwards, discuss the results and differences between the two groups. Concluding the exercise, you should summarise the key differences between the two types of groups in terms of their activity, ownership, management and expected economic results.

Machinery and marketing groups compared

Complete the following table. Consider yourselves as farmer directors of these groups explain how your group will operate in terms of activity, ownership, management and expected results. Be prepared to present your ideas to other groups

<i>Machinery group</i>	<i>Marketing group</i>
Activity	Activity
Ownership	Ownership
Management	Management
Expected economic results	Expected economic results

In a market economy producer groups are expected to work in a competitive environment and so are vulnerable to the same kinds of market and economic forces that face all other types of businesses. They also require sufficient financing, careful market analysis, strategic planning and well trained, committed and visionary management.

However in other important ways producer groups are different to other business forms. The most important is that the primary users of a group (farmers) are also the business owners. This influences the way in which a group is managed. Importantly farmer members normally agree to commit their production, or use the services of the group, to agreed quantities, specifications and standards. This commitment forms the main form of operating capital. Without a strong base of committed and disciplined farmer members working to ensure its success a group will fail.

The main aim of a producer group is to unite separate and independent farmers, in order to help them pool their activities, become more competitive through economies of scale and so increase their individual income and security on the market.

Producer groups are voluntary organisations and members are not forced to join and can withdraw their membership. New applications for membership are normally assessed on the basis of rules designed by the group members themselves. Applicants not willing, or able, to meet these defined conditions cannot become members. In this way farmers can maintain their independence, make their own decisions on who they will work with and determine the basis for their collaboration and the distribution of surpluses that will result from their joint activity. Many producer groups offer services only to their members and non-member activities are only allowed as a supplement to the core activity and are strictly limited.

Which boat do you want to be in?



In the European Union, more than 50% of inputs supplied to farmers and production marketed from farms are sold through organisations which farmers jointly own. Many have developed from modest beginnings and over more than 50 years some developed into large-scale operations, such as *Case Study 22 Cooperativa Euro-ortofrutticola Del Trigno* with 1200 members. Others such as *Case Study 20 Cooperativa Agricola Valdarnese* (4 members jointly marketing quality wine) have purposely tried to maintain their small size.

The first producer group markets emerged in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 1880s. The main reasons for the emergence of these markets and the establishment of a producer group were:

- To save time for producers by delivering goods to a market and where the producer group assumed responsibility for their sale
- To enable producers to focus on production and to employ professional traders to carry out produce sales on their behalf
- To enable small quantities of particular produce to be brought to one place and so allow larger quantities to be offered to wholesale traders
- To gain a competitive advantages over competitors by signing producer agreements to produce products of a common type and unified quality

Case Study 1 Brecknock Farmers Market is a more recent example of local markets that were established during the late 1990s in the United Kingdom. Local producers become co-operative members of the farmers market and this gives them access to a stall once a month.

In recent years other significant changes have also taken place in the global trade of food products and including,

- Increasing abolition of tariffs and barriers across Europe and through the World Trade Organisation and so growth in the global production and trade of agricultural goods
- Increasing concentration and size of national and international buyers
- Changes in the habits and preferences of consumers
- Food safety and quality assurance demands and legislation

These factors have increased the need for produce to be supplied at a defined quantity and quality to the extent that opportunities for many producers to sell small quantities of undefined quality products to major buyers are limited.

Many farmers across Europe also face difficulties in relation to:

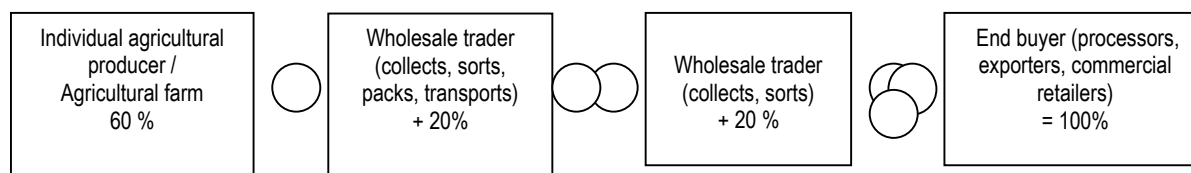
- Relatively small production areas
- Access to affordable credit and inputs (seeds/chemicals/fertilisers/ machinery etc)
- Information about market requirements or prices
- Adding value (such as, transport, storage grading and even processing of agricultural production)

There are therefore numerous opportunities for the development of new producer groups and extending the services provided by those currently existing.

Even in years with good climatic conditions farmers cannot be entirely certain that they will manage to sell their produce or receive timely payment. Crop production is also subject to natural disasters, particularly droughts and floods and where an effective insurance system is lacking this represents a clear production risk to farmers. Properly constructed groups can help to reduce risk.

When marketing produce a number of intermediaries might be involved and each intermediary adds to the final product price. A simple example of a fresh fruit product is shown below.

Example: Price formation of agricultural products



In many cases differences between the farmer price and the final consumer price is even greater. When purchasing inputs (seeds, fertilizers, agrochemicals), the reverse is the case, and higher prices are paid by the farmer when numerous intermediaries are involved. **Case Study 2 Corinth Auction** is an example of a cooperative using an electronic auctioning system for supplies of inputs and through competitive bidding considerably reducing the prices paid for bulk purchases.

Some producer groups (particularly the fruit and vegetable sector) are able to receive grant support for added value activity and also carry out interventions in the sector (withdrawal of overproduction from the market). The amount of aid is determined an annual basis for each group and is calculated as a percentage of the annual production sold at market. In order to be recognised a group is normally expected to meet certain conditions such as:

- A minimum number of members
- A minimum marketed production
- A minimum duration of membership

In order to qualify for recognition a group will need to prepare a plan and which includes:

- A description of its activities and members, in particular with respect to the number of member producers and with detailed data on the members, production, trade and facilities
- The goals of the group bearing in mind production perspectives and potential markets
- A detailed description of the measures to be undertaken, containing individual steps and means to achieve these goals for each year of the plan (the duration of the plan cannot exceed five years)
- Financial aspects, namely:
 - The method of calculation and amount of financial contributions
 - Funding procedures
 - Information evidencing the different amount of contributions
 - A budget and timetable for implementation of the programme

It is important to remember however that such aid is not a tool to resolve all the problems of the group, but just a temporary means of assistance.

5.2 Developing producer groups

Producers need to take positive measures to develop their own initiatives, but should assess very early whether:

- There is a clear producer commitment to the group
- There is a clear market or business opportunity?
- There is a leading farmer or small visionary working group capable of driving the group forward and able to communicate effectively with producers, buyers and suppliers?
- There is a clear (financial) benefit to producers from forming a group?

Exercise: Split participants into two groups. One of the groups should prepare a list with the strengths and weaknesses of a small to medium sized farmer. The second group should make to make a list of the potential strengths and weaknesses of a producer group

For most producers, joining a group is a simple commercial choice. It has to be an effective mechanism for reducing their own costs, increasing their total income or for minimising risk. The economic benefit must be predictable and with a significant degree of accuracy from the outset. The catalyst for establishing a new farmer group is normally a shared recognition that a group approach is the best means of meeting

mutual needs. The group should begin with a shared mission and clearly identified goals, such as:

- Providing members with better prices through access to higher value markets or improving qualities and quantities of produce available to buyers
- Reducing production costs, through discount bulk purchases of farm inputs
- Adding value to production, through washing, grading, preparing and packaging fresh fruit and vegetable produce to a level acceptable to supermarkets and compliant with the demand of the customers
- Providing a long term guarantee, stability and insurance in the market
- Developing a central collection or marketing point that enables members to better collect and sell production

Exercise: Examine the *Case Study 22 Cooperativa Euro-ortofrutticola Del Trigno*. Try to define at least three goals of this organisation.

As with any business, starting a group will need careful thought. Ten steps can be followed:

Step 1 Research and identify a market, supply or farmer service. More detail on how to carry out research is provided in *Module 2 Marketing*

Step 2 Undertake a feasibility study and prepare a simple business outline. It is important to be able to present a simple business proposition at an early stage to other potential farmer members. Important factors to present will be, market opportunities, potential volume of business, membership, facilities needed, possible operating costs and capital required. This need not be a detailed plan at this stage but an indication of intent.

Step 3 Assemble a core group of interested farmers and agree objectives and group mission. Discussing your ideas with other farmers is important for establishing a group. This may take time (and a number of meetings) but will encourage commitment

Step 4 Select a small initiative group committed to establishing the group. Unfortunately responsibility for starting a group and making it work often rests with a small group of visionary, motivated and committed farmer leaders

The primary tasks of this initiative group will be to:

- Discuss ideas in more detail with individual buyers, suppliers and potential members
- Prepare a draft of the statute and membership agreements
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for the group and prepare an outline business plan
- Consult relevant advisers (such as lawyers, business planning specialists etc) regarding the appropriate form and management of the group
- Prepare draft registration documents
- Prepare materials in a form that can be easily presented to potential farmer members

Step 5 Draft the group statute and membership agreements

Each country will have a legal requirement for certain issues to be included in the group statute. You will need to take advice on this. However it is likely to include issues related to:

- Products to be marketed/supplied or services to be provided
- Membership rules, such as fees, elections, voting, discipline/disputes and termination of membership
- Elections of directors
- Meetings
- Management of finance and distribution of surplus
- Record keeping
- Insolvency

An important difference between a group and an individual farmer is the need for additional agreements between the members and the group. These are not necessarily included in the group statute and may be renewable each year. Things to consider include:

- The amount of product to be marketed through the group e.g. a percentage of members production, number of tonnes, litres or quantities of livestock or inputs to be purchased from the group
- Penalties for shortfall
- The specification of the product to be accepted and marketed by the group (type, size, quality etc.) or supplied to members
- Information that is required by the group to enable it to carry out its function e.g. projected deliveries, volumes and time periods
- The production criteria to be imposed by the group (e.g. varieties to be grown)
- Quality control procedures, inspection of production and farms and the results of non-compliance
- Responsibility for collection, transport and deliveries
- Ownership of production or supplies
- Responsibility for risk and insurance
- Collection and distribution of money and charges for services

Case Study 14 Sjenica Wool Marketing shows the importance of agreeing rules prior to operation

Step 6 Prepare a detailed business plan. More information on how to do this is provided in **Module 1 Farm Business Planning**

Step 7 Convene a meeting of all members to outline basic business objectives and targets and to ensure final agreements on rules and members commitments. Make sure this meeting is properly organised and managed. Publicise the date and time of the meeting, venue, agenda and ensure potential members are able to attend. During

the meeting one person should be nominated to make notes and complete the minutes of the meeting for distribution to all potential members.

Step 8 Legally register the group. The form of registration for the group differs between countries. Registration should take into account members specific expectations and commitments to their group. The most common forms are either limited liability company or a cooperative.

Step 9 Hold the first meeting to select the board of directors and chairperson.

Step 10 Start operations and implement the business plan.

5.3 Managing producer groups

Good groups are able to sensibly balance the individual interests of group members with those of the group. There are a number of promoters and potential constraints to producer group activity including:

Promoters	Constraints
Potentially lower prices for inputs (fertilisers, agrochemicals, seeds etc.)	Differing member opinions and objectives
Improved prices of products sold	Increased costs of administration
Less time wasted on marketing by individual producers	Potential joint liabilities
Lower product insurance costs and easier access to credit through joint liability	Lack of commitment or interest from farmer members

Regardless of its aims, every group will need to be effectively managed. This is all the more necessary when combining people of different interests, needs and demands. If each member of the group is interested only in their own agenda and without consideration for that of the other members, the group will not survive in the long term. Specific targets will need to be set, decisions made and targets realised. It is important that decisions made should be well founded and understood by everybody.

The group must have a clear vision about the direction of its activities and which can be used as a basis for directing the group activities and defining targets. This vision should clearly outline the aim of the group, its operational area and long term aims, as well as relations with interested groups (such as suppliers or customers), which directly or indirectly will influence the group.

Across Europe the most commercially successful groups seem to conform to a number of criteria and in particular:

- They are formed with a clear business objective and trusting, ongoing and long-term relationships with buyers or suppliers are developed

- ❑ They are owned and controlled by producer members and managed for the benefit of those members. Any financial surpluses, from activities are returned to members (either annually or on cessation of membership) in proportion to the trade by the member through the group and not according to their shareholding. Non member trade is reduced to a minimum
- ❑ Produce is sold, or inputs purchased, on behalf of producer members and the full sales price is returned to members, but less the agreed charges for the services provided. This approach provides full transparency of all transactions through the group. In many cases the group may never actually buy the product from the members
- ❑ The voting system is based upon one person - one vote or according to the usage of the groups services or facilities by individual members

The distribution of votes must be laid down in the statute, but regardless of the legal status the main principle to be followed by any group is that control is not governed by investment. Whatever method is used it must be workable and clear to all members.

- ❑ A condition of membership is a signed and legally enforceable members agreement. This agreement is signed for a defined period and sets out the obligations and commitment of both the group to the members and members to the group. **Case Study 24 Camgrain Storage** shows a group where members have an obligation to market a minimum of 100 tonnes of produce through the co-operative annually.
- ❑ Groups specialise in particular products and services. Groups that aim (at least initially) to sell a wide range of members produce, as well as to supply other services, such as machinery, chemicals or credit have considerable difficulty in managing such diverse activities
- ❑ The group is properly financed, managed and controlled. In order to carry out its operations the group will need finance. The group will incur expenses, including operational costs, e.g. rent of office space, telephone, electricity, heating, depreciation charges, advertisements, transport, accounting etc. as well as interest repayments on loans. The group may also need to purchase assets to be owned jointly by members. Finance may come from the following main sources:
 - Your own capital including joining/annual fees (repayable or non repayable) or member loans to the group
 - Fees for services rendered, normally as a percentage charge on the buying transaction e.g.
 - ... % of the value of fertilizers, agrochemicals, seeds purchased through the group
 - ... % for the use of equipment through the group
 - ... % of the sales price of the goods sold, for example 4% per tonne of vegetables supplied to the group and sold through it

This levy needs to be set at a realistic level in order to cover all costs

- Non-distributed surpluses that are reinvested into the group at the end of the year and agreed at the annual meeting of all members
- External finance either through bank loans or by grants. It is prudent to ensure that membership capital should always amount to at least one third of total capital requirements.

Producer members will need to be made aware of the possible need to provide funds for capital investments (if required) but always in proportion to their use of the facility.

Case Study 24 Camgrain Storage provides a good example of how a group is financed with a mix of fees, loans and charges. This has enabled the group to purchase appropriate equipment and grow storage facilities from a 10,000 tonnes capacity in 1983 to 130,000 tonnes today.

- The roles and responsibilities of directors, members and management (if any) are clearly defined

There are people with different interests, and skills within every group. It is important to define the rights and the responsibilities of each member and to use their skills as effectively as possible. Clarifying the rights and responsibilities of each of the members will also define the management structure. What are the roles of the directors, members and management?

In general the rights of an individual member of a group are normally limited to being kept informed on decisions made, as well as receiving information on issues that are of interest to them. They are also able to vote on election of directors, management and other control bodies and on the distribution of surplus and approve any changes in articles of association. Members will be required to pay relevant membership fees and generally assist in the activities of the group and to follow group rules that may include areas such as:

- Not becoming a member of another group of the same type
- Remaining a member of the group for a defined minimum period
- Providing information to the group on their production activities
- Using the services of the group, such as making produce available to the group for sale or buying a minimum agreed amount of product.

When agreeing rules, roles and responsibilities in a group, tensions or distrust may appear. In order to maintain the unity it is important to maintain a balance of various interests and all members should be aware of them. A dissatisfied member may create significant problems outside the group.

Trust is an important element of effective cooperation. **Case Study 13 Orto Sole** presents an example of a group formed around 9 family partners and each with very specific responsibilities.

Exercise: Examine the example of the *Case study 23 Eastern Agri-link - Essex and Suffolk machinery ring*. Divide the group into two parts. Each of the groups must present at least five of the obligations of the members of this organisation.

- Proper recording and information systems are in operation

Including financial and trading records that are transparent and with monthly summary reports prepared for the board of directors. Members too can expect regular updates on progress and activities, such as process, charges or payments. Effective communications with producer members is a vital part of producer group activity.

Case Study 23 Eastern Agri-link - Essex and Suffolk machinery ring use MS Access based software to facilitate their work. This database contains information on machinery demands and on the availability of equipment and services. This database contains very detailed information on each member, their needs and what services and equipment they are offering.

- The group has an approved legal entity

Informal groups are invariably short term. Long-term development requires proper legal registration and business structuring. An approved legal entity also ensures that any arrangements made with third parties are properly structured and documented

Exercise: Carry out a role-playing exercise in the form of negotiations between a producer group and a trading chain and to agree under which arrangement the produce of the group will be sold.

Divide the participants into three groups: one will represent the group, the second will represent the trading chain, and the third will play the role of an observer. The negotiations will go on for 15 minutes and the result must be an agreement. The negotiating parties will nominate three representatives each. The time for preparation of the groups for the negotiations is 15 minutes.

Observers will have to express their opinion at the end of negotiations. Questions to which the observers must present their views should cover:

1. What were the alternatives negotiated?
2. How were the alternatives assessed (rational or emotional)?

Information for the producer group:

Prepare arguments for negotiations on the basis of the following information about your group:

- You are a group of vegetable producers and you produce around 10% of the vegetable production in your region
 - The group produces high quality produce and you have a signed contract with an acknowledged laboratory for quality assessments
 - You can provide an all-year round assortment of fresh vegetables
 - You can deliver the produce sorted, washed and packaged
 - You are a new group and in order to build trust amongst the members, you don't want to take undue risks. You prefer to sign contracts for firm prices and payment on a defined delivery date
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Information for the trading chain:

Prepare arguments for the negotiations on the basis of the following information about your company:

- You are one of three major trading chains in the region
 - You work with high quality vegetable producers. However they cannot supply produce all-year and in the quantities you need
 - You want to buy produce, which is prepared ready for sale
 - It is important to you that your customers get high quality produce and why you insist on quality assessments to be made in a laboratory chosen by you
 - It is your company policy to make payments one month after delivery
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5.4 Farmer to farmer support

Too often group development is over stimulated by advisers and policy makers rather than led by producers. Producer participation, in their own development, is now a widely accepted principle. An increasing number of analyses of projects have shown that their involvement in action planning and in adapting technologies and structures to their own environment is a critical component of project success. Producers need to take positive measures to develop their own initiatives. *Case Study 25 Cwmni Pysgotwyr Llyn Fishermen Ltd* shows a group of fishermen faced with variable fish stocks and an uncertain future. They have developed an innovative alternative to develop fish farming with effective support provided from the local development agency.

If a producer group is to be assisted, the aim must be to facilitate reflection by the group itself. Producer group members must carry out a situation analysis on their own terms, trace their own path and generate their own innovations. The process of innovation starts when the producers themselves begin to assess the importance of a

problem and whether it can be solved. Advisers can play a useful role in facilitating (but not dictating) planning meetings for group directors and can encourage cross fertilisation of ideas between groups. Advisers may help producers to reflect on long standing problems and consider their group strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, key short and longer term objectives, activities, membership agreements and operational procedures.

There are a variety of other participative techniques that advisers may consider using, including:

- Questions and answers** are the simplest form of participation and it is highly effective. Participants are given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss issues with the adviser and with other participants
- Tick boxes** are techniques that provide trainees with a number of questions that have a number of possible answers. Trainees tick the box they feel is most appropriate and give their reasons
- Questionnaires** consist of a prepared set of questions and which are distributed to each participant. The participant is meant to answer the question as honestly as possible. The questions can be “closed” and answerable by yes or not, or “open” and enable the participant to write their own views.
- Ranking exercises** are simple but effective participative training exercises. They can be completed either individually or in groups. Trainees are asked to rank named items into order of importance. On completion the items are compared and trainees are asked to explain their choices. This encourages discussion and helps to emphasise important priorities
- The matrix ranking** technique produces a ranked list of criteria for a particular topic of interest and helps to identify perceptions about the advantages or disadvantages of a particular issue.
In groups four or five key topics for the ranking exercise are identified. Then for each topic questions are asked such as “what is good about it?” or what is bad about it. Once all ideas (and less than 10) have been obtained a table is drawn. The topics are listed across the top and the ideas down the side. Each are then compared against the other, compared and scored accordingly on a scale of 1-5. A complete table is then produced. As the matrix ranking is prepared discussion on each topic can be promoted, in order to clarify the reasons why.

It is important that participants are clear about the criteria before beginning the ranking, otherwise inaccurate results will be produced. Similarly be careful about analysing the total score as it will hide the fact that each criteria may not count for equal weight.

- The pair-wise ranking** technique assists in identifying how choices are made and the differences between the preferences of people. 6-7 items are selected for

discussion on the topic to be discussed. These items are then written in tabular form with each of the items written along each axis.

Each point is then discussed against the opposite axis and a preference obtained for each pair. Participants should discuss in detail the reasons for their preference. These reasons should be recorded as well as the final preference. Adding up the number of times a particular point is preferred in the matrix will give an indication of the most preferred point overall. The real value of this exercise does not lie in the absolute ranking but rather the opportunity that arises for a discussion on their choices.

- ❑ **Team building exercises** set tasks for a group of persons to solve and within a framework prepared by the trainer. The task normally has a specific objective to achieve and a set of materials to work with. Leaders are nominated to manage the task and the group and an observer records what happens.
- ❑ **Case studies** are realistic examples or problem solving exercises, which may be true or fictional. They are written descriptions of an organisation or event, on which, the trainees can discuss and develop their own views. Case studies can take from one hour to one week to complete, depending on their complexity. The trainer should always ensure that the key learning points from case studies are achieved
- ❑ **Study visits** are useful, if good examples can be found. A visit to a particularly interesting site can stimulate participants to innovate and provides a realistic and practical environment
- ❑ **Work booklets** may be used as practical step by step guides. Trainees work through the booklets (either with the facilitation of a trainer or at home). The booklets provide information on particular topics as well as exercises and case studies
- ❑ **Films and videos** are useful for breaking up a long training session and can provide practical examples. But you need to carefully select examples relevant to your topic and ensure you extract from the video the key learning points after it is shown
- ❑ **Role plays** are where participants are asked to imagine that they are participating in real life situations and work out what to do as the situation develops. Role plays are not games and they are particularly good for understanding the emotions of other persons or in experimenting with new ideas
- ❑ **Brainstorming** is a useful exercise for quickly developing a list of creative and innovative ideas to solve a problem. The aim is to generate as many ideas as possible – no matter how crazy for later discussion and analysis. All ideas should be encouraged. The approach is useful in involving even the most reserved participants and can help in team building

- ❑ **Cluster techniques and snowballing.** A slight amendment to the brainstorming approach is for participants to write their ideas individually onto cards. When completed these are then collected and pinned onto a board. Exact duplicates can be removed. The remainder can then be clustered into broad topic areas.

Snowballing is a further variation. Participants are divided into pairs to write down ideas. After a few minutes these pairs join and compare lists and extra ideas. After a further few minutes the four persons join with another group until the whole group reassemble with the master list of ideas.

- ❑ **The Pareto principle and consensus.** The Pareto principle maintains that by focusing on 20% of key actions we can achieve 80% of the most important achievement. This can be a useful principle in focusing on actions that will achieve the greatest result from a long list of brainstormed ideas. In order to achieve a consensus all participants should be asked to record their favoured 20% of suggestions. These should be combined together in order to achieve an overall consensus.

Remember consensus is finding a proposal that is acceptable enough for all team members to support it. It is not a unanimous vote and may not represent everyones first priority. Consensus requires the participation of all members, skilful communication, creative thinking and structured processes in the early stages.

- ❑ **A venn diagram** gives a visual representation of the different groups and organisations within a community and their relationships and importance in decision-making. Participants are divided into groups according to their organisation, hierarchy or department. They are then asked to identify the institutions and individuals that play a key role in the activity or community being assessed. Participants then cut out circles of varying sizes from card. Each circle size representing the relative importance in decision making of the institution or the individual.

Circles are then labelled and arranged to represent the working relationships between them. Separated circles - representing no contact, touching circles – information exchange, small overlap – some co-operation and large overlap – considerable cooperation. When completed the diagram is analysed and the differences and underlying causes assessed. Venn diagrams quickly and visually reveal who the key decision makers really are and the relationships between them.

- ❑ **A force field analysis** helps a group to develop a shared vision of a future situation and to develop an agreed strategy of how to get there. On a large piece of paper or a whiteboard a box is drawn on the left side and labelled “present situation”. On the right side of the paper a box is drawn and labelled “future situation”. This will be the improved state that meets the objectives you are trying to achieve.

Brainstorm with the whole group the present situation that is relevant to the objective and the potential future situation. A line is drawn between the two boxes. The length and thickness of this line will determine just how far apart the two situations are. The participants then decide what constraints there are likely to be in achieving the future situation and the local resources that will enable it. These ideas can again be brainstormed and marked on side arrows away from the main line. Participants can then discuss (or again brainstorm) how local resources can be strengthened or constraints overcome and prepare a consensus report.

- ❑ **Trend lines** present a historical or future time line of trends in a particular activity and upon which future plans can be based. On a large sheet of paper or chalkboard produce an unmarked graph with X and Y axis. Then brainstorming amongst the group all the environmental, cultural, socio-economic and market conditions that relate to the activity under discussion. Select 6-10 of the most important and plot the trends from the past (as far as the participants can remember and also the expected trend in the future.

Participants should discuss whether each of the factors are related and what conditions have influenced the current situation. For the future projections discussion should be held on what interventions may affect this trend over time. Trend lines are useful in planning and can be updated every six months.

- ❑ **Spider diagrams** identify the strengths and weaknesses of specific factors during the design of a project and help to identify how these activities may be modified to improve the situation. Four factors are assessed: 1.Environmental 2.Institutional/Cultural 3.Local skills/resources 4.Economic and market factors.

A large cross is drawn on paper and each factor labelled at the end of the four lines. Each line is then scaled from 1-5 (with 0 in the middle). For the issue under discussion the activity is scored along the lines with the very strong marked 5 and very weak 0. By joining the four dots a diamond is formed. The shape of this diamond will indicate where interventions or modifications into an activity might be required. Discussions on possible solutions can then be made.

- ❑ **Stretch goals** aim to push a team to deliver major breakthrough solutions by innovative approaches. Through asking the team to deliver solutions that will radically improve processes rather than develop incremental solutions participants are mentally “stretched.” Once an innovative solution is found by brainstorming alternative possibilities and through lateral thinking a number of milestones are identified as stages to achieving this goal and the processes by which it will be achieved prepared.
- ❑ **Flowcharts** are a step by step diagram which is used to plan the stages of a project or describe a process being studied. They can focus on key stages or can be prepared in considerable detail and provide information about every stage of a process. They are particularly useful in identifying where potential problems may arise and also to focus on the important steps. They also help to identify where

there is inadequate knowledge of a process and the points where there are unnecessary steps taken in completing the process.

- ❑ **Community based maps** of this kind help to show where resources, features and assets are located and their spatial relationships with each other. Group participants should represent a cross section of a village (Gender, age, livelihoods etc.).

The map should be started (on paper/chalkboard or on the ground) with a key feature placed such as a road, river or lake). The participants should then illustrate key features on the map in relation to the issue being discussed eg poaching or tourism development. As each feature is placed participants discuss this issue in relation to making improvements or introducing new approaches. An observer records the discussion, but is not involved at any stage.

As well as recording physical sites such as, forest, mountains and buildings participants should also record assets and resources not so easily mapped such as friendly people, easy access, multi ethnic population etc. Symbols are used to emphasise these points. Once the map is completed the group discusses and debates their map with other groups until a final consensus for action is obtained. The final map and notes are completed by the observer and distributed to everyone.

- ❑ **Mobility maps** help us to identify where local people travel, the purpose of the trip and the time taken. It is particularly helpful for field workers that are planning their own schedule but also in clarifying just how important a particular task or trip actually is.

A circle is drawn on paper, a whiteboard or on the ground and representing the village. Key informants then trace the movement of people to different directions and for different activities and mark the distance of the trip and the time taken. Only one topic should be completed at a time. Once all topics are completed the group should discuss the opportunities and constraints the people in the area face.

- ❑ **Seasonal calendars** help to demonstrate changes in an activity throughout the year, seasonal trends and particular periods of stress or vulnerability in a community. The year should be divided into the periods that suit the participants best. A specific subject (eg fruit production) should be identified and groups are then asked to make diagrams to illustrate trends and changes in their activities over a defined period. If a number of topics are covered this can be combined into one diagram to show correlation between variables and the periods of particular stress.
- ❑ **Transect walks** demonstrate the importance of going in person (as a team) to a region to observe and talk about things of local importance. Local informants should accompany the team and a route is planned in advance. The subject of the enquiry should be well defined and participants should record what new things they discovered, the views of persons they meet and the methods used during the walk.

- ❑ Walks can indicate changes in vegetation, human habitation, biodiversity problems or human habitation or views. Transect walks may be further accompanied by staying overnight (or over a defined period) within the local community.

5. Further Sources of information

www.cogeca.be General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives in the European Union

www.fao.org Agricultural cooperative development. A manual for trainers.

www.farmerslink.org.uk

www.plunkett.co.uk An educational charity with the aim of supporting the development of rural group enterprise worldwide