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# Engaging with farmers as entrepreneurs and partners: experiences with a self- assessment tool for farmers' organisations (FORCE)

TED SCHRADER

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**WAGENINGENUR**  
*For quality of life*

## *Markets, Chains and Sustainable Development* **Strategy & Policy Papers**

'If external people come to you and start pointing at your weaknesses you are likely to defend yourself but do nothing. If you discover the same weaknesses yourself, you most likely start working on them, especially if improved performance translates in better business'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Farmer's reaction on self-assessment assessment results for his Farmer Field School network (Malindi, Coastal Province of Kenya; June 2009)

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# Engaging with farmers as entrepreneurs and partners: experiences with a self-assessment tool for farmers' organisations (FORCE)

Ted Schrader<sup>2</sup>

## *Abstract*

Governments, donors and companies increasingly perceive small farmers and their organisations as development actors and business partners. A practical self-assessment tool, 'Farmers Organizations Reviewing Capacities and Entrepreneurship' (FORCE), takes up the challenge to translate the recognition of farmers' agency into operational practices. In this chapter we demonstrate that FORCE is an effective tool to quickly map how farmers perceive their organisation and business relations. Self-assessment results of farmer groups in coastal Kenya illustrate how the tool is applied and how farmers' views are plotted in easily understandable scores and graphs. The chapter shows that FORCE functions like a mirror for farmers' organisations and that self-assessment results are a good starting point for discussing the way forward. In this manner FORCE can contribute to capacity development of farmers' organisations and to farmer-inclusive value chain and agribusiness cluster development. The chapter ends with recommendations when and how the tool can be most effectively applied.

## **1. Self-assessment and the challenge of improving organisational performance and business relations of farmers' organisations**

### Lead questions

Farmers have predominantly been treated as passive target groups or beneficiaries. Policies and agribusiness realities are however rapidly changing. Governments, donors and companies increasingly perceive farmers and their organisations as partners and entrepreneurs. This new perception raises the need to engage with farmers and their organisations as autonomous actors. This chapter presents a self-assessment tool that makes it this possible. This tool is called 'FORCE': 'Farmers' Organizations Reviewing Capacities and Entrepreneurship'. It has been developed for farmers' organisations to harness how members evaluate the capacities and performance of their organisation and how they view the business relations they are engaged in.<sup>3</sup>

We explore whether and how this self-assessment tool can contribute to more sustainable and inclusive value chain and agribusiness cluster development. More specifically, we seek to answer the following questions:

Can FORCE induce self-propelled change processes within farmers' organisations, leading to capacity strengthening and performance improvement?

Can the self-assessment tool induce dialogue and collaboration between farmers and other players in the agricultural sector?

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<sup>3</sup> This project was funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Netherlands (BO-10-006-114).

Can FORCE be effectively applied in programs supporting rural agribusiness development? When and how?

How do we answer these questions?

We first briefly highlight important drivers and trends in development policies and agribusiness relations. This leads to the identification of two major challenges: (i) member-directed change in farmers' organisations and (ii) improved mutual understanding and collaboration between farmers and other stakeholders in the agricultural sector.

The core of this chapter presents the methodology of the tool and experiences with applying it.<sup>4</sup> Sections 3 and 4 address the following operational questions: How to organise the self-assessment? What are the methodological steps and supporting materials? What are the outputs that are produced and how do these look like? How do self-assessment results feed discussions within farmers' organisations and among farmers' organisations and their partners?

We illustrate the main features of the tool with examples derived from a farmers' self-assessment in the Coastal Province of Kenya. In this case, the tool was adapted to the contract farming relations farmer groups have with a processor and exporter of African Bird Eye chilies (Equator Products Ltd). In section 5 we summarise the outcomes of the self-assessment exercise and touch upon the follow-up actions for strengthening the chili producer groups, improving contract farming relations and forming sustainable agribusiness clusters.

Summarising our major findings and reflecting on our experiences, the last section suggests practical recommendations for further development and most appropriate application of the self-assessment tool.

## **2. Changing agricultural policies and agribusiness relations and challenges for engaging differently with farmers**

Changing perceptions of farmers: from target groups to actors

Hardly anybody in Europe would question that farms are enterprises and farmers are entrepreneurs. In Africa it's different. Until recently, Governments and donor organisations generally approached African (small) farmers as 'rural poor', 'target groups', or 'beneficiaries'. This is now rapidly changing. Development policies increasingly perceive farmers and their organisations as 'actors', 'entrepreneurs' and 'partners'.

Leading international organisations explicitly recognise small farmers and their organisations as players in factor and commodity markets. The new agriculture-4-

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<sup>4</sup> A detailed methodological description and discussion of the self-assessment tool is beyond the scope of this paper. Ted Schrader (Wageningen CDI) and Bertus Wennink (KIT) are preparing a methodological guide and related training module. Having harnessed experiences in different African countries, the aim is to share the tool with a broader audience (farmer organisations, cooperative colleges, local facilitators and capacity builders, business development services, etc.). For popularisation purposes, the tool has already been labeled as 'FORCE': Farmers Organizations Reviewing (their) Capacities and Entrepreneurship.

development agenda<sup>5</sup> argues for market-economic and systemic approaches that 'work for the poor' and involve rural people's organisations. The DGIS-LNV policy note on agriculture, rural economic development and food security largely underscores the international agriculture-4-development agenda, which stresses the 'functional' roles of farmers and their organisations as market players and value chain operators. Under track 2, support for capacity strengthening of farmers' organisations is explicitly mentioned. DGIS and LNV, pointing at asymmetric power relations in the agricultural sector, also stress the important representation and negotiation roles of member-based farmers' organisations.

In many African countries, democratization and decentralisation processes have contributed to the establishment of farmers' organisations. Governments are (re)launching cooperatives; some observers even speak of a renaissance of the cooperative movement in Africa.<sup>6</sup> As a result, farmers' organisations of all odds and sizes are coming up.

In this context, the interest for the role of farmers' organisations is rapidly growing. In many policy notes one can read that small farmers, when organised, can build social capital, create economies of scale, develop market intelligence and strengthen negotiation power. Farmers' organisations are also increasingly seen as actors that provide important services to their farmer-members. Among others, these services include: facilitating access to seeds, inputs and credit, training services, storage and processing, collective marketing, market and product development, price negotiation, lobby and advocacy. Capacity development of farmers' organisations therefore increasingly features in current agricultural development strategies.

#### Changing agribusiness relations: farmers as business partners

International agri-business relations are rapidly changing. The combined effect of important international drivers and trends<sup>7</sup> is setting the stage for fair and sustainable trade initiatives. Reliable and responsible sourcing is becoming increasingly important in supply chain management. As a result, agri-food companies, such as traders, processors, exporters, and supermarkets, have to deal with organised farmers as chain partners.

Many companies are therefore increasingly interested in establishing trustful relations with 'effective' farmers' organisations. This is exemplified by two major questions the cocoa industry (traders and processors) raised during a cocoa innovation session organised by the Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH): (i) How do we accelerate the formation of effective producer groups? (ii) How do we rapidly build local capacity to get producer groups qualified for certification?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> World Development Report 2008. *Agriculture for Development*. World Bank, Washington, October 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Develtere, P., I. Pollet and F.O. Wanyama (eds), (2008). *Cooperating out of poverty. The renaissance of the African cooperative movement*. Geneva: International Labour Office.

<sup>7</sup> International drivers and trends include: competing claims for natural resources, climate change, standards and regulations, consumer demand, international campaigns, corporate social responsibility and private sector codes of conduct

<sup>8</sup> The 'cocoa innovation session' was organized by the Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH, Haarlem, 2 November 2009). The two lead questions each had two sub-questions:

1. How do we accelerate the formation of effective producer groups?  
- What are the characteristics of effective cocoa producer groups?

### Is FORCE a methodological approach we need in this changing context?

The profound changes in agricultural development policies and international supply chain management announce new relations between actors in the agricultural sector. Should these changes have repercussions for the way governments, donors and private companies approach farmers? We think they do. In fact, we see two major challenges for engaging differently with farmers' organisations:

- *Challenge 1: Reasoning organisational change from member perspectives* The recognition of farmer agency and organisational autonomy requires tools that promote ownership of organisational change. In the current situation, external parties often evaluate farmers' organisations and suggest - or even prescribe - farmers how to improve their organisation. This typically leads to a defensive attitude, or, at best, superficial change processes that are triggered by donor funding. Can FORCE facilitate self-assessment, fuel internal strategic discussions and subsequently induce action-oriented planning within farmers' organisations?

- *Challenge 2: Establishing mutual understanding among farmers and their partners* Collaboration and transactions with farmers are only possible with a minimum level of mutual understanding and trust. In the current situation, many players in the agricultural sector often treat farmers' behaviour as a 'black box'. For establishing collaboration, reducing transaction risks and default, they however need to understand the perspectives and motivations of farmers. Why do farmers behave as they do? There is of course also the other side of the same coin. Farmers need to understand the interests, views and expectations of their partners (traders, processors, input dealers, banks, research institutes and others). Can FORCE induce better mutual understanding among farmers and their partners and contribute to improved stakeholder collaboration?

Before elaborating on these questions, we first acquaint you with FORCE and its methodology and then discuss possible results of the self-assessment tool.

### **3. Applying the self-assessment tool in the Coastal Province of Kenya**

#### Seven steps

The application of the tool typically goes through 7 subsequent steps. The methodology is the result of a gradual tool development process.<sup>9</sup> Our objective is to have a self-assessment

- 
- What can be done to accelerate the formation of effective cocoa producer groups ?
  - 2. How do we rapidly build local capacity to get producer groups qualified for certification?
    - What local capacity is needed to help cocoa producer groups qualify for certification ?
    - What can be done to rapidly build this local capacity?

<sup>9</sup> References initial phases of tool development in Rwanda, Niger and Mali:

- Schrader, T.H. & B.H. Wennink, (2005). *Auto-évaluation de l'orientation client et ébauche d'un plan de changement organisationnel de l'Institut des Sciences Agronomiques du Rwanda (ISAR)*. Rubona (Rwanda), Février 2005.
- Schrader, T.H. & A. M-A Tumukunde, (2006). *Résultats d'auto-évaluation Ingabo*. Gitarama, Mai 2006.
- Wennink, B.H. & J-D Nyamwasa. Wennink, (2006). *Auto-évaluation Imbaraga: les premiers résultats*. Kigali, Mai 2006.
- Nyamwasa, J-D, T. Schrader, A. Tumukunde & B. Wennink, (2006). *Profiling et évaluation de performance organisationnelle des syndicats d'agri-éleveurs*.

tool that is flexible, easy to use, cost-effective and action-oriented. Different materials support the 7 steps (cf. table below).

### Facilitation

A facilitator accompanies the self-assessment process.<sup>10</sup> A facilitator may come from the farmers' organisation itself or he/she may be an outsider. In case of an internal facilitator, it is generally a higher tier (for instance a national federation or a provincial network) that assists local branches in assessing their performance. An external facilitator typically comes from a local capacity builder that supports farmers' organisations. Both options, e.g. internal or external facilitation, have advantages and inconveniences that need to be examined for the specific situation at hand.

Steps	Supporting materials
1. Customization and organisation	
2. Identifying indicators and formulating statements	A. Statements relating to selected performance areas and indicators
3. Introducing the self-assessment to farmers	B. Introductory note
4. Farmers scoring the statements	C. Scoring form with statements
5. Data processing	D. Excel worksheets for data entry and processing and for preparing graphs
6. Preparing debriefing report and meeting	E. Format for debriefing report
7. Sharing and discussing self-assessment results	

#### *Customization and organisation: applying the tool in Kenya (step 1)*

We applied the self-assessment tool in the context of the innovative business model that a young company, Equator Products Ltd, is piloting in the Coastal Province of Kenya. Reliable

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- Nyamwasa, J-D, T. Schrader, A. Tumukunde & B. Wennink, (2006). *Imbaraga et Ingabo (Rwanda). Analyse méthodologique comparative de deux outils d'analyse organisationnelle des OP*. Arnhem: Agriterra, Mai 2006.
  - Nyamwasa, J-D, B. Wennink, A Tumukunde et T. Schrader, (2007). *Evaluation de Performance d'Organisations de Producteurs Agricoles, Un outil pour le renforcement des capacités des Organisations Paysannes: expériences au Rwanda*. Amsterdam: KIT, février 2007
  - Schrader, T.H. & T. Duffhues, (2007). *Restitution des résultats du 'scoring individuel' AREN (Association pour la Redynamisation de l'Élevage au Niger)*. Niamey, Octobre 2007.
  - Schrader, T.H. (2007). *Restitution des résultats du 'scoring individuel' FCMN (Fédération des Coopératives Maraichères du Niger)*. Niamey, Octobre 2007.
  - AOPP et al. (2008). *Outil d'auto-évaluation de la performance des coopératives agricoles de base. Guide d'utilisation*. Première édition, novembre 2008.

<sup>10</sup> It is possible to divide tasks (facilitation, data processing and reporting, discussion of debriefing results) over different persons.

sourcing with smallholders and meeting high international quality standards are the key features of this business model (cf. box 1).

Equator Products: reliable sourcing with smallholders and meeting high quality standards

In 2008, Equator Products Ltd (EP) started the production of solar dried African Bird Eye (ABE) chilies in the relatively poor Coastal Province of Kenya. The company offers smallholder farmers access to promising international niche markets. Sourcing high quality ABE chilies with smallholders characterizes the EP business model. For 2009, the company set the objectives to double the number of contracted farmers (moving from 2,000 to 4,000 farmers) and to triple export (from 60 to 200 tonnes of dried chilies). Attaining these objectives would bring the company at break-even point. In the absence of other cash crops, the ABE chili value chain has the potential of becoming an engine for rural economic development and innovation in the Coastal Province. In 2009, Equator Products has been buying chilies with some 300 farmer groups, most of them organized in higher tier organizations.

The objective of the self-assessment exercise was to promote reflection on the functioning and performance of the farmer groups and their higher tiers and the contract farming relations they have with Equator Products. On the basis of these orientations, we structured the scoring form in two main sections and 8 assessment areas:

<b>Organisational functioning and performance</b>	<b>Contract farming relations</b>
1. Membership base	
2. Governance, leadership and internal democracy	6. Production risks
3. Management of human and financial resources	7. Relation farmers-company
4. Collaboration and alliances	8. Default risks
5. Service provision to members	

*Identifying indicators and formulating statements (step 2)*

For each of these assessment areas, we identified indicators for which we formulated statements (cf. box below for some examples). A basic model on farmer group dynamics and performance inspired the statements on organisational functioning and performance. The statements on contract farming relations were specific to the EP smallholder sourcing business model. The scoring form we used in Kenya contained 88 statements (8 to 13 statements per assessment area).

Examples of statements

- 'Our organisation can function well without outside financial support'
- 'Our organisation facilitates access to credit and other financial services'
- 'If I were not member of the farmer group, I would have earned less'
- 'We can produce enough chilies even if the rains are bad'
- 'I am sure of producing good quality'
- 'I know how the company is drying the chilies'
- 'The better the quality of the chilies, the higher the price I get'
- 'We always deliver our produce on time at the collection points'

Most statements are positively stated, formulated in the active tense and from the viewpoint of an individual farmer ('I') or a farmer group ('we'). Our experience is that participants may have problems with scoring statements formulated in the passive tense, with negatively phrased statements and with If-then type statements (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> statement above).

Steps 1 and 2 adapt the tool to the specific situation of a farmers' organisation. Once the contents and modalities of the self-assessment are clearly defined, the role of the facilitator is essentially to introduce the subject, handle the scoring exercise, process the data and prepare the debriefing report.

#### *Introducing the self-assessment to farmers (step 3)*

The introduction of the self-assessment tool is one of the key roles of the person who is facilitating the exercise. In Kenya we introduced the self-assessment tool to four farmers' groups. During interactive sessions, which took 1-2 hours, we addressed the following three issues: (i) farmer group dynamics and organisational performance; (ii) business relations and (iii) farmers' self-assessment.

It is useful to introduce these subjects with concrete examples and metaphors.<sup>11</sup> In Kenya, we for instance compared agribusiness relations with dancing. And for introducing the self-assessment tool we used the metaphor of looking in a mirror ( ... do I need to comb my hair, shave my beard, redo my make-up ...?). We did not use powerpoints or hand-outs, but used drawings (on flipchart or blackboard) and games. In Kenya, on request of the farmers, the presentations were summarised in writing, translated in Kiswahili and made available to the farmer groups.<sup>12</sup>

#### Four farmer groups in coastal Kenya

Two of the four groups, KIFFSNET and LAFFSNET, are Farmer Field School Networks that were established in Kilifi and Lamu Districts during a FAO project promoting farmer field schools (FFS). They now largely continue as ABE chili producer groups. These networks are composed of farmer groups, which, in the case of KIFFSNET, are regrouped in zones. CODO<sup>13</sup> is a younger second tier organisation that also operates in Lamu District. The fourth entity was composed of loosely structured (not yet federated) farmer groups in the Witu production area.

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<sup>11</sup> Schrader, T.H. (2009). *About farmers' organisations and their business relations; 'Kuzumgumza kidogo kuhusu vikundi vya wakulima na biashara zao'*. Wageningen International, CDIC Program, June 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Schrader T.H. (2009). *VYAMA VYA WAKULIMA NA MAHUSIANO YA BIASHARA ZAO; ''Mazungumzo kuhusu vyama vya wakulima na biashara zao''*. June 2009 (translated by Equator Products & Zaina Mamu of Wageningen International)

<sup>13</sup> CODO stands for the rather generic denominator 'Community Development Organization'. Like KIFFSNET and LAFFSNET it is a second tier organisation that is composed of primary farmer groups.

*Farmers scoring the statements (step 4)*

The scoring form has the following basic outline:

No	Statement	Score					
<b>1</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>						
1.1	..... STATEMENT .....	0	1	2	3	4	5
1.2	..... STATEMENT .....	0	1	2	3	4	5

Respondents (members of farmer groups) give their opinion by scoring the statements on a 5-point Likert scale. For each statement, they ask themselves two basic questions: 'Is this statement true or not true?' and 'To what extent is it true or not true?' In this manner, the level of agreement or disagreement with statements is approximately measured.<sup>14</sup> We stress that scores that thus obtained are subjective and time-bound: every respondent compares the current situation with what he/she thinks it could or should be.

Not true		←				
Scores	0	1	2	3	4	5
	<i>Absolutely not true</i>	<i>Not true</i>	<i>Not really true</i>	<i>A bit true</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Absolutely true</i>
				→	<b>True</b>	

With appropriate translation and depending on the education level of farmers, filling out the scoring form takes 30 to 90 minutes. The number of respondents depend on the objectives of the self-assessment and availability of members. For the 4 major chili production areas in Kenya, the sample was as follows: KIFFSNET (N=21), LAFFSNET (N=27), CODO (N=17), WITU (N=16). Representation of certain respondent groups, for instance men and women or staff, leaders and members, needs to be addressed when organising the self-assessment.



LAFFSNET scoring session (June 2009)

*Data processing (step 5)*

We use Excel work sheets for quick data entry. The work sheets match with the questionnaires. Standard formulas calculate average scores, highest and lowest scores and standard deviation. Different types of graphs can be chosen to be automatically generated (cf. section 4).

<sup>14</sup> Methodological discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. For more information, cf. notes 6 and 7.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
1											1. Membership base			
2											1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4
3	Zone no	area 1	area 2	area 3	area 4	area 5	area 6	area 7	area 8	Zone name				
4	1	82.2	93.9	88.3	95.0	73.3	51.7	80.0	53.8	Gungoni	3	3	5	5
5	2	84.4	98.5	90.0	92.5	77.8	41.7	88.3	83.1	Mtwapa	3	4	5	1
6	3	73.3	64.6	40.0	42.5	42.2	41.7	51.7	47.7	Kabzinuni	4	3	2	4
7	4	91.1	80.0	63.3	75.0	62.2	58.3	66.7	60.0	Mwakuhenga	5	5	3	5
8	5	77.8	67.7	53.3	77.5	66.7	55.0	58.3	50.8	Bale	3	5	5	3
9	6	92.2	76.9	70.0	87.5	88.9	90.0	70.0	84.6	Kayanda	3	5	5	5
10	7	44.4	73.8	43.3	52.5	51.1	33.3	60.0	52.3	Minnamine	3	4	3	0
11	8	88.9	92.3	71.7	100.0	62.2	41.7	41.7	76.9	Takaungo	3	5	5	5
12	9	82.2	93.8	85.0	97.5	77.8	55.0	85.0	63.1	Kibarani	5	5	4	3
13	10	86.7	90.8	78.3	100.0	84.4	51.7	75.0	66.2	Kiniba	5	3	5	4
14	11	80.0	63.1	65.0	62.5	48.9	55.0	55.0	63.1	Dzikunze	3	4	3	4
15	12	73.3	64.6	58.3	67.5	44.4	55.0	56.7	53.8	Snanani	4	3	3	2
16	13	75.6	83.2	65.0	52.5	53.3	55.0	55.0	38.5	Kachoronni	5	4	3	4
17	14	62.2	66.2	56.7	57.5	46.7	53.3	53.3	69.2	Ngerenya	5	4	3	3
18	15	73.3	72.3	41.7	57.5	60.0	60.0	63.3	56.9	Matano mane lower	3	4	3	4
19	16	62.2	84.6	55.0	72.5	68.9	60.0	75.0	63.1	Majarani	3	5	2	1
20	17	88.9	93.8	68.3	97.5	86.7	48.3	85.0	64.6	Matsangoni	4	5	5	5
21	18	80.0	73.8	53.3	85.0	55.6	58.3	68.3	55.4	Central Ngerenya	5	5	4	5
22	19	55.6	66.9	45.0	42.5	31.1	40.0	28.3	47.7	Dida	5	3	2	3
23	20	71.1	53.8	46.7	55.0	46.7	56.7	70.0	70.8	Lower Ngerenya	3	4	5	5
24	21	80.0	78.5	36.7	55.0	44.4	55.0	60.0	52.3	Matano mane	3	4	3	4
25				11	2	8		12	3	6				
26		76	77	61	73	61	51	64	61	Average	3.8	4.1	3.7	3.6
27											76	83	74	71
28											76%	83%	74%	71%
29		44	54	37	43	31	33	28	38	Min	3	3	2	0
30		91	98	90	100	89	60	88	85	Max	5	5	5	5
31														
32		11.7	13.3	16.0	19.8	16.3	7.4	14.8	11.8	STDV	0.9	0.8	1.1	1.5

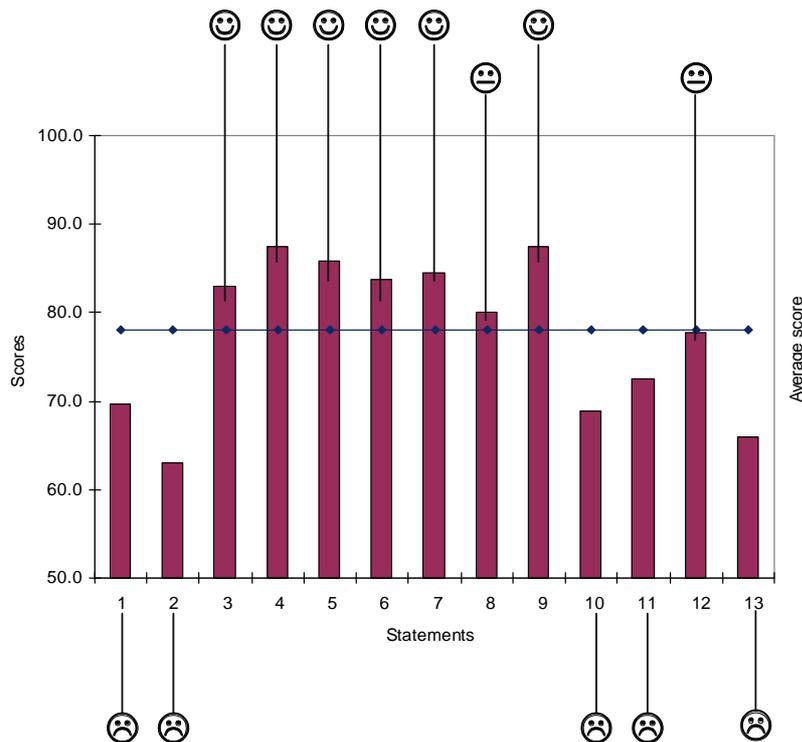
### Impression of Excel work sheet

#### Preparing debriefing report and meeting (step 6)

After data entry, a pre-defined report format helps to compose a debriefing report. In Kenya, the format for the debriefing report was as follows: (1) Introduction; (2) The 'mirror': overview of total average scores and scores per assessment area; (3) Perception of organisational performance and (4) Perception of contract farming arrangements with Equator Products. When work sheets, graphs and report formats are well defined, data entry and reporting takes 4-10 hours. It is possible to present self-assessment results the next day. In case of several self-assessments, it is possible to do organise scoring sessions in one week and come back the next week for debriefing the results.

#### Graphs

- *What do the graphs show?* The graphs show perceived strengths and weaknesses. Scores reflect the subjective and time-bound views of respondents.
- *What do the scores indicate?* Scores of 60, 70 or 80 do as such not tell us much. A high score does not necessarily mean that the organisation is 'objectively' strong in a certain domain or on a certain subject. We often observed that active organisations engaged in capacity strengthening trajectories give themselves relatively low scores, whereas young or less active organisations give themselves relatively high scores.
- *How to interpret the scores?* The graphs show subjects and issues for which members are relatively more or less happy. Low scores suggest that farmers perceive a necessity to improve the situation.
  - The basic reasoning is that if an organisation is 'objectively' weak on a certain subject, but does not perceive it as such, the chances for internally motivated organisational change are slim!
  - If sufficient data on the organisation are available, it is possible to link scores to 'objective performances' or benchmarks. In that case, self-assessment comes close to a more formal evaluation.



#### *Sharing and discussing self-assessment results (step 7)*

A key element of the methodology is to share and discuss self-assessment results with farmers as soon as possible after the scoring exercise. Quick data processing and easy reporting modalities make this possible. The date, time and venue of the debriefing are set during the scoring exercise and generally take place at the premises of the farmers' organisation.

The debriefing meetings have two objectives: sharing the results and discussing the results.

At the beginning of the meeting, the emphasis is on explaining how scoring forms are processed and how different presentation formats are made. The facilitator shows the excel work sheets in his/her laptop and makes sure that scores and results are related to the scores on the scoring forms. Respondents appreciate this transparency very much.

Farmers generally quickly understand the line-bar graphs that are used (cf. example above). They understand that the line represents the average score (overall score or assessment area score) and they easily relate the bars to specific assessment areas or specific statements. Often, farmers comment that the graphs are indeed 'pictures' of their organisation, which were collectively 'drawn' by filling out the scoring forms. Participants highly appreciate that many views are heard and anonymously treated.

Self-assessment results, e.g. the internally perceived strengths and weaknesses, are a good starting point for in-depth discussion of organisational practices and performance. When looking at the results, farmers are, not surprisingly, most interested to below average scores, e.g. the subjects for which members are apparently not so happy. During the debriefing sessions, it is important to explain the possibility that subjects that get low scores are not

necessarily those that require priority action. And it is important to indicate the possibility that subjects that already get good scores may need further improvement.

#### **4. What are the possible outputs of a self-assessment exercise?**

Now that we've seen the different steps of the methodology, it is useful to indicate what output and results a FORCE self-assessment exercise can produce. We first discuss the possible scope of self-assessment and the analytical perspective it may adopt. We then present four possible outputs.

##### Scope: organisation reports and comparative reports

A self-assessment exercise can be done with one or with several organisations. A self-assessment is always discussed at the level of an organisation and results in an organisation report. In case of several self-assessments, it can be considered to making a comparative analysis.

##### Organisation reports

Self-assessment results are always analysed within the farmers' organisation. This leads the farmers' view on their organisation and business relations. The basic debriefing report is the starting point for any organisation report. Debriefing reports present results per assessment area. Analysis of specific subjects, especially those that seem to be 'burning issues', can be done during debriefing meetings and subsequent meetings of the organisation. An organisation report capitalises the self-assessment results and subsequent discussions.

##### Comparative reports

A comparative report presents and compares assessment results of several farmers' organisations. It is made for analytical purposes that go beyond one specific farmers' organisation. Comparison of self-assessment results allows for identifying (i) trends and cross-cutting issues which may be relevant for reasoning more general priorities for action; (ii) particularities of certain farmers' organisations and defining tailor-made interventions. Comparative analysis requires making additional excel sheets and additional analysis. This takes of course additional time that has to be taken into account when planning the self-assessment.

##### Analytical perspective: farmers' and stakeholders' views

External analysis is possible when farmers' organisations are ready to share self-assessment results with others. Farmers' organisations can inform their partners on how they perceive their organisation and business relations. These partners can also give their perception on strengths, weaknesses and priorities. Sharing self-assessment results and views on priorities for action is a potential starting point for dialogue and collaboration among farmers and other stakeholders.

##### Four types of assessment reports

Depending on the scope and analytical perspective of a self-assessment, four types of assessment reports are possible:

<i>Scope</i>	<i>Analytical perspective</i>	<i>Output</i>
One organisation	Internal	- Internal organisation report: the farmers' organisation analyses its self-assessment results. This output is always produced.
	External	- External organisation report: external observer and/or partner of farmers' organisation analyses self-assessment results for one organisation
Several organisations	Internal	- Internal comparative report: higher tier (union, federation, platform) makes comparative analysis of self-assessment results of local chapters
	External	- External comparative report: external observer and/or partner makes comparative analysis of self-assessment results

It is possible to combine internal and external analyses and to compare results. This is a starting point for dialogue and collaboration. In case several organisations are involved in a self-assessment exercise, all organisations will in principle have a specific report for their organisation.

## **5. Level of analytical detail and options presenting self-assessment results**

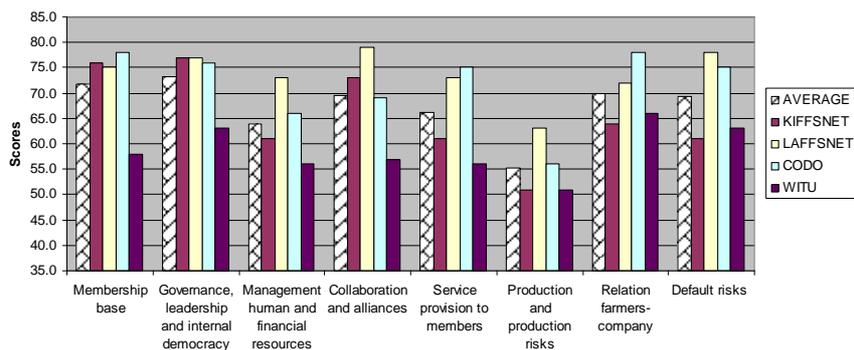
### Level of detail

The level of analytical detail may vary, both for organisation reports and comparative reports. In addition to the presentation of overall results and results per assessment area, the following analyses are possible: variability in scoring, ranking scores and detailed analysis per subject (statement referring to a specific indicator). In the next sections we show how self-assessment results can be presented and the level of analytical depth a self-assessment may seek to attain.

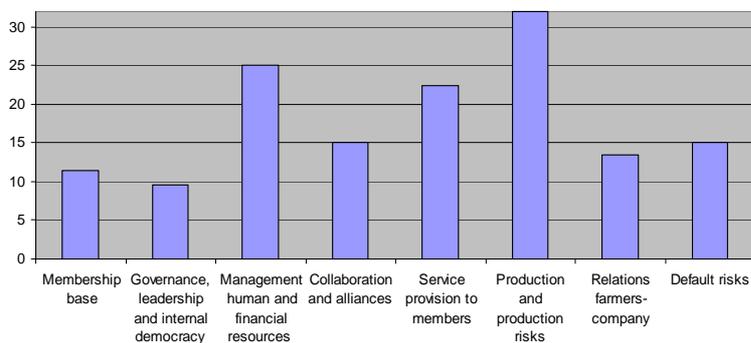
### Presenting overall results

Overall results are helpful to identify general priorities. They can be presented in different manners: (1) Tables with total scores, averages and differences from average score; (2) Graphs with the average total scores for assessment areas (3) Graphs comparing the scores for different organisations and (4) Ranking scores (for one or several farmers' organisations). The figures below show the third and fourth option.

Comparing the scores



Priority setting based on ranking scores

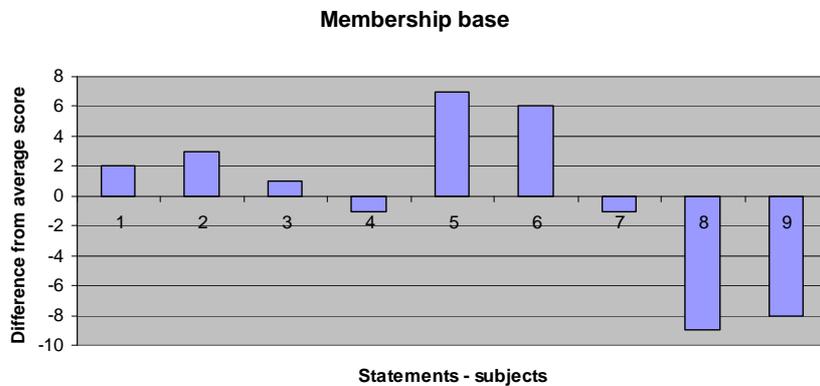


Presenting results per assessment area

Discussing results per assessment area allow to identify priority subjects. Results per assessment area can be presented in tables and line-bar diagrams. A third option is to use graphs that more specifically show to what extent certain subjects score below or above average. This third possibility is illustrated with the graph below .

### Presenting results per assessment area

Discussing results per assessment area allow to identify priority subjects. Results per assessment area can be presented in tables and line-bar diagrams. A third option is to use graphs that more specifically show to what extent certain subjects score below or above average. This third possibility is illustrated with the graph below.



Statements refer to:

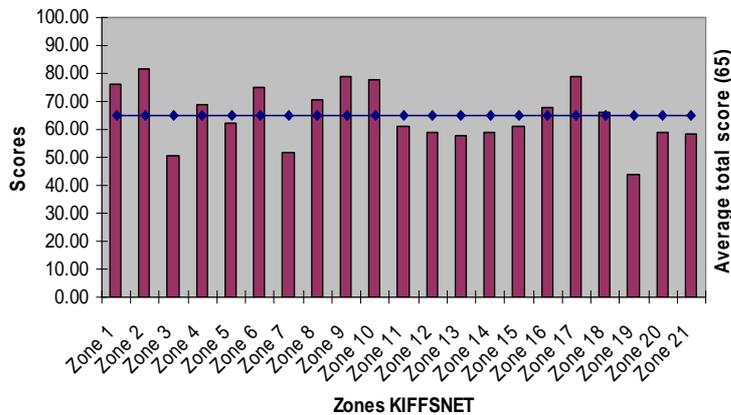
- Formulation of organisation objectives
- Sharing organisation objectives with members
- Definition membership conditions
- Openness of organisation
- Search for new members
- Member register
- Information flow to members
- Payment membership dues
- Active member participation

### Presenting variability in scoring within the same farmers' organisation

Within the same organisation perceptions can differ among different member categories. Through roughly categorising respondents in sub-groups, the tool allows to distinguish scoring results of important sub-groups, for instance: (i) geographical zones; (ii) views of Board members, staff members and ordinary members; (iii) views of male and female members or (iv) view of farmer groups near towns versus remote farmer groups. The choice of sub-groups depends of course of the specific context.

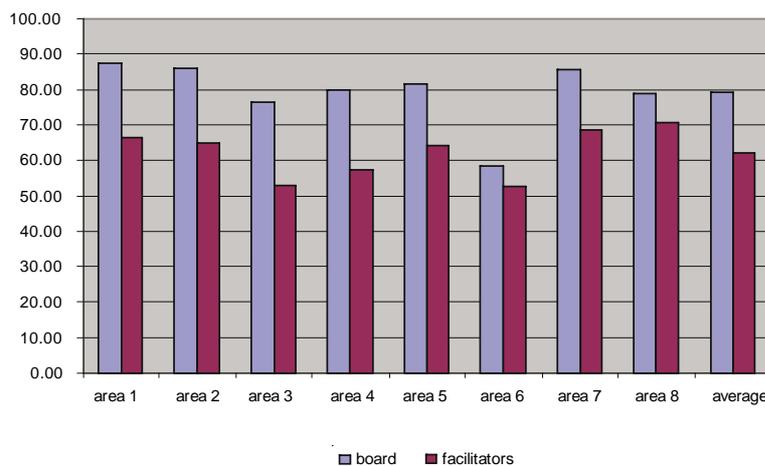
The following graph shows the variability in the scores of the 21 zones of KIFFSNET. This allows to identify particularities of certain KIFFSNET zones and to take specific action at this level of the organisation.

Average scores KIFFNET



The next graph shows that CODO board members scored significantly higher than the CODO facilitators. It seems that facilitators, not having administrative functions in the organisation and having been exposed to training sessions, are more critical in their assessment of the functioning and performance of farmer groups.

Scores Board members and facilitators (CODO)



Detailed analysis per subject/statement: what are challenges and what can be done?

During debriefing sessions, we give specific attention to the detailed analysis of assessment results. What are the reasons for a high, average or low score? It is at this stage that more factual information comes to the fore and future benchmarks can be set. When different farmers' organisations were involved, it is also possible to compare notes and to analyse the subject in even more detail. This is especially useful when the subject appears to be a 'burning issue'.

The table below gives an example of the issue of access to credit and other financial services. The comments are illustrative as to how the subject could get follow-up action in a multi-stakeholder context.

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Results</i>				
5.6.		Kiffsnet	Laffsnet	CODO	Witu
Our organisation facilitates access to credit and other financial services	Scores	26	64	61	48
	% disagree	81%	30%	35%	44%
<i>Possible discussion points</i>					
<p>Kiffsnet respondents clearly indicate their view that the organisation is not facilitating access to credit and financial services. The scores for the other three groups are significantly higher, but still with a high number of respondents disagreeing with the statement.</p> <p>Access to credit and financial services is more important for CODO than access to inputs (cf. statement 5.4), whereas it is the other way round for Laffsnet and Witu.</p> <p>High standard deviation (all groups). This is clearly an issue that needs broad discussion within farmer groups, zones and networks and open discussion with Equator Products.</p> <p>To be explored:</p> <p>Are Kiffsnet farmer groups indeed less able to get credit with banks?</p> <p>What can Equator Products do to support Kiffsnet in establishing relations with banks?</p> <p>What can be learned from the first experiences in Lamu District?</p>					

## **6. Self-assessment and follow-up action: the case of ABE chili producers in coastal Kenya**

FORCE leads to a lot of information that can be analysed and presented in different ways.

The self-assessment of farmer groups in coastal Kenya led to two complementary analyses:

- Emerging farmers' priorities. Each farmer group reflected on the self-assessment results.
- Implications and suggestions for the further development of the EP business model. Both Wageningen UR and Equator Products Ltd interpreted the self-assessment results, reflecting on further development of the business model. Comparative analysis allowed for highlighting the particularities of the different farmer networks.

### Identified action points

These analyses resulted in a large number of action points, both for organisation development and improved contract farming relations. These are summarised in the table below.

<i>Organization development</i>	<i>Contract farming relations</i>
1 Defining member adherence conditions and their rights and duties.	1 Facilitating access to production factors and bank loans.
2 Operational and transparent annual planning, budgeting and evaluation.	2 Addressing climate risks and drought stress.
3 Internal communication and accountability.	3 Cost-benefit analysis and reducing production costs.
4 Establishment of lean M&E system.	4 Analysing optimal acreage according to household characteristics.
5 Training of Board members.	5 Adapting and clarifying price setting mechanisms, premiums, payment modalities and contracts.
6 Professionalisation of facilitators.	6 Ensuring communication on contract farming arrangements beyond board members.
7 Financial management.	7 Pursuing technical training efforts of EP and addressing the 'bridge function' of farmer facilitators.
8 Collaboration with banks.	8 Improved management of collection points.
9 Collaborations with providers of production factors (seeds, fertilisers, chemicals).	9 Further efforts to increase farmers' understanding of the chili drying process and value chain.
10 Developing relations with local government, and institutes for research and education.	10 Review of EP payments for the services of networks (communication) and facilitators (training in good agricultural practices).
	11 Better anticipate on conflict resolution

### Way forward

Conducting a self-assessment should not be a stand-alone activity: it should be linked to follow-up activities. Experiences in Rwanda and Niger show that farmers' organisations can fruitfully link self-assessment to their strategic planning process.

### What is the likelihood that farmer groups in coastal Kenya will strengthen their organisation and that contract farming relations will be improved?

In Kenya, the farmer groups showed a high level of motivation to address the identified priorities for organisational development. Self-assessment results are feeding into a process of transforming farmer field school networks in more economically oriented producer groups. To arrive at practical action, it is important that dialogue continues, both within the farmers' organisations and between farmer groups and Equator Products. Suggesting options for addressing identified challenges could be a role of external capacity builders.

The involvement in contract farming and its concomitant requirements of Good Agricultural Practices and collective marketing are important push factors for farmers'

professionalisation. Improved member participation, internal communication, training, planning and evaluation, cost-price analysis, financial management and relations with third parties are likely to have positive impact on economic results. This suggests that organisation development is most easily promoted when linked to income-generating activities.

Equator products is developing a business model that increasingly involves small farmers. There is increasingly trust and mutual understanding between farmers and Equator Products. More farmers (including a growing number of female farmers) are member of farmer groups, new farmer groups are created and farmers are increasing their ABE chili acreage.

For improving the volume and quality of dried chilies, Equator products has an interest in promoting more effective farmers groups. This is important for reliable sourcing and meeting quality requirements. Equator Products has already invested human and financial resources in farmer professionalisation and will continue to do so. In addition, Equator Products is playing a pro-active role to facilitate farmers' relations with other stakeholders. Equator Products is for instance making efforts to convince Equity Bank to open branches in chili production areas. Equator Products is also playing an intermediary role to facilitate contacts between farmers and input suppliers, research institutes and local authorities. Self-assessment results are playing a guiding role in this endeavor. With increased involvement of banks, input dealers, researchers and local authorities, an ABE chili agribusiness cluster is being established.

## **7. Conclusions and recommendations**

In the preceding paragraphs we have shown the features of FORCE and shared experiences with applying it. We now come back to the strategic question whether and how the self-assessment tool can contribute to the strengthening of farmers' organisations and to inclusive value chain and agribusiness cluster development. The conclusions summarise our findings on the potential of the tool and indicate the most appropriate circumstances for applying the self-assessment tool. We wind up by suggesting practical actions for the further development and application of the tool.

### Five major conclusions

#### *1. The self-assessment tool facilitates capacity strengthening of farmers' organisations*

- The self-assessment tool (FORCE) is a methodological device for approaching and dealing with farmers and their organisations as development actors and business partners.
- It allows farmers' organisations to quickly harness, process and communicate how (different categories of) farmer members subjectively perceive their organisation.
- The possibility of voicing opinions within the farmer organisation, quick feedback, easy uptake of the results and practical discussions on the way forward are strong features of the tool.
- Farmers indicate that they are more likely to act on challenges they identified themselves.
- With appropriate follow-up, FORCE induces self-propelled organisational development processes and improved mutual understanding between farmers and their partners. In

this manner, the tool contributes to more sustainable and inclusive value chain and agribusiness cluster development.

2. *The tool is easy to handle*

- Applying the tool for one farmers' organisation takes some 2-3 days. This includes: explaining the self-assessment, scoring, data entry and processing, making graphs and preparing basic debriefing report, sharing and discussing the results.
- The tool can be easily transferred to staff of farmers' organisations and to local capacity builders. Learning by doing is the best transfer mechanism.

3. *FORCE is a flexible tool*

- FORCE can be customised for the specific situation at hand and related information needs. Customising the tool to the needs of the specific farmers' organisation(s) and their agribusiness relations involves: defining the assessment areas; identifying the indicators; formulating the statements and inviting participants.
- Content-wise, FORCE can be oriented at organisational performance, at specific relations farmers have with other stakeholders in the agricultural sector or at both.
- The tool can be applied to one organisation and result in single organisation reports. When applied to several organisations it can also result in comparative reports.
- The level of analytical detail may vary. It is possible to analyse self-assessment results in detail (per subject/statement) and to analyse variability in scoring (different categories of respondents).
- In addition to representing evolving farmers' priorities, analysis may be extended with an interpretation of external observers.

4. *FORCE is useful for partners of farmers' organisations*

- FORCE is not only important for farmers' organisations assessing themselves, but also for governments, donors and companies that seek to seriously engage with farmers and build mutually beneficial collaborative relations.
- Self-assessment results inform stakeholders on farmers' priorities and perspectives and hence improve mutual understanding and joint action.
- Experiences in Kenya strongly suggest the particular importance of the tool for private companies (processors, traders, exporters, etc.) that seek to reliably source with small farmers.
- Organisation development is most easily promoted when linked to income-generating activities. Experiences in Kenya show that contract farming relations trigger farmer groups to address organisational issues. And they trigger the sourcing company to invest in farmer professionalisation and linking farmers to other stakeholders (banks, input suppliers, research, local government, etc.).

5. *FORCE can be most fruitfully applied in a context where there is public and/or private sector demand for effective farmers' organisations*

- A first appropriate context for applying 'FORCE' is when governments and development organisations are interested in strategising and monitoring capacity development of farmers' organisations.
- A second appropriate context is where companies are interested in reliable sourcing with farmers and establishing trustful partnerships.

### **Five practical recommendations**

Having been developed and tested in different African countries, the tool is ready for popularisation. We suggest four recommendations for practical follow-up:

1. *Provide follow-up on the self-assessment exercise in Kenya*

- What: Critically assess how results have been used and how the tool may better anticipate on organisational change processes and multi-stakeholder relations.
- Who: Wageningen UR-CDI, in collaboration with farmer groups, Equator Products, local stakeholders and agricultural attaché at EKN Kenya.

2. *Elaborate a methodological guide and related training module*

- What: (i) Methodological guide explaining in detail the organisation, application and follow-up of a FORCE self-assessment exercise; (ii) training module composed of trainer's guide and training materials for participants; (ii) announcement of tool and training opportunities.
- Who: Wageningen UR-CDI and KIT, in collaboration with selected partners and training centers, for instance cooperative colleges in East Africa and networks of local capacity builders.

3. *Prepare the transfer of the tool*

- What: Wageningen UR-CDI and KIT approaching relevant players in the field of agricultural development and inform them about FORCE and options to learn more about it, preferably through practical training and subsequent application of the tool.
- Who (target group for information sharing): (i) Farmers' movement (International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), regional farmers' federations such as EAFF in East Africa, national farmers networks and federations; (ii) Cooperative colleges and local capacity builders; (iii), development organisations and networks (DGIS-LNV, Embassies, SNV, AgriCord, AgriProFocus and its member organisations, others); (iv) Ministries and government agencies responsible for development of producers' organisations; (v) private sector interested in reliable sourcing with farmers' organisations.

4. *Further apply the tool in other countries and value chains and with different types of farmers' organisations.*

- What: Invite all actors that are informed about the tool to identify opportunities for applying the FORCE self-assessment tool
- Who: All actors that are informed about the tool.

5. *Take specific action in the context of Dutch international development initiatives*

- What: Wageningen UR-CDI and KIT may specifically engage with key players directly and indirectly involved in the implementation of the DGIS-LNV note on agriculture, rural economic development and food security.

- Who: EKN staff members (rural development experts and Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality offices), AgriProFocus network, Dutch development agencies and Dutch companies, for instance those involved in PSI and IDH programs.

Farmer's reaction on self assessment

'If external people come to you and start pointing at your weaknesses, you are likely to defend yourself but do nothing. If you discover the same weakness yourself, you most likely start working on them especially if improved performance translates in better business.'

The **Markets, Chains and Sustainable Development** Strategy and Policy Paper Series of Wageningen University and Research Centre is a result of the research programme International Cooperation and International Agreements. The papers examine the relationships between market-led development schemes, integration processes in agrobased value chains, and sustainable rural development. Increasingly, policies in the public and private sector and in civil society are based on intertwined objectives referring to vital agricultural development, sustainable management of natural resources, social justice and poverty reduction. These objectives are complementary to requirements in food provision, such as safety and quality or continuity in supply. The papers in this series aim to deepen our understanding of the interface between markets, value chains, vital rural economies and enabling institutions, in relation to these multiple development goals. And, to inform strategic policy, in companies, governments or civil society, about possible measures that may contribute towards the achievement of these intertwined objectives.

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