
PAPER

Farmers organising themselves – 10 perspectives

This paper is linked to the guide 'Optimising the Performance of Producers and their Organisations'

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About the paper

This paper introduces ten perspectives for exploring the organisation of farmers.

The introduction to different dimensions for understanding farmers' organisations sets the stage for assessing the Governance, Management and Performance of farmers' organisations and for discussing options for collective action of organised farmers.



Ten perspectives

1. Why would farmers organise themselves?
2. Informal and formal farmer groups
3. Diversity, commonalities and definition of farmers' organisations
4. Predominant motivations of farmers' organisations (ICU – do you C me?)
5. Development over time
6. Internal governance and management
7. Membership base and organisation rate
8. Zoom on cooperatives and collective action for farmer benefits
9. Higher tiers for business development and farmer representation
10. Profiling and classifying farmers' organisations

1 Why would farmers organise themselves?

Asking farmers and asking yourself: why organise?

Farmers can have many reasons to organise themselves. It is good to start reflections about farmers organising themselves by asking yourself, or your audience the basic question: Why would farmers organise themselves? For what purpose?

We have been asking this question to farmers themselves and to many different audiences. Over the years, the recurrent picture that comes out is that the diversity of farmers' motivations can be clustered according to the following categories:

Empowerment	Socio-economic benefits	Achieve goals
Awareness, knowledge and information Capacity and skills	1. Access to production factors and agro- inputs; collective procurement/ supply to members; leading to lower cost and/or better quality	Address challenges
	2. Access to technology, advice and experience sharing leading to production, productivity and quality improvement and reduction of production costs	Harness opportunities
	3. Access to credit and financial services	Livelihood improvement
	4. Creation of added value to own production (storage, processing, branding, ...) and value chain development	
	5. Collective action for improved market access, sales and bargaining power	Profit and income
	6. Lobby and advocacy – voicing farmers interests and needs; Increased influence in policy and business environment	Autonomy, resilience and independence

Empowerment for practical collective action to achieve farmers' goals

In the OPPO approach, much attention is given to the organisation of farmers and the governance and management of farmers' organisations, which are the basis for raising awareness, sharing knowledge and information and developing capacity and skills (left part of the table above).

Farmers' organisations are seen as a means for farmer empowerment and a vehicle for achieving goals. through collective action. The main driver for farmer cooperation is to address challenges and/or harness opportunities together, with the aim to improve livelihoods, profit and income and to enhance autonomy and resilience and independence (right part of the table above).

These goals can only be achieved by working hard and practically for specific socio-economic benefits in different intervention areas (central part of the table above). Based on experience, the OPPO approach distinguishes six intervention areas for farmers' organisations, ranging from input supply to the voicing of farmers' interests.

Social reasons and visibility for external support

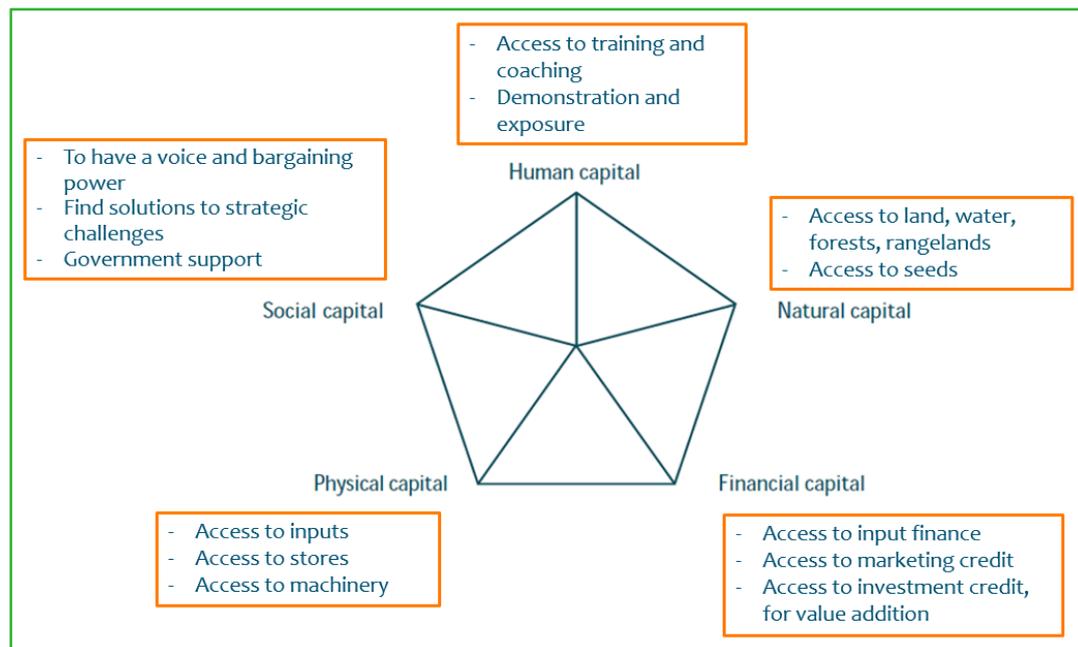
In addition to socio-economic motives, individual farmers can have social reasons to join a farmer group. Social benefits reasons include, but are not limited to:

- Experience a sense of belonging to a group and finding protection within a group;
- Comply with the norm in a community or society;
- Obtain status and respect, by becoming active in the decision-making and management of the farmers' organisation;
- Additional education and training

... and we shouldn't forget: visibility for external support (Government, NGO's, projects) ...

Farmers' motivations can be linked to the five capitals

By organising themselves, farmers can defend and strengthen their resource base. Farmers' motivations to organise themselves can be easily linked to the 5 capitals, as shown in following figure:



Push factors for farmers to organise themselves

Several factors and circumstances may encourage farmers to form local groups or to join existing groups:

- Problems and constraints that cannot be solved individually nor by help of family and friends
- Opportunities that cannot be grasped individually
- Trust that it is possible to work together (social cohesion)
- Successes of other farmers (copying good examples)
- And last but not least: the perception that advantages outweigh costs: the value of benefits from better access to inputs, loans, services, markets, gifts (...) is more than the money, effort and time that is put in the farmers' organisation.

Importance of understanding farmers' motivations

In actual practice, farmers and farmers organisations pursue multiple objectives, often at the same time. For a facilitator, it is very important to understand the motivation of farmers from their perspective. For farmers, the bottom-line is that the time and money spent on group activities should be considered worth the effort for (economic, social, political or other) reasons they find important. Facilitators should know the most important motivations of farmers and to find out if members are all on the same page, which is not always the case, because of the diversity of members and needs, even within the same organisation.

Group membership is part of farmers' livelihood and risk management strategies

Anyone familiar with rural communities knows that farmers are often member of many different groups. In a context of high risks and limited socio-economic security, the affiliation to groups is part of livelihood strategies of rural households. The costs of group membership are generally limited.

But why are so many farmers not (effectively) working in groups?

There are many reasons that explain it. In addition, working in groups is not easy.

... Many reasons Participating in groups is not easy ...
Dependency syndrome: solutions should come from others, like Government or donors	Members often have unreasonable expectations
Distrust or tensions in community	Members do not respect obligations (participation, dues)
Bad previous experiences	Non respect of codes of conduct
Lack of information or confidence to take up collective action	Joint activities do not come at convenient time
Weakness of community leaders	Long group meetings and decision making processes
Individualism	Frustration, disagreement and conflicts in groups

2 Informal and formal farmer groups

Informal farmer groups

In rural communities, informal groups exist in all sorts. Examples are community work groups, saving and credit groups ('merry go round'), wedding groups, funeral groups, faith based groups, women and youth groups, and many others.

Informal groups and associations are important because they help to address social and economic issues that farmers have to deal with and increase the resilience to shocks. Informal organisations are locally developed upon own initiative and are important social capital of rural people. Self-help orientation, risk sharing and mutual support, ownership and sustainability are words that can be used to describe informal groups. Internal rules and regulations are rooted in culture and traditions. Informal organisations are generally marked by high levels of trust, cohesion and member commitment. Celebrations and ceremonies reaffirm the social importance of these organisations.

It is important to know about local ('indigenous') forms of organisation. Informal farmer groups, embedded in local societies and cultures, can be the starting point for more formal organizations.

Formalisation

The main difference between informal and formal groups is the official registration. Informal groups are loosely structured and not formally registered. Formal organisations have to comply with prevailing laws and regulations, have to have a certain organizational structure and formally elected office bearers. Informal organisations are generally only active at the local level and have informal leaders.

The main reason why farmers would like to formalize/register their group is that this is a precondition for opening a bank account, signing contracts, financial transactions or tax advantages. Official registration increases the visibility of local organisations and opens doors for collaboration with, and support from Government, NGO's and donors. Often, certain services like input supply and training are only provided to officially registered organisations.

Registration can take time and can be costly and may surpass farmers' capacity and resources.

Different types of organisations are generally registered at different Ministries. Associations are for instance often registered at the Ministry of Social Affairs or Ministry of the Interior, while cooperatives are often registered at the Ministry of Economic Affairs or Ministry of Trade. This varies of course from one country to another. The type of farmer groups depends on purpose and function, and the context (for instance legal and tax implications).

3 Diversity, commonalities and definition of farmers' organisations

Diversity of farmers' organisations

The diversity of farmers' organisations is enormous.

- As we have seen, in terms of official registration, there are informal and formal groups.
- Formal groups can be registered as associations, cooperatives or have another legal status.
- The legal status generally relates to the official purpose of a farmer organisation, which can be more social, economic or political in orientation.
- Some farmers' organisations have several purposes and can be called 'Multi-purpose organisations', while others are more specialised and can be called single purpose organisations.
- Some farmers' organisations only operate at local level and are not federated, while others together with other organisations and have formed higher tiers.
- Some farmers' organisations have a distinct membership base, for instance smallholders, women or youth.

In this context, it should not come as a surprise that organisations of farmers can have many different names. Farmers' or producers' organisations (FO's and PO's) are most common. Others are: rural people's organisations (RPO), farmer groups (FG), self-help groups (SHG), community-based organisations (CBO).

Local farmer groups, both informal and formal fall under the broad category of Community Based Organizations (CBO's). They are often multi-purpose and pursue different social and economic goals. They generally haven't formed higher tiers. Cooperatives are often commodity-oriented and focusing more specifically on certain economic activities. They are more market-oriented and have often formed higher tiers.

Commonalities

In all their diversity, farmer groups share - in principle - the following characteristics:

- Common interest. Members are rooted in rural areas and have some kind of common goal, which cannot - or not easily - be achieved by farmers individually;
- Certain modalities for internal governance and management;
- Collective action - Members participate in the realization of joint activities to achieve the goal(s) of the organisation;
- Provision of goods and/or services to the members.

General definition of farmers' organisations

Farmers' organizations are established, governed and controlled by farmers, in view of realizing joint activities, for the benefit of associated members. Farmer-control, joint activities (collective action) and benefits for members are really key words.

Some organisations include but are not limited to farmers. Examples are platforms, councils or networks that are geographically organised (for instance a district platform) or focusing on certain commodities (for instance 'rice council' or a sector stakeholder network). These may be important for farmers, but are not as such farmers' organisations, as they are not farmer-controlled.

4 Predominant motivations of farmers' organisations (I C U – do you C me?)

Who or what kickstarted and promoted farmers' organisations in a country or region?

Generally the answer to this question is a combination of different triggers, of which Government is most often the most important, followed by development partners (donors, NGO's), farmers themselves or the private sector.

I C U – do you C me?

This is an easy way to remember predominant farmers' motivations to organize themselves (and to be aware of risks that these motivations may entail).

I dentity

This refers to a socio-cultural motivation. Farmer-members have established an organisation because they share a lifestyle, culture, vision and/or live together in a certain geographical area. Maintaining and creating (social and cultural) identity is not very tangible, but is often very important. This motivation is often found in local farmers' associations that have a strong social function (mutual aid, community functions). Governance of these organisations is generally informal and rooted in and guided by local culture, norms and values.

C ompliance

This refers to a political motivation. Farmers organize themselves because the government wants them to do so, or to comply with laws, policies, regulations. Formal organization is often needed to get access to subsidies, to inputs and services, or for selling agricultural produce at government controlled markets. For many governments, local farmers' organisations are means for controlling the local population or getting votes from the rural masses.

A strong government-orientation (compliance/ conformity) generally affects the autonomy and professional and economic management. Producer Organisations oriented at Government may be called POGO's.

U tility

This refers to an economic orientation. Farmers organize themselves for economic empowerment, professionalization and better revenues from farming and related business activities. Member seek benefits, which should be higher than the costs of membership. Through collective action, individual farmers do things better or cheaper, or engage in economic activities that are individually impossible.

Do you C me?

For many smallholder farmers, the main reason for creating, or being member of a farmers' organization is the visibility for external support ('Here we are, ready for support, do you see us?'). This may be called opportunism, but it is in fact very rational: with limited effort a significant level of free or subsidized support could be obtained. With this orientation, farmers have however a limited focus on own contributions, member participation and self-help.

A strong donor orientation (do you see me?) generally affects autonomy and self-help attitude. Often PO's are not operating as emerging farmers' business organizations, but as donor-dependent spoon-fed NGO's. That's why we may call these producer organisations PONGO's.

Origin and orientation of farmers' organisations matter

The origin, history and policy environment of farmers' organizations matter a lot and define their orientation of farmers' organisations. The relative importance of socio-cultural, political, economic and

opportunistic motivations may vary per country, and even from one organization to another. Although most organizations are hybrid and combine some of the mentioned motivations, a certain motivation is generally predominant. From experience we know that:

- **U and I are important.** A combination of utility and identity is seems to be best recipe for developing successful farmers' organisations, because of the focus on effectiveness and efficiency (utility) that is linked to local governance, social cohesion and control (identity).
- **We have to be aware of POGO's and PONGO's.** A strong Government or donor orientation most often negatively affects the self-help attitude and autonomy of farmers' organisations, as well as the ownership, governance and management of these organisations.

Existential question

For any farmers' organisation, the important existential question to ask is whether it would continue activities if external pressure or financial support would stop. What will be left over? Would the farmers' organisation continue its activities? Very often:

- Local, socially oriented organisations are able to continue, because of strong social capital.
- Economically oriented organisations can continue if they have own financial resources, clear business orientations and professional management.
- For POGO and PONGO type organisations, the unfortunate answer is most of the time these will not survive without external pressure and support.

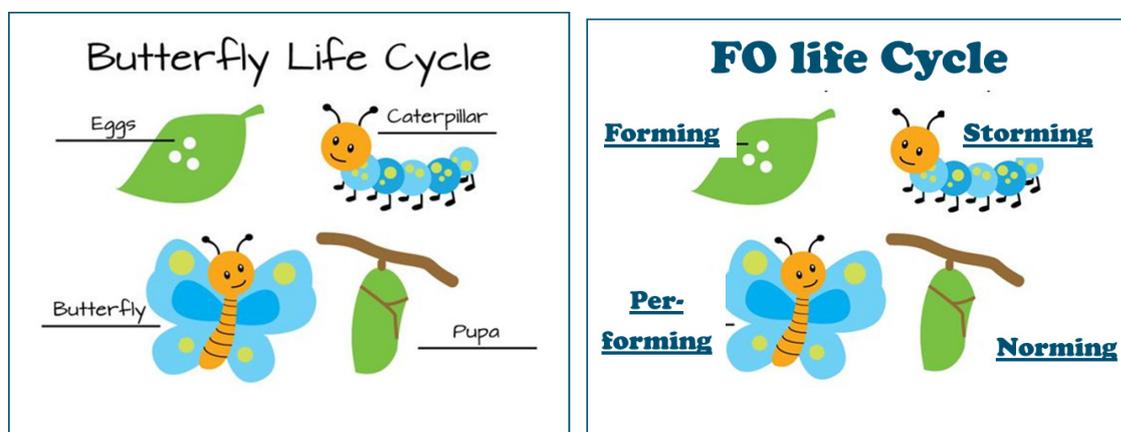
5 Development over time

The story of the ugly caterpillar and beautiful butterfly

This story is about a remarkable series of changes between seemingly very different creatures, culminating in the emergence of a butterfly.

- The butterfly lifecycle starts with a small tiny egg. After a short period the egg hatches and a tiny caterpillar emerges.
- Caterpillars go through different stages of growth (different instars). Every now and then they shed their skin so that it can expand and grow to a larger size. After a period of some weeks, the caterpillar is fully grown.
- The caterpillar then searches for a suitable site where it forms a hard case around itself by using silk that it excretes from the end of its body. It then turns into a pupa or chrysalis. Within its protective case, the caterpillar changes into a butterfly.
- The young butterfly emerges, moves around, mating takes place and the cycle starts again.

Only few of the initial eggs reach the stage of a butterfly. Many eggs do not even reach the first stage of a caterpillar. Many caterpillars die because of hunger or predators. Only a few caterpillars get the chance to reach the pupa stage and transform into a butterfly.



Farmers' organisations are like living organisms that go through different stages before reaching maturity. The four organisational development phases mentioned above can be compared to the stage of egg, caterpillar, pupa and butterfly. Also farmers' organisations may go through a remarkable series of changes. The Tuckman model (cf. MSP guide 2015) distinguishes four phases groups need to go through:

- Forming: initial stage, members are motivated and show good behaviour.
- Storming: existing working modalities, governance models, management modalities are contested and conflicts occur. Frustration with lack of progress is common. Farmers' organisation may collapse or may merge with others.
- Norming: Member resolve differences, roles and responsibilities, as well as objectives and activities are redefined, new leadership creates enthusiasm.
- Performing: Implementation of action plans leads to results and member satisfaction. Problems are prevented or solved as they pop up.

Over the years, by going through several cycles of organisational crises and reform, farmers' organisations may grow from a small local group into successful farmer-owned companies or national federations defending the rights and interests of farmers. Reform, new storming and re-norming are necessary to adapt organisations to new situations, to improve performance or to take up more complex activities. This is for the organisations that re-invent themselves. In actual practice, we see however that many farmers' organisations remain a tiny egg or a caterpillar and that many die from hunger or are eaten. Quite some few are sleeping like pupas.

More than 150 years of organized farmers in the Netherlands

When we look at farmers' organisations that are successful today, it is revealing to go back to their origin and to retrace how these organisations evolved and developed, while not forgetting that during that process so many other organisations have not made it and disappeared.

A case study on a farmers' organization in the North-East of the Netherlands, written when it existed for 100 years (1842-1942) is revealing, as it shows that farmers' organisations start small and develop by taking small steps at the time.

Centenary book on a farmers' organisation in North-East of the Netherlands (1842-1942)

How did this organisation start ? Just some few farmers that started off (with support of local elite)

What were the conditions? Farmers were very poor, illiterate, food insecure and living in miserable conditions (image simple houses in wintertime).

What kind of activities did they start with ? Very practical things: literacy training, small study groups (like Farmer Field Schools), exchange of experiences, trying out new cultivation methods.

What were the next steps? After confidence and trust was built, the farmer groups engaged in collective purchase of simple ploughs, to be pulled by horses. This allowed the extension of cultivated areas, which led to higher production, satisfaction of home consumption needs and to a marketable surplus.

What came next ? Blacksmiths for repairing the ploughs; Collective purchase and maintenance of male horses to improve the quality of draught-horses; Potato processing units leading to potato starch agro-industry (etc.). This led to increased professionalization and increased income.

Credibility and credit. By having a more secured income, farmers became eligible for credits from banks, which, at first, were very reluctant to take the risk to invest in the agricultural sector.

Key message: start small and move forward by taking small steps at a time

Currently successful farmers' organizations have all started small and moved forward by taking small steps at a time. Next steps were based on benefits that were invested in the development and scaling of activities. Achieved results created new conditions, new options for collaboration and new market opportunities. Farmers' organisations are like a tree: when it is well rooted, a small seed can over the years become a huge tree.

Farmers' organisations around the world

Each country has its own history of farmers organizing themselves. First of all, there are many informal self-help groups and community based organizations, which are based in a long associative history and embedded in local culture and societies. Formal farmers' organisations were generally introduced since the end of the 19th century or beginning of the 20th century. Colonial and post-colonial governments often promoted cooperatives. Development aid has also induced the creation of many farmer and community organisations.

In every community, there is a mix of informal and formal organisations. At intermediate level (Districts, Provinces), there are many primary farmers' organisations and first tiers. At national level, there are farmer federations and platforms. In all continents there are regional and continental farmers organisations. In Africa, there are for instance four regional platforms and a Pan African Farmers Organisation.

6 Governance and management of farmers' organisations

Governance

Governance is the way how a group of people, in this case a farmers' organisation, decides to do things together. Basically, governance has to do with the organisational structure, the membership base and autonomy of the organisation.

Organizational structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Legal status and compliance with legislation- Cooperation among farmers' organisations. This can be vertical (affiliation to higher tiers and apex organisations) and this can be horizontal (collaboration with other types of farmers' organisations)
Membership base	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Democratic member control- Member economic participation
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Independent decision-making (without outside interference)- Financial autonomy – own capital for implementing activities

Members should own and direct the farmers' organisation, which should be able to be able to operate autonomously, independent of others, and using own capital for implementing activities.

Management

Management is about directing, planning, using and controlling the organisation's resources in order to achieve the objectives of the organisation. Key elements for good management are the availability and functioning of professional staff and the application of transparent procedures for handling the financial resources of the organisation. Based on good governance and good management of human and financial resources, a farmers' organisations has to have the capacity to properly plan for its activities and subsequently implement, monitor and evaluate these.

Human and financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Staff- Financial management
Planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Planning- Implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Often encountered problems

Many observers complain about the problems and weaknesses of farmers' organisations. There are good reasons for this, as the list of often encountered problems is long: Government interference, elite capture, weak leadership capacities, lack of by-laws or lack of respect of internal rural and regulations, failure to hold general assemblies and elections, accountability of elected leaders, internal miscommunication, weak participation of ordinary farmer members, responsiveness to member needs (e.g. women and youth), dependency on external financial donor support, financial mismanagement, professional staff taking over the organisation, internal litigations, long decision making processes, to name just a few.

These problems exist in farmers' organizations around the world. Also the history of the Dutch farmers' movement has been marked by conflict and tensions. Periods of growth and extension are often followed by conflict and demise. Viable organizations overcome problems, consolidate and grow. The only way to empower farmers is to overcome these challenges. Putting farmers' organisations aside is depriving smallholder farmers of the option to have a voice and create economies of scale.

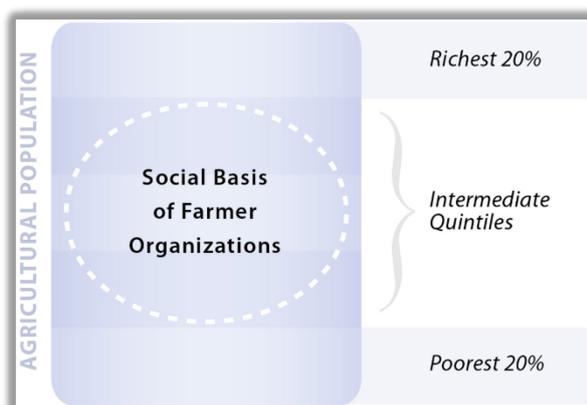
Assessing Governance and management

The many possible problems and challenges are a good justification for assessing the governance and management of farmers' organisation. Facilitators can observe and assess the governance, management and performance of a farmers' organisation. In the OPPO approach, a specific tool (GMP scoring) is suggested for that purpose. This tool allows for a quick, yet systematic review of the several dimensions of governance and management. Scoring of indicators and dimensions leads to the identification of strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for improvement. The points of attention can also be used for profiling an organisation. The GMP tool may help to prepare for a self-assessment. In that case the indicators are transformed into statements for members to assess and score themselves.

7 Membership base and organisation rate

Membership base

Farmers' organisations are member-based. It is important to know who are the members and who are not. Generally, members are not the smallest nor the largest farmers. Poor smallholders cannot afford the membership costs and/or live far away from small towns where the offices of primary organisations are located or meetings are held. And they may not see the benefit of being a member. Larger farmers generally take care of themselves and have less challenges related to inputs, production and marketing.



Although members are generally not the poorest of the poor, it is maybe as close as you can get for autonomous participation of the 'bottom of the pyramid' ? Farmers who are organized can be the entry point for local economic development ?

When looking at the membership base, it is also Important to consider gender and age. Are women members or not. In case of household membership, it is generally the head of household who is the member. In case of individual membership, both men and women can join, It is however observed that also in this case the membership is most often also predominantly male.

Sometimes, women and youth have their own specific organisations. In larger organisations, there are sometimes women and youth groups.

Diversity of members

The membership base can be quite diverse: different farm sizes (micro-small and intermediate farmers), male and female members, younger and older members. A rule of thumb is that with increased member diversity, there is increased differentiation of needs and an increased need to differentiate services. This is why we often see a tendency to some homogeneity in the membership base. Examples are: separate organisations of larger farmers, commodity-oriented organisations (for instance maize or poultry associations) and women and youth groups.

Farmers' organisation rate

The organisation rate of farmers is a simple ratio: the number of organized farmers divided by the total number of farmers. If there are 50,000 farmers producing maize in a certain district and the district maize organisation has 5000 members, the organisation rate is 10%. It is generally observed that the organisation rate is higher for commercial commodities (as compared to food commodities) and is higher for perishable products (horticulture, dairy).

This organisation rate, expressed as a percentage, is a first quantitative parameter, which has to be put in perspective by answering more qualitative questions: who are those who are organized and who are those who aren't? What are their motivations? How active is the organisation? What is the decision-making and financial autonomy of the organisation.

8 Zoom on cooperatives and collective action for farmer benefits

Definition of cooperatives

The following definition of cooperatives (International Labour Office (ILO) recommendation 193, 2002) is broadly accepted: "A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise"

In most countries, this definition is adopted in cooperative laws and policies, sometimes with slight modifications. Almost all words in the definition count and are important. It is important to note that a cooperative is defined as a farmer-owned and controlled enterprise. Cooperatives are clearly part of the private sector and have to operate like 'normal' companies. What is different is the governance and ownership: farmers are the board members and own the company. In fact, cooperatives are meant to be social enterprises and can contribute to inclusive business development.

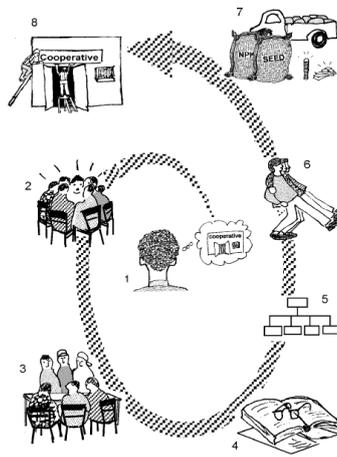
Supporting cooperatives

There are many manuals that guide facilitators for training and supporting cooperatives. In many countries there are dedicated cooperative colleges.

Starting a cooperative

A practical booklet explains the process of starting a cooperative in eight steps (Koopmans 2006).

The focus is on sustainable business development, based on member initiatives and resources.



Step 1: Developing the initiative

Step 2: Building consensus

Step 3: Establishing a steering committee

Step 4: Feasibility study and member survey

Step 5: Organisational design

Step 6: Member commitment

Step 7: Involving other stakeholders

Step 8: Starting up the enterprise

Economic importance of cooperatives

The year 2012 was the UN international year of cooperatives. A short video presents many interesting facts and figures, which indicate the huge socio-economic importance of cooperatives.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHS4Qj5oCpQ>

Collective action of cooperatives

The definition of collective action is basically as follows: a group doing something for a purpose. The definition is not more difficult than that. Farmers' organisations do what individual members can't do. And higher tiers (for instance a cooperative union), do what lower tiers (for instance primary cooperatives) can't do.

In farmers' organisations, members decide to do something together, in one way or another, for a purpose they find important. Collective action can manifest itself in different ways:

- Members participate in activities
- Farmers' cost share the organisation activities
- Farmers invest in fixed assets of farmer-owned enterprise
- Farmers contribute to costs of management and staff
- ...

For farmers, working together in a farmers' organisation such as a cooperative, collective action has two major purposes:

1. Individual benefit: collective action for the provision of services to members
2. Business development: collective action for developing member-owned enterprises

First purpose of collective action: services to members

By working together, individual farmers have the following benefits:

- can learn and improve their farm practices
- improve access to goods and services that improve the performance of their individual business
- better sell their farm production via collective marketing

Members provide working capital and/or pay commission for the services delivered. Farmers are satisfied if the benefits obtained outweigh the cost of membership

Second purpose of collective action: farmer-owned company development

By working together, farmers as become the co-owner of a (social) enterprise that:

- Produces or sells inputs
- Stores, transports farmers' produce
- Processes farmers' products
- Markets farmers' produce
- Or a combination of these

Farmers' capital is invested in the company (share). The profit is paid out as dividend and/or reinvested in the company, leading to higher share value.

Double purpose: member-owned company providing services

Often, the first and second purpose can be combined:

- Farmers can establish saving and credit groups or even a cooperative bank as a farmer-owned enterprise that is to the benefit of member farmers for accessing credit.
- Farmers can establish a cooperative for seed production, artificial insemination or fingerling production as a farmer-owned company, which delivers to farmer members and other customers.
- Farmers can set up a cooperative processing unit or marketing cooperative which is to the benefit of individual farmers if these enterprises lead to better products or manage to sell at higher value markets.

Specialization

At the start, farmers' organisations are often multi-purpose ('Jacks of all trade'). Over time, when economic sustainability becomes more important, it is realized that a single organization cannot professionally do all activities and that priorities have to be set. In the evolution of a farmers' movement, specialization develops, especially in the economic realm, where cooperatives operate. Mother organizations can create specific daughter organizations.

Countries with a more developed cooperative sector often have dedicated cooperatives for seed production, input procurement, artificial insemination, marketing, transport, processing or other economic functions along commodity value chains. It is observed that specialised farmers' organisations often work well. The specialisation of farmers' organisations is a good strategy for tailoring services to member needs. To satisfy their needs, farmers can choose to be member of several specialized farmers' organisations.

9 Higher tiers for business development and farmer representation

Higher tiers

Higher tiers are higher levels or layers established by the lower levels. Farmers, confronted with challenges that go beyond the local level, have felt the necessity to join hands and create larger organisations with different levels. In the cooperative movement, the different levels are: primary cooperative, union, federation and confederation. For lobby and advocacy, we often see that there are district, province and national level farmer platforms. The process of creating higher layers explains why farmers are organized from local to national or even international level.

A multi-layer farmers' organisation is like a pyramid. A pyramid can only be built from the bottom to the top and not the other way round. Local organisations are the members of higher tiers and should define their orientation, and provide the necessary resources.

Challenges of multi-layered organisations

Although higher levels were established and should be controlled by lower levels, it is observed that, over time, higher levels often become disconnected from the lower level organisations, even if these are their members. The main challenges are limited bottom-up control and limited downward accountability. As a rule of thumb, One has to pay serious attention to the structuring of a multi-layer farmers' organisation when higher tiers call their members 'branches', as if the higher tier decides for the lower tiers. The disconnect between different layers often lead to problems and conflicts, which most often turn around the lack of transparent decision-making and financial management.

Subsidiarity principle

To avoid problems, it is of highest importance to respect the so-called subsidiarity principle. This principle stipulates to assign and keep responsibility at the lowest possible level, as close as possible to the farmers. This implies that primary farmers' organizations should do what individual farmers can't and that second tiers should do what primary farmers' organizations can't. By having representatives in board and contributing to the budget of higher tiers, the lower tiers should decide on the strategy and activities of the higher tier,

A practical example of applying the subsidiarity principle is the following division of tasks:

- Primary cooperative: training on agricultural practices to members, storage of inputs, organisation of collection point of farmers' produce (bulking), first sorting and grading.
- Cooperative union: collective procurement of inputs for member cooperatives, collection and transport of farmers' produce (collected at cooperative aggregation points), processing and packaging and marketing of processed products.

In this example, the higher tier (Union) has a supporting role for associated member organisations and takes up activities that the cooperatives can't undertake.

The subsidiarity principle also applies for farmers' organisations that engage in lobby and advocacy. The higher tiers, for instance a national platform, should consult its membership base throughout the country and local organisations should be convinced that their higher tier is representing them at strategic levels.

10 Profiling and classifying farmers' organisations

Profiling farmers' organisations

Farmers' organisations often do not have a short introduction about who they are and what they do. This means that they are not much known and not visible on social media. This can change by making short profiles. A simple format can help to put farmers' organisations on the radar. The format has 5 parts: Who are we? // What do we do? // How do we operate? // Contact details and Annexes (optional). The format can help farmers' organisations to profile themselves or may help a facilitator to do so. [The tool is available.](#)

Classifying farmers' organisations

Many parameters can be used for classifying farmers' organizations: Origin, Legal status, Membership base, Purpose, Type of services to members, Scale and level of operations, Level of autonomy and others. The typology below is a hypothetical overview of a national farmers' movement based on two parameters: type of services to members and the scale and level of operations.

Levels	Political services	Economic services	Financial services	Information & training services	Social services	Special services for women
Local level (1st tier)		Cooperatives / farmer groups (commodity-based)	Saving and credit cooperatives (SACCO)	Study clubs, FFS, FRG, farmer radios	Community associations	Women groups
Inter-mediate level (2nd tier)	District or Provincial platform	Union of cooperatives	Union of SACCO's	District or provincial network		Provincial forum of women organizations
National level (3rd tier)	National farmers' platform	National federation of cooperatives	National federation of SACCO's	National network		National women league
MAIN FOCUS	<i>Representation, defence of interests, policy development, lobby and advocacy</i>	<i>Economic service delivery, input supply, production, marketing, processing</i>	<i>Financial services (savings, credit, insurance)</i>	<i>Information, training, innovation and learning</i>	<i>Mutual assistance and visibility to outside world</i>	<i>Services to women</i>