



# Guidelines for designing capacity-building programs for farmers' organizations

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## Participations



The first edition of this document (June 2014) was drawn up with support from a number of AVSF permanent staff members around the world: Pierril Lacroix and Christophe Boscher (technical assistants for the Smallholder Organizations and Markets program, in the Andes and West Africa respectively), Laurent Dietsch (AVSF regional coordinator in Central America), Anne Lafalaise (technical assistant in Haiti), Dodji Kossi Apedo (project manager in Togo), Adrien Brondel (technical assistant in Madagascar), Cédric Bussac (AVSF national coordinator in Mongolia) and Barbara Guittard (head of the Smallholder Organizations and Markets program, at AVSF's head office).

This document draws on AVSF's experiences working with farmers' organizations and NGOs in the South (particularly the **Peruvian NGO Progreso**, who has worked with AVSF for years to develop the capacities of farmers' organizations and who has played a key role in establishing conceptual and methodological references within AVSF).



# Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Farmers' organizations and multidimensional management.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2. Principles for supporting farmers' organizations.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3. The main farmers'-organization capacities to strengthen.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4. Identifying which skills to develop.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>5. Putting together a training plan.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>6. Capacity-development indicators: an important monitoring and assessment tool.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Summary and conclusion.....</b>	<b>24</b>



LES

Les trois états  
 - État solide  
 - État liquide  
 - État gazeux

1) États solides  
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2) États Liquides  
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Tableau à 2 colonnes et 4 lignes de données.

Mardi 21 Mai 2013

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$405 < 504; 4 \times 2 = 8; 3007 > 2009$

## Introduction

The liberalization of markets in the South and the disappearance of important policy instruments supporting agriculture have intensified competition between smallholders and capitalist farming in the North and South. The situation — aggravated by the policies of over-subsidized farming in the North — makes smallholder families in the South more vulnerable and makes it harder for some countries to ensure their own food sovereignty.

A large number of widely dispersed smallholders now have to compete on local and international markets with dominant players (traders, supermarkets, agribusiness companies, local and international intermediaries, etc.) who control the supply chains for agricultural raw materials. National policies supporting rural communities are insufficient in the South, and agribusiness companies and supermarkets take opportunity of an increasingly dominant position, with more stringent demands in terms of volume, uniformity and traceability. As a result, the exclusion and under-use of smallholders is becoming a more serious issue.

Against this backdrop of growing inequality between farmers worldwide and the exclusion of smallholders, the NGO *Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontières (AVSF)* works with farmers' organizations<sup>1</sup> in the South to help them develop their capacities to participate directly in conventional markets and work together under better conditions. AVSF also helps them position themselves on alternative markets that are sometimes better suited to smallholder farming. In carrying out this work, AVSF adheres to the four pillars below:

- **strengthen the technical capacities** of smallholder families and organizations to boost the volume and improve the quality of production;
- **make smallholder families more self-reliant** by diversifying their crop- and livestock-farming activities and developing agroecological practices, and by helping them to add value to their products ;

- **encourage the development of farmers' organizations with strong negotiation and management skills**, so they can sell their productions on conventional markets or alternative markets that offer higher and more stable prices than conventional ;

- **strengthen networks of farmers' organizations** to get people to recognize the economic efficiency of smallholder farming and implement sector-based policies that support smallholders.

**Creating a farmers' organization is the best way for smallholders to strengthen their connections with agricultural and food supply chains, generate more income from their products and achieving a fairer distribution of the value added.** Working together allows smallholders to: demand, gain access to and have greater control over production factors; achieve economies of scale thanks to increased volumes ; and mitigate production- or sales-related risks. When marketing, the organizations give smallholders more power and transparency in negotiating prices, shorten the supply chain by creating a more direct relationship with buyers and provide access to markets where smallholder farming is more valued (e.g. via high-quality supply chains that offer guarantees as to product origin). Organizations give farmers greater control so they can improve quality, increase the value of their products through processing and create added value locally. They also help farmers become more professional and better structured, with sustainable access to loans and other important services. Through the various services they offer to their members, organizations allow smallholders to earn better prices for their products while reducing costs (inputs, loans, transaction costs) and making agroecology more viable<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, these organizations aren't just providing smallholder families with easier and fairer access to markets, while helping them become more productive and competitive. They also represent smallholders and help them defend their interests by negotiating policies at the local, national and

<sup>1</sup> AVSF works with regional smallholder organizations, economic smallholder organizations and smallholder agricultural unions. This document focuses on economic smallholder organizations, also known as "farmers' organizations"

<sup>2</sup> For AVSF, agroecology combines agricultural science and ecology with a view to strengthening or designing sustainable production systems. To meet today's challenges, AVSF promotes a systemic approach to agroecology, combining technical, environmental, economic, social and political aspects.

international levels. Locally, farmers' organizations can become direct points of contact for regional governments and play a key role in defending smallholder farming and the future of rural communities through decentralization, which is underway in a number of areas. Regionally and nationally, setting up "second-degree" and "third-degree" organizations — or supra-regional organizations — and integrating them into networks is highly important. This boosts smallholders' visibility and recognition among consumers and public authorities. These supra-regional organizations promote responsible and solidarity-based consumption that recognizes and values smallholder farming as a source of high-quality food and as an activity that has a positive impact on rural communities<sup>3</sup>.

Lastly, in several countries in the South, where democratic processes have been gaining strength since the '90s, smallholder organizations have played — and continue to play — a big role in rebuilding civil society at the national level. They also help repair and strengthen the social fabric in marginalized regions, while defending local and traditional cultures that are often threatened by standardization and globalization.

**Farmers' organizations are therefore key actors when it comes to development, as they fulfil important functions such as producing food, feeding communities, generating income for families, creating jobs in rural areas, sustainably managing natural resources and representing smallholders.**

<sup>3</sup> Reference text "Organizations paysannes et filières", AVSF, 2009. Available at [www.ruralter.org](http://www.ruralter.org)

In some cases, of course, creating an organization



is difficult or impossible. In other cases, organizations have little power or are only able to help a small number of families gain access to a market. That's why empowering farmers' organizations is so important, requiring time and often external assistance to overcome difficulties such as farmers' geographic isolation, illiteracy, conflicts between individuals or communities, difficulties accessing certain markets, etc. Organizations are also sometimes met with skepticism or suspicion from farmers who may have had negative experiences with organizations in the past.

**to help farmers' organizations develop their capacities.** As part of its Smallholder Organizations and Markets program, AVSF draws on its experience to assist the projects teams working to support farmers' organizations, and to assist other actors working with farmers' organizations to promote their development. This document presents a conceptual and methodological framework to inspire the creation of capacity-building programs for farmers' organizations.

**AVSF's role** —according to its mission and code of ethic<sup>4</sup> — **is to support smallholder families and organizations in the South. One of our main goals is**

<sup>4</sup> Available at [www.avsf.org](http://www.avsf.org)



Meeting of the board of a farmers' organization in Cambodia

# 1. Farmers' organizations and multidimensional management

Assistance provided to farmers' organizations must be driven by a supply-chain approach that ties in with rural development — the objective should not be only an economic one. To empower legitimate, independent, strong and sustainable organizations, the assistance must be long-term and should respect the ways organizations and rural communities are used to operating.

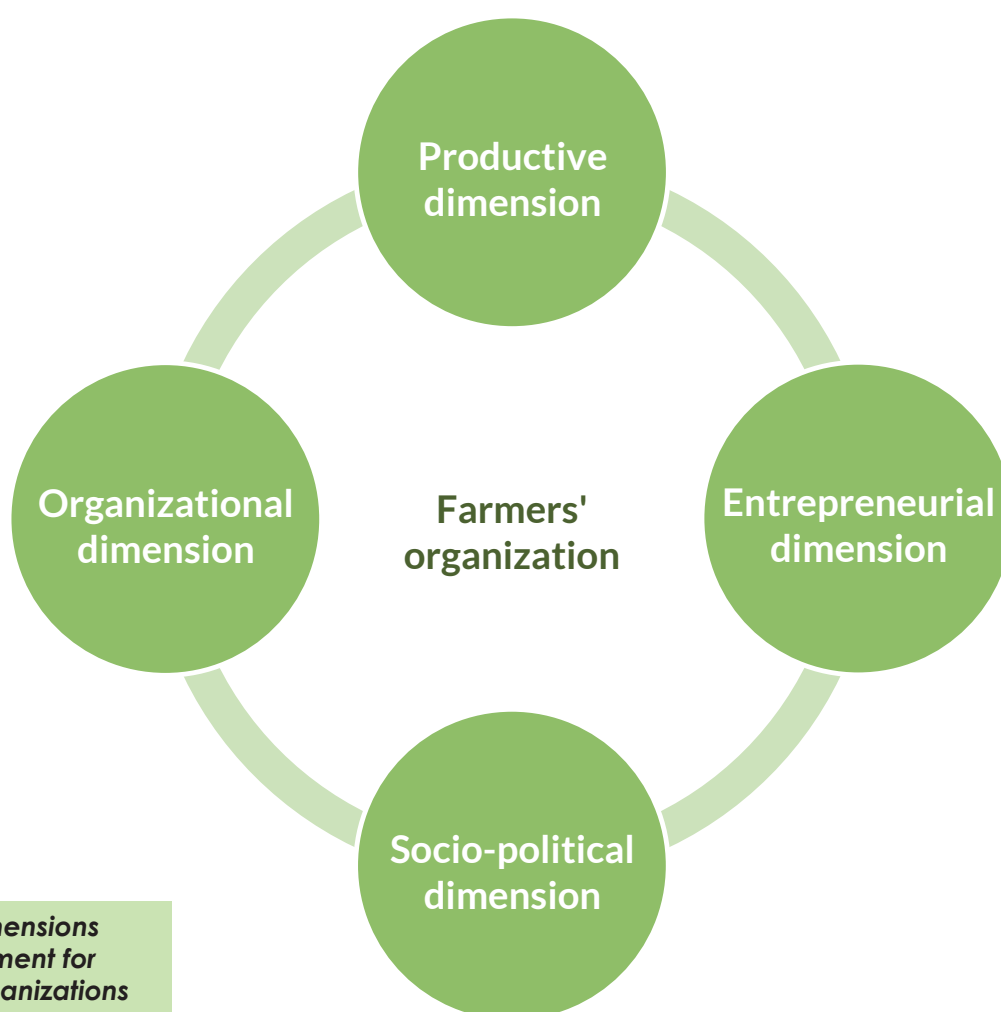
We have broken down the management of a farmers' organization into four independent and complementary dimensions: the productive dimension, the organizational dimension, the entrepreneurial dimension and the socio-political dimension.

## ■ Productive dimension

This dimension deals with the agricultural production (crop and livestock) of smallholder families belonging to an organization, as well as the volume and quality produced. It is also the foundation of the farmers' organization's activity.

## ■ Organizational dimension

This dimension deals with the internal functioning of the organization, how the group — members and leaders — is organized, how they pass along information and manage the organization transparent-



*The four dimensions of management for farmers' organizations*



ly, collaboratively and democratically so that the members can continue to take advantage of the benefits provided by the organization while respecting the values that it was founded upon.

### ■ Entrepreneurial dimension

This dimension deals with the organization's sales activities and the services put in place to support those activities (collection, processing, loans, etc.), as well as the administrative, accounting and financial management of the organization to make sure that proceeds are redistributed internally to the smallholder of the organization and their families — which is a defining feature of associations and co-ops — and that the organization is viable as well as economically and financially sustainable.

### ■ Socio-political dimension

This dimension deals with the projection of the organization beyond its members and includes interactions with other stakeholders in a given region (local, national and international) and/or sector, with the organization representing and defending the interests of its farmers in existing spaces for dialog and decision-making.

Depending on the organization, its trajectory and dynamics and the vision of its members and leaders, one dimension may be given priority over the others. The entrepreneurial dimension — which focuses on the sales activity — is generally an important driver for an organization, especially at the time of its creation.

**However, as mentioned above, the four dimensions are interdependent.** An organization cannot develop its sales activities — which are based on the collection of products from its members — if the farmers and their leaders don't have a firm grasp on production, haven't clearly defined or assumed their respective roles, don't identify with the organization, don't trust the organization's financial management because they don't have access to certain information, etc. (organizational dimension); or if the national legal and tax framework is an obstacle for their activities (socio-political dimension). Conversely, it's hard for an organization to have any influence in policy decisions affecting its region or sector if it doesn't have legitimacy through representation (organizational dimension) or if it doesn't

carry out sales activities allowing it to position itself as a major economic player in its region or sector (entrepreneurial dimension).



Training workshop on the information system on sesame market – AAJAC – Senegal

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Outreach meeting on implementation and organization in Togo

© AVSF

## 2. Principles for supporting farmers' organizations

When providing assistance to farmers' organizations, **the following principles<sup>5</sup>** should be kept in mind:

### ■ Try to support internal dynamics without pre-established structures

The many failures when it comes to supporting farmers' organizations are often the result of processes created *ex nihilo* by governments or assistance programs through projects that identify the need to create an organization, define its objectives and social forms and provide it with resources. This alters the behavior and interests of the beneficiary families, as the farmer groups become less empowered and more dependent on the external assistance. **One of the essential conditions for ensuring that assistance is effective and helps strengthen a farmers' organization over the long term, is making smallholder families aware of the need to work together while also respecting the forms of social organization and the local context** to set up a suitable organizational model.

There is no ideal model for a farmers' organization. Any project that aims to develop an organization's processes must as a priority **analyze and understand the landscape and agricultural context, farming systems, smallholder strategies and social, cultural and organizational dynamics in each community where the project is carried out.**

The organization's structure, its objectives and the activities and services it undertakes must be in line with the conditions or characteristics of the product they want to market, how the economic context within the supply chains and markets operate, the interests and needs of the smallholder families, and their vision and capacities.

### ■ Analyze the supply chains and how they function

It is essential to **understand the supply chains and markets, and how they function.** The following should be analyzed carefully: the added value of the product and how it's shared throughout the supply chain; the distribution of costs and risks between the different actors and their respective strategies. It is also important to have a firm grasp of a product's market — whether local, national or international —, the different segments of that market and the policies and standards that can drive changes in those segments. The supply chains and markets for crop and livestock products have special characteristics that will determine the form of an organization and the work it does.

This knowledge, once acquired, should be shared with smallholder families. It helps give direction to group efforts and determine the organization's economic activity, which links the organization will be involved in and under what conditions. **The organization does not necessarily need to occupy all the links or carry out all the activities in the supply chain.** Sometimes, forging alliances with other actors can be better for an organization than taking on activities alone. For instance, some organizations decide to process their goods under contract with private companies (ideally, the organization still owns the product when it leaves the plant). Again, it depends on current dynamics, need, cost-benefit ratio and capacities (both existing and future).

**It seems essential to first strengthen the core** (or "first-degree") organizations — even if they operate on a small scale and are rudimentary from an organizational standpoint — adapted to the capacities and forms of management and social control of its members and to the local social context.

Second, depending on what the supply chains and markets require, it may be a good idea to **facilitate coordination between these first-degree organizations and begin structuring supra-regional organizations for collective action.** There are a number of advantages to centralizing certain activities and services within umbrella structures that can oversee products collection, certification, processing, promotion, marketing and loans. Centralization makes it possible to diversify markets, creates economies of scale and ensures a more uniform level of quality as well as bigger investments and more negotiating

<sup>5</sup> Reference text "Organisations paysannes et filières", AVSF, 2009.

power. It also makes it possible to control competition between first-degree organizations, mitigate risk, organize self-funded technical assistance mechanisms and influence local or regional policies. Centralization may, however, concentrate power and increase the risk of the smallholder base's losing the social control.

Moreover, that is the reason why it is important to define, from the outset, the involvement of the organization's members and give them more control, to maintain optimal coordination with the technical teams. **Defining the roles and services between first-degree and supra-regional organizations must be guided by the principle of subsidiarity.** In any case, setting up and strengthening an organization is a slow process, often exceeding the timeframe of a three- or four-year project.

### ■ Strengthen the organizations beyond economic efficiency, while following the strategies of smallholder families and working towards fair development

Growth in the organization's membership, volumes and revenue is an indicator of the organization's performance and the result of its processes — but it should not be the only objective. **Any growth, modernization or professionalization must be reasoned and progressive.** Giving farmers' organizations suitable and professional management skills is vital. **The added value gained must allow the farmers to increase their price,** even if only by a small amount. After all, a small increase may have a big impact for a family's finances. The added value created locally must also **help fund the organization and cover its operating costs and investments.**

A farmers' organization, however, is not a company — in the traditional sense of the word — that invests to maximize its return on capital. A farmers' organization is a tool that uses corporate management techniques to serve a social group. **It has an obligation to defend the interests of all its members and to produce tangible economic and social benefits for everyone.** Organizations don't just market products more efficiently, they set up alternative supply chains that are more profitable for small farmers and give them greater power, whereas they don't have access to many public services and major

agricultural policy tools. **It is therefore part of a vision for a solidarity-based economy that aims to defend the interests of its members and benefit the entire community.**

Working to strengthen farmers' organizations so that they can improve their market positioning, must not be the sole focus. To create the right conditions for developing a smallholder-farming system that is more productive and more sustainable, it is more efficient to **combine complementary actions at the same time in one area to overcome the many difficulties that smallholder families encounter in their region.** Seeking access to a better market must not be a detriment to smallholders, to their advantages and what makes them unique. It also must not be a detriment to the balanced development of the rural areas in question. Working only for greater inclusion of smallholders in the market may create large social, economic, environmental and agricultural imbalances within smallholder communities and rural areas. It may lead to dangerous processes of specialization and pressure on natural resources that could threaten internal strategies to diversify production, efforts towards agroecological sustainability, permanent smallholder risk management and food security. It may also weaken the mechanisms for collective regional management.

Against the backdrop of a global food crisis, particularly in many countries in the South, **AVSF believes that it's possible to help smallholder families sell their subsistence or/and cash crops on the market at a better price, while also improving their food security.** Expanding the production of cash crops may go against the objectives of food sovereignty if carried out as intensive monoculture on a large scale. To prevent against this risk, AVSF aims to help smallholders to **take advantage of crops' diversity within the farming systems, whether they're destined for local, national or export markets.** The idea isn't to promote systems that are specialized in a given type of production, but to preserve systems that are diversified, in accordance with smallholder strategies, to mitigate market and climate risks and ensure the food sovereignty of local communities.

## ■ Train, communicate and promote an active participation in collective work

The joint efforts required to develop the capacities of farmers' organizations to manage supply chains and markets are centered on training and communication, internal and external coordination and assistance.

**Training and communication must be far-reaching and diversified, suitable for all types of actors within the organization, whether they are leaders, members, technicians, managers, young people or women.** This support must be practical and should respond to identified needs and challenges related to planning, completion and monitoring of activities and internal control. **Improving the knowledge and capacities of all members, leaders and managers makes it possible to generate the common vision needed for effective and sustainable collective action, and offer a solution for problems, delays and conflicts.** Far-reaching training is needed to specialize and professionalize leaders and technicians, who will ensure the independence of the organizations, while also ensuring that all members maintain a level of social control.

These training and communication activities go hand-in-hand with overseeing internal and external coordination in order to manage the organization and the supply chain in a way that it benefits to smallholder families. **Internal collaboration aims to define the objectives of the organization, operating standards and strategies for solving conflicts of interest between members, technicians and leaders.** This coordination must help the organization

constantly improve and move forward in a way that is approved by all the farmers members. External coordination aims to benefit the organization by optimizing relations with other stakeholders in the supply chains in question.

## ■ Foster a close relationship of trust with the partner organization

When it comes to developing the capacities of farmers' organizations, **one of the keys is generating trust**, particularly between the members of the farmers' organization (members, leaders, technical team) and the organization providing the assistance. Trust is generated through a combination of professionalism, joint management of resources (particularly financial resources), respect of internal bodies and friendly relations. For example, the participation of the supporting organization's technical teams at key moments of the organization and community (general meetings, anniversaries of the organization, local celebrations, etc.) can be very important.

**The permanent presence of some members of the technical team from the capacity-building project — with certain members residing on-site in addition to the occasional visits performed for monitoring and training — helps build a relationship of trust with the smallholder families belonging to the organization.** The technical team's positioning as a group that listens to actors at all levels of the organization (members and their families, leaders of first-degree organizations, leaders of the central organization, technicians, administrative and management teams) also helps build this good relationship.



Training for women of the Fanohana cooperative – Madagascar



Training for craftswomen of the alpaca sector – Bolivia

© AVSF

### 3. The main farmers' organization capacities to strengthen

To date, AVSF has assisted roughly one hundred farmers' organizations in Latin America, Haiti, Madagascar, West Africa and Asia, positioned within different supply chains for subsistence crops (grains, tubers, vegetables, fruit), cash crops (coffee, cacao, banana, mango, litchi, vanilla, quinoa, sesame, etc.) and livestock-farming products (yack and alpaca fiber, meat, dairy products, eggs). Several organizations that received assistance in recent years are now leading entrepreneurial organizations with participatory, transparent and efficient management, particularly those positioned on the fairtrade market, such as CEPICAFE in Peru on the coffee and cacao supply chains, and FANOHANA in Madagascar on the supply chains for litchi, vanilla and spices. Other examples include organizations positioned on local supply chains, such as Let a gogo in Haiti on the dairy supply chain, Banabeni in Bolivia on the banana supply chain and ARPAC at Cusco's big open-air market in Peru.

**AVSF creates projects to develop the capacities of farmers' organizations** by working with them to determine which activities will be given priority, over time, according to the organization's needs and available funds. AVSF draws on its experience with partners in the South — particularly the Peruvian NGO PROGRESO<sup>6</sup> — to **design programs that will help farmers' organizations develop their capacities and, over the long term, become independent and more efficient in four-dimensional management:** productive dimension, organizational dimension, entrepreneurial dimension and socio-political dimension.

<sup>6</sup> Formerly PIDECAFE, an NGO based in Piura in northern Peru, whose capacity-building work with coffee-farmer organizations served as a good model for later work of AVSF on mango, banana, cacao and sugar-cane supply chains. Website: [www.progreso.org.pe](http://www.progreso.org.pe)

For an organization to be successful in four-dimensional management and in meeting the needs of its members, **these internal capacities must be developed:**

- **democratic, transparent and participatory management of the organization** (organizational dimension),
- **design of an offer for high-quality smallholder products** (productive dimension),
- **effective and efficient management of the organization's entrepreneurial activities** (entrepreneurial dimension),
- **active participation of the organization in dialog and advocacy work** (socio-political dimension).

Level of structuration, shared vision by members and board, socio-economic dimension and skills requirements are depending on the organization main activities, and may not all be considered.

In this document, the **concept of skill** refers to the combination of capacities to use knowledge, tools and necessary attitudes. The table below shows all of the capacities that may be necessary and in need of being developed to make sure the farmers' organization can be stable and strong enough.



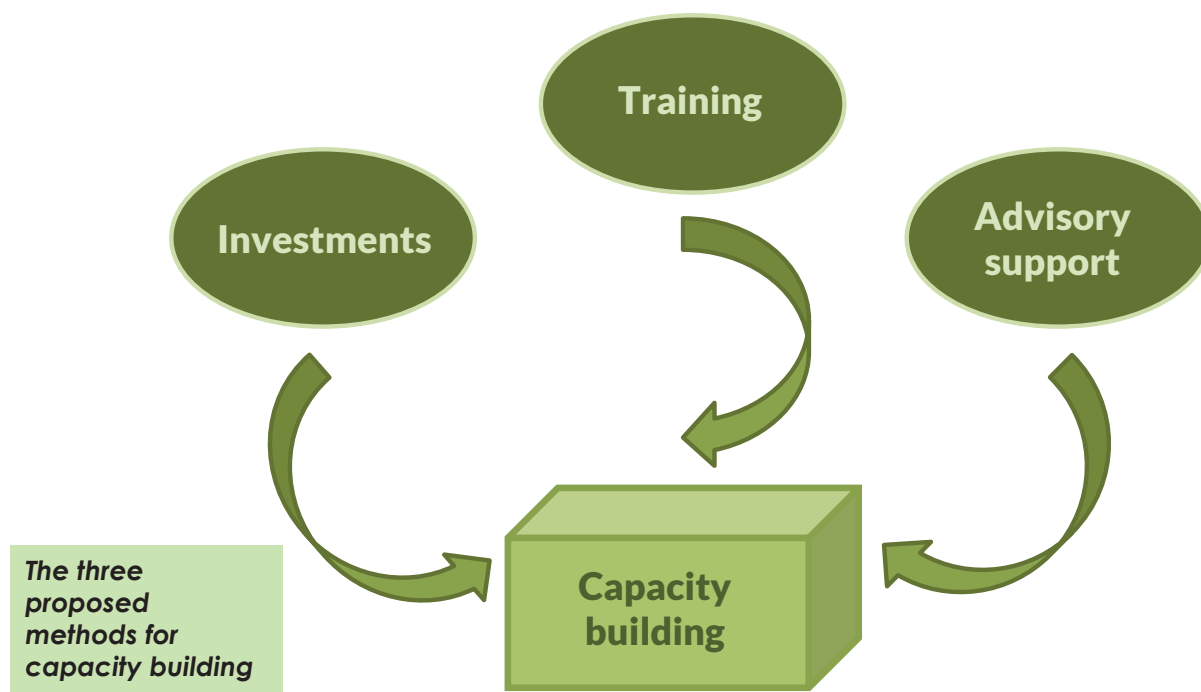
Training on process of natural treatment products – Cuenca – Ecuador

Skills	Capacity-building target
<b>Democratic, transparent and participatory management</b>	Mobilization of members for a collective organizational project (mission, vision, principles of shared responsibility, trust, solidarity, etc.)
	Application by the members and leaders of organization-management tools: organic structure, by-laws, internal rules, institutional strategic plan, minutes
	Planning and coordination by the leaders of meetings with members (general meetings, visits of first-degree organizations, miscellaneous meetings)
	Functioning of tools for communicating and providing information: internal bulletin, website and blogs, bulletin board at the organization's premises, radio program, other
	Offering social services to members' families (emergency fund, health campaign, academic scholarships, cultural activities, etc.)
<b>Designing an offer for smallholder high-quality products</b>	Firm grasp by the members of the technical processes for production using agroecology techniques
	Offering services to help members diversify production (loans, seeds, equipment, etc.)
	Firm grasp by the members of quality standards for their products, and compliance with those standards
	Firm grasp by the members and technical team of standards and procedures for certification and/or participatory guarantee (particularly internal control), and compliance with those standards and procedures
	Management by the members and/or technical team of the collection and/or conditioning of the products
	Management by the members and/or technical team of the processing of the products offered by the organization (creation of added value, quality control, diversification of the offer)
	Negotiation and quality control performed by the leaders and/or technical team for processing via private operators outside the organization
<b>Professional and efficient management of entrepreneurial activities</b>	Collective management of a marketing project focusing on supply chains (knowledge about the supply chain(s) and demand, roles and functions within the organization, etc.)
	Application of sales-management tools: cost structure (production, collection, processing, conditioning and marketing), market studies, business plans, marketing strategy, campaign plans and recap, tools for promoting the offer
	Offer services to members to support the organization's marketing activity (loans, inputs, storage, etc.)
	Management of different types of markets: smallholder exports, open-air markets, public procurement, smallholder boutiques, distribution to a network of boutiques or supermarkets, other (constraints, specialized management system, etc.)
	Firm grasp by the members and technical team of certification standards, and compliance with those standards
	Implementation by the members and technical team of the internal-control system
	Management of quality-guarantee systems to highlight the origin of the products and their health, social and/or environmental quality (development of specialized procedures and skills)
	Definition and adaptation of the organization's by-laws based on changes in its entrepreneurial activity and legal framework (co-op, association, corporation, EIG, etc.)
	Application of financial-management and accounting tools: cash flow, chart of accounts, operating statement, accounting and financial software
	Transparent financial management of the organization vis-à-vis its members (accounting records, financial statements, balance sheet) and compliance with current tax and legal standards (balance sheet, labor rights, etc.)
<b>Active participation in dialog and advocacy work</b>	Management of relations with buyers
	Mobilization of national or international external financing to develop and/or support the organization's entrepreneurial activity (working capital, investment funds, etc.)
	Management of loans to members through ad hoc ownership structures of the organizations or through agreements negotiated with local lending institutions
	Mobilization of support for the organization's economic and social activity
	Channeling and/or improvement in members' access to social services (education, health, potable water, etc.)
	Participation of organizations in local collectives organized for group initiatives: management of local markets, participatory certification systems, access to public procurement, etc.
Getting public authorities to recognize smallholder farming within supply chains identified as strategic at the national and/or local level	
Representation and defense of smallholder interests on high-quality markets (particularly organic and fair trade) by participating in agroecology collectives, national fair-trade platforms, etc.	
Representation and defense of smallholder interests when drawing up or coordinating agricultural and rural-development policies, within supra-regional organizations, trade unions, networks, inter-professional associations, etc.	

Depending on the level of maturity of the organization, its activities, any special features of the product(s) marketed and their supply chain(s), some of the capacities listed may be reformulated, others are not to be taken into consideration, and/or additional capacities are to be added.

In addition to financial investments, which are often necessary (infrastructure, equipment, revolving funds, guarantee funds and others, in most cases co-financed with contributions from the beneficia-

ries), two other methods are also used to develop the capacities of organizations: technical support and training.



It is important to point out that **training does not just entail workshops and training sessions: it must also entail phases where the team providing assistance helps** put the acquired knowledge into practice. For instance, after completing a training session on accounting records, the people identified and trained must be shown how to actually use those records. It is recommended that the team helping the organization develop its capacities maintain a quasi-permanent presence (among the families belonging to the organization, leaders and members of the technical team) to monitor progress.

The appended table shows, for each of the capacities mentioned above, examples of methods for strengthening farmers' organizations that have been used in various AVSF projects in recent years.

Like the "farmer-to-farmer"<sup>7</sup> and "farmer field school" approaches used in a productive dimension, it is important to **build on the capacities of other organizations in a given region**, whether it's the capacities of their farmers, technical and administrative teams,

leaders, etc. These exchanges between farmers' organizations allow for a horizontal transfer of capacities and best practices. There are several different methods of exchange: assembling a relatively big group; internship where a manager from one organization interns at another organization; sending an experienced manager from one organization to a weaker organization, etc. A more advanced organization may even temporarily lend its services to less advanced organizations, to ensure the progressive transfer of capacities and responsibilities without putting the less advanced organizations in a position of dependence.

Capacity building may also involve the temporary financing of human resources (technical assistants, administrators and accountants, managers, etc.) for projects. One of AVSF's strategies is to **integrate these professionals into the organizations, under a contract with those organizations**. That way, these human resources can be integrated into the organization and its technical teams, and truly be considered part of the group (instead of being seen as someone from outside the organization who is only involved for a short-term project). AVSF's experience shows that these human resources have a

<sup>7</sup> The "farmer-to-farmer" extension system is a training method where smallholders share their experiences and knowledge with others.



much easier time integrating into the internal bodies and dynamics of the organization in question, which usually hires them at the end of the project (and end of the project's subsidization of these positions), **thus guaranteeing the approval and longevity of the capacities added by these human resources.**

*Experience presented in this document has shown that designing and carrying out a structured program to develop the capacities of a farmers' organization takes time and requires a great deal of specific resources, all of which must be taken into account during the design phase of the project this action is part of.*



## 4. Identifying which skills to develop

In order to put together a structured and relevant proposal to help a farmers' organization develop its internal capacities, the organization's needs and challenges have to be identified with its members and technical teams. At the start of the project, **the organization's weak points and the existing internal capacities must be identified through a participatory diagnosis. It may be necessary to come up with the capacities that should be developed as a priority**, depending on the organization's level of consolidation, the potential duration of the assistance, the available resources and the members', leaders' and technical teams' available time for participating in the proposed activities.

**The project team uses the initial diagnosis to create the capacity-building program, with an order of priority. This affects the organization as a whole**, as it aims to **identify the existing internal capacities linked to the four dimensions of management** mentioned above. The project team will probably not be able to address all the needs identified within the organization given that: there are many different capacities to develop (particularly within younger organizations); the technical assistance is sometimes too short owing to the project-focused mindset of the financial backers; the available financial resources for these types of projects are limited; specialized professional expertise is needed to develop these capacities. **Still, the diagnosis phase is an important opportunity for group exchange and thinking within the organization**, allowing its stakeholders to expand its scope of action (often highly focused on the product and sales side) and address critical points. **It also helps identify, in conjunction with the organization, all the capacities requiring other partners with skills and resources that complement those of the project team. It is a tool that helps monitor and assess the capacity-building process**, by providing an overview of the organization's capacities at the

start of the project.

Over the past few years, AVSF has developed **the Institutional Strengthening Index (IRI)**, which aggregates assessment indicators in order to quickly identify the internal capacities of partners involved in the projects, including farmers' organizations. This index is based on the principles listed below, which are outlined in this document for the proposal of a more comprehensive diagnosis of the organization's capacities, particularly for organizations that are more consolidated:

- **Be an easy-to-use tool** that takes into account the availability of the stakeholders involved in the diagnosis phase and allows them to actually help assess the organization's capacities, which is necessary for the approval of this exercise and for the resulting capacity-building proposal.
- **Have an approach that is both quantitative and qualitative**, providing access to concrete and measurable data (quantitative approach) and encouraging dialog, debate and thinking among the stakeholders involved in the diagnosis phase (qualitative approach).
- **Highlight the organization's existing capacities**, in order to put them to good use and avoid frustrating or discouraging the stakeholders by focusing only on the capacities that need to be developed.

The indicators must be formulated before implementing the diagnosis, in order to organize the discussions and ensure both that the different components inherent to each of the identified capacities are actually addressed and that the people involved in the diagnosis have a good understanding of the capacities to assess.

For the quantitative approach, these indicators must be objectively measurable and verifiable. They are then defined by the participants to describe the corresponding situation on the date the diagnosis is performed.

For the qualitative approach, guidance questions are asked for each capacity before starting the diagnosis itself. After discussing these questions, the level of each capacity is then determined using a simple rating system.

Skills	Capacity-building target	Quantitative		Qualitative		Assistance received	Priority**
		Indicators	Assessment	Guidance questions	Assessment*		
<b>Democratic, transparent and participatory management</b>	E.g.: Application by the members and leaders of organization-management tools: organic structure, by-laws, internal rules, institutional strategic plan, minutes	E.g.: 1. Existence of by-laws and internal rules	By-laws exist, but no internal rules	PE.g.: do the roles and functions assumed within the organization correspond to the organization's by-laws and internal rules?	1 (members don't know about the by-laws, board members, Chairman and review committee are not carrying out their responsibilities...)	None	x
	...	2. ...	...	...	...	...	...
<b>Designing an offer for high-quality smallholder products</b>	...						
<b>Professional and efficient management of entrepreneurial activities</b>	...						
<b>Active participation in dialog and advocacy work</b>	...						

\* Very deficient = 0, Problems = 1, OK = 2, Good = 3, Very good = 4  
 \*\* Indicate priority needs with an 'X' (if left blank, the needs will be dealt at a later time)

When organizing this type of diagnosis (internal and participatory), **be sure to take into account any power games and existing conflicts within the organization, and consider the ways in which they may interfere.** In order to identify the organization's weak points, it is important to involve all types of organization's stakeholders: leaders, technical team and basic members, as well as the leaders of first-degree organizations in the case of a second-degree or supra-regional organization. It may even be a good idea to separate different spaces for working with groups in order to facilitate the expression of constraints and difficulties, and then hold a plenary session with all to pool the results. That would make it easier to **share opinions and come up with a collective vision of capacity-building needs within the organization** (approval of the diagnostic process, which then conditions for the appropriation of the capacity-building program).

As mentioned above, depending on the level of maturity of the organization, its activities, any special features of the product(s) marketed and their supply chain(s), the organization's structure (first-degree or umbrella), and the shared vision with members and board, some of the capacities listed may be reformulated, others are not to be taken into

consideration, and/or additional capacities are to be added. The proposed diagnosis tool should be adapted, as all the skills named may not all have to be described.

***This diagnosis may be the first phase of a project implementing programs of capacity-building for farmers' organizations. It may also be applied when designing such a project in order to identify in advance which capacities to develop and, based on that, to formulate indicators and specific activities to be organized, and account for the human and financial resources needed.***



Training on administrative and accounting management – Atsemawoe cooperative – Togo

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## 5. Putting together a capacity-building program

After the diagnosis phase, a number of capacities have been identified as needing to be developed as a priority during the period in question.

Now is the time to **determine which activities are to carry out in order to build these capacities, using the methods** cited above: investment, technical support and/or training.

Skills	Capacities to develop as a priority	Capacity-building method		
		Investment	Advisory support	Training (single session or modular)
<b>Democratic, transparent and participatory management</b>	Mobilization of members for a collective management (structure, by-laws, strategy plan, minutes, etc.)	-	1. Atelier de révision 1. Workshop on the update of the statutes and internal rules... 2. Implementation of an integrated administration and control system, training for treasurer and review committee on budget planning and monitoring	1. Board assistance on different responsibilities, roles and activities
	...		...	...
<b>Designing an offer for high-quality smallholder products</b>	...			
	...			
<b>Professional and efficient management of entrepreneurial activities</b>	...			
	...			
<b>Active participation in dialog and advocacy work</b>	...			
	...			

The capacity-building program should be organized based on that work and reflection.

About **investments**: they have to be budgeted and planned, including statement of responsibilities and expected results (feeding the monitoring-assessment system, described in the next chapter).

About **technical/advisory support**: activities have to be planned, with target groups and representative bodies to be mobilized (members, board, staff...), including statement of responsibilities and expected results (that will also feed the monitoring-assessment system, described in the next chapter).

And at last, about **training**: training activities have to be planned and budgeted for different target groups, learning contents, statement of responsibilities and expected results should be clearly identified

(that will also feed the monitoring-assessment system, described in the next chapter).



A table is provided below to help create the training plan:

General skills to develop	Skills to develop as a priority*	Required knowledge (themed content)	Technical or methodological tools to master	Potential learning activities to put in place	Time needed to acquire the capacity	Learning materials	Means of confirming acquisition of the capacity	Comments
Democratic, transparent and participatory management								
Designing an offer for high-quality smallholder products								
Professional and efficient management of entrepreneurial activities								
Active participation in dialog and advocacy work								

\* Specify the target audience (leaders, members, technical team, etc.)

The table should be filled out from left to right, specifying:

- The capacities — indicated in the previous stage as being a priority — to develop, which may (must) be acquired through training.
- The (specific) knowledge needed to acquire each priority capacity. This knowledge gives us **the themed content to be developed in the training**.
- **The technical or methodological tools** to master in order to build the priority capacities.
- The **learning** methods to put in place in order to help the training participants acquire the specific knowledge, technical or methodological tools needed: oral explanation, practical demonstration, case study, practical work, etc.
- An estimation of time **needed** to acquire the priority capacities by completing the proposed learning activities.
- **The materials** required for carrying out the proposed learning activities: video projector, paperboards, tools for practical demonstrations, internet, manuals, brochures, etc.
- **Means of confirming** whether the capacity has actually been acquired. This echoes the measurement of the indicators defined to confirm the

acquisition of the new capacities (see below).

Once the table has been filled out, **the training plan should be finalized** and should include the following:

- Objectives of the training program.
- Participants (characteristics, potential selection criteria, etc.).
- Expected results of the training (what the participants are expected to learn).
- Themed content (broken down into modules or themed units)
- Training methods.
- Assessment methods (for assessing participants and trainers).
- People in charge of the training.
- Timetable for completion.
- Budget and financing plan, including the contribution from training participants.



Farmer field school on vegetable production  
- Peru

## 6. Capacity-building indicators: an important monitoring and assessment tool

Developing the capacities of a farmers' organization is not simply a question of organizing a training session or making an investment. It involves acquiring and putting to use new knowledge, expertise and attitudes. In addition, to assist an organization's members and technical teams after the training sessions are over, **it is vital to jointly monitor and assess whether the capacities have actually been acquired by the farmers' organizations.** It is therefore necessary to monitor indicators measuring the improvements made throughout the capacity-building project as well as at the end of the project (at the end of the project or at the end of the assistance phase corresponding to the list of priority actions drawn up during the diagnosis), compared with the initial situation (the benchmark situation). Only capacities that were given priority in the diagnosis phase will be monitored and assessed; those are the only capacities that should be noted in the table.

Skills	Capacity-building target	Indicators*	Initial situation		Expected results		Progress made	
			Quantitative	Qualitative	Quantitative	Qualitative	Quantitative	Qualitative
Democratic, transparent and participatory management								
Designing an offer for high-quality smallholder products								
Professional and efficient management of entrepreneurial activities								
Active participation in dialog and advocacy work								

\* In order for the diagnosis to be used as a benchmark situation, the monitoring and assessment indicators will be those used during the diagnosis.

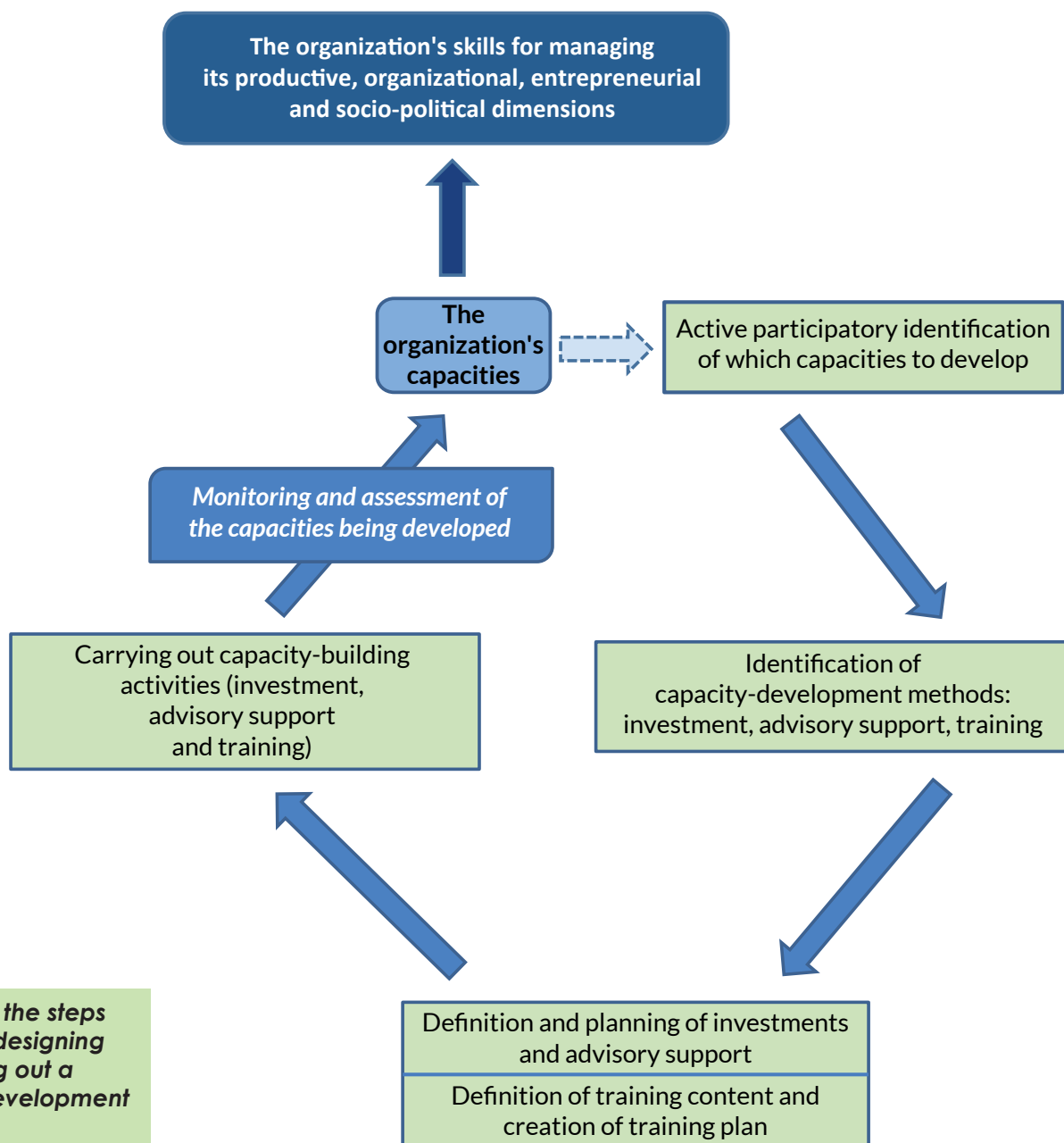
**It is important to work with the organization's leaders and members to consider the time needed for sharing and analyzing the tools used to monitor the changes in the capacity-building indicators (progress made). Depending on the frequency to be defined for assessing the indicators, enough time must be given to allow them to integrate the capacity-building process into their organization. This may include general meetings, board of directors meetings or other group meetings already planned or yet to be planned with the organization.**

## Summary and conclusion

The purpose of this document is to share references and methodological inputs for setting up structured programs to build the capacities of farmers' organizations.

Capacity development for a farmers' organization may have an impact on the organization's four dimensions — productive, organizational, entrepreneurial and socio-political — and may be based on three methods: investment, technical support and training. The decision as to which methods to use must be made collectively and must correspond to each specific context.

The diagram below summarizes the process:





If these steps should be considered for the design, monitoring and assessment of structured programs for developing the capacities of farmers' organizations, the tools proposed in the document must be considered as inputs. Each person is, of course, free to use them as they are presented, modify them or use other existing tools to carry out the recommended process.

Lastly, to actually carry out the capacity-building programs designed, different methodological tools, training content and management tools, developed for the organization by AVSF, its partners in the South and other actors working on this issue, should also be mobilized or designed





Quality check and packing of organic bananas in Peru



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