Session I: ORGANISE YOUR STUDIES

Objectives

1. To become familiar with the handbook and the study circle concept.
2. To define the responsibilities of the study circle leader and other participants in the group.
3. To set the rules for the study circle group.
4. To design a study plan.

How to use this manual

Use this manual as a support and guidance in your aim to increase knowledge in sustainable agriculture.

How to learn in a study circle

We recommend that you study this material in a group because then you will be able to discuss and share ideas and experiences as you go on reading. Remember that there are many sustainable methods and many ways of learning.

We recommend that such a study group has between 5 to 15 participants because if the number becomes too large it might be difficult for everyone to participate equally and to organise sessions and field trips. Make an effort to bring people with different experiences, ideas, knowledge and skills to enrich your study circle. This is easily done by inviting both men and women, youth and old, and people with different backgrounds. Remember that participants should join the group voluntarily and because of a mutual interest in the subject.
Of course you may also read the book on your own or in a smaller group but then you will miss the opportunity to discuss and learn from the experiences of others.

_In this book you will study sustainable agriculture. Look at the people below. They are interested in joining a study circle group on sustainable agriculture. Discuss what type of knowledge and experiences each of them might contribute to the study circle._

How to learn in a group guided by a study circle leader

We strongly advise that you as a group elect a study circle leader. The circle study leader is not supposed to be a teacher, but he or she is to facilitate the learning process. This means that the leader should make sure that everyone can participate equally by motivating and encouraging all the participants to take part in the discussions and actions. The study circle leader does not have to be an expert on the subject, because the information is readily available in this handbook and elsewhere, but it is good if the leader is trained in leading study circles.

How to learn in an organised form

Together you should agree when and where to meet and for how long. Normally a session would take around two hours but this depends entirely on the group and how much you discuss and practice.
Make a study plan during the first session. The study plan will show what you will study during each session. The Table of Content can be used as a guide for what to study at every session, but the group is free to choose their own study plan and which chapters to study. One suggestion is to study the manual chapter by chapter. The text could be read out loud or the participants could be expected to have read the chapters before each session. It can be the responsibility of the leader to suggest questions to discuss, to explain assignments and to start up other exercises that the group has decided upon. Each chapter contains questions for the group to discuss, but the group is also free to discuss other questions that come up as you go on studying the topic.

How to learn in a participatory manner

To learn in a participatory manner means that everyone should take an active part in the learning process by listening, discussing and by practising. We hope that you will try out the techniques discussed not only in a demonstration plot but also in your own field.

Exercises like filling in lists should be done so that all participants can follow the process. Use flip charts if available and remember that pictures say more than a thousand words. Take time to look at the illustrations and be creative in the way you learn.

The group may also call upon experts, such as extension officers, to participate when some technical matters are being discussed.
Why learn?

This is your opportunity to help others and to fill in the gaps of your own knowledge. The more you seek answers to your questions and the more you practise your skills, the more useful your studies will be.

First study circle session

Here are some steps that might help you in your first study circle meeting:

• Introduce all members of the group to each other.

• Go through what a study circle is and how it should be run.

• Let everyone share their expectations for this study circle. This could be a good time to discuss what you think sustainable agriculture means and why it concerns you. Discuss this issue in pairs and then as a group.

• Go through the book together to familiarize everyone with the book. For example look through the Table of Contents.

• Compare the contents of the book with the expectations of the participants. Make a study plan in order to meet the wishes and needs of the participants.

• Decide the number, dates and length of sessions.

• Identify resource persons and when they should come. Some parts of the handbook may be complicated and need the service of an expert.

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR STUDIES!