



Figure 2. Village-level training by AGILE facilitators on the recognition of local level assets and actors and their employment in achieving integrated enterprise-NRM visions in Kapchorwa, Uganda

AGILE builds upon existing institutional and community strengths to foster a more comprehensive, coordinated development paradigm linking conservation and livelihood goals. Reflect farmer learning cycles coupled with dynamic facilitation have enabled more effective change processes in support of these goals.

Revitalizing Grassroots Knowledge Systems: Farmer Learning Cycles in AGILE

Developing Landcare Ideals through AGILE

Landcare is an approach to community-based environmental management. It is based on local voluntary groups working collectively and in partnership with local government units to foster better land management for improved livelihood. The African Grassroots Innovation for Livelihoods and Environment (AGILE) is a spin-off movement applied to the eastern African context but rooted in the principles and ideals of Landcare. These include:

- ✓ A shared conservation ethic and philosophy manifest through local collective action;
- ✓ Local ownership and grassroots innovations (local issues, resources and solutions);
- ✓ Flexibility and adaptability at all levels;
- ✓ Voluntary and partnership-based; and
- ✓ Sustainability as defined by the “triple bottom line” of stewardship, profitability and community.

The following realities have made the challenges facing rural resource managers increasingly complex:

- ✓ Growing awareness of the magnitude of land degradation and the scale of measures required to achieve sustainability;
- ✓ A refocusing of disconnected natural resource management interventions around integrating concepts such as the catchment and landscape;
- ✓ A shift from voluntary action to regulation, and from aspirational planning to targeted plans;
- ✓ Debate surrounding the costs and benefits of natural resource management, and who should pay; and



Figure 3. Reflect cycle meeting to distill integrated evaluation criteria (income, NRM, value to other farm enterprises and cultural acceptance) to compare new with traditional Banana cultivars in Bundibugyo, Uganda

- ✓ The fast pace of change, requiring accelerated learning processes to internalize the meaning of this change for rural livelihoods.

Effectively confronting these challenges requires a shift from formal to experiential capacity-building methods that enable greater dynamism. This brief discusses an approach for linking accelerated local learning processes to more dynamic facilitation for enhancing the effectiveness of rural communities in driving their own development.

Linking into Farmer Learning Processes: Reflect Cycles

AGILE has been utilizing “reflect cycles” to provide an opportunity for people to learn together, to strengthen their opportunities for influencing their own well-being, and to fill critical knowledge and information gaps. This methodology consists of a group of people meeting regularly for a period of time, most often once per week, to study a certain subject or theme or to take part in a practical activity. The reflect cycles are characterized by democratic values and responsibility toward one’s own situation.

In these groups, farmers plan based on their own needs and interests, exchange experiences and ideas, and acquire knowledge based on the collected wisdom of the group. Farmers' reflect cycles in AGILE study areas involve a variety of community groups, and draw in representatives of community-based organizations, extension and adult literacy departments as needed. Reflect cycles are location-specific, integrating farmers from a particular area (neighbours) into a particular reflect cycle and thereby enabling work on shared problems and goals. Reflect cycle members meet regularly to assess development activities they are involved in, whether joint areas for technology testing, technology dissemination within the group or shared landscape management activities. They blend traditional knowledge with modern science by inviting in subject matter specialists from extension, research and different government ministries. Adult literacy classes are central to the reflect cycle, as this strengthens the capacity of less empowered group members. Reflect cycles are organized and managed by community members, with activities largely based on members' felt needs.

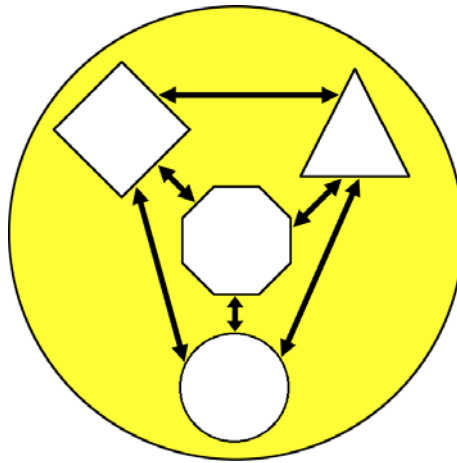


Figure 1: Facilitators' Role in the Knowledge Jigsaw

- ◆ **REPRESENTATION**
 - Household • Profession • Institution
- ▲ **COMPOSITION**
 - Gender • Age
 - Culture • Education
- **NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE**
 - Technology • Policy
 - Financial • Social/cultural/religious
- ⬡ **TYPE OF KNOWLEDGE**
 - Field (health, agricultural, etc.)
 - Scale (plot, landscape)
 - Temporal significance (urgent, short term, long term)

These challenges demand sound knowledge to enable communities and support organizations to adjust to changing circumstances. This places unique demands on Landcare facilitators, who must be able to simultaneously:

- ✓ Encourage local-level innovations and improved knowledge management systems;
- ✓ Operate as a generalist and a knowledge specialist under different circumstances;
- ✓ Develop links and coordinate with other actors in the field of conservation and livelihoods;
- ✓ Discern site-specific lessons and opportunities with landscape-level significance; and
- ✓ Create and maintain links with the local governance structures as well as partnerships among diverse stakeholders.

The key to balancing these diverse demands lies in a heightened responsiveness to needs of diverse actors and a synthetic knowledge system. The facilitators' role has become that of an on-the-spot innovator, capturing stimuli from diverse actors and sources and enabling their transformation into unified visions and actions (Figure 1). Investing in facilitators has proven instrumental in advancing impact.

—Joseph Tanui

The Changing Roles of Landcare Facilitators

Given the strong local empowerment element, the facilitator is responsible primarily for assisting the group in establishing linkages with outside actors and information to open up new opportunities for livelihood and conservation (Figure 1). The facilitator must be a generalist, yet provide or link with specialist information in particular circumstances. In this regard, facilitators must evolve and develop skills that are targeted to confront emerging challenges in the evolution of Landcare. These challenges include:

- ✓ Sharing of responsibilities and costs in the development of Landcare;
- ✓ Tensions arising from new market and regulatory mechanisms;
- ✓ The broadening and integration of the natural resource management agenda;
- ✓ Increased “bureaucratization” of formal procedures, which are at odds with the voluntary principles of Landcare; and
- ✓ The need for flexible and versatile “social capital” that stretches local and external organizations beyond their comfort zone.



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