



## Episode Five: Farmer Field Schools

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### Synopsis

The Farmer Field School (FFS) is a participatory tool for technology transfer which brings together 20 to 25 men and women farmers who are willing and able to learn. They meet once a week throughout an entire crop cycle (of a winter season) to follow training according to the Farmer Field School methodology. The farmers must observe all the interactions around a plant, identify the potential and constraints and test solutions, given production constraints, having first carried out an exploratory survey. At the end of this process, participants are asked to choose the technical approach that is best suited to alleviating these constraints. In this way, the FFS promotes the learning and uptake of new agricultural production techniques which take account of farmers' capacities, but also of the possibilities offered by local conditions.

### Characters

Group of men and women farmers: Idi, Koudou and Dodo

Union facilitator: Biba

FFS facilitator: Djibo

#### ➤ Scene 1: Meeting to select participants

*Idi, a farmer wishing to learn certain new agricultural techniques, is coordinating a group of producers who face the same constraints, so that they can all receive instruction from a Farmer Field School run by the Bokki union. Previously, he joined the Albarka millet producers' group after receiving information about the many advantages that he could obtain from the input shop (IS) of the Bokki union, of which his group is a member. Idi, who has arrived very early at the Farmer Field School, is sharpening his tillage tools before the other group members arrive.*

**Music: Cue in theme music. Keep for 30 seconds and crossfade, followed by the sound of tillage tools being sharpened.**

**Idi:** *(alone in the FFS, he talks to himself):* I'm going to see if it's true what Saidou the input shop manager and my cousin Mintou say about using fertilizer to improve yields. I will observe all the techniques to be tested in the trial field and *Incha-allah*, from next year onwards, none will have a better harvest than I do.

**Sound of other farmers arriving, who have been chosen to participate in this year's crop trial cycle.**

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**Koudou**, an FFS participant (the husband of Idi's cousin Mintou): *Salamaalaikoum*. But who do I see here? Is that you Idi? Have you come to see how we are going to work in the Farmer Field School, or are you also part of the group?

**Idi**: Yes Koudou, I've come to see what you learn at a Farmer Field School, and afterwards, I'll see how I can put that to use. I really want to know what is going on in my field and understand why other farmers' soil produces so much more than mine.

**Koudou**: Hmm, and what has awakened this curiosity and desire to learn in you?

**Idi**: It was your wife Mintou. For once in her life, she's been useful (*laughs*) She convinced me to contact members of the Bokki union to discover the advantages I can get from it.

**Koudou**: *Alhamdoulaye*. I thank God for having given me such an enlightened wife, who is always ready to be of help. I won't deny that it was she who convinced me as well to join the group of participants this year. She wants me to become a model farmer. Given my capacity for hard work, I can be of use to other men and women farmers in the union. At least, that's what she keeps on telling me.

**Dodo** (FFS participant): But Koudou, as far as I know, Idi does not belong to any PO, so how can he be part of our group today?

**Koudou**: Hmm, that's a very awkward question, but as he is here with us, let's ask him for the answer.

**Idi**: You see Dodo, I have realised the harm I was doing to myself by staying away from union activities all these years. And I am grateful to you Mintou for having steered me towards the input shop, and also to other union officials. They have given me a great deal of advice on the many possibilities for becoming a model farmer. They know how to take advantage of new agricultural production techniques, especially those linked to the use of fertilizer. It was they who pointed me in the direction of the FFS, advising me to first join a PO that is a member of the Bokki union. Here is my membership card.

**Koudou**: (*addressing Idi*) Let's try not to disappoint Mintou. We must be the best in the group.

#### ***Arrival of the union facilitator.***

**Biba**: (*the union facilitator, after the traditional greetings, addresses the group to make sure that all the participants are present*): Koudou, how many are there in your group this year, working in the Farmer Field School? Are you all here?

**Koudou**: There are 20 of us this year and we are all here.

**Biba**: And you Dodo? You are part of the Haské *janguéro* production group, aren't you?

**Dodo**: Yes, that's right. There aren't many of us this year, but we are going to give our best.

**Biba**: (*addressing Idi*) Idi, I've never met you in any of the POs?

**Idi**: It's a long story. I have joined the group for mixed millet/sorghum cultivation and was chosen by the group to take part in the FFS work, together with Koukou Baba, Zazaï, Sitou, Kangaï and Nounou.

**Biba**: Let's clarify some of the guiding principles for our work here.

**Participants (together)**: Yes, yes, we are well aware of these principles but it's always best to go over them again before we start work.

**Biba**: So I have just checked that you are all members of a PO, but that is not enough. You need to have a great deal of spare time to devote to the FFS activities. Are you all aware of that?

**Participants (together)**: We all know, *ni lakkalo ma kani* (don't worry).

**Biba**: In any case I will remind you that you must be available at least one morning a week throughout the crop trial cycle, which is spread over 12 to 14 weeks.

**Participants (together):** We know, we know.

**Biba:** You also know that the things you will learn here are not just for you, but are also for the other members, and even non-members, of your groups, who are not with you. So you must be diligent and determined to learn. That is crucial.

**Participants (together):** Have no doubt. We are all determined.

**Biba:** Do you all know how to read and write?

**One participant:** More or less, in Zarma yes. Many of us attended the adult courses provided by the Say literacy services.

**Biba:** Good. For everything else, we will wait for the facilitator. That's Djibo. You all know him, as he often comes to Bokki. I think that's him now. I can hear his motorbike.

## ➤ **Scene 2: Setting up the crop trial system**

*Djibo the facilitator gathers together the participants to set up the crop trial system and the timetable for the work to be undertaken.*

### **Sound of a motorbike and arrival of the facilitator**

**Djibo:** *(after the traditional greetings)* I hope you have had a detailed discussion with Biba about the conditions, and especially about the time taken up by FFS activities. Now we are going to deal with some practical issues. We need to develop a rule of procedure for the running of our site. You know that for all activities, you need a certain degree of organization. If not, each person will work as he or she thinks fit. So we must define the main points that need to be included in our written procedures. For example, we need to determine the number of days' work, plan the daily activities, establish what penalties to impose for anyone who arrives late or is absent, define how harvested crops or agricultural material on loan should be used and ensure that participants are organized into sub-groups, etc.

**Group of participants:** As regards working days, let's try to avoid market day and prayer day on Friday. I think Thursday would be perfect.

**Djibo:** Now we need some volunteers who will be on the FFS committee. They will have the task of monitoring the site regularly and reporting back to the rest of the group with information about urgent action needing to be taken. Biba, have you discussed this as well?

**Biba:** Yes. Idi is the Chair, Koudou is the secretary and Dodo is treasurer; they all volunteered. I did everything possible to get a woman farmer involved, but the three of them refused, for fear of being told off by Mintou *(laughter)*. Unless anyone has any objections, I think we can keep these three, especially as they all have good literacy skills.

**Djibo:** The others also know how to read, don't they? We will be putting up some placards to identify the trial sites. They will be in Zarma or in Hausa, so everyone will be able to read them. I am happy about this and also about the geographical location of the FFS. It is next to the village, and the land is level, with easy access. It appears to be the same kind of terrain as that of other farmers in this area and it's on the road going towards Say. Anyone who passes can see it.

**Biba:** Yes, it's a good choice. The union thought long and hard before finding this site. And there is no problem about security of land tenure. A deed of transfer has been made in the union's name for a period of 3 years.

**Djibo:** I think we have everything in place. So now we can start work and decide the content of the training sessions and start the courses. Biba, do we have notebooks and pens for all the farmers?

**Biba:** Yes, yes. It's all ready.

**Djibo:** Good. I think we'll decide the content of the training sessions now and then get to work. Do you remember all the crops we identified during our earlier meetings?

**A participant:** It was millet, most of all. Because our soils are poor, the rain is inadequate and there are a great many pests. All of this means that our harvests are not good enough at the end of the season, even though we farm quite large areas. We don't even leave any fields fallow any more.

**Djibo:** Have you also thought about the local crop calendar and all the operations that need to be carried out for millet cultivation? Because we are going to be making comparisons throughout the crop trial cycle and then choose the best options.

**A woman farmer:** When it rains, we take our hoes and our seeds and we do the planting. When pests attack our crops, we buy pesticides and put them on the plants. Those with enough money buy fertilizer and scatter it over the field. Sometimes when there isn't enough rain, all their crops are burnt.

**Djibo:** During the course of the next 14 weeks, we will be coming here once a week on Thursdays. To combat the problem of inadequate rainfall, we will compare some early maturing varieties with your local variety. To tackle the problem of lower soil fertility, we are going to carry out 4 treatments, using different strata of manure, including applying microdoses in the seed pockets. In this way, one plot will receive a complete technological package as recommended by the research institutes, and the other will follow local farmer practice, as you have just described. We will then make comparisons as we go along and will carry out an overall evaluation at the end of the season. We will have two plots side by side, so as to allow a better comparison.

**Biba:** We are measuring out each plot taking into account the average size of a household farm. We will also be choosing land that is suitable for cultivating millet. As regards preparing the soil, we will follow the same crop spacing, seed quantities and procedures for maintenance, harvesting and storage as those practised by you farmers, and for the other plot we will use those recommended for the technological package. It is also outlined in the protocol that I have here.

**Djibo:** We'll start by using the local variety that is most widely grown in the area and planting it in both plots. Then we will plant improved varieties that are widely available here. As regards fertilizer, we will observe the quantities and types of fertilizer and their methods of application at each stage of cultivation. We will use suitable small-scale farm tools. And each week, we will make observations and agro-ecosystem analyses to assess the general appearance of each basic plot and the degree of uniformity or variation. We will write all this in our notebooks and on charts which will be pinned on a board, so that concrete lessons can be drawn from our experience. Because after this journey, it is important that everyone can apply the best possible techniques in their fields and share our knowledge with other members of our groups.

**Music: Cue in theme music. Keep for 20 seconds and crossfade.**

### ➤ **Scene 3: Evaluation of FFS and sharing results**

*After 14 weeks of trials, the FFS participants from Bokki meet to talk about their experience with other farmers.*

#### **Crowd noise and sound of greetings**

**Djibo (FFS facilitator):** Good day everyone. I am very happy to see you all here today after all the work that has been accomplished by the participants who attended our Farmer Field School. For those of you who are still not familiar with the Farmer Field School, it is a participatory tool for technology transfer which brings together 20 to 25 men and women farmers who are willing and able to learn. They meet once a week throughout an entire crop cycle (of a winter season) to follow training according to the Farmer Field School methodology. The farmers must observe all the interactions around a plant, identify the potential and constraints and test solutions, given production constraints, having first carried out an exploratory survey. At the end of this process, participants are asked to choose the technical approach that is best suited to alleviating these constraints.

There are 6 stages in the implementation of a Farmer Field School. First and foremost is the identification and ranking of challenges facing the village. This is done by organizing exploratory surveys and meetings between villagers. Next, the researchers, extension agents and farmers meet to study the main constraints and identify the causes and some possible solutions through research. Afterwards, the facilitators meet the farmers to develop a programme of trials. And finally, the Farmer Field School is set in place. Today, you are witnessing the final phase, that of sharing the results.

**Idi:** Through the Farmer Field School, I was able to compare different varieties of millet and find out that the new SOSSAT variety, which is recommended by agricultural research institutes, has a much shorter cycle than our traditional varieties. The cycle only lasts four weeks. And as well as that, the yields are higher.

**Koudou:** I must say that I too found the difference astonishing. I think we should get organized so that everyone can have good seeds.

**Idi:** I was also very interested in the microdosing technique. Even for local varieties, using microdosing promotes plant growth and offers much higher yields. Just looking at the field, I was astonished to see the plants looking thicker and taller, and maturing faster than those on the plot where microdosing was not applied. Using about 6 grammes of NPK 15-15-15 fertilizer per seed pocket, the yield of this plot was 550 kg/ha, while that of the control plot, where we didn't use any fertilizer, was only 330 kg/ha.

**Mintou:** So Idi, you've learned a lot over the past few months, haven't you?

**Idi:** Mintou, Mintou. And to think I thought you were making things up. I must thank you for pointing me in the direction of the Bokki union and its input shop and Farmer Field School. I was surprised many times, and I learned so many things, thanks to your advice.

**Mintou:** That makes me very happy Idi. We are here to help each other!

**Idi:** Yes Mintou. I too will be sharing my experience with my friends from the village. There's work to be done.

**Mintou, Idi, Koudou and Djibo laugh and take their leave of each other. Music: Cue in final theme music. Keep for 20 seconds and crossfade.**

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**End of Episode Five**



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