This manual offers guidance to field workers involved in advising and providing training for committee members and staff of primary agricultural co-operatives. The manual gives advice on how to plan and carry out training activities and discusses methods for assessing training needs. Alternative systems for organising training in the field are described, with particular reference to the use of the self-study guides that are now downloadable from the Rural Finance Learning Centre.
1. ASSESSING TRAINING NEEDS

An agricultural co-operative is an association of farmers doing business together - purchasing farm equipment, seed and fertilizer; arranging transportation, collection, storage, and marketing of produce; mobilizing savings and advancing credit; in general, providing whatever is needed to increase the income and improve the condition of the members.

The success of such a co-operative, however, depends to a great extent on the ability of its leaders (the committee members) and staff who look after the day-to-day business. They must be hard-working and seriously committed to the common goals of the co-operative, and must have the special skills and knowledge their work requires.

These pictures illustrate some of the most important tasks that they undertake:

- Preparing plans and budgets and maintaining the books,
- Organising credit and supply services,
- Organising receipt and storage of produce,
- Organising transport,
- ... plus marketing, information, member education and many other things.

If a co-operative is not performing well (e.g. its members are dissatisfied, it is operating at a loss or its business is declining), it is quite likely that it has a weakness somewhere within these key areas.
The co-operative can be helped only if the exact causes of the problem can be identified. The weakness may be due to inadequate knowledge and skills among committee members or staff, lack of interest on their part or outside factors such as changes in government policies. Specific training can correct a lack of knowledge and skills and foster a sense of professionalism. Other causes of cooperative failure may require different remedies.

**Methods of Assessing Training Needs**

There are a number of ways by which the training needs of a co-operative can be determined. Among the most convenient are:

i. personal observation and informal discussion with members, committee members, staff and colleagues;
ii. study of co-operative accounts and reports;
iii. individual interviews with committee members and staff, based on their job specifications.

*Personal observation and informal discussion*

The fact that you are a field worker means that you probably know the co-operatives in your area very well. You are in a position to see for yourself the actual workings of the cooperatives. Furthermore, you know many of their members and most of their leaders and staff. You hear opinions about the various societies from all levels, management and members, insiders and outsiders. This is very informal, useful input; it offers you some idea as to potential training needs in different groups.

What you observe may confirm what you are told. Actual office management, trading procedures, maintenance of books, staff behaviour, care of stock, transport scheduling, and the like may reveal weaknesses in these operations - perhaps due to lack of training. Your personal observations form a necessary basis for your training needs assessment, but you must certainly continue your analysis in a less informal way.

*Study of accounts and reports*

You can analyse the accounts of a society to pinpoint its weaknesses. The accounts may reveal unsuspected problems or confirm something you have suspected for some time (for instance, that transport arrangements are too costly or erratic; or that income has dropped with the quality of produce). The accounts reflect only results; with the co-operative management, you need to determine the causes of a given problems.
For example: Was the transport poorly planned, so that partial loads rather than cost-
efficient full loads were driven? Were pick-up dates for transport adequately publicized?
Did produce lose quality due to improper storage? Through your analysis of the accounts it
is very likely that you will discover such areas of training need.

Other documents can be used to assess weaknesses and training needs as well (for
instance, operating statements and reports prepared regularly for the committee by the
manager, minutes of meetings, and reports of auditors and other inspectors). You should
study all such reports carefully, analyse each difficulty and ask yourself: “would training
solve the problem?”

Individual interviews with committee members and staff

You cannot accurately determine the training needs of co-operative personnel or
committee members unless their job specifications are clear. If they do not know exactly
what their job entails, they cannot know if they have the training to do it or not. Even
then, some of them may simply not know that there are other and better ways of doing
things. In addition, if people are not sure exactly what their jobs are, they often assume
that "someone else" is responsible for certain tasks which they, in fact, should have carried
out themselves.

Before you attempt to assess training needs through interview, therefore, it is advisable to
arrange a joint meeting with the committee and the staff of the society to discuss two
important questions:

- What are the jobs to be done?
- Who is going to do them?

It is important that everybody knows his own tasks and responsibilities and also appreciates
the roles of other people, both management and staff. This fosters collaboration and
avoids unnecessary interference in other people’s work. For you - as adviser and trainer -
it facilitates the planning of a suitable programme of counselling and training for those
who need it.

Ideally, you, together with the committee, the manager and the staff, should work out job
specifications for all people engaged in the management and the day-to-day work of the
society. If everyone is involved in these discussions and decisions from the beginning, it is
likely that motivation, sense of responsibility and job satisfaction will be much higher than
in an autocratic system where everything is decided by one person.
Job specifications:

A list of typical tasks to be carried out in an agricultural cooperative is available separately and can be used to facilitate discussion about job specifications.
When everybody has agreed on the jobs to be done, how and by whom, you can begin the individual interviews. Your aim is to find out exactly what the staff and committee members need to learn and how they can use your assistance. Use the relevant job specifications, which now should be available. Go through all items on the list. Try to establish what your “trainee” thinks about the actual task, how s/he wants to do it, what s/he feels confident or unsure about, and so on. On the basis of this information, you can plan your assistance and training input.

**Specific Training Needs**

You may discover that the training needs of the committee members differ from those of the staff. Every committee member, for example, is not required to keep books, although there must certainly be a person in the co-operative trained to carry out this job. The roles and functions of committee members vary from place to place, but their overall responsibility for the operations of a co-operative remain basically the same everywhere.

In some smaller societies, they may perform all managerial tasks themselves and be involved in the day-to-day work, as well. Other larger co-operatives may have a general manager and several staff specialists employed, leaving committee members to concentrate on policy matters, planning and control. Taking into account the actual situations in your co-operatives, it is your job to assess the training needs for all committee members and staff.

**2. TRAINING SYSTEMS AND ARRANGEMENTS**

Once you have determined the training needs in the co-operatives you are working with, it is time to start thinking about how you can offer training to those who need it. Training can be given in many ways, even by a field trainer with limited resources. The basic approach, the timing and the venue, as well as the methodology can vary. Let us discuss some of the more common possibilities.

**Training approach - individual or group?**

You must first decide whether to work with your trainees individually or in groups. There are advantages to each approach.

*Individual training*

A new staff member is normally taught on the job, “learning by doing” under the supervision of an experienced manager. The method can be very effective if the supervisor is able to give instructions and guidance in a positive way. It also allows the business of the co-operative to continue uninterrupted, whereas a more formal training course takes both trainer and trainee away.

In some co-operatives, especially new ones, there may be no experienced supervisor, so an adviser or field worker may have to provide the individual training, working closely with both committee members and staff. Many important procedures can be taught on the job, for instance, record keeping and cash and stock control. Specific problems can be discussed in detail and the pace of learning can be set to suit the trainee.

The primary disadvantage of individual training is that, by definition, it can only be offered to a limited number of people. Its one-on-one nature is time-consuming for the trainer and more people could be reached with group methods.
Group training

The group approach allows a larger number of people to be trained in a given interval but they may have to meet away from the work place and may possibly inconvenience the co-operative members.

The first task of a group trainer is to work out how to form appropriate groups. If you discovered training needs that were common to both the committee members and the staff in a particular society, you could arrange one programme for all of them. This can save considerable time and it can help to develop a common understanding among committee members and staff.

However, in many cases training needs are different for committee members, managers and staff in terms of content, emphasis or coverage. So you might have two or three different “target groups” for training. Their separation might be essential if the training is to meet the specific needs of each group. Other factors which might favour the separate training of committee and staff are the level of literacy, and social or psychological issues.

There are many group training patterns. You might be able to arrange joint group training for participants from different co-operatives, depending on the situation in your area. You might, for instance, select groups according to specialization and arrange for a group of clerks (or managers or warehouse supervisors) from different co-operatives to meet for a short training course.
Such “specialization” facilitates the training of a large number of people in a relatively short period of time. There is homogeneity among members of the group; they have similar jobs and interests and can learn from each other through personal interaction and exchange of experiences. The knowledge and skills being learned can be put under group scrutiny.

Timing

A training event, organised in the field for a group of people on a specific topic, need not last long - one or two days at most. If the trainees live in the same area, it might also be possible to meet for a few hours daily over one week, or to meet once a week over a period of time.

The next training topic might then be introduced after an interval of some months. This ensures that the trainees are not absent from their work too much. This timing schedule is based on the theory that people will profit more by training “served in small portions” than from longer comprehensive courses.

Venue

Where should training be carried out? Basically you have two alternatives:

- at a specific co-operative (for training its own personnel); or
- at a common facility - a centrally located co-operative, a school, a community centre (for training personnel from several co-operatives).

Training at a specific cooperative

When you organise training of committee members and/or staff in their own co-operative, the training can be focussed to meet their specific needs. You can devote more time to discussing individual problems and the actual work procedures practised in the cooperative, pointing out specific areas where immediate improvements can be made by trainees. Committee members and staff may even attempt to implement any agreed improvement in practices under your guidance.

Training organised in this way becomes informal and can be arranged when it is most convenient to participants. The co-operative may not have to be shut down during training. There is no need to arrange accommodation for trainees or organise food. But “in-house training” does mean that the adviser or trainer will have to spend several days working solely for the benefit of one individual cooperative.
Training at a Common facility

When you arrange for training at a common location - perhaps with participants from a number of co-operatives - you will have to settle a few issues before starting.

While deciding on the venue, you must ensure that it is suitable for training. (Will the trainees be unduly disturbed? Can they easily commute to the location from their work places? If not, what arrangements exist for overnight stay?)

You must be certain that you have the necessary equipment and facilities (chalkboard, a flip chart, perhaps a projector, adequate seating arrangements, etc.) available. It may be necessary to see if adequate lighting arrangements will be available, particularly if training is to be conducted in the evenings.

Finally, there is the question as to who should meet the costs of trainees' travel, boarding and lodging, training material, and so on. If you have a common budget for that purpose, inform the co-operatives accordingly. But if you expect the trainees or their co-operatives to meet these expenses, you must clearly explain this, indicating the amount and method of payment and when it is due.

* WHAT
* EQUIPMENT AND
* FACILITIES
* DO YOU NEED
* FOR TRAINING?

A QUIET PLACE
GOOD LIGHTING

CHALK-BOARD
CHALK

FLIP CHART
FLIP CHART

AND / OR FELT PENS

STATIONERIES

GOOD SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

FORMS and BOOKS
actually used in the co-operatives.

STUDY MATERIAL;
handouts, exercise material, study texts, etc.
3. DESIGNING TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Let us assume that you have made a thorough “training needs assessment” in close collaboration with your trainees. Together you have agreed on a number of topics which you will include in the training programme.

Priorities

Your next step in designing a training programme is to decide on the sequence of topics - what should be taken up first and what later.

As a general rule, you should first take up the topics most likely to help solve immediate problems facing the co-operatives or those expected to help improve performance in current operations. Other less urgent topics may be taken up later.

Since priority varies with the concerns of the co-operatives, topics will vary from one cooperative to another.

Training Material

The self-study booklets (called “Learning Elements”) produced by MATCOM on each of the major areas of concern to committee members and staff of primary agricultural cooperatives in the 1980s have been updated and made available in the Rural Finance Learning Centre as self-study guides. These can be of significant use in the preparation of education and training activities.

You should go through them carefully, familiarize yourself with their contents, and decide how to utilize them best. Remember, each guide covers only a single aspect of the management of an agricultural co-operative. To be able to decide on their suitability for your activities, you must read all of them.

Each MATCOM study guide is produced as a “universal” edition without reference to any particular country or set of circumstances. The material is readily adaptable to local conditions and practices. Many countries have modified the original booklets to increase the effectiveness of training. The adaptation is most conveniently done centrally for an entire country by a special committee or team of specialists. The guides can then be translated as necessary, reproduced and distributed to trainees via the field trainers.

If you yourself participate in adapting MATCOM material, keep in mind the following points:

- Alter all currencies, names, crops, co-operative nomenclature, terminology and physical conditions described in the booklets to suit your specific local conditions.
- Modify the size of co-operative operations discussed in each booklet to bring them in line with those of the average co-operative in your area.
- Make sure that co-operative activities and practices discussed in each booklet meet local requirements; delete or modify whatever is not applicable.
- Be sure that staffing patterns and salaries, rules of depreciation and taxes, costs and prices of articles, rates of interest, etc. are similar to local conditions and practices.
- Translation should be done by professionals thoroughly familiar with both local language and local co-operative practices. The guides need not be literally translated, i.e. word for word. Rather, the emphasis should be on conveying the essence of the contents through local phrases, local situations and local vocabulary. The local reader should find himself completely at home with the contents and language of the translated guides.
Ways of Using MATCOM Self Study Guides

Ideally each trainee should be given a personal copy of every MATCOM study guide for independent study and later reference. This will ensure effective learning and lasting course impact.

There are several ways of using the study guides as part of a field training programme:

i. Self-study
ii. Study circle
iii. Seminar

Self-study

This method is suitable for highly motivated trainees with a strong desire to learn and (usually) previous study experience. It is also recommended as a supplement to on-the-job training organised by an experienced manager.

- On the basis of your training needs assessment, you decide which staff or committee members in your district might benefit from studying relevant MATCOM study guides. Distribute copies of the guides accordingly.

- Establish an individual study plan with each trainee - which guides should be completed within what time frame, etc.

- The trainee then studies the lessons from each guide on his own, according to that plan.

- Contact the trainee regularly to check on his progress, discuss the reading and encourage further study.

Study circle

Here the studies are arranged for several trainees with similar training needs who live in an area where they can conveniently commute to a central location for regular meetings of their "study circle".

- The trainees prepare themselves by studying a guide on a selected topic at home. They prepare answers to all the questions in the booklet and note any difficult parts on which they require further explanation.

- On a fixed day, they meet their fellow trainees for a group session. Under the guidance of a circle leader (you, or some other suitable person), they go through the guide, comparing notes and answers. Any problems are thoroughly discussed. "Group exercises" are arranged to reinforce the learning, as needed. The meeting should take approximately two hours. Before it is over, every member is given a new guide to study for the next meeting.

- The study circle meetings that follow (scheduled one to three weeks apart) are arranged similarly. When the programme is completed after a few months, the trainees will have studied several important topics.

- The facilitator should follow up study results continually, encouraging the trainees to put into application what they have learned.

Seminar

When trainees live far apart and cannot meet regularly, this method is most suitable.

- Selected trainees are given one or more MATCOM guides for home study. They are asked to have this completed by a certain date, when they will attend a short seminar to discuss the material.
The seminar is held over one or more days, depending on the number of topics included. Its programme aims at helping the trainees fully assimilate the content of each guide. To this end, there are discussions, explanations and exercises, as needed.

It is a good idea to conclude the seminar with "action commitments".

As an alternative to the above example, a seminar may be organised without any requirement for prior home study. In this case, of course, more time is needed for the actual seminar.

An example seminar programme:

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>1st Day</th>
<th>2nd Day</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.30 to 12.00</td>
<td>Review of study material.</td>
<td>Preparing the Buying Points:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Last year's experiences</td>
<td>- Equipment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- an analysis</td>
<td>- Staffing</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.30 to 17.00</td>
<td>Reception procedures:</td>
<td>Preparing and presenting plans.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Quality control</td>
<td>- Action commitments.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Payment procedures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- New forms</td>
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**Training Sessions**

When you run a training programme, you meet your students in "training sessions", which may be rather short, informal, local group meetings or more formal seminars with many participants.

If you want your participants to profit from these sessions, remember the following points:

- Plan the whole session very carefully; try to predict approximately how many minutes each section of the session is likely to take.
- Be sure that the session is clearly structured in the trainees' minds. Outline the structure at the beginning, follow it or say that you are diverging from it and summarize what has happened at the end.
- Keep in mind the various learning points. Do not forget the job-oriented objectives of the session. Sum up the main points on the chalkboard, a flipchart or a poster. Encourage the trainees to take notes.
- Avoid, when possible, telling the trainees everything; try to elicit ("draw out") important points from them by skilful questioning.
- Avoid talking too much yourself; trainees' discussion should take up most of the time. Ask, listen and guide rather than talk.
Never ridicule a trainee’s answer or suggestion; it may have some merit and the attempt itself is commendable.

Call on the silent and, if necessary, silence those who talk too much.

Be sure that everybody understands what is going on; do not allow discussion to be taken over by a few who understand.

The role of the trainer

The trainees should regard you, the trainer, as the person whose job it is to organise and facilitate their learning. Your role does involve some supervisory functions, but it is important that you avoid an attitude of superiority, especially in the case of adult learners. Instead, you should try to create an atmosphere of collaboration between yourself and the trainees. Trainer and trainees alike must bear in mind the ultimate purpose of the programme: to help trainees achieve a better job performance.

Review

If the trainees have studied a particular topic in advance, the main purpose of the training session will be to review all of its essential points. The session might take the shape of a lesson-by-lesson discussion of the study guide. Sometimes individual trainees might be asked to provide details of certain special matters or to explain how they apply to a given job. This gives you an opportunity to provide “feedback” to participants on their preparatory studies and to discover what areas in the topic require further elaboration.

It is important that the trainees, not the instructor, be the most active participants in the review session. The role of the instructor here is to plan the session, to elicit the key points from the participants and to lead the discussions; but it is the role of the trainees to give accounts of the subject matter, to ask and answer questions, to share their own experience, and to participate fully in the discussions. The instructor is to function as the coordinator and, when needed, as a resource person.
Feedback

Feedback - the providing of information on their progress to the trainees - is very important in the learning process. Through your comments, whether verbal or written, you should let the trainees know exactly where they stand in their comprehension of the course material. You have various ways of giving feedback.

Where there are small groups of trainees, you will have enough time to closely follow the work of each individual, giving direct personal feedback in the form of comments on answers or discussions. This greatly reinforces learning.

During their preparatory study, the trainees were supposed to write answers to the questions in the guide. These answers must now be checked. Some questions require an exact answer and are simply marked right or wrong accordingly; others require comment or opinion, longer written responses. These can be especially useful as indicators of the full extent of trainee understanding.

You should write comments on the answers or request re-reading as necessary.

Exercises

In addition to the "review" of the contents of a guide, some additional exercises may be needed. These are intended to help trainees see the relevance of the study topic to their own work situations. They allow the trainees to practice certain work procedures described in the guide, forming an essential "bridge" between study and work.

Most guides contain proposals for such "complementary exercises". You should feel free to modify or to add to the exercises to create the most relevant and effective training programme possible. You should consider the suggestions of the trainees in selecting the most relevant exercises.

Upon completion of each group exercise, it is important that the trainees be given adequate time to report their findings to the other groups or to demonstrate the results of a practical assignment.
"Action - programme"

It has been observed on occasion that co-operative personnel spend a long time attending training courses - with no visible change in job performance upon their return to work and no improvement in their co-operatives.

We said earlier that there must be a bridge between training and work. Programme content must be closely related to the actual tasks of the trainees, but this may not be enough. A commitment by each trainee at the end of his course of study to a specific "action programme" can provide that vital bridge.

Individual action programmes are developed in the manner below.

- Notify every trainee as the course begins that s/he will have to decide how to make use of it in his or her actual work. S/He will need to pick a particular problem and solve it, using techniques learned during the training.
- At the end of the course, ask each trainee to write up their action programme - defining the problem, the proposed solution and its time frame.
- Allow adequate time for the trainees to discuss their programmes with each other and with you. This consultation may lead to modification and improvement.
- Ask every trainee to present his or her plan to the full group of fellow trainees. Encourage their comment and advice. It should be evident that the trainee is clear about the steps involved in the effective implementation of his or her plan and that s/he is fully committed to it.
- Obtain from each trainee a written copy of their action programme, including details and timing.

Follow up and evaluation

Keep the copies of your trainees' action plans for your follow-up. This is important, for several reasons.

- Your interest and support will encourage the trainees to carry out their plans effectively.
- They may need your assistance in the implementation of their plans, and they may have other ideas to discuss with you.
- You can evaluate your training courses by studying the progress of your trainees. If they fail, the fault might lie with your programme. You must determine the reasons for failure and take action accordingly.

Regular visits to your trainees are a must. Only by keeping in close contact with the societies and their staff and leaders is it possible for you to design and implement effective training programmes.