



## PERFORMANCE-BASED TRAINING FOR SMALLHOLDER PRODUCERS IN UKRAINE

## GOOD PRACTICE SERIES

### AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

### INTRODUCTION

In an effort to improve the often inadequate standard and impact of training for small-scale agricultural producers, a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Ukraine has developed a two-pronged strategy that involves conducting performance-based training and evaluation to analyse how effective it is.

The Dnipro Agriculture Extension Service provides consulting and information support to small- and medium-scale agricultural producers and agricultural cooperatives in southern Ukraine. More recently, its target audience has expanded to include international donors, technical assistance projects and extension services, interested in assessing the efficiency of training that they supply and ensuring that it is performance-based, focusing on specific outcomes and generating value.

To this end, the NGO conducted training initiatives on cooperative development and economic issues in southeast and southwest Ukraine for dairy, grain, berry, honey and horticulture producers, and developed a system to evaluate its performance.

### METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The NGO provided training and other educational activities to men and women small-scale producers who were aiming to create or develop a cooperative, conducting 77 training initiatives in 2018 and 75 in 2019. Each year, approximately 1 000 participants were trained.

Training was delivered to a total of 17 cooperatives in the dairy, berry, horticulture, honey and grain sectors. Specifically, training was supplied in the areas of organizational development, governance and economics to producers, cooperative presidents, board members, cooperative members, potential members, executive managers and employees.

#### Sustainable Development Goals



#### Objective

*This fact sheet aims to capitalize the experience of initiatives to deliver and evaluate training and support provided for small-scale agricultural producers belonging to cooperatives in southern Ukraine. It analyses the methods developed to deliver effective training for participants who were often reluctant to undertake it, and assesses the degree to which these were successful. The fact sheet also highlights the importance of designing performance-based education that is specifically tailored to generate results and create value.*

#### Stakeholders and partners

- Dnipro Agriculture Extension Service
- International technical assistance projects
- Small-scale producers aiming to create or develop a cooperative
- Extension services

Under the umbrella of various international technical assistance projects, regular training, practical support and inputs were provided to key cooperative board members and employees.

Due to the perceived importance of participants being able to identify clear impact as a result of training and/or to rapidly put new knowledge to use, care was taken to design a practical mix of coaching, regular support and study tours, rather than exclusively theory-based training. This complex approach helped to mitigate resistance.

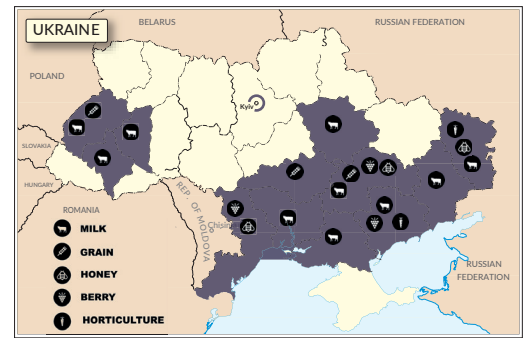
To better analyse the impact of training and other support activities, an evaluation questionnaire was completed before and after each event, aimed at assessing the knowledge and skills acquired, their application and the topicality of the training sessions. Training results were discussed and assessed on a regular basis at meetings of stakeholders.

From the outset, there was a strong gender-sensitization component, to ensure that women were targeted for training in cooperative management and participation.



## Geographical coverage

The area covered included southeast and southwest Ukraine.



Map No. 3773 Rev. 6 UNITED NATIONS Department of Field Support  
March 2014 Cartographic Section

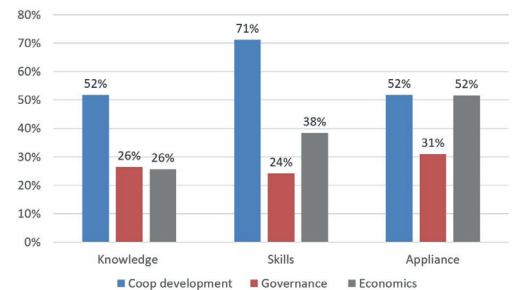
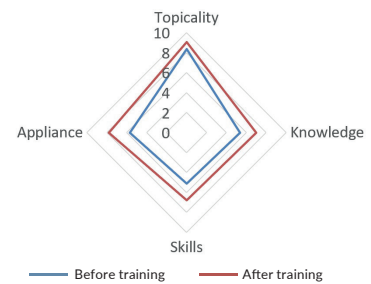
Source: Author's elaboration, conforms to Map No. 3773 Rev. 6 March 2014\*

## IMPACT

Participants who were initially hesitant about attending training sessions became more willing to invest their time in such activities after seeing the concrete and positive changes that these generated. Understanding how the cooperative functions helped them to promote and grow their business.

The economic component of the training showed them how to assess the financial situation, and to compile a monthly scorecard as part of the manager's report; becoming familiar with and practising Board and management duties has helped to avoid conflicts.

The effectiveness of training was shown to have increased. Questionnaires completed by training participants before and after revealed gains for all criteria – topicality, knowledge, skills and appliance. The increases scored for the knowledge and skills component rose by more than 30 percent. But the greatest increase was in the appliance level, at 52 percent, highlighting the fact that the training had a strong practical focus.



## SUCCESS FACTORS

The main success factors behind the increased efficiency of training were:

- Assembling a professional training team – centred around the Cooperative Academy concept – working at different levels (training, coaching, study visits);
- Consideration of resistance to change and its underlying causes;
- Embedding gender-sensitization;
- Offering constant support across a wide range of topics, applying a mix of theory-based and practical tools.

Careful matching of training with target audiences increased impact. For example, governance and economic topics were mostly delivered to board members and employees, who were likely to be involved in making decisions, calculating costs and setting strategic goals.

For producers' cooperatives, it is important that training programmes are adapted to future strategies as well as to current needs.

## CONSTRAINTS

The initiative encountered strong resistance from some smallholder farmers, and analysing this reluctance to participate in training sessions proved a

### Adjusting the gender imbalance

In Ukraine, as in many other contexts, gender bias and discrimination persist in agricultural cooperatives, leading to skewed representation and participation in leadership. Following training, which was gender-sensitized – particularly in the case of the governance module – women producers proved particularly responsive to engaging with the relatively new model of cooperative governance, decision-making and transparency. This was especially marked in the dairy sector, where up to 70 percent of cooperative members are women. Some 95 percent of women members are now actively using the services of cooperative milk marketing. To date, 80 percent of presidents and 46 percent of elected officers in dairy cooperatives have been women.

significant component of the approach to overcome it. The leaders of some cooperatives were particularly reluctant to engage in training because they feared that it would cause them to lose power within the group.

Other constraints included poor levels of financial literacy and lack of experience in the use of management tools. The concept of cooperatives was also tainted by the negative experience of collective farms during the Soviet era. The training highlighted the main differences between the Soviet *kolkhoz* and this type of cooperative, namely private ownership in the case of the cooperative, decision-making by an elected collective body, the adoption of an efficiency approach and transparency with members.

Women farmers require empowerment to stand for and take on leadership positions and more support in soft skills to help them run for elections in cooperative management roles. Board members and management were sensitized to women's roles, encouraging them to promote and engage more women. The Ethic Code was developed as a tool to mitigate sexist or discriminatory behaviour. Where there was low representation of women members (as in the grain sector), the cooperative Assembly adopted a quota system of permanent seats on the Board for women.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Training programmes for smallholder agricultural producers are notoriously problematic, especially when they delve into more abstract topics such as governance issues or economics. Given farmers' natural tendency to prefer practical training, and their reluctance to divert time from on-farm activities, it is critical that new knowledge is applied to relevant tasks soon after its acquisition, if producers are to develop and build on the skills that they need to succeed. Without this conversion from theory to practice, time is lost, resources are wasted, and lessons are not learned.

Four important lessons have been identified:

1. Work constantly with the various actors in the cooperative;
2. Use a mix of different educational tools;
3. Focus in parallel on both the organizational and business aspects;
4. All trainers should:
  - have good knowledge of the cooperative;
  - believe that the cooperative is a valid structure;
  - recognize that the members have an inherent ability to learn.

## SUSTAINABILITY

A key feature of this experience was an understanding that training per se is rarely enough to have a real impact on the success of a cooperative. Participants, especially those from the small-scale agriculture sector, respond much better to a formula that is likely to generate practical results soon after training. For this reason, it is important to integrate theory-based training with other activities where necessary, such as coaching and study tours.

Sustainability of evaluating training efficiency also depends on consistency. In this case, development of the Cooperative Academy model proved critical, comprising a team with a variety of competencies and experience, which followed the training initiatives on a regular basis.

## REPLICABILITY AND/OR UPSCALING

The training evaluation and analysis approach has the potential to be extended to other locations and contexts. The before-and-after questionnaires can be adapted and refined to suit particular circumstances. For example, within the small-scale agriculture sector, it may be desirable to monitor the progress of a specific area of training, such as how farmers are

### Cooperative Academy team helps to overcome resistance

*An innovation that proved pivotal to the success of these training and evaluation initiatives was the creation of a separate department – the Cooperative Academy – which specializes in providing support and training for small-scale agricultural producers on topics generally considered to be too theoretical for farmers. Using a carefully structured approach that included a mix of training, coaching, study tours, networking and practical assistance, this unit succeeded in engaging producers in learning about issues that they would normally have avoided. Examples include cooperative identity, good governance procedures, strategic planning, financial analysis, budgeting and management.*



### Training pays dividends for smallholder producer

*As a busy dairy farmer, Mykola Pelypets was sceptical that training in the use of cooperative secretarial tools would be a good use of his valuable time. He expressed strong doubts as to the relevance of acquiring such knowledge, or of learning how to write up minutes or about the organizational procedures of meetings.*

*Two months later, after attending various training sessions, he had changed his mind.*

*"I am thankful for the skills I gained," he said. "I was recently enrolled as a member of the (cooperative) voting committee. When we started working, it seemed that nobody really knew how to organize the meetings or the vote counting, but I did. So, I was elected as secretary and now I earn a salary. The training paid off."*



using new knowledge on crop rotation. In that case, this section of the questionnaire can be designed to be more detailed.

To implement accurate analysis of training effectiveness, it is essential to define what new knowledge and skills have been acquired and how participants can apply these in their daily life.

It is possible to filter analysis, by, for example, disaggregating training priorities and results by gender.

If this training evaluation approach is replicated, it is important to take into account literacy levels, which will influence the level of the training instruments/approaches to be used, and their relative impact.



## CONCLUSION

Lack of organization among small-scale producers in Ukraine and the advent of increased market competition following independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 led to an urgent need to develop ways in which farmers could work together to increase market access and develop negotiating power. As a potential solution, the Dnipro Agriculture Extension Service designed a strategy to support the creation and development of cooperatives, initially in the dairy sector, and subsequently in several others.

Activities included training groups of farmers in cooperative issues, providing support in the areas of registration and by-law development, and organizing study visits. The mix of theory-based and practical training proved critical to overcoming initial resistance by many smallholder actors, and before-and-after assessments helped to assess the impact of various components and refine them accordingly.



*Experience capitalization is a systematic, iterative and participatory process through which an experience is analysed and documented. This creates knowledge, which can be shared and used to generate change.*

*FAO and the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) organized an online course on experience capitalization in 2020. The hands-on series of mentoring webinars helped learners to work on their case studies.*

*What are you going to capitalize upon? Who for? What for? What happened? How and why? What have you learned?*

*This case was capitalized by Sofia Burtak based on her experience with Dnipro Agriculture Extension Service.*



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**FAO Good practice template**  
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