



**BRIEFING
NOTE ON:**

**Longer Term Sustainability of
Linked Local Learning¹**

Everyone engaged in LLL, from the local learning groups to the organizations providing international support, realized from the outset that linking local learners to improve agricultural services was a long term endeavour. At our user assessment workshop in Kakamega last October we all re-committed ourselves to another year of learning. Our one year of experience served to reinforce our appreciation that we are engaged in a long term venture. We recognized a number of threats to our continuation and some conditions for sustaining our learning.

One threat to our continuation is keeping the benefits flowing to farmers and service providers. If farmers and service providers do not get immediate benefit from LLL they will stop going to the internet cafes to share their ideas and experiences. This is costing them time and money which has to end up paying for itself and more. One threat to the flow of benefits lies with the identification of learning topics. The choice of learning topics must remain in the hands of the learners. Over the year we have seen a drop in interest for renovating T&V styled public extension and a surge of interest in the local organization of advisory and information services as a private business. As farmers and service providers figure out how to articulate demand and negotiate relevant services, the seeds of which we can see today, interest in the topic of demand-driven services will be replaced with new operational challenges to enhance quality, coverage and cost effectiveness of services.

A second threat to continuation is covering more and more farmer groups and service providers who do not have immediate access to the internet. We must find ways for the LLL internet learning support service to reach those who cannot get 'online'. This is not just a matter of bringing cyber cafes closer to rural people. Shortening the distance between those unable to access the internet and the nearest cyber café, the so-called 'first mile' of internet connectivity, requires changes to the LLL service itself. What the LLL service sends out and takes in as emails must become more user friendly in its printed form.

Farmer groups and service providers in remote areas need a paper based way of engaging in learning and sharing their ideas and experiences. In the longer term this is not the only challenge to the designers of the LLL service. Designers are also challenged to develop web hosting shareware that is free and thus cut the subscription costs local people must pay to use the LLL service.

Turning to conditions for sustaining our learning we look briefly at the questions of ownership, replication and resources. In the long term the programme started here must be owned by the users themselves. We must evolve from a programme in which local learners participate and international supporters coordinate to a 'learning network' that is user owned. Various steps towards greater user ownership have already been made. For instance at the outset all the local learners organized on their own when and how they wished to engage. The organization, operation and funding of the field based action learning process is entirely their own. They also identified learning topics of their choice, albeit within the common interest in agricultural services. User ownership of the ideas and experiences shared, the intellectual property, is guaranteed by the automatic tagging system within the LLL service itself. Each input always remains tagged to its original email source. In the longer term users are challenged to pay for the LLL service itself and the mentoring that supports it. Achieving user ownership and self sufficiency requires a level of resources that can only be realistically obtained through engaging very large numbers of users. Replication of users and the benefits that flow to them requires far greater engagement with mass media, radio, TV and newspapers, and development institutions both public like the Ministry of Agriculture and private like NGO's and Producer Cooperatives. With sufficient numbers of users realizing adequate monetary benefits a business case can be made for a non-profit user owned 'network'. One could also imagine a scenario in which many 'Farmer News Services' like 'Habari za Wakulima Kilosa, selling information, advice and training make enough profit to support a user owned learning network.

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