BRIEFING NOTE ON:

The Local Learners [i]

All the local groups involved had been in existence for some five or more years before the learning programme started. Some like the farmer unions were much older. All those groups formed by farmers or with farmers as members included small holders growing staple foods, vegetables and some cash crops like coffee or tea. Most kept a small number of chickens, goats and a few cattle or if more they were pastoralists like the Massai. Most local learning groups had between ten and thirty members with the largest group having forty-five members. The learning groups either comprised of single organizations such as youth clubs, Farmer Field Schools or farmer unions, or multiple organizations including farmers, extension, local government, NGO's and private sector. Few of the groups comprised just farmers and service providers. The large majority of the groups met monthly with few meeting twice a month or weekly and one or two meeting irregularly. All took minutes of their meetings. The local organization of learning groups in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania was as follows:

- In Kenya learners from the Kenyan Federation of Agricultural Producers (KENFAP) and the Farmer Field Schools Networks have organized themselves into learning teams in Lake Region, Mount Kenya Region, Western Region and in the following districts: Bungoma, Busia and Kakamega. Farmers from the Livestock Sector Stakeholder Association (LISSA) and Mugomoni Organinc Farmer Self Help Group have organized themselves into a learning team to cover Mount Kenya Region.

- In Uganda learners from Uganda National Farmers Federation (UNFFE), National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), District Agricultural Technology Information Centres (DATICS) and Farmer Field Schools Networks have organized themselves into learning teams in the following districts: Soroti, Busia, Masaka, Tororo, Iganga, and Mpigi.

- In Tanzania the Tanzania Multi-stakeholder Learning Association (TMLA) supported at the national level the Farmer Field Schools Networks and local beneficiaries of the Danida Agriculture Sector Programme Support (ASPS) in the Ministry of Agriculture organize cross-institutional teams in Morogoro, Iringa and Mbeya regions.

While all learning groups were able to integrate an action learning process on how to improve demand driven services into their on-going field work they did request additional capacity building on how to organize and run local learning exercises for future visioning and partnership building with necessary stakeholders. The concept of future visioning as opposed to problem solving as a driver for development was new to some of the programme participants. Half of the group also requested more skill development in group dynamics and leadership. When it came to documentation most local learners wanted training in how to write up their ideas, good practices, and stories of impact.

When it came to sharing experiences and discussing over the internet those working in district or national capitals found it much easier to do this than those living in rural areas. Everyone, with very few exceptions, visited a cyber café to access the internet. A few used the post office and some their offices. Those with easy access to the internet logged on to the LLL service every other day or twice a week. Most people logged on once a week

with some less frequently at once or twice a month. As Betty Ajambo tells us below for those living in rural areas assess to the internet is not easy:

First of all it is not easy because we have only one internet cafe in Busia and of course many people want to use it. So sometime you can go and there are many people you have to wait. Also, of course, I don't stay in town. I stay in the village so travelling to town after discussing with my group and going to the internet café and then of course travelling back you find that it is not all that easy. If the internet could be nearer the farmers than in town then they only need raise funds for the internet and not transport costs as well. It would even be better if farmers were organised and could own and run internet cafes, of course with start up capital. Maybe if they could get assistance from somewhere to start it up then they can run it by themselves.

Moreover, those in rural areas also paid the highest costs to log on to the service. In Uganda costs ranged from $1 to $5 per week while in Kenya it ranged from $2 to $6 a week. The farmers thought that getting their own computer services; installing internet connections in regional offices or information resource centres; buying village phones would all help. Some went as far as suggesting that farmer groups should establish their own internet cafe and generate income from it. However, setting up an internet café and associated information services is a complex business. Those farmers and extension agents interested call for capacity building in the planning and financing of small rural businesses.