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# *Farmer Empowerment through Farmer Life School, adapted from Farmer Field School Approach*



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Abstract  
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By Mrs. Yim Vuthang, Farmer Network Coordinator, Srek Khmer

Farmer Life School (FLS) is a tool that helps farmers to develop their critical thinking on their livelihood. It is developed from the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Farmer Field School (FFS) approach. In IPM FFS, farmers meet weekly for one morning to discuss and set up the experiment based on their practices experiences and then they continue to observe, analyze and make decisions on what they have found in the field. It dramatically develops farmers' critical thinking on ecological agriculture.

A similar learning process is happening in the FLS. The concept farmers learn from FFS in IPM is developed to focus on the human ecosystem. During the weekly meetings, a set of learning exercises is conducted by different groups of farmers. These exercises include brainstorming to identify and prioritize the problems, visit to selected families, discuss and analyze on special topics, draw conclusion, make presentations and group dynamics. These activities assist farmers in recognizing and analyzing the inter-related elements of their lives in much the same way as they apply their mastery of ecological concepts to their rice fields (Agro-ecosystem Analysis- "AESA"). Issues addressed in FLS range from poverty, lost of land, domestic violence, alcoholism and the attendance of children at school to specific health problems concerned with different diseases such as dengue fever, malaria and HIV/AIDS.

The core process in the Farmer Life School is the linking of ecology, group organization, and student centered learning applied through what is termed "Human Ecosystem Analysis (HESA)". The HESA involves groups of farmers investigating various threats and adverse factors (non-supporting factors) to their lives and at the same time they identify supporting factors that are helpful for their lives in the same way that farmers observe pests and natural enemies in their fields through AESA. In HESA, supporting and non-supporting factors are divided into 6 categories: Economy, Health, Culture, Education, Social Relations and Environment.

These process enables farmers to build their skills in identifying and analyzing problems encountered and take appropriate action to prevent and reduce risks as well as to solve problems in their community. FLS are being organized and run, not by outsiders, but IPM farmer themselves.

This initially, was funded and assisted by UNDP South East Asian HIV Program and executed by the FAO IPM Program. Srer Khmer, a local NGO, which has been to continue to support the development of community IPM the FAO community IPM was ended last Dec, 2001, has taken after this activity as one of its most important project to meet its goal.

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# **Farmer Life School, adapted from Farmer Field School Approach**

Compiled by Mrs. YIM VUTHANG, Farmer Network Coordinator, Srer Khmer

## **1. Introduction**

Cambodia is one of the targets of HIV/AIDS in South East Asia. HIV/AIDS affects human and ecological agricultural. The impact of HIV/AIDS has caused the majority of rural populations living in poor conditions of food security and lack of labor. HIV/AIDS is a threat to sustainable agriculture and rural development through its systemic impact. This situation has created vulnerabilities in which the HIV epidemic can develop rapidly. The border of Thailand and Cambodia opened in 1998, after being closed for 30 years. Since these time traffic and cross border trade has increased along with a corresponding increase in the mobility of people along its route. The highway is currently in poor condition, however it will be repaired in the near future. It is part of Trans-Asia highway linking India and Thailand, through Cambodia to Hochiminh City (UNDP and FAO, 1999).

To address this HIV/AIDS, the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) has been seen as an entry point of a mitigation process against the spread of HIV. The principles of the Integrated Pest Management have been successfully applied for years in Cambodia and are being used as a pilot project to strengthen the resilience of Cambodian farming communities to HIV/AIDS and other vital social issues along the national route 5 in Cambodia. As such, this potentially is a route of transmission HIV/AIDS and it is likely to increase. UNDP-HIV collaborated with FAO Community IPM and tested pilot farming community strategies to combat HIV epidemic along this route (UNDP and FAO, 1999).

The IPM approach had been brought to life through "the Farmer Life School", which is organized through the network of farmers who completed IPM Farmer Field School. These farmers have created a network along route 5 to assist them in running Farmer Life Schools.

## **2. Goal of FLS**

The FLS has been set up with the goal of Mobilization and empowerment of rural Communities along the National Route 5 in Cambodia to Reduce HIV/AIDS vulnerability and other livelihood threats.

## **3. Objective of FLS**

The FLS has been set up with the following objectives:

- To strengthen farmers' understanding of how their socio-economic vulnerabilities relate to risking behavior
- To prevent adverse social and economic effects from HIV/AIDS in farming Communities in the project area.

## 4. Farmer Life School in Cambodia



The FLS established by UNDP/HIV and FAO in year 2000. The program targets remote villages along route 5 within four provinces: Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang and Banteay Meanchey

## 5. From Farmer Field School to Farmer Life School

The FFS is potentially and entry point for a wide range of community development activities. The discovery-learning process of the FFS generates a deep understanding of ecological concepts and their practical application. This ecological approach of identifying problems and finding solutions has been applied to pests but could be translated to HIV/AIDS, other threats and understanding of human behavior and development.

## 6. What is a Farmer Life School?

The Farmer Life School use a non-formal education method, in particular an experiential learning process based on the FFS. The Farmer Life School takes place in the village-a school without walls. There are 18-20 farmers participating in the Farmer Life School (50% are women). The Farmer Life Schools are organized and run by 3 Farmer Trainers.

### 6.1 The curriculum of FLS

The curriculum of the FLS is based on the process in a Farmer Field School, but has different contents from FFS. The duration of the Farmer Life School is 18 weeks and farmers meet for one morning a week. The primary learning material in a FFS is the field, and in FLS, it is livelihood. Each meeting consists of a set of activities: Human Ecosystem Analysis, presentation, a special topic and group dynamics.

### 6.2 Human Ecosystem Analysis (HESA)

In FFS, AESA is the main learning process. Farmers learn based on discovery and analyze the crop ecology in the field and make appropriate decisions to manage their crop. In FLS, the Human Ecosystem Analysis leads farmers to discover and analyze the way of people living and make decisions to eliminate risky behavior, other threats and re-arrange their lives in the rural areas. The HESA process is used as a basis for group discussion and decision-making for individual and in groups. The HESA studies all the supporting and non-supporting factors related to six categories: economy, health, education, social relationship, environment and culture. The topic discussed in the HESA

depend on the farmer's need and problem happened in the community. Firstly, farmers list down problems in their own community, and then select 5 priorities for studies.

## 6.2.1 The HESA process

### Interview

The HESA start with a group of participants and one Farmer Trainer to assist in one group. Three different group conducts interview to get informations from different family, but the same problem at their home and fill in supporting and non-supporting factors. They discuss and annalyze with the farmer (interviewee) to find out the root causes which are influnt to his/her problem, then they use problem tree method to analyze the root caourses which are effected to the



*Interview with the farmer who had problem on chronic disease, Kampong Chhnang Province*

his/her family in the present and the future. After analyze the problem tree, the intevieees realize from their risky behaviors and find out ways to make decisions by his/her selfe to eliminate or reducede their risky behavior and planing to improve their living in the future. Farmer Trainer and participants have some suggestions to the interviewee which are available to improve his/her life situation. No speccialist or experts are involved to offer solution or strategies (Du Guerny 2000:10). **See HESA example in annex 1**

## HESA presentation

The HESA presentation is carry out one week after HESA interview. Each group present their HESA to the big group and discuss together to compare the root causes from different three HESA that had the same problem, but some time have different root causes. They discuss the decision made by the interviewee whether they want to add some idea or suggestions to the interviewee, what else are available to improve or help his/her living situation .

living better in the rural area.



*Farmer Life School in Battambang Province*

Through the HESA presentation, participants learn by critical thinking and analyze the real life situation in their own rural area. They learn from different experiences of lives in the livelihood. By understanding of life situation, they are willing to eliminate their risky behavior and make a plan to improve their

## 6.3. Special topic

The FLS curriculum includes issues such as Problem Identification, Problem Analysis Problem Web, Age Stages and Human Need, Daily Behavior of farmers, Existing Resources in Community, Life Skills, Communication related to farmers' living in the community, Using Local Recourses. These topics are important to contribute and increase the farmers' knowledge to be aware and realize what they need to do to improve their livelihood. Group dynamics is also included in the curriculum, participants and trainers hold group dynamics or icebreaker activities in order to relax and develop a closer friendship and trust.

## 7. Follow-up activities after FLS

The FLS is not end of leaning process, farmers need to increase their knowledge and capacity gained from FLS. After the FLS, the graduated farmers and Farmer Trainers come to meet each other every two months to discuss and review the activities, what did they do to solve their problems based on their decisions. They discuss what they want to learn or do more to improve their life's skills related to health, agriculture training, study tours to improve their capacities and knowledge or farmer association group to eliminate their poverty in the rural area.

## **8. Farmer to Farmer Training**

After graduating from the Farmer Trainer Orientation Course, IPM farmers play a crucial role in preparing Farmer Life Schools in their respective villages. Farmers who have completed the FFS and FLS are involved in educating other farmers about the benefits of FLS. Prior to starting an FLS in any village, Farmer Trainers and local authorities conduct a selection session to identify farmers who are interested in attending Farmer Life Schools. After the selection process, the farmer trainers and volunteers make a detailed plan for the one-day-a-week course including the location and timing of training activities.

In addition, Farmer Trainers play an important role as organizers of farmer meetings, writing report/case studies, preparing budget proposals for FLS activities, keeping financial records transparent and maintaining all reusable facilities or materials for follow-up use in the next FLS. The Farmer Trainers establish a good network in each province to organize, facilitate and operate Farmer Life Schools. A group composed of three farmer trainers who live in the same area facilitate each farmer life school. New and experienced farmer trainers are mixed to facilitate each Farmer Life School the locations. Budgets are sent out before starting new FLS to buy materials. Although new, farmer to farmer training is now accepted as a crucial component for disseminating knowledge throughout the rural population.

## **9. Impact**

**(See case study in Annex 2, Kevin Kamp (RAP), 2002)**

- Farmers were able to identify and analyze issues facing their communities, including the threat of HIV/AIDS.
- Farmers showed a decrease in risk-taking-behavior related to HIV/AIDS infection and other public health threats.
- Farmer Trainers developed leadership, networking, training, planning and organizational skills in their communities.
- Farmers initiated activities to help their communities after the FLS, such as the establishment of a self-help group or farmer association (eg: saving account, research group on rice or vegetable, animal raising).

## **10. Lessons learned**

The project has accessed the farmers to learn in a way that relates to their livelihood. The process helped the farmers become more positive and expressed their feelings to share experience with each other (for example, related to the culture, they always feel shy and keep the problems for themselves and never discuss with other, even though among their families members.). The farmers have formed a network with its own identity. This corresponds to the development with in poor farming communities, one that they have created themselves. These activities will become increasingly important in the future fight against poverty, HIV/AIDS and other social issues in their communities.

This project provides the chance for farmers to take charge of their futures, rather than waiting passively for help from outsiders once a threat has arrived. Farmer Life Schools are making a valuable contribution to the sustainable livelihoods of farmers in rural farming community (Srer Khmer, Farmer Life Scholl in Cambodia).

## Annex 1

# HUMAN ECOSYSTEM ANALYSIS (HESA) on Landlessness

## I. Background Information

- Location: Aren village, Snam Preah Commune, Bakan district, Pursat province
- Name of interviewee: Keo Kang, male, 39
- Date of HESA: 23 August 2001
- Problem happened: 1999 (Pawn rice land 1ha to neighbor)

## II. Supporting Factors

### 1. Economy

- Laborer (in farming and business)
- Income: 200,000 Riels per year
- Raising 20 chickens
- Raising 2 cows
  
- Growing vegetables around house

### 2. Health

- Wife is healthy
- House is good hygiene
- Drink boiling water

### 3. Education

- Wife got primary school level (grade 2), then drop out.
- The First child, 20, is in primary school
- The second child 18, is in primary school
- The fourth child, 14, is in primary school



## 1. Non-Supporting Factors

### 1. Economy

- More expenses
- No land for cultivation
- No other occupation
- In dept: 400,000 riels

### 2. Health

- Husband smokes cigarette
- Husband gets cough with blood and spent 700,000 Riel for treatment at private Clinic
- One child got Malaria and spent 400,000 Riels on Treatment
- No toilet
- Insufficient food/nutrition
- Health center is far away

### 3. Education

- Husband is illiterate
- No skill/vocational skill
- Children get low education
- The third child does not attend school

- The fifth gets, 10, is in primary school

#### **4. Social relation**

- There are 8 members in family
- 3 children are living with parent
- Good harmony in family
- Good communication with neighbors

#### **5. Environment**

- Convenient habitation for living
- Good road to village

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#### **6. Culture**

- Buddhism
- Khmer tradition

#### **4. Social relation**

- Most children live apart
- Have no role/status in Community
- Husband plays ambling

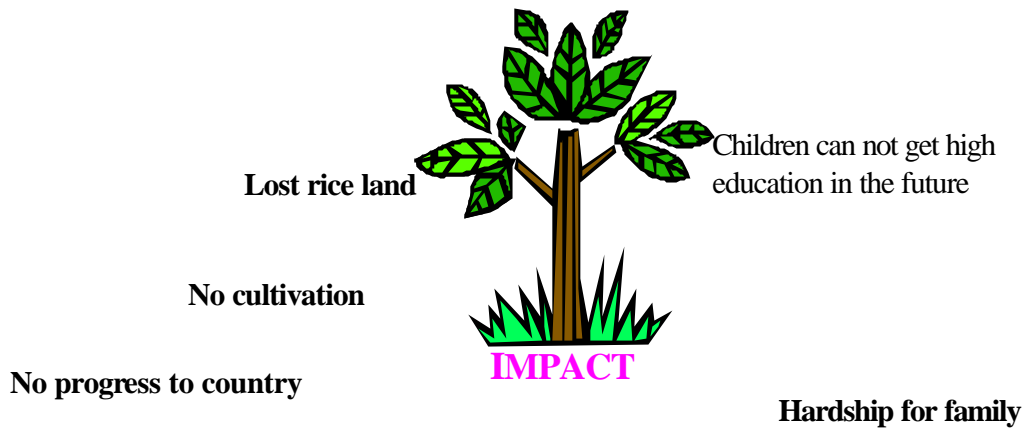
#### **5. Environment**

- Spray pesticide on vegetable
- Having mosquito shelter around house

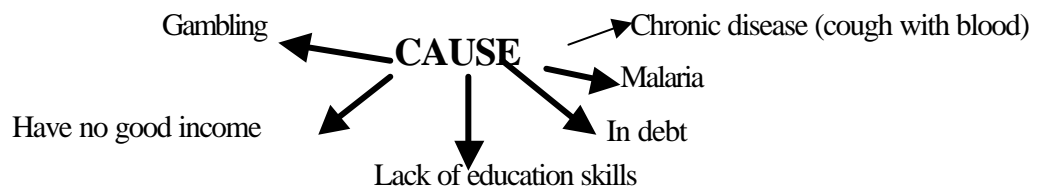
#### **6. Culture**

- Believe on superstition

## PROBLEMS TREE



**PROBLEM:** Landlessness



## DECISIONS MAKING

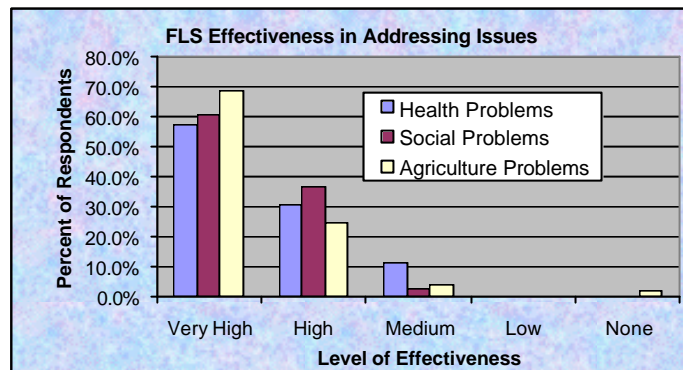
- Look for additional job/skill to release debt and try to save money to buy her land back
- Increase raising chickens and growing vegetables
- Take care of health
- Decrease smoking cigarette
- Stop gambling
- Sanitary around the house

## Annex 2

### Case study: Farmer perception from Farmer Life School

This is the case study of FLS, with 62 farmers in four communes from four Farmer Life Schools in Kompong Chhnang province, in Cambodia participated in a data analysis exercise. The purpose of the exercise was mainly extractive: Srer Khmer wanted to know *the impact of the Farmer Life School*. However, the methodology was simply used based on participatory principles in which farmers provided quantitative answers to questions regarding the appropriateness and effectiveness of Farmers Life Schools and was, therefore, a useful exercise for farmers as well. After quantifying their answers, they were involved in a process on analyzing its meaning. The facilitators recorded both the data and their analysis (See graph 1 and 2).

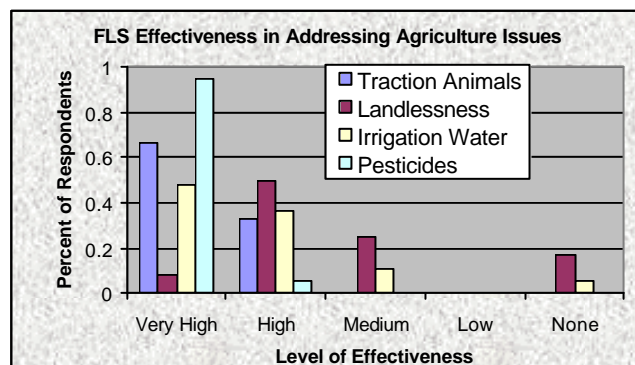
This graphic #1 provides insights in to how well social problems, agriculture problems and health problems are addressed through the FLS. Generally, the data indicates that there is a general perception that the FLS is effective in addressing all three of these farm livelihood problem categories.



There does seem to be some indications, however, that farmers perception are that the FLS may be more effective in addressing agricultural issues than social or health issues. This may be influenced by the history of the FLS being from a Integrated Pest Management program, as well as the FLS being facilitated by IPM farmer trainers. One might be able to make the water

conclusion, however, that the FLS is probably an effective mechanism for all three of these problem categories.

Graph #2 illustrates the perceptions of participants in the FLS effectiveness in addressing agricultural issues. Four issues were suggested by the participants, to include shortage of traction animals for farming, landlessness, irrigation water



irrigation and pesticides. Of particular interest is the perceptions of participants in the FLS effectiveness in addressing pesticides, as this relates very much to the background of the farmer trainer facilitating the training, who were initially involved in IPM program activities. Also of particular note is the significantly reduced effectiveness of the FLS in addressing landlessness issues, but the effectiveness in addressing the problem with a shortage of draft animals. Additional documentation is needed to find the reasons behind these perceptions. Farmers noted that:

- Before I just did things without thinking about it. Now I relate it to other things in my life. I make plans and can now cultivate more crops than I did before, like vegetables, to make more money.

Such a statement lends some credence to the assumptions that FLS increases planning skills, resulting in a number of potential, positive impacts. Indeed, even issues of landlessness and traction animals could be approached through better strategic planning by individuals as well as communities.

The data presented in Graphs 1-2 provide some important insights into perceptions of FLS participants in terms of the impacts resulting from their participation the FLS in their own communities. While the data suggests that there is an overwhelmingly positive impact of the FLS for agriculture, social and health issues, the disaggregated data for each. The FLS of Srer Khmer has not worked with children.

## **Reference**

- Project Document: UNDP-FAO Mobilization and Empowerment of Rural communities along the Asian Highway (Rout 5) in Cambodia to reduce HIV vulnerability
- Sara Nam, APO UNAIDS in collaboration with Robert Nugent, IPM Country Officer, FAO, Cambodia, 2001
- Report Project UNDP-FAO/RAS/97/202 Mobilization and Empowerment of Rural Communities Along the Asian Highway (Route 5) in Cambodia to Reduce HIV Vulnerability (by Ms. Ngoun Sokunthea, Project coordinator of farmer Life School, Srer Khmer)
- Case Study by Dr. Keven Kamp, FAO-RAP, Thailand