

Note: DRAFT VERSION, NOT FOR QUOTATION
Paper for International FFS Workshop,
21-25 October 2002, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

APPLYING THE FARMER FIELD SCHOOL APPROACH TO FARMER-BASED ADVOCACY IN INDONESIA¹

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This report summarizes World Education Indonesia's experience to date on the facilitation of farmer-based advocacy in the context of the Farmer Field School (FFS) model. The paper attempts to explain how the FFS approach has been used to involve farmers in organizing, research and analysis activities in an effective way that ultimately influences rural policy.

Farmers have had success addressing technical constraints on their farms through the FFSs. With this success come increased levels of confidence and increased interest to address off-farm issues/challenges. Organizing farmers around policy level issues – known within our network as farmer-based advocacy – is now an important component of our program. Issues are identified by farmers who have already participated in the technical (IPM) farmer field school. Based on their experiences using the FFS approach, farmers apply a similar process on advocacy efforts. Through participatory research and analysis they identify what policy issue(s) should be addressed and devise a strategy for addressing those issues. Group observation, research and analysis, and planning are all applied to develop an appropriate and effective advocacy strategy complete with specific and complementary activities. Building and strengthening of farmers' organizations and popular education are additional strategies and results of this program.

¹ The paper "Applying the farmer field school approach to farmer-based advocacy in Indonesia" will be presented at International FFS Workshop in Yogyakarta, 21 -25 October 2002.

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Through the FFS experience on technical and policy issues farmers have greatly enhanced capacity to explain their ideas and to discuss and negotiate with policy-makers. These increased capacities combined with the support they get from being a part of an active network have greatly helped farmers to address and even change policies that impact upon their lives. Some examples – which will be elaborated upon - are increasing farmer involvement in local representative bodies; chemical fertilizer quality control; agriculture credit reform (KUT); and on issues related to irrigation.

Indonesian Green Revolution Policy

Since 1968, Indonesia has been introducing Green Revolution³ technologies in agriculture. The mass guidance (BIMAS) scheme was designed to develop conditions where a large number of farmers (masses) adopt the new technology to increase their productivity and income. Basically, the system is focused on motivating the farm community to participate actively in the program for increasing production, which is supported by an integrated program and services from various institutions in a coordinated structure (UNDP, 2002). BIMAS is a nation-wide program and implementation has been totally controlled by the government. It treats farmers as passive recipients of agriculture packages (Kingsley, 1999).

Farmer Field School (FFS)

The Farmer Field School approach for Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an innovative training model developed primarily by FAO in which farmers gain the

³ The term "Green Revolution" was used first by USAID in 1968. The term was used to express the success of wheat and rice high yielding varieties. The impact of this research was projected to confront the "Red Revolution" by the International Communist movement. (Wahono, 1994 in Prisma No 3 Maret 1994)

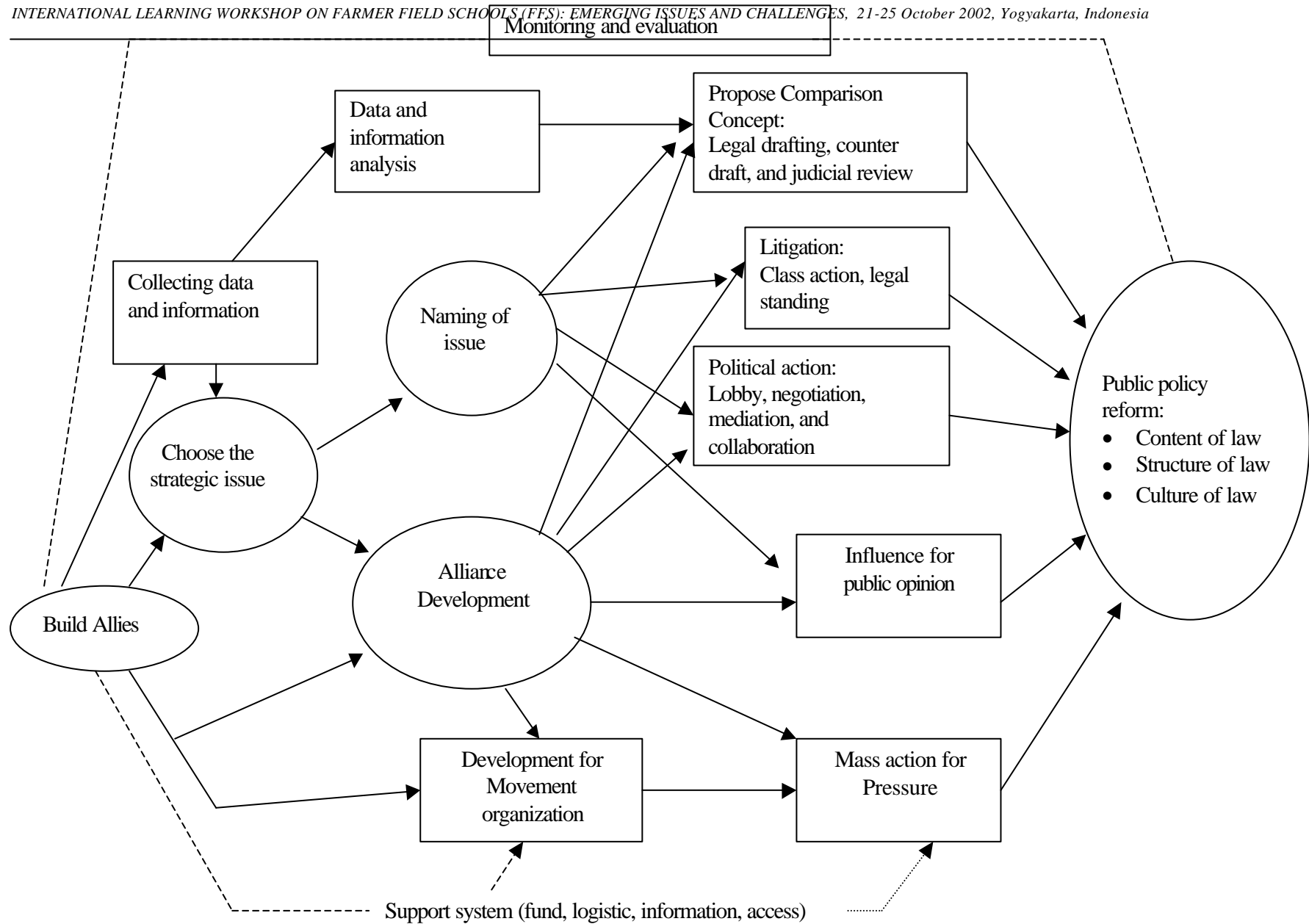
capacity to make their own decisions regarding pest and disease control. The Farmer Field School stands apart from standard extension approaches in that training takes place over the course of an entire growing season; occurs in farmers fields; and depends on an action-learning approach where farmers work together to observe, analyze, and make decisions about the status of field plots (Kingsley, 1999). Since 1989, The FFS has been used by FAO in the National IPM Program in Indonesia and several other countries. Focussing on paddy rice in the early days, the FFS approach has since been applied to many other crops as well as for training on post harvest management, general farm management, and more.

The FFS model has become known as a flexible, effective and appropriate approach to empower farmers - first on technical issues, and now on political issues. The model can be effectively applied to facilitate a process whereby farmers identify needs/issues/challenges; collect and analyze data related to those needs/issues; discover solutions; and then to communicate their findings to appropriate stakeholders. In this way farmer and NGO networks in Indonesia are beginning to influence rural policy.

Advocacy

Advocacy is about politics and change, values and beliefs, and consciousness and knowledge. It is about influencing the powerful on problems that concern people, especially those who have been marginalized and excluded from the political process (Institute for Development Research - IDR, 2001). The IDR, 2001 report goes on to explain other reasons for the advocacy process: (1) create opportunities for participation and decision-making in civil society, (2) improve policy development and make it more

democratic, and (3) ensure a role for grassroots groups/organizations in policy development.



World Education Indonesia

World Education is an American non-profit and non-government organization based in Boston, Massachusetts. In Indonesia, World Education has been working with seven Indonesian NGOs, who together have a long-standing Sustainable Agriculture Program applying the Farmer Field School/Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach. Beginning in 1989, this network has improved livelihoods of 5-6,000 farmers per year through field-based training and research on sustainable agricultural practices for lowland rice, secondary crops (palawija), and highland vegetable production.

Originally World Education Indonesia program had focussed on technical issues in agriculture, especially pest management; however, it later evolved to include other aspects of farmers' problems, such as agriculture-related policies. Several internal and external factors may have contributed to farmers' increased interest in organizing local advocacy campaigns to address policy issues (Kingsley 1999,13). Their experiences in organizing themselves and managing economic and political crises and the implementation of decentralization, helped farmers to face up to the powerful local institutions that have wielded tight control over their livelihoods.

World Education is now working to build on these incipient advocacy efforts by improving NGO and farmers groups' capacity to conduct systematic advocacy work on rural livelihood issues. Part of this program is to strengthen not only NGOs and farmers groups but also introduce participatory planning and management methodologies to civil servants at the district and province levels. Our strategy for advocacy is building GO/NGO/farmer partnerships to address livelihood issues.

These local advocacy efforts have reached wide audiences and attracted attention of local and regional policy makers. At the same time, they are grounded in the farm-level learning process that is the hallmark of World Education's farmer field school approach. Through this program, farmers have gained a voice in shaping local policy. Partner NGOs have also developed their role as intermediaries in bringing local issues to the policy table (World Education, 2001).

From Technical to Policy Advocacy

The IPM program, which uses the FFS approach, has improved farmer knowledge on pest management, especially on the decision-making process. The main activities of the IPM/FFS program are weekly meetings in the field, farmer experimentation and farmer fora. In the weekly meeting farmers learn how to observe, analyze data and making decisions based on the data from their observations. With field-level experimentation farmers learn how to solve problems systematically. Through various farmer fora, farmers enhance their organization and communication skills.

Farmers learn that they cannot solve the pest and disease problems individually, but must work together to find solutions. Communal action skills and strategies help farmers to cope with off farm problems as well, such as credit, irrigation, and agriculture-related policies. Farmer fora also help to drive program direction. Within the context of the farmer forum farmers discuss their existing problems, share their experiences, and co-develop plans for the future. In this way the program has evolved to address both on-farm and production issues as well as off-farm and policy level issues.

Weekly Meeting Create Farmers Skills on Advocacy

The weekly meeting is a core component of the FFS approach. The process begins with the facilitator explaining the session objectives. Farmer participants are then divided into two or more sub-groups and each group is responsible to conduct observation in the learning field. Based on their observation finding, they do field analysis and formulate crop management decisions together. One FFS consists of 13-16 weekly meetings. By participating in this same process every week farmers gain skills on the use of data for agricultural decision-making and over time their mindset becomes more critical, systematic and rational. The change of mindset ultimately changes farmers' behavior - making them more active, informed ecological decision-makers. They use their new-found analytical skills to solve technical problems, but now increasingly for off-farm challenges.

The implementation of the weekly meeting is adjusted to make it more relevant to address policy issues. Within IPM, farmers observe the dynamics of crops and field to make a decision while for advocacy they observe the socio-economic-political situation to divine the cause of problems. Jaringan Tani Tanah Karo (JTTK-Tanah Karo Farmers' Network; a local NGO in North Sumatra and partner of World Education) has applied this strategy to help farmers solve the problem of bogus fertilizers. Farmers and JTTK's staff collected fertilizer samples from the village kiosk. The samples were then sent to the research station, which has the capacity to examine the fertilizer quality. Farmers and the NGO analyzed the results from the research center and compared the research finding with the statements on the fertilizer bag labels. They then put the research finding and

the statements from the labels in a matrix so that the data could be easily compared. They informed the result of the comparison to other farmers and the appropriate government officials. They used many methods to inform the research finding, like posters, talk show in the radio, public hearing with the parliament and government officials. The Jaringan Wakak Jukuk Lampung (JWJL-a local NGO in Lampung and partner of World Education) has been helping farmers within the Way Seputih Irrigation area to find a solution to their irrigation woes. The NGO and farmers with assistance from World Education have since conducted research to divine the exact source of these problems. They explored together the existing canal; the P3A⁴ institutions and its problems; the policies related to water management; and the role of government officials who are responsible for water management. Because of lack of research capacity, the NGO and farmers collaborated with the research organization - AKATIGA (an informal partner of World Education) - to help them on research design and implementation. The findings have been used to educate the other farmers on water problems and also for influencing the necessary policy changes. The research demonstrated that the water from the dam is not enough to cover local farmers' rice fields. One recommended solution was to advise farmers to plant secondary crops (rather than paddy rice) during the second planting season, which reduces water needs. For the decision maker, they proposed to improve P3A management to become more democratic. They also proposed to develop district-level rules on irrigation, which would involve farmers on every decision.

⁴ P3A (Perkumpulan Petani Pemakai Air) is a water user organization and exists at the village level. The P3A has networks in both the sub-district and district levels.

The processes of policy advocacy within the Lampung case are similar to that within the FFS/IPM. That is, farmers observe and analyze the data; make a decision based on the analyses; and then take action (often collective) to solve the problem.

Farmer Forum as a Model of Policy Decision-making Process

The Farmer Forum is particularly for FFS alumni and exists in the group, village and sub-district level. In the group or village level, the forum is primarily held monthly while in the sub-district level it is after harvest time (seasonal). In the sub-district forum, farmers share their experiences, such as the dynamics of pest and disease problems, a new technology or farmer innovation; present their individual preliminary group plans; and discuss an existing problem faced by them. In this forum farmers can further develop their plans to solve their common problems.

Farmer fora are used in policy advocacy too. After data is gathered farmers meet together to analyze the data and make a decision. The forum is also used to develop advocacy strategy and action plan. In the case of water problems in Lampung, they used two steps for the forum. First, they conducted farmer fora in three different areas: at the top of the irrigation scheme, at the middle of irrigation scheme and at the lower part of the irrigation scheme. In each forum they invited farmers, P3A management and also the government officials. In this forum, farmer analyzed the research findings and developed the strategies and the action plan. They discussed the various aspects of the issue, including potential technical solutions. Secondly, they conducted forum for all of stakeholders of the irrigation system. This forum was held at the district level. The participants of the farmer forum were representatives of farmers from each village which

receive an allotment of water from the irrigation canal, the P3A management, the government officials, and the NGO staff. This forum was used to find a broad solution to the water problem. It includes the development of policies which ensure equality for all of the farmers in each part of the irrigation area and ensures farmers' participation on future irrigation policy decision-making.

In case of bogus fertilizer in North Sumatra, farmers conducted fora to inform the research finding to other farmers. They developed an action plan to address the bogus fertilizer problem. The action plans were: (1) how to educate farmers in Tanah Karo district on bogus fertilizer issues, (2) what action should be taken if farmers find a bogus fertilizer in their village, (3) what action should be done to influence the decision maker to stop the distribution of bogus fertilizer.

Based on the fora, farmers took several actions, including the generation and distribution of appropriate media for each village in Tanah Karo District, discuss the problem with parliament members, and proposed the government stop the distribution of bogus fertilizer.

Lesson Learned

1. Farmers who received FFS training have been able to develop their analytical skills, which can used to solve non-technical or off-farm problems.
2. Processes developed within the FFS approach can be an appropriate for policy advocacy work.
3. The farmers' forum is an effective tool that farmers' can use to solve both technical and policy issues.

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