



Regional Learning & Advocacy Programme for Vulnerable Dryland Communities

## GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLES PASTORALIST FIELD SCHOOLS (PFS) IN THE DRYLANDS OF THE HORN OF AFRICA DCM partners, November 2011<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

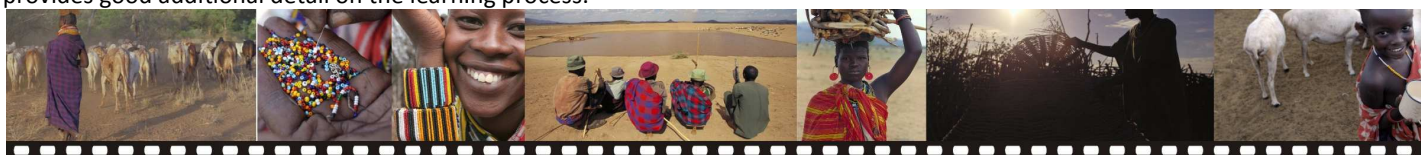
A Pastoralist Field School (PFS) is essentially a 'school without walls', where groups of pastoralists learn through observation and experimentation within their own context. Using experiential and participatory learning techniques participants are empowered, rather than advised, what to do. The objective of a PFS is to improve the decision-making capacity of its participants and their wider communities, and to stimulate local innovation. It allows pastoralists to improve their management skills and to become knowledge experts on their own resource use practices. A PFS will usually comprise a group of about 30 pastoralists (including elders, men, women and youths) who will meet regularly over a defined period of time (often between 1 and 2 years) and who make observations and experiments with their own livestock on the rangeland ecosystem. A trained PFS facilitator, usually from or living in the community, will guide the learning process.<sup>2</sup>

The PFS approach is an adaptation of the Farmer Field Schools (FFS) approach that was developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in South East Asia in 1989. The FFS were a means of empowering farmers to develop their own solutions to problems that research and extension could not provide answers for. In 1995 the approach was applied in Eastern Africa, originally in agricultural areas. In 2006 ILRI, together with VSF-Belgium, embarked on a process of adapting the FFS approach to the pastoralist situation in Northern Kenya. Since then numerous NGOs and actors in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia have taken up the PFS concept. PFS are of particular value in helping pastoralists supplement their existing knowledge in facing challenges such as climate change and emerging diseases. A PFS will build upon the existing traditional systems of knowledge transfers among pastoralist communities.

As the PFS approach has been expanded in recent years it has become evident that a harmonization of PFS procedures and coordination among actors is necessary to ensure widespread quality in interventions.

<sup>1</sup> These good practice principles were drawn up/reviewed during an ECHO DCM partners meeting in ILRI, Addis Ababa in May 2011, and later edited by Helen de Jode, Consultant REGLAP.

<sup>2</sup> The REGLAP newsletter 'DRR in the drylands of the Horn of Africa' (June 2011) includes an article on Pastoralist Field Schools, which provides good additional detail on the learning process.



### 1. PFS Facilitators

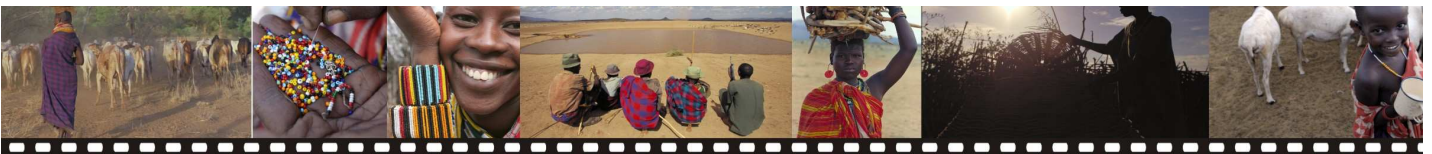
- Facilitators ideally need to be a locally selected resource person. In groups that are started up with external facilitators, a community facilitator should be identified soon after the initiation of the field school to allow them to gradually take over the facilitation role. Where appropriate Community Animal Health Workers can make ideal facilitators.
- Field level PFS facilitators who lead the regular PFS learning sessions should be trained by a master trainer (i.e. specialist in the FFS/PFS approach) in order to ensure universal quality of the approach.
- Training of PFS facilitators' courses should be of a minimum duration of 3 weeks.
- Facilitators can handle a maximum of 1 - 3 schools concurrently depending on their workload.
- All PFS learning cycles should include frequent monitoring / mentoring visits by PFS expertise.
- If possible it is useful to establish sufficient capacity for PFS within the local government structures.

### 2. PFS implementation

- PFS should be implemented as part of a wider community engagement approach, i.e. in close synergy with CMDRR, rangeland management, ABCD approaches etc.
- Encouraging networking among PFS groups is an effective way of ensuring sustainability.
- PFS should apply all the key principles and core activities of the approach. In particular, comparative experimentation and a comprehensive Pastoral Ecosystem Analysis are essential components of a successful PFS.
- Local knowledge and resources should form key entry points for study topic identification.

### 3. PFS membership

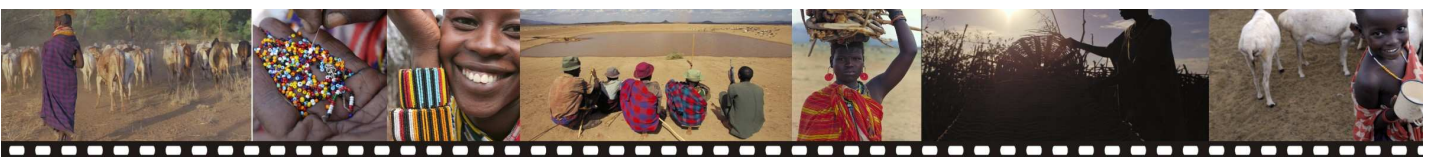
- PFS group members should live within easy access of the learning site.
- Timing of sessions needs to be established based on the availability of both men and women.



- The participation of women, youth, poor and social minorities should be encouraged where possible according to socially acceptable norms – but not dictated by them.
- It is useful to encourage the participation in the groups of innovators and individuals who have positive influence in the community.

#### 4. Project Management

- PFS should not be applied as a generic approach to deal with all the needs among pastoral communities, but rather it should go hand in hand with other forms of assistance.
- PFS facilitators should receive some kind of motivation allowance, whether in-kind or cash, agreed by the group and if possible tied to the local casual labour rate.
- The rate and mode of facilitators' allowances should be harmonised among the NGOs and other implementing institutions in the area (and if possible nationally/regionally).
- Direct funding to groups for learning activities is preferable, as opposed to in-kind support, in order to enhance ownership and develop financial management skills in the group. Any form of group funding should include an element of cost sharing by the group.
- The PFS learning grant should be standardized and harmonized across development actors.
- The group should be encouraged to register officially with local authorities, and have a bank account if possible.
- The duration of PFS should be scheduled at roughly 40 sessions, spread out over around 1.5 years, although this is dependent upon the selected learning topics and the prevailing climatic conditions.
- PFS projects should have inbuilt monitoring and evaluation systems, including participatory M&E tools.
- It is essential to gain the buy-in and support of PFS activities by the local authorities and the wider community.

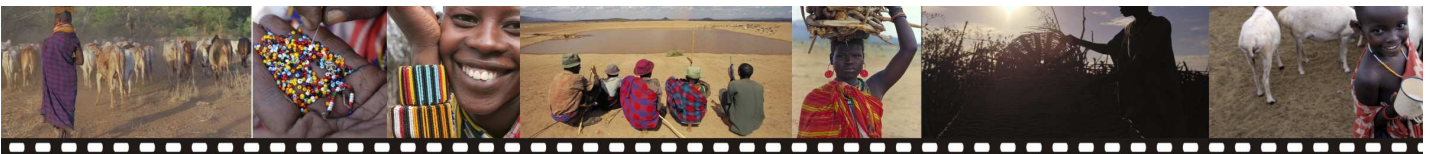


## Recommendations for the further development of the principles

- There is a need to further define this list of principles with more details (i.e. with indicators for each principle). A consultative meeting among practitioners is proposed, which FAO REOA will take the lead in organising.
- These principles of good practice should be further developed in close collaboration with the government and NGOs / implementing institutions, who should also sign off against these.
- The principles should be updated periodically, possibly annually, following a wider stocktaking of lessons learned. Regular updating could also be done through a wiki system.
- There is a need to develop an annual ‘facilitators forum’ to enable field level practitioners to feed into the good practice principles.
- There is a need to advocate for donors to insist that any implementers who receive funding for PFS should also comply with the principles of good practice (Donors should also sign up to the principles).

## Recommendations for developing the PFS approach in future

- Case studies of PFS should be used as a tool to promote a positive image of pastoralism.
- It is necessary to define how the PFS approach can be used to support the implementation of CAADP and how it can be applied in county-specific contexts depending on their individual CAADP/Agricultural strategies.
- Developing a substantive body of evidence through independent impact assessments and peer review will support arguments for the wide-scale adoption of PFS through collaborative research with governments.
- A harmonised M&E system should be built across PFS actors (with standardisation of indicators) coordinated by a defined focal point (e.g. FAO feeding into national agricultural coordination mechanisms).
- The links between PFS and other approaches (CMDRR, VICOBA, PNRM, HNRM etc) needs to be further researched and materials developed for dissemination.
- An anthropological study is needed to examine the socio cultural impact and appropriateness of PFS.



## Additional policy recommendations

- PFS needs to be recognized by Governments and other stakeholders as an appropriate extension approach to empower pastoralists / agro pastoralists.
- PFS activities should if possible be aligned to feed into National Extension Programs, and in the long term be recognized, integrated and budgeted within national extension programs.
- Community facilitators should be recognized, and used in extension (through both private and national extension systems), to facilitate pastoralists to adapt in a sustainable way to the changing context of their livelihoods.
- PFS actors need to establish links to universities and formal / adult learning institutions.

## References

FAO and VSF Belgium (2009) Pastoralist Field Schools – Guidelines for Facilitation. ECHO funded Regional Drought Preparedness Project, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy and Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium, Nairobi, Kenya.

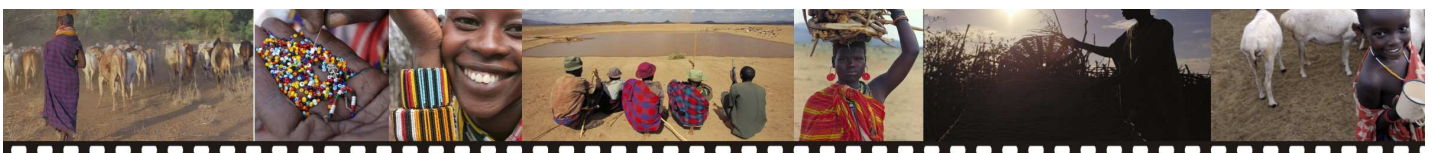
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Please send comments/suggestions on this document and relevant good practice experiences/studies to:

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*Copies of these principles and related technical briefs and articles can be accessed at:*

<http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/east-central-africa/reglap>

