



inter
cooperation



The notion of accompaniment



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What is this document?

This document presents the notion of "Accompaniment" - a form of coaching. It presents several stories - all fictive - and some ideas developed on the basis of our field experience. The document describes the approaches we have been introducing with our Partner NGOs in the Village and Farm Forestry Project.

More than a training manual, which could be too "rigid", this document should be taken as a companion by those who support and coach either field staff or farmers' organizations. We hope it might help them, and that it can be enriched by their experience in a further edition.

Here, we would like to acknowledge the numerous colleagues and clients who have contributed - often without knowing it - to this brochure.

The authors.

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1. Four examples to introduce the subject.

1.1. The story of Asma arriving in Geneva.

This is the story of Asma, a Bangladeshi, travelling to Geneva, Switzerland, for the first time. After arriving at Geneva airport early in the morning she took a train to the city. She had no problems at the airport and got through smoothly. However getting out of the railway station, she was apprehensive. She needed to change dollars into Swiss francs and also had to look for a hotel. She was a little afraid on her first visit to Switzerland, as she did not understand the language and the people. She stood for a while at the gate of the railway station, wondering how she was going to find her way to a bank and a hotel. She knows English, but was hesitant about asking the people in the street for information. Her hesitation is because she is not sure whether they will understand her.

Shamima is also a Bangladeshi citizen who has been living in Geneva for 5 years and speaks French fluently. She went downtown in the morning to shop, but found that the shops were still closed. She was wandering in the street, waiting for opening hours, when she happened to pass Asma. Asma at that time was still desperately trying to find a solution to her problem.

When Asma saw somebody looking a bit like her, she seized the opportunity and shyly asked Shamima: "Excuse me, are you Bangladeshi?"

Shamima was surprised and happy to meet a fellow countryman, and started talking with her. Asma explained that she needed to change money and find a hotel. Shamima had some free time, and so she decided to help Asma. Shamima accompanied Asma to a bank and on the way,



she explained to her how to find the way to the bank another time. At the bank, Shamima translated in French to the clerk the amount of dollars Asma wanted to change. After that, the two new friends went to a hotel. The receptionist spoke English but, to make sure he understood correctly the kind of room Asma wanted, Shamima again played the role of translator.



After ensuring the hotel arrangements Shamima left Asma who wanted to take rest after her long journey, and promised to come back the day after to show Asma the best shops in town.

The following day, before Shamima came to pick her up, Asma went to the bank again to change money. After the introduction to the bank the day before she felt assured about conducting her own money needs. The clerk recognised her and she was able to make him understand the amount of dollars she wanted to change.

She was ready to go shopping with her new friend Shamima.

What does this story show us?

Asma is confronted with an unknown situation, and hesitates a lot before entering into this "new adventure". When Shamima aids her by walking with her to the bank and the hotel, she is encouraged and gains confidence. For instance, on the day after her arrival, she was able to go on her own and change money at the bank. The role Shamima played was one of an accompanier, a temporary support until Asma felt confident enough to go on her own.

1.2. Guess what happens.

Take a look at the pictures. There are 3 types of characters in each. Try to guess what the pictures represent before reading the explanation.

Case A

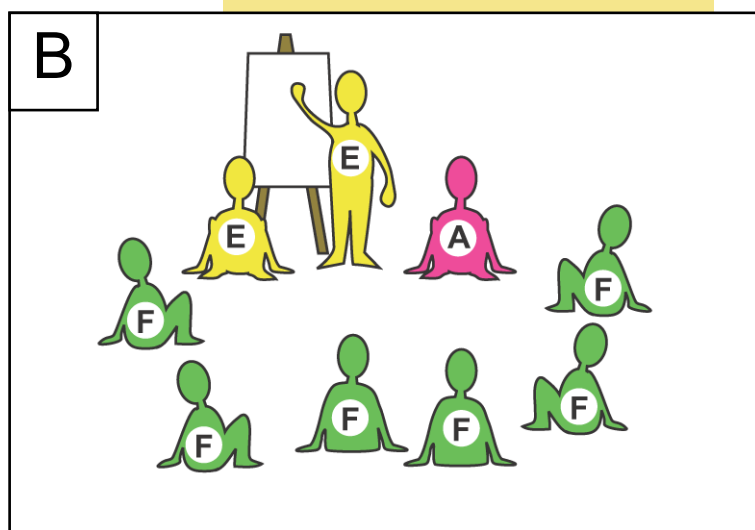
The “F” characters are the members of a village community or a farmers’ organisation attending a meeting. The “E” characters are the members of the executive committee of the community / organisation. “A” character is a field supervisor of a support organisation (GO, NGO or project...).

In this picture, “A” facilitates and clearly takes the lead



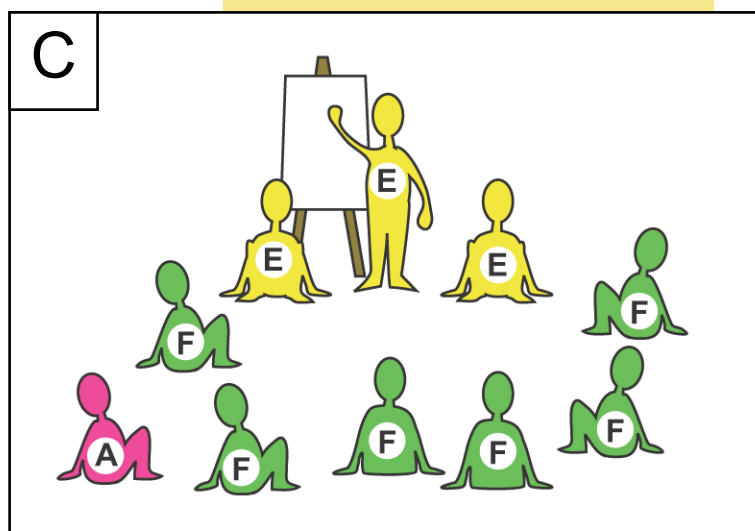
Case B

Here, “A” is seated among the group, beside the President of the executive committee. He does not take the lead of the meeting, since the President has taken this role. He probably advises the President from time to time, sometimes intervening as a facilitator.



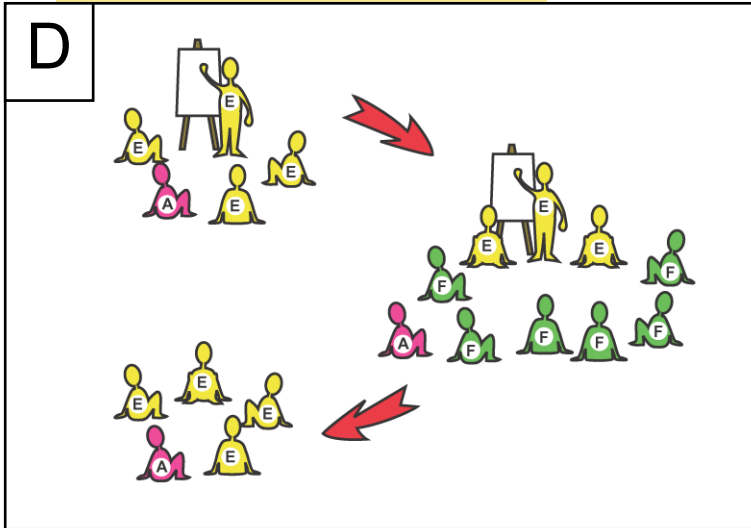
Case C

In this situation, “A” takes a markedly separate physical position from the group. He sits in the background. He intervenes when the group requests help from him, e.g. when they face difficulty in their discussion. He may also take the initiative to intervene, in case the executive committees members cannot overcome a problem of facilitation, or if the discussions drift the wrong way.



Case D

This situation is a bit more complex and actually represents 3 stages. The first stage shows the preparation of an event by the executive committee of the organisation. "A" attends this meeting, and plays the role of an adviser of the executive committee. The next stage represents a general assembly of the community or organisation, led and facilitated by the executive committee. "A" sits again in the background, but does not intervene, except in case of major problems. Instead, he observes actively what happens. Stage 3 is organised just after the general assembly, "A reviews " with the executive committee the positive and negative points of the meetings in order to improve the effectiveness of the next meeting.



What does this succession of pictures show us?

From the picture A to D, we can observe a change in the role played by the field supervisor. In the beginning, he directly handles the farmers' organisation or community in order to gradually give more and more of the responsibility of facilitating and leading the meeting to the executive committee. At the last stage, he mainly advises and helps the executive committee members in enhancing their performance.

1.3. A day of two project staff.

Case A

Anil coordinates and coaches several field supervisors. Their task is to facilitate the strengthening of farmers' capacities so that the latter will be able to function as self-help groups and also improve their practices in the field of agro-forestry.

One day, in the morning, after preliminary office work, he went to the field to attend a farmers' organisation meeting. When he arrived at the village, all the members of the association were already seated on mats. Anil took a seat just beside the field supervisor, who presided over the meeting sitting on a chair in front of the group. When Anil is invited to take the floor, he used the opportunity to emphasise the importance of planting trees, and invited the farmers to make efforts in this regard. He then gave the floor back to the field supervisor. The latter then asked the association members to prepare their savings cards, and proceeded with the collection of the savings. After the collection procedure, he presented a lecture of one hour on how to improve the yield of mango trees. At the end of this training session, he asked the group for other agenda items, facilitated the discussions and eventually asked Anil to officially close the meeting.

After the meeting, Mister Anil enquired from the field staff about the number of farmers attending the meeting, and meticulously notes this information in his field book.

Back at his office, Mister Anil spent the afternoon writing the report of his field trip that he needs in order to get his travel allowance.

Case B

Onamika like Anil is a coacher of field staff. Last week, she arranged with a field supervisor that she would attend a farmers' meeting with him.

On the day of the meeting, she directly went to the office of the field supervisor, an hour before the morning meeting. She discussed with him the objectives of the meeting, the expected results, and possible problems that could emerge. She also discussed with him what the role of the field staff would be during the meeting, and special points he should take care of. Then they went together to the meeting and spent half-an-hour with the executive com-

What do these two stories show us?

In case *A*, Anil attends the farmers' meeting, entirely facilitated by the field supervisor. He does not provide any support to the field supervisor, only "monitors" the event and intervenes when needed if at all. No interactions take place before and after the meeting, neither between Anil and the field supervisor, nor between the field supervisor and the executive committee.

The next case is different. Here there are two levels of accompaniment: the accompaniment of the field supervisor by Onamika, and the accompaniment of the executive committee by the field supervisor (with the additional support of Onamika). Both of them play an active role before and after the meeting, mainly to strengthen the executive committee capacities. During the meeting, the field supervisor gives the responsibility to the President to lead the meeting, even if he has to support him from time to time, while Onamika notes the behaviours and other aspects to improve.

mittee to finalise the agenda and clarify the different objectives and interventions. During the meeting, they sat with the group, next to the President of the farmers' association.

The field supervisor left the responsibility to the President to lead and facilitate the meeting, but had to intervene often since the President was confused in his presentation. When intervening he gave room for the participation of the assembly. Onamika observed both the behaviour of the field supervisor and the members of the executive committee, and made notes in her notebook.

At the end of the meeting, both Onamika and the field supervisor took some time with the executive committee to comment on the meeting, and identify the aspects needing improvement for the next time. Then, before leaving the village, Onamika discussed with the field supervisor, and recommended him not to take the floor too much in the next meeting, but instead take more time with the President to prepare the meeting. She expressed also her personal comments on specific aspects to take care of in the next meeting.

Onamika then left the village and go to another meeting she had to attend in the afternoon.

1.4. Two types of training styles.

Case A

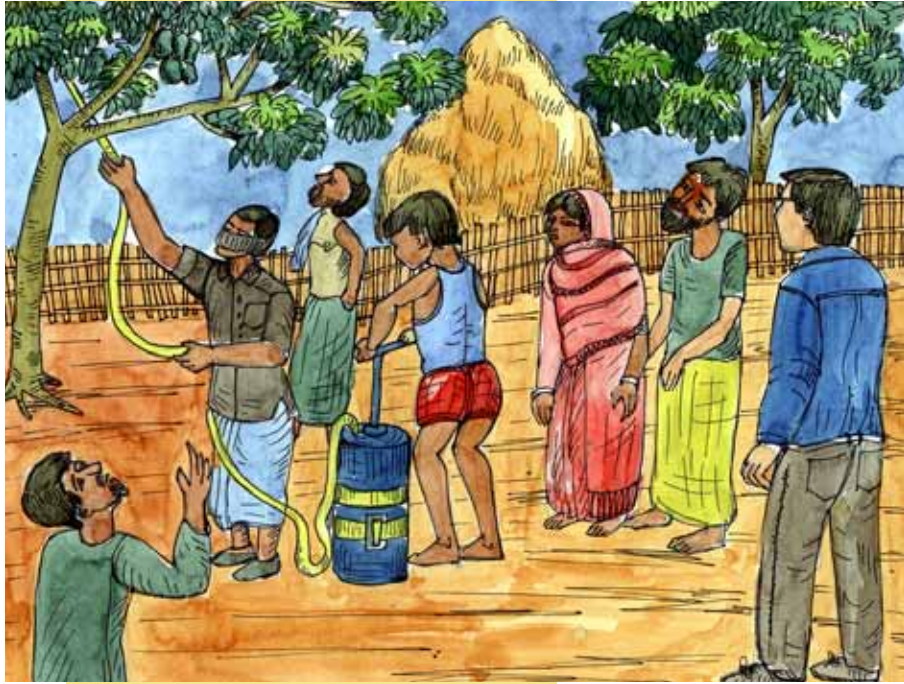
Rokeya is a trainer in the field of agro-forestry. She arranged with a farmers' group to train them on the fruit tree management, as requested by the farmers. The farmers planned 3 consecutive days for the training session. During the training, Rokeya mainly referred to the notes and the books she kept from the university she went to. Since most of the farmers were illiterate, she used pictures to illustrate her course. This was also a means of showing fruit diseases that they could not observe directly on the trees because the season was not appropriate for these observations. After the training session, the farmers were very happy because they learnt a lot of new things. Rokeya was also very happy: the training session ran very well and she went on to other sessions with other farmers' groups. She was sure her supervisor would also compliment her, since she would be organising many other similar sessions.



One year later, she came back to the group to follow up on the training. The enthusiasm and confidence about the impacts of the training dies very quickly. When she asks what the farmers did during all that time, the answer is "nothing!" The reason is that they did not dare to do something because they were afraid of doing it wrong, as they had no practice during Rokeya's training.

Case B

Karim is also a trainer in the field of agro-forestry, and supports several farmers' organisations. After an analysis of the problems they had with their fruit trees -a process was facilitated with the collaboration of Bashar, whose organisation has planned a yearly training programme. This plan was based on their priorities regarding fruit trees, as well



What do these two stories show us?

In the case of Rokeya, the training session encompasses, in a single event, all the subjects related to fruit trees. A lot of information comes at the same time, but after the training session, the farmers are left on their own to apply what they have learnt.

Karim adopts another approach and style. The diagnosis process selects and considers the more crucial problems the farmers face. The priorities are given to these problems and automatically discards useless subjects. The training programme is planned in the season in which the diseases can be really observed. It constitutes numerous but small interventions planned over twelve months. The training process reflects the problems encountered by the farmers round the year. Karim not only ensures a role of training, but also accompanies the farmers while they apply the training received. Because of his presence and availability, the farmers feel confident about implementing the training they receive.

as the most important disease and pests problems they faced - and therefore included a limited number of training sessions and actions.

Karim planned a day to present the way to control the mango hopper. On that day he invited the farmers to sit under a infected mango tree. For about an hour they discussed the knowledge they had on the problem, on the ways to solve it, and the supplementary information brought by Mister Karim. After the discussion, the group watched and learnt from a treatment demonstration.

Subsequently the farmers fixed

a date to apply the treatment demonstrated by Karim, which was a method of spraying the fruit tree. Karim went to another training after this. The next week, he came back to attend the "operation day" decided by the farmers' group. While the farmers spray the mango trees, he advised the group, noted the mistakes, and gave necessary recommendations. The group felt confident about what they had learnt because in the presence of the trainer, they applied what they had learnt. The following week Karim went back to help them to solve the problem of the jackfruit drop, and checked the results of the treatment of the mango trees.

2. Trying to understand the “accompaniment”.

Accompaniment is best understood through a description of its component dimensions.

2.1. General thrusts.

A temporary function

Accompaniment is like “walking together for a while”, and must be understood as a transition period in which the accompanier will provide his or her support until the “accompanied” are able enough to go on their own.

Developing the self-confidence

What must be sought during this transition period is the development of the self-confidence of the accompanied. They have to gradually acquire capacities that allow them to act more and more without the support of the accompanier, and take more and more the responsibility of their action, project, group, organisation, fate, future etc.

Availability and continuous presence

The development of self-confidence depends mainly on the availability and the presence of the accompanier. To be effective, accompaniment needs to be made available as and when required. It helps to progressively strengthen a group or an individual.

A friend who understands a situation

This “comforting presence” implies that the relation between the accompanier and the “accompanied” is somewhat like friendship, and that the accompanier has opened his mind to the individuals or groups he accompanies. It implies also that he understands the context, the environment and the realities to which the accompanied is customarily used to.

A fading facilitation and moderation role

In most cases, the accompanier of groups will have to ensure a lead role in the facilitation and moderation of the group at the beginning of the process. But gradually, he will have to transfer this responsibility to the appropriate members of the group. The speed of the process will vary from case to case, according to the level of the capacities existing in the group. The most important is that the

accompanied should understand that the group's dynamism must depend on its own strengths, and not only on the capacities of the accompanier.

The acceptance of failure

In order to promote the transition of responsibility from the accompanier to the accompanied, the accompanier should never substitute himself for the leaders of the group. This is a mistake usually committed by accompaniers who artificially maintain the dynamism of a group through their personal efforts because they refuse to accept failure. Failure has to be accepted at times, and withdrawal is necessary when the "accompanied" does not show the proof of personal initiative and rely only on the work of the accompanier.

Valuing and developing capabilities

In case of groups, an important function of the accompanier will mainly be to identify, value and develop the group's existing capabilities rather than impose his knowledge and skills. The challenge for him is avoid showing his own competences and to develop those of the group.

A training process

The accompanier plays more of a formative and training role for the development of individuals (particularly the identified capacities) and collective capacities. Through continuous support and advice, he informally trains the accompanied. Sometimes he will have to organise more formal instances of training (e.g. a workshop on facilitation methods).

An advisory service

While the accompanier will gradually reduce his direct intervention in the group, his role will evolve towards a service provision, delivered in accordance to the demand. These advisory services will probably start at the initiative of the accompanier, but with time should change to a service supplied on request.

An active role behind the scene

The accompanier passes through 3 distinct phases. At the beginning of the accompaniment, he will often intervene or even play a lead role. During the second phase, he will gradually give up this part of responsibility and play a more active role behind the scene. Specifically, he will prepare the events (meetings for instance) with the accompanied persons, and then observe the events and the accompanied during the events. After each event, he will review the proceedings with the accompanied and share his com-

ments. The role of monitoring during the events must be very "active". It requires good capacities of observation and listening in order to identify the mistakes and problems, and then coaching the accompanied accordingly. If need be, the accompanier may have to intervene during this second phase. The last phase of transition is the moment the accompanier leaves the accompanied. The accompanied persons should understand it is the time to say good bye, and go ahead on their own.

A way of participative monitoring

Accompaniment can be a way of monitoring a programme, since the accompaniers will have the opportunity to observe the activities going on in the field. But more than an evaluation tool, accompaniment should be understood as a means to compare the planned activities with the realities of the field. On one hand, it will constitute a tool in order to keep the people implementing a programme in line with the objectives, strategies and approaches that were defined. Especially for the accompanied, it will be also an opportunity to realize the changes operated, both positive and negative. On the other hand, for all parties involved in the programme, it could be a means to adjust these objectives, strategies and approaches if it is noticed that they are not feasible or not appropriate to the field reality.

2.2. The accompaniment of farmers' organisations.

A contribution to the empowerment

To summarise accompaniment should contribute to the empowerment of farmers' organisations and communities. The accompanier should have "empowerment" written in bold capitals in front of his eyes, and follow this objective single-mindedly. His role is thus to develop the groups capacities accordingly, both internally and in relation with local institutions.

Help to analyse problems in the rural context

The first capacity that should be developed at the farmers' level is the ability to identify and analyse problems in their own context. This is an essential step, which will enable them to fix their objectives, and then negotiate with external institutions by asserting their point of view.



The field supervisor (middle) helps executive committee members prepare a meeting.

Help to make decisions in a democratic way

Farmers' groups are seldom very homogeneous, and the influence of some leaders often tips the balance in making decisions. The role of the accompanier will thus be to help the groups adopt a democratic decision-making process. This is a necessary condition of real empowerment.

Help to be organised

Although community-based organisations and farmers' associations usually have internal structures to lead them, the members of these executive committees often do not understand what their role is and the way they should be effectively organised. An important function of the accompanier is to help the groups, particularly the executive committees, to organise themselves both internally and in relation to their different partners.

Help to develop negotiation capacities

The development of capacities should normally help the farmers' organisation to be more confident, and capable of negotiating with both the support institutions and service providers. This is a part of the empowerment process. However, the accompanier will have to help the group maintain the manner of negotiation, and avoid passing from a situation in which the farmers are subjected to the power of other institutions to a situation in which they behave like dictators.

Developing a "service searching" mentality

The objective of the accompaniment is the development of the autonomy of the farmers' groups. The relationship between the between accompanier and accompanied could rather facilitate or jeopardise this objective. Because farmers tend to trust the accompanier, they usually depend too much on his advice and recommendations. So, as the accompanier organises a "phasing-out process" for himself, he should also develop the understanding at the farmers' level to look for other service providers and search the most appropriate individual or institutions according to their needs.

The danger of manipulation and substitution

The influence that the accompanier can have over the farmers poses two dangers. Firstly, the former could manipulate the farmers, even unconsciously, so that they decide what he thinks they should be deciding - the case of a false participatory approach. The second danger is the accompanier starting to substitute for the leaders of the group - often as a result of his over-enthusiasm. For these reasons, an accompaniment of the accompaniers will often be needed.

2.3. The accompaniment of accompaniers.

Since accompaniment is a concept taking into account various dimensions mainly related to behaviour issues, it requires a lot of capabilities that an individual seldom masters at the same time. Consequentially in most cases, the accompaniers themselves need accompaniment. This implies several levels of accompaniment from the field staff who are directly in contact with the farmers' organisations up to the conceptual level. It is, however the role of the conceptual level to play the role of the accompanier at all levels of the chain and organisation. On one hand, they have to make sure the concepts and strategies are internalised and applied, and on the other hand, they have to check if the different levels of accompaniers performed their work in the right way.

Accompany the accompaniers, not the boss!

A common fault observed, when several levels of accompaniers operate at the same time, is that "lower" accompaniers accompany more their "boss" than their "clients" in the sense that, they tend to play the role of field guide. It is thus difficult for the "upper" accompanier to check the way his colleague really accompanies the field staff of farmers. Accompaniment is not a field visit or a simple follow-up of activities, but an active method of coaching. The "upper" accompanier should thus specify that he is not a guest, but a silent observer.

Discussions between field staff and their accompaniers after a training course organized for a farmers' association.



Help to understand their role and to internalise concepts and strategies

The concept of accompaniment is not easy to “catch”. It is actually a type of behaviour and sometimes companions who are not clear about its working tend to turn to the conventional methods. It is especially the companions who are close to the farmers’ level that do not understand clearly what is exactly their role. Thus they too need training support that will help them not only to better understand the approaches they have to follow, but also to internalise them in the right way. The companion of the companions should be critical enough to identify and correct the mistakes made.

Help to be more at ease with the rural world

For the fresh graduates from high school or university, the accompaniment will aid them to gain confidence in their communication and relation with the rural world. Often, because of lack of confidence in the new environment, the graduates are awkward with farmers, at times adopting a directive attitude to hide their weaknesses. In parallel with accompaniment, the system of “pairing” -forming a team of two persons developing together new experiences- is also advantageous.



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