

## **Self-Assessing Good Practices and Scaling-up Strategies in Sustainable Agriculture - Guidelines for Facilitators**

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### **Summary**

#### **The context**

An estimated 700 million people worldwide – and approximately 300 million in India alone – suffer from food insecurity and malnourishment. The German Government adopted the International Action Programme 2015 and is committed to contributing to the planned 50% reduction of this number. 75% of the hungry poor live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their main source of livelihood.

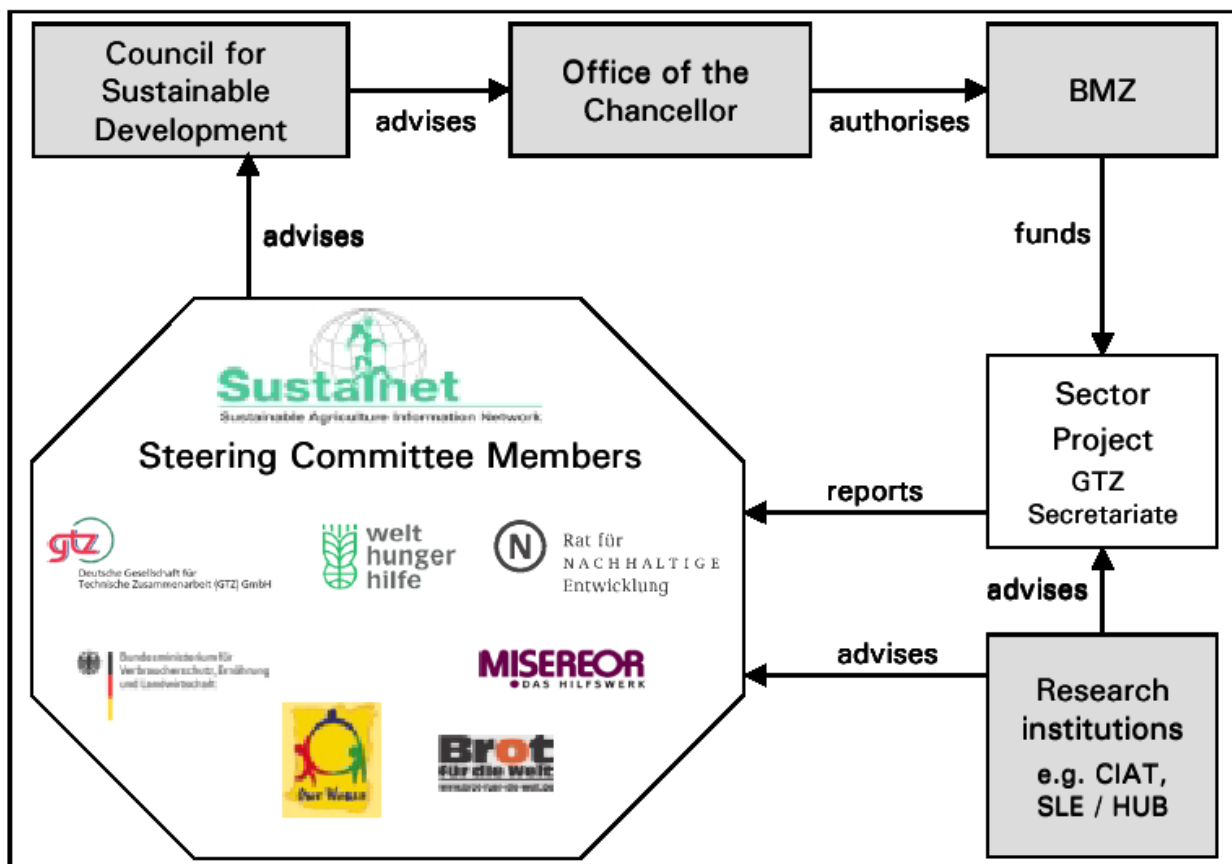
In India, for instance, many small and marginal farmers practice non-sustainable agriculture that has not been locally adapted (e.g., monocultures, cultivation of high-yielding varieties), which frequently leads to the depletion of natural resources (soil fertility, water, biodiversity, etc.) and a growing dependence of producers on external inputs.

Worldwide poverty and food insecurity accompanied by increasing population figures requires a shift towards more sustainable forms of agriculture that are more adapted to local social, economic and environmental conditions. Experience gained in various parts of the world shows that sustainable agriculture makes a key contribution to the alleviation of poverty and food insecurity. Many good examples (so-called ‘best practices’) of sustainable agriculture were developed with the assistance of German development agencies and their partner organisations. Although they have had a manifold positive impact on the reduction of poverty and food insecurity, many lack wider dissemination. The need to scale up this impact is the driving force behind the Sustainet project.

#### **The Sustainet project**

Initiated by the German Government’s Council for Sustainable Development, Sustainet was launched under the project title “Combating world hunger with sustainable, adapted agriculture” in December 2003. Funded by the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Sustainet is a joint project of three major German non-governmental development organisations – Misereor, the German Agro Action (DWHH) – and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ). For organisational and fi-

financial purposes, the project is to be implemented as a Sector Project (SP) with its secretariat located in GTZ. The project will cooperate closely with various research institutions, such as the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), the FAO (in particular the Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Initiative – SARD, the Conservation Agriculture Project –CA), and the African Conservation Tillage (ACT) Network (see chart below).



### What does Sustainet want to achieve?

The overall objective of the project is for selected partners in pilot areas along with the German partners cooperating in Sustainet to systematically evaluate, communicate, and disseminate successful approaches and concepts for scaling up sustainable agriculture.

With this overall objective in mind, Sustainet wants to:

- establish networks between local and international partners, hence promoting the dissemination of successful concepts,
- understand the factors relevant to successful scaling up,
- highlight the significance of sustainable agriculture for global food security to political institutions in the partner countries and in Germany,

- identify promising key promotion priorities in rural areas and
- specify fields of action for agricultural policy.

Although Sustainet started in Germany, its aim is to become a worldwide network for the spread of good practices in sustainable agriculture. Sustainet plans to begin in the following pilot areas: Asia - India, Africa - Kenya / Tanzania, and Latin America - Peru / Bolivia and Northeast Brazil. Sustainet India was initiated in September 2004, and Sustainet Africa and Sustainet Latin America will start working in spring 2005.

### **Objectives of the self-assessment**

Many development organisations and farmers around the world have had positive experiences with sustainable agricultural practices. By documenting their lessons learnt, assessing the preconditions and impact of good practices, and communicating them to others, these one-time, all-too-often 'island' solutions have the potential to be developed into strategies that are transferable to other places and other contexts. This is the core idea behind the Sustainable Agriculture Information Network (Sustainet) and the self-assessment guidelines.

Contrary to approaches that focus on the potential of agriculture in terms of increased productivity (e.g., high-input agriculture, including cultivation of genetically modified varieties), Sustainet wants to concentrate on reaching the poorest population groups by promoting agricultural practices that fulfil environmental, economical, institutional and socio-cultural sustainability criteria.

The members of Sustainet believe that sustainable agriculture not only improves food quality and quantity, but also counters some of the root causes of food insecurity: degrading natural resources, inequitable access to livelihood resources, dependence of small and marginal farmers on external inputs, which results in increased indebtedness and unfavourable market conditions.

### **The structure of the guidelines**

These guidelines are envisaged as a tool, which organisations can use to take stock of their successful approaches to sustainable agriculture and scaling-up strategies to increase their impact. Because these guidelines have been developed for different organisations, they are not a conventional manual or "cookery book" containing advice one only has to follow to achieve the desired results. Recommendations must be adapted to suit the organisations' needs and the conditions under which the organisa-

tion or project works. The guidelines should be considered as a document in progress, which can be improved on and developed even further by Sustainet and its partner organisations in the pilot areas.

**Chapter A** introduces Sustainet and describes its objectives, activities and intended impacts. It further explains how Sustainet was initiated and its plans for worldwide coverage. Part 2 of this chapter gives a picture of how the self-assessment framework was developed in cooperation with Indian Sustainet partner organisations and a consultancy team from the Centre for Advanced Training in Rural Development (SLE), Humboldt University Berlin, Germany. We have outlined the objectives, time frame and working steps of the SLE consultancy project and give interested readers an insight into the various stages of developing the self-assessment framework.

**Chapter B** presents the conceptual framework. For those interested in the concepts, definitions and inter-linkages of the two units of analysis “good practices of sustainable agriculture” and “scaling-up strategies”, this chapter provides models and explanations.

**Chapter C** outlines the actual self-assessment. It specifies survey questions, sources of information, the methods and tools we recommend for data collection, and ideas for documentation, all of which are recommendations for conducting self-assessment in your organisation or project. This chapter is primarily seen as instruction for your organisation’s self-assessment facilitators, since it goes into considerable detail. Additionally, it provides information for people who want to understand the concepts and inter-linkages introduced in the conceptual framework, which have been extended to include specific assumptions for each survey question.

**Chapter D** deals with the organisational side of self-assessment. It gives recommendations on how to plan the self-assessment (part D1), and covers aspects such as selection of facilitators and case study area, and how existing data can be integrated into the assessment. The next two parts are primarily based on the field-testing experience in Indian partner organisations and give hints on conducting and documenting the self-assessment.

**Part D2** covers aspects such as how to prepare for the field phase, how to conduct the field survey and document the data, and how to carry out the first analysis.

Similarly, **part D3** makes recommendations on the assessment of the organisation’s scaling-up strategies, such as meetings with management, department and field staff.

**Part D4** contains recommendations on how to learn from the assessment findings in the organisation or project. This chapter will also give some guidance on report writing. The

final aspect considered in this chapter is how to communicate the findings in the organisation, and to Sustainet and other stakeholders.

**Chapter E** introduces the suggested report format and gives hints on visualisation and layout.

In the **Annex** we provide the reader with the following documents:

- a glossary with working definitions of key terms, drafted by the participants of the self-assessment workshops;
- a list of further reading material, particularly on scaling up;
- a brief introduction into SWOT-analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and a sample moderation plan;
- a timetable and list of participants of the Conceptual Workshop;
- a list of participants in the Methodology and Reflection Workshop;
- the Sustainet Project Planning Matrix (PPM).

### **Evolution of the guidelines**

These guidelines were developed during a five-month process in which a total of 15 Indian partner organisations and projects participated. This period included:

- the six-week preparation phase of the SLE team members in June/July 2004,
- the Conceptual Workshop in August 2004;
- the two-week methodology test runs in three partner organisations;
- the Initial Workshop of Sustainet India in September 2004 in the area where Sustainet India was founded; 18 partner organisations were invited to participate in the network;
- the Reflection and Methodology Workshop in October 2004, where the draft guidelines were revised to focus on content, method and feasibility;
- the constant feedback from various national and international Sustainet stakeholders;
- the public presentation in November 2004, where results and recommendations were presented and discussed with the Sustainet Steering Committee, SLE staff, and interested members of the public.