



engineers without borders
ingénieurs sans frontières
Canada

Agriculture as a Business Curriculum

Everything you need to know about the AAB Curriculum

The purpose of this document is to describe why the curriculum is the way it is. Or rather, that this curriculum is not just a bunch of steps on paper and shiny photos. There's a lot of thinking that has gone into it which has made it a program that successfully has AEAs develop strong and business-minded farmer groups.

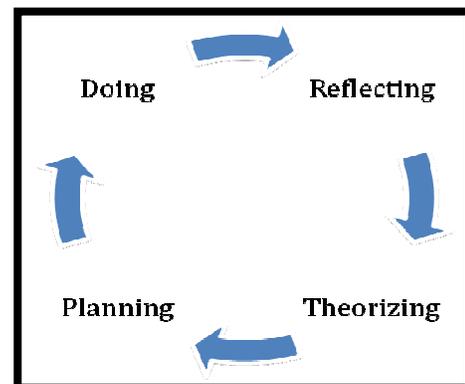
1. Approach that EWB took to developing the curriculum

Testing, testing, and more testing in the field... EWB took an iterative approach to developing this curriculum because we wanted to develop something to a point where it works. Iterating is significant because as an outsider it is difficult to design something perfect from the beginning. There may be issues of language or terminologies that are not well understood by farmers or AEAs. The AAB curriculum was developed by over 10 EWB volunteers working with AEAs over the course of two years and 500 field visits.

Appropriate capacity building tools... The curriculum was developed to meet three criteria: Reasonable, Recognizable, Respectable. The curriculum was developed as a Reasonable tool by ensuring the topics fit within what adult farmers already know. It is a Recognizable tool because it is tangible with stories and photos providing clear messages. And it is a Respectable tool because the topics are seen as modern, and groups can identify with the prestige of successful groups highlighted in the stories. Meeting these three criteria results in greater adoption of the concepts by farmer groups.

Action learning as a key part of the program...

Each module has the AEA follow the flow of an action learning cycle. The meeting begins with **reflection** – the group is normally asked to reflect on a story, proverb or photo that the AEA shares. The idea is to get the group thinking about the topic in the module. Based on this reflection, the AEA guides the group to the **analysis** stage. The analysis depends on the module. For the Group Meetings module, the group analyzes whether they are having good group meetings. The AEA then guides the group to make a **plan**. The plan is based on the group's analysis. The plan is action-oriented to ensure that group has actions they can do to improve their group. The AEA then monitors the group's **actions**. The action-learning cycle begins all over again depending on the results.



Replicating positive deviant AEA approaches and topics... As opposed to building workshops and field tools from an office disconnected with the field, EWB worked side-by-side with AEAs to identify and capture AEA best practices. The curriculum is a compilation of AEA best practices to ensure it spreads practices that already work well with farmer groups.

2. On the job training of AEAs

Workshops aren't enough. EWB has seen that workshops aren't enough to change behaviour. In order for behaviour change to occur there needs to be follow-up after the workshops. Workshops are still useful. They are good at introducing concepts. They are good at introducing tools. But often with extension work, the main learning occurs in the field. It is easy to read a book about facilitating a meeting. But it is much more difficult to become a good facilitator without practicing in the field. So when EWB trains AEAs we provide workshops but the main focus is the training we provide on the job. We go to the farmer group meetings with the AEAs to provide them the opportunity to practice, learn and improve in the field.

Farmer group development is a gradual process. We noticed that conversations on group dynamics were already occurring with farmers. AEAs wanted to strengthen groups; however, the conversations on group dynamics would occur in a single meeting. The meeting would typically have the AEA inform the group of the essential practices they need to follow in order to be organised and ultimately access a loan. This approach was resulting in disorganised groups that existed only to access loans. The groups lacked the beneficial attitude of self-sufficiency because of how they were developed. The AAB curriculum was designed to draw out the process of group development and ensure that farmer's attitudes are oriented towards self-sufficiency and running their farm not as a way for them to access development assistance but as a business. Additionally, through the gradual process, the groups not only know the essential practices, but they have the opportunity to plan and address the challenges they face in applying these practices.

The curriculum covers two important goals – grooming groups and demonstrating the value of taking farming as a business...The AAB curriculum is broken into two phases. The first phase focuses on group development so that AEAs can groom up groups to access markets, finances and make good use of development support. The second phase of the curriculum develops the business skills of the farmers by having them operate their group project as a business. Through running their group project, the group learns the value of developing a business plan, analyzing profitability and markets, keeping business records and evaluating their business. In this way the curriculum covers two very important and mutually reinforcing goals.

Farmer groups are a tool – for farmers primarily to access information, share ideas and access improved markets and finances. The most successful farmer groups are those that remain together not because it will ensure they get a loan but because there's social capital. Farmer groups are an effective extension tool because farmers can share ideas, experiments, and innovations. However, they are hardly used like this! A secondary result of the AAB program is that the AEA and farmer group have a strong relationship. The AEA feels more committed to the group because they helped them learn and grow. This helps the farmers access quality extension in the future.

3. Why AEAs like the AAB Curriculum and continue to use it

- ★ Simple and inviting to take to the field
- ★ Pictures, stories and proverbs make meetings fun
- ★ Good reminders of things to talk about
- ★ It helps them get more connected to their farmers
- ★ In short, it makes it easy for AEAs to strengthen groups

4. Why EWB likes the AAB Curriculum and continues to share it

- ★ Consistency in messaging
- ★ Enables AEAs to be participatory
- ★ Enables AEAs to take a more gradual approach to farmer group development
- ★ Demystifies some of this value chain talk
- ★ In short, it is more effective at getting AEAs to develop strong and business-minded farmer groups.

Limitations of AAB

The stronger the AEA, the more effective AAB is. Strong AEAs are developed through years of experience and on the job training. On the job training and good management support is a gap in MoFA. EWB is currently addressing this by working with management to develop their skills and developing a series of modules that management can use to refresh the AEA's knowledge and skills.

The more motivated an AEA is to do this work the more likely they will. Currently, there are few incentives for AEAs to strengthen groups. There are incentives for them to form groups. There are a lot of incentives for AEAs to get farmers to adopt technologies. EWB is currently working with the M&E department of MoFA to help them adopt incentives that will motivate AEAs to strengthen farmer groups and get them to be more business oriented in their work.

Behaviour Change Tool – Monitoring Table for Farmer and Farmer Group Progress

Area	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Outcome
1. GROUP MEETINGS	Group has trouble meeting even when AEA requests	Group meets when AEA requests	Group holds regular meetings (at least once / month)	Group meetings are productive, inclusive, and recorded	The changes the group makes in group meetings are sustained and the group runs productive meetings to move the group forward.
2. GROUP FINANCES	Group doesn't have a bank account. Group doesn't collect dues	Group has opened a bank account. Group has a plan to collect dues.	Bank account has had activity in the last 2 months. Group collects dues and records them.	Group keeps records and knows the current balance. Group is using their finances for a group project.	The changes the group makes in group finances are sustained has the group using finances to help the group move forward.
3. GROUP PROJECT	Group doesn't do any work together	Group helps each other on their farm. Group has a small agriculture project together.	Group buys inputs or markets outputs together. Group has taken a loan and repaid entire amount.	Group owns and successfully managed a pumping machine, grinding mill, transport truck, tractor, donkey cart, etc.	The group project should help the group develop momentum. Through the experience the group will learn that they can design and implement a project that takes advantage of their strengths and opportunities.
4. GROUP MARKETING	Group sells individually to any buyer.	Group has held on to their product until the lean season.	Group has bargained for the price. Group has sold or bought inputs together. Group has transported inputs.	Group has negotiated a new market link. The buyer will give them a more secure or better price for their product.	The changes the group makes in how they market brings them more profit.
5. LOAN PREPAREDNESS	Groups see loans as a hand out and want one.	Groups want a loan.	Groups want a loan so they can increase production or adopt certain technologies (e.g. fertilizer).	Groups see that taking a loan is a serious thing and only want one if they can use it to increase profit.	Groups start using loans in a profitable manner.
6. BUSINESS PLAN	Farmers plan their farm based on what they did last year.	Farmers have a goal for profit they will make.	Farmers have drawn up a business plan.	Farmers use the business plan to decide how much and the types of farming activities to undertake.	Farmers start to use planning as a way to think critically about their business and when making decisions.
7. RECORD KEEPING	No one keeps records.	Farmers use records to keep track of expenses.	Farmers use records to keep track of expenses and income.	Farmers use records to keep track of yield and calculate profit made.	In order for the group to sustain the behaviour of record keeping they need to use the records to evaluate profit and help them make business decisions.
8. BUSINESS EVALUATION	Farmers don't know how much profit they made last year.	Farmers know the amount of profit they made last year.	Farmers know what they could have done differently to increase profit (increase yield, market, different crop)	Farmers use profit calculation to advise themselves on their farming activities this year.	The group sees the value of business planning, recording and evaluating to help them provide sustainably for their family and the value of being a member of an organized farmer group.

Sample of the Agriculture as a Business Curriculum

MoFA Agriculture As A Business Programme



The members of the ASUNGTABA Farmer's Group grow watermelons. The group organizes their members to share labour and get access to markets that they could not reach alone. They also maintain a bank account, pay dues, and meet on a regular basis.

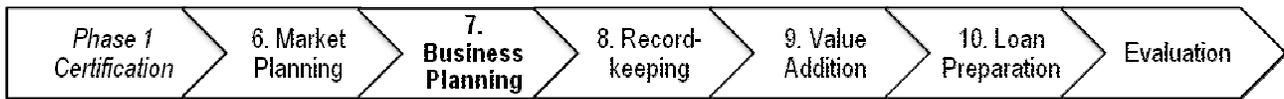


The group has been working together for more than ten years, and for the past two years has been organizing transportation for their watermelon production to markets in Kumasi and Accra. They had a problem where shipments spoiled because of local traders blocking them from selling in Kumasi, but they were not discouraged.

They now call traders in Kumasi and Accra on the phone and find out if it will be better for them to sell in the local market or to hire a truck and sell in Kumasi or Accra.

6. Market Planning

Sample of the Agriculture as a Business Curriculum



7. Business Planning (Part 1)

Desired Output of Meeting: The group analyzes the costs, benefits, and risks of their business.

Desired Outcome of Meeting: The group is making decisions to maximize profit from their business.

Step One: Ask the group to reflect on their last meeting. Review the workbook section from last meeting, and discuss what the group learned.

AEA Tip: Encourage 5 different members to mention at least one relevant point.

Step Two: Read the story on the front of this page. Ask the group, “What is the meaning of the picture?” Allow the group members to speak out for some time.

Answer: The farmers planned their lettuce farm to harvest at different times, and get profit.

Step Three: Ask the group, “What activities are involved in their business from starting to selling? How much will the group spend on each activity?” Calculate the total expenses after all the activities and costs are mentioned.

Activity	Cost

AEA Tip: Only cost labour if the group hires labour.

Step Four: Ask the group, “How much income does the group expect from their project?”

$$[\text{Market Price}] \times [\text{Yield}] = \text{Expected Income}$$

AEA Tip: Refer to the Market Price from the previous Market Planning meeting. Use a realistic Yield figure from the group members.

Step Five: Calculate the profit.

$$[\text{Expected income}] - [\text{Total expenses}] = \text{Profit}$$

Group Activity: Demonstrating profit calculations

Use stones, leaves, or beans in a pile to demonstrate the Expected Income. Remove stones from the pile for each activity to indicate the Total Expenses. The remaining stones indicate the group profit.