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# Integrated Farmer Training (IFT)

Derivative of the Farmer Business School approach  
to expand outreach and success rate



## → What is the environment like?

Sierra Leone's poverty is widespread in spite of its rich mineral and natural resources. Despite the existing natural resources, the standard of living and level of education have not increased. Significant events such as the ten-year Civil War and a two-year epidemic have further contributed to the slow pace of development and today the country ranks only 179th in the Human Development Index. The majority of the rural population has to cope with 2 USD and less per day.

Many children and adolescents are out of school and school drop-out levels are high, particularly in rural areas. The low level of education across the whole spectrum of primary, secondary, tertiary and TVET forms of education means that graduates who do not have sufficient knowledge and basic skills are permanently released onto the labor market. Symptomatic is the high illiteracy rate of 40 - 70%, which increases with the rurality. In addition, the extension services of the government are weak in terms of personnel, equipment and structure and cannot effectively close the gap of skills and education among the rural population.

## → Why was IFT developed?

One of the tasks of the third phase of the Employment Promotion Program (EPP III) is the effective and sustainable education and training of self-employed farmers and micro-small and medium entrepreneurs in their respective value chains. When working with the beneficiaries of EPP III, it soon became evident that they were over challenged with existing training approaches such as "Competency based Economies through Formation of Entrepreneurs" (CEFE), Farmer Business School (FBS), "Farmer Field School" (FFS), "Bauern Unternehmer Schulung" (b | u | s). The starting knowledge level of those trainings is far too high and moreover farmers usually have neither the time nor the ability to concentrate on multi-day trainings. In particular, almost all formats target literate people, and leave out many of the farmers who are illiterate and innu-



RES Facilitator conducting the IFT in Soa Chiefdom, Kono District

merate. In 2014, EPP III decided to develop a new concept that would better meet the context in rural areas of Sierra Leone and likely of many other countries. The aim was therefore to develop a training course that uses the essential components of FBS, FFS and b | u | s and turns them into a modular curriculum of one-day courses.

## → What are the advantages of IFT

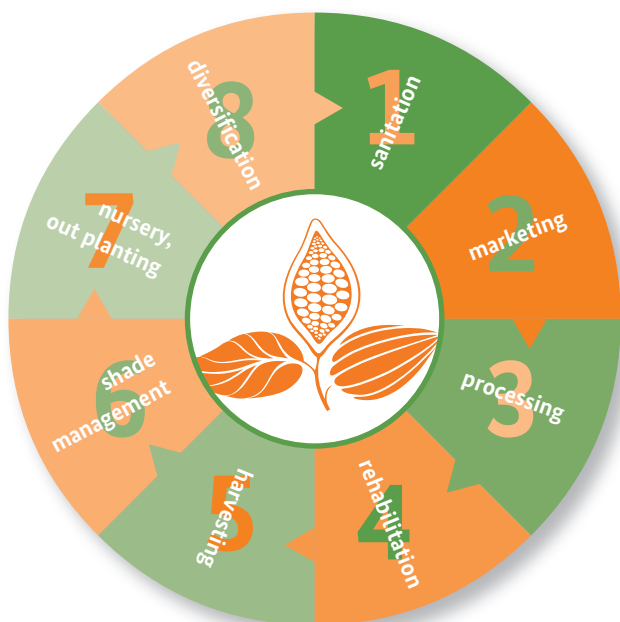
The Integrated Farmer Training (IFT) combines the essential components of three learning areas that were formerly taught separately, but actually belong together for successful business management.

Three components were effectively merged together and evolved:

- 1. Good agricultural practice, derived from FFS, among other sources**
- 2. Basic entrepreneurial skills, derived from FBS**
- 3. Behavioral reflection and change, derived from b | u | s**

The individual syllabus consists of a sequence of one-day trainings with follow-up sessions after 14 days. The individual subjects are based on the annual cycles in crop or animal production, in order to always target the relevant and current topics for the participants. During the respective follow-up sessions it is therefore possible to address real implementation problems of what has been learned before in a very practical and in-depth manner.

While the actual training takes place for groups of about 25 people in central gathering places in the villages, the follow-up groups of 10-15 people are smaller and take place on alternate farms to ensure the practical demonstration. The curriculum for the main theme “cocoa elementary” is divided e.g. in eight individual one-day trainings as follows: 1 sanitation, 2 marketing, 3 processing, 4 rehabilitation, 5 harvesting, 6 shade management, 7 nursery / out planting, 8 diversification.



*The modular structure of the IFT for the 'Cocoa Elementary' curriculum is illustrated here as an example*

The different modules, each with different practical, theoretical and playful parts and contents make the training day diverse and thus promote the attention of the audience. Each day ends with a summary, which reiterates the essentials messages and vividly formulates them for the way home. Didactically, IFT works preferably with signs and images, and even calculates with symbols, to allow everyone, including innumerates, to grasp concepts taught during the training. At the same time, the training is also offered at a higher level to people who can read / write and count, to keep an effective learning pace.

All curricula developed so far are elaborated up to the individual lesson contents (aim, questions, lesson structure and board image) and ready to use, including the necessary training materials (adapted posters and handouts). The entire concept is embedded in an M & E system to trace the key parameters such as “quality of teaching”, “degree of application”, “participant satisfaction”.

## → For whom did we create IFT

The IFT was developed primarily for people in agricultural professions. However, due to the modular structure there is the possibility to include other professions. Entrepreneurial skills and attitudes are relatively universal traits that require little adaptation. As easily as the technical part of e.g. “cocoa elementary” can be changed to “chicken breeding elementary”, it could also be changed to “plumber”. The principle of the IFT is a loose sheet collection representing the individual components and can therefore be exchanged or maintained as required. The individual sheets are laminated to withstand wind and weather for a longer period.

## → What do we have already

IFT is still at the beginning of its scaling up and thematic potential. In response to customer requirements, five curricula have been developed so far, some of which build on each other to address differently advanced target groups:

1. Cocoa elementary
  - a. Cocoa productivity
2. Coffee elementary
  - a. Coffee productivity
3. IVS wet rice elementary

Further curricula on cashew nuts and vegetables are in the making.

## → The success story of IFT

The new approach has been in the pilot phase since 2015 and has since been tested with 5,000 cocoa and coffee farmers. The first results are very promising, as they show a high return rate of 83 % of the farmers to the individual training sessions. The participation rate remained similarly stable for male and female farmers. Given that EPP III does not make any payments to the farmers for participation, we believe that the format and content of IFT proves to be of much interest for the beneficiaries, particularly for women, who are already burdened with several household and productive activities. The high customer satisfaction from the participant surveys supports this assumption.

Ideally, IFT is an evolving approach and EPP III is continually working to explore the potential for improvement. For instance, the interface between training and practical implementation by farmers is being reviewed to achieve even higher application rates. Furthermore, it may be necessary to look for better integration with other services, such as savings groups or access to microcredits, to enable farmers to apply the knowledge.

Due to the past positive experience, IFT has now been running since 2017 together with over 14,000 people on rice, cocoa and coffee. To ensure sustainability, the original coaches founded a private cooperative firm (Rural Extension Service Ltd) that provides management and logistics of trainings and monitoring from a single source. Thus, the service can also be offered to other private, civil society or state customers.

## → Who is implementing IFT?

The Rural Extension Service (RES) Ltd. is a private company that is marketing the products of the IFT. The RES facilitators are certified trainers that provide training and extension services to farmers and rural businesses. In order to meet the training requirements of their customers RES has currently about 45 trainers in the districts and an equipped main office.

The development of new curricula and the necessary training of coaches are still done by external consultants. Concept and materials can also be applied in other countries.

*Farmers transplanting rice seeds during a field demonstration – IFT Inland Valley Swamps (IVS)*



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