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Nextfood - Educating the next generation of professionals in the agrifood system

Practice Abstract #45: Observation as core competence to facilitate action learning at Farmer Training Centres

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Observation is one of the core competences identified in the NEXTFOOD project important for the transition to a sustainable agrifood system. Observation is a useful competence that paves the way for continuous learning. In the NEXTFOOD Case 3 at the College of Dryland Agriculture and Natural Resources, Mekelle University in Ethiopia, observation helped students to reflect on and be engaged in the real life experiences of farmers. Farmers also learnt from observing the experience of other peer farmers. Observation opened up the opportunity to dialogue, participate and reflect on the real life experiences. Students also appreciated the role of observation in facilitating good visioning and innovation. Observation was the first ranked core competence that helped students to carry out their practice oriented course during the first and second cycle of the action learning sessions in Ethiopia.

To effectively learn from observation:

- Plan time for observation individually and open the dialogue afterwards
- Give time for participants to dialogue within the group or with other people
- Encourage group participants to limit their talk during observation
- Let participants use easy language for communication
- Guide the participants to be divergent (not much influenced by their own bag of knowledge)