

Documentation on the SHEP (Smallholder Horticulture
Empowerment & Promotion) method



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Introductory Note

This fact sheet has been produced as part of a study to map innovative methods and tools in agricultural advisory services in West and Central Africa. This study was commissioned by CORAF/WECARD (the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development) and carried out by RESCAR-AOC (the West and Central Network for Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services) across 13 West and Central African countries.

The overall objective of the study was to compile a descriptive directory of innovative agricultural advisory methods and tools for scaling up agricultural technologies and innovations in West and Central Africa.

Several individuals within CORAF, RESCAR-AOC, and beyond, across the 13 countries covered by the study, contributed to the success of this initiative. We extend our gratitude to everyone involved for their contribution.

1. Overview of the SHEP method

The SHEP (Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment & Promotion) was designed as an agricultural advisory tool aimed at providing specific solutions to these underlying issues. It can be described as an agricultural extension approach that promotes market-oriented farming among smallholder farmers (JICA, 2018). It was developed in Kenya in 2006 through a technical cooperation project between the Kenyan Ministry of Agriculture and JICA (Sugimoto Fall, 2022).

The key features of SHEP include supporting agricultural activities, particularly by promoting the sharing of market information between farmers and market stakeholders, thereby reducing the information gap, and designing a series of activities that take farmers' motivation into account (JICA, 2018). According to JICA (2018) and Sugimoto Fall (2022), the vision of SHEP is to maximise farmers' initiative by following four key steps: (i) sharing the goal and vision of success with target farmers, (ii) encouraging farmers to become aware of business opportunities through market research initiated by the farmers themselves, (iii) enabling farmers to make decisions on crop selection and cultivation schedules, and (iv) equipping farmers with skills to improve their agricultural practices.

SHEP seeks to bring about a behavioural change among farmers and extension officers. It shifts the focus from a “produce and sell” approach to a “produce to sell” mindset. The goal is to empower smallholder farmers to engage in market-oriented agriculture.

The SHEP method is currently used in nearly 51 countries worldwide (Sugimoto Fall, 2022), with around thirty African countries having adopted and implemented the SHEP approach (Mwangi et al., 2021).

2. Brief description of the types of beneficiaries supported using the SHEP method

The SHEP method is primarily used with small-scale farmers who have limited agricultural land, with a maximum plot size of 2 hectares. This includes young people, women, and men alike. These households typically practise mixed farming, with a strong focus on vegetable production. In terms of livestock farming, the SHEP approach concentrates on small ruminants and poultry farming, which are well suited to small-scale producers. The main crops grown and sold by these households include various types of vegetables. The marketing of these products mostly takes place at the local level, although some er Farmers’ organisations (FOs) have the opportunity to access markets in nearby towns

3. Necessity and Objective of the SHEP Method

The SHEP (Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment & Promotion) method was introduced in many West African countries from 2014 onwards with the support of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to address the specific challenges faced by small-scale horticultural producers. This methodological choice was driven by several key observations: a significant proportion of the agricultural population in these countries consists of smallholder farmers whose incomes remain low due to exploitation by intermediaries, high transportation costs, and a lack of knowledge about market prices. This situation also leads to increasing information asymmetry and post-harvest losses caused by the absence of effective marketing strategies. The SHEP approach was introduced to tackle these issues by transforming agriculture into a commercial activity and empowering farmers to become entrepreneurs. The goal of SHEP is to improve the marketing of agricultural products and increase farmers’ incomes. The services provided under this approach include sharing the vision behind SHEP, raising awareness of its importance, supporting decision-making for commercialisation, and offering solutions for market access and partnership development.

4. Implementation Methodology of the SHEP Approach

The SHEP method is implemented through a four-step support cycle:

- Vision sharing (awareness-raising workshops);
- Awareness-building (baseline surveys, market studies, networking forums);
- Decision-making (selection of target crops, development of action plans, cultivation schedules);
- Solution provision (technical trainings).

5. Impacts of the SHEP method

According to Sugimoto Fall (2022), more than 225,807 smallholder farmers have benefited from the SHEP method, with support from approximately 25,438 agents involved in SHEP activities. In Kenya, for instance, a project promoting this method has reached over 20,000 smallholder farmers (MOALF and JICA, 2020, cited by Mwangi et al., 2021). In Senegal, documentation study results indicate that the SHEP method has enabled 13.4% of horticultural producer unions in the implementation area to gather information to improve their income. Additionally, 76.9% of producer organisations have modified their production and commercial activities using SHEP tools. Furthermore, 96% of targeted farmers have started collecting information to enhance their income, and more than 54% of producer groups have observed an income increase of over 20% since the method was introduced. About 62% of unions in the implementation area have also experienced growth in their horticultural income. The direct beneficiaries include 2,594 individuals (1,128 women and 1,466 men), with 20,887 indirect beneficiaries (7,234 women and 13,653 men).

Farmers have reported an increase in income due to better market connections, strengthened business relationships, and an improved understanding of their economic environment. Access to new markets has been facilitated through business trips, enabling producers to establish partnerships with traders and other value chain stakeholders.

According to other sources, farmers have been able to apply the skills and knowledge acquired through SHEP training, leading to positive effects on their farms (Mwangi et al., 2021). On average, SHEP has helped farmers increase their horticultural income by 70% to 80% over two years (Mwangi et al., 2021; Sugimoto Fall, 2022).

6. Technologies and Innovations Promoted through the SHEP Method

Several technologies and innovations have been promoted through the SHEP approach, including:

- Promoting market-oriented agriculture;
- Creating forums for value chain stakeholders;
- Conducting market studies by farmers themselves;
- Encouraging farmers to maintain records to track production costs, improving cost management and profitability awareness;
- Establishing business relationships through market visits and study tours;
- Diversifying production to meet market demands identified through market research;
- Facilitating access to new services such as microcredit and irrigation technologies.

7. Average Implementation Costs of the SHEP Method

The costs associated with implementing the SHEP method mainly include transportation expenses for market research activities and forums, as well as financial support for agricultural advisors. These costs can be partially covered by farmers' organisations or the participants themselves. This method stands out for its cost-effectiveness, as it provides broad coverage of farmers at a relatively low cost.

The successful implementation of the SHEP approach requires various inputs, including human resources, training materials, equipment, and operational expenses (Mwangi et al., 2021).

8. Strengths and Limitations of the SHEP Method

The main strengths and limitations of the SHEP method identified during the national discussion and evaluation workshops and during the interviews on the documentation of methods and tools are as follows:

Strengths of the SHEP Method

- Simplicity and flexibility of the approach;
- Lower implementation costs.

Limitations of the SHEP Method

Initial farmer dependency on external aid is a key limitation, as it can lead to high expectations for continued support, necessitating proactive communication to prevent misunderstandings.

9. Prerequisites for Success and the Role of various Stakeholders in the SHEP Method

The prerequisites for the successful implementation of SHEP include clear communication from the outset to align expectations, active engagement from both beneficiaries and advisors, and strong institutional support. The main roles of institutional and other key stakeholders are as follows: local and national institutions must support and legitimise the method to ensure its sustainability; cooperation with horticultural value chain stakeholders is essential to strengthen the effectiveness of the approach while facilitating access to market and resource availability. In addition, market knowledge is essential for effective guidance on production, with efforts also dedicated to marketing and value chain management.

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