



**SOLINSA**  
Support of Learning and Innovation  
Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

Agricultural Knowledge Systems In Transition:  
Towards a more effective and efficient support of Learning  
and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

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# RURAL WOMEN'S GROUP OF THE BAVARIAN FARMERS UNION IN MUNICH

## LINSA Case Study Report: Germany

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# 1 SUMMARY

**The Rural Women's Group in South Germany is a LINSAs with a long learning and innovation culture. The group itself was founded in 1948, as a subpart of the Bavarian Farmer's Union. Nowadays the LINSAs counts ~6.500 local women groups, 72 local chapters, 7 district chapters, and one State Executive Committee. Due to the high diversification of the farm sector and farm women's livelihoods, the LINSAs notes currently considerable changes in the clientele. The LINSAs has a good, acknowledged standing in society, but is considered as a niche player in the AKIS. They are a cross-sectoral player, linking the farm sector with the health-, nutrition- and education-sectors.**

SOLINSA practice partner in the narrower sense is the State Executive Committee with seven voluntarily engaged women and a managing director. The main part of data are collected through workshops within those women. The SOLINSA workshops were considered as a chance to redefine the work of the group – always keeping networking, learning and change needs of the LINSAs Rural Women's Group in mind.

The LINSAs is characterized by a high degree of formality, as well as complexity, and relatively low diversity of actors involved. It is considered to be a community of practice of farm women. The LINSAs notes considerable changes in the clientele due to farm women's livelihoods. The increasing diversity of farms, the need of strategies to deal with heterogeneous farm development, and the presence of social questions stimulate the necessity to find new answers for how to deal with new and partly unknown demands.

Essential part of the LINSAs is a diversified educational work based on manifold topics. Beyond this the LINSAs has a good, acknowledged standing in society. Profound agricultural expert knowledge is coming together with knowledge about local development processes, with knowledge from the health and nutrition sectors as well as from the dialogue with consumers. This knowledge is being used as pool, internally for stabilising and developing farms and externally for introducing farm knowledge in broader networks, crossing various interests regarding rural development under a female perspective.

The total BBV is gender-balanced with ~50% men and ~50% women in the honorary posts. Even with an increasing focus on team orientation, many of the activities are carried out in separated spheres. This is one explanation of the fact, that the Farmer's Union is an inherent part of the AKIS and the Women's Group is a niche player in the AKIS and at the same time an essential player in knowledge and innovation systems of other sectors.

The LINSAs-SOLINSA cooperation was used as an opportunity window to take up a latently started change process actively. The workshops are considered as free space for thinking and reflection, and as a basis for a much more conscious planning. Decisive are the open-endedness and the own responsibility for the results. Prerequisites for that are trust building and openness. As a group process, this is not a single decision but instead rather a maturation process.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

The LINSAs-under-study is the Rural Women's Group of the Bavarian Farmers Union in Munich/Germany. Practice partner in the narrower sense is the State Executive Committee with seven voluntarily engaged women and a managing director. The Committee is elected for five-to-five year periods. The current group was newly composed in April 2012, four months after starting the SOLINSA workshop series. The SOLINSA project within the workshops was considered as a chance to redefine and to reflect the work of the group.

The Rural Women's Group is considered to be a community of practice, representing the interests of farm women. The LINSAs is characterized by a high degree of formality, high degree of complexity, and – from an outsider view - relatively low diversity of actors involved. The local groups and individual persons are broadly represented in diverse, cross-sector networks in rural areas.

Most involved women are farm women, in most cases representing family farms. From the insider perspective the group notes considerable changes in the clientele. On farms and inside the Farmers Union, many of the younger women put current structures and activities into question. At the same time older women doubt or cannot fully understand the changes. During the SOLINSA work the willingness to change on the one side, and resistance to change on the other side, became to be obvious. The increasing diversity inside the group – due to the diversity of farm women's livelihoods, and the increasing diversity of needs, stimulates the necessity to find new answers for how to deal with new and partly unknown demands. Nevertheless, communicative exchange and education as a result of this exchange keep staying the motors of the rural women's work. Mutual acceptance and appreciation are important drivers. As a result of the SOLINSA project the Women's Group took up this discussion process actively. In the project discourse it is understood as learning and social innovation.

The Women's Group was founded in 1948 as a part of the Bavarian Farmer's Union (BBV). Connections to the AKIS are mainly the technical committees of the Farmer's Union, but women are strongly underrepresented in those committees. The Women's Group is recognised as a partner who contributes to the AKIS, when agricultural issues are related with social issues, health care and food (consumer and children) education. The individuals as well as the group itself have many influential contacts to politics, consumers, primary schools, health insurances, press, and other women's associations. These partners are numerous and multifaceted, and there is a strong search for new alliances observable (network development, often due to the social pillar of sustainability).

The internal structure of the LINSAs follows a pyramidal structure. It is transparently organized in all regions of Bavaria, with ~154.000 members coming from ~90.000 farms; ~6.500 elected farm women on village level – this corresponds with 6.500 local women groups. The total BBV is gender-balanced with ~50% men and ~50% women in the honorary posts. Membership is not held by individuals, membership is held by the entire farm, and involves

everybody who belongs to the farm. The coexistence of activities which are directed from “above” and of freely organized activities from the basis is typically for the LINSA. Mainly the basis-activities stimulate the identification and commitment from members, currently lots of transformation processes occur in this direction. New ideas – one of the most recent ideas is a discussion series for young women who got married to a farmer and who are challenging to reflect on their own goals in life, traditional role models as well as questions of social security - are developed and tested in local groups. Based on these experiences, the learning offers are further developed until they become educational offers. At the same time, the experiences of the women participating in such offers contribute as a knowledge resource to current discussions about the orientation of the women’s group.

### 3 METHODS

Data collection consists of facts and processes. Facts concerning establishment and development, activities, composition and network size were researched by consulting documents and protocols, archives and websites. The most important part of data collection is process observations, workshops and interaction. Main issue in this context was to get insights into communication and decision-making processes, the development of learning activities and planning, the handling of conflicts and opinion differences, as well as the handling of change and planned change. It was worked with:

**Open, non-participative observation of the State Executive Committee's monthly meetings.** The project team was invited to follow these one-day events since December 2011. This served to get to know about interactions, persons, communication and decision-making routines, as well as activities and day-to-day business. The following meetings have been attended: Dec 2011, Jan 2012, Feb 2012, Apr 2012, Jun 2012, Nov 2012.

**Open, participative observation of the conclave in May 2012.** As strategic 2-day meeting of the board with 16 participants and 1 professional facilitator. The outsider-perspective of the researcher was brought into the discussion about positioning, interests, and program content. This perspective served on the one hand as mirror and on the other hand as a question-tool for rethinking of what is considered familiar.

#### 3.1 SOLINSA Workshops

##### 3.1.1 Nov 2011 and Dec 2011: Work agreement

Content: establishing the contact, negotiating the work plan, 4 members;

Methods: visioning, brainstorming, small group work, facilitated discussion

Dec 2011: reflection and results of the November meeting in the whole group with 12 members

### **3.1.2 March and Mai 2012: Negotiation and establishing trust**

Interactive session - ca. 2 hours - during a 2-day seminar, 150 participants / honorary engaged farm women.

Methods: presentation and group dynamic exercise “from a group to a team”; working in 5 facilitated groups á 30 persons, working in small groups and plenary discussion.

Content: potential and limits of the local groups, team building, conflict matters, communications skills and trust.

Mai 2012: two day conclave, researchers with a guest-role.

### **3.1.3 July and October 2012: Real cooperation - vivid trust**

July 2012: interactive working group with 8 board members during a board meeting / follow up in October 2012 - strategic 1-day meeting of the board

Content: Discussion of the necessity and direction of new activities; reflection on procedures of communication and decision making, reflection of the power-relations and women’s influence inside and outside the Farmer’s Union.

Methods: facilitated discussions in small groups and plenary; feedback and meta-communication.

### **3.1.4 March and June 2013: Fading out - success of trust**

March 2013: seminar, 150 participants

Content: dissemination and feedback of the working process.

Methods: Presentation of a 3-minute video about the SOLINSA interaction with the board members; discussion with individuals during an information-market.

June 2013: strategic 1 day meeting with 8 board members

Content: reflection of communication matters, reflection of the issue of power relations and women's influence, reflection of changes in the clientele and strategies to deal with those changes in a constructive and open, non-directive communication process.

Method: facilitated discussion, brief presentations of the farm women, feedback and meta-communication

The SOLINSA Workshops were documented via photo-reports and minutes. After three events feedback was given in written form. After the first workshop as a motivation and expectation letter, after the Workshop in March 2012, reflecting content and methods of the single interaction, and after the last workshop in June 2013, reflecting the total SOLINSA interaction. The workshops in between were evaluated with reflection rounds finalizing the

interaction. Often it was an individual reflection, of content and methods, and it was introduced in the perspective of the follow up event (see Helmle 2013a).

## **4 RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Constraints and opportunities for the LINSARural Women within their particular context and the support needs for successful LINSAR**

#### **4.1.1 Potentials**

The network consciously developed itself as a learning-network for women for over more than 60 years. Important is a diversified educational work based on manifold topics directly for farm women and women living in the country site. The wide integration in the area results in offers which are strongly related to agricultural practice and which are proved from a road capabilities' perspective. The group has a good, acknowledged standing in society. It is highly branched and influential in women topics like nutrition, consumer dialogue, children and youth education, as well as health topics like care of the elderly, cancer screening, or dementia. Beyond this, profound agricultural expert knowledge – many women are actively involved in farm work - is coming together with knowledge about local development processes and current issues of regional development – this is the broader perspective and vision, why women introduce their knowledge in local networks. In those networks, or particular cooperation, farm knowledge comes together with knowledge from the health and nutrition sectors as well as consumer information. This knowledge is being used as pool, internally for stabilising and developing farms and externally for representing agriculture in public and connecting farm development and rural development.

The search for network partners for individual projects is an open process. Limitations through political preferences, churches or establishment of potential partners are exceptions. It is rather intended to get to know different, new perceptions. Very often, this is not more than an enhancement of the perspective and the curiosity of getting to know what others do. At the same moment, it is the search for and the contacting of niche groups and groups which are doing something different. Good networking also means continuously detecting and contacting new partners. In this context, the Women's Group accomplishes integration work between AKIS and niche actors.

#### **4.1.2 Constraints**

The hierarchical structure of the Bavarian Farmers Union combined with clear gender-specific role models, and the idea to offer opportunities for every farm is one of the most relevant constraints. Even when it is still practiced, the structure limits the free space to try out something which is really new to the own spheres of action and decision of the women. The communication of rather unconventional plans is difficult because they are being reframed by various

groupings and by this lose their inherent potential. Communication and decision making templates are strongly institutionalised among the different levels of the Farmers Union. Alongside the topic “team orientation of women and men” it was observed that this has been realised on the one hand but that there is almost less movement on the other hand – in the last months transformation became to be visible, but this is quite young. Younger women have difficulties to deal with their perceived “background” presence/influence. The women’s expertise is introduced only little or by chance for agricultural topics. This knowledge and the knowledge interfaces with niche actors are perceived and used too little. It is also difficult to staff topics which are not role-bound in their character (see Helmle 2013b).

### 4.1.3 Support

- Awareness work and reflection of the own work with known and new partners from outside the Farmers Union to communicate the achievements, competences and ideas of the group to the outside. At the same time it is important that the group becomes aware of how valuable their impulses are for others and that they have to contribute knowledge/experience and creative ideas.
- Open discussions about the will to change and potentials for improvement with different groupings inside the Farmers Union. In especial this deals with changed perceptions of self-worth and new modes for contributing to the unions’ work. Awareness work on how to deal with different interests and systems of values of farmer groupings.
- Awareness work on own potentials, to be able to specify them and to bring them into larger networks as technical and experienced knowledge.
- Conferences to become aware of the own limits and potentials, to integrate new members, to set new focuses and to secede from out-dated. Especially the issues of heterogeneity and representation of different women requires much stronger meta-communication. Doubtless it is necessary to continuously communicate at this meta-level about perceptions, ways of thinking and understanding, matters of course as well as assumptions to facilitate a common, task-sharing work.
- Documentation and publication of on-going activities and also of reflection processes. These documentations help to trace ways of development and learning and to make them known to public. Valorisation of the working processes and results. This can be achieved by professional journalists who e.g. are invited to workshops as observers. Incentives for publishing this in non-scientific media. Scientists can document such processes for longer periods and reconstruct them as innovation and development histories.
- Research activities and analysis of the members. How did farm life and matters of course of farmers change? Under which circumstances do farmers take effect, how can the logics of operational management be understood and what does that mean for supporting networks?

## 4.2 Mechanisms of network development, learning and innovation processes and connections with the formal AKIS systems

### 4.2.1 Network development

The Women's Group addresses all farm women of Bavaria. Because of the resulting differences in age, professional education within and outside agriculture, and the different branches and high diversification of agriculture, the common link of the women is at first only that they live at farms. The criteria "farm women/women in agriculture" makes it for a start a very homogenous network. The picturing of the manifold specialisations as well as of the differing ways of how women are present in agriculture makes the network a homogenous-heterogeneous network which reflects the characteristics of agriculture and becomes attractive because of this diversity.

In approx. 6.500 local groups, which are organised by the women honorary, there arise many different connections to local politics, nature conservation groups, churches, health groups, schools and adult education centres, health insurance funds, social insurance agencies, nursing and social services.

Local groups act mainly autonomous. They receive impulses from other groups and cooperate with other groups. The local groups act very democratic as long as it stays within the women group. The cooperation with local farmer-groups is partly team-oriented, often the women are put in the background and not involved in decision making. The department board has work areas with high levels of autonomy and strong binding to the local basis.

In this type of work, the women are highly recognised within the Farmers Union which profits from a strong outward-oriented presence of the women connecting numerous actors in rural areas. Nevertheless, it requires in especial insider knowledge for recognising the quality of this networking because this development is completely perceived self-evident.

### 4.2.2 Learning and innovation processes

Learning happens at different levels. The long-standing existence of the network holds on the one hand a high continuity of self-conception and activities. At the same time, this self-conception is put into question by the members themselves. Locally, activities develop out of the questions of what should be offered for women, in how far situations have changed, of what is new and how to contribute to current debates. These results in an on-going development of offers which are demanded in such a strong way that other groups adapt them as well or that the State Executive Board takes up these locally tested offers to professionalise them and to create: an educational program, information material, training for facilitators and trainers, and sometimes also extra-occupational programs with certificate. During the SOLINSA workshops, this process was activated for a new program. In a 7 to 10 parts seminar series young women from agriculture are facilitated to reflect on their own professional

career, on financial provision (pension, insurance, marriage contract) and on decision and communication structures on their own farm. The program supports women in finding own ways instead of adapting unwritten but strongly traded role models. In this context, women search for a self-determined (not egocentric) role in the farms.

Open but activated is the learning process, which broaches the issue of the women's role within the Union. In this regard, it is about the search for gender equity in the sense of partnership and team orientation. It deals with an offensive treatment of agricultural change processes and the accompanying changes in the pluralistic but difficult to comprise orientation of agricultural families. Through the SOLINSA process, this reflection was taken up actively and next to the clarification of the situation and an own position-fixing within the Women's Group, functioning and state of the debate undergo a broad audience. Aim is to lead the discussion in a process-oriented and result-open way in the context of group discussions and workshops in end of 2013 and early 2014. This way of learning shows that the initial point very often is oral, in the beginning rather diffuse, reflection within groups. Through the process of reflection the discussion gains in profoundness and outline. The current described discussion is seen as social innovation. Questioned and changed are: the discussion culture and decision making, the openness of the results instead of fixed suggestions, and the treatment of insecurity which is showed openly.

#### **4.2.3 Embedment in the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System - AKIS**

The Farmer's Union is an inherent part of the AKIS, the Rural Women's Group is part of the AKIS via the presence of the Farmers Union. This is institutionalised through the various elected authorities and responsibilities in the boards and thus, independent of individual persons. Agricultural research affects the Farmer's Union. The women rather resort to knowledge coming from the health sector, the regional development and the educational institutions in rural areas. Occasionally, science is consulted; nutritional science and home economics, which did the preliminary work for the Rural Women's Group, have been disestablished largely. Contacts to science are rather of sporadic character and bound to individuals (not to institutions). Good contact to trainers and advisors, especially from the area of communication, rhetoric, management and soft-skills, do exist. Good contact to journalists, who report regularly in the farmers' weekly journal as well as to ministries and administration. Nevertheless, it becomes obvious in the political-administrative area that the own scope of action is strongly limited.

### **4.3 Learning approaches, methods and tools used in the LINSAs**

This subchapter gives an overview on the most important mechanisms through which learning and innovation processes are being discussed (points 1.-3.),

results and precise implementation become obvious in conferences and educational offers (4., 5.). It is important to the LINSAs to continuously take up new and current issues and to implement educational offers. The women are at the same time receiver as well as provider and designer of educational work. They are supported in these processes by few full-employed persons - this is a crucial issue with regard to support. Learning happens through exchange and controversial discussions as well as through information. Important are long-lasting ways of learning, meaning that often it is worked with follow-up events and with connecting the learning persons. There is not much space - and this was appreciated of SOLINSA - for open discussions in which there can be discussed controversially and in which it can be thought into the very far future. A strengthening of such participative, open and facilitated rooms for thinking stimulates innovation.

**1. Regular monthly meetings in the different groups for information exchange.** It is brought together who has been at which meetings with other partners, what has been discussed there and what this means for the own work. Furthermore, requests are discussed whether the group gets involved into activities of other groups. It is also talked about how own activities can be further elaborated and these activities are critically reflected in preparation and post-processing. During these meetings, continuity and information exchange arise.

**2. Full-employed personnel supports honorary workers:** The farm women are honorary group members and are being supported by full-time employees who are usually professional classes. The full-time employees write down the thoughts, collect technical information and help in the search of adequate innovation brokers. The full-time employees are an important interface to the AKS; they concentrate information coming from different sides. In this context foundation and background work develops.

**3. One or two day Conclaves** which are conducted every five years in the respective groups. The SOLINSA workshops have been taken up as "conclaves" as well. Based on the SOLINSA experience the conferences should now happen once every 9 months. For one day it is worked with facilitation instruments on higher ranking topics: visioning and self-reflection, communication, trust creation and solution of ongoing conflicts, decision making procedures and adjustment. In this context, solidarity and clarification develop. During the SOLINSA work, these days helped strongly to further develop women's work because discussions were taken up for which there is no time in the normal day-to-day business. External facilitation has helped to focus on the discussion and with summaries it was made clear how the discussion had developed. The women learned to deal with processes and process development. Facilitated discussions have a strongly clearing character. Important are the neutral, impartial role of facilitation, good background knowledge of the facilitator, willingness of the participants to address open and not determined issues. In this context direction changes and new discourses develop.

**4. Conferences** to which many members come together (two times per year). Main elements are speeches, information about activities and the on-going

work, information about the work within the Farmer's Union, as well as individual interactive working units. This is important for internal information and for the exchange among and getting to know of the women.

**5. Educational offers** in the form of seminars and service trainings. An important aim of the rural women's work is to qualify women. Classic offers, which are demanded strongly, are meanwhile "technology training", "agricultural office specialist" and "nutrition expert". Important are apart from the certification of the trainings the continuous development of the programs for first-time users as well as for the continuance in the form of exchange and advanced modules. For the educational offers, it is strongly collaborated with educational institutions, ministries and professional schools. The success/high demand is incentive to maintain the programs up-to-date. The development of these offers many times is a process of several years.

#### 4.4 Tasks, roles and emerging quality needs for the knowledge and skills of actors and institutions

Main challenges are the cross-sectional tasks which are ascribed by the women themselves. They cope the areas of farm women and home economists, skilled employees in agriculture and self-employed direct sellers, public relation workers and women who are at the interface of health – food – agriculture – consumer and thus, in applied agricultural policy. The spectrum of educational work, public relations work and representation of interests is very broad. The available knowledge is becoming more complex in all areas what is perceived as excessive demand by the network actors. Especially outside of the farms, the women confront with the questions of consumers and are responsible for questions of plant protection, animal welfare and animal keeping, agricultural policy and in especial price policy. In local conflicts they take up the role as mediators. Apart from this they have a high request on the educational work with the non-agricultural population. The educational mandate in the form of green classrooms or children days is taken very serious.

The request on the knowledge is very high for the women. This is being overlaid with the questions of what is accepted as technical knowledge, what are women's topics, what are partnership topics, what are gender-specific experience growths and what does this mean for the technical knowledge? For advisors respectively trainers this means to accompany groups in clarification processes. Often it is not about increasing technical knowledge because it can be assumed that women who work in agriculture read technical newspapers and improve their skills have technical competences. Instead it deals with bringing the foundation of the own knowledge to the mind and to become clear which knowledge is already available, where knowledge is required and how to deal with knowledge gaps. The women show enormous expectations on their own, they perceive critical questions of consumers as a challenging of their profession and show themselves to be insecure at this level. It is helpful to them to reflect on the changes they perceive and to develop strategies on how to deal with a) the growing diversification of the agricultural sector (quotation: " I understand what happens at my farm but the neighbours have totally different

branches so I can't join in a conversation") and b) the alleged critical, information seeking questioning of consumers who very often do not expect as profound answers as the women give.

Extension as **group extension or coaching** can support the exchange of experiences and the reflection of what makes secure respectively insecure. The focus and concentration on only few activities instead of the "vendor's tray" which offers many different topics is considered to be helpful.

Extension can cooperate in this context with professional journalists, who showed to be very interested in such learning processes in the sense of Change Management or Organisational Development during the time of the project. Important are the documentation and publication of such results which facilitates an insight into current changes to other actors. Extension and change in the context of this process understanding are perceived to be positively open and developing from the outside. Extension and continuous reporting is then also triggering these questions in other groups and makes transparent what is currently moving. Effect of the SOLINSA project was to take up these tasks partly. To the outside it became more evident where the group stands, by what it is affected, and how communication and development happen beyond the group.

## 4.5 Evaluation criteria used for assessing the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of support measures that are exploited by LINSAs

The potentials of the LINSAs can develop better especially through supporting meta-communication. Goals are a precise positioning in public in the context of innovative learning, a stronger presence and perception of the LINSAs within the AKIS and a strengthened position in inter-sector innovation systems. Helpful are instruments supporting the limits of honorary commitment - especially if private financial resources are used in addition to time resources.

### 4.5.1 Policy Instrument to support educational offers

Fees and travel costs for trainers, material, costs of rooms cannot be paid out of own financial means.

Evaluation criteria: Oral and written feedback for the different offers. In especial, it is asked for practice-relevance, usability and participant orientation. Over longer periods the registration statistics are counted to analyse the demand for the offers. Finances should not be a burden for not taking part in offers. Because of this, participants only pay a small contribution, the larger part results from membership fees and support by ministries, or of the respective partners who are co-offering the programs. Speakers give feedback in independent evaluation rounds.

#### **4.5.2 Network development: Soft-skills training**

Soft skills in the area of personality development, communication and organisation are relevant for a well-functioning networking. Multipart seminar offers and folders with material for self-study. Measurement of success: internal feedback, demand by other groups whose base is honorary work, too. Continuous revision and improvement of the material by full-employed personnel and trainers.

#### **4.5.3 Expense allowance and compensation of travel costs for honorary workers:**

Travel costs which arise because groups cooperate over large distances are compensated by membership fees. Depending on how frequent travel occurs, expense allowances are being paid which are related to the participating groups. Meanwhile, honorary work has become that highly-qualified, technically complex and time-consuming that it is almost no more manageable as honorary work. During these days, the missing work force has to be compensated at the farm respectively honorary work can only be done by people having and using the financial and temporal resources. This applies especially to the women being active at area, district and department level.

Criteria: the networking days are perceived, the women are present at events and expert panels, networking activities among different agricultural and non-agricultural actors, technical further training.

#### **4.5.4 Development of the own brand “we rural women”:**

The brand underlines the visibility of the Women’s Group. The brand was developed in the year 2011/2012 and was part of a restructuring process inside the overall Farmer’s Union. Costs for the discussion process (Wherefore stands the brand? Who can use the brand?), costs for the design development, costs for marketing were covered by the Farmer’s Union budget. Evaluation: Using of the brand, tracking of the interpretation of the brand – the brand as general principle and challenge.

### **4.6 Operational tools that AKIS actors could use to improve support for LINSA**

Instruments supporting the visibility of and concentration on new learning processes are supportive networks of innovation brokers, journalists as well as scientists.

#### **4.6.1 Recognition and appreciation of the women's experience as technical knowledge**

Involving women consciously into technical discourses and expert panels. This is only possible through active addressing and the will for doing it. Agricultural expert panels in Germany are mainly staffed by men. Women – with their own areas of responsibility – are largely being disregarded in this context. To become member of an expert panel needs long time, strong network activities and in the end there remains only one statutory woman. Knowledge about the areas in which women are active is so far being perceived in a closed and one-sided way. At the same time it is the activities in educational work through which learning in agriculture has developed in the past.

#### **4.6.2 Recognition of extra-occupational education**

Changes in agricultural enterprises become new fields of work for women (agricultural office, part-time farms, direct marketing). The professionalization results from the needs of these new fields of activity. Often, these activities are related to low own incomes (agricultural office) but for the farm, these activities are indispensable. Offers of agricultural education for non-agricultural groups happen mostly at prices which are only cost-covering. Actors should be involved in price negotiations – very often they are being confronted with facts. Furthermore, AKS can support with certification and recognition of professional qualifications.

#### **4.6.3 Coaching and process company of individual network actors (groups)**

SOLINSA workshops showed the strong effect of reflection of the own work, expectations and possible capacity, and of change processes. Like this, activities are not the result of spontaneous ideas but of sophisticated and considered discourses. It is possible through reflection to set priorities and to use resources in a goal-oriented way. Concentration on the essential instead of the whole, broad fields of activity. An on-going company, which is open in their result and which has a development mandate formulated by the group. Through SOLINSA the Rural Women's Group gained the awareness for such a work. Without this experience, the group would possibly not take up such measures in this intensity. Therefore it is important in this context to report on the possibilities and potentials of such coaching processes – a task for coaches, professional journalists or accompanying research. At the same time it requires well-educated facilitators who are able to accompany such development processes in a result-open way and who motivate to get engaged in such processes.

Policy support: Start-up financing for facilitators/coaches, compensation of travel costs for participants, education of facilitators, techniques of group dynamics and group moderation, planning techniques, methods of conflict management and theory of change processes.

#### 4.6.4 LINSAs Cooperations

**LINSAs – LINSAs networks** to exchange knowledge and to discuss openly and crossways outside of organisational structures. Important in this context is to not participate as representative of the union with only representative tasks but to put own ways of thinking into question and to show curiosity and openness.

**LINSAs – researcher cooperation** a) to analyse developments, genesis and characteristics of LINSAs with classical socio-empiric methods, b) in the sense of accompanying research to capture the dynamics of development processes and to better understand them, c) as action research – with the respective resources – to connect the strengths of research (analysis, contact to other groups, collection of knowledge, theoretical reflection of practice processes) with an active LINSAs development. Cooperation of young and experienced researchers is favourable and in action research, the possibility of a researcher-coaching to be able to stay in clear roles and the necessary outsider position has to be considered.

**Innovation broker networks.** Similar to LINSAs – LINSAs networks it is supportive to exchange at a process-accompanying level about development processes and related progresses or setbacks, the adequate methodological instruments and the content-related setting up. These networks are to be understood as forum for exchange, clarification and education.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The women's group benefits from its long experience and from the own developments in the educational sector, which retrospectively can be considered as self-supporting innovations. The women are aware of this perspective. Nevertheless, it became obvious that innovation development respectively the stimulating of behaviour change processes as a planned process have been an extreme challenge for the women. The starting position was very beneficial: enormously high motivation and will for starting a change process, advanced trust but also the request of practice-relevant achievements of the researchers to strengthen the trust. The strong presence of the research team and their participation in activities have been considered as important. Trust establishment and strengthening stayed important topics until the closing workshop. Listening, observation, questions instead of answers, neutrality and impartiality of the research team were appreciated. Collaborating in a research team showed to be helpful for separating process observation and process control.

Through the SOLINSA process, it was new for the LINSAs to consider in workshops the own achievements, the power spectrum and the underlying questions such as "how modern are our activities, from which activities can we detach ourselves, how do new challenges look like?" Interactive working and workshop methods are strongly familiar. It was new to work on a topic over the

course of various meetings. With respect to the content, it became obvious how strongly the LINSAs - in its current composition - belongs to the women's identity. In this context, change processes become partly changes of the own personality. Through that, processes gain in profoundness and reliability. Questions like "How much change do I allow through my contribution to the LINSAs? How strongly does change question and eventually devalue the hitherto existing? What personally motivates me to advance change? What hinders me? Is the pressure to change really high enough?" become of central importance. Strong insecurity was created in the LINSAs through questions like how rural areas and farms do change, what this means for the working and living conditions for women in agriculture, or how these results lead to a newly aligned women's work. At the same time, these questions were asked intensively by LINSAs women during the project phase. Facilitation techniques, the views of the researchers as outsiders, short technical impulses and especially summaries of discussions were helpful for not getting lost in insecurity. At the same time, the importance of constantly formulating questions for development, which are documented as results for implementation, became obvious.

It became evident how important time resources are for a growth of trust and the direction of the discussion. From a methodological point of view it was important that the researchers maintained distance to the LINSAs. This does not happen automatically but is a result of reflection processes within the research team, trainings for researchers and the CBW during the SOLINSA project meetings. In this context it was important to have clear responsibilities at any point of time: The LINSAs showed responsibility for content-related discussions and the implementation of results. The research team was responsible for the methodological company, documentation and analysis. A definition of implementation-oriented workshops, an ongoing evaluation of the workshops, and the documentation of contents in non-academic language and form, such as a 3-minute video or a publication in the agricultural monthly newspaper, were of extraordinary importance. In especial, the gap between researchers and the LINSAs could be closed.

Is the LINSAs a LINSAs? Keeping the L and N in mind, approaches of adult education for the members and educational offers for the public are the results from networking with a wide range of groups, who discuss the needs, plan activities, and link the cross-sector knowledge with the AKIS. Looking to the L and I, considering ideas of radical and incremental innovation in mind, L and I are strongly connected. Social learning leads to instantaneous new activities and discourses, often resulting in incremental innovations. In the real life it is hard to distinguish development and improvement from incremental, ongoing innovation. What about sustainable agriculture? The Women's Group stands for family farming, diversification and income combination, as well as for the whole set of social questions. Most of the farms are conventional farms, often it is part-time farming, and very often the farm generation turnover is not clear. But there are also young farmers, developing their businesses and farm women looking for own perspectives and development potentials on the farms. Additionally, the Women's Group is always rethinking on how to get involved into discourses about e.g. plant and animal production, landscape conservation or water protection. Guiding principle in this context is a further development of modern

and economically oriented farms with a good embedment into nature and society. The integration of the perspectives of all people working in agriculture is certainly one part of sustainable agriculture. To reach this has become the new task of the Rural Women's LINSAs. This is demonstrated through a stronger presence of women in organisational and agricultural policy. This change process had already been started in the past, could be fostered and consciously taken up through the SOLINSA project, and is being continued in an open-ended way concerning the results.

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## APPENDICES

- Appendix I descriptive material
- Appendix II LINSAs reports
- Appendix III IDW Poster