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Knowledge Centre for
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DEVELOPING PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEM (PGS) FOR FARMER GROUPS

Training Guide for Practitioners

A Two-Day Village-Based Training for Organic Farmer Groups



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Supporting organizations



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ACRONYMS

- PELUM – Participatory Ecological Land Use Management
- PGS – Participatory Guarantee System
- KOAN – Kenya Organic Agriculture Network
- IFOAM – Organics International (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements)
- NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
- GMO – Genetically Modified Organism

BACKGROUND

Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Kenya is a national network that promote Agroecological principles and practices through its 68 member organizations located in 47 Counties. The members of PELUM Kenya are distributed in the four (4) PELUM Kenya zones: Nairobi and Central, Rift and Western, Lower Eastern and Coast, Upper Eastern and Northern Zone. It is, however, essential to note that PELUM Kenya does not work directly with the farmers but through the member organizations.

The vision of PELUM Kenya is empowered, prosperous, healthy and resilient communities and its mission is to champion agroecological principles and practices for sustainable and resilient livelihoods among small holder farmers, pastoralists and fisherfolks. The five (5) Strategic Focus areas are; Advocacy and Policy Influence, Women and Youth in Agroecology, Climate Action, Markets Development and Institutional Capacity Strengthening.

By developing this guide, PELUM Kenya aims to equip trainers and multipliers with practical tools to support farmer groups in adopting PGS, improving market access, and ensuring credibility of organic products. Ultimately, the guide will contribute to increased farmer incomes, stronger local organic markets, and the scaling of agroecology as a sustainable food system approach in Kenya.

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1.0 About This Guide

This is a practical, hands-on training guide designed for trainers working with smallholder organic farmer groups in rural communities, where flip charts, open discussion, and farmer wisdom are the tools of the trade, not projectors or slides. It is rooted in the IFOAM PGS Guidelines and shaped by real field experience.

2.0 Who Is This Training For?

This two-day training is designed for groups of organic farmers who are already practicing agroecological farming and are ready to take the next step, accessing markets through a structured, community-owned certification system called a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS).

The farmers attending this training:

- Already grow organically — they are not being introduced to organic farming
- Are organized in groups or are willing to organize
- Want to access markets but lack the credibility or structure to do so
- Need a low-cost, community-led route to certification

THE TRAINER'S ROLE

You are a facilitator, not a lecturer.
Your job is to draw out what farmers already know, introduce the PGS concept simply, and guide the group to make their own decisions.
Use questions, stories, and examples not long explanations.
When in doubt, ask the group.

3.0 What is a PGS? - The Simple Version

A Participatory Guarantee System is a way for a group of organic farmers to certify each other, with the support of consumers, traders, local organizations, and community members, without needing an expensive outside certifier.

Think of it this way: in a village, your neighbors already know how you farm. PGS makes that community knowledge official.

A good PGS should have the following 6 elements:

Shared Vision

Everyone agrees on the why and the what — what it means to be organic in your community.



Participation

Farmers, consumers, and partners all play an active role — not just one person at the top



Transparency

Everyone can see how the system works. No secrets.



Trust

PGS works because farmers trust each other and the community holds everyone accountable.



Horizontality

No one is the boss.
The group decides together —
farmers lead.



Continuous Learning

PGS is a living system.
Farmers learn from each other
and keep improving.



4.0 DAY 1

Understanding PGS and Our Starting Point

| Time | Session | Content | Method |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 8:00 – 8:30 | Welcome & Introductions | Icebreaker: Each farmer shares their name, village, and one crop they are proudest of growing organically and the reason. | Pair sharing → group circle |
| 8:30 – 9:30 | What is PGS? | What is certification and why does it matter for markets? How PGS differs from expensive third-party certification. The 6 key elements of PGS explained simply. | Flip chart, Q&A, discussion |
| 9:30 – 10:30 | Our Situation — Market Challenges | Farmers identify challenges they face in accessing markets. Group brainstorm on flip chart (mirror the format from the field: What challenges are you facing?) | Flip chart brainstorm |
| 10:30 – 10:45 | HEALTH BREAK | | |
| 10:45 – 12:00 | Situational Analysis (Part 1) | Understanding our farming context: crops grown, seasons, current markets. What is working and what is not? | Participatory mapping & seasonal calendar |

| | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| 12:00 – 13:00 | LUNCH | | |
| 13:00 – 14:00 | Situational Analysis (Part 2) | Current markets vs potential markets. Who are we selling to now? Who could we sell to? What strategies should we use when marketing our produce, pricing, presentation, promotion? | Flip chart — two columns: Current / Potential |
| 14:00 – 15:00 | Why PGS? The Vision | Why do we want to do this? What does success look like for our group in 2 years? Agree on a shared vision statement for the group. | Small groups → present back |
| 15:00 – 15:15 | HEALTH BREAK | | |
| 15:15 – 16:00 | Stakeholder Mapping | Who else needs to be part of our PGS? (Consumers, extension staff, NGOs, county government, KOAN, PELUM). What role does each play? | Sticky notes on flip chart |
| 16:00 – 16:30 | Day 1 Reflection | What did we learn today? What questions do we still have? Homework: each farmer draws a simple map of their farm overnight. | Open circle |

4.2 Session 1: What is PGS? (8:30 – 9:30)

4.2.1 Objective

Farmers understand what PGS is, why it was created and how it can help them access markets without expensive certification.

4.2.2 Key Messages to Deliver

- Most organic farmers grow good food but cannot prove it to buyers — PGS gives them that proof built from community trust.
- Third-party certification costs too much and is too complex for smallholders. PGS is the affordable, community-owned alternative.
- PGS works because farmers know each other's farms better than any outsider ever could.
- PGS is already working for farmers in Brazil, India, South Africa, and across Africa. This is not a new experiment.

4.2.3 Opening Discussion — Start Here

1. Ask the group: 'When you go to the market, how does the buyer know your food is organic?'
2. Let farmers respond freely. Write their answers on the flip chart.
3. Ask: 'What if there was a way for your whole community to vouch for you — officially?'
4. Introduce PGS as the answer to this question.
5. Draw the 6 key elements on the flip chart as you explain each one.

TRAINER TIP:

Use a local analogy:
'PGS is like a village guarantee.
If your neighbor says your maize is
chemical-free, the whole market
believes it — because everyone
knows your neighbor is honest.
PGS makes that
guarantee official.'

4.3 Session 2: Situational Analysis (9:30 – 12:00, with break)

4.3.1 Objective

The group develops a clear, shared picture of where they are now: their farming context, challenges, crops, markets and opportunities. This is the foundation on which the PGS is built.

4.3.2 What to Cover in a Situational Analysis

A good situational analysis answers six questions. Work through each one with the group on flip charts:

| Question | What to ask and note on the flip chart |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Who are we? | How many farmers? How many acres? What communities and counties are represented? |
| 2. What do we grow? | List all crops grown — long rains and short rains separately (e.g. indigenous maize, cassava, millet, sorghum, beans, African leafy vegetables, pumpkins). Note: crops already grown organically are assets. |
| 3. What markets do we have now? | Farmers market, cereals market, fish market, open-air vegetable markets, institutions (schools, hospitals), neighbors, middlemen. List and rank by importance. |
| 4. What markets could we access? | Nairobi and Mombasa, value addition markets, direct institutional supply (school feeding programs) farmers markets, export. What is stopping us from reaching these? |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>5. What challenges do we face in the market?</p> | <p>Use the flip chart format: market intelligence, not in structured groups, no storage, lack of awareness, no markets for organic produce, insecurity, youth leaving, land issues, poor infrastructure, weak extension, limited organic inputs, cross-border barriers, transport costs, cost of certification.</p> |
| <p>6. What strengths do we have?</p> | <p>Existing organic practices, community trust, group cohesion, traditional knowledge, diverse crops, land.</p> |
| <p>7. What strategies should we put in place to better access markets</p> | <p>Discuss how to price different products, price elasticity, how to sort, grade, package present products to different markets, value addition opportunities and branding.</p> |

4.3.4 Participatory Activity: Seasonal Calendar & Farm Mapping

7. Draw a simple year on the flip chart (12 boxes for months).
8. Ask farmers: which months are long rains? Short rains? Dry season?
9. For each season, ask: what do you plant? What do you harvest? Where do you sell?
10. Colour-code the calendar with markers — green for planting, red for harvest, blue for market.

Display the completed calendar and discuss: when are we strongest?
When are we most vulnerable?



5.0 DAY 2 - Building and Running the PGS

| Time | Session | Content | Method |
|----------------------|------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 8:00 – 8:30 | Morning Energiser & Review | Quick recap of Day 1. Farmers present their farm maps. What surprised us? What do we want to build on? | Gallery walk |
| 8:30 – 9:30 | Steps for Implementing a PGS | Walk through all 7 steps on a flip chart. Connect each step to what the group said yesterday. | Flip chart flowchart |
| 9:30 – 10:30 | The Farmer's Pledge | What does it mean to pledge to farm organically? Draft a simple pledge statement as a group. Discuss consequences if a member breaks the pledge. | Group drafting session |
| 10:30 – 10:45 | HEALTH BREAK | | |
| 10:45 – 11:30 | Farm Mapping & Records | What details should every farm record include? Practise filling in a simple farm record card. Discuss how records help build trust with buyers. | Practical exercise |
| 11:30 – 12:30 | The Peer Review | What happens during a farm visit? Who goes? What do they look for? Role play: one group visits another group's 'farm' (a corner of the training space). | Role play |
| 12:30 – 13:30 | LUNCH | | |
| 13:30 – 14:30 | Structure & Organizations | How does a PGS group organize itself? Administrative staff, certification committee, peer review group, national council links (KOAN, PELUM, county govt). Proposed committees: marketing, self-help, health & nutrition. | Discussion & flip chart |
| 14:30 – 15:15 | Certification & Next Steps | What does a PGS certificate mean? How do we get our first certificate issued? What do we take home from today and do in the next 30 days? | Group action planning |
| 15:15 – 15:30 | HEALTH BREAK | | |
| 15:30 – 16:00 | Our 30-Day Action Plan | Each group commits to 3 specific actions before the next meeting. Trainer records commitments on flip chart. | Commitment circle |
| 16:00 – 16:30 | Closing & Celebration | Certificates of participation. Closing remarks. Each farmer says one word that describes how they feel leaving this training. | Circle close |

5.3 Session: The 7 Steps for Implementing a PGS (8:30 – 9:30)

5.3.1 Objective

Farmers understand the full PGS implementation journey — from where they are now to receiving their first certification approval — and see how each step connects to the work they did on Day 1.

| Step | Name | What Happens | What to Do in the Field |
|------|---|--|--|
| 1 | Situational Analysis | Understand the group's farming context, challenges, crops, and markets. Map current and potential markets. Identify key stakeholders. | Done in this training! Document and keep the flip chart outputs as your group's first record. |
| 2 | Stakeholders Share the Vision | Bring together farmers, consumers, NGO partners, and local government to agree on why you are forming a PGS and what you stand for. | Hold a community meeting. Invite extension staff, a county agriculture officer, and a consumer representative. Write your shared vision on a banner or poster. |
| 3 | Agree and Document How PGS Will Work | Write simple rules for your group: organic standards you will follow, how decisions are made, what happens if someone breaks the rules. | Use simple language. Your group writes the rules together — they do not have to be perfect on day one. Adopt the Kenya National Organic Standard (or IFOAM standard) as your base. |
| 4 | Build Awareness and Make a Pledge | All farmers learn what the organic standards mean in practice. Each farmer makes a public commitment — the pledge — to farm organically. | Hold a pledge ceremony. It can be oral or written. Make it meaningful — witnessed by the community, a local leader, or a consumer partner. |
| 5 | Map the Farm and Record Details | Each farm is documented: location, size, crops, inputs used, water sources, neighboring farms. A simple farm record card is filled in. | Train each farmer to fill in their farm card. Keep a group register. Photographs and simple sketches are acceptable maps. |
| 6 | Conduct a Peer Review | A small team of fellow farmers (and where possible a consumer or partner) visits each farm to verify that organic standards are being met. | Plan farm visit schedules. Train peer reviewers: what to look for, what to ask, how to record findings. Peer reviews are supportive — not inspections. |
| 7 | Issue Certification Approval | The certification committee reviews the peer review reports and issues a PGS certificate to farms that meet the standards. | The certification committee (PGS members) makes the decision. Issue a simple certificate. Approved farmers can use the group label on their produce. |

TRAINER TIP:

Draw the 7 steps as a simple flow diagram on the flip chart with arrows between them. Let farmers number the steps themselves. Ask: 'Which step are we at right now?' (Answer: between 1 and 2.)

5.4 Session: The Peer Review - How It Works (11:30 – 12:30)

5.4.1 Objective

Farmers understand what a peer review visit looks like, who is involved, what is checked, and how findings are recorded. Through role play, they practice doing it themselves.

5.4.2 What Peer Reviewers Look For

- Is the farmer using any chemical pesticides, herbicides, or synthetic fertilizers?
- Are organic inputs (compost, manure, biopesticides) being used correctly?
- Are there buffer zones between the farm and any neighboring conventional farms?
- Are farm records being kept — even simple ones?
- Is the farmer's crop diversity reasonable? (Monocultures are a warning sign in organic systems.)
- Is the farmer's pledge visible or can they recite it?

5.4.3 Role Play: The Peer Review Visit

13. Divide into two groups. Group A is the 'farm family'. Group B is the 'peer review team'.
14. Group A sets up their 'farm' in a corner of the training space using whatever is available — bags, sticks, seeds.
15. Group B receives a simple peer review checklist (trainer prepares in advance).
16. Group B visits the 'farm', asks questions, observes, and fills in the checklist.
17. Both groups come back together and debrief: What went well? What was uncomfortable? What did the farmers learn from being reviewed?
18. Swap roles and repeat.



TRAINER TIP:

The peer review must feel supportive, not threatening. The goal is learning together, not catching people out.

Remind reviewers:
'You are there to help your neighbor improve, not to judge them.'

5.5 Session: Structure and Organization (13:30 – 14:30)

5.5.1 Objective

Farmers understand how a PGS group organizes itself and begin to decide on roles and committees for their own group.

Draw this structure on the flip chart as you explain it:

| Body | Who Is In It | What They Do |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Administrative Staff | Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer | Day-to-day running of the group. Keeping records, calling meetings, managing any funds. |
| Certification Committee | PGS members (farmers) | Reviews peer review reports and makes the final decision on who receives certification. |
| Peer Review Group | Consumers, NGO staff, extension staff, county government | Conducts farm visits and fills in review reports. Brings outside perspective and builds community trust. |
| National Council Link | KOAN, PELUM Kenya, county government | Connects the local PGS group to national organic standards, policy, and support networks. |
| Proposed Committees | Farmer members (volunteer) | Marketing Committee — finds markets and manages group sales. Self-Help Committee — supports members in crisis. Health & Nutrition Committee — monitors household food and nutrition. |

TRAINER TIP:

Let the group elect their first administrative officers during this session if energy and time allow. Even a temporary chairperson and secretary gives the group momentum to keep going after the training ends.

5.5.2 The Farmer's Pledge - A Guide for Trainers

The pledge is one of the most powerful moments in a PGS training. It is the point where individual farmers publicly commit to the community that they will farm organically — and that they understand the consequences if they do not.

Sample Pledge (Adapt this with the group)

SAMPLE FARMER'S PLEDGE

I,[name], farmer of [village/location], hereby pledge to my community that I will farm according to the organic standards agreed by our PGS group. I will not use synthetic chemicals, prohibited pesticides, or GMO seeds. I will welcome my fellow farmers to visit my farm. I will be honest in my records. I understand that if I break this pledge, I may lose my certification and will be answerable to the group. Signed / Witnessed: _____ Date: _____

5.5.3 Making the Pledge Meaningful

- Hold it at the end of Day 2 so farmers have fully absorbed the training.
- Invite a local leader, consumer partner, or county official to witness.
- Oral pledges are fully valid — literacy should never be a barrier.
- The pledge can be in the local language — Swahili, Kikuyu, Luo — whatever makes it feel real.
- Consider a small ceremony: a communal meal, a moment of silence, a song.

5.5.4 Simple Farm Record Card Template

This is the minimum information every farmer should record. Simplify further based on literacy levels — pictures and tick boxes work just as well as words.

| Body | Who Is In It | What They Do |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Administrative Staff | Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer | Day-to-day running of the group. Keeping records, calling meetings, managing any funds. |
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6.0 30-Day Group Action Plan

Before closing the training, guide the group to agree on concrete next steps. Write these on the flip chart and photograph or copy them so the group has a record.

| What We Will Do | Who Is Responsible | By When |
|---|-------------------------|----------------|
| Hold a community meeting to share the PGS vision with non-attending members | Chairperson + Secretary | Within 2 weeks |
| Each farmer completes their farm record card | All farmers | Within 2 weeks |
| Form the certification committee and peer review group | Group vote | Within 2 weeks |
| Schedule the first round of peer review farm visits | Certification committee | Within 4 weeks |
| Invite a consumer or local partner to the next group meeting | Chairperson | Within 3 weeks |
| Contact PELUM Kenya or KOAN for national registration guidance | Secretary | Within 4 weeks |

7.0 Trainer Resources & Preparation Checklist

7.1 Before the Training

- Print or hand-write the farm record card template for each participant
- Prepare blank peer review checklists for the role play exercise
- Bring enough flip chart paper (minimum 10 sheets per day), markers (multiple colors), masking tape
- Confirm venue has enough space for small group work and a role play exercise
- Arrange for a simple communal meal or tea break
- If possible, invite one consumer or community partner to attend at least part of Day 2

7.2 Flip Chart Sequence (Prepare these in advance)

- Sheet 1: 'What challenges are you facing?' — blank, for brainstorm
- Sheet 2: The 6 PGS Key Elements — pre-written
- Sheet 3: '12-month calendar' grid for seasonal analysis
- Sheet 4: 'Current Markets | Potential Markets' — two columns
- Sheet 5: The 7 Steps flowchart — pre-drawn with boxes and arrows
- Sheet 6: PGS Organizational Structure diagram
- Sheet 7: 30-Day Action Plan table — blank, to fill in with the group

7.3 Key Reference

IFOAM – Organics International. PGS Guidelines: How to Develop and Manage Participatory Guarantee Systems for Organic Agriculture. 2019. Download at: ifoam.bio/pgs

7.4 Key Kenya Contacts

- KOAN (Kenya Organic Agriculture Network) info@koan.co.ke — national organic standards and registration
- PELUM Kenya info@pelumkenya.net — leading the intra-Africa trade and organic market access process
- County Agriculture Extension Officers — peer review support and government linkage



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