

Farmer decision-making: Discourse 2

LGB socio-economic survey and mud-silo evaluation study – Mike Morris, 4 April 2003

Dear Joyce, Prince, Sam, colleagues..

I read with interest Joyce's response to my earlier suggestions for the two proposed questionnaires, and accept her understanding of the rationale for each. In these particular contexts – situation analysis for the LGB survey, and evaluation and adoption rate survey of the mud-silos – then I concede that the respective questionnaires go some way to the realisation of their respective objectives. (I do believe that it is always helpful to ensure the objectives are visible during the development and presentation stage).

In my last communication I was stepping back a bit (too far you might say) and questioning whether the logframe – or the coalition's understanding of it - really added up? Was it rigorously debated during the inception workshop? Were there any major concerns with the logframe rationale, or inconsistencies or gaps identified? Not very helpful if one simply wants to get on with the tasks – but I did apologise in advance for possibly being 'cantankerous' as a result of missing the workshop. That of course is a ploy - I'm cantankerous by nature, as Prince can tell you.

Stepping back even further, my position is as follows: Research and extension has largely failed poorer communities, households and individuals in many places, including in Northern Ghana. The reasons are complex. They are also well documented. New approaches have been emerging, which emphasise pluralism (i.e. diverse stakeholders e.g. producers, policy actors, development agencies, state, voluntary and private sector service providers), inclusion (e.g. demand-led research, mainlining farmers in the process) and empowerment, in meeting people's requirements. They also, notably through the livelihoods approach and poverty agenda, recognise the need to recognise that 'farmers' are diverse and not a single monolithic group. Recent CPHP developments, including changes to the PM format, the move (albeit it belated, poorly thought through and implemented) to a 'coalition' approach, are in line or response to these.

Activity sets to outputs to purpose

At the logframe level any set of 'activities' associated with a given output are deemed to be the full house of requirements to realise that output (with the only reservations being those expressed in the risks/assumptions column). Unfortunately the activities in our logframe double-up against different outputs, which is somewhat confusing. Moreover, as I attempted to suggest last time, while the outputs look reasonably obvious they are all crucially dependent on understanding 'farmer-decision making' (FDM) (i.e. what we need to know to translate our paper ideas into the real world context) – and I haven't read anything (from the inception workshop, say) that seriously sets out how we come to grips with the difficult challenge of exploring and understanding FDM - have any of you? A starting point would of course be existing literature, which I briefly referred to in my last e-mail.

Does the team, I wonder, have a mutual and robust understanding of the project proposal, and share a belief in an inclusive participatory approach (which was further emphasised by the PAC review team)? Do we have a team communication strategy (which I recall is included on the inception meeting agenda in response to the PAC's comments)? Will the sum total of all our separate tasks add up to something worthwhile for poorer rural households - or could the purpose be better and more cost effectively realised if we 'development elites' were bypassed, and the money handed directly to farmers' groups? Had we to be accountable to rural communities - the projected beneficiaries – will our contributions add up? OK, I'm backing closer to the edge...but is it a disastrous vertical drop, or the foot of a challenging climb?

If the project outputs are to be meaningful (i.e. initiate a process which will ultimately improve small-holder farmers livelihoods – our purpose) then I believe we should seek to ensure that all activity sets (i.e. the processes we engage in) comply with the 'principles' set out in the above and earlier observations (i.e. disaggregating the rural community, the need to develop a framework for understanding FDM in the context of livelihoods and vulnerability, mainlining farmer participation throughout the process [also a key PAC recommendation] and pluralism). This project really could help poorer people select more appropriate storage options, and offset the failure of many earlier approaches, and the poor record of our own organisations with respect to the rural poor. But to do

this we really do have to work not only on our pluralism, where we have a good start, but also and primarily on the inclusion – active participation - of a diversity of farmers.

LGB socio-economic survey and mud-silo evaluation study

As above, I understand Joyce's rationale for the respective questionnaires based on the PM, and thus far it is entirely valid. As I see it however, the challenge for either – situation analysis or evaluation and adoption rate survey – is answering: how will farmer diversity be captured; who will choose the group parameters; and, how well will the findings articulate, or throw light on, the situation or evaluation for different farmers? The survey methods proposed are familiar and legitimate social science tools, but they also effectively rely on social scientists for their analysis and interpretation. Moreover, in their present format, they fail to address issues of access, the diversity, plenitude and mix of asset types, livelihood patterns, that are associated with well-being and resilience (or in the negative, with ill-being and vulnerability). What rationale or framework links the questions on either form with FDM? Can we ensure that the paper farmers resurrected from these statistics are meaningfully grounded in and throw light on FDM as undertaken by different types of real farmers? Is there be an accessible common denominator in the two questionnaires that will facilitate comparisons, and add value to our understanding of FDM? (Or should we not look or go beyond the 'tasks' somewhat artificially drawn up in the PM activities)?

What would happen if we were to adopt the 'principle' of inclusion and work at mainlining farmers (as agreed with the CPHP) in contributing to (improving) the strategic activity sets in the PM? Clearly interviewing them (even if we have trained the field staff), and asking questions that WE formulated in line with OUR conceptions of the parameters of wealth or poverty, farmer type, FDM models etc, does not really measure up. Some sort of fully participatory process would be needed to determine how best this be done...

My earlier offering – involve members of the community in well-being/poverty ranking to identify the main sub-groups (the indicators typically overlap with 'livelihood' terms) within the community – albeit initially an external imposition, avoids 'experts' somewhat arbitrarily deciding which of their data they will use for differentiation purposes. Working then with farmers (additionally selected or worked with by gender, age or social identities) from each of the sub-groups would actively ensure that different groups of farmers were represented. Technology, pest and/or crop issues would then be addressed in more focused questionnaires. This approach would not only allow qualitative comparisons between 'equivalent' sub-groups responding to the two questionnaires, but also sub-group work and/or its findings could be used to develop a framework of understanding for FDM.

Specifically with respect the **mud-silo evaluation** and adoption, it is important not only to interview those choosing to adopt or not, but also others 'outside' the project. Not only do we need to explore the 'who' and 'why' of adoption and non-adoption, we need to understand why other poorer farmers have not benefited. The latter is equally interesting as it would throw up both researchable constraints (e.g. intermediate agencies do not recognise, disaggregate, have the know-how, have the capacity or interest etc to work with poorer farmers), and where this technological fix is simply not appropriate, researchers – stakeholders in storage issues - would have a better understanding of why not, which could be of immense use in profiling the factors associated with FDM (i.e. the responses of non-adopters **AND** those of individuals passed over by the promoting agencies, have great value, for improving the decision-tree/targeting/scaling-up of the specific technology fix (mud-silos), for identifying tech. modifications or institutional constraints and improvements, for the project overall and storage stakeholders with a mandate for the bigger picture.

I appreciate that things will have moved on, and this 'message' has already been read and largely dismissed, but unless we attempt to use 'joined-up thinking' throughout the project processes, cost effectiveness associated with individual tasks will contribute no overriding added-value to individual outputs or the project as a whole. Some specific questions and points:

- Is the unit of analysis the HH or the individual? Need to identify position of individuals within the HH.
- Neither questionnaire appears to adequately disaggregate 'farmers' by wealth, social or political connections, physical capital etc. How then will we be able to use this information to inform/elaborate the development of any 'decision-tree mechanism'? If Qs. not carried out in

specified groups then we need to take account of these other dimensions in each Q – see below – but this makes for a long form.

- Group discussions have now been included on the mud-silo questionnaire – great! What's important however is the selection of the groups. This is not specified, but I have argued that participatory well-being ranked groups with gender subsets would make sense. (There is a sleight of hand here (i.e. in the above) – it is in effect a hypothesis; same sex members of such groups may practice different livelihood strategies (i.e. make certain decisions in different ways).
- I think both Q. should more fully explore where, how, what, and from-or-with whom, individuals secure or share information. This is most creatively done in gendered groups, and again there is good evidence that individual's information systems are linked to their livelihood status (vulnerability, accessible assets, and strategies) for which 'well-being' status would act as proxy. (NB where extension staff/agencies etc select groups, they often select on a skewed basis and unwittingly or deliberately omit people with different [often more limited] communication networks.) Example questions follow.
- The Qs. do not themselves explore assets held at the community level (i.e. differentiate between localities). Livelihoods/poverty will differ according to favourable and less favourable areas, as determined by bio-physical characteristics and socio-economic characteristics (infrastructural development which may impede access to markets, health & educational facilities, safe water; numbers of NGOs; presence or proximity of levels of government), together with political-cultural dimensions. These can of course be explored outside the Qs., but we should agree some sort of protocol for this?

The following questionnaire was drawn up and used by colleagues in Uganda. AS above I am only really recommending the 'information' section be included, and that we identify 'livelihood' groups using participatory ranked well-being status as a proxy.

Understanding the nature of the farmer and her/his household (HH)

What we are trying to find out: ↓	About the participating farmers: ↓	About the farmer's household: ↓			
Name of participating farmer:		X			
Farmer's age and sex:		X			
Relationship to HH head (<i>head, first wife, son, daughter</i>)		Is HH head male or female?			
Length of residence in village?					
Ethnicity or tribal origin?					
Number of people in HH (<i>ie men, women, boys, girls</i>)	X	M:	W:	B:	G:
Education or training? (<i>total years of schooling</i>)					
How many adults are able to work in HH?	<i>seeking labour potential, indication of sickness, dependency ratio etc</i>				
Volume of staple food harvested: (<i>Approximate for last year</i>)					
Average monthly consumption:					
Did farmer and/or HH experienced food shortages last year - for how many months? When?					
Where did you get food in the case of shortages? (<i>purchases, credit, loan from neighbours/ relatives, food aid</i>)					
What physical assets does the farmer or the HH own? (<i>eg tools - hand hoe, plough - bicycle, truck, radio..</i>)					
On and off-farm activities undertaken to generate income (monetary and non-monetary contributions to HH consumption):					
What crops are grown? (<i>types, use [food/cash], acreage & yields</i>) Cassava Millet Groundnuts Sorghum Sweet potatoes Maize Yams Cowpeas Other					

What we are trying to find out: ↓	About the participating farmers: ↓	About the farmer's household: ↓
<p>What livestock are kept and why? (<i>types and numbers owned: use [eg draught power, cash, milk, meat, hides]; products and/or livestock sales</i>)</p> <p>Cattle Goats/sheep Chickens / Guinea Fowls Turkeys Pigs - Other</p>		
<p>Livelihood activities associated with the collection of wild products for cash and/or consumption? (<i>eg firewood, fruit, honey, building poles, bushmeat, medicinal plants, shea nuts</i>)</p>		
<p>Petty business interests of farmer and of HH (<i>food kiosk, local brewing, brick making, petty trading, charcoal burning.</i>)</p>		
<p>Did farmer or other HH member provide labour for others in last 12 months? (<i>on/off farm; for cash, food, reciprocal arrangements</i>)</p>		
<p>Has farmer or HH hired labour in the last 12 months? (<i>on/off farm; for cash, food, reciprocal arrangements</i>)</p>		
<p>Do you (or HH) receive pensions from earlier employment, Remittances from absent members (<i>Large or small - compare with labour rates?</i>)</p>		

How and from where do HH members receive information?

What we are trying to find out, and possible questions: ↓	↓ Participating farmer	↓ All other HH members
How do you or HH members solve your agricultural problems? <i>(eg accessing new seeds, advice on pests and diseases, storage problems)</i>		
Have you ever received farming information through;- <i>(posters, radio, AEs, NGO staff, farmers associations, other farmers, training courses, books, school or school children etc)</i>		
How useful is the information received if any		
What did you like and what didn't you like.		
What do you recommend for other farmers to use or accept and why		
Was the information understandable and accepted		
What change has the information caused to farmers		
In which form do they want extension material?		
Which group or associations do you belong to?		

General location information

Region:		Sub-county:	
District:		Parish:	
County:		Village:	
Available Infrastructure			
Markets (and distance):			
Water points / Wells:			
Schools – Primary / SS:			
Roads:			
Reliability of rainfall:			
Others:			
Extension services & community activities			
Agric. Extension Delivery:			
Public Health:			
Community Development:			
Co-operative:			
Farmer Groups:			
Processing Facilities:			
Agro-ecological data			
Land and soils:			
Vegetation cover:			
Common pool resources:			
Others:			
Crop general information (not relevant)			
Last year highest price:		Last year lowest price:	
Which month was it?		Which month was it?	
Is the village representative of the district, regarding cowpea production?			