Discussion paper: Methodology for engaging farmers – Mike Morris, June 2003

Which Farmers?

In the project literature farmers are variously described as partners, participants, stakeholders, end-users and beneficiaries. Different groups of farmers play (or will play) an active role in Outputs 1, 4 and 6, and are central to Output 3, which might suggest that some groups or individuals should be considered part of the project team (this was mooted in the PM&E discussion document)[1]. Earlier work has already selected groups of farmers, and prior to / at the Shinyanga workshop we agreed to explore how other storage stakeholders differentiate the rural community, with a view to developing understanding and lesson learning for future project activities. Not only do we need a protocol - as Brighton suggests (e-mail 8 June, 2003) - for selecting farmers for the participatory evaluation, Output 3, but also we need to systematise our methodology for interacting with (mainlining?) farmers across the project. Moreover this should be in line with the types of farmers identified in the project's higher objectives - at purpose level (a given objective from the CPHP) 'poor farmers' are identified, but this description clearly invites disaggregation.

Technological fix and/or farmers' group fit?

The project has a clear technology focus / technological aim - the application of information in the form of materials, tools, knowledge, practice and/or skills. If however the technology is to contribute to the project purpose - to reduce poor people's food insecurity - it has to be suitably promoted / marketed to reach such potential user groups. The better our understanding is of these potential groups (e.g. their capabilities, knowledge networks), the more effectively and efficiently (and equitably) we shall be able to match promotion material to the most appropriate groups. Moreover a clearer understanding of the profile of different groups should facilitate the development /refinement of the technology (e.g. practices) making it more accessible to, or better meeting the needs of, specific farmer groups.

Clarifying objectives

As above the purpose level objective (i.e. the 'impact' of the project or change expected after the project has finished) is a given, while the project design process identified the 6 output objectives (i.e. **changes** to be effected within the time span of the project) deemed to be essential to realising the purpose (see Box 1 for objectives-monitoring linkage).

I have already suggested (e-mail 9 June 2003) that there may be some advantage in revisiting the Output 3 objective. Output 3 refers to **evaluating the user acceptability**, in terms of efficacy, cost, application method, taste, cooking and brewing characteristics, **of DE treated stored grain**; a shorthand which intrinsically conflates farmer diversity and side-steps the circulatory issue of whether users determine acceptability or acceptability defines users.

(Having now reflected..) It seems that the Output 3 objective might more rationally, more long-windedly, but ultimately more usefully, be expressed along the lines of: using a farmer participatory approach **to develop** a fuller/comprehensive understanding (the change - new knowledge) of the factors/criteria and their respective weightings used by different groups to asses grain protectants; and **to asses** the DE technology against a subset of these factors (NB subset because some crucial factors [e.g. taste, cost effectiveness] cannot yet be tested). This clearly extends the debate - relocates the output - into the realm of farmer decision-making (FDM), motivation etc, which invites, I would suggest, some interesting considerations.

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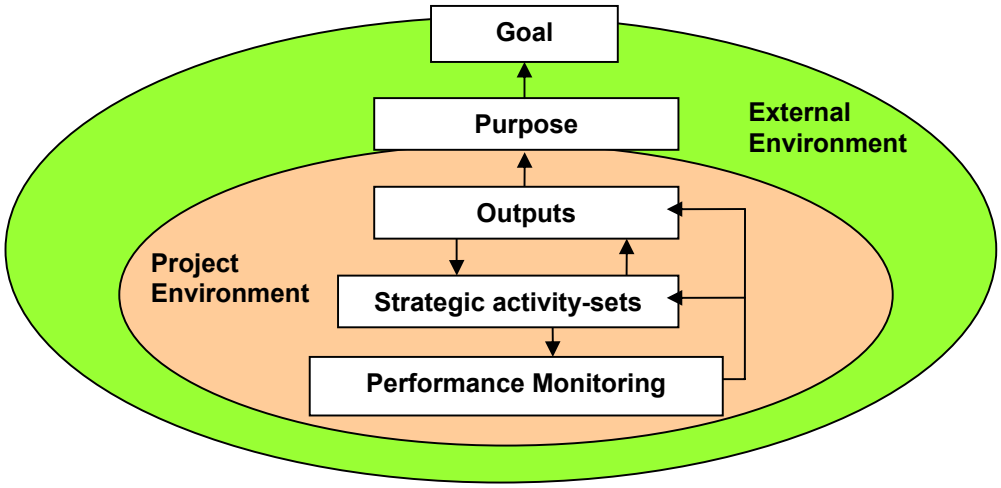
[1] Actively - unashamedly - acknowledging that particular groups of farmers are part of the team (i.e. should be given / facilitated to have comparable 'voice' to other team players) would move us toward the zenith of demand-led research or participation - *collegiate* à la Biggs, or *control* according to the DFID typology. My impression is however, that research projects inevitably discover a number of constraints which frustrate the realisation of an otherwise awesome logic. Why is this?

Box 1. Objectives and monitoring: The logframe presents goal, purpose and outputs as a set of nested objectives. Logframe 'activities' are the strategic activity sets deployed to realise outputs. The project's performance in realising the activities and outputs can be monitored.



Strategies and activity sets: Strategies describe how human and financial resources will be applied - activities - to achieve the stated output objectives

Were we looking at FDM with respect to (w.r.t) storage protectants generally rather than DEs alone, and seeking to scope the range of factors that influence different user groups' decision-making, then at this stage we might (should?) be considering which approaches from the FDM literature would be most suitable - **technology** (TA), **pest** (PA) or **crop** (CA) **focused** approaches, or more holistically, farmer-type or livelihood approaches (LA). We might consider comparing and contrasting different technologies, different crops or pests, across different groups. This could be done through one-off focussed field work with different groups, in addition to the participatory trials (which need not be confined to DE treatments?). Matrix scoring could be used to compare different technologies, and cost considerations included by arbitrarily setting DEs at <,= and > the cost of ASD on different occasions? Moreover by emphasising the FDM w.r.t. storage issues we not only avoid the limitations & pitfalls associated with 'validation' approach, we are better placed to confirm the output/s to purpose linkage/s.

Should we introduce FDM shorthand to re-write output 3 in terms of FDM? While I am not necessarily suggesting we change the wording of Output 3, just trying to clarify its objectives, making this 'clarification' explicit (in the logframe/to CPHP), besides being logical, might also play to our advantage for the review - we would be demonstrating that our monitoring plan is working and reinforce our 'learning process' credentials. Food for insecurity?

The implication of this clarification would feed through as already suggested to a project-wide operational methodology (to match our actual awareness that farming communities are not monolithic), which in turn would lead to improved promotional and better targeting, a better fix on adoption and any subsequent adaptation. Demonstrating the value of an approach which disaggregates farming communities, the 'poor', might well lead to wider benefits were intermediate project stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, planners, service-providers) to adopt the approach. But how do we start?

Possible steps to realising a protocol

1. I'm assuming we would first share thoughts to date which argue the need to develop a project-wide methodology for interacting with farmers in their diversity, as driven by the need to proceed with, but also bearing implications for, Output 3. We could invite comment and contributions on the **objective** of Output 3, using the above re-write plus modifications from yourself and/or a FDM

spin, to stimulate wider debate of the issues. The outcome of this step would be the establishment of a clearer, mutually held understanding of the Output 3 objective.

Output 3 draft re-write: **to develop** a comprehensive understanding of the factors used by different groups to asses grain protectants and **to asses** the DE technology against a subset of these factors using a farmer-participatory approach.

The significance of the proposed change to Output 3 relates to the switch from a technology-focused approach (TA) to a farmer-type/livelihoods approach (LA), which acknowledges that the decision-making process will differ between different groups. Moreover it seems probable that the outcome of decision-making (i.e. technology choice) by any particular group, may well change throughout the storage season according to different factors (e.g. price movements, nature and timing of different pest attacks). So a further early task is for the team (with others) to explore the axes or identities which might most usefully be used to disaggregate 'farmers', the 'poor'. Usefulness here might include relevance to output objective 3, or FDM approaches (TA, PA, CA, LA), but what might be meant by 'usefulness', 'relevance' etc, should itself be open to further debate.

2. Teams in the study areas could be invited to elaborate / brainstorm on possible identity axes, and on their relevance - strengths and weaknesses - to the redrafted output objective and FDM approaches, and to the study areas [e.g. social, political & cultural dimensions, ecological zones], storage and post harvest issues etc. Table 1 suggests an example framework which might be used to structure thoughts. They should be invited to critically reflect on and incorporate their, and/or the project's previous experience of selecting farmer participants.

Table 1. Social or farmer differentiation: identities, relevance and method

Identity axes / group unit of analysis	Relevance to output 3 & FDM approaches, study area (strengths & weaknesses)	Selection method (strengths & weaknesses)
Wealth or well-being groups	Intrinsic, albeit subjective, poverty focus; often close to livelihood asset analysis; could include gender; comprehensive - all wealth groups could be involved.	Wealth/wellbeing ranking / PPA methodology Strengths: participatory Weakness:
Gender	Needs linking with other cleavage.	
Individuals vs households (plus MHHs vs FHHs)		
Livelihoods strategies - main livelihood sources (using various typologies:	Would provide comprehensive picture of people's livelihoods (LA), but might represent overkill on FDM w.r.t. storage pests and technologies.	Seasonal calendars of production, employment and income. Q to explore nature of livelihoods. Potentially comprehensive (S✔), but time & skill consuming (W).
Food self-sufficient p.a., food insufficient (variation of subsistence vs cash crop producer)	Narrower LA focus with food vs cash crop implications; assoc. literature picks up on motivational aspects e.g. subsistence farmers more risk averse	Questionnaire; could be readily carried out by FEW; need to avoid under-statement of productivity?
Use of different existing	TA focus	

treatments (e.g. indigenous, ASD).		
Membership (and non-M) of community groups currently contacted by the extension services (e.g. IPM groups, FarmAfrica farmers' groups).	Will differ according to nature of groups; some suggestion that T focused groups (e.g. IPM) will include 'early adopters'; in Shy. non IPM group members included the majority of poorer farmers & the richest few, which suggests a poverty connection - but not as reliable as wealth groups.	Already in place, therefore easy and cheap to take advantage. Would it be difficult to engage non-members? Their absence would significantly reduce value of approach.
Volunteer farmers		Self selecting

3. Feedback from exercise 2 (columns 1 & 2), would hopefully suggest preferred option/s. (The alternative would be to take an executive decision for a given FDM approach, and work it up.) These could be more critically examined and debated, and the resource, time, skill, ease etc. implications of the associated selection method (column 3), and sampling issues[2], be introduced to aid a final decision. Different methods could (I guess) be operated at different study locations to accommodate different circumstances (e.g. team preferences, skills, experience); this too would provide for comparisons between the 'identity' selections and any respective emphases in terms of FDM approaches.

4. With one (or more) identity axes selected, a working protocols (for each) would be drafted in detail by a sub-group, and again shared (inside and outside the team) for additions, comments etc. Work could also commence on (what would presumably be?) a questionnaire for individuals not engaged in trialling DEs (or other treatments?), and on extending the selection protocol to include trial procedures.

5. Protocols (including questionnaires) would then be pre-testing (where? by whom?) and modifications incorporated. It will not be possible to pre-test the trial component of the protocol, but lessons learnt where it is first initiated would be shared.

It is perhaps worth restating that 'negative' outcomes in this context, may be equally as useful as endorsements or validation (i.e. identifying 'groups' for whom the technology is not suited, or criteria the treatment fails to meet, can equally lead to improvements in targeting and promotion).

[2] For example: potential measures of 'representativeness' of participants with respect to any disaggregated 'group'; representation of a greater diversity of 'groups'?