

## Farmer decision-making: Discourse 1

### General Comments – Mike Morris, 21 March 2003

Apologies for my absence from the inception workshop; this was due to events beyond my control – a ruptured Achilles tendon (which will see me in plaster for a total of approximately 12 weeks and my mobility severely constrained). Unfortunately this means that I missed the opportunity to learn from colleagues and contribute to the project's inception, and will be unawares of much that will have taken place. The following remarks will clearly be limited for these reasons, so I would hope that where these comments reflect my ignorance, colleagues would be forgiving. However, it may be that my removed perspective might be considered to provide a check on whether the emerging project literature would make sense to interested observers, say, CPHP staff.

### Comments following the inception workshop

I had hoped that by attending the inception workshop I would discover what we all felt this project was really about, and that through robust discussions a firmer shared vision of the project and its potential would have emerged. Not having enjoyed that experience, I have to confess that much of what we have already jointly written and repeatedly amended remains somewhat mysterious to me.

The 4 outputs are however reasonably clear. The first relates to **storage technologies**, their validation and areas of relevance; the second and third relate to **dissemination** and **promotion** respectively – albeit the former may be viewed as a subset of the latter, which in turn requires understanding of the communication context and capacity of intermediate (e.g. state and civil society extension agencies) and end-users (e.g. diverse farmers and householders); and the fourth which goes beyond the communication context of farmers into the realm of **farmer decision-making**. While for me they all have a certain familiarity and overlap, it is 'farmer decision-making' which represents the biggest challenge, presumably because it is so unambiguously about farmers, rather than agency workers or researchers, making decisions. Arguably all four require understanding of how farmers make some decisions, but as for output 1 ('management options **further** validated by farmers..'), this is generally prescribed in the first three outputs.

I propose to keep 'farmer decision-making' firmly in mind while attempting to offer some suggestions that might help upgrade the draft questioners on LGBs and mud-silos, or rather suggest an approach for undertaking these surveys.

### Farmer decision-making (FDM) – the literature

The literature<sup>1</sup> on FDM suggests a number of approaches or starting points for fieldwork to explore FDM. They include approaches that centre on the technology, pest, or crop, or more holistically on the livelihood of individual. I do not propose to elaborate these now but would invite us to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of these different approaches – perhaps we could each elaborate the following table (I include a couple of suggestions from Robinson et al (2000) to get us going)?

Approach	Strengths	Weaknesses
Technology		No info on pre-adoption decisions
Pest		Seasonal dimensions not covered
Crop		
Livelihood		

Where is this going? (Aside from my difficulty with the logframe approach in which there is inevitable overlap between the different sets of activities and the different outputs, as in our case – or could that be because of the overlap or lack of distinctiveness between the outputs?) The two draft questionnaires (Qs) appear (according to the titles) to have an overarching focus on LGB and mud silos, respectively – pest and technology. The contents of both then move into exploring demography (or a very sparse livelihoods take), crop aspects in moderate detail, technologies (hardware and practices), and a final section on pests and the mud silo technology respectively.

<sup>1</sup> See for example Robinson et al (2000), Analysis of farmers' decision-making in pest management. NRI-led component report of DFID CPP Project R7500.

In the Project Memorandum (PM) we were invited to identify (Section C) the different categories of poor people expected to benefit from the project, their specific livelihoods problems, and just how the project would help them. We were also asked questions about the different livelihood problems faced by men and women, and about the different impact of the expected outputs on men and women etc.

Moreover, in assessing the PM the PAC requested we ensure that farmers be better mainlined in the project.

Taking these together - the FDM theme, and the CPHP emphasis [rightly] on poverty and disaggregating 'poor people', and on mainlining the involvement of farmers – it seems to me that the Qs in their present form don't secure enough information to enable us to disaggregate individuals by socio-economic or livelihoods (e.g. social, human, physical, financial and natural capital) standing, and presently omit key questions relating to the communication or decision-making aspects, both of which are typically different for individuals of different wealth (or well-being) status, gender, age etc. And I don't believe we can afford to omit the people centred livelihoods approach.

How can we best get round this? A fully articulated livelihoods Q (as Prince will be able to attest) is demanding for the extension worker and farmer respectively, and requires a lot of time for analysis. This could be done, but at a serious cost (perhaps Prince could circulate a copy of the cowpea 'livelihood questionnaire'?).

The following might be better and more participatory. A well-being exercise<sup>2</sup> (or wealth ranking) would be undertaken by a small focus group (5-8 people) at each village. They would agree on local proxy indicators for wealth/poverty (e.g. acres cultivated, animals owned, education, tools owned, house quality etc) and identify 3-5 wealth/poverty groups. They would also suggest a wealth group for all members of the village.

Say four wealth groups were identified, then meetings would be held with representatives of each group broken down further into men and women (or any other key identity) i.e. 8 sub-groups all together. The respective Qs could then be undertaken with all represented individuals, but would now include the additional information re their wealth ranking. But certain sections of the draft Qs (including missing sections on communications etc) would also or primarily be addressed through sub-group activities:

- collect background information (e.g. key identity status, location, farming system, capacity to receive/access information) by questionnaire.
- time-line to explore **post-harvest information and technology sources, changes over time, players, media, impact** etc.
- transect walk to observe **methods of storage**, crops grown, livestock reared, homestead condition.
- **information linkage diagrams** or matrix for each sub-group.
- pair-wise matrix to identify **preferred media channels for a given message** (by sub-group)

This would not replace the Qs, but rather provide an additional mechanism for cross-referencing and getting a more informed picture of different types of farmers (by participatorily selected identities), their choice of technologies and crops, and knowledge of pests. The Qs would need some reshaping to dovetail with the sub-group exercises. If this is of interest, I can elaborate.

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<sup>2</sup> **Well-being ranking** (see wealth ranking & LAST) - people-centred perceptions of poverty/wealth and the causes of vulnerability, and their distribution in the village.

- Well-being (the idealised outcome of a SL) ranking uses local proxy indicators for 'wealth' which relate to and/or reflect the outcome of household livelihood strategies. The group might be asked to identify proxy indicators for the following classes: surplus (accumulation s.), self-sufficient, poor, poorer, between life and death (BLAD - the ultra-poor). As for wealth ranking, the participating group should be invited to distinguish between the **signs** and **causes** of wealth/poverty e.g. a tin roof may be a one-off gift from an urban relative, rather than a measure of current earning power; cattle may belong to richer clansmen who seek to spread the risk of disease or rustling i.e. the measure of wealth may be more accurately aligned with social capital and patronage.

Finally, I think it is essential to spell out what the overall objective of any exercise is; that way one is more likely to get what one wants. And for each section of the Q it is useful to have a brief sentence indicating what its specific objective is. This is particularly helpful to the fieldworker who may not have had any role in designing the questionnaire. Despite the titles, it was not very clear what the draft Qs intend or expect to find? It would also be useful to know how Joyce expects to analyse them?