



Assessing needs

fact sheet



Combine field observations with discussions to better identify problems and opportunities

Why do a needs assessment?

Farmers often ignore recommendations because the recommendations are not suitable, not profitable or too risky for the farmers. A good needs assessment starts with diagnosis of the farmers' actual needs and circumstances and results in developing and recommending more appropriate solutions.

What is a needs assessment?

A good needs assessment combines discussion and field observation to identify the actual problems facing farmers, the "true cause" of those problems and possible solutions based on discussion with farmers, researchers and extension workers. Recommendations are discussed and developed with farmers based on the farmers' resources and circumstances.

How do I do a needs assessment?

1. **Identify representative areas**
Identify an area (or areas) to survey that are representative of the zone of work.
2. **Collect secondary data**
Compare crop or animal requirements with factors such as topography, rainfall and soils.
3. **Plan the assessment**
Identify who will help with the survey (include researchers, extension and farmers).
4. **Visit the field and talk with farmers**
Use participatory methods to see what farmers perceive as problems. Visit farmers' fields to diagnose problems (Modify and use the attached survey). Talk about production, postharvest, marketing and price issues, etc..
5. **Analyze and prioritize problems**
Use field observations and input from discussions to assess and prioritize problems (how many people are affected? what is the cost in terms of lost yield or profit? etc.). Allow the different groups to prioritize differently. See note below on "Perceptions versus reality".
6. **Identify the true cause of problems**
Viable solutions depend on correctly identifying the true cause of the problem. For example, a problem of field water could be caused by poor land leveling rather than water availability.
7. **Develop solutions with farmers**
Farmers need to accept solutions. Discuss options with them and see how possible solutions might (or might not) fit with their systems.

"Perceptions versus reality": Sometimes, a factor may be perceived as a problem when it is actually not a problem. Other times, farmers may identify the wrong cause of a problem or they may not be aware of a problem. Knowing the perceptions of the farmers is important as this represents their "reality". The following table summarizes these factors and shows the appropriate response to each.

	Farmers perceive a problem	Farmers do not perceive a problem
Factor "really" is a Problem	OK – Jointly look for solutions	Raise awareness of farmers , then discuss
Factor is not "really" a problem	Help change farmer understanding	OK – no action required.

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Site/region: _____ Season: _____ Year: _____

Production factor ⁺	Priority	Done by whom?*	Present practice	Preferred scenario	Comments (Cause, if a major problem)
Cropping systems/ crop rotations		Not applicable			
Land preparation					
Primary tillage					
Residue management					
Secondary tillage					
Land leveling					
Timeliness					
Varieties		Not applicable			
Current varieties					
Expected flowering					
Expected maturity					
Crop establishment					
Seed or seedling quality		Not applicable			
Planting date and rate (kg/ha)					
Timeliness					
Planting method					
Weed control					
Method and timing					
Rate and type if herbicide					

⁺ Combine these discussion questions with field observations to validate perceptions and to better prioritize problems and possible solutions

* By hired labor (male or female) or family labor (male or female).

Production factor	Priority	Done by whom?	Present practice	Preferred	Comments (Cause, if a major problem)
Nutrition & fertilizer use					
Type & amount (kg/ha)		Not applicable			
Timing (when applied?)					
Is NPK use balanced?					
Micronutrients applied?					
Organic manure used?					
Pests					
Insects					
Types found and methods of control used		Not applicable			
Diseases					
Types found and methods of control used		Not applicable			
Other pests e.g., Rats or birds		Not applicable			
Water management					
Irrigation type: canal, pump, well, etc.		Not applicable			
Water table depth					
Drought or flood damage?					

Post-production factor	Priority	Done by whom?	Present practice	Preferred	Comments (Cause, if a major problem)
Harvest					
Method and timing					
Processing					
Storage					
Product quality		Not applicable			
Marketing, price					
Knowledge access, extension					
Credit availability					
Labor cost, availability		Not applicable			
Inputs cost, availability		Not applicable			
Land tenure		Not applicable			
Own					
Rent					
Share cropping					
Average yield		Not applicable			
Highest recorded yield					
Yield gap					
Significance of rice in household income					
Farm animals		Not applicable			
Off-farm employment					
Others (specify)					

What does farmer perceive as the greatest problem? _____