



Identifying Problems. Farmer Focus Groups – Seasonal Calendar

Farmer focus groups are used to help identify the needs within a community. The approach below uses a seasonal cropping calendar as the central discussion tool.

How to conduct a farmer Focal Group

1. **Introduction. Welcome and Goals.** The moderator welcomes the farmers, and
 - 1.1 Introduces any visiting group members
 - 1.2 Outlines the purpose of the meeting – e.g., to identify jointly with the farmers the major problems they face.
 - 1.3 Notes that discussions will be recorded on posted sheets for ease of discussion
 - 1.4 Notes that participant comments remain anonymous.
 - 1.5 Asks for respect – i.e., do not interrupt others while speaking and note there are no wrong or right answers.
 - 1.6 indicates the meeting will last or take less than 1 hour.

2. Materials and Format

The facilitator uses two large sheets of paper. One is used to record both the crops for each season and any special management practices for the crops (Figure at top right). On the other sheet, record problems as stated by the farmers. These sheets are posted (when possible) so that the farmers can see the notes as they are taken (Figure at right).

The moderator introduces the seasonal cropping calendar to the group which is used as a visual aid to correspond with the questions (below). The questions start at a seasonal level, then go down to the crop level and then to specific management and business activities and problems for important crops. Ideally, this approach brings attention to all major aspects of the farming system in a given community.

Questions

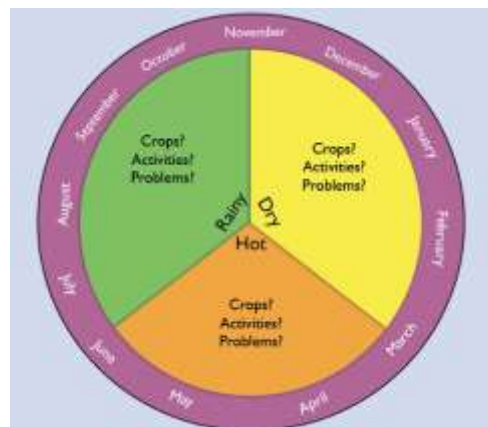
1. What are the main constraints corresponding to each season?
2. What crops do you grow in each season?
3. What are major constraints or problems for each crop?
4. Are there crops that you used to grow but have since abandoned? If yes, why?
5. Please explain the farming activities that are carried out for the major crops (including purchase of inputs, production, postharvest, marketing)?
6. What are constraints for each activity?
7. What other problems are occurring?

3. Grouping, Ranking and Scoring of Problems

The moderator presents the flip-chart paper to the group with all of the recorded problems. The problems are numbered and the farmers are given pens and small pieces of paper. The farmers are asked to write the numbers corresponding with the three most important problems. The results are tallied and presented to the farmers. (In our experience, illiterate farmers were able to do this because all of the problems were read out loud and others could help write the numbers even if the farmer could not.) Some discussion may follow the ranking of problems and the facilitator will continue to record these comments.

4. Closing

The farmers are thanked for participating in the focus group discussion. A small, culturally appropriate, gift of appreciation may be given to the farmers. (In Cambodia, bars of soap were appropriate.)



Example of seasonal cropping calendar.



Notes are made on the posted sheets.

Use field visits to confirm problems identified during discussions.

Developed with input from Neda Yousefian, Frederik Sagemuller and Mark Bell 2012

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