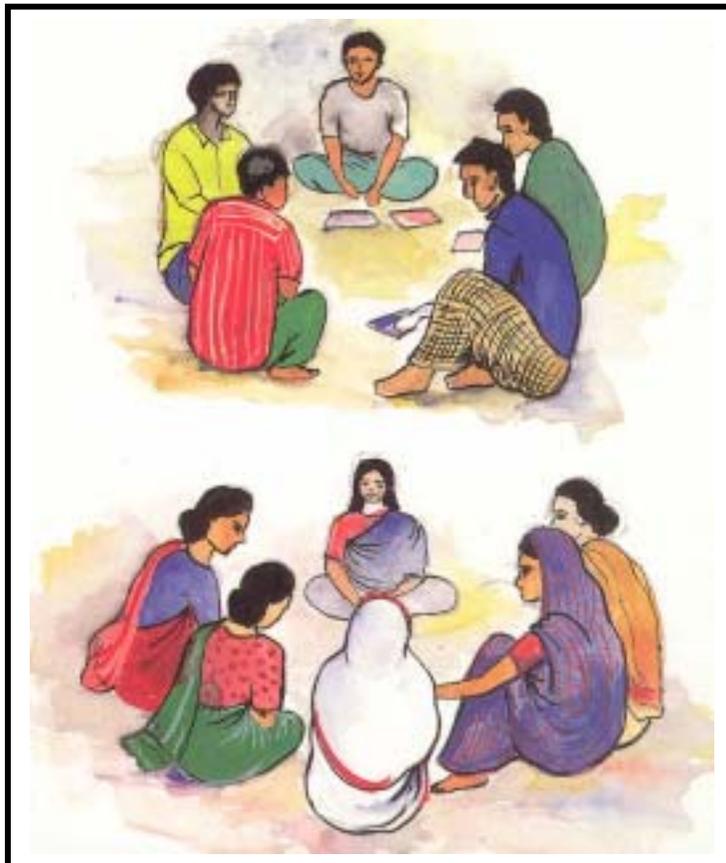




THE PROBLEM CENSUS



***A GROUP EXTENSION METHOD FOR
IDENTIFYING FARMERS SPECIFIC
PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS***

THE PROBLEM CENSUS

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Department of Agricultural Extension

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FORWARD

The Department of Agricultural Extension is making major reforms to the way in which it works, to enable it to offer an effective service to all members of the rural community. These reforms are detailed in a new Extension Manual which will be issued shortly.

The new Extension Manual emphasises working with groups, and responsiveness to farmers needs. The Problem Census is a useful technique for staff to use in assessing the needs of a group of farmers. The Problem Census is a major step away from the top down planning of the past, towards bottom-up planning with the participation of farmers.

I am sure that, through using this technique, staff will become more effective at providing the type of service that the farmers of Bangladesh require. I wish staff well in the application of the Problem Census, and look forward to the development and use of other participatory techniques.

M A Satter
Director General
Department of Agricultural Extension

PREFACE

One of the key functions of the Field Services Wing of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAB) is to provide effective extension services to all farmer categories including small and marginal farmers, women, disadvantaged groups and youths.

In order to provide an effective service, it is essential that extension staff have a clear understanding of farmers needs and problems, and farmers ideas for solving these problems. Extension programmes at thana and district level are to be "bottom-up". This means that they are to be based on the information farmers want, and with as much farmer participation as possible.

The Problem Census provides staff with a specific technique that they can use, with groups of farmers according to farmer category, to identify information needs, problems and potential solutions. It is a participatory technique.

I wish staff well in the use of the Problem Census for bottom-up planning, and look forward to hearing the results of this work.

A K M Tafsiruddin Siddique

Director

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Objective

A Problem Census is a needs assessment process based around an agricultural topic. The objective of a Problem Census is to :

help a group of farmers identify, analyze and rank specific agricultural problems, and suggest possible solutions.

Important Features

The Problem Census is an informal discussion facilitated by Block Supervisors. This means that participants identify problems and solutions, not the Block Supervisor. The **participants** are farmers who have something in common with each other. They may be from the same socio-economic category, or grow the same crop, or already be members of an extension group or a group affiliated with a Non Government Organisation (NGO). It is important that they have features in common, in order for them to reach some consensus about problems and solutions. The location is a village, not a departmental office or market place.

Uses

The Problem Census can be used in a number of ways, including:

- Day to day extension work with farmers groups in the normal course of field activities;
- As a first step in developing local extension programmes, at block, thana or district level;
- As a means of raising consciousness about common problems faced by farmers. This can lead to co-ordinated action by the farmers, not necessarily with future DAB involvement. In this respect it facilitates self-reliance.

Method

Each Problem Census is best conducted by a pair of Block Supervisors. Each census has six stages:

STAGE - 1: ORGANISE MEETING

- Invite a group of farmers who are interested in discussing agricultural problems to a meeting. Set a convenient date and time - one that is suitable to the farmers. Do not force people to meet if they are unwilling.
- Briefly explain to participants the objective of the Problem Census, and its important features.
- Any size of group is possible, though 20 to 30 seems to work well. The farmers should be a relatively homogenous group. For example, in a group of small or marginal farmers, it is important to avoid participants who are larger and wealthier members of the rural community.

FEMALE GROUP DISCUSSING A TOPIC



MALE GROUP DISCUSSING A TOPIC



STAGE - 2: EXPLAIN TOPIC

- State a topic for the group to discuss.
- The topics used can be decided at the thana office before field work, or defined through discussions with farmers. A general Mini Problem Census could be conducted to identify key topics. In a mini problem census, one meeting is held in every block to define key topics. The topics should reflect the agricultural issues the participants find most important.
- The topics should be specific, otherwise farmers will identify general problems in response. General problems are difficult for both farmers and DAB, to address.

Examples of topics include:

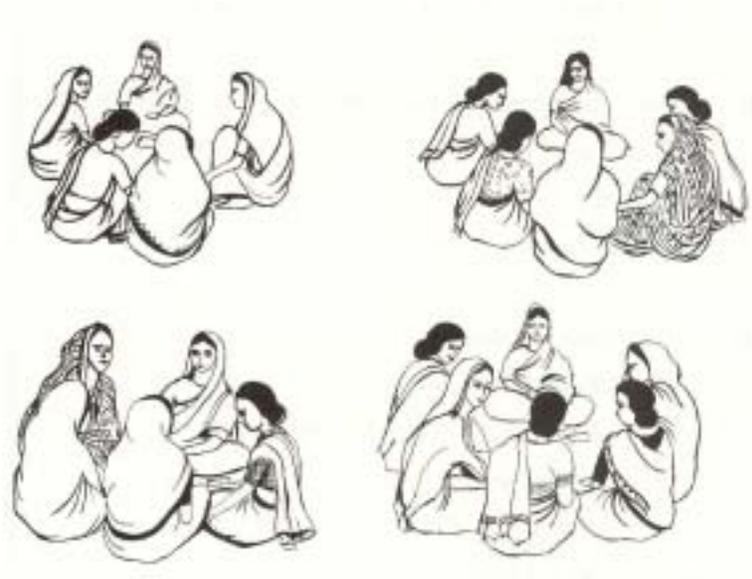
- **Seed production and preservation**
- **Soil fertility**
- **Access to extension information**

Taken together, many topics provide an indepth understanding of farmers- problems.

STAGE - 3: LIST PROBLEMS

- Divide the whole group into four sub-groups and provide pens and flip chart paper or small cards to each group. Each sub-group should sit in a separate circle, discuss the topic, and identify problems.
- A recorder should be chosen in each sub-group. The recorder writes down identified problems. This can be as one list on flip chart paper, or, when using cards, one problem per card. The recorders role is not to dominate the sub-group, but to write down identified problems.
- Extension staff will need to help when none of the farmers in the group can write. The assistance of literate friends or school children can also be sought.
- Farmers can even be encouraged to draw a simple picture to represent each problem. The picture can be drawn beside the written problem. This helps everybody understand what the problems are, whether they are literate or not;
- The extension workers should not suggest problems they think are important. The main concern is facilitating the process, rather than controlling the product.

FEMALE SUB-GROUPS LISTING PROBLEMS



MALE SUB-GROUPS LISTING PROBLEMS



STAGE - 4: COMPILE AND DISCUSS

- Once all sub-groups have a set of problems, they come together as a whole group.
- Each recorder in turn shows the set of problems so that everybody can see them, and presents to the other farmers.
- If there are any questions, these should be discussed and answered when each recorder has finished presenting. The extension staff **must** ensure that the problems are detailed and well defined, and that they understand what the farmers are explaining.
- While each recorder is presenting the set of problems, the other recorders check their own sets. If they have recorded the same problem, they mark it. If they have not, they add it to the bottom of their flip chart paper, or write it on a separate card.
- When all the recorders have finished presenting, they should have the same set of problems.
- The whole group then decides which **ten** problems from the compiled set are the most important. Try and encourage farmers to select problems that the Department can address. Do not force them.

FEMALE GROUP COMPILING & DISCUSSING PROBLEMS



MALE GROUP COMPILING & DISCUSSING PROBLEMS



STAGE-5: RANK

- Each sub-group re-forms with the same set of ten most important problems.
- Each sub-group discusses the ten problems, and puts them in order of importance.
- They identify the one that is **most** important. They give this a rank of **ten**. They identify the one that is **second** most important and give it a rank of **nine**. They identify the one that is **third** most important and give this a rank of **eight**. This continues until the sub-groups identify the one that is **least** important, which is ranked **one**.

FEMALE SUB-GROUPS RANKING PROBLEMS



MALE SUB-GROUPS RANKING PROBLEMS



STAGE- 6: DISCUSS DETAILS AND SOLUTIONS

- The sub-groups come together again. Each recorder explains the railings their sub-group has given.
- The rankings from each sub-group are added together to produce a final ranking of the ten problems.
- The Block Supervisor asks the whole group:
 - Why each problem is important;
 - What the causes and effects of each problem are;
 - What the farmers suggest as solutions to each problem;
 - What assistance the farmers require from the Department in relation to each problem or solutions.
- These questions are important elements of **problem solving**.
- Explain what the Department can and cannot do. For example, DAB can provide information on pest control, but cannot provide free plant protection chemicals. Do not promise to offer something the Department cannot deliver as farmers will loose interest. Farmers problems will not be solved instantly, and the Block Supervisor should explain this to the group.
- End the Problem Census by thanking the farmers. The farmers may want to meet again. If they do, offer to help. Follow up is essential.

MALE GROUP DISCUSSING SOLUTIONS



FEMALE GROUP DISCUSSING SOLUTIONS



Table 1
Problem Census Result Sheet

Date and Location					
Topic					
Group Size					
Group Type					
Problem	Sub-Group				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Problem	Solution				

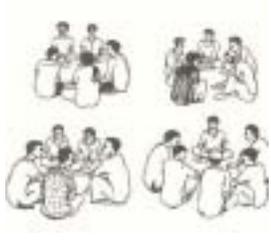
Record the farmers names, and the name of the contact person

Problem Census for Extension Planning

The Department has decentralised budgets and decision making to districts and thanas. Districts and thanas are required to generate their own local extension programmes. The Problem Census can ensure that these extension programmes are needs based. This enables extension to be **demand driven** and **farmer responsive**.

The Problem Census can be conducted in a number of ways for extension programming. How the Problem Census is conducted is the decision of the district and thana staff. However, the following is one example of a structured way to employ the Problem Census as an input to local extension programming:

- Conduct a Mini Problem Census covering a broad agricultural problem. One census would be done in each block. Half the blocks would cover female farmers, the other half male farmers.
- Based on the results, a specific topic is defined for each block for the Main Problem Census.
- There are three target groups for the main series of the Problem Census:
 - Large and medium male farmers;
 - Small and marginal male farmers;
 - Female farmers.
- In each block, two censuses are done with each target group, making a total of six Problem Census per block. All six are based on the topic defined.
- The thana compiles the results for each target category, and uses the information for local extension planning. An example format is shown in Table 2.

Stage 1 Organise Meeting	Stage 2 Explain Topic	Stage 3 List Problems	Stage 4 Compile and Discuss	Stage 5 Rank	Stage 6 Discuss Details and Solutions
					
<p>Gather a group of farmers who wish to discuss their agricultural problems. The meeting should be set in advance at a convenient time for farmers.</p>	<p>Explain the Problem Census to the farmers, and state a specific topic for them to consider.</p>	<p>Form sub-groups, provide materials and select recorders. Recorders list problems. Recorders and extension staff do not dominate the sub-group.</p>	<p>Records present sub-group problems to all groups. Compile one list. Whole group decides priority list of ten problems.</p>	<p>Sub-groups reform and place problems in order of importance. The most important problem is ranked 10, the second most important ranked 9 and so on.</p>	<p>Recorders present rankings to whole group. Add rankings. Discuss problems in detail, possible solutions, DAE assistance and future action. Record results and thank farmers.</p>

Involving Other Organizations

In a thana there are many organisations working towards rural development. Some of these are in the government sector, others are in the non-government sector.

It is important that all the organisations are at least aware of the activities of the other, and in this way, they can coordinate.

For this reason, it is important to involve other organisations in the Problem Census, from start to finish.

Some of the organisations may be able to put DAE in touch with their affiliated farmers groups.

Members from other organisations, including the research stations, NGGs, Banks and people who deal in agricultural inputs and outputs can be invited to attend the Problem Census. They can be invited to a meeting to discuss results. They can be involved in subsequent planning meetings and workshops.

In this way, DAE can act as an efficient linkage between farmers and other relevant agencies.

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