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INFORMATION AT COMMUNITY LEVEL FOR THE BENEFIT
OF SMALL HOLDERS

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INFORMATION AT COMMUNITY LEVEL FOR THE BENEFIT OF SMALL HOLDERS

Both production and dissemination of data have direct bearing on the interests of small farmers. Data are needed for policy formulation in general or targeting these farmers. Only census and administrative data provide detailed information at low administrative units or community level. Practically all survey data do not furnish reliable information at low level of administration. Some data may be obtained through community surveys which are useful for development programmes targeting specific areas or groups. Data disseminated are also of interest to small farmers who need to be informed about the agricultural and market situations. These small farmers take decision regarding the choice of the types of crops or animal species to raise/practise to be competitive, based on information available to them; they need market information to decide on the best period to harvest or to sell their products. All this information has to be disseminated in such a way that it reaches the community where small farmers reside.

This paper covers information/data at community level useful for policies and programmes that target small farmers, and also data dissemination aiming at small farmers to help them decide on their agricultural operations.

1. Community level data for the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of development projects and programmes in rural areas

There is an increasing demand for data at low administrative unit in order to define and evolve policy for the benefit of people living in rural areas, especially for food security and poverty reduction. Such data are often available only from censuses and administrative sources. In response to these data needs, countries' statistics offices have been looking for ways to produce the required information keeping in mind the often limited resources made available for statistical activities. It is also noted that when data at community level are produced, development partners have made extensive use of them in programme or project identification, formulation, monitoring and evaluation. These data are even more interesting when they are presented in maps using the geographic information system (GIS) technique.

Small farmers often have limited access to information or data to help them decide what action to take regarding agricultural production, inputs or sales of their products. To increase their ability to negotiate with the middlemen in agricultural produce market or suppliers of agricultural inputs, they need reliable and up-to-date market information. The means used by government agencies for disseminating all this information may have to be specially devised if small farmers are to benefit from them. Information disseminated at community level can be very beneficial to small farmers.

1.1 Recommendations of the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2010 concerning community level data

Recognizing the usefulness of community level data in agricultural and rural development and the increasing demand from development partners for such information, FAO has included one chapter on this type of information in its World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2010. It is recommended that countries collect data at community level as part of their agricultural censuses, in order to capture the information relevant to the structure of agriculture which cannot be obtained from holdings. These data are useful complements to the holding level results in ensuring a harmonious development of the agriculture sector from the production stage to the processing, transport and commercialization of products.

The statistical unit for the community level data is in general the lowest administrative unit in the country, such as commune or village.

Thirty-two community level data items are recommended. They are grouped into four categories. Countries can select data items from this list and include additional items relevant to their prevailing conditions. The recommended data items are as follows:

- **Geography:**

Location, Agro-ecology, topography, soil types, Land use, Area of communal grazing land, Area of communal forest, Travelling time to the urban centre, access to a motorable road, proneness to natural disasters

- **Socio-economic conditions:**

Demographic profile, socio-economic status, and nature of economic activities, whether there are seasonal food shortages

- **Community infrastructure and services:**

Fertilizer/ pesticide dealer, seed dealer, credit institution, irrigation facilities, area equipped for irrigation, processing facilities, agricultural produce market/collection network, farmers associations, extension/veterinary services, health, radio/telephone/internet, public transport etc.

- **Development programmes.**

It is recommended that community level data are collected during the listing operations for the agricultural census before the main field work. This can be done with limited additional financial resources, as information at community level can be collected from representatives of the community administration.

Complete enumeration is recommended for community level data. This is feasible even if sampling is introduced in the agricultural census, due to the relatively small number of communities or villages as compared to the total number of holdings in a country.

1.2 Identification of food shortage pockets through community surveys

Usually national agricultural surveys provides results at aggregate geographic or administrative levels, but due to the use of sampling in these surveys the production data are not statistically significant at the lowest administrative level, e.g. commune, village or community. While the aggregate results may show self-sufficiency in food from national production for major aggregated administrative units, such a survey for one year may not reveal any possible pockets of food-shortage at low administrative units, especially in rural areas.

If the government or development partners are interested in identifying pockets of food shortage to ensure that food assistance programmes or projects reach the people who are really in need, the national agricultural survey may be supplemented by a community survey to find out the level of agricultural production at commune or village level, covering major

food crops. The statistical unit is the commune, village or community and the data may be collected on food production for these crops in areas where it is known that food shortages exist. The estimates from this community survey may not be very accurate as the responses provided at community level may be based on administrative records or eye estimates. The results of the community survey should be adjusted taking into account the data of the national agricultural survey to ensure that the production figures for the aggregated administrative units where the results are statistically reliable are consistent.

1.3 Country experiences in community surveys

In Indonesia, a village potentials module is implemented as part of agricultural census conducted every ten years, the last one being in 2003. This operation is conducted before the actual field work of the census. Socio-economic information related to agriculture and rural development is collected for poverty study. The results are thoroughly analysed to derive indicators on different aspects of the socio-economic conditions of the villages. One main outcome of this operation is the identification of poor villages for intervention by the government through targeted programmes and projects.

In Senegal, the 1997 agricultural census included a village survey conducted as a pre-census work. The information collected includes veterinary services, markets, abattoirs, grain storage and milling facilities, community land. Other data items collected cover information whether there is presence of processing facilities in the village, such as animal feed, fruit/vegetable processing, dairy produce, drying smoking/fish; presence of farm organizations in the village.

During the 1990s when different parts of Cambodia had food shortages, areas where food aid was needed were identified through surveys of communes. Even after 1995 when national production of rice becomes consistently self sufficient, pockets of food shortage continue to exist due to natural disasters, such as drought or flooding. The community surveys were very useful in identifying vulnerable communes. The production figures from these community surveys were adjusted taking into account production data from national agricultural survey and other data sources. An analysis was then conducted to identify food shortage communes in order to target food aid programmes.

1.4 Use of community survey data

Community level data are relevant for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of agricultural and rural development, and for food security policy. Data from the community survey module of the agricultural census may be used identify areas where an agricultural market may be needed or a commercial network is needed to be developed. Information on whether a farmers association exists, or if there is a fertilizer/pesticide dealer in the community or in the village, is useful for designing agricultural services plans. Information on processing facilities is also needed for government whether to encourage the installation of agricultural factories or not in different areas of the country. Community level data from agricultural census can also be used to identify vulnerable areas where there is a risk of food insecurity due to natural disasters, such as drought or flood. Relevant development programmes or food aid may be initiated or planned according to the findings of the community surveys. Results from the community module of the agricultural census may be presented on maps in the form of geographic information system to enhance the presentation of the findings, facilitating thus the interpretation of data. The overlaying of the results for different data items allows more in-depth analysis for more sophisticated uses.

Other surveys using community as statistical units are also useful for food security and agricultural development purposes. Short-term interventions in food shortage areas may be

targeted based on results of community survey as mentioned earlier. The results are also useful for defining agricultural development programmes or projects.

1.5 Community level data for decentralized planning

If a country adopts a decentralized planning process, detailed data at low administrative units are needed. In addition to the data at community level as recommended in the WCA 2010, all statistics on agriculture need to be maintained at very low level of administrative unit, including crop production, yield, number of animals, and other socio-economic data. The domains of data needed for decentralized planning are more than the information on agriculture.

2. Dissemination of information for the benefit of small farmers

Small farmers often do not have access to data disseminated through traditional methods, such as bulletins or yearbooks which are not distributed to them. Also data disseminated through the Internet rarely reach small farmers in developing countries as they do not have computers. Appropriate and specific means may be devised for information to reach small farmers in a timely manner.

Radio and/or television transmission is certainly the quickest way for delivering the information to all the population. Small farmers can obtain the information through this means, provided that they have a radio/television or can listen to a neighbour's or community's radio if one exists at that level. The transmission programme should be regular so that those who look for specific information about agriculture or markets can plan to listen at the set time. The radio programme may cover information related to agricultural development in general. A more specific transmission on agricultural markets is necessary to provide daily information on prices and on market arrivals and other market analysis. Some countries, including India, Philippines and Thailand, have successfully used this means of dissemination.

Another means of dissemination that ensures access for small farmers is posting of notices or bulletins at the community level. The places where such materials can be posted include the offices of the community (communes or villages) or of the government agencies responsible for agricultural and/or rural development. The materials need to be updated as often as possible. In the case of market information, bulletins giving prices and market arrivals should be updated daily or at least weekly. Other analytical documents on agricultural markets may be updated as frequently as the analyses are done (weekly, monthly or quarterly).

3. Conclusions

It is advantageous to include a community module in an agricultural census. The additional cost involved is limited, but the results are very much appreciated by data users and development partners. Data from the community modules are easy to process and the results may be presented in a more user-friendly manner using the geographic information system. Data from community surveys in general are especially important for both short-term and long-term policies in food security and agricultural and rural development. Specific programmes for the benefit of small farmers may be identified, designed and implemented based on information at community level. Additional data from other sources can also be used for these purposes to cover particular aspects of development.

For small farmers to benefit from the data produced by government agencies, special dissemination means may have to be devised. Radio programmes providing information on the progress of the agricultural season and agricultural or markets bulletins or notices posted at community level are two important means that small farmers may find useful to them.

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