

COMMUNICATION IN THE SURVEY PROCESS

Role-Play Exercise

ACTIVITY: This is an interactive learning exercise designed to actively engage workshop participants in considering the myriad of chances for mis-communication that may occur, unless rural research, including agricultural censuses, household surveys and other instruments are not carefully planned with data collectors trained on appropriate methodology and social aspects of community contexts. Selected workshop participants or volunteers will assume the roles of: Farmer husband and wife, census enumerator, NSO director, Minister of Agriculture.

PURPOSE: Workshop participants are expected to identify the points of miscommunication, explore the various reasons for such miscommunication, the implications for such miscommunication (the resulting errors in policy making) and strategies to avoid such miscommunication.

Script

Farmer Husband to wife: “Eh – there comes that census man again. He is always digging in to our business and we don’t want our taxes to go up, remember? So, let me do the talking and you just shut up and don’t butt in – you hear me?”

Farmer Wife: “Ah, so you think you know everything about what I do, and my sister and my cousin on this family plot? – o.k. go ahead and if he finds out you are lying, don’t blame me – because we will get doubly taxed!” (her face shows that she is annoyed at being left out, but she proceeds to the corner of the room, pretends to pound the rice, and keeps an ear open to the conversation that is about to take place.

CENSUS TAKER APPROACHES THE HOME.

Farmer Husband to Census taker: “Good morning Sir! Ah you are back. So, last week when you came to collect the census information from us, you spoke to my wife’s brother? Well, he gave you a lot of misinformation – that is why I asked you to return. Today, you will speak to me – because I am the head of this household.”

Census taker: “Oh hoh.. so YOU are the head of this household. I better write that down!”

CENSUS TAKER SCRIBBLES MADLY ON HIS NOTES AND CENSUS FORM.

Farmer Husband : “So – here is the correct information. This land is registered in my name, it is 1 acre, and we also grow vegetables in the paddy field.”

Farmer Wife - Interrupts husband and waves the mortar as if she wants to hit the husband with it: “Hey – that’s not the truth - why are you lying to this government official?”

(addressing the Census taker) “Sir, he does not want to admit that I inherited this land. He went to the land registry and put only his name – and anyway, he is not the one who does most of the work – it is the women in my family – we are the ones who clear the land, we plant and transplant while this one spends his day drinking tea at the temple...”

Census taker: o.k., o.k. please be patient. (scratches his head and studies the census form, mumbling to himself: “hmm... head of household – male; holder – female... no, that can’t be right... what to do, what to do...”

Farmer Wife – interrupts him – “What’s the matter? You don’t know how to write that down, or your form is bad? Oh, you government people are all the same..

Census taker: “Now, sister, hold on... I will call my supervisor and find out how to enter the correct information.”

He pulls out his cellphone and dials. Speaks on the phone: “Hello, hello, give me supervisor – small question on the form.... what? He is out having tea with the district governor? O.k. I will make a note on the side then..

Farmer Husband : “Can you also make a note that we need to get the new rice seed and fertilizer ON TIME this season? Last season they came two weeks after the sowing period...”

Census taker: “No, no, you don’t understand – that is another department. I am only the census taker.. I just write down what you are producing, how much, things like that...”

Farmer Wife: “So, write down that we couldn’t produce enough because the seed was late...”

Census taker – starts to protest, but realizes it will not get through, and says: “Sure, sister, I will write down everything – what else would you like me to write?”

Farmer Wife – to her husband: “You see, I told you – if we tell him everything, he can tell the district governor, and we can get what we are missing...” She goes into a long itemization of what they need “the canals are blocked by the higher terraces, so we never get enough water down here, and they don’t clear the weeds – those women are lazy and so are their husbands, anyway, many are away in town working in construction because this farm income is not enough, and we can’t even pay for the school uniforms for our children, and the rats ate half of our rice stored last year, then the rain came through the storage bin and we lost most of the remainder...” (peering over the Census taker’s notes)
: “DID YOU WRITE THAT DOWN?”

Census taker – Steps back trying to escape.. looks worn out, glances at his watch and says “Sorry sister, I have 25 other interviews to complete today. I will come back another day when, er... when (winks at the husband as if to say when wife is not around) – thank you very much”

He proceeds to his office to speak to the Census Director.

Farmer couple leave the room.

NSO Director: “So, how was your first day at the job? Did you collect all the information on the form?”

Census taker “yes sir, yes sir. Everything is here. That village has no water, and they have a lot of small animals, and they need more labor to help with the harvest.”

NSO Director: “Oh good - we’ll tell the Minister that he can hire his supporters in the other village to help this one – that way he is sure to get the vote, and we’ll tell him to ask the FAO to introduce a small livestock project – that will make them happy. Maybe the World Bank can build a new irrigation system.. Lets go to the Ministry”.

They approach the Minister of Agriculture.

NSO Director: “Good afternoon sir! We have important news for your upcoming election - the lower terrace village will pay the loan from the World Bank for better irrigation water for their rice crop, and they want you to ask the FAO to support their livestock farms – good way to get protein in to the diet and you will be very popular with the FAO too – that you tried to reduce food and nutrition insecurity... and if you can ask your voters in the other village to go there to work, they will get good wages, and you will win the next election.”

Minister of Ag: “ah – thank you for this valuable information. Its always nice when the solutions are easy. Remember though – We are doing this to serve our country – not just to win the election – you understand – o.k. let us put out a leaflet for the villagers to see announcing these decisions”

They leave the room.

FINAL SCENE: Farmer couple returning home, reading notice and start shouting at each other.

Farmer Husband: “Wait a minute – we have to pay for a work gang ‘decent rural wages’ – policy of FAO – what? Even I don’t earn this amount!! We are not big farmers – we will have to hire ourselves out.. See you gave him the wrong information –

Aha.. this is a good one – the government will ask the FAO to give us small livestock – that will be good!

And the World bank will give us a new irrigation network - Not bad – not bad. That will solve our water problems – but where will they put it?”