



Assessing Needs

**Tips &
Facts
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 men and women 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 men and women 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 men and women 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? Are men affected? Are women affected? What is the cost in terms of lost yield, profit, labor, household needs? 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 and/or household needs.

"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". There may be differences in perception of problems between and among men and women farmer, which should be noted. 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

Needs assessment survey sheet

Site/region: _____

Season: _____

Year: _____

Sex: _____

Production factor ⁺	Priority	Done by whom?*	Present practice	Preferred	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		Not applicable			
Seed or seedling quality					
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).

What does the farmer perceive as the greatest problem? _____

Adapt sheet as required for different crops or commodities

Needs assessment survey sheet

Site/region: _____

Season: _____

Year: _____ Sex: _____

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

What does the farmer perceive as the greatest problem? _____

Needs assessment survey sheet

Site/region: _____

Season: _____

Year: _____

Sex: _____

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

What does the farmer perceive as the greatest problem? _____

Adapt sheet as required for different crops or commodities