

Communication and facilitation skills

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To work effectively with farmers as partners in developing new agricultural technologies, you will need to practice some essential communication and facilitation skills. These include neutrality, positive body language, questioning skills and facilitation of group discussions.

Why is it important to be 'neutral'?

The way you ask questions will influence the answers you get. Being genuinely interested in farmers' opinions, we do not want to influence their answers by asking leading questions.

Examples of **leading questions** are:

'This is an excellent forage variety, don't you agree?'

'What is good about this variety? It doesn't seem to have good disease resistance.'

This type of question should always be **avoided** as it tells the farmer what you would like to hear or limits the answers to a particular topic!

Your body language also influences farmers' answers. Show that you value farmers opinion through your body language. Many of the photographs and drawings in this book demonstrate positive body language.





What type of questions should I use?

Try to use **open-ended questions** and follow these up with **probing questions**. Open-ended questions invite farmers to reply freely and openly. Probing questions help you gain more insight into the farmers' answers.

Examples of **open-ended (O)** and **probing (P)** questions are:

What do you think about these grass varieties? (O)
I like this variety the best.

Why do you like this variety better than the others? (P)
Well, it has soft green leaves.

Why is that important? (P)
Well, they are easy to cut and my animals like to eat soft leaves.

Is there anything else you like about this variety? (O)
It stays green in the dry season while the others turn brown quickly"

Is there anything you don't like about this variety? (O)

Often the answer to a probing question requires more probing questions to fully understand the issue. Always ask for clarification.

Take Note!



Open-ended and probing questions are the key to really understanding farmers' opinions and experiences. Never assume you know the answer - always ask the farmer to explain.

How do I facilitate group meetings?

As part of your work with farmers, you will need to facilitate many meetings with villages and focus-groups. This important skill takes time to learn and improves with practice. Here are some ideas which will help you become a better facilitator:

- Stop any individual from dominating the meeting
- Encourage contributions from all farmers, especially the shy ones
- Guide the meeting towards its goal
- Manage the pace of the meeting to maintain farmers' interest
- Take regular breaks to allow people to mix and relax
- Summarise the results of the discussion

... and remember to use open-ended and probing questions.

One technique that we found useful when working with groups is to use cards to 'brainstorm' and analyse ideas.





Using cards to analyse ideas

Much of your work will involve meetings with farmers where you want to record and discuss their ideas. You can write farmers' ideas on cards that can be sorted easily into groups of similar ideas. The process of sorting ideas stimulates discussion and the sorted cards provide a good summary of this discussion.

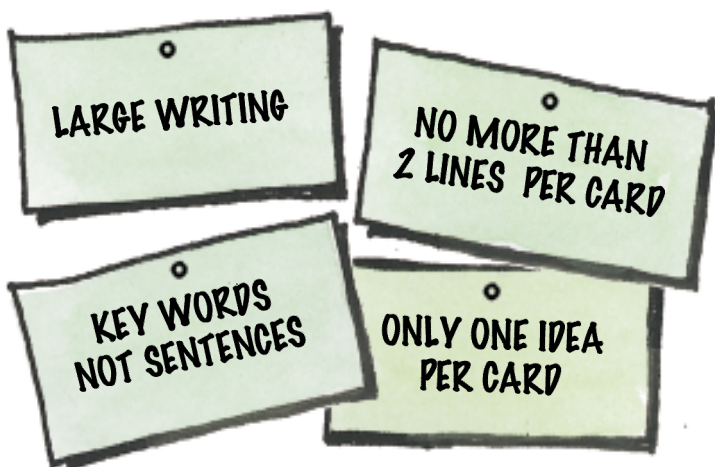
How to use cards to analyse ideas

1. As with every discussion, make sure that everyone understands the issue (e.g. 'What are the main causes of poor cattle production in our village?')
2. Encourage everyone in the meeting to suggest ideas.
3. Write each idea on a card and stick it on the wall so everyone can see it. This will stimulate new ideas.

4. Once there are no more ideas, start organising the cards into groups of similar ideas in consultation with the farmers. It helps to use cards of a different colour to write group headings.
5. Once all the cards have been sorted, summarise the ideas and discuss them with the group.

Make sure that you use

- large writing
- no more than 2 lines per card
- keywords not sentences
- only one idea per card



Some tips for using cards to analyse ideas

- Try using coloured cards to differentiate between types of participants. For example, give white cards to farmers with livestock and yellow cards to farmers without livestock.
- If possible, ask the farmers to organise the cards themselves.
- Be aware of literacy limitations!