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Ahmad, Bashir and Ahmad, Munir

Agricultural Social Sciences Research Centre, University of
Agriculture, Faisalabad, Department of Farm Management,
University of Agriculture, Faisalabad

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Farmers' Perceptions of Problems using RRA Methodology

DR. BASHIR AHMAD* AND DR. MUNIR AHMAD**

INTRODUCTION

It has been emphasized that "a linkage must be created between agricultural universities, research organizations and extension departments" for the improvement of agriculture sector (Government of Pakistan, 1993, p. 45). In this connection Pakistan Agricultural Research Council introduced a new policy initiative that is called "Pilot Area Real Life (PARL)" model aimed at transferring of research and resource based technological interventions specifically targeting the small and the medium size farmers and covering also landless communities on the basis of an area approach' (Khan, 1994). Thus, the major goal of this model is to transfer the most appropriate technologies for wider adoption in the PARL project areas through providing key inputs and other services for crops, animals and other household based economic activities at the doorstep of the rural community.

To get started for such type of activities (i.e., PARL), it is critical to diagnose major on-farm constraints in the project areas.

A common procedure to collect information about the farming system has been the conduction of elaborate and detailed farm surveys. However, it has been realized that these type of surveys are not the proper way of obtaining key information concerning farming practices along with the first hand knowledge of the problems faced by the farmers. These formal farmers surveys are very time consuming and take many months to complete and in some cases these even take years before the true picture comes out. Consequently, such surveys are very costly to carry out and moreover, the results are usually not available when needed. Additionally, they seldom furnish in depth information that helps to understand the current standing of rural inhabitants (Van Der Veen, 1986). To

* Professor of Farm Management and Director, Agricultural Social Sciences Research Centre, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad.

** Assistant Professor, Department of Farm Management University of Agriculture, Faisalabad.

avoid these problems, use of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) approach is becoming more popular among researchers. It allows rapid and substantially economical collection of valuable information.

RRA is a rapid learning process during which scientists/researchers progressively learn from farmers, from each other, from casual observations, from existing data, secondary sources, extension agents, veterinary officers, etc. (Grandsta *et al.*, 1985). In other words, it is a quick way out for developing perception about farmers' problems and circumstances; so that the experts could come up with prompt pragmatic conclusions.

The experience of using RRA of Nepal, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Burma and some other countries has shown that although only few individuals at a specific farming site are interviewed, the information gathered from those appraisals are nearly as accurate as any other large surveys regarding farming systems in those countries. (Veen Der Can, 1986).

METHODOLOGY OF RRA

McCarycken, Betty and Conway argue that minimum cost and the accuracy of the information required are the two basic themes of the RRA methodology. The first objective is achieved by adopting a multidisciplinary team approach as it tries to reach at an "agreed sufficiency of knowledge of the process and properties relevant to the targets of the RRA and thus, does not investigate irrelevant aspects or unnecessary details". The second one, i.e., the accuracy, which is accomplished using several different sources and means to collect the information.

To carry out the present RRA, the survey team included specialists, and agricultural economists. These members first visited the PARL area located on Faisalabad - Sheikhpura Road. They walked through the PARL area and gleaned useful information by group discussions with farmers and interviewing farmers whom they met by chance that helped determine their vision of major problems in relation to general conditions of the area and farm enterprises.

A checklist was used to keep the interviewers on track while discussing with or interviewing farmers and village leaders. The experts spent couple of days in the project area to collect all the required factual details.

APPRAISED INFORMATION

About 97 per cent of the farm household owned less than 12.50 acres of land. Over 92 per cent were owner operators (For more information see Ahmad and Ahmad).

General Problems in the Production of Various Crops

Among the general problems noted in the project area, the inadequate availability of canal water was ranked as the most important one. This was partially due to the fact that underground water was not fit for irrigation. The second serious problem was the adulterated inputs, especially fertilizers and chemicals that was also a big constraint to increase the production of agricultural commodities. The third major problem was the non-availability of good quality seed of various crops as well as the fertilizers and chemicals in increasing the productivity of crops.

Efforts were also made in RRA to get farmers' considered view about a key question "*why are sugarcane, wheat, etc. yields low and stagnant in the area*". A range of the possible causal factors were identified and later refined with key informants and farmers and through direct observation in the field. The most plausible causative factors are given in Figure 1 and 2 for sugarcane and wheat crops.

FIGURE - 1

CAUSATIVE FACTORS OF LOW SUGARCANE YIELD

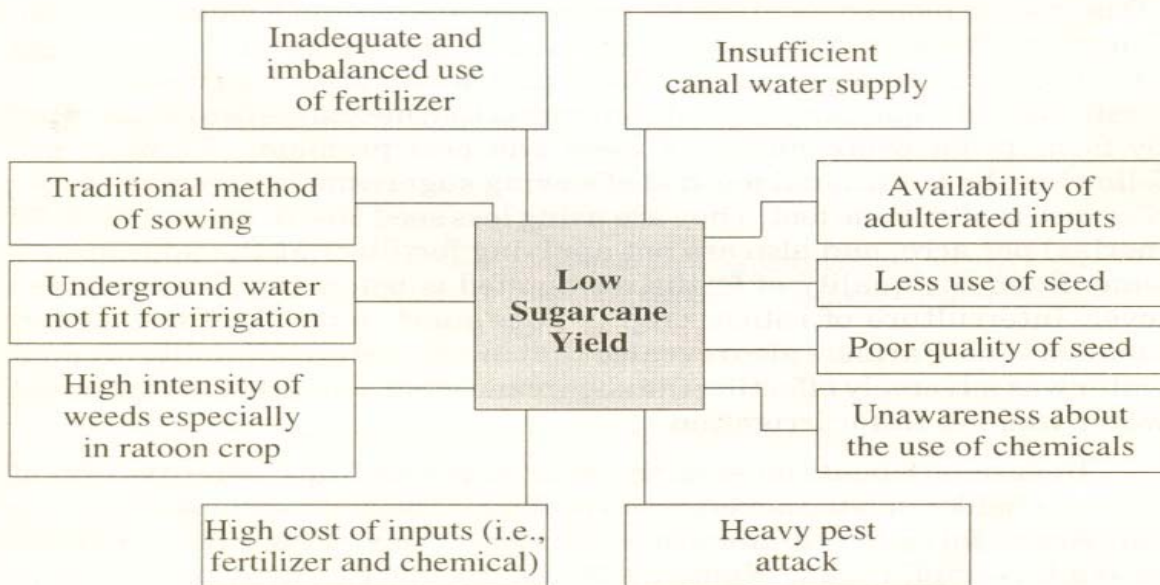
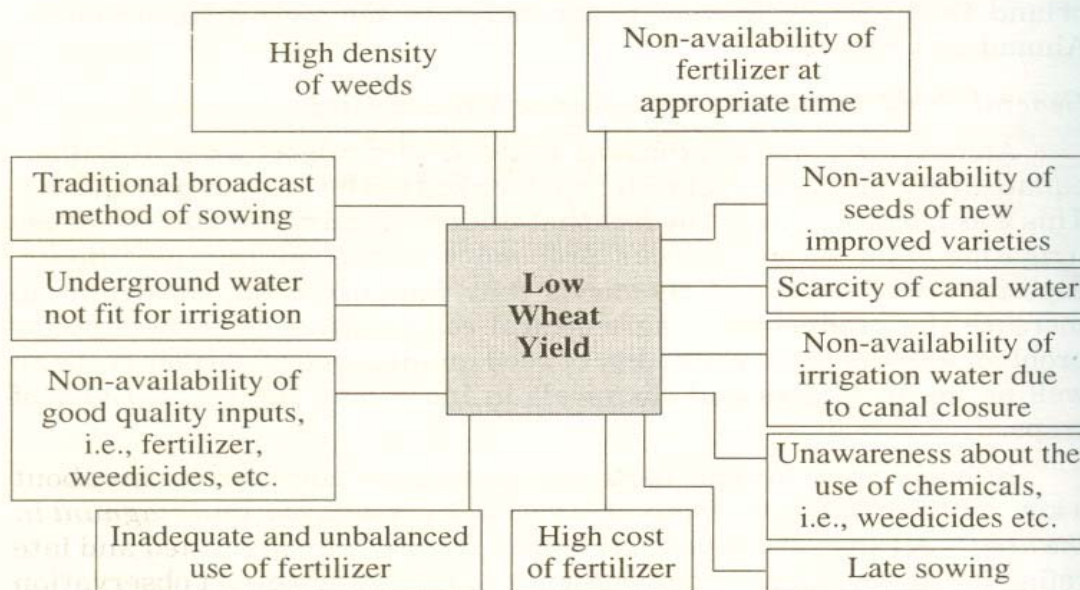


FIGURE – 2

CAUSATIVE FACTORS OF LOW WHEAT YIELD



In case of sugarcane, farmers are mostly cultivating an “Indian” variety. Inspection of farmers’ sugarcane fields clearly indicated severe weed problems (especially in ratoon crop) and insects attack (termites and top borers). Important weeds mentioned by farmers were Itsit (*Trianthema monogyna*), Deela (*Cyperus rotundus*) and Khabal (*Cynodon Dactylon*). Serious damage was reported by the top borer (*Scirpophaga nivella*). Termite (*Microtermes obesi*) attack was also observed in many fresh planted sugarcane fields. Plant protection measures are not adopted by farmers for overcoming the weed and pest problems. Farmers are following the traditional method of sowing sugarcane, where row to row distance is about one foot. They are using less seed 50-70 maunds (or 8-10 merlas) per acre, and also are not applying fertilizer at the appropriate time. Even the quality of fertilizer applied is below the recommended level. Interculture of ratoon crop is done much later than the recommended time. Farmers also revealed that inadequate availability of canal water was adversely affecting the sugarcane yield, since the underground water was not fit for irrigation.

In case of wheat, most of the area is planted late. Observation of farmer’s field indicated severe weed problem. The more serious weeds are Jai (*Arena fatva L.*) Dumbi grass (*Phalaris minor Retz*), Riwari (*Vicia sativa L.*), Jungli Palak, (*Rumex dentatus L.*), etc. Farmers are not using

weedicides for the control of weeds. Some of the farmer's fields were also heavily infested with aphid at the post-heading stage. Discussion with farmers shows that they are applying inadequate doses of fertilizers. i.e., one bag of urea and 1.5 bags of nitrophos. Even the quantity that is applied is unbalance. Farmers also reported non availability of fertilizer at the time of sowing. Inadequate availability of canal water, mainly due to long canal closure, was also reported by the farmers. Farmers and key informants perceptions about the problems in various crops is reported in Table-I

TABLE - I
FARMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROBLEMS OF VARIOUS
CROPS RANKED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

Problem/Crops	Sugarcane	Wheat	Kharif fodder	Rabi fodder
Insect	2	—	3	2
Weed	5	1	—	—
Lack of Capital	3	5	—	—
Scarcity of Water	1	2	2	—
Fertilizer and Other Inputs	4	4	—	—
Adulterations				
Poor Variety	—	3	1	—
Disease	—	—	—	1

Note: Most serious problem = 1, Next serious problem = 2 and so on.

Problems in Livestock

Information about the problems constraining improvement in livestock production was also obtained from the farmers and key informants. The response is reported in Table-II.

Problems in Poultry

Various aspects of Poultry farming in the area were discussed with the Veterinary Health Officer-Poultry. He pointed out that 90 per cent of the poultry farms obtained chicks, feed and medicines on credit. Consequently, not only the quality of chicks, feed and medicines was poor, but also they had to pay substantially higher prices than the market. Similarly, when the poultry farms sell the broilers, a lion share is taken

TABLE – II
 FARMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROBLEMS IN
 LIVESTOCK RANKED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

Problems	Order of importance
Adulterated concentrates	1
Shortage of fodder	2
High cost of concentrates	3
Lack of capital	4
Diseases	5
Non-availability of canal water	6

Note: Most serious problem = 1; Next serious problem = 2 and so on.

away by the intermediaries. It was also reported that there existed many management problems which warranted immediate action for improving the production of poultry. These management problems are given below.

1. Inappropriate housing direction. 90-95 per cent farms did not have right direction (i.e., East-West) of poultry houses.

2. Poor liter management. Over 98 per cent of poultry houses had "Katcha" floor. Consequently, the occurrence of coccidiosis, chronic respiratory and Johl disease was very common.

3. Lack of disposal pits. Farmers just throw the dead birds outside the poultry houses rather than burying them in pits. Consequently, diseases like Gumboro (IBD), New Castle, etc., could spread easily through birds, dogs, etc., resulting in heavy losses to poultry farms.

4. Inadequate technical knowledge of the poultry farmers. Since, no technical advice from poultry experts was available and thus, management practices followed by the farmers were very poor.

5. Inappropriate method of vaccination. The birds are provided underground water for drinking. It is poor quality hardware. This makes the vaccination partly ineffective. What in fact required is that the vaccination be administered by an expert and not by the farmers: Poultry farmers were also reported to be vaccinating their birds not at the appropriate time.

Farmers have also reported a number of problems in poultry business. These included poor quality of broiler and layer chicks, poor quality

and expensive feed, poor quality of vaccine, etc, Farmers perceptions regarding problems of poultry ranked in order of importance are given in Table-III.

TABLE – III
FARMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROBLEMS OF POULTRY
RANKED IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

Problem	Broiler	Layer
Non-availability of quality chick	1	1
Diseases	2	—
Non-availability of quality feed	3	2
Poor quality of vaccine	4	3
Inadequate capital	5	—

Most serious problem = 1. Next serious problems = 2 and so on.

SUMMARY

Farmers' perceptions of general problems of the area, ranked in decreasing order of importance for increasing the production of agricultural commodities, are inadequate availability of canal water, non-availability of quality inputs i.e., seed, fertilizer and chemicals. It will not be possible to enhance the existing canal water availability. However, farm gate supplies can be significantly increased by improving the structure and layout of the existing water channels. Availability of good quality inputs should also be ensured to improve existing crop yields and overall welfare of the farming community.

Farmers' perceptions of problems, ranked in decreasing order of importance in sugarcane are, scarcity of water, insect attack, lack of capital, adulterated inputs and infestation of weeds. In case of wheat, their ranking proceeds as weeds, scarcity of water, poor variety, adulterated inputs and lack of capital. Problems identified in livestock in order of importance are adulterated concentrates, high cost of concentrates, lack of capital, diseases and shortage of fodder. There are serious management problems in poultry production. Poultry houses have serious flaws in their construction, especially their direction. Poultry farmers do not generally use pits for disposing off their dead birds. They also lack adequate technical know-how and use inappropriate method of vaccination. Farmers perceptions of problems of poultry, in decreasing order of importance are, non-availability of quality chicks, diseases,

non-availability of quality feed, poor quality of vaccine and inadequate capital.

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