

Purpose of the tools

The tools in this section can be used to get started on strengthening the five skill sets with farmer groups. They can be used by field staff to plan this work, or they can be used by farmers, with support of a facilitator, for participatory planning and evaluation. The first tool, “Find out about groups” is designed to help those planning to work with farmer groups to carry out an initial assessment of what groups already exist in an area, their purposes, their membership and their history. The second tool “A five skill set checklist” can be used to assess the skills of existing groups or newly formed groups and can be applied before, during and after interventions to improve the five skill sets.



Tool #1 Find out about groups

In many rural communities, active groups already exist among the poor that have formed for a variety of purposes and that may want to get involved in agroenterprise development. As a first step, it is important to identify these groups and assess their potential by understanding their status, quality and functions. Then you have the information needed for answering the following questions:

- Can existing groups be ‘retrofitted’ to learn those components of the five basic skill sets that they currently lack?
- Do new groups need to be formed?
- Do existing groups need to be encouraged to include more poor people, women or ethnic people?
- Do new groups need to be formed to give poor people a chance of linking to markets?
- Should existing groups with complementary skill sets be merged to form new agroenterprise groups?

This assessment can be guided by the questions outlined in Box 6 that explains what the information is for. Of course, other questions can be added to provide other information that may be important for making these decisions about group formation in a specific situation. The information can be obtained from knowledgeable informants.

Box 6. Explanation of the tool “Find out about groups”

Question	Why is this question important?
<p>How many groups are in the community or village and who is a member? What percentage of the households do the groups collectively cover?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If groups already exist, they may include very poor farmers. These groups might be a good platform for including the poor in agroenterprise activities . • If there are no groups in the village, then the field agent may want to begin forming them.
<p>How many years have these groups been functioning well, what are the trends (are the groups stable, strengthening or declining) and who supported their organization or is currently supporting them?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The age of the group sometimes (not always) indicates the level of organizational maturity and quality of internal and external social capital in that group . • If the groups are mature and of good quality, the field agent may have better success with an agroenterprise activity . • If not, he or she may want to take the time to improve the social organizational aspects of the groups before focusing on agroenterprise activities . • Knowing the origin of the groups and the actual support they are having can help to identify opportunities and/or threats for an agroenterprise process .
<p>What activities are the groups currently engaged in and which components of the five basic skill sets have they already acquired or are they actively seeking to learn?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups may have components of one or more of the five basic skill sets whether or not they are already doing agroenterprise activities . A field agent can build on the existing skill sets.
<p>What interest do they have in doing agroenterprise activities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some individuals and groups may have more interest than others. The field agent should always begin with the most interested people . Agroenterprise is not appropriate for all small producers, or all kinds of groups.
<p>Are there segments of the rural community that are commonly excluded from social and/or developmental activities (the marginalized and under-served)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The more vulnerable among the poor are often excluded from groups because they lack the time to participate (they are busy working or migrating); there is discrimination against women or ethnic minorities or lower castes; they lack assets and are seen as high risk by better endowed people; they lack skills; or they lack self-esteem .

“Find out about groups” A diagnostic questionnaire

A. Complete these questions yourself:

1. What is the area to be assessed? _____

2. Name of the informant interviewed: _____

B. Obtain the answers to these questions from at least two knowledgeable informants:

1. How many groups are there in the area? _____

2. Are there groups with any of the following as their primary objective:

- * Internal savings
 - * Internal lending
 - * Credit from outside agencies
 - * Collective marketing
 - * Agribusiness
 - * Seed production
 - * Sustainable production
 - * Organic farming
 - * Irrigation
 - * Collective management of natural resources (forest, land, grazing, water, etc)
 - * Other objectives of groups? _____
- _____

3. Are any of the existing groups interested in adding new functions or activities?

- * Yes: Go to Question 4 .
- * No
- * Don't know

4. What new activities or functions are groups looking for?

- * Internal savings
- * Internal lending
- * Credit from outside agencies
- * Collective marketing
- * Agribusiness
- * Seed production
- * Sustainable production
- * Organic farming
- * Irrigation
- * Collective management of natural resources (forest, land, grazing, water, etc .
- * Other (specify): _____

5. What percentage of households in the area participates in one of more groups?

- Over 80%
- 50-80%
- Less than 50%
- Don't know

6. Do any of the groups' membership include:

- Women only
- Men and women
- Men only
- Ethnic minorities (specify as needed)
- The poorest households in the area

7. How many years ago were the oldest groups formed?

- More than 10 years ago
- 5-10 years ago
- 2-4 years ago
- 1 year or less

8. Is the number of groups in the area:

- Declining
- Stable
- Increasing

9. What kinds of organizations are supporting groups in this area? Check any that apply:

- NGOs
- National government program
- Religious organization
- Local Farmer cooperative
- Watershed organization
- Bank
- Local government program
- Public agricultural research or extension
- National farmer cooperative
- Other: _____

Note names of any organizations you may want to contact here:

Thank you