

Social Analysis Systems²

Concepts and Tools for
Collaborative Research and Social Action

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Title **Creating Strategic Alliances in the Tobacco Farming Areas of Southern Bangladesh**

Key Words Social Analysis CLIP, Bangladesh, Agriculture, Tribal People, Stakeholder Analysis

Reference and Acknowledgement Buckles, D. 2006. Creating Strategic Alliances in the Tobacco Farming Areas of Southern Bangladesh. Social Analysis Systems² Technique Report #10, 4 pp. Retrieved from: <http://idl-bnc.idrc.ca/dspace/handle/123456789/28107>. The author wishes to acknowledge the efforts of Rafiqul Huq Titu who helped to design and facilitate the diagnosis.

Context



Lama is a township of tribal people and Bengali settlers in Bandarban District of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of southern Bangladesh. It straddles the banks of the Matamuhuri River and is close to lush forests. The British American Tobacco Company (BATC) and other tobacco buyers have been promoting the production of tobacco in the villages of the township since 1984. Currently, tobacco farming uses fertile river valley soils during the main growing season. Each year, a lot of wood must be cut in order to cure the tobacco leaves (using smoke). Problems that stem from tobacco production include a decline in food farming, ill health from exposure to the pesticides and smoke used in the production process, deforestation, soil erosion and high debt loads among small and marginal farmers. UBINIG, a non-governmental organization that supports ecological farming in a nearby township, has recently contacted a few farmers in Lama that want to stop tobacco farming. UBINIG wonders whether it should launch a broad campaign to promote ecological farming in this region.

For more information on this project, see UBINIG; Carleton University. 2006. From Tobacco to Food Production: Assessing Constraints and Transition Strategies in Bangladesh. First Interim Technical Progress Report to IDRC. 18 pp.

Purpose

To identify the strategic alliances that UBINIG might use to support farmers who want to stop tobacco farming.

Process Summary

UBINIG invited two male farmers from Lama to their Cox's Bazaar Centre for a meeting. One of the farmers had been working with UBINIG for a year and had already stopped tobacco farming, in favour of horticulture. He identified and invited to the meeting two tobacco farmers who were open to doing the same. The merits of shifting out of tobacco into horticulture and other forms of agriculture were discussed, along with the challenges that both they and UBINIG have in the region. The farmers created a list of stakeholders and discussed terminology and ratings for each stakeholder until there was a common understanding. This information was recorded on cards and a table was drawn on a flip-chart to represent the stakeholder structure. The group then discussed the history of conflict and collaboration among stakeholders, followed by actions UBINIG could take to mobilize support for a shift to ecological farming. The process was facilitated by the report author, with permission to report on the findings given by the participants.

Analysis

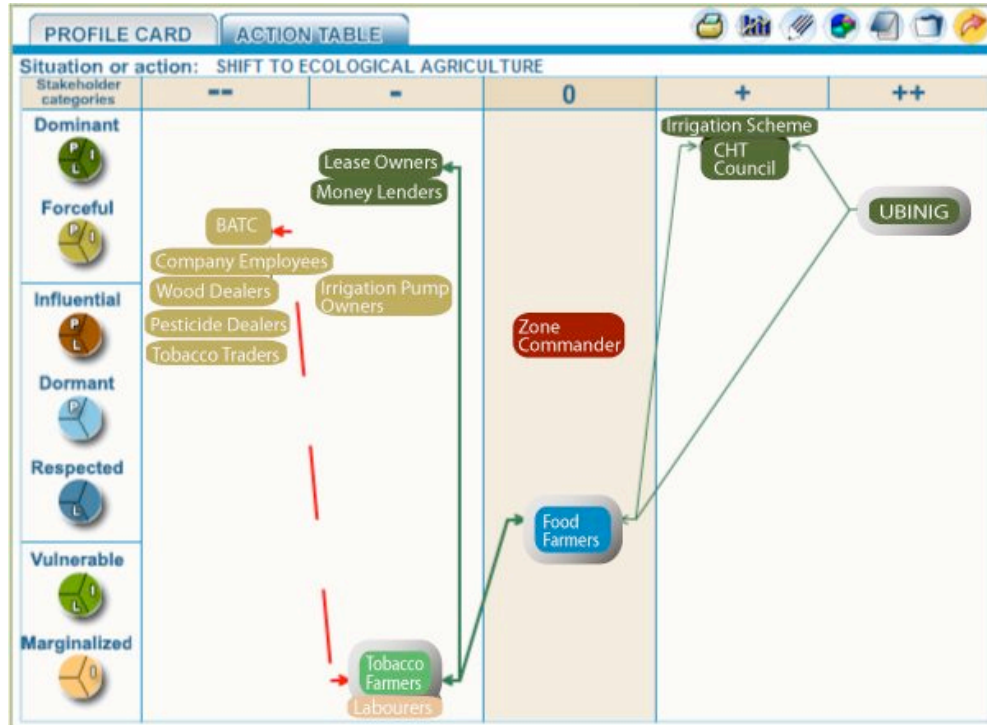


The profile of 15 different stakeholders is based on ratings of three factors that can affect the proposed action: interests, power and legitimacy (Table 1). The two columns on the left show stakeholders whose interests would be affected negatively by the shift to ecological farming (-- and -). The two columns on the right are stakeholders whose interests would be affected positively (+ and ++). The middle column shows stakeholders whose interests are neutral. The higher the stakeholders are in the Table, the greater is their power to influence the shift to ecological farming.

The effect of legitimacy on a stakeholder's profile is shown by the presence or absence of "L" in the pie chart in the column on the far left. The colour of each stakeholder group shows the unique way these factors combine to create each profile. The broken red line shows a history of conflict between the tobacco farmers and the BATC. The thin and thick green lines show histories of weaker and stronger relations of collaboration among those stakeholders. A

shadow behind the stakeholder name indicates the three stakeholders who were part of the assessment (labelled UBINIG, Food Farmer and Tobacco Farmer).

Table 1: Stakeholder structure in Lama as it relates to a shift to ecological farming.



The stakeholder structure shows that powerful stakeholders have opposing interests, and that some also have subordinate allies. A large block of forceful stakeholders led by the BATC would be strongly opposed to the proposed shift from tobacco to ecological farming. Some support for their position comes from land lease owners, money lenders, and irrigation pump owners. An opposing block of three stakeholders holds similar power to this group, and they support the shift to ecological farming. Between these two blocks lies a block of three vulnerable or marginalized stakeholders (labelled Tobacco Farmers, Labourers, and Food Farmers) whose interests would be negatively affected by or neutral to the proposed action. One cannot conclude, however, that they are allies of the powerful stakeholders opposed to the shift, because there is a history of conflict between them. Nor can they be counted on to support the shift to ecological agriculture; collaboration between food farmers and UBINIG is recent and still weak. One stakeholder (the Zone commander) is an influential and neutral party, making him a potential mediator.

Interpretation

The scenario is a challenging one for UBINIG because, according to the participants, most tobacco farmers will not believe their interests would be served by the proposed action, and food farmers will be neutral at best.

Action

Despite the challenges, several actions were identified as a result of the exercise. UBINIG decided it could try to indirectly influence tobacco farmers through its recent, positive link with food farmers who have close ties to tobacco farmers. The farmers who took part in the assessment noted that the connection between the three of them had already followed this path: one of the farmers had made the shift from tobacco to ecological farming after being exposed to that option through UBINIG, and invited the other tobacco farmers to think about doing the same. They noted, however, that this action would have little influence on the majority of tobacco farmers unless the campaign was supported by new information on the net economic benefits of ecological farming. The participants encouraged UBINIG to support or undertake research on the economic gains and losses from tobacco farming from the point of view of men and women, and to compare these to various forms of ecological farming. UBINIG agreed and also decided to study the impact on prices of more local food supplies and whether it is feasible to market horticulture products outside the township. Finally, the participants discussed building closer relations between UBINIG, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council and the BADC irrigation scheme as a way to create support for the shift both from the Zone Commander and the marginal stakeholders. They decided, however, that this action should come later, once the perceived interests of tobacco farmers and food farmers change in ways that show more support for the proposed action.

Observations on the Process

The farmer participants provided all of the information used to rate the various stakeholders, while the UBINIG staff added information on the history of collaboration and conflict that it was aware of. The facilitator asked for confirmation of results at each stage in the exercise, and encouraged the farmers to actively record their views on the cards provided. These were visually recorded

using words, pictures and objects representing the various factors and stakeholders. Both parties (farmers and UBINIG) discussed and agreed on the strategy that would be most useful as a result of the exercise. They were very surprised and enthused with the final table pulling together the information they had generated as it accurately expressed for them the key dynamics in the situation and the path ahead. They also noted that the exercise had made them more clearly aware of the challenge they faced, and that this was useful to their planning.