
Farmer-based research on alternatives to tobacco production

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Key Words

Causal Dynamics, Option Domain, Activity Mapping, The Wheel, Social Analysis CLIP, Forum, International Development, Bangladesh, Tobacco, Natural Resource Management, Agriculture, Rural Development, Participatory Action Research

Context

- Farmers grow tobacco on some 80,000 acres of agricultural land in Bangladesh, mainly under direct contract with the British American Tobacco Company (BATC).
- Tobacco farming causes large-scale deforestation, soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, farmer indebtedness, and serious health hazards for workers.
- Tobacco farmers are concerned and many are seeking alternatives.
- The Government of Bangladesh, as part of its obligations under the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, has restricted the use of tobacco products and committed to helping tobacco farmers shift out of tobacco production.

Questions:

- Why do farmers grow tobacco, despite their concerns?
- What crop combinations can farmers use to shift out of tobacco without bringing severe economic hardship?
- How to deal with tobacco companies, local money lenders and community leaders



Participants

Hundreds of tobacco farmers in three different districts of Bangladesh.

Tools

- Causal Dynamics
- Option Domain
- Activity Mapping
- The Wheel
- Social Analysis CLIP

Example Results

Why do farmers grow tobacco?

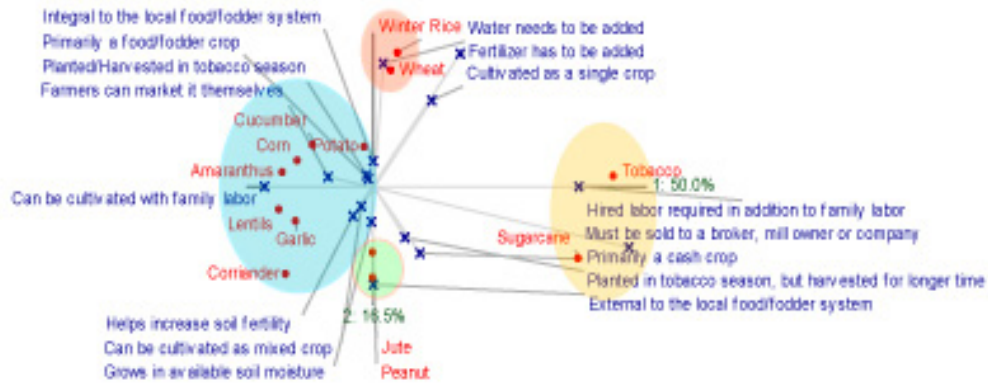
Causal Dynamics allowed farmers to analyze the way many factors are interrelated when it comes to tobacco production. They could see how they are trapped in a vicious circle of interacting factors that reinforce the decision to grow tobacco. As farmers and the soil have become dependent on tobacco, the technology (seed and knowledge) and markets for other crops and livestock have faded away. Experimentation with new crops is stagnant.



What crops can farmers use to shift out of tobacco?

Option Domain allowed farmers to analyze desirable crop characteristics and new crop combinations and rotations. By using this technique, participants came to focus on mixed

cropping systems involving crops farmers can markets themselves (either locally or regionally). The strategy involves starting the transition in the season before tobacco is grown, rather than simply substituting one crop for another. Plans are made to organize experiments (Activity Mapping).



How well did the alternative crop combinations and rotations perform in comparison to tobacco?

The Wheel allowed for an analysis of performance based on criteria that are meaningful to farmers. The crop combinations performed very well on three criteria (food stock, market, labour, see Figure 2). Control over seed, improving soil conditions and providing for multiple uses from the combinations remain challenges for farmers. These are ongoing areas of research (Activity Mapping).

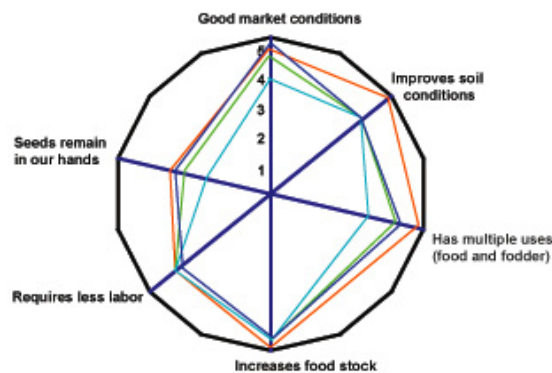




Photo: Wheel assessment of crop combinations, Cox's Bazaar.

What institutional supports are needed?

Social Analysis CLIP allowed farmers to identify stakeholders that may help or hinder the shift out of tobacco.

- BATC continues to use very aggressive and well-financed strategies to promote tobacco farming and to keep farmers dependent on their seed and technical help. The Nayakrishi Andolon (New Farmer's Movement) offers an alternative institutional strategy that can break this dependence by providing access to biodiverse seed and appropriate technical assistance.

Contributions of SAS²

The methods:

- combine dialogue, reflection, and problem-solving.
- use visual elements, local language, and local ways of measuring.
- support novel thinking and technical innovation.