

CASE STUDY

Farmer Perceptions of Farmer Life Schools

Introduction

On May 12 and May 14, 2002, 62 farmers in four communes from four Farmer Life Schools in the province of Kompong Chhnang in Cambodia participated in a data analysis exercise. The purpose of the exercise was mainly extractive: Srer Khmer wanted to know the impact of the Farmer Life School. However, the methodology was simply used based on participatory principles in which farmers provided quantitative answers to questions regarding the appropriateness and effectiveness of Farmers Life Schools and was, therefore, a useful exercise for farmers as well. After quantifying their answers, they were involved in a process on analyzing its meaning. Both the data and their analysis was recorded by the facilitators. It should be noted that the facilitation was done first by a non-Cambodian, then by a Cambodian employed by Srer Khmer, and finally by farmer trainers for themselves for the final two Farmer Life Schools, with some minor assistance from the outside facilitators. It was felt by the outside facilitators that the exercise was qualitatively better when done by the farmer facilitator.

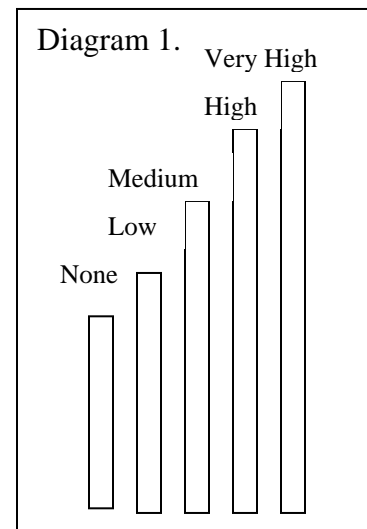
Methodology

A data collection and analysis process was used in which five 4 centimeter diameter plastic PVC pipes of different lengths (30, 35, 40, 45 and 50 centimeters) are attached together and the bottoms blocked, making it look something like a bamboo organ (see Diagram 1). The tops are open.

It is carefully explained to the farmers that questions or issues will be raised for which they will each independently, and secretly, “vote” their answer using these plastic tubes, by placing a seed or colored paper ball in the appropriate tube. Initially the tokens were balls of paper of different colors, but finally unshelled cashew nuts were used, again, of different colors. The color of the token indicated the sex of the respondent: red for women and blue for men, so that the data could be disaggregated.

The nature of the question or issue is such that it can be answered by indicating a level from “none” to “very high” as follows:

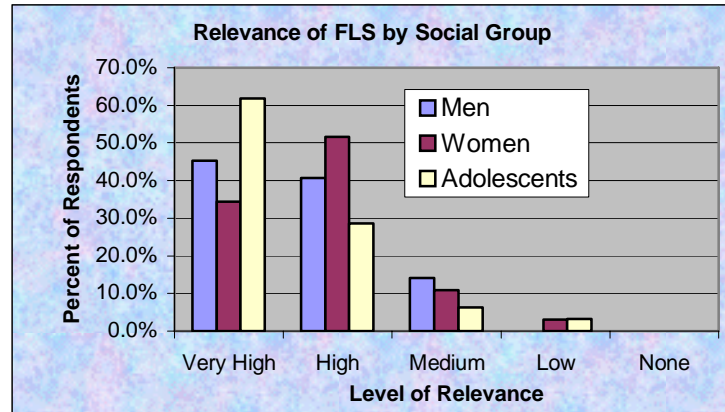
- 30 cm pipe = None
- 35 cm pipe = Little
- 40 cm pipe = Medium



45 cm pipe = High
50 cm pipe = Very High

Results

The data in Graph 1 indicates a number of interesting perceptions of FLS participants which are relevant to targeting in future FLS. Firstly, only a very small number of participants felt that the FLS was of low to medium relevance for any of the three social groups. Second, it indicates that the highest value of the FLS



might be for adolescents. This is supported by statements made by participants:

- Adolescents should learn so they can get more knowledge. Some things parents cannot teach their children.
- Before, the young girls have no idea or plans of what to do when they get older, but in the FLS they learn that they can get a job to generate income for supporting family like sewing, or other activities, after completing FLS.
- FLS is good for teenagers because they easily accept new ideas, both good and bad.
- The teenagers in the FLS said they share what they learned in the FLS with others and have influenced their risky behaviors.
- Teenagers in the village get together during festivities for dancing and at night the groups of boys often got into fights. This seems to have gone down since attending the FLS.

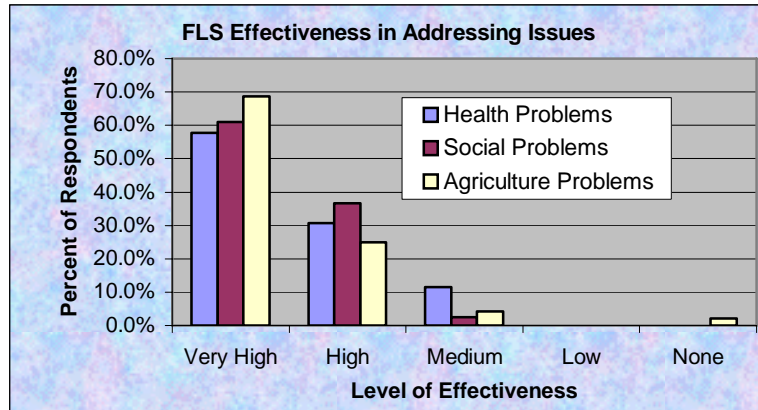
Finally, there appears to be a perception that the FLS may be somewhat more relevant for men than women. This, however, is not well supported by the comments made by respondents:

- Women need to attend the FLS as they can help their husbands to cut down or stop drinking, smoking, gambling, etc.
- Women need to attend the FLS because they help their husbands with their problems, like drinking, etc. Women have influence on their husbands for drinking, smoking, etc.

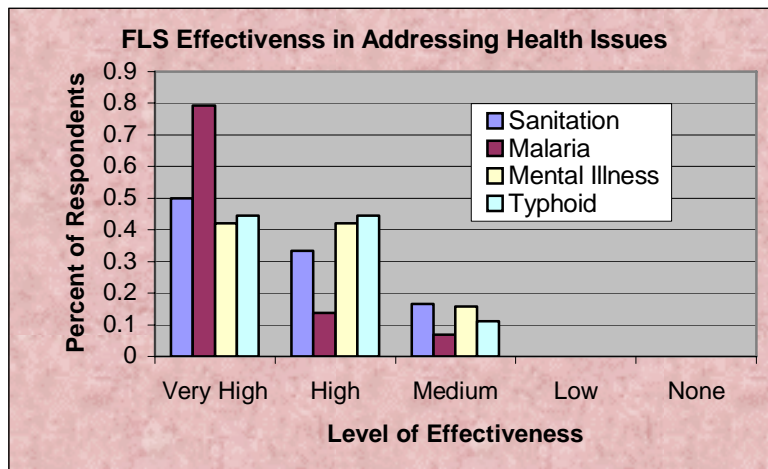
On the other hand, such statements indicate that there is a perception that men have more problems to solve than women, and the women's role is perceived as controlling their

husbands vices, habits and poor behavior. One of those problems also relates to the wives: domestic violence. Probably one of the key statements by one respondent was that, “if men and women come together in the FLS is best so they both know what happens at the FLS”.

Graph 2 below provides insights in to how well social problems, agriculture problems and health problems are addressed through the FLS. Generally, the data indicates that there is a general perception that the FLS is effective in addressing all three of these farm livelihood problem categories. There does seem



to be some indications, however, that farmers perceptions are that the FLS may be more effective in addressing agricultural issues than social or health issues. This may be influenced by the history of the FLS being from a Integrated Pest Management program, as well as the FLS being facilitated by IPM farmer trainers. One might be able to make the conclusion, however, that the FLS is probably an effective mechanism for all three of these problem categories.

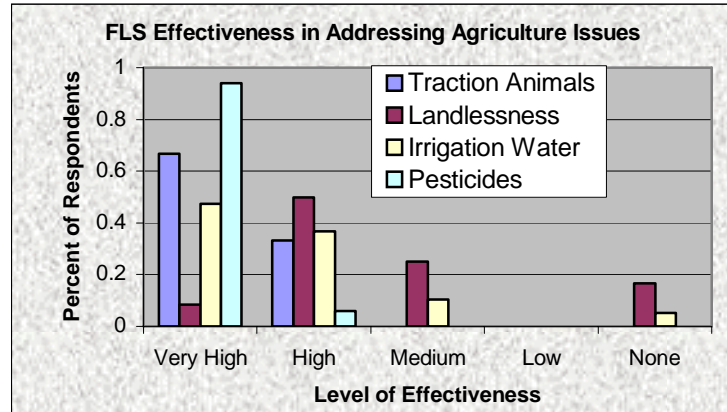


Graph 3 presents data on the effectiveness of FLS in addressing health issues. Different FLS groups had different health issues (combined in Graph 2 above). As such the number of respondents is significantly less per issue. While for most health issues, there seemed to be a perception by almost 90% of

participants that the FLS was “very high” to “highly” effective in addressing the four health issues indicated (sanitation, malaria, mental illness, typhoid) there appeared to be a significantly positive perceptions from one FLS group about the FLS process having an impact on malaria. It is interesting to note that none of the groups noted HIV/AIDS as a significant health problem in their areas, therefore, no data is presented on this. The data in the graph is backed up by comments by the participants:

- Now [after the FLS] every family boils water before drinking it. This is something we learned the importance of in the FLS which we didn't do before. (Village affected by typhoid)
- Before the FLS, if our children had typhoid we would take them to a traditional healer. Now we go to a health center.

Graph #4 illustrates the perceptions of participants in the FLS effectiveness in addressing agricultural issues. Four issues were suggested by the participants, to include shortage of traction animals for farming, landlessness, irrigation water and pesticides. Of particular interest is the perceptions of participants in the FLS



effectiveness in addressing pesticides, as this relates very much to the background of the farmer trainer facilitating the training, who were initially involved in IPM program activities. Also of particular note is the significantly reduced effectiveness of the FLS in addressing landlessness issues, but the effectiveness in addressing the problem with a shortage of draft animals. Additional documentation is needed to find the reasons behind these perceptions. Farmers noted that:

- Before I just did things without thinking about it. Now I relate it to other things in my life. I make plans and can now cultivate more crops than I did before, like vegetables, to make more money.

Such a statement lends some credence to the assumptions that FLS increases planning skills, resulting in a number of potential, positive impacts. Indeed, even issues of landlessness and traction animals could be approached through better strategic planning by individuals as well as communities.

Summary

The data presented in Graphs 1-4 provide some important insights into perceptions of FLS participants in terms of the impacts resulting from their participation the FLS in their own communities. While the data suggests that there is an overwhelmingly positive impact of the FLS for agriculture, social and health issues, the disaggregated data for each of the areas stimulates more questions than answers.

- What particular aspects of the FLS have the greatest influence on changes in behavior?
- Which methodologies are most effective in increasing knowledge?
- Why are some agriculture, social and health issues addressed more effectively than others and why?

- How can the effectiveness for all issues be enhanced within the context of the FLS?
- The data related the relevance of the FLS by social group is also important. While the data does suggest all the groups profit by the FLS to a significant degree, should some groups be targeted more?
- Is there a synergistic impact by combining age groups within the FLS, or is there something to be gained by segregating groups?

The comment about how women support men in making positive change is a particularly poignant testimony supporting “family” participation. The FLS of Srer Khmer has not worked with children.

- Is this important, and how should the FLS be adjusted?
- Or should children be included in the current FLS?
- CARE has tried to target it’s girls groups in the FLS. Is this a good idea? The data suggests that although their participation is important, the FLS may be more effective if age and gender are mixed.