Beneficiary Assessment for Agricultural Extension
A Manual of Good Practice

Lawrence F. Salmen (SDV)

October 2000

The World Bank
Rural Development Family
Agricultural Knowledge & Information Systems (AKIS)
Agricultural Knowledge & Information Systems is a thematic team focusing on agricultural extension, education, and research within the Rural Development Department of the Environmentally & Socially Sustainable Development Network of the World Bank.
# Contents

Foreword iv

Abbreviations v

Agricultural Extension and the Beneficiary Assessment Approach 1

## Designing the Beneficiary Assessment

- Understanding the Context 2
- Setting Objectives 2
- Selecting Institutions and Field Researchers 2
  - Institutions 2
  - Field Researchers 3
- Preparing Terms of Reference 4
- Sampling Frames 4
- Preparation of Interview Guides 5
- Methodology 6
  - Conversational Interviews 6
  - Focus Group Discussions 7
  - Participant Observation 8
  - Institutional Assessment 8

## Implementation

- Training of Field Researchers 9
- Monitoring and Evaluation 10
- Preparation of the Final BA Report 10
- Internalization 11

## Dissemination and Documentation of BA Impact

11

Annex: Terms of Reference for Beneficiary Assessments for Agricultural Extension 13
Agricultural extension programs are under increasing pressure to show results in order to maintain financing from public budgets. Experience indicates that agricultural extension systems must respond to farmers’ real needs, if they are to show results and be effective. Evaluating the quality and effectiveness of extension services is difficult, but is essential to improving program operations and maintaining funding. Beneficiary assessment is a tool that has proven effective in providing decisionmakers with information on how farmers view extension services. This AKIS Good Practice Note describes good practice in carrying out beneficiary assessments.

“AKIS Good Practice Notes” are designed to disseminate views, experiences, and ideas that may assist World Bank Team Leaders, national counterparts from Borrower countries, and other partners to prepare and implement projects to strengthen agricultural research, extension, and education programs. The Good Practice Notes contain valuable information about lessons learned from innovative experiences in World Bank projects and elsewhere, and make this information readily available for comment and use by project teams.

The Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems (AKIS) Thematic Team includes World Bank staff working in or interested in research, extension, and education programs. The team objective is to enhance the effectiveness of Bank support to agricultural knowledge and information system development. This, in turn, contributes to the Bank’s objectives of alleviating poverty, ensuring food security, and improving sustainable management of natural resources. The AKIS team emphasizes policy, institutional, and management issues associated with agricultural research, extension, and education. Other thematic teams focus on technical issues. The team mission is to “promote the development of sustainable and productive agricultural research, extension, and education systems in Bank client countries.” This “AKIS Good Practice Note” was prepared by Lawrence F. Salmen (SDV).

Marie-Hélène Collion
Chair, AKIS Thematic Group
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKIS</td>
<td>Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems Thematic Team of the World Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Beneficiary Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>Contact Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory Rural Appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOR</td>
<td>Term of Reference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Agricultural Extension and the Beneficiary Assessment Approach

The farmer is at the core of the agricultural enterprise. Climate, soil, seeds, roads, and insects affect agricultural production. The key person who determines how these factors are managed is the farmer. It is the farmer who decides on what crops, and how, when, and where to plant and cultivate them. The farmer also decides on what livestock will play a role in the farm enterprise. Information passed on to the farmer will only be effective if it is put to use by the farmer. Agricultural extension is basically a system to improve farm income through the provision of information to farmers. Extension programs are information services and, as with any service, the best judge of the quality of the service performed is the client, in this case the farmer. In extension work, assessment of its effectiveness includes not only the quality of the services, but also whether it succeeds in reaching large numbers of target farmers. A sound appraisal of the effectiveness of an agricultural extension program must start with listening attentively and systematically to the farmer. The input derived from listening to farmers is the essence of the beneficiary assessment approach described in this manual.

Designing the Beneficiary Assessment

Because Beneficiary Assessment (BA) is primarily a management tool, the objective of a BA, the way it is conducted, and the use to which it is put should be determined by managers of agricultural extension agencies. Terms of reference (TOR) must be prepared to guide the selection of persons inside or outside the extension agency to conduct the BA, and supervision of the work (see section “Preparing Terms of Reference” and Annex).

The following issues play a part in the design and execution of a beneficiary assessment:

- Understanding the context
- Setting objectives
- Selecting institutions and field researchers
- Preparing terms of reference for BA implementation
- Sampling frames
- Preparing interview guides
- Methodology
- Institutional assessment
- Training
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Report preparation
- Dissemination of findings.
Understanding the Context

To implement a beneficiary assessment, one must first have a good understanding of the environment in which it is to take place. This will be particularly important if the person doing the assessment is new to the project or locale. It is important to become familiar with the sociocultural setting and the institutional environment where the project is taking place to fully understand the context. The following are recommended as initial steps in assessment design:

- Reviewing relevant documentation such as identification, appraisal, and supervision reports; any previous related studies; and broader social and economic analyses—for local, regional, and national levels;
- Interviewing key persons involved in developing, implementing, and evaluating the project in other agencies, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), government, or donor institutions; and
- Exploring sites covered—and time permitting, those not covered—by the program being assessed. Limited immersion in the environment being affected by the intervention is in order; this should involve unstructured conversations with randomly selected intended beneficiaries, and other key people (diverse farmers chosen at random, community leaders, and members of local governments and NGOs).

Setting Objectives

Once the context in which the BA is to be implemented is clear, it will be easier to determine BA objectives that are feasible and realistic. The manager of the agricultural extension agency must develop the objectives of the BA. This assessment must be of use to the manager as he or she attempts to implement and evaluate a project that meets the needs, and helps realize the aspirations, of its intended beneficiaries. In determining objectives, and depending on the degree of decentralization of extension activities, the central manager may want to consult with regional managers. While the general objective of a BA will be to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of an agricultural extension program, particular objectives will likely include:

- Assessing the nature and degree of beneficiary satisfaction with the extension service;
- Determining the degree, and increasing the rate, of participation in extension-related activities;
- Identifying and helping the extension service reach the targeted segments of the population, regardless of income, ethnicity, or location;
- Assessing willingness to share in the costs of extension, thereby increasing sustainability;
- Providing feedback on the utility and appropriateness of the technologies and information supplied;
- Ascertaining farmer appreciation for, and involvement in, local public and private institutions;
- Determining the level of awareness of the existence and nature of the extension service and ways to relate to it; and
- Discovering and examining factors underlying motivation (or lack thereof) to implement advice of extension agents.

Selecting Institutions and Field Researchers

Ideally, BAs of agricultural extension projects should be carried out by the extension agencies themselves, in partnership with an NGO, a university research center, or a consulting firm. The contracted agency then identifies and recruits qualified persons to join the BA teams and helps coordinate the training and implementation process. Placing part of the responsibility for executing the BA with an outside agency should increase the quality and credibility of the BA,
as it is done with the involvement of a “neutral” party not seen as overly identified with the project itself.

The mix of in-house and external expertise in BA work combines the advantages of familiarity and internalization associated with in-house involvement, with technical expertise and credibility that comes with the participation of an external agency. A small, new extension agency may lack credibility and qualified personnel, so the BA work should be done by an external institution. A larger and well-established agency should have the BA work done by an internal client-feedback or monitoring and evaluation unit.

A director should be chosen who will be responsible to the manager of the extension agency for selecting and supervising the BA teams. This person must have a good field knowledge of agricultural systems and available technologies, and a good appreciation of the BA approach as well as the objectives of the assessment to be undertaken. In addition, the BA director will need good analytical and writing skills to effectively oversee the tabulation and analysis of assessment reports, and to prepare the final report. When a decision is made to involve an external agency, a lump-sum contract can be given by the extension service (with an appropriate TOR). The extension service can then liaise with the person/unit in the public entity responsible for monitoring the BA work. The BA director may be from the extension service or the external agency, as determined by extension management.

In selecting the individual and/or institution to manage a beneficiary assessment for an agricultural extension agency, it is important to keep in mind that the BA is an activity that, when done well, brings three diverse and often disparate entities into a functional and mutually-reinforcing partnership: the grassroots community of farmer-beneficiaries, the implementing agency (extension agency), and policymakers in government and donor agencies. The best BA practitioners should be able to communicate well with each of these layers of international development.

Field Researchers

BA teams should include people who are familiar with the local culture, and have sound conversational ability in the language of the beneficiaries. The selection process for the BA teams is an important one, because it determines to a large extent the quality of field interviews and the integrity of information gathered.

The BA teams must be able to conduct conversational interviews with people of modest means who do not know them. Responses must be elicited in such a way that they can be recorded in an orderly and intelligible manner, and ultimately be used to improve the living conditions of these people. Although the assessors ideally should be university graduates, individuals without a university degree, but with good communications and writing skills, can do an effective job.

A good BA interviewer will be:
- A good listener;
- Sensitive to local culture;
- Respectful of all persons, regardless of status;
- Knowledgeable about local agriculture;
- Unobtrusive;
- Open and engaging;
- Proficient at recalling interviews; and
- A competent writer.

Having good recall is an important characteristic for the assessor, who should try to minimize note-taking during interviews. The interviews should be done in an informal, conversational manner, as opposed to a more structured questionnaire style. Note-taking during an interview may create an atmosphere of anxiety or mistrust, inhibiting the free flow of information. Because assessors will be writing notes based on their interviews—as opposed to filling out forms—clarity and precision of writing will be important.

Despite the fact that most BA interviewers are social scientists, the above-mentioned char-
acteristics are more important than the academic discipline of the interviewers. BA teams should be gender balanced because persons normally communicate more openly with persons of the same gender, particularly on sensitive topics often covered by BAs.

Preparation Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for BA implementation (see Annex for Prototype) should elaborate on the following areas:

- Brief note on background and justification (rationale);
- Specific purpose and objectives;
- Methodology—techniques to be used;
- Research issues and themes to be addressed (including the preparation of an interview guide);
- Sample size;
- Reporting (forum, frequency, to whom);
- Time frame for implementation (generally between four weeks and six months, depending on the sample size); and
- Budget (costs can range from US$20,000 to 60,000).

Sampling Frames

In determining the sample size, the primary concern is that the beneficiary population interviewed should be large enough to serve as the basis for management decisionmaking. Salmen (1995) stated: While statistical sampling procedures may serve as a general guide, these will suggest sample sizes greater than those needed for beneficiary assessment. Because of the in-depth, qualitative methodology employed in this approach, long conversational interviews, often complemented by participant observation, can provide a great deal of understanding from a relatively small number of beneficiaries.”

BA work uses purposive sampling based on parameters determined by the extent of extension coverage, the variability of target communities, and the complexity of the program. Depending on variability of the client group for extension services, the sample should be stratified according to ethnicity, class, income, farm size, gender, and other relevant variables. Within the stratified sample groups, sampling is random.

For agricultural extension BAs, interviews should be conducted with representative samples of all major stakeholders. The most important, and largest, group to be interviewed, naturally, is the direct beneficiaries, the poorer farmers of the communities where extension takes place. Communities to be interviewed should be selected at random with the number of farmers to be interviewed varying according to the size of the community (usually 5-15 percent of the community). Other key stakeholders to be interviewed in the selected communities would include: extension workers (see Box 1), community leaders (formal and informal), local government officials, NGOs, senior officials of the agriculture line ministry, and social and economic policymakers. For control purposes and to better understand the nature of demand and dissemination, it will be necessary to include representative samples with residents of communities that are similar to those receiving extension but which are not covered by extension.

By including interviews with representative samples of these other key stakeholders, it becomes possible to provide project managers with a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the issue at hand. In addition, it enables BA teams to provide more relevant and realistic recommendations. BAs that include focus groups and participant observation (see below) will also select representative groups and case

Box 1  Extension Agent-Farmer Interaction

The interaction between extension agents and contact farmers has generally had positive results, as reflected in the greater increases in production experienced by contact farmers compared to farmers who did not have direct contact with extension. These latter, which is most of the farmers, may feel resentment toward the extension worker, who generally has little or no time to spend with them. Some contact farmers voice disappointment about extension agents who lecture them on research themes considered relevant to farmer needs, without listening to farmers who express their real needs.

Extension agents, of course, have their own perspectives, which must be understood in any comprehensive attempt at reforming extension services. Many extension agents complain of lack of support from their own central offices. They receive too little fuel for their vehicles. They are given little or no chance for promotion. They are left on their own often in remote corners of the country with inadequate supervision. Perhaps most frustrating to extension agents is their perceived inability to resolve many of the problems faced by farmers. In Ghana, fully two-thirds of the extension agents interviewed for a beneficiary assessment stated that they could solve fewer than 40 percent of the farmers’ problems. Although much of the reasoning for this perceived shortcoming lay in the lack of resources of the farmers, roughly one-third of the extension agents said that the major obstacles preventing them from assisting farmers as they should were constraints imposed on them by the extension agency that limited them to disseminating knowledge gained during their monthly training, and by their own ignorance. Insights such as these, gained during the conversational interviewing that is central to the BA approach, can be invaluable to the management of an extension agency as it seeks to improve the performance of its staff, and thereby enhance the quality of its services to the farmer.

studies, respectively, and take more time, or involve larger teams of interviewers.

Preparation of Interview Guides

The interview guide plays an important role in the implementation of the BA. Given that this is the main instrument used to obtain information from the assessment, the development of its content should be a collaborative effort largely between the project manager and the BA study director. It should also involve the BA team members to obtain their inputs and provide them a sense of ownership of the exercise.

The BA technique of conversational interviewing uses as guides themes based on areas of interest and operational relevance to project management, instead of administering mostly closed questions, as is generally done in traditional surveys. This technique allows for a smoother flow of information, and often brings to light new information that was not previously considered by project management. The following are sample interview themes:

- How has agricultural production changed (increased/decreased) over the previous three years?
- Why has this change occurred?
- What knowledge and information did farmers obtain from contact with the extension service?
- How many farmers obtained information directly from the extension service? How many obtained information indirectly through their friends, neighbors, or relatives?
- How useful was the information obtained from the extension service? How many farmers adopted new technologies or innovations as a result of this information?
- How effective was the extension service and the extension agent?
- How could the extension service be improved?

Interview guides need to be tailored to the particular group thus separate guides would need to be developed for farmers, extension agents, and government officials. Regardless of
who is being interviewed, the guide should not include more topics than can readily be memorized by the interviewer and discussed during a one hour interview.

Although the dominant mode of inquiry used in beneficiary assessments is the qualitative technique of conversational interviewing, there are certain kinds of data that can best be addressed in a quantitative way. These include topics requiring prioritization, and certain touchstone issues that may best be reduced to a simple yes/no response such as: Have you heard of the extension agency? On balance, have you benefited from this extension service? Were you consulted on the kind of assistance you wanted from the extension agency?

Methodology

Conversational Interviews

A conversational interview is the basic tool of inquiry for the BA practitioner. These interviews often take place in the home of the interviewee, where the farmer will be most comfortable. Interviews should be conducted in the local dialect, in such a way that open-ended questions revolve around a number of themes or topics that project management has selected. The objective is to gain in-depth information on beneficiary views in relation to a planned or ongoing activity, by encouraging beneficiaries to speak freely and bring to light issues of concern to project management.

Interviews may be conducted on a one-to-one basis or in focus groups. The advantages of individual interviews are that people are likely to speak more freely, without worrying what peers or other community members may think. Lower-status or introverted members of communities may not feel comfortable speaking out in groups. Use of focus group interviews permits a wider coverage of people, and may provoke insightful commentary stimulated by peer interaction. Focus groups are, however, more difficult to quantify, and attribution of responses to specific individuals more difficult.

In undertaking conversational interviews, the interviewer should establish trust and good rapport with the respondent to enhance the likelihood of gaining unsolicited information (which could be as important as the thematic areas identified in the interview guide). The timing of the interview, its duration, and the time of day, should all depend on what is most convenient for the intended beneficiary. Interviews should be completed in under one hour (both to accommodate interviewees and to facilitate recall). Note-taking should be kept to a minimum, and should be completed as soon after the interview as possible.

Unguided discussion is apt to be vague and therefore of little use for decisionmaking; probing for specifics is often required. For example, if the intended beneficiary of an extension project stated that he or she did not benefit from it, the interviewer should probe to find reasons for this dissatisfaction, preferably prioritizing reasons (up to three).

Conversational interviews are simply a way to approach a subject in a natural manner. Asking direct questions on sensitive topics can put people on the defensive; responses given may be ones that the respondent feels the interviewer wants to hear. The use of indirect questioning is meant to elicit a more valid expression of opinion, or of fact. Below are examples of interviewing techniques.

- **Assessment of quality of extension service:** “I’ve noticed that a number of farmers in this community have experienced good growth with their crops this year [including yours, if noticeable]. I know the extension service has been active in this area. The goal of extension is to increase agricultural production and thereby improve the living conditions of farmers...”

- **Responsiveness of project to needs and priorities of farmers:** [For those farmers who are...}
familiar with the extension message] “In some parts of this country extension work has clearly had a positive effect on agricultural production. Would you say this is the case with your particular farm? When the extension agent visits you (or a neighbor), does he spend time listening to your concerns or is he mainly transmitting messages of his own?”

- **Role of farmer-to-farmer information exchange:** “Clearly extension agents do not have the time to contact all farmers individually. Perhaps you or others in the community receive information from other farmers who have had direct contact with extension workers . . .”

- **Suggestions to improve project:** “Putting yourself in the place of the head of the agricultural extension agency, what would you do to best serve the needs of the farmer?” or “Some farmers complain about the extension service, some praise it. In a poor country like this extension has its constraints, like all government services. Yet few would deny that extension could do better. The challenge is to give specific suggestions for improvement…”

---

**Box 2 Interviews with Extension Contact Group Members and Nonmembers**

Conversational interviewing with both members and nonmembers of contact groups (CGs) in ten African countries revealed that in all but one (Mali) the CG generally failed in its task as diffuser of information received from the extension worker. Part of the problem was the minimal supervision and publicity given to contact groups. In Senegal, perhaps the country where CGs were weakest, a number of farmers who were listed as belonging to CGs did not, when interviewed, know that they were members. Only a third of the farmers in areas covered by the extension agency knew of the existence of CGs. Eliminating the CG members, fully 90 percent of the non-CG farmers did not know anything about the existence of CGs. While part of the problem lay in the absence of an information campaign relating to CGs on the part of the extension agency, another clear obstacle was the lack of incentive for the CG member to pass information on to his non-CG member farmer. These insights regarding the degree of knowledge about the CG and the lack of motivation of the CG member to relay extension messages to non-CG neighbors came directly out of the conversational interviewing of farmers. The importance of these insights can be seen in the decisions to strengthen CGs in several countries or downplay them, to the point of elimination in Senegal, and in a general trend toward more participatory extension models involving entire communities.


---

**Focus Group Discussions**

In addition to enabling a wider coverage of the beneficiary population in a given time period, focus group interviews can serve as a cross-check to individual interviews carried out in the BA. The groups should normally have 6-12 people with common characteristics (for example, groups of intended beneficiaries may be composed of married women, male heads of households, youth from 15-25). There are times, however, when it may be of use to purposely mix the constituents of a focus group—say, with members and nonmembers of contact groups—to better appreciate the nature of conflict and communication between them, and provide the opportunity for indigenous solutions.

The interview guide should be used in conducting these interviews. The interviewer takes on a facilitative role, guiding the discussion to cover topics from the thematic guide and ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to participate. This will generally entail encouraging the more reticent, introverted persons to speak up while providing less encouragement to those most apt to dominate the discussion. A researcher should also be present to take notes.
While the difficulty of quantifying focus group discussions may be considered a liability, their utility as a cross-check and as a fairly rapid and easy-to-read barometer of the mood of a community on many topics make focus groups a useful component of the BA approach.

Participant Observation

This technique generally involves living in a target community for a lengthy period. During this stay, it is expected that the participant observer will establish enough rapport and involvement to enable him/her to represent accurately the conditions within the community as they relate to project objectives. The participant observer normally spends from one to three weeks in a given community. The researcher will focus on the areas of concern identified in the interview guide. Particular issues related to agricultural extension that have been the object of inquiry using participant observation include: the relationship between contact groups and other community associations, the role of gender in dissemination of the extension message, and the nature and extent of interaction between an extension agent and the community served.

During this stay in the community, the participant observer should prepare case studies of 5-10 households based on repeated visits and observation. Participant observation, being costly and time-consuming, should be used selectively on topics of particular interest, that are of a sensitive nature, and that lend themselves to this form of intensive personal interaction.

Because participant observation is time-consuming and costly, it may not be feasible to include it in many BAs. The value of close, protracted observation of persons who become transformed from interviewees to acquaintances and perhaps friends should, however, be recognized and built in to all BA work. Part of the reason for the success of the BAs done on agricultural extension in Guinea for example, was that the interviewers lived in each community in the sample for roughly 5 days. This mini-participant observation provided an in-depth understanding of the cultural context surrounding the project intervention, which gave added weight and relevance to the BA team’s observations.

Important factors in undertaking participant observation include:

- **The reason for the participant observer’s stay should be explained to everyone at the outset**: Communities, while informed of the nature of the participant observer’s stay in the community, should ultimately see the participant observer as more than an acquaintance, more like a friend.

- **There should not be over-identification with any group, but rather accessibility to all**: A few close contacts from diverse major segments of the population should be cultivated. They should represent key social groups such as landowners and landless members and non-members of contact groups. The participant observer should join in major organizations and activities of the community, to be appreciated and identified as a participant. The observer should retain independence yet demonstrate some level of involvement in the affairs of the community.

- **The focus of inquiry must be consistent with that of the BA**: The participant observer should base structured conversations on topics in the interview guide, and discuss relevant issues emerging from the guide with representative members of the community.

Institutional Assessment

Successful development is promoted and sustained by institutions. Although people are rightfully said to be the focal point of development, it is the way people are organized and represented in institutions that gives them the voice and opportunity for their own advancement. Despite their obvious importance, however, institutions are often neglected in social
analysis work. Beneficiary assessments for agricultural extension must include an understanding of those institutions necessary for the sound and sustained workings of extension, as an integral part of their analysis. Key institutions would include: community associations (those that represent the entire community, leadership councils, women’s associations, youth and sports clubs, and credit unions); NGOs that work in the community; and local government. In each institution there are various stakeholders or target informants to be interviewed around certain cogent topics.

Informant groups to interview for the institutional assessment include:
- Institutional leaders (all);
- Members (sample stratified by age, gender, and if relevant, income/class, ethnicity); and
- Nonmembers (small sample, similar stratification as preceding);
- Community leaders, local government officials.

The institutional assessment should attempt to determine the role of the group in relation to the extension program. Topics for the interview would include:

- Objectives of the institution and the degree to which these objectives have been achieved;
- Criteria for membership (if any);
- Track record—major accomplishments;
- Role as development agent; potential as catalyst for participation;
- Relationship to other institutions, public and private; and
- Potential as vehicle for empowerment; effectiveness.

Although the BA would usually include interviews with senior government officials, a thorough understanding of national institutions is not within the purview of most BAs of agricultural extension. The focus for institutional assessment in the BA of extension is at the micro level, where the farmers live and work and where extension must be effective to succeed.

These four techniques of conversational interviewing, focus groups, participant observation, and institutional assessment are central to the BA approach; other survey techniques, ranging from traditional questionnaires to those used in participatory rural appraisal (PRA), may usefully be introduced to complement the four main techniques.

### Implementation

#### Training of Field Researchers

The training of local researchers should take from two to five days depending on the experience of team members. The training takes the form of orientation, because BA is a simple-to-use technique, and should be relatively easy to implement. The following (collapsible) training schedule is recommended:

All field researchers would undergo the first two days of training:

- **Day 1:**
  - Introduction to the project and its objectives;
  - Introduction of the BA approach and distribution of course materials;
  - Illustration of BA as a management tool to be used at all phases of the project cycle (design, implementation, and evaluation), through presentation and discussion of case studies; and
  - Familiarization with the reading materials provided.
Day 2:
- Discussion of the following BA techniques: conversational interviews, focus groups, and participant observation;
- Review of the interview guide;
- Tips on report writing;
- Simulation of individual interviews and focus group discussions using the interview guide;
- Note taking based on simulation exercises; and
- Review of note-taking.

Those field researchers with little experience in qualitative research would continue for three additional days:

Days 3–4:
- Field exercise and pretest of interview guide. The team will choose one or more communities to apply the draft interview guide. Most team members will conduct conversational interviews with at least five persons selected at random as representatives of the diverse elements (such as age, gender, status) of the community. The remainder will conduct either focus groups or participant observation.

Day 5:
- Morning: Team members will review notes and relate experiences to the entire group; and
- Afternoon: Critique by the study director and the project manager; suggestions for improvement of applied techniques and the interview guide.

Training should involve social fund staff, even beyond those participating in the assessment work. Such involvement will allow for tailoring of the methodology to the particular context of communities and operations, and exposure of fund staff to participatory appraisal techniques that may be incorporated into their own work.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Adequate monitoring is a key aspect of the BA process. Monitoring and evaluation of the BA is the overall responsibility of the extension agency manager, assisted by an external technical advisor. This monitoring is necessary to ensure that the BA stays true to its objectives. The monitoring process must ensure that BA researchers are effectively gathering information and not biased in their recording of interviews, and that information gathered is relevant to project management needs.

The most crucial moment for the monitoring of the BA is the interim review, which should come roughly one-third of the way through the fieldwork. The BA team should prepare a brief progress report for this review presenting initial findings, suggesting revisions to the interview guide, and making other recommendations for BA improvement. This interim review allows for changes in the BA based on actual field experience, yet still leaves sufficient time remaining for the improvements to affect the overall assessment.

When beneficiary assessment work covers an extensive area, logistical and budgetary constraints may preclude persons coming together for a mid-term review. In this case, the SF manager and the BA director should visit each site covered by a regional team and hold mini-interim reviews on progress achieved in each area. Findings from these localized reviews can then be compared and synthesized at national headquarters, giving an understanding of overall progress with the BA.

Preparation of the Final BA Report

The final beneficiary assessment report is a critical part of the BA process, because it summarizes the findings of the field research and also because the recommendations it provides serve as a guide to project management. Given the
goal of serving a wide range of users, two kinds of final reports for the BA may be considered: the comprehensive for discussion with donors, and the abbreviated for local use. The comprehensive final report should attempt to quantify findings to the greatest extent possible. Responses to a few key questions should be categorized according to thematic areas of the interview guide and presented as percentages. The findings of focus group discussions should be summarized by groups and by the regions where they took place. The report should focus as much as possible on issues of relevance and importance to project management.

The comprehensive final BA report should contain the following:
- An executive summary;
- An introduction that gives background information on the, the objectives of the BA, and a description of the methodology used;
- Findings of the BA as they relate to the interview guide (this section should include tabular data);
- Any other relevant information; and
- Conclusions and recommendations.

The abbreviated report should contain only the essentials of sample size, interview guide, conclusions (as related to key findings), and recommendations. The length of final reports will vary according to the subject matter, need, and context (5-10 pages for abbreviated, and 25-40 pages for comprehensive).

Internalization

Much as an intended beneficiary has to gain ownership of a development initiative for it to take root and flourish, so the agricultural extension agency has to own a beneficiary assessment so that it too takes hold and becomes the instrument of change it is intended to be. Experience demonstrates that BA work will be far more likely to gain its desired impact if it has an institutional home within the implementing agency. Although many of those who conduct the BA should be external to the agency, they need a counterpart unit within the agency to serve as intermediary between themselves and the extension management. The functions of this unit would be to (a) assist agency management with the BA design; (b) participate in the implementation of the BA; (c) monitor progress; (d) assist in the preparation and dissemination of the final report; and most important, (e) help internalize the findings and recommendations of the BA in such a way that they result in concrete changes in the practices and policies of the agency. In this way the feedback from the communities of intended beneficiaries has the desired effect of improving the work of the extension agency.

Dissemination and Documentation of BA Impact

Beneficiary assessment is an integral part of an extension agency’s developmental activity; as such, its findings are to be used to further the objectives of the agency. The major audience for these findings is the management of the agency itself. Other audiences are also important, however. Dissemination of the findings of a beneficiary assessment should start with the origin of these findings, the communities of intended beneficiaries, for two reasons: First, these beneficia-
ries can confirm or refute findings, thereby reinforcing the message or calling for further inquiry. Second, as a matter of respect: this is the story told by members of the community for their own betterment, so they should be the first to hear it.

A second external audience for dissemination is the agricultural policy formation sector of government. Sharing BA results with these public sector officials will help bring about needed program coordination as well as enriching policy formulation with extension experience. A third audience is the World Bank and other donors. Both government and donors may best be reached through seminars, workshops, and roundtable discussions. When the lessons of the BA have wide application, the general public may be reached via publications.

Finally, an important part of the BA process that is often neglected is the documentation of how BA findings have affected project activities. This should be done at the end of the BA, after the report is given to project management. The task manager should make sure that any follow-up actions that are taken as a result of BA findings be kept in the project file as well as the final BA report. A manager appointed while a project is going on will thus have up-to-date information on the BA, and be likely to continue to follow the approach in use. By documenting the process, findings, and impact of beneficiary assessments, and keeping this information as a permanent part of the file, the BA process becomes a learning and feedback component generating continuous project improvement.
Annex: Terms of Reference for Beneficiary Assessments for Agricultural Extension

The candidate who wishes to conduct a beneficiary assessment should address each of the following issues. Elaboration of each is provided in this manual.

Rationale and Objectives

Why is this beneficiary assessment (BA) being carried out? Who are the primary and secondary audiences for it? What are the major objectives of the BA?

Generally, the beneficiary assessment is done to provide feedback to the management of the agricultural extension agency, which should result in project improvements. Secondary audiences would include donors and the host-country government, central and local. More particular objectives might include: determining the level of satisfaction of intended beneficiaries, understanding the degree and manner in which farmers have participated in various phases of the implementation of the extension projects, and learning how stakeholders feel the project could be improved.

Methodology

Beneficiary assessment is a qualitative research tool used to provoke policy and program change. As such, to the degree possible, findings are to be quantified. The core techniques of BA are: (a) conversational interviewing among representative groups of key stakeholders (intended beneficiaries, contractors, NGOs, government officials); (b) focus group discussion, particularly with intended beneficiaries; (c) participant observation, and (d) institutional assessment. This core may readily be complemented by such PRA techniques as mapping, wealth ranking, and Venn diagrams.

Sample Framework

The sample size must be established according to what is considered significant by the extension agency’s management. Given the use of in-depth probing and qualitative techniques, smaller samples than what are normally considered to be statistically significant will suffice, although they must allow for meaningful cross-tabulation and be of sufficient size to be useful for decisionmaking. Samples should be representative of both numbers of people reached and numbers of subprojects funded. Stratification should be by gender, ethnicity (where relevant), project type (health, education, water), and region of country.

Research Issues/ Interview Guide

The research issues for the BA will be determined by the extension agency manager in consultation with the BA director. They will be addressed largely by interviewing, using a basic interview guide that may be modified for use with different stakeholder groups. This guide would include the following topics:

- Exposure to extension service—how people learned of its existence and what they know about it;
- Participation—degree and nature of involvement in decisions regarding extension in community;
- Dissemination—utility of contact group/family as relay for extension message;
• Partnerships—collaboration with other entities: local governments, NGOs, private sector; degree, utility, advisability for each;  
• Satisfaction with extension regarding objectives, mode of operation, and relevance to farmers’ needs; and  
• Recommendations for improvements in extension service.

Dissemination

The value of a beneficiary assessment correlates directly with the effect it has on influencing action. Whereas the extension agency management is the immediate and, generally, most important consumer of BA findings, a number of other groups should benefit from these as well: the intended beneficiaries of the project, the local (and international) NGO community, and local and central government. An important component of the TOR for a BA done on extension work is a dissemination plan detailing how these various stakeholders are going to be reached: papers, workshops, seminars, audiovisual media, and other means.

Schedule

A brief breakdown of the phases of BA activity should include:

- *Training and field testing of interview guide*—usually one week  
- *Field work (including interim progress review)*—usually 4-6 weeks  
- *Data tabulation and analysis*—usually 2 weeks  
- *Final report preparation*—usually 2 weeks

Total time for most BAs is from two to three months. This amount of time varies considerably from project to project, the sample size, experience of the BA team, and logistical difficulties in reaching interviewees. It is important to keep in mind that this schedule is for one round of interviewing. Beneficiary assessment is best conceived and practiced as an iterative tool providing periodic feedback to a social fund over time, at say 18-month intervals.

Budget

This will vary even more than schedules, according to local costs. The key categories here are personnel, expenses (food and lodging), travel, and office supplies. Fees for persons skilled in qualitative research techniques are considerably higher than those paid to enumerators who apply questionnaires. The average cost for BA work on agricultural extension has fallen in the range of US$20,000 to US$60,000 per survey.