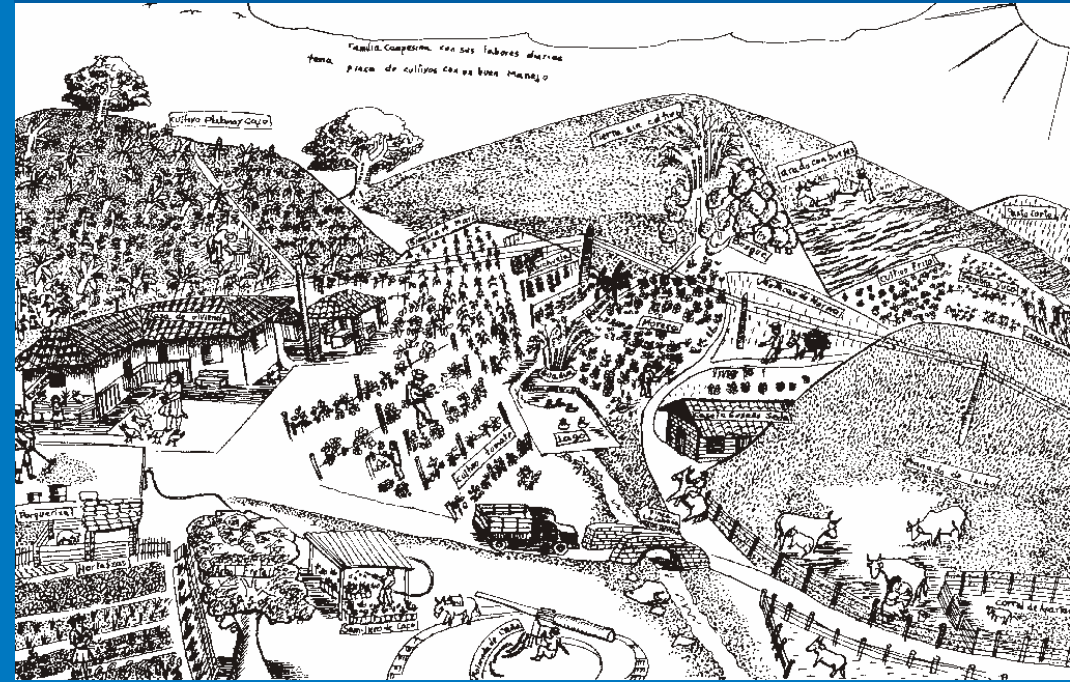


Some Valuable Lessons

10



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Fundación Carvajal



The International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) is dedicated to the alleviation of hunger and poverty in tropical developing countries, through the application of science to increase agricultural production while conserving natural resources. CIAT is one of 18 international centers of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). The CGIAR is a group of 40 countries and international agencies that support agricultural research for development in the tropical countries of the world.

Participatory Research in Agriculture (IPRA) is a CIAT special project created in 1987 with the objective of developing methodology for involving small-scale farmers in the design and evaluation of appropriate agricultural technology. IPRA is sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The Carvajal Foundation, located in Cali, Colombia, is a non-profit organization created in 1961 with the objective of promoting the social, economic and ecological development of low-income communities. The Foundation supports programs related to microenterprise, low-income housing, community radio, health, education, community recycling, crafts, and agricultural development. It contributes to the development of similar foundations nationally and internationally through sharing field experience.

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Handbooks for CIAL

Some Valuable Lessons

HANDBOOK No. 10



Fundación Carrvajal



Presentation

This handbook is the result of participatory research carried out by several institutions and rural communities. The handbooks were designed by farmers. The examples are based on real cases and form part of the experience of the Local Agricultural Research Committees (CIALs) that participated in the project from the beginning. The following CIALs collaborated in the preparation of this handbook: Cinco Días, El Diviso, Pescador, San Bosco, Sotará and Portachuelo in the state of Cauca, Colombia.

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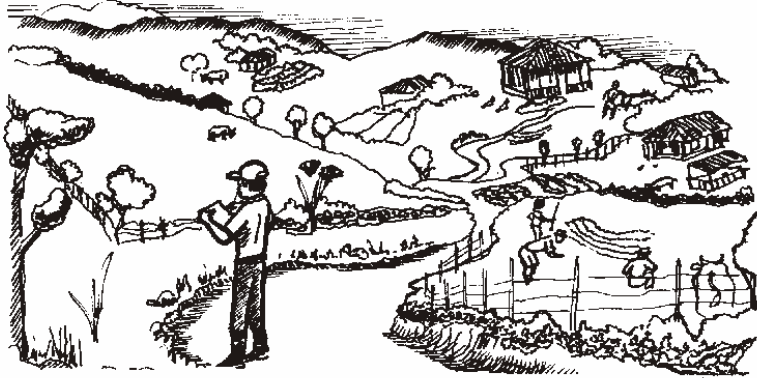
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To be successful Local Agricultural Research Committees need to work as a team.



People in our village first learned about farmer research committees from an extension officer.

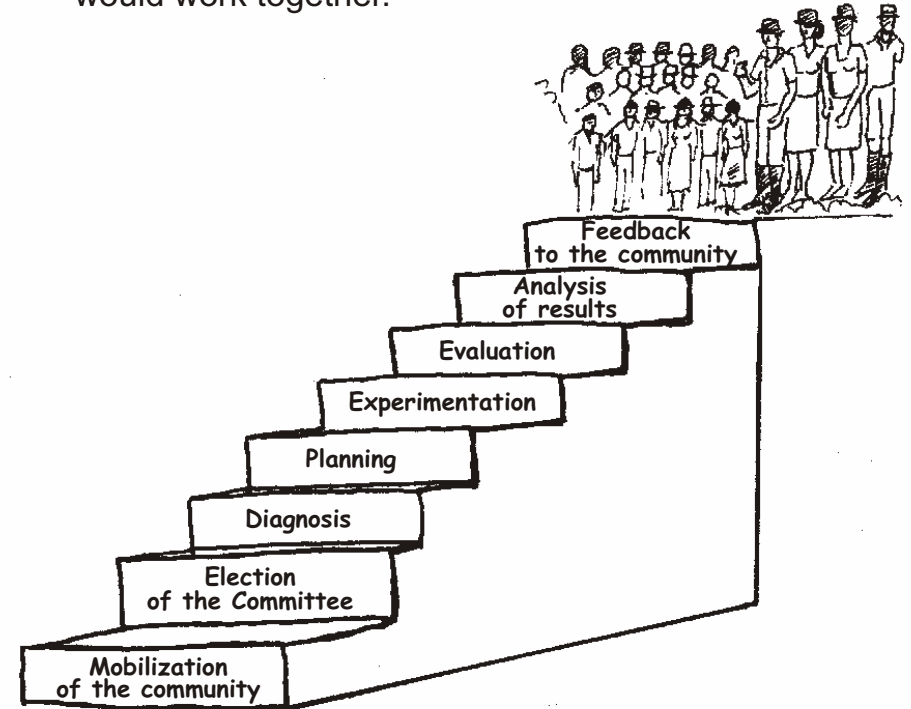


She or he organizes meetings to explain what the Committees do and how they work.



We decided to form a Committee and the people of our village elected the members.

Step by step the extension officer explained how the Committee and the whole community would work together.



We understood that the Committee would do different kinds of experiments:

The first is called the preliminary experiment.

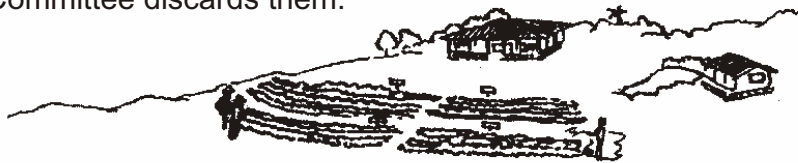
In the preliminary experiment the Committee tries out several new things to see which work. It's risky so the experiments are small. The plots can have as few as 5 rows for each treatment. The rows might only be 5 meters long.

The preliminary experiment lets the Committee identify the treatments that are unsuitable for our conditions.



The second experiment is called the check.

In the check experiment the Committee tests the treatments that were successful in the preliminary experiment. They want to make sure that these treatments are really suitable. If they give poor results in the check experiment, Committee discards them.



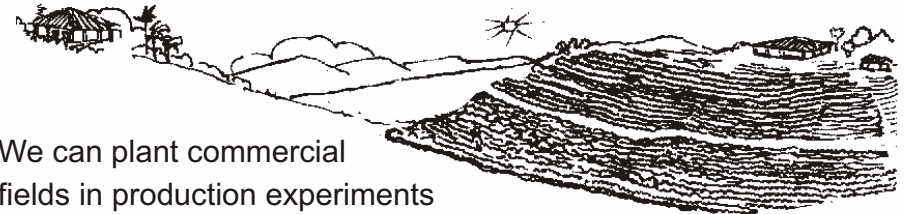
The plots in a check experiment are a little larger.

When treatments give good results in both the preliminary and check experiments, the Committee is more confident that they are suitable for our area.

When the control gives better results than the treatments in both experiments, the Committee can conclude that our local way of doing things is better than the new things they are trying.



Finally, the Committee plants a production experiment. The plots in a production experiment are bigger than the check experiment plots. Production experiments can have 20 or more rows per treatment and the rows might be 20 meters long.



We can plant commercial fields in production experiments because we already know that the treatments are suitable for our local conditions.

Sometimes local students volunteer for our research committee and work with us in our experiments.

It's a good idea to give students the opportunity to participate in agricultural research.

The students and the farmers learn from each other



In our village women participate in the research committee.

Their role is important because they notice different things and often have different priorities.

For example, the men are interested in how many kilos a new bean variety will produce. But the women also want to know how the beans will taste and how long they will take to cook.

The women in our Committee design, manage and evaluate experiments very well. They take good care of the experiments and are good at communicating the results.



Sometimes husbands make it difficult for their wives to participate in research committees.

Some men feel that women should stay at home looking after the children.

But women can benefit from their participation in a committee. It gives them the opportunity to express their opinions and to work together in a group.



What if there is a conflict in a committee?

A researcher from a national agricultural service helped to form a farmer research committee. The committee had members from two different villages.

Soon she realized that there were problems in the Committee



She helped the villages form two separate committees. Now both are working well.

What can happen if a committee becomes dependent on external resources?

An extension officer missed a meeting with a Committee, so they delayed planting an experiment.



They learned that other Committees in their area were also waiting for the extension officer to arrive.

When he finally appeared, the Committee asked why he hadn't visited them as planned. He explained that he had been waiting for his office to give him the funds for buying fertiliser for the Committee's experiment.



The Committee proposed a solution. They decided to use the profits from one experiment to buy the inputs for the following experiment.

They called this their petty cash fund. The community supported their decision.



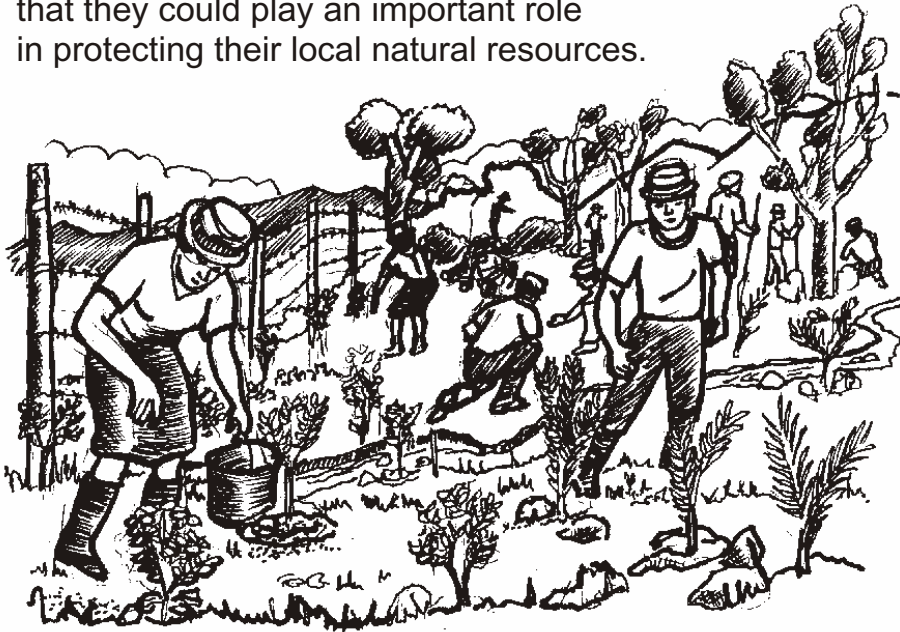
Today all Local Agricultural Research Committees manage a petty cash fund to finance their experiments. The fund frees them from dependence on external resources.

What other things can farmer research committees do?

In one community an onion crop failed because there wasn't enough water. The research Committee called a meeting with the community to discuss the problem and to look for solutions.

They decided to protect the water catchment areas. They planted more trees and put fences around springs.

The Committee and the community realized that they could play an important role in protecting their local natural resources.



This is only one examples of the kinds of services that a research committee can provide for the community.

A Committee decided to experiment with guinea pigs, a local source of meat.

A nearby NGO sold guinea pigs for breeding, but the Committee had to participate in training to qualify for the program.

Obtaining the guinea pigs meant filling out an application, waiting their turn for training and following other procedures.

All of this took much longer than the Committee expected. It required a lot of effort. But they learned many useful things about working with organizations.

The first step is to find out the requirements and procedures. These may cost time and money.



Before making any plans a Committee should evaluate if the benefits of working with an organization are worth their investment of time and money.

What if a member of the committee has problems getting along with others?

A village elected a leader who often offended members of the Committee and others in the community. He spoke to others in a disrespectful way.

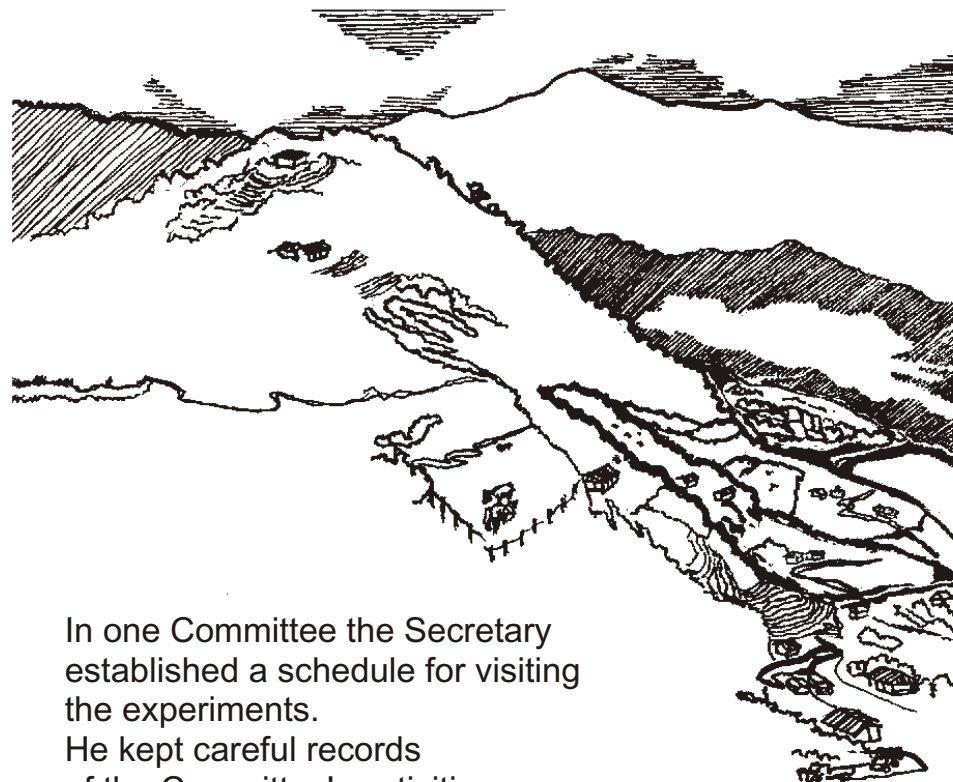
The other members of the Committee decided to speak to him about this problem. They helped him see how his behavior affected others and how it was creating problems for the Committee.



The leader understood the feedback that they gave him and he was successful in changing his behavior. He learned the importance of treating others with respect.

Can a farmer research committee be successful if it is very far from the local agricultural services?

Sometimes Committees are located in distant villages. Researchers or extension officers from the agricultural services may not be able to visit them frequently or regularly.



In one Committee the Secretary established a schedule for visiting the experiments. He kept careful records of the Committee's activities and of their results.

The Leader took his responsibilities very seriously. She worked hard to coordinate the work of the committee and was committed to helping them meet their objectives.



The Committee organized regular meetings to inform people in the village about their experiments. Many attended the meetings.



Through these meetings the community learned about the work of the Committee.

Support for the committee grew.

The Committee and the community can motivate one another.

This experience shows that success depends on the unity of the Committee and the community.



Committees in distant communities can work well even if they are far from agricultural research and extension services.

What can happen if the community does not support the Committee's research?

The extension officer was not able to motivate one of the Committees that he had formed. He learned that most of the community disagreed about the topic they had chosen for an experiment.

The Committee members felt frustrated and were losing interest in their research work.



Together they reviewed the diagnosis. The Committee realized that only a few people in the community had been interested in an experiment on potato varieties.

Potatoes were not grown in the village, and many felt it was a waste of time trying a crop that was normally grown in much colder areas.

The Committee called a meeting to conduct a new diagnosis. The majority of the participants wanted to test snapbean varieties.

The committee conducted the experiment and found some varieties that gave very good results.



The Committee learned that strong support from the community comes from respecting their priorities.

What if difficulties with the research demotivate the Committee?

A Committee was functioning well until they lost two experiments because of a long drought followed by unusually heavy rains.

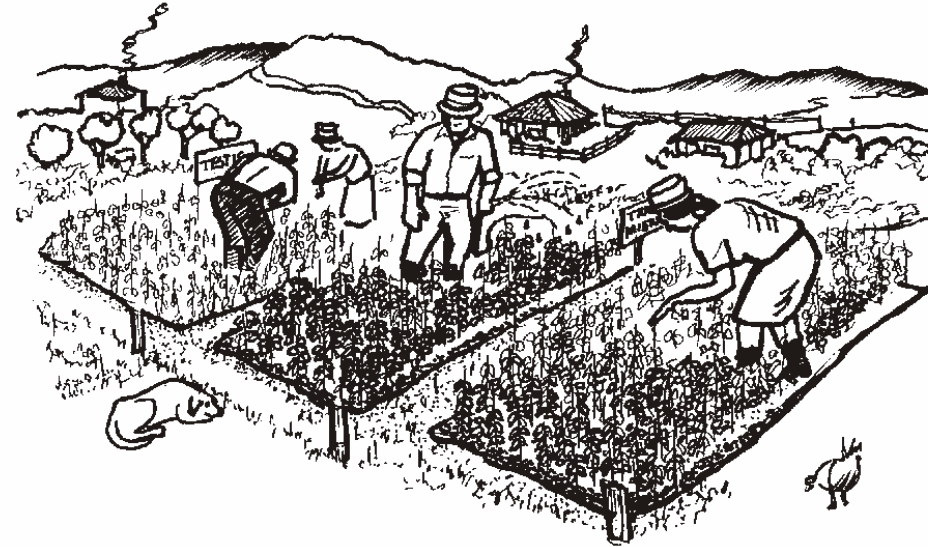
Some members decided to leave the Committee, but others wanted to continue.



The agronomist who had helped to form the Committee organized a visit to several other Committees.

They learned about the problems other Committees had experienced. One of the most successful Committees had also lost experiments in the past.

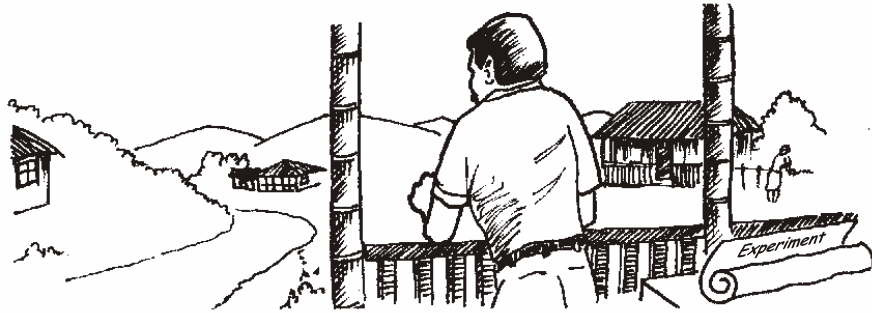
The next season the Committee called a new diagnostic meeting in their village and began working again.



Since then their experiments have helped many people improve their farming.

What can happen if the professional who supports a farmer research committee is not committed?

The agronomist from the national agricultural service often missed her appointments with the Committee. After a time they lost interest and stopped their research work. An NGO tried to initiate a new Committee, but few people from the village attended the meetings.



The NGO worker decided she would not give up. She kept calling meetings, and always turned up for them even though hardly any one from the village came.



When people realized that she was committed and reliable, their interest returned and they elected a new Committee



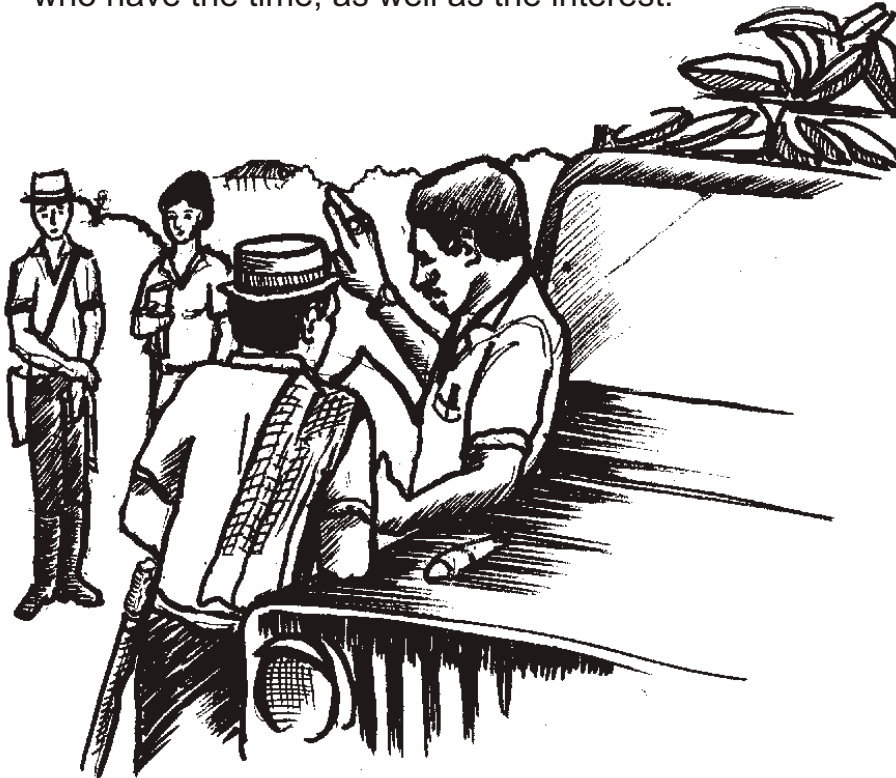
The NGO realized the importance of following through with commitments.



Sometimes people who serve on a research committee have other positions of responsibility in the community.

Sometimes these people have little time left for evaluating experiments, meeting with others or sharing their experiences with the community.

It's better to choose committee members who have the time, as well as the interest.



Keeping the community well informed motivates strong collaboration with the Local Agricultural Research Committee.



How do Local Agricultural Research Committees communicate?

The Committee visits other farmers in the village. They meet at the school, the village hall and in people's houses.



The Committee meets with community leaders and with other village organizations.



The Committee disseminates information to other farmers. They distribute flyers and brochures and share information through the local radio station.



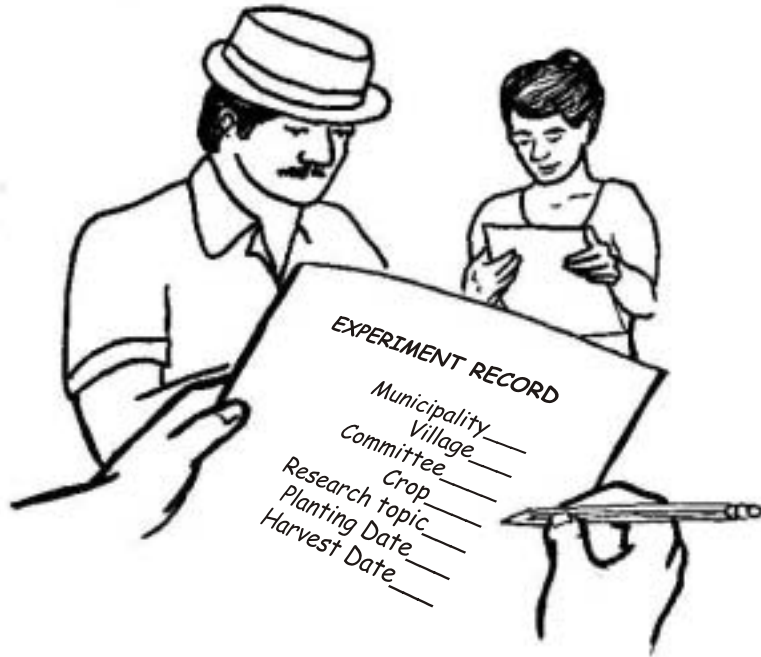
The Committee posts information in public places.



How does a Local Agricultural Research Committee organise information?

Each Committee has at least four members. The members elected by the community have specific responsibilities. They keep records of the Committee's work.

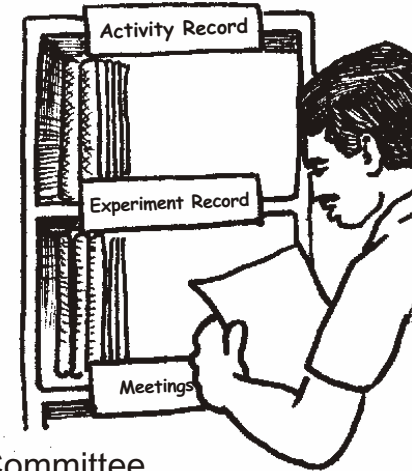
They keep records of their experiments.



Good records help a Committee communicate well with the community.

The Committee organizes and saves an Activity Record, an Experiment Record, receipts of purchases and sales, photographs of their experiments, notes about their study visits, and records of their work.

They present information about their work when they meet with other Committees. Well-organized and up-to-date records are an important resource for the Committee.



Well-organized information helps the committee prepare for meetings with agricultural research and extension organizations.

What is the purpose of study visits?

Committees often find that they need information to plan their work. Each Committee is different and knows different things.



Visits to other Committees and organizations is an important way to obtain information.



When a Committee needs information, they may organise a study visit to another Committee or organization.

Listening to other farmers from the same or other areas is a useful way to benefit from their experience.

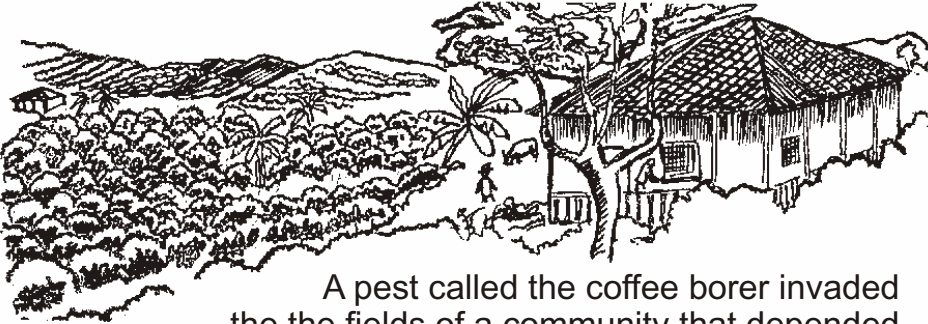
During a study visit, a Committee asks many questions to compare their experience with others.

Listening to and learning from others is a good way to become well informed



Why is diversification important?

In some areas farmers plant only one or a few crops, and they may be afraid to risk trying new crops.



A pest called the coffee borer invaded the the fields of a community that depended on the coffee crop.

The Local Agricultural Research Committee organized a visit to other Committees that had already worked to solve this problem.

The other Committees explained the advantages of having other crops as well as coffee. They produced food locally and still had produce to sell.

The Committee returned home and shared these ideas with the community. They did a diagnosis and decided to investigate another crop. The experiments were successful and the community began to diversify their farming.

After this experience the Committee was always interested in hearing about the work of other Committees.

When a community selects a topic for the Committee to investigate, they are collaborating with the Committee.



Scheduling meetings well in advance helps to promote good attendance.



The community and organizations that collaborate with the Committee benefit when the Committee organizes a field day for visiting their experiment. This improves collaboration in the future.

What makes a Local Agricultural Research Committee work well?

Committee members should be honest and reliable. They should be good communicators and able to manage resources carefully.



They should be able to conduct all the different steps in the research process

The agronomist or extension officer who works with the Committee should know its ground rules and the responsibilities of each member.

A Committee works well when

- ... the Treasurer keeps the accounts up-to-date
- ... the Secretary records plans and decisions in the Experiment Record
- ... the Communicator invites the community to learn about the Committee's results
- ... the Leader coordinates the activities of the Committee.



One for all and all for one!