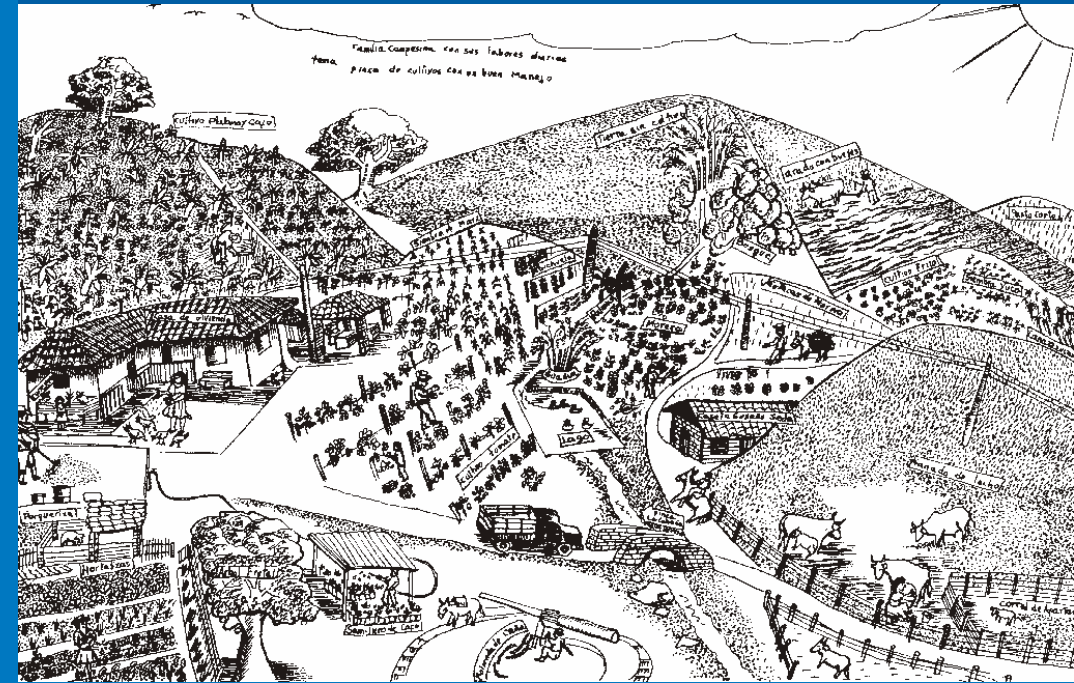


# Checking Our Progress

# 12



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**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.

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Handbooks for CIAL

# Checking Our Experiment

HANDBOOK No. 12



## 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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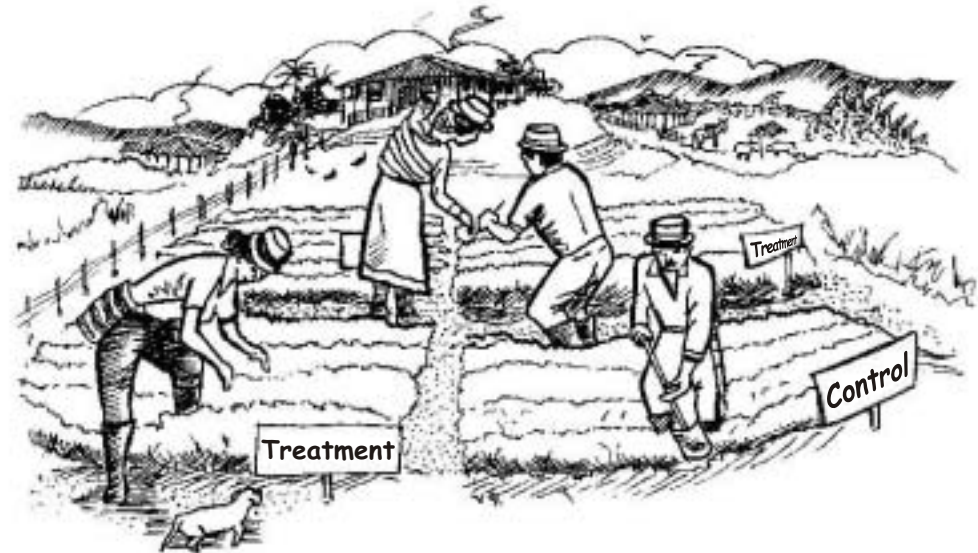
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Now everyone in the village understands what research is all about.

By doing experiments we can resolve problems and learn many useful things.

We gain experience in ourselves and feel confident about continuing our research.



Experimenting is like walking along a new path.

When we make a new path, sometimes we get lost without releasing it.



How can we tell if we are on the right path?  
How can we be sure of reaching our goal  
as a Local Agricultural Research Committee?

And how can we improve  
our skills as researchers?

These are very important questions.

To answer them, it's useful to reflect  
on the experiences of Local Agricultural Research  
Committees that strayed off their paths.



One Committee lost most of the information that they had gathered during an experiment.

They weren't able to reach a conclusion or to inform the community about their results. Their research questions remained unsolved.

With nothing to show After working for six months, the community felt the Committee was irresponsible.



Another Committee sold the potato harvest little by little without keeping records of the sales.

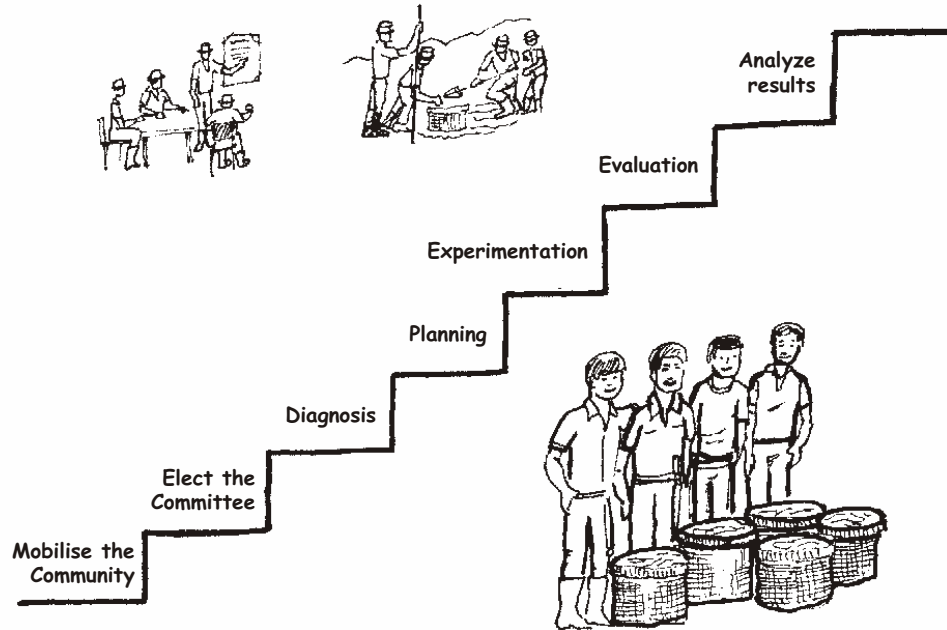


The money was left in different places and the members of the committee couldn't remember how much had been sold.



This Committee didn't have enough money to plant another experiment.

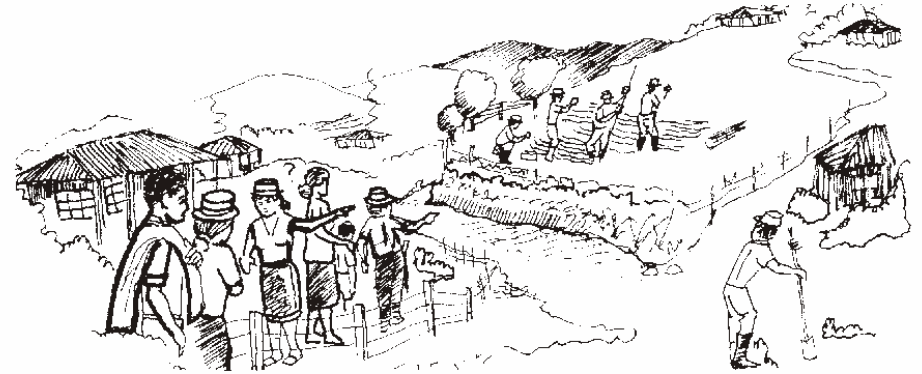
Another Committee planted a very successful experiment. Everyone did his or her part. They followed all the steps in the research process:



They were enthusiastic about designing a new experiment!

In their haste to plant a new experiment, the Committee skipped a step. They didn't report the results of their first experiment to the community.

People felt curious about the Committee's research.



But they were disappointed that no meetings were organized to discuss the results. The community stopped supporting the Committee, and the members felt abandoned.

Another Committee planned an experiment with the help of an agronomist from the local agricultural research station.



The agronomist didn't come to the planting.



The Committee decided to wait for her and several weeks passed.

It was too late to plant the experiment. By the time the agronomist appeared, the rains were over.

They planted the experiment, but it was too dry and many of the plants died. There wasn't much to harvest.

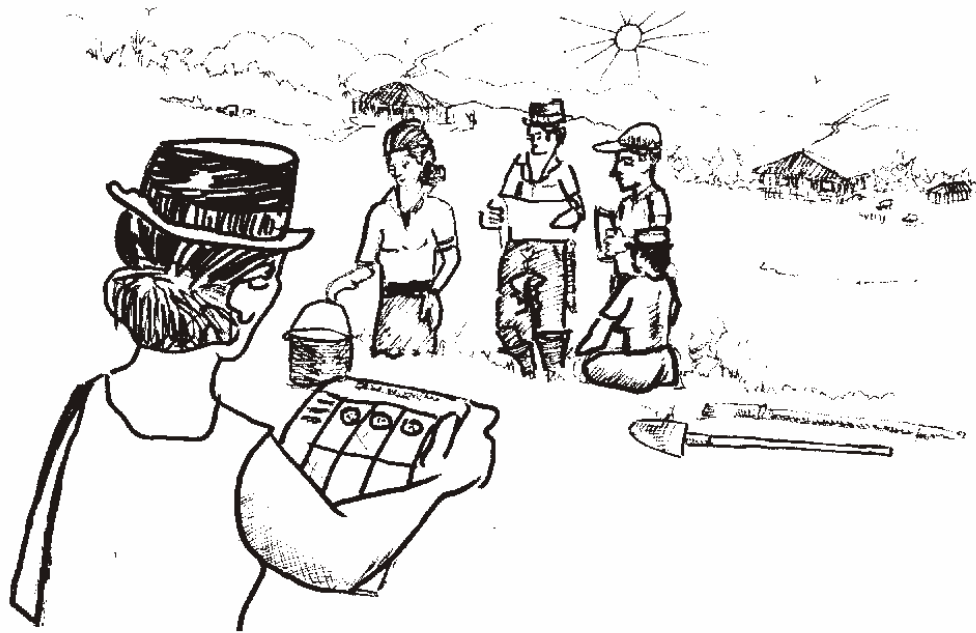
The Committee and the Agronomist felt badly. No one wanted to continue the research. They blamed one another for what had happened.





Negative experiences can teach important lessons. When we realize that we have strayed off the path, reflection on our experiences and those of other Committees experiences can help put us back on track.

We can learn new things that help us improve our work.



How can we learn as we go?  
We need to ask keep asking ourselves  
a few important questions.  
Are we doing a good job of coordinating  
our work as a Committee?

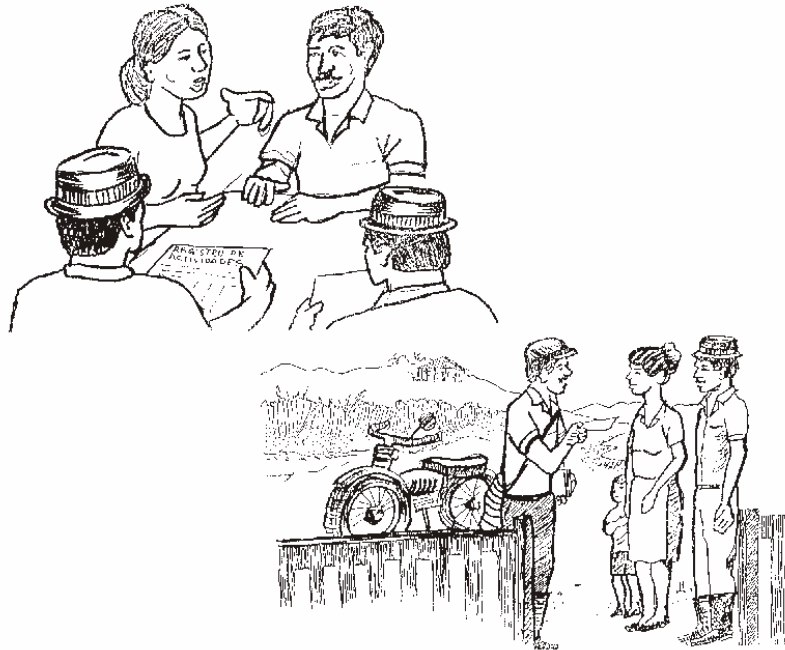
To help answer this question, a Committee  
should keep a **Record of Activities**.



The Record helps us answer various questions.

Which members of the Committee are meeting their commitments?

Is the agronomist from the local agricultural experiment station meeting his commitment to us?



Has the Committee followed all the steps in the research process from the diagnosis through to the sharing the results with the community?

Before closing our Committee meetings we make notes in the **Record of Activities**. We write down who was present and record all of our activities.



When we call a village meeting to share our results, we tell people about all our activities.

Keeping records is a good way of telling whether a committee is becoming less dependent on help from the agronomist or extension officer.

The Record shows how confident the Committee feels about each step of the research process.

As confidence grows, the agronomist or extension office can attend to other communities who want to form a Committee of their own.



Everyone benefits when a Committee feels sure about the steps in the research process and can manage their activities independently.

The Committee keeps an Experiment Diary.

The Committee records the plans for every experiment in the Diary.



The results of every experiment are recorded, The Committee can use the Diary to look up details of their earlier work.

The Committee also keeps records of purchases and sales in the Diary. This information is useful for monitoring profits and losses.

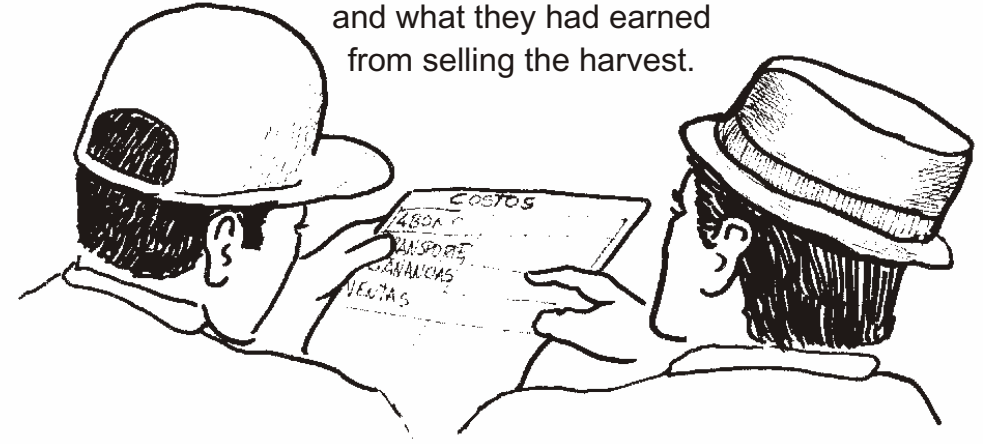
An agronomist from a development organization offered credit to farmers who planted the crop that the Local Agricultural Research Committee was testing. People discussed the idea at a village meeting and many were enthusiastic.

But others worried that the recommended fertiliser was costly. The cost of the fertiliser would have to be included in the credit. A heated debate raged back and forth between the agronomist and those who thought the credit was a good idea, and those who felt it was too risky.



The members of the Committee were present at the meeting.

They brought out their Experiment Diary and showed the agronomist the members of their community what they had spent to plant the experiment and what they had earned from selling the harvest.



The agronomist learned some new things from the Experiment diary. When he saw the results obtained by the Committee, he understood the concerns of those who thought the credit was too risky.



Our Committee evaluates experiments, but we also evaluate our work as researchers.

We use the **Happy Face method** to help us see how we are working as a group.



It's better to face difficulties before they become serious and while there is still time to resolve them.

Evaluating ourselves help us to work together and to become more united.

One way of evaluating ourselves is to meet as a group or for each member of the Committee to meet with the agronomist who works with us. We answer the questions on the **Faces Form**.

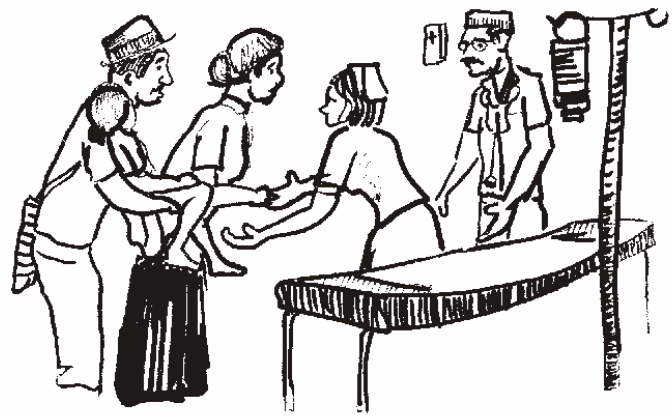


By asking ourselves these questions we can find out how people feel about working in the Committee. If someone is unsatisfied we can learn why he or she feels unhappy.

In one Committee the Treasurer was often absent when the others met to work on the experiment.

The other Committee members felt embarrassed that the financial records were not clear or up to date. They worried that the Committee would lose the support of the community.

The Committee filled out the Faces Form. We were able to discuss how well we were accomplishing our tasks.



Our Treasurer explained his problem. One of his children had been ill and he had borrowed a lot of money to buy medicine. He had to sell his labour to pay off the debt.

He had no time to work on the experiment with the other members of the committee.

The Committee made an agreement to work on the experiment on Sundays.

This way the Treasurer could participate. We also decided to help the Treasurer harvest one of his fields. This helped him to pay off his debt more rapidly.



One Committee experimented with organic fertilizer from a chicken farm.

They obtained good results, but the community was concerned about the cost of transporting the chicken manure from the chicken farm to the village.



The Committee called a meeting. They asked how many people wanted to try the organic fertiliser and how much they were willing to spend for it.

Many people were interested. Enough to justify hiring a truck to haul the chicken manure to the village. The Committee was able to negotiate a good deal on the transport.



People were able to buy the chicken manure at a reasonable price.

It's important for a Committee to know whether the the community supports their activities. We can ask people if they are benefitting from the Committee's work.

It's also important to ask who is benefitting.



Each Local Agricultural Research Committee works for the community. We share our research results with everyone in the community because all of us can benefit from improving our agriculture.



We meet with the community to chose a topic for our research.



The diagnostic meetings are important part of our work.

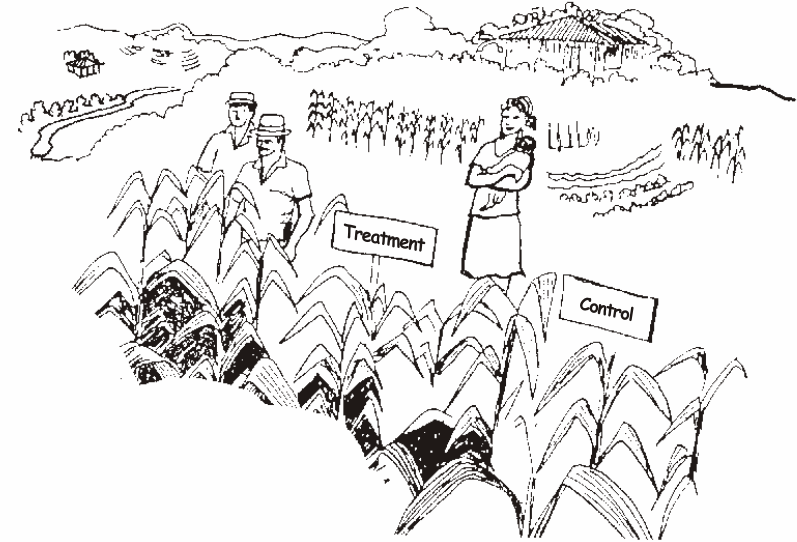
By involving the community in setting priorities, a Committee can make sure that their research topics are important to everyone.



Whenever we finish experimenting on a certain topic, we should organize another diagnostic meeting to choose the next research theme.

We plan our experiments with the help of experienced farmers. Many farmers experiment on their own. They know a great deal about the agriculture in our area. The Committee can benefit from their experience.

Learning about the experiences of others can help us avoid mistakes and repeating work that has already been done.



Local Agricultural Research Committees try new things, but we take advantage of the knowledge shared by others.

This way we can be sure that we are on the right track with our research work

Our Committee works with professional researchers, extension officers and development workers too. We seek out people from these support services to tell them about our priorities. We ask them to share ideas and provide suggestions for improving our agriculture.

We choose the most suitable suggestions and include them in our experiments.



We share our results with the agricultural service people and all of us learn together.

When there is a problem working with people from the research or extension organizations, we share our concerns with them.

For example, if they are always late or miss meetings, we note this down in our **Activity Record**.



We can fill out the **Faces Form** with people who support our work.

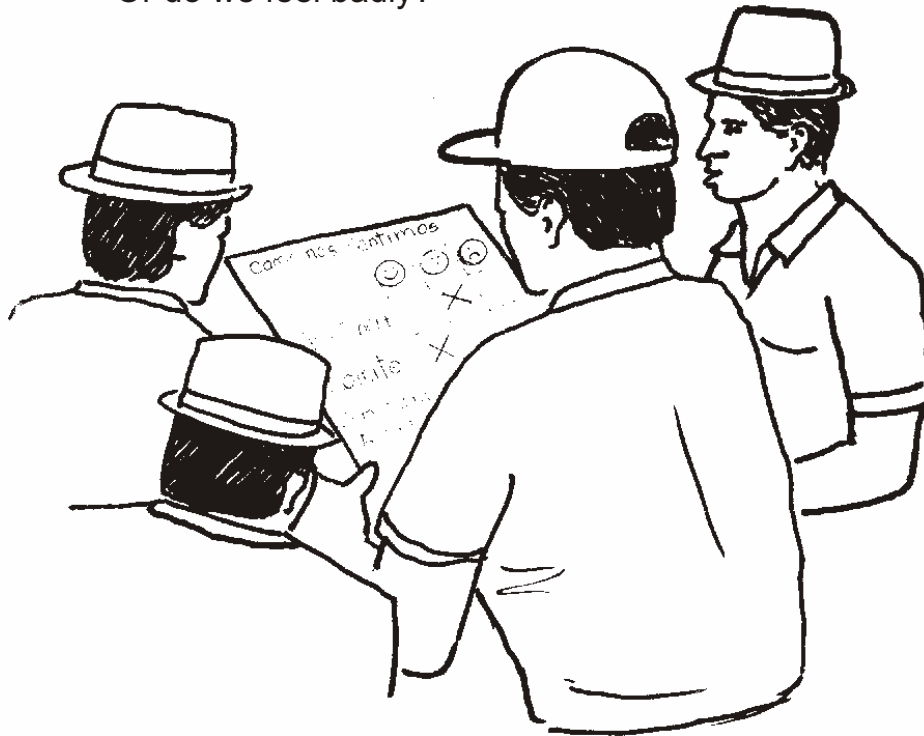
This is a good way to learn their opinions.

How do we feel about working together?

Do we feel good?

Do we feel OK?

Or do we feel badly?



When a Committee, the community and the agricultural service organizations work well together, the Committee can be sure of obtaining useful results.

The Committee can be confident of having the support it needs to continue its work as a local agricultural research service.



In our village the community decided to experiment with peas.

Since no one had ever grown peas, it was difficult to plan the experiment.

What did we do? We organized a visit to another Committee that was already studying ways to grow peas.



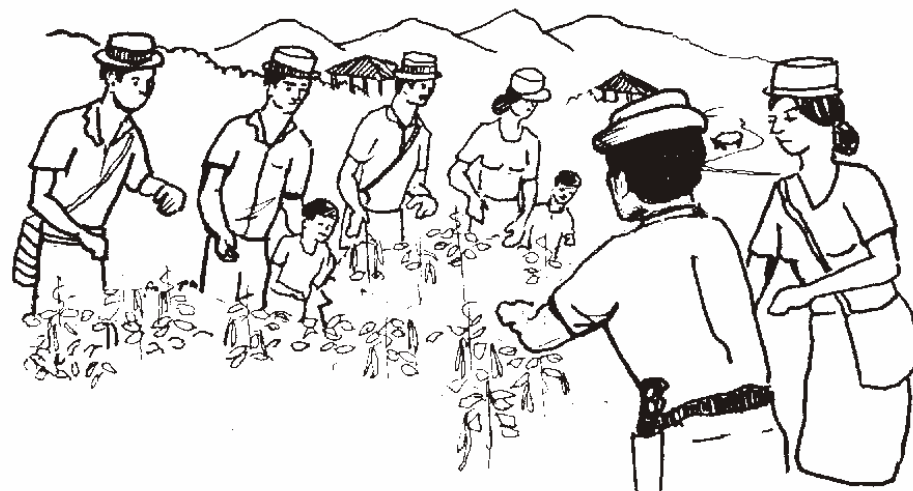
On the study visit we learned about the varieties they were testing and about different ways for staking the peas.

Later, in a meeting of all the Local Agricultural Research Committees in our region, we met with many other farmer researcher groups.

Some of them were experimenting with peas. We asked them about their experiences.

One Committee wrote down their main results on an Experiment Sheet for us to take back to our village.

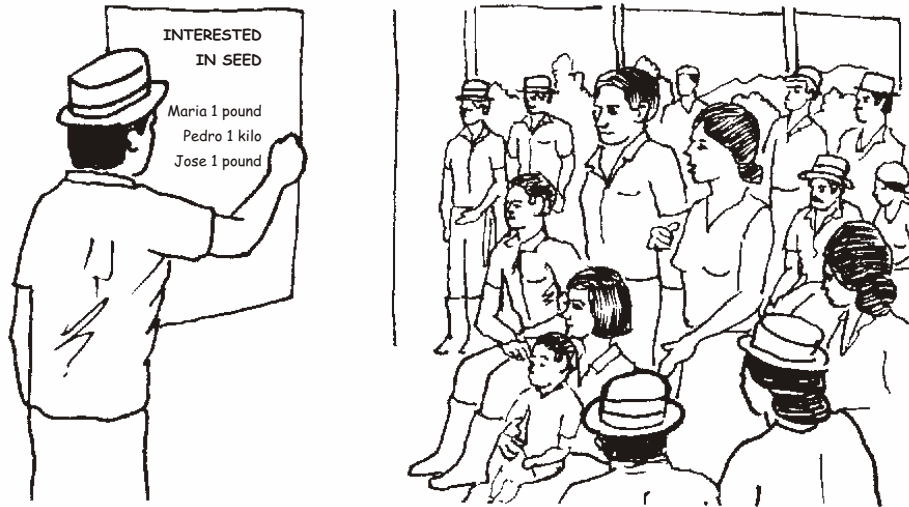
One way to make sure we are on the right path with our research is to visit other Committees. We can also attend meetings where many Committees present and discuss their work.



If we want to sell the seed from our experiments, we should first find out how many people might be interested in buying the seed.

We can ask the Community about their interest in buying seed by doing a survey.

The **survey** allows us to get an idea of how much seed people might buy.



With this information we can make plans for planting a seed production field.

We would like each members of our Committee to understand his or her responsibilities.

We have a set of **regulations** to help make these clear. Reading our **regulations** together helps each of us to remember our responsibilities as a member of the Committee.



**Our regulations** also describe the responsibilities of the community.

We always remember that the our research Committee belongs to the community. The community elects the members of the Committee.

**The regulations** tell us what qualities a each member of the Committee should have.



By working together the community and the Committee can bring benefits and progress to our village.

An important question for every Committee is:  
How can we improve our work?

These guidebooks contain many ideas to start you along the way to becoming a successful Local Agricultural Research Committee.



The Committee, the community and people from supporting organizations learn by working together.

Doing research means walking along a new path.