**EXERCISE 4A. FOCUS GROUPS**

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| *OBJECTIVE*  **After this exercise you will:**   * Have key information about the current situation and farmers’ interests to incorporate into the project’s activities and objectives.   **After this exercise the participants will be able to:**   * Explain their production and marketing system and constraints. | |
| *EQUIPMENT NEEDED*   * Large sheets of paper, marker pens | *EXPECTED OUTPUTS*   * Information about farmer’s conditions and priorities |
| *TIME*  1-2 hours | *PREPARATION*   * Identify 10–15 farmers who are interested in the marketing project, for example by asking lead farmers, traders and village elders. Arrange a meeting with these community members. You may wish to have a focus group of only men and another focus group of only women to understand their different views. * You will need a moderator to guide the discussion and an assistant to help you take notes. * Prepare some questions that you need to have answered. |

A focus group is a small group of people who discuss a subject, gradually focusing on specific areas that need to be explored in detail.

*SUGGESTED PROCEDURE*

1. Explain the goals of the project to the participants.
2. Ask the participants about themselves, the local situation and their interests. Make sure that the participants realize that you are helping them find solutions to their problems, and provide a comfortable environment where everyone is invited to participate. Ask a colleague to note the responses, using the sheets of paper.
3. Start off with general questions, and then gradually focus on more specific subjects. For example, you might start out asking about general farming problems/ constraints, then focus on a particular crop that is usually grown by men, another that is usually grown by women, and then discuss the marketing of these crops.
4. End the meeting with a clear summary of what has been discussed, your conclusions, and some final thoughts from the participants. Thanks the group members for their time and support.

*QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE DISCUSSION*

* What are the main crops or livestock that you and your neighbors grow for food? For income? How many farmers in your village grow these crops?
* What crops or livestock are you and your neighboring farmers interested in?
* Who grows and sells these products? Who knows best about production and marketing questions?
* What are the yields, prices and marketing channels for these products?
* What challenges do you face in producing and selling these products?
* What do people want to buy?

*NOTES*

Consider holding separate meetings if a lot of farmers are interested, or if it is advisable to talk to different groups (e.g., women, young people) separately.

