Community-based tree and forest product enterprises: Market Analysis and Development

INTRODUCTION

DEFINING WHERE YOU WANT TO END UP

BOOKLET B

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Before using MA&D, it is important to have an overview of how the process flows and of the outcomes that can be expected. In this booklet, the process is detailed and its underlying principles are outlined. A list of suggested reading materials is included.

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BOOKLET B

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING WHERE YOU WANT TO END UP

Manual prepared by

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Foreword

Trends towards economic liberalization and governmental decentralization are opening new markets and giving local communities more decision-making power in the management of their forest resources. But, how can these local people transform themselves from sellers of harvested forest products into entrepreneurs actively developing strategies to manage and market their forest products? How can they benefit from the management of their local forest resources?

The Community Forestry Unit (CFU) of FAO in collaboration with the Regional Community Forestry Training Center (RECOFTC), in Bangkok, Thailand, has supported the development of a methodology called Market Analysis and Development (MA&D) for establishing community-based tree and forest product commercial enterprises.

MA&D is an innovative process that assists field-level facilitators and forest users to systematically identify and develop sustainable tree and forest product enterprises. By taking into consideration not only the commercial aspects of an enterprise, but also the environmental, social and technological aspects, MA&D helps communities to directly link forest management and conservation activities to opportunities for income generation. In short, it enables local people to identify potential products and develop markets that will provide income and benefits without degrading the resource base. It is a flexible approach with an emphasis on capacity building of forest users.

This field manual has been designed to guide facilitators who will assist local people in conducting the MA&D process. It is the result of many years of work and its authors have been given key support by a number of different people and organizations. The basis of the MA&D methodology was originally developed by Isabelle Lecup during 12 years of experience working on small-scale enterprise development in Nepal. She and her husband, Jacques Lecup, first assisted farmers in the remote Gorkha district of Nepal to identify forest products that could be harvested for income generation without degrading the resource base, and they later worked with groups of Nepali people to set up a commercial enterprise in the processing and marketing of medicinal plants.

From 1994, with the support of RECOFTC, the MA&D methodology was further developed, and an early draft of this manual was produced for use in conjunction with RECOFTC's regional training course on the marketing of tree and forest products. Thomas Hammet and Thomas Fricke provided important input to the early development of the marketing concepts and of Phase 3, respectively. Ken Nicholson became involved in the project in 1997, bringing with him extensive experience in small-scale enterprise development in Asia (in Nepal, India, Bhutan, Thailand and China). Mr Nicholson has been responsible for the development of Phase 3 of the MA&D process.

Ms Lecup and Mr Nicholson continue to collaborate with RECOFTC as the principal trainers in the centre's regional training course in small-scale tree and forest product enterprise development, which is based on the use of MA&D, and is coordinated by RECOFTC Training Manager Dr Vitoon Viriyasakultorn. They have been given significant support in their work by Dr Katherine Warner, Senior Community Forestry Officer at FAO. Formerly the Head of Programme Development at RECOFTC, Dr Warner was a key figure in the development of the MA&D methodology and was one of the authors of the initial training materials.

Institutions and organizations that have supported the development of the MA&D methodology and this manual include the World Conservation Union (IUCN), specifically, the Regional Forest Officer for Asia, Andrew Ingles; Netherlands Development Assistance (NEDA); the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR); and the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV).

The development of this manual was given a strong impetus by a 1996 workshop organized by CIFOR and IUCN and held in Indonesia. The workshop was held to guide the development of a book entitled *Incomes from the forest. Methods for the development and conservation of forest products for local communities*, edited by Eva Wollenberg and Andrew Ingles. One of the chapters in the book makes a comparative analysis of MA&D in relation to other methods for assessing the feasibility of sustainable non-timber forest product-based enterprises.

SNV's Praja Community Development Programme (PCDP) was the first in Nepal to use the MA&D methodology. The field implementing organization was the Nepal-based non-governmental organization (NGO) School for Ecology, Agriculture and Community Works (SEACOW). The authors are grateful to them for sharing the information about the Praja NTFP Cooperative used in this manual.

Since 1994, Ms Lecup has used the MA&D methodology extensively in Viet Nam in collaboration with several partners. She would like to thank the Quang Binh Integrated Food Security project (IFSP), a German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ)-Viet Nam Government cooperation project, for agreeing to share its experiences in applying MA&D, which are presented in this manual.

MA&D has also been used in China (from 1995-97), where it has been adapted to local circumstances by the Sichuan Forestry College.

Helle Qwist-Hoffmann collaborated in the development of this manual as the coordinator of activities related to the sustainable use and marketing of NTFPs for the Community Forestry Unit at FAO. Michael Victor had a central role in bringing together the authors and other collaborators during the development of the manual in Asia.

The comments on the draft of this manual by Jon Anderson, Leo Lintu and Paul Vantomme of FAO's Forestry Department were very useful. Helen Gillman acted as the managing editor, and worked closely with the authors to revise the materials. Barbara Walsh copy-edited the manual and Laura Clarke reviewed the proofs. Guida Joseph designed the illustrations and Cecilia Valli designed the layout.

Support and funding for this publication was provided by the multidonor trust fund, the Forests, Trees and People Programme (FTPP), which works to increase social and economic equity and improve well-being, especially that of the poor, through the support of collaborative and sustainable management of trees, forests and other natural resources. Other support and funding was provided by RECOFTC.

The MA&D methodology is being further developed and tested in a number of different situations. Feedback from users of this manual will contribute to improving the methodology and the manual itself, based on experiences in the field. Comments and requests for further information can be directed to:

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The MA&D process

Marketing opportunities are emerging throughout the world as trends towards economic liberalization and governmental decentralization open new markets and give local communities more say in the management of their forest resources.

Local communities, therefore, have more opportunities to benefit from forest resources, and also have a greater incentive to better manage and protect those resources.

However, increasing demand for forest products, which increases their commercial value, can result in over-exploitation of the resource base and economic exploitation of the people who harvest the products. The result is degradation of the resources and continued poverty and indebtedness of the harvester. Therefore, it is now recognized that forest products need to be not only financially viable, but also environmentally and socially sustainable.

The goal of the MA&D approach is to assist local people in developing income-generating enterprises while conserving tree and forest resources. The main strength of the process is its systematic inclusion of social and environmental concerns, together with its consideration of the technological, commercial and financial aspects of a product. An integral part of identifying and planning potential enterprises is the assessment of the sustainability of local environments. It also includes guidelines for determining which products are the most viable in the market place.

The direct user of MA&D is assumed to be a facilitator, working closely with interested community members, who work in teams to gather information throughout the entire process. Therefore, this manual is primarily directed towards facilitators who will assist rural entrepreneurs in conducting MA&D. As part of the preparation for undertaking MA&D, it is important to have an overview of the process. In this booklet, the purpose and objectives of the MA&D process are explained and the outcome that can reasonably be expected at the end of each phase is outlined.

Purpose and objectives of MA&D

The primary purpose of the MA&D process is to identify tree and forest products, develop markets and provide income to local tree and forest products entrepreneurs without degrading the resource base.

The facilitator will use the MA&D process to:

- identify the target group;
- work with the target group to evaluate the performance of the existing market system in order to shortlist a range of products;
- work with the target group to identify opportunities and constraints related to the proposed initiative, and select the most promising products;
- identify the future leader entrepreneurs; and
- assist the leader entrepreneurs to develop an enterprise plan for sustainable development based on the most promising products, and to develop tools for implementing and monitoring the progress of the enterprise.

Three phases in the MA&D process

MA&D provides a framework for planning tree and forest products enterprises. It is a logical sequence of steps arranged in three phases, and it uses a series of general tools that have been adapted to achieve specific results in the identification and development of business ideas.

This manual assumes that facilitators will have existing knowledge and expertise in the use of participatory assessment tools, since they will be required to adapt these tools considerably.

There are three phases in the MA&D process, as follows.

Phase 1: Assess the existing situation. Understand the issues, define the problems and opportunities, and shortlist a range of products.

Phase 2: Identify products, markets and means of marketing. Decide on the best products and gather information for their further development.

Phase 3: Plan enterprises for sustainable development. Formulate a business plan and prepare for implementation.

Though the MA&D process is a logical sequence of steps, the processes of decision-making and selection within it are iterative, depending on the information flow and analysis. Phases 1 and 2 are diagnostic and serve to identify and motivate, while Phase 3 serves in planning, training and monitoring. The process starts with a wide open situation (Phase 1), in which there are many actors, forest products and market relationships. Following a process of identification → analysis → decision-making, the phase ends with a reduced number of products and of interested target group members. In Phase 2, the same process is repeated in order to further narrow the range of products and the number of interested target group members.

Generally, it will be necessary to go through all steps in each phase of MA&D, and each phase should be completed before the next phase is undertaken. For example, before collecting data on a new technology to improve a product, it is important to know if long-term access to the product is secure; before developing the operation plan for a new business idea, it is necessary to review the costs and potential benefits. The outputs of each phase are the foundation of the next phase; each phase is the consequence of the results of the previous one.

However, there are some situations in which it is possible to enter the process at different points.

- If the target group is identified, but the products/enterprise ideas are not identified, it is possible to start at Step 2 of Phase 1.
- If the products/enterprise ideas have been clearly identified, but the target group is not clear, it is possible to skip Steps 3 and 5 of Phase 1 and Step 2 of Phase 2.
- If the target group is identified, the financial objectives of group members are clear, they have already inventoried the raw materials, they understand the key constraints of the market system, and they have selected potential products on which to base their enterprises, then it is possible to skip Phase 1 altogether and begin the process at Step 1 of Phase 2.

After completing the three phases, it will be necessary to repeat Phase 3 annually for routine monitoring and planning.

BOX B.1

The MA&D process*

PHASE 1 ASSESS THE EXISTING SITUATION

STEP 1 Identify the target group
STEP 2 Determine the financial objectives of the target group
STEP 3 List existing resources and products
STEP 4 Identify key constraints of the existing market system
STEP 5 Shortlist a range of products
STEP 6 Raise awareness of the benefits of working together

Outputs
- A shortlist of products that will be evaluated in the next phase of MA&D
- Understanding of the social, environmental and technical constraints of a range of products
- Formation of a team of target group members to undertake Phase 2

PHASE 2 IDENTIFY PRODUCTS, MARKETS AND MEANS OF MARKETING

STEP 1 Analyse the four areas of enterprise development
STEP 2 Select the most promising products
STEP 3 Create interest groups for the selected products

Outputs
- Identification of the most promising products and gathering of information for the design of business plans
- Formation of interest groups for the selected products
- Formation of a team of target group members to undertake Phase 3

PHASE 3 PLAN ENTERPRISES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

STEP 1 Examine the business environment of the selected products/enterprise
STEP 2 Define the enterprise mission, goals and objectives
STEP 3 Develop strategies in each of the four areas of enterprise development
STEP 4 Formulate action plans to implement the strategies
STEP 5 Calculate financial projections for the enterprise
STEP 6 Obtain financing as specified in the capital needs statement of the financial plan
STEP 7 Initiate pilot phase and training
STEP 8 Monitor progress and deal with change

Outputs
- Formulation of an enterprise strategy for the selected products
- Development of an action plan
- Financing, as specified in the capital needs statement
- Implementation of a monitoring and planning system

*See also the separate MA&D map in this manual for a graphic representation of the process.

Phase 1: Assess the existing situation

MA&D STARTS FROM WHAT EXISTS

This is an exploratory phase, in which the aim is to develop an understanding of the key issues of the existing situation.

- What are the potential enterprises?
- What are the available resources and products?
- How do existing market systems operate?

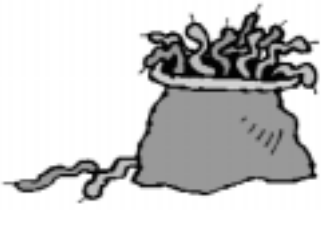
The broad limits of the future initiative can then be determined, in terms of possible scale and potential products, markets and means of marketing, as well as potential partners.

The MA&D process starts from what already exists, considering products that are already traded and that provide income to the target group members. Local people will describe their experience with production, processing and trade of tree and forest products. For example, they will answer the following questions.

- What do they collect from the forest?
- At what time of the year do they collect the products?
- What income do they get from these products?
- Where do they sell them?
- Do they receive any support from the local extension office?

In order to help local people discover profitable products, markets and means of marketing best suited to their expectations and environment, it is necessary first to develop a clear picture of the characteristics of the actors and their context, and to encourage them to understand the importance of social and environmental factors. Such common mistakes as overestimation of the availability of raw materials, or lack of proper skills for using and maintaining equipment, can occur when environment and social factors are not taken into account.

As a result of this assessment in Phase 1, a range of products will be shortlisted for consideration in Phase 2.



Phase 2: Identify products, markets and means of marketing

In Phase 1, a range of products was shortlisted by eliminating the non-viable products from further consideration. In Phase 2, the potential development of these products is further investigated. Once the issues, problems and opportunities of the existing situation have been clarified, products can be selected and potential markets and means of marketing can be identified.

A number of problems can occur if an attempt is made to develop an enterprise without going through the steps of Phase 2. These problems can include:

- unsustainability of the resource and/or the market;
- economic dependence on one product or type of product;
- erratic supply;
- poor product quality;
- low income from the product (poor return);
- non-compliance with current rules and regulations;
- unawareness of important rules and regulations;
- unawareness of sources of assistance (such as credit or technical expertise); and
- destruction of the environment.

In Phase 2, the following questions are asked.

- Which products have the best market potential?
- How can the products be developed to generate a sustainable income for the households involved in their production?

This will enable the best products, markets and means of marketing to be identified.

Phase 3: Plan enterprises for sustainable development

By now, a product should have been identified that is both environmentally sustainable and financially promising. The aim of Phase 3 is to plan for a successful enterprise. The focus will be on developing a marketing strategy, although other areas of concern (especially resource management and social issues) will be covered.

Even if the previous steps have been carefully conducted, procedures and management tools still must be developed in order to make the enterprise work. The first condition is to start a pilot phase in order to arrange operational and organizational aspects. In this phase, proper indicators will be prepared in order to recognize unexpected changes in the business environment that may disturb the smooth implementation of the enterprise. Phase 3 also serves to provide guidance for anticipating changes that could have negative impacts on the activities and results of the enterprise performance, and for using appropriate corrective measures when changes arise.

Remember that the objective of MA&D is to identify products and develop markets that provide income to the producers without degrading the resource base.

BOX B.2

Benefits of using MA&D

Local people already involved in their own enterprises can benefit in different ways from using the MA&D process, depending on the nature of their activities and their role in the market channel.

By using the MA&D process, Nepali entrepreneurs producing, processing or trading medicinal plants were able to:

- identify new buyers, such as a public processing company, a district factory and various Indian traders;
- learn how to respond to the demands of these new buyers (for example, learning which part of the product should be used, or how products should be dried in a way that does not affect the percentage content of active substances);
- learn new technology in order to upgrade quality to match that required by prospective buyers (for example, learning how to build a simple solar dryer, or learning appropriate techniques for harvesting different types of medicinal plants);
- identify how to add value to products that they had previously sold in unprocessed form (for example, how to purify bitumen in order to get higher income);
- obtain financial support from the district branch of the Agriculture Development Bank of Nepal; and
- contribute to decreasing the pressure on the natural stock of some species (for example, replanting some species in forest gardens).

The manufacturers and traders of medicinal plants were able to:

- obtain a regular and sufficient quantity of raw material from organized producers;
- obtain a better quality supply by learning how to contact producers' groups directly to inform them about quality requirements;
- prepare a business plan in order to get a bank loan from the National Nepal Industry Development Corporation; and
- survey foreign market preferences and develop new products for export, such as herbal tea and incense sticks.

Gathering and analysis of information in MA&D

Screening of the four areas of enterprise development for gathering and analysing information

The main strength of the MA&D process is its systematic inclusion of all aspects of enterprise development. It takes into account environmental, social and technical factors, as well as the commercial and financial aspects of a product. This focus on social and environmental issues means that long-term development of an enterprise will occur only if it meets the needs of the target group members, if they have the required capacity to operate the enterprise, and if it is adapted to their environment. Early assessment of needs and expectations reduces the risk of developing an overly complex product, for example, development of rattan furniture for the international market, when the same objectives could be achieved through a more simple enterprise, such as production of dried mushrooms for the local market.

In the MA&D process, the methodology used to gather and analyse the necessary information is known as 'screening the four areas of enterprise development' (see Figure B.1). The areas are:

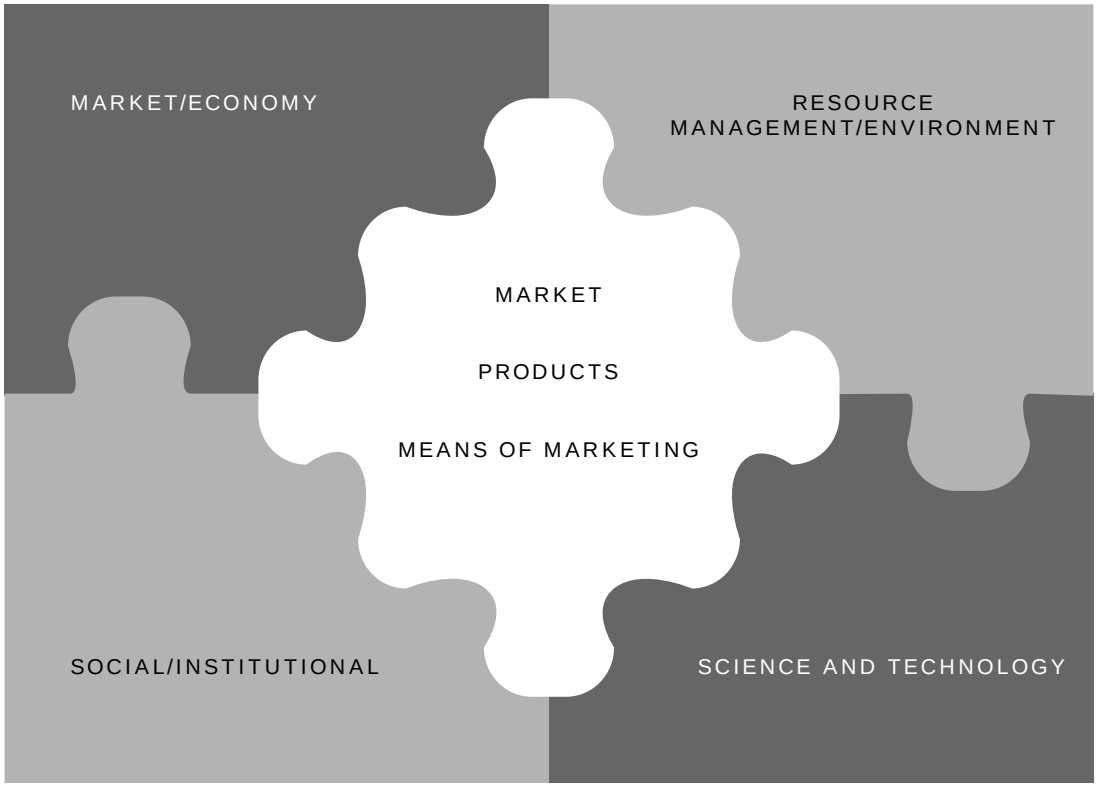
- market/economy;
- resource management/environment;
- social/institutional; and
- science and technology.

Information is gathered in these four areas throughout the process. The objective is to systematically organize the investigation of factors relevant to planning the development of enterprises, in such a way that all the required information is collected. The facilitator will help target group members prepare for fieldwork by sorting questions into these four areas of enterprise development. Questions will be included only if they fall into these areas.

Screening the four areas of enterprise development is a technique that will enable the facilitator and the target group members to focus their activities of information gathering and analysis and avoid wasting time in gathering unnecessary information.

The process may initially seem rather overwhelming, particularly to those who have never been involved in an exercise that requires the gathering information prior to decision-making. Gathering information during each phase requires the development of skills, especially in the review of printed materials, interviewing and observation. These skills and related tools are discussed in detail later in this booklet.

FIGURE B.1 The four areas of enterprise development



Levels of research in MA&D

Research is conducted at up to five levels in the MA&D process, including:

- community;
- district;
- provincial;
- national; and
- international.

Often, an intervention at one level will require investigation at a higher level. For example, developing a product at the community level will require a study of potential buyers at the district level, and, if supply exceeds demand at the district level, an investigation may be necessary at the national level.

For instance, if the financial objectives of the target group members can be fulfilled by production and marketing of a product for which there is sufficient demand at national level, it will not be necessary to extend the survey to the international level. The definition of the financial objectives of the target group members is therefore an important step in the MA&D process. It determines the level at which research needs to be carried out.

The same methods are used in the MA&D process, whatever the scale of the enterprise (for example, both for a family enterprise and for a medium-scale industry), and whatever the context and whoever the target group members. The only difference may be in the time (depending on the amount and source of information) and the skills (the human resources) required, according to the level of research.

Access to information and cost efficiency in MA&D

Whether in a project context or not, the time and costs involved in identifying and developing an enterprise are of considerable concern to local people. They usually do not have the time or resources to collect vast amounts of information, and they need clear guidelines for a systematic approach to collecting only relevant information in order to avoid wasting time.

Access to information can be determined by policy as well as by local circumstances. Therefore, local people will often begin their information gathering in a context where very little formal information exists. The MA&D process adopts the perspective of the local people, recognizing that information is to be collected for practical purposes and not for research. It is a practitioner-oriented methodology aiming to assist local people in collecting a feasible amount of relevant information in a cost-effective way.

MA&D aims to do the following.

- **Simplify the complexity of required information by:**
  - indicating the priority areas for the gathering of information and providing checklists of the minimum amount of information required for sound decision-making; and
  - using indicators that are relevant to, and easy to understand by, local people, such as 'number of people who received a loan last year'. This information is easy to gather and will help in understanding the experience of local people with credit and financial support.
- **Recognize local knowledge as an important source of information.** Local people already have extensive information about local resources and the existing situation. It is important to recognize this knowledge and to help draw it out during the process of reviewing the information available in each of the four areas of enterprise development.
- **Prioritize information gathering in each phase of the process.** In Phase 1, the aim is to obtain a broad picture of the context in which enterprises will operate, and it is not necessary to collect extensive and detailed information. In Phases 2 and 3, more details will be necessary, but for a reduced number of products, thus decreasing the time and money required for information gathering.
- **Train local people to gather information and to rely on specialists for selected tasks only.** For many local enterprises, decision-making will depend on information gathered by rapid appraisal techniques and simple research tools. Local people should be able to conduct a local market survey by following simple instructions. For example, producers of raw materials would simply follow the physical movement of their products to the final market. In a project context, it may be necessary to include a short training session on methods for information gathering, such as interviewing, observation, and analysis of secondary sources of information available at local level. Trained local information gatherers can usually get a good picture of the local market system within a short time, thus making it unnecessary to employ a costly specialist. (See the section on tools for information gathering in this booklet.)
- **Build alliances with appropriate institutions or individuals in order to overcome problems of access to information.** In certain circumstances, it may be necessary to make more in-depth studies, which the local people cannot undertake by themselves. Lack of access to national or international information can be overcome by linking with other individuals or institutions that may be in a better position to get the required information at low cost.
- **Provide simple tools for saving time and money.** In Phase 1, the elimination of products is a tool used as a short cut to avoid spending further time, effort and money on products that are obviously non-viable.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

The amount of time, money and human resources needed for the MA&D process depends on the size of the proposed enterprise. In conventional enterprise development methodology, the time spent for a 'feasibility study', and the costs induced, are included at least partly under the 'investment budget' lines of the enterprise.

PHASE 1

Location. Although the work takes place mainly in the field, an overview of the national policy, socio-economic conditions, and institutional and political situations may be needed. A market survey at national and international levels may be required in order to identify opportunities and constraints.

Time. One to three weeks may be needed, depending on the size of the target group, the accessibility of the area, the complexity of the natural and human environment, and the complexity of the potential markets.

Team. Usually a team comprises one to three facilitators, plus assistants and interpreters. The size of the team will vary according to the size of the target group and the number of sites.

Budget. This includes the costs of training village information gatherers (one to two days), information gathering and analysis and participation in regular workshops organized by the local tree and forest products users (up to 12 days), and surveying the market system within the district or provinces (two to seven days). If a market survey in a neighbouring area is deemed necessary, an additional one to two weeks would be needed.

PHASE 2

Location. A market analysis could be required outside the locality, at the provincial, national and sometimes international levels, in order to assess the potential of a product.

Time. One to four weeks may be needed, depending on the complexity of the marketing channels for the chosen products, and the availability or accessibility of market information.

Team. This is the MA&D team from Phase 1. Alliances may be formed if market surveys need to be conducted outside the locality.

Budget. This includes the time required for the market survey by the team, or facilitation of a survey by a marketing specialist, and significant transportation and communication costs.

PHASE 3

Location. This is the production site and sale site.

Time. This may require one to three weeks for one product and one group of entrepreneurs, plus a pilot phase (one year or more) and time for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Team. This is the MA&D team formed in the previous phase. During the monitoring period, there is less need for outside expertise.

Budget. This includes the cost of workshops for entrepreneurs and the time required to analyse the data and develop the enterprise strategy and enterprise development plan, and to secure funding.

Identifying sources and gathering information

Gathering information during each phase of the MA&D process requires the development of new skills, particularly related to the review of written information, interviewing and observation. During the MA&D process, teams of information gatherers will be formed, and these teams will be drawn from among the members of the target group. It is crucial that the facilitator recognize the need to train target group members in basic information-gathering techniques before embarking on the MA&D process. Information gatherers begin their work at an early stage, in Step 2 of Phase 1, when they are required to calculate the financial objectives of the target group.

The three main ways to gather information during the MA&D process are by:

- reviewing written/printed materials;
- interviewing; and
- using observation.

Each is discussed in this section, and guidelines for gathering valid and reliable information are provided. These guidelines could provide a useful basis for a training session to prepare the teams of information gatherers.

REVIEWING WRITTEN/PRINTED MATERIALS

Much information about the market environment can be obtained from written and printed materials. The first step is to determine where to gather accurate and timely information. This can be difficult in many contexts, particularly in countries where access to official written information may be restricted.

The next step is to review the available materials, bearing in mind the limitations of particular sources. For instance, data recorded by official trade agencies tend to be overly optimistic in order to promote the country's products. In some cases, most of the available information will come from multilateral, bilateral or international non-governmental organization (INGO) sources. Since interest in marketing tree and forest products is fairly new, particularly in a project context, it is not surprising that relatively little has been written on the subject.

However, in the process of identifying products and markets, exact figures are not necessary. Even approximate information can be useful in providing a general picture of the situation, and it can serve as a reference base in the preparation for collection of information from direct sources. Box B.3 provides a guide to sources of written/printed information.

BOX B.3

Sources of written/printed information

Background information

Sources of information include various documents, minutes and reports from relevant experts, departments and agencies, communication services, universities, libraries, local communities, special interest groups such as local traders, import/export companies, industrial units, trade promotion centres, research institutions and professional groups.

Information sources

Potential sources of tree and forest product marketing information would include:

International-level information

- International data banks on trade of selected tree and forest products
- Libraries and communication departments of selected research institutions
- Tree and forest product producers, manufacturers and traders

National-level information

- Decrees and laws of the Forestry Ministry, or Agriculture Ministry, on product extraction, trade and processing
- National inventory of tree and forest products; specific branch of the Forestry Ministry
- Trade and industry-related centres and trade promotion centre statistics
- Chamber of Trade data
- Semi-public or private companies' product transactions
- INGOs' or multilateral agencies' experiences and studies on tree and forest products
- Universities and research institutions
- Tree and forest product literature review
- Botanical gardens and plants and wildlife museum libraries and archives

Regional-level information (within the country)

- Regional inventory of products
- Research and project reports in the region
- Maps, botanical herbarium, regional forest and agricultural statistics (for example, taxes collected for tree and forest products)
- Main traders and market places transactions

Community-level information

- Baseline surveys concerning production, collection, transportation, post-harvest activities and selling of tree and forest products; dependency of the community members on the products for household use and income

INTERVIEWING

Information gathering from direct sources through interviews and observation is one of the most difficult tasks for the users of the MA&D process. A common problem is that not enough care is given to the preparation of different exercises, and not enough thought is given to the purpose of the information. Before including information, information gatherers must make sure that it is valid and reliable, and that they can use it for planning and developing solutions.

It is important that the facilitator spend time with information gatherers to train them in interviewing and observation techniques. If information gatherers are sent out unprepared, they are likely to obtain inadequate and unreliable information that will be of no use in later decision-making. Proper training is also a key to enabling them to continue gathering information after the facilitator's departure, in order to ensure that their enterprises run smoothly.

GUIDELINES: HOW TO CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW

The following is a checklist that can serve as a guide in conducting an interview. The main techniques are discussed below in more detail.

- Make the interview informal; only some of the questions should be predetermined in the form of a topic checklist. During the interview, other relevant questions will arise from observation, responses, and topics the people being interviewed want to discuss.
- Select the key informants, who may include individual small producers, processors, wholesalers or retailers; leaders of a product association; large-scale producers, processors, wholesalers or retailers; and government officials.
- Develop interviewing skills and information-recording techniques. The most useful information can usually be obtained by asking questions indirectly and linking the question to what can be observed.
- Write down all information. Practise asking questions among the team members, based on the 'six helpers': who, what, why, when, where, how. Obtain more significant responses by asking probing questions, such as 'But why?' or 'Please, tell me more' or 'Anything else?' Determine if responses can be judged as fact, opinion or rumour. Always listen patiently; let the person being interviewed talk, even if at first the answer may not directly address the question.
- Select an appropriate time. If an appointment is made, it is important to be punctual and to explain the purpose of the visit on arrival. Ask permission to take notes. Make the person being interviewed feel comfortable (for instance, make pleasant conversation about the shop, factory, farm, house, weather). Interviews should be no longer than approximately one hour in duration.

- Select an appropriate location for the interview. If possible, it should be conducted at the place where the activity occurs. For example, if the subject of an interview is forest products, then the interview is best conducted in the forest; if it is about farm products, conduct the interview on the farm; about factory production and marketing, at the factory; and about the retail market, at the shop.
- Respect the informants and learn from them. Do not make negative comments about the activities of the people being interviewed. For example, it would not be appropriate to comment negatively on their harvesting methods even if these might be judged destructive. The task of the information-gathering team is to learn. Therefore, it is important to explore in depth the issues important to the people being interviewed.
- Prepare daily and long-term field plans (see Box B.4).
- Compare notes. There should be a daily review of the information gathered (see Box B.5) and the results should be written up.

INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

Information gatherers need to know how to conduct interviews and how to use a range of techniques for validating information.

Semi-structured interview This is an informal interview that starts off with a checklist of issues the interviewer wants to learn about. Some people prefer to have detailed checklists so they do not forget what they want to ask, while others feel comfortable with only a broad outline. In either case, the interview should be as relaxed and friendly as possible. How the questions are asked depends on what the participants have to say. This allows the conversation to be more natural and to flow more freely. It also allows the person being interviewed to bring up new issues not anticipated by the interviewer.

Key informant interview At several points in the MA&D process, the need for more precise information will become apparent. At these points, it can be very useful to conduct semi-structured interviews with carefully selected people who have a particular knowledge of the topic of discussion. These people are known as ‘key informants’. Key informants can include individual small-scale producers, processors, wholesalers and retailers; leaders of a product association; large-scale producers, processors, wholesalers and retailers; and government officials.

Some useful interviewing tools

What's wrong with this question? Information gatherers should be encouraged to avoid using ambiguous or leading questions during interviews. Leading questions illicit a yes or no response, whereas an open-ended question that uses what, when, where, who, why or how opens up the conversation. However, there is debate about whether an unclear or a leading question is always inappropriate. This is a good opportunity to stress that there is no absolutely correct or incorrect question. The way questions are framed will depend on the topic and the context of the interview, but it is important to be aware of the need to word questions carefully.

But why? An interview tool In order to obtain clear and reliable information, a good interviewer will probe during an interview. Probing is like peeling away the layers of an onion, the objective being to get to the centre, or in this case, the point. Examples of a few good probing questions include 'But why?', or 'Please tell me more about that', and 'Anything else?' By using the six helpers (who, what, where, when, why and how), the interviewer will progress towards learning the underlying reason for the initial statement. This tool can be a real help in conducting a good interview and in assessing the value of asking open-ended, non-leading questions.

Techniques for validating information

Triangulation This is a way to cross-check information for accuracy. It means looking at any problem from as many perspectives as possible, but from at least three. Triangulation is achieved by using different tools to gather information on the same issue (e.g. maps, transects and trend lines to examine environmental changes), and by listening to different people with different points of view about the same topic (e.g. women/men, young/old, wealthy/poor, about food production). Notes made during interviews should be compared during a daily review of the information gathered (see Box B.5).

Judging the reliability of the responses It is better to gather a small amount of reliable information than large amounts of ambiguous or unreliable information. To avoid gathering unreliable information, the interviewer should judge the responses and react to them immediately. The information gathered should be classified in one of the following categories:

- *act,* a commonly agreed time- and place-specific truth;
- *opinion,* an individual's or group's view on a topic; or
- *rumour,* unsubstantiated information from an unknown source.

All information that falls into the categories of opinion and rumour needs to be cross-checked.

USING OBSERVATION

Physical observation is not commonly used in information gathering. The usual tendency is to sit and carry out the interview without physically observing things. However, it is important to ensure that interviews are conducted on the spot and relate to what can be seen there. Some examples follow.

- Walking through a community can provide information on such aspects as land use, local economy, division of labour (who is doing what?) and seasonal activities.
- Walking through a factory can provide information on such aspects as technology, labour, quality of product and storage.
- Walking through a market place can provide information on such aspects as the number of sellers, quality of products and infrastructure.

Information gatherers can also link what they see with the questions asked during the interviews. Some examples follow.

- They can point to a product and ask questions about where it came from and how long it will last.
- If there are trees around the house that produce products that are marketed, they can ask about the products and their uses, about who planted the tree and who manages it, and about how much is sold and how much is consumed (general estimates are all that is needed).
- If products are being processed, information gatherers can ask if they are for home consumption or for sale, who processes them, who sells them and to whom they are sold.
- When in a forest, information gatherers can point to trees and ask when (or if) they were planted, how old they are, and what their uses are. They can also ask about forest products (such as mushrooms, animals, medicinal plants) and about how the forest is used (for grazing, timber, construction material, etc.)
- When in a shop or at a market stall, information gatherers can ask such questions as where the products came from, whether the trader bought them directly from the producer or from a trader, how much of the product will be sold that day, who will buy it and in what quantities, and whether the transactions are in cash or credit.

BOX B.4

Prepare a field plan before going into the field

In order to make the best use of the time spent in gathering information, it is important to have a field plan that includes a schedule, topics and informants. There should be both a preliminary long-term plan and a daily plan. Both the long-term field plan and the daily field plan will probably change constantly, since they are meant to serve as guidelines for planning rather than as rigid schedules.

In developing the field plan it is necessary to:

1. Identify

- the topic areas for which there is little or no information
- issues, constraints and opportunities
- which tools to use

2. Design a field plan that includes

- a daily schedule of activities
- a clear outline of who will do what (the community members/key informants that are needed for the activities)
- logistical needs (transport, food, etc.)
- enough unscheduled time for potential delays, new activities

BOX B.5

Daily review. Coming back from the field

The objectives of the daily review are the following.

1. **To assess the performance of the interviewer**
   - Were the questions open-ended?
   - Did the questions follow a logical sequence?
   - Was there a good follow-up and exploration of information?
   - What went well?
   - What needs improvement?

2. **To answer the following questions (using the day's notes and worksheets)**
   - What new information was gathered?
   - What was learned?
   - Has the same information been gathered from more than one source?
   - Is the information accurate?
   - What new issues arose from today's fieldwork?
   - How could information on this new issue be gathered (tools)?
   - What information still needs to be gathered?

3. **To discuss (based on the information gathered) whether any product(s) should be eliminated**
   (In particular, factors that are key barriers should be considered. They include the following questions.)
   - Are there any policies/regulations that would prevent the collection or harvesting of a product (access to the resource)?
   - Is there a monopoly in control of the product?
   - Are entrepreneurs not interested in expanding production?
   - Is the product currently being overharvested? Is it becoming more difficult to find and collect?
   - Is there oversupply of the product (too many plantations, trees, etc.)? Is this keeping prices low?
   - Is there low and declining demand for the product?

4. **To plan ahead**
   - What are the field activities for the next day?
   - Who will do what?
   - Which informants will participate?
   - What logistical arrangements (transport, food, etc.) need to be made?

Underlying principles

In this section, the underlying principles of the MA&D process are explained in order to clarify why this methodology is so appropriate for small enterprises based on tree and forest products.

Integration of sustainability considerations in the planning and development of tree and forest product enterprises

Sustainable enterprises benefit local entrepreneurs by creating sustainable economic activities and safeguarding the environment in the long term. Therefore, they are socially, economically and ecologically sustainable.

Social sustainability

From a social perspective, a sustainable system is one in which the activities of the tree and forest products enterprises do not harm disadvantaged members of the community, and do not create social disruption.

The following example shows how social sustainability was a key issue in the selection of an enterprise in a community in central Viet Nam.

EXAMPLE

During an MA&D initiative carried out in Viet Nam, the final selection of the product was made according to social criteria. While other products could have produced a higher income, silkworm production was preferred because of the already high involvement of women in this activity. Although for some women silkworm production may have meant a slight increase in workload, the advantage was that women would get a fair share of the benefits.

Economic sustainability

This incorporates both the technical and the market aspects of an enterprise. From the perspective of community members:

- technical sustainability is the long-term ability to utilize and maintain equipment and processes for production, manufacturing and marketing; and
- market sustainability is the ability to maintain a position in the market system by assessing changes in the market environment and adapting the product so that it remains competitive and attractive to the targeted customers.

EXAMPLE

Traditional medical practitioners in Nepal realized that they had to change the presentation of their medicinal preparations if they wanted to stay competitive. They understood that consumers were more attracted by 'modern-looking' medicines. Therefore, they began packaging their traditional medicines in colourful capsules and strips of tablets. An additional advantage was that the medicines could also be preserved for longer periods.

Ecological sustainability

A sustainable system for exploiting resources is one in which products can be harvested indefinitely from a limited area of forest and in which development of a market for those products will not lead to overexploitation.

EXAMPLE

Farmers in Nepal harvested the fruits of the amala tree (*Emblica officinalis*) in the same area of forest every year, without causing a decrease in the stock of the product over the years.

By integrating sustainability principles into enterprise development, local people will prepare resource management and social plans, in addition to operational, marketing, organizational and financial plans.

Characteristics of tree and forest products

Tree and forest product-based enterprises have characteristics that differ from other enterprises. A common drawback in the design of micro and small rural enterprises is that solutions are often not adapted to these characteristics. The facilitator needs to be aware of the unique characteristics of tree and forest products in order to be able to help entrepreneurs to assess the resulting constraints and opportunities.

Tree and forest product-based enterprises can have the following characteristics.

- The seasonal nature of growth and production often implies that collection and utilization are concentrated during short periods in the year. For example, bamboo shoots are usually harvested during a period of two to four months.
- Trading of tree and forest products is usually informal, with unrecorded actors and transactions. Small-scale units are scattered outside the established distribution channels; therefore, market information is difficult to obtain.
- There is no national infrastructure to support marketing efforts.
- They are dependent on the ecological integrity of the forest; a number of forest products require a more complex level of resource management than plantation products or agricultural products. For example, when harvesting valerian root there must be strict rotation of the harvesting sites in order to ensure a good-size root.
- Remote location of products results in long distribution channels, lack of market access and high transportation costs, as well as poor access of the producers to education.
- Cash income activities based on tree and forest products are usually a secondary source of income for villagers in the low season, when no other activity provides food for the family.

These characteristics explain why, in general, producers of tree and forest products do not market their products but, instead, sell the products to a customer, such as a government agent, a trader or consumer. If producers want to retain a larger portion of the income generated by these products, their task and that of those involved in planning market development of tree and forest products is to transform the process from selling to marketing.

Selling is trying to make the customer buy the available product.

Marketing includes not only selling, but also producing, processing, promoting and distributing the product.

The role of the facilitator in MA&D

The facilitator's role is to assist target group members and guide them through the MA&D process. It is not the role of the facilitator to analyse data and make decisions for the target group members, whose active role is central to the methodology. Initiatives and activities emerging from the MA&D process must continue to be viable and efficiently operated by the entrepreneurs after the facilitator leaves. While the support of a facilitator is needed as the future entrepreneurs go through the MA&D process, it is imperative that they make their own decisions and plan for their future business activities. Therefore, it is important that the future entrepreneurs should be involved from the preliminary stages of MA&D.

The facilitator will need to use various techniques to ensure that poor and disadvantaged members of the community are not left out. These techniques should be used from the beginning of the process. They can vary according to the circumstances. The facilitator could:

- select people from disadvantaged groups, teach them how to use tools for information gathering and assist them in analysing the information; and
- help organize workshops during which target group members can select products and learn how to use the tools that will help them through the MA&D process.

Facilitators using MA&D in the Integrated Food Security Project (IFSP) in Quang Binh, in central Viet Nam, applied these techniques with good results (see the case study in Booklet F). For instance, producers of brooms made from grass flowers realized that this traditional activity faced enormous market constraints. As a result, they decided to diversify to other, more profitable activities such as beekeeping in order to increase their income.

It is important for the facilitator to keep pace with the capacity of target group members. The challenge for the facilitator is to avoid taking over the process, in order to get through it faster or achieve a desired result. Instead, a good facilitator will help target group members to obtain and analyse the required information and make their own decisions about their future enterprises. If the facilitator conducts a step for the future entrepreneurs, it may deprive them of key information, which may later be critical to the selection of the enterprise.

It is also important to acknowledge that local people are capable of making decisions and operating enterprises without ongoing external support. The belief that a product cannot be marketed without substantial government or project support reflects a lack of trust in the market and local people.

MA&D as a learning and capacity-building process

Market analysis and development is an iterative learning process, with decisions made on product and market development after a wide range of information is gathered. The facilitator will help target group members gather information that will enable them to objectively consider potential options. The process is as follows:

- gather information about potential products and their opportunities and constraints;
- analyse the findings;
- make assumptions based on the analysis;
- develop strategies from these assumptions;
- field-test the proposed strategies; and
- on the basis of the results of the field-testing, reconsider the proposed strategies, go back to a previous stage and abandon a product if necessary.

The proper use of methods at the right point in the process is important in order to achieve a sustainable end result.

The importance of this process of learning and acting on what has been learned is often misunderstood, leading users to increase risks. It often happens that entrepreneurs or facilitators do not act on survey results that indicate a need to make a change, if that change may be difficult, time-consuming or costly.

EXAMPLE

An entrepreneur producing bamboo furniture has learned from the results of a technical survey that some species of bamboo may crack when subjected to wide variations in humidity. However, in order to eliminate this risk, the entrepreneur would need to change supplier, increase transport costs, or undertake additional (and therefore costly) primary treatment of the bamboo. The entrepreneur may prefer to ignore this risk, but in the long run this might result in significant losses if wholesalers refuse to accept his/her bamboo furniture.

Therefore, it is important to encourage future entrepreneurs to learn and then act on what they have learned. This will help them avoid making decisions based on preconceptions, as, for instance, when they may want to retain a product simply because they know it well, even though survey results show that it is not economically feasible.

The learning and capacity-building process is also based on trying out ideas in pilot projects. This means that resources, such as time and money, are not wasted on the wrong product and can therefore be invested in more profitable products and strategies.

The MA&D methodology helps future entrepreneurs become responsive. The information gathered during each step of the process is used to make decisions before proceeding to the next step. Often, this can mean that products are abandoned, and new options are revealed.

EXAMPLES

In northern Viet Nam, a group of producers wanted to develop an enterprise based on the processing of bamboo shoots. However, a survey of the relevant legal considerations revealed that there was a new decree that banned the exploitation of bamboo shoots for sale. The proposed enterprise was therefore abandoned.

In southern Nepal, farmers had chosen to cultivate and eventually market the seeds of two fruits, harro *(Terminalia chebula)* and barro *(Terminalia bellerica)*, used for medicinal purposes. However, a social survey during the first phase of the MA&D process revealed that local women did not support the idea because the processing would be too time-consuming and would increase their workloads, with minimal benefits. The two products were abandoned and another product, gurjo *(Tinospora cordifolia)* was selected. This vine, which many women were already collecting and processing, could also be used in medicines and could be marketed more effectively.

Importance of strategic alliances: potential partners

Tree and forest product enterprises, by their nature, cannot be undertaken by one person, since the flow of goods and information among a range of different actors is critical to the success of an enterprise.

The market chain starts with the producer and ends with the consumer. Throughout the chain, there are two types of actors: direct actors, who are the members of the market chain through which the product moves (harvesters, traders, manufacturers and consumers); and indirect actors, who can influence the marketing of the product (such as policy-makers, technical researchers and environmental advocacy groups). These include both private and public sector companies and agencies.

Alliances are so important that if one of the parties in the chain is weak, the whole venture can be affected and may even collapse. The formation of effective alliances is, therefore, a key issue. The challenge is to help target group members identify strategic partners who will be in a position to contribute to the development of a sustainable enterprise.

When planning the development of a product, MA&D considers its entire subsector. Future entrepreneurs need to identify and create links with partners who will reinforce their leverage in the subsector. For example, the establishment of a cooperatively owned and managed cold storage facility in a district centre could benefit many small groups of producers scattered throughout the area. It could be preferable to building small storage facilities in each village.

Target group members could link up with other actors in order to:

- negotiate technical assistance or maintenance contracts (indirect actors);
- negotiate purchase contracts between producers and manufacturers (direct actors); and
- arrange financial support contracts/short-term loans for working capital with local banks or the private sector.

Creating strategic alliances

In order to create strategic alliances, target group members need to:

- assess their main strengths and constraints;
- list the areas where external assistance is most critical;
- select other members in the chain who could also benefit from the alliance;
- identify indirect actors in each of the target areas of enterprise development who could assist in overcoming constraints (for example, partners who could solve technical problems or develop institutional structures);
- assess the nature of existing relationships and how they need to be changed;
- develop linkages with the selected key actors; and
- eliminate from consideration or give lower priority to actors with whom a relationship is not necessary.

EXAMPLE

Mushroom producers in northern Viet Nam benefited from forming an alliance with the national mushroom research institute. They learned how to grow new species of mushrooms and had access to information on the quality required by consumers. Their alliance with a company that prepared salted mushrooms for export ensured that the producers had a buyer for the mushrooms they could not sell to wholesalers or restaurants, or on the retail market. The alliance also meant a guaranteed supply of raw materials to the company. Both parties benefited from the partnership.

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- Fruits of our work: women in community forestry, Tanzania [slide booklet], 1991 (E)
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3 I am so hungry I could eat a tree, 1992 (Ch/E/F/S)

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Latin America and Caribbean (Spanish): Revista bosques, árboles y comunidades rurales
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