

SID - BOLIVIA

COMPETING TO RECLAIM ERODED SOILS AND PASTURES AND INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY AND INCOME

Competitions are an innovative way to help farmers reclaim land and increase productivity and income, increase participation in projects, organize the training and technical assistance to farmers, and include farmers in project planning and evaluation.

Steps:

- At the beginning of each rainy or dry season, NGO staff and farmers select the practices that the farmers will adopt or improve during the season. For example, practices such as digging water infiltration ditches in compacted soils, damming gullies, re-seeding pastures, vaccinating animals, digging farm ponds for better year-round watering of animals, or more efficient watering of crops.
- Farmers set the criteria for how they will measure the results in each community. For example, criteria such as meters of water infiltration ditches, hectares of pasture re-seeded, number of animals vaccinated, or time and volume of water required for irrigating crops.
- Farmers also select the prizes for the communities and families that win the competitions. For example, farm tools, improved seed, or young animals.
- NGO staff provides training and technical assistance in the practices throughout the rainy or dry season.
- The farmers select a panel of judges.
- The judges review the results in each community and award the prizes to the communities and families with the best results.

Benefits:

- Participation in environmental projects rarely exceeds 10 to 20% of families in each community. Participation in agricultural projects often does not exceed 50% of the families. By using competitions among communities, an NGO can achieve 80 to 90% participation in projects that achieve both environmental and agricultural goals.
- The competitions are flexible enough to permit farmers to find their own solutions to their problems.

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- Competitions give recognition and reward for adopting better practices.
- They mix environmental and agricultural practices, and make reclamation practices part of general agricultural practice and the agricultural calendar.
- Competitions mobilize labor for doing hard chores such as digging water retention ditches, damming gullies, or re-seeding pastures. When everyone participates, the work seems less onerous.
- NGOs would like to include farmers in project planning and evaluation, but often fail to do so. By using competitions to organize the training and technical assistance, farmers select the changes they will make and evaluate the results.
- Competitions are like knowledge management projects. Everyone participates in the judging, and farmers who did not win see what others did to win. They adopt these methods, improve upon them, and become the winners in the next competition. Few communities win more than two or three times in a row.

Additional Costs:

The NGO needs to include the costs of the prizes in its budget. For example, if there are 30 communities in the project area, three communities might be awarded 1st place prizes worth \$1,000 per community and six communities might be awarded 2nd place prizes worth \$500 per community. Thus, the cost of the prizes is \$6,000 per season or \$12,000 per year. However, the only input provided to the farmers is the training and technical assistance, and most NGO budgets can be adjusted to take advantage of this innovation at no additional cost.

Sustainability:

The widespread participation and adoption of practices that reclaim land and increase income help make these changes a permanent part of the agricultural calendar. Enough reclamation in pastureland and increase in productivity can be seen from one year to the next to prove the value of the practices.

For More Information, Contact

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