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# Participatory Integrated Climate Services for Agriculture (PICSA): Field Manual

A step-by-step guide to using PICSA  
with farmers

**Walker**  
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Food Security



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## Field Manual: A step-by-step guide to using PICSA with farmers

### Introduction

Smallholder farmers are key to food security in sub-Saharan Africa where two thirds of the population depend on small-scale, rain-fed farming as their main source of food and income. Critical farming and household decisions depend upon the weather, for example, how much rain falls, the length and start date of the rainfall season and the timing of dry spells. Such aspects of the weather vary considerably from year to year.

The Participatory Integrated Climate Services for Agriculture (PICSA) approach aims to facilitate farmers to make informed decisions based on accurate, location specific, climate and weather information; locally relevant crop, livestock and livelihood options; and with the use of participatory tools to aid their decision making.

Considering farming and livelihood options in the context of climate is crucial for making good decisions. A farmer in Matumba village in central Tanzania expressed this notion perfectly when he said, *“We should select crops that look like the climate”*.

The PICSA approach has been designed with field staff in mind, and aims to support you to do your job better by providing you with improved resources and information.

This field manual is a step by step guide to working through the PICSA approach with farmer groups. It is primarily for the use of facilitators (e.g. NGO and extension field staff who have received training in the use of the PICSA approach). The PICSA approach is divided into twelve steps to be carried out with groups of farmers. Due to the location specific nature of PICSA there are a number of preparatory activities that need to be completed before field staff are trained in the approach. The details of these activities can be found in the document ‘Preparing for PICSA’ on the PICSA website (<http://www.walker-institute.ac.uk/research/PICSA>).

### The key components of PICSA

1. Providing and considering climate and weather information with farmers – including historical records and forecasts



2. The joint analysis of information on crop, livelihood and livestock options and their risks, by field staff and farmers



3. A set of participatory tools to enable farmers to use this information in planning and decision making for their circumstances



## *How to use this field manual*

In this field manual the activities are broken down into clear and logical steps. Each step builds on what has been covered in the previous steps. The first steps focus on what farmers are doing now and how climate and weather influence this. The following steps then enable you to help farmers to use a range of sources of climate, weather, crop, livestock and livelihood information for their planning and decision making.

This process can be divided into 12 steps (see below and the activity flowchart on page 7):

- Step A: What does the farmer currently do?
- Step B: Is the climate changing?
- Step C: What are the opportunities and risks?
- Step D: What are the options for the farmer?
- Step E: Options by context.
- Step F: Compare different options and plan.
- Step G: The farmer decides.
- Step H: Seasonal forecast.
- Step I: Identify and select possible responses to the forecast.
- Step J: Short-term forecasts and warnings.
- Step K: Identify and select possible responses to short-term forecasts and warnings.
- Step L: Learn from experience and improve process

Each step has a set of activities that you, as the facilitator, implement with a group of farmers through a series of meetings. The activities for each step will be explained in more detail in the associated activity sheets throughout this field manual. The names of the activity sheets correspond to the step they belong to, e.g. Step A, activity sheets A1 and A2. Steps B, D, H and J require location specific information, which is provided in the appendices<sup>1</sup>.

One of your first duties as a facilitator will be to decide on a timetable for the meetings. When planning your timetable you need to consider at what time of year each step needs to take place. Ideally, steps A to G need to happen at least 8 to 12 weeks before the rainy season starts. Steps H & I need to be implemented when the seasonal forecast is available. Steps J and K should take place just before and during the growing season and Step L at the end of the season. If you already hold regular meetings with farmers then many of these activities can be included in the existing meetings.

A possible timetable for the meetings is:

- Meeting 1 (3 hours): Steps A and B (well before the rainy season)
- Meeting 2 (3 hours): Steps C to E (well before the rainy season)
- Meeting 3 (3 hours): Steps F and G (well before the rainy season)
- Meeting 4 (2 hours): Steps H and I (after the seasonal forecast)
- Meeting 5 (1 hour): Steps J and K (during the season)
- Meeting 6 (2 hours): Step L (after the season)

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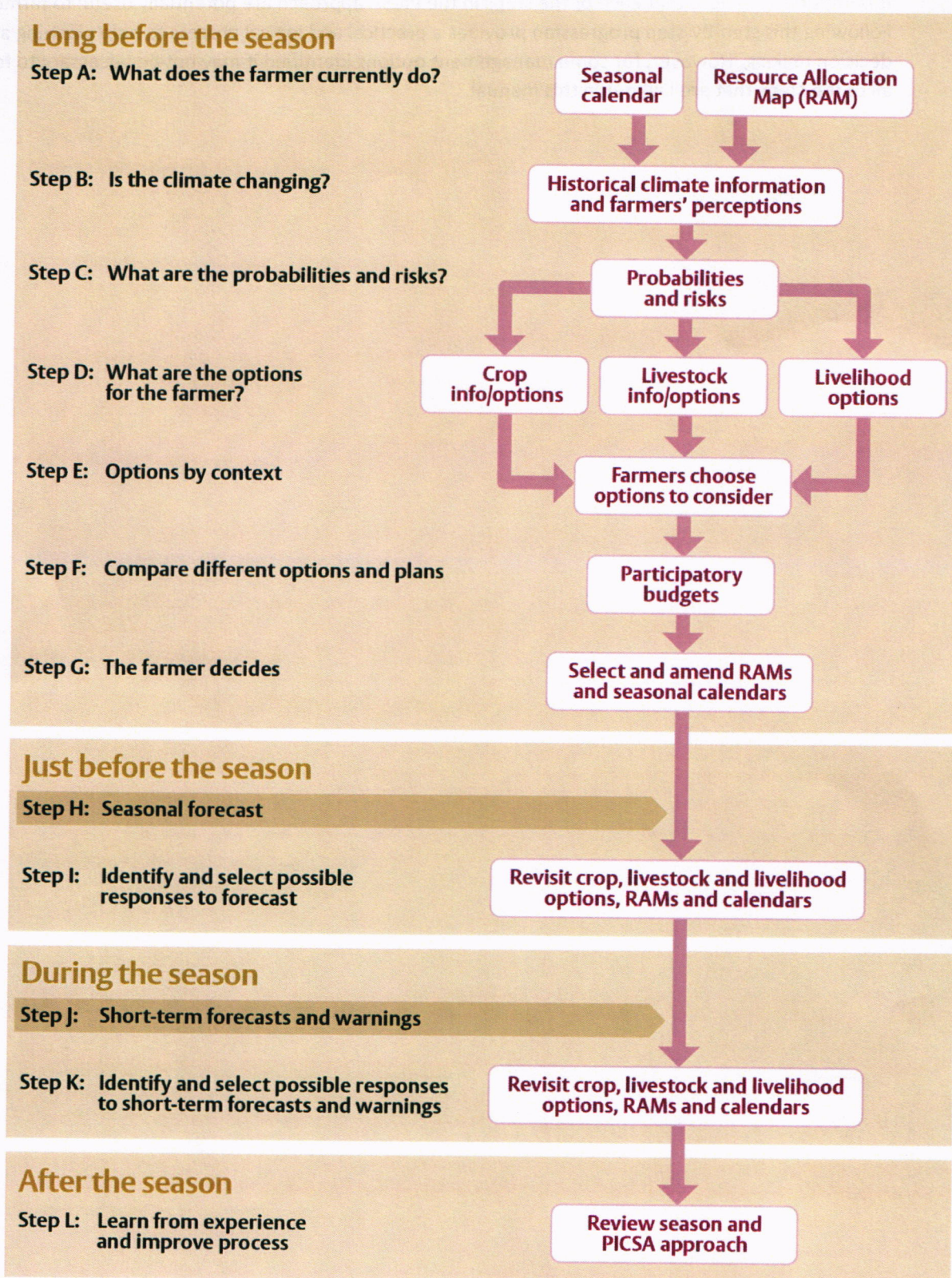
<sup>1</sup> Location specific appendices need to be prepared in advance of training.

This is only a suggested timetable and should be adapted to meet farmers' needs. For example, Steps A to G could be split over 2 longer sessions if you and your groups prefer.

It is important to note that each of the steps in the PICSA approach are potentially useful to farmers. Following this step-by-step progression provides a practical and logical process to help planning and decision making. However, for some management options identified it may not be necessary to follow all of the steps that are laid out in this manual.

## Activity Flow Chart

This activity flow chart provides an overview of the whole PICSA process.





### ***Tips for successful facilitation:***

As a facilitator it is important to always be thinking about your role, which is to enable shared analysis and learning by participants. As a facilitator you should:

- Be prepared

Make sure that you are familiar with the materials for the session and that you have a strong understanding of the related background materials. It is also useful to spend some time thinking about what questions the participants might ask, and how you would answer them.

- Define and discuss the structure and objective of the meeting

It is important that the group works together towards a common goal. Spend some time at the beginning of the meeting explaining the plan and intended outcomes of the session, and addressing any questions that the participants might have.

- Guide your group to do the work, but do not do the work for them

When you explain an activity it is often useful to provide an example. After introducing some examples, it is important to remember that in all participatory methods it is the participants (farmers) that complete the activities. The facilitator facilitates the process, supports the farmers and asks questions. For example, if the activity involves drawing diagrams then after providing an example to the farmers they should be doing their own drawing.

- Ensure easy understanding

When creating Seasonal Calendars, Livelihood Options Matrices or Participatory Budgets, try to use symbols instead of words.

- Ensure that all group members are heard

It is important that the opinions of all group members are taken into account. As a facilitator you will have to make sure this is happening by asking questions.

If a participant is being very quiet you could try occasionally asking them an easy or opinion based question (“e.g.: how do you feel about this?”). This can help to reduce their fear of answering wrongly and thus build up their confidence.

If you have a very dominant participant who talks too much, you can try pulling out interesting points from what they are saying to further the group discussion. To do this, thank them for bringing up the topic, rephrase the point you have chosen and ask the other group members for their thoughts on the topic.

- Bring a positive attitude

It is important to be friendly and honest with participants and to be respectful of participants’ cultures, community standing and their level of knowledge.

- Manage your time well

Good time keeping is important to keep participants engaged and happy in the exercises that they are doing. Be clear at the beginning of the meeting how long you estimate the exercises will take; be realistic and stick to it.

- Respect the decisions of participants

In some of the exercises, farmers will be considering options and are likely to plan ahead for their own farms and livelihoods. Everyone is different – not just in terms of their resources like soil type, how rich or poor they are, or what opportunities they have – but also regarding what they want to achieve and how much risk they want to take. Your role is to support individuals to decide for themselves what they want to do and to respect their decisions.



Photo Cecilia Schubert (CAAFS)

## Step A - What does the farmer currently do?

By the end of this step, you as the facilitator together with the farmers should clearly understand the main activities that the farmers currently undertake; their timing and how climate and weather affects those activities. This will be the starting point from which the farmers can use climate and other information to make decisions.

Because this is the first step in PICSA make sure that you take the time to explain the overall PICSA process and discuss what you will be doing over the series of meetings that you have planned.

### *Aims of this step:*

1. To better understand what livelihood activities a household undertakes, what resources it has, how they use them and what they produce (using a Resource Allocation Map).
2. To understand what main activities a farmer has for different crops and/or livestock, the timing of these activities, and how they are affected by weather and climate (using a Seasonal Calendar).
3. To create a starting point from which to explore ways of using climate and other information.
4. To enable you as the facilitator to better understand the differences between farmers in the group regarding their activities and access to resources.

### *During this step you should facilitate farmers to:*

- Construct a Resource Allocation Map (see activity sheet A1).
- Construct a Seasonal Calendar (see activity sheet A2).

