

The Neuchâtel Initiative

Review of Experiences on Market Oriented Agricultural Advisory Services (MOAAS)

Expansion of Farmer Field Schools Programme in Eastern and Southern Africa

Country: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Mozambique

Name of intervention: Expansion of Farmer Field Schools Programme in Eastern and Southern Africa

Time period under analysis: 2005 to present (Phase II), with some reference to Phase I of the project in 1999-2002.

Institutions/agencies involved: Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries Development, Food and Agriculture Organisations of the United Nations, Farmer Field School District Networks, and other stakeholders, funded by IFAD.

Project purpose: Enhance the livelihoods of farmers in the region through the development of a low-cost, sustainable and broad-based model for farmer education and empowerment, including development of self-financing mechanisms for Farmer Field Schools, broadened scope of advisory services, foster demand-driven and market oriented services, and support development and strengthening of farmer networks and producer organisations.

Main Results: Self-propelling action among farmers for collective marketing of produce and emerging movement of farmer networks and producer organisations, able to articulate demands and carry out services for their members.

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Question 1: What are the general settings and arrangements for MOAAS?

The current trend among governments in East Africa is to promote demand-driven and decentralized services for farmers. In Kenya, the National Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP) of 2001 was revised in 2006 (NASEP) in order to make the policy more inclusive of all players in extension and to provide for increased focus on market oriented agricultural services, move towards privatisation of extension and decentralisation of services. In Uganda, the National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAADS) provides a context where provision of services is privatised and decentralised and farmers are facilitated to contract extension providers of their choice. During the recent years Tanzania has undergone a Reform of Agricultural Extension Services and the Agricultural Sector Development Programme (ASDP) has been formulated with the aim of developing a national policy for agricultural research, extension and training. This has led to a local government reform strategy whereby full responsibility of extension activities has been transferred to the local government at district level. However, in all countries there are still gaps of concrete knowledge of how to carry out demand-driven extension in practice and especially how to reach poor farmers.

Farmers, especially small-holders with limited land holding sizes that operate on individual level will face great challenges in finding market outlets for their produce and in securing high prices for their products. On the other hand, if small-scale farmers are well organized and networked, they may be

able to access higher value markets, venture into chain marketing and have a comparative advantage in supplying high-value, labour-intensive crops and products to expanding domestic and global markets. The move towards food sales being done increasingly through supermarkets puts a new dimension of need for farmers to sell at scale, i.e. unless farmers are organised to produce in bulk they will not be able to enter this new market. Producers' organisations and farmer groups provide a 'voice' for the poor, both by placing pressures on extension providers and by providing and facilitating services, such as collective input supply and marketing, for their members and other producers. With collective strength the farmer is able to combat the outside exploitative and corrupt forces like traders and money lenders. Farmer associations can allow small farmers to pool their resources to purchase extension information that individual farmers may not be able to afford on their own.

Based on the above context, the programme aims facilitating farmers to access local markets, through increased leadership and management capacity of farmers and building of social capital in forms of farmer organisations.

Facilitators of the advisory services are generally public extension staffs who have been trained in the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach and in relevant technical topics including market development and 'Farming as a Business (FAAB)'. Increasingly farmer trainers that have undergone training are also being used as facilitators. Services are funded through donor funds, in this case IFAD together with a certain degree of contribution by benefiting farmers. All activities are driven by the farmers and increasingly by local farmer networks.

Close linkages are established with other actors and stakeholders, such as other projects and programmes with similar goals. The organised groups have further proved an attractive entry point for private sector partners to establish partnerships with farmers. In all countries close links have been established between groups and input companies such as seed and fertiliser suppliers.

Even though Governments are in policy promoting strong private-public partnerships this seems in practice to be difficult to put in place due to the large gaps in culture, attitudes, economic situation and motives between public institutions and individuals and private sector actors.

Question 2: Who are the clients of MOAAS?

The clients of the agricultural advisory services are small-holder farmers, organised in formally registered groups of about 25-30 members, of which a majority are women (70%). Studies have indicated that the FFS groups include both poor and vulnerable farmers and better off small-holder farmers. A majority of the farmers are however, below the poverty line and classified as poor. However, the very most vulnerable, sick people or single house hold heads with many children etc, often find it hard to attend the weekly learning sessions, since if being sick the practical work during the learning sessions becomes hard and if being extremely poor casual labour opportunities are often prioritised above learning opportunities. The programme has been discussing ways of merging the agricultural advisory services with food aid interventions in order to provide opportunities for the most vulnerable. However, this would to some extent go against the voluntary spirit among current farmers involved in the programme. The farming enterprises applied among the participating farmers vary widely, and span over a range of crop and livestock enterprises, of which maize, vegetable, sweet potatoes, plantain and poultry have been some of the major enterprises applied as focus in the agricultural advisory services. Youth are involved in the programme to some extent. Particularly when focusing on marketing youth has proved more interested in taking part of the activities. Generally however, the interest among youth for agricultural activities is low in the programme areas.

Generally the ability among local farmers to articulate their needs are fairly good, however the abilities to demand services and to hold service providers accountable for their services are weak. Therefore the programme has made particular efforts to try to capture farmers' demands and target services accordingly. As a mean of ensuring accountability among service providers the programme applies a demand-side funding system where farmers are in charge of the funds going for capacity building activities and are also the ones to issue transport refund and payments to the service providers. This has proved to increase the capacity among farmers to demand services.

The clients of the services are mainly small-holders that both produce for subsistence and smaller amounts for selling on local markets. Most of the marketed produce is normally sold at farm gate to local traders or on local or road side markets. However with the strengthening of local groups and with the emergence of farmer networks farmers have increasingly been able to access more lucrative markets and organise themselves to market produce collectively. A large number of groups have

entered into value addition and small scale processing, such as for example production of potatoes chips, tomato jam etc. Especially the processing of sweet potatoes chips has been done on large scale following collaboration with CABI and CIP, through which farmers have been able to receive advisory services on appropriate processing and storage methods.

Question 3: What approaches and methods are used for agricultural advisory services?

The bulk of advisory services are carried out through the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach, where farmer groups are involved in hands-on discovery based learning aimed at increasing farmers' ability for critical decision making. The FFS approach, consists of groups of people with a common interest, who get together on a regular basis to study the "how and why" of a particular topic. The FFS provides an opportunity for farmers to learn together, using practical, hands-on methods of discovery learning. The methods emphasise observation, discussion, analysis, collective decision-making, presentation and taking appropriate action. Discussion and analysis are important ways to combine local indigenous knowledge with new concepts and bring both into decision-making. The process builds self-confidence (particularly for women), encourages group control of the process, and improves group and community skills. By integrating marketing, business skills and cost-benefit analysis with practical production skills farmers build up their capacity to produce for markets and develop their 'farming as a business' thinking. The groups meet regularly, generally on weekly basis at a field site where the group is involved in practical experimentation and testing of production or post-harvest practices. The programme has developed a set of learning materials for discovery based exercises in various production, marketing and business related topics for farmers to discuss and analyse their local context in terms of constraints and opportunities. Leadership and organisational skills building is also integrated in the learning approach. As farmers gain production and marketing skills farmers are increasingly facilitated to engage in chain marketing of produce including value addition, processing and collective marketing? Alongside learning activities, the farmer groups generally also start-up income generating activities, in order to secure some income for the group and to ensure sustainability of the group activities.

The FFS facilitators, i.e. extension staff or farmer leaders are trained in the FFS approach which entails a 2-week practical training on facilitation skills, participatory technology development, group dynamics etc.

For members of the FFS networks special trainings in marketing, leadership and organisational management has been provided, in the form of 2-5 days workshop and training events.

The programme applies "demand-side financing" and have developed the grant system, and lately the loan system where farmers are provided with programme funds to their own bank account that are used to pay the facilitator his or her transport refund and lunch allowance. This has sometimes led to a situation where farmers refuse to pay if their facilitator is not delivering quality service and this system of channelling funds is seen as one of the main success factors of FFS in the programme, since extension staffs are put under pressure to deliver and respond to farmers' demands. At the onset of the advisory services farmers prepare a plan of action and budget for their learning activities based on the demands of the group. Funds (in the range of \$ 300-600) are then transferred to the group bank account to serve as seed money for a 1-year cycle of agricultural advisory services. The funds are mainly used to pay the service provider and to set up learning trials and experiments by the group. By the end of the learning cycle farmers' return about 50% of the amount to the local FFS farmer network, who uses the funds to start up new FFS groups.

The FFS approach has been up-scaled largely in all East African countries by a range of actors including government extension programmes, NGOs, and other actors. However, many programmes still focus mainly on the production side and not many other FFS initiatives have applied the marketing and business aspects of this programme. The reason is probably lack of skills and experience in applying more market oriented advisory services. The manuals and guides developed through this programme will thus greatly assist also other FFS initiatives to move towards stronger focus on marketing issues. The demand-side grant/loan financing has been applied by some actors but many actors especially government programme are still reluctant to release funds directly to farmers and prefer to buy the necessary inputs in bulk and distribute and channel funds for extension staff through local administrative offices.

Question 4: What are the outcomes and impacts of agricultural advisory services?

Preliminary data indicate that crop yields have increased among participating farmers, and about 80% of the farmers had adopted improved production methods such as use of manure/fertilizers, improved crop varieties or vaccination against New Caste disease in poultry etc. The funding provided directly to farmer groups has enhanced ownership and accountability and facilitated the development of a demand driven extension system. A majority of the FFS groups have developed a group savings system or established income generating activities to ensure sustainability of the group. Increased uptake of innovations and technologies related to land management; food production, income generation and natural resource management have been recorded to a high extent in project areas.

There are substantial data to suggest that the FFS experience is a valuable and formative one for the groups and their members. As a result of what they learn in the Field Schools, group members are able to immediately realise significant increases in yields and/or reduction in costs, resulting in increased incomes levels. However, it is also clear that the Farmers Field Schools do not represent an end in themselves; the Field School experience also bonds the farmers' groups and gives them a real dynamism, which may be translated into collective, commercially-oriented endeavours; and it gives the members (and particularly women) far greater confidence in their own ability to deal with government staff and market intermediaries. In short, the FFS experience is a means to enabling small farmers to create their own cohesive economic empowerment groups. According to programme staff, some 80-90% of FFS groups remain together beyond the Field School, engaging in a range of collective commercial activities, as well as conducting further field trials. Today, there are waiting lists of farmers' groups seeking to join the FFS Programme.

An additional component (not envisaged by the project) in the earlier programme 1999-2002 was the establishment of local and district level "FFS networks" consisting of elected boards from the FFS graduates and a paying membership. These networks are increasingly starting to take on the role of assisting the groups to identify and access external service providers / skills. They have also proved to be effective units for input supplies and produce marketing as policy advocacy. They represent a significant development in terms of organisations owned and controlled by the poor. In the follow-up project from 2005 these network have taken over much of the management of the programme.

While individual FFSs are capable of conducting their own business, they are too small to engage in meaningful negotiations compared to the FFS Network that brings together a larger number of farmer groups. However, FFS Networks can only take advantage of the critical mass if the production among FFSs is coordinated. As business units, FFS Networks are directly involved in the pre-season planning and enterprise selection process to ensure some uniformity for collective marketing. Similarly, after ascertaining projected levels of production, FFS Networks initiate negotiations with potential buyers. For example, the FFS Networks in Eastern Uganda have initiated discussions with the World Food Programme (WFP), one of the largest cereal buyers, to supply maize directly to its collection points without any other intermediaries. In a second example, the district Networks of Busia and Soroti in Uganda have constructed permanent agro-processing and storage structures with support from Sasakawa Global 2000 and the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund.

In Western Kenya the Kakamega FFS Network has been pioneering in accessing the national market in Nairobi, particularly for sweet potatoes. Initially the Network attempted to sell fresh orange-fleshed sweet potatoes with limited success. However, value addition training and certification through Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) has enabled them to find a market through the Kenya Agricultural Commodity Exchange (KACE) for dried orange-fleshed sweet potato chips at Kirinyaga Millers, a flour producer offering higher prices for the value added product than for the fresh product. The Network is also looking for diversification opportunities with cash crops and has currently entered into a contract with an Eldoret-based private company to grow and supply chili peppers. A survey for potential national markets for passion fruit, moringa and chili peppers is also underway. The Kakamega FFS Network, in Kenya, realized that as a Community Based Organization, its business opportunities were limited and closed out more lucrative markets. As a consequence they have opted to register a Limited Liability Company.

In a similar attempt, the sweet potato association under the Soroti District FFS Network briefly ventured into the processed orange-fleshed sweet potato market in Nairobi before settling for local millers. The cereals association is benefiting from a huge demand for epuri-puri (a variety of sorghum used for brewing) from Nile Breweries Company. The citrus association on the other hand is in advanced stages of finalizing a deal with one of the local beverage companies, Jakana. All these market- and commodity-orientated advances in the FFS Networks in Uganda can be traced back to a market linkages trade fair held in April 2006. The workshop, the first of its kind in Soroti, brought together the FFS Networks and other commodity based groups to identify different market chains and possible areas of collaboration. The most important lesson was that by providing a communication platform among the scattered pockets of producers triggers more realistic dialogue across the market chain.

(the above section is an extract from the draft paper: Okoth J., Braun, A., Delve, R., et. al, The emergence of Farmer Field School Networks in Eastern Africa, paper prepared for the Research Workshop on Collective Action and Market Access for Smallholders, 2-6 October 2006, Cali, Colombia)

Question 5: What is the role of development cooperation and other key stakeholders?

The programme is funded by IFAD and executed by FAO. However most of the day to day management is carried out jointly by local Ministry of Agriculture staff and FFS network organisations at district level. Gradually more management tasks are carried out by the FFS networks, such as identification of new groups to support, management of funds, monitoring and evaluation etc. For specific technical training in for example processing, value addition techniques, HIV/AIDS etc various organisations have been involved such as national research institutes, CABI, etc. FAO provides technical support and are involved in supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

Collaboration with private sector actors has been established. Especially input industry actors within the seed and fertiliser business have established close links with many of the FFS groups and networks. Several of the FFS network buy inputs in bulk and sell in small quantities to member farmers at low prices. With the increased focus on collective marketing, interactions among farmers with market actors and traders have increased. Direct links have also sometimes been established with local or national supermarkets etc.

Government extension staffs are the ones available on the ground to assist farmers. However, generally the skills and knowledge and even often the motivation for market driven service provision is low. There is still a strong bias for production related advisory service among Government staff, which provides a constraint for expanding quality market oriented services.

Despite the potential, collective marketing among farmers have also proved a high risk area for farmers, wrong estimations of produce quantities among farmers, fluctuating market prices, problems of transport etc. makes collective marketing a risky business among small-holders with limited information and management capacity.

Question 6: What linkages exist between agricultural advisory services and other types of services?

A number of linkages have been made with research organisations, for adaptive research together with farmer groups in the programme. The programme has also been drawing on the technical expertise of a number of specialist bodies, especially for technical aspects where the local extension staffs may be weak such as value addition and processing techniques.

The Linking Local Learners initiative in East Africa has proved an excellent compliment to the programme by providing a platform for farmer groups and organisations to share information and knowledge through ICT, and online discussion forums. These forums have proved especially useful for farmers to share market related information.

Formal credit facilities targeted at small-holder farmers are in very high demand, and would provide a stepping stone for farmers to engage in more market oriented activities. However, unfortunately there

is a lack of favourable credit facilities, and formal bank loans lay out of the reach of most small-scale farmers.

Question 7: What are the general lessons learnt in terms of e.g., good practices, obstacles, pitfalls?

The results show that farmer field schools can indeed have an impact on poverty alleviation in the realms of financial, social, and political capital development. The FFS is an effective and comparatively cheap tool to encourage communities to validate and adapt improved technologies to local conditions, improve rural food security and income generation, and empower farmers to find solutions to their problems.

The gender balance in FFS has proven to be majority female. In Kenya, on average about 70% of FFS participants in the country are female. Experiences suggest that the approach is highly appreciated by both sexes but females seem to especially value the approach due to the practical, field-based learning focus and the social value of the FFS groups.

FFS empowered communities and raised their profile at district level, as has been demonstrated by the creation of strong and cohesive FFS networks and associations. These FFS networks emerged without external support. They have a big potential in acting as a platform for community based extension activities, and for addressing marketing and policy issues.

Farmer groups managing directly the funds of the FFS, in particular the payment for the provision of the extension services, substantially improved the performance of extension delivery and accountability of extension providers. It promotes a demand-driven extension system in which farmers are empowered to choose the extension activities that are most relevant for them and their communities.

Other aspects of organising FFS to be considered beyond the financing aspects is the "Foci Model" in which new supported groups should be on walking distance from each others, to form clusters of groups. This allows groups to interact on a regular basis on a commonly held topic at no cost. This model has led to the self-financed and independent development of FFS-Networks/producer organisations at the district level in the project areas.

Collective marketing of produce among small-holders is risky, and highly depending on external factors outside the control of farmer groups. Therefore good management skills among farmer leaders and a well established information system is crucial in order to avoid marketing pitfalls. Therefore market oriented agricultural services, has to go hand in hand with capacity building in leadership, organisational management etc among farmers and local networks/organisations.

Other lessons learned include challenges in facilitating an attitude change among public extension staff, and refocus the content of advisory services from production thinking to marketing and business thinking. Even with comprehensive training this shift in attitude is difficult for many service providers to apprehend.