
WORKING GROUP 8b CASE STUDY – EAST AFRICA

Farmers dialogue – NEPAD process experience

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Farmers organizations in Africa

Farmers organizations of Africa have been involved in many different types of dialogues on behalf of their members. Some dialogues have addressed grassroots or local communities' issues, while others have been on national, sub-regional and regional level concerns.

At national level, consultations have been between governments, farmers' organizations and other stakeholders in agriculture. Most dialogues have taken a process approach from the village, national, sub-regional, regional and international levels. A case in point was the NEPAD consultation, supported by IFAD, that cut across all levels in creating awareness of the NEPAD process.

Other dialogues are issue-specific, such as the regional implementation planning meetings in preparation for the launching of Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) that were conducted at sub-regional level – Eastern, Southern and West Africa – by the regional networks of farmers. These issue-specific consultations helped develop farmers' positions on the priority areas they wished to see supported and implemented in CAADP, both on a short and long term basis.

There were also issue-based consultations towards preparation for the WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Conference. Farmers consulted at national and regional level and put together their position on expectations for Hong Kong. Farmers organizations such as ROPPA and EAFF used their already developed positions to seek support from NGOs and government negotiators. These initiatives were supported by AGRICORD, GTZ and others.

Keys to successful dialogue

It is important to understand that for farmers to be able to consult, dialogue and eventually have an agreed position, there is need for mobilization of ideas from members. This requires time and resources.

The keys for success of national dialogue mainly relate to the issue, which must be of interest to the members. In addition, the following must be considered:

- Has there been adequate awareness creation on the issues;
- Have the farmers been adequately mobilized and given the opportunity to contribute to the issues
- Have they been provided with capacity in the form of resources and know-how to assist them to engage in the dialogue at all levels
- Is the dialogue on issues generating actionable recommendations that would eventually result in tangible benefits.

On the development of issues that would trigger dialogue at all levels, there is a need for the existence of farmers organizations. These organizations, properly working with their memberships, have the opportunity to continuously collect issues from farmers, conduct surveys, validate the issues and package them in a way that would be of interest to the majority of the members.

This would be in line with their mandate to represent and empower their memberships socially and economically. This means that farmers issues for dialogue will only evolve in situations where farmers organizations exist. It is for this reason that farming communities should be assisted in forming their own organizations.

Success factors for farmers organizations

The formation and full support of farmers organizations require awareness creation and mobilization of the farming communities to form organizations. There is a need for support in resources and personnel. There are many farmers organizations existing today, but many of them are weak and not able to meet the aspirations of the membership. These organizations require capacity to develop their secretariats and hold activities that would justify their existence and demonstrate their importance to the membership, triggering their support. There is a need for leadership training, so that they are well governed and truly represent the interest of the membership.

In situations where farmers organizations have been established and are strong, they are able to lobby and carry out advocacy work. They should be able to establish linkages and alliances and also participate in policy formulation, planning and implementation of programmes as key stakeholders. All this will lead to the identification of important issues for dialogue that would cut across all levels.

For organizations to effectively identify issues and disseminate them to the membership, there is a need for development of a strong and efficient infrastructure. This requires resources, training and expertise, with both domestic and external support.

Existing farmers organizations in developing countries have already invested in self-development and have a reasonable level of strength. They have already educated farmers on the importance of establishing and strengthening their own organizations. They have also managed to lobby for recognition by national governments as the representatives of farmers who are the key stakeholders in the agricultural sector. Many of them now enjoy government goodwill and are involved in activities touching on agriculture and other issues of interest.

Farmers organizations have also embarked on the process of regional integrations, recognising that governments in different regions – and especially Africa – are establishing regional political and trading blocs. This has resulted in some policy issues and even development programmes of interest to farmers shifting location from the national governments to Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as COMESA, EAC, SADC and ECOWAS, that have been mandated to manage these trade and political blocs. These regional blocs are facilitating the development of the African Union.

In view of the ongoing regional integration process, and the fact that some important issues of interest to farmers require a regional approach, farmers decided to form regional networks. We now have in existence regional farmers organizations such as ROPPA, EAFF, SACAU and others. They are all viewed as additional capacity to national farmers organizations.

Challenges and priorities

Agriculture faces challenges including globalization and liberalization, degradation of natural resources, low level agricultural research, poor infrastructure, conflicts, inadequate support to

women, and diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB. Farmers organizations recognise these challenges and are seeking support and partnerships to realize the objectives they articulate on sustainable development of agriculture and overall rural development.

Farmers organizations have also outlined and presented to governments and development partners these priority areas for intervention:

- Strengthening the capacity of farmers organizations
- Improvement of the economic and social situation of the family farmer
- Policy reform in agriculture and trade.

Farmers' organizations have committed themselves to:

- First and foremost creating and developing credible, recognized farmers organizations representing the majority of the rural people
- Working towards professional development of the farmers organizations
- Building alliances with other actors
- Embarking on programmes which ensure reliable access and rights to natural resources and farm inputs.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that economic development in most developing countries depends on agriculture. In the case of Africa, 80% of the population depend on agriculture as a source of both employment and food. Studies imply that any investment in agriculture results in more benefits than investments in any other sector, especially with reference to developing countries.

Farmers organizations are the most important civil society organizations in developing countries. They require support from farmers themselves, governments and development partners to be able to play their role more effectively.

References

NEPAD – Eastern Africa Awareness Workshop Statement – Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya 6th to 8th August 2003

NEPAD – Southern Africa Awareness Workshop Statement – Lusaka, Zambia 20th to 23rd Jan. 2004

The PAN-AFRICAN Farmers Workshop statement Pretoria, South Africa 23rd to 25th Feb. 2004

The Farmers Workshop Statement in Preparation for the Regional Implementation Planning (RIP) Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya 12th to 14th Jan. 2005

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