

Workshop on Farmer Based Organizations in Africa

Held in Dakar, Senegal from December 8-9, 2011

Introduction

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), in collaboration with the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), organized a workshop on farmer based organizations (FBOs) in Africa in Dakar, Senegal from December 8-9, 2011. The primary objective of the workshop was to bring together stakeholders to draw on their experience and knowledge as well as establish a shared and up-to-date diagnostic of past policies and programs in support of African FBOs.

Participants for this stakeholders' workshop included policy-makers, FBO representatives, private sector and researchers to provide evidence regarding the successes and failures of previous support to FBOs and their micro-level impact on smallholder farmers in Africa. In particular, three country programs from Ghana, Senegal and Cameroun that provided support to FBOs were presented and evaluated at the workshop. The three country programs were the Millennium Development Authority's Commercial Development of Farmer-Based Organizations program (Ghana), FAO's Agricultural Commodities Program (Cameroun), and the World Bank's Programme de Services Agricoles et Organisations de Producteurs (Senegal).

GSSP sent a team including GSSP staff, leaders from three FBOs and the Chief Operating Officer of the Millennium Development Authority (MiDA) to discuss the genesis, conduct, and impact of MiDA's support to FBOs.

Proceedings

A few key points from the workshop that were noted include:

- 1.** Researchers provided background information on the activities and performance of FBOs in Africa with special reference to Burkina Faso, Senegal, Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda. Most of this research focused on the role of FBOs in providing market access to their members. The presentations, however, highlighted the difficulty researchers face in measuring the performance of FBOs as there is lack of specialization among them; FBOs tend to do more than one activity and operate around multiple objectives.
- 2.** Support to FBOs should aim at enhancing both their technical and financial capabilities. It appears many donors are not interested in human resources development of the FBOs. Most often in supporting FBOs, less effort is made in providing an enabling environment within which FBOs can function well i.e. institutional building is very slow in Africa.
- 3.** While the PSAOP of Senegal focused largely on equipping the advocacy and lobbying skills of FBOs (more on federated and union FBOs), Cameroun's Agricultural Commodities Program concentrated on linking smallholders (particularly oil palm and cassava farmers) to market (private buyers). On the other hand, the Ghana's Millennium Challenge Account Program provided training, inputs and loans to FBOs

as way to of increasing production levels per hectare of smallholders. MiDA's programs paid limited attention to promoting collective action in FBOs.

Discussion and way forward

During the last session of the workshop, members of the 3 different groups of stakeholders (FBOs, researchers, and donors/policymakers) got together to discuss lessons learned from the workshop, the role we see ourselves playing in the future, and what we expect from the other 2 groups of stakeholders to be able to carry out this work. Here are a few of the thoughts that came out of each group of stakeholders.

1. FBOs – The FBO representatives emphasized that donors should not only invest in FBOs but should also provide a conducive environment for FBOs to function well. They also noted that much of the support to FBOs focuses less on building their human capacity. Support to FBOs should aim at the sustainability of the FBOs. FBOs should be given the opportunity to evaluate the performance of programs that support them.

2. Researchers – There is inadequate information flow between FBOs and donors on activities and the performance of programs. Research should aim at providing feedback to all stakeholders, especially the beneficiary of the programs. The donors should engage researchers at the beginning of projects rather than only asking researchers to evaluate projects after they end. Research findings and lessons learned from past projects should be better incorporated into project design. FBOs should have confidence and provide information for research purposes.

3. Donors – Donors should continue to provide support to groups at the local level. FBOs should be involved at the design stage of projects. Donors should design projects that are long enough to fully develop FBOs so that they function on their own. Research should be demand-driven.