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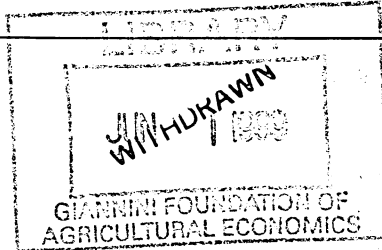
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**AGRICULTURAL ADMINISTRATION
(RESEARCH AND EXTENSION) NETWORK**

NETWORK PAPER 50

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**LINKING FARMERS' ORGANISATIONS
AND RESEARCHERS:
FOUR CASE STUDIES**

- 50a The Sustainable use of Natural Resources by Community Organisations in Central America: The Experience of the Olafo Project by *Tania Ammour*
- 50b Diverse and Linked: Farmers' Organisations in Tanzania by *Amon Z Mattee and Thierry Lassalle*
- 50c Birth of a Small Farmers' Group in Guinea by *Pierre Krebs and Jean Vogel*
- 50d Building a Dialogue between Researchers and Small Farmers: the Tocantins Agro-Ecology Centre (CAT) in Brazil by *Marcia G Muchagata, Vincent de Reynal and Iran P Veiga Jr*

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EDITORIAL DISCUSSION

John Farrington
Overseas Development Institute

These four papers are to be presented at the International Symposium on Farming Systems Research and Extension to be held in Montpellier, France, from November 21-25 1994.¹ They are reproduced here since they address a number of issues of central concern to the ODI/ISNAR Farmers' Organisations study.

The four papers all have certain elements in common:

- the impetus for working with farmer groups arose from the inadequate performance of conventional "project-led" or top-down approaches;
- all seek closer understanding of farmers' objectives and constraints, of the dynamics of group formation and support, and of current and potential interaction among groups and between them and external agents;
- all are written from the perspective of natural resources researchers, seeking to understand how they best gain the confidence of farmers and increase farmers' influence on the objectives and processes of research and development.

Beyond these basic similarities, the papers clearly differ in important respects:

- **Paper 50a** summarises CATIE's experience in working with local groups in natural resources management at three locations in Central America. It is particularly concerned with the need for projects with a resource conservation perspective to be supportive of (or at minimum, consistent with) farmers' own objectives if they are to succeed. From this arise the

¹ The permission of the Scientific Committee of the Montpellier FSR/E Symposium to publish these papers in the Agricultural Research and Extension Network is gratefully acknowledged.

The assistance of John Nelson and Sue Squire in translating and editing three of the four papers presented here is gratefully acknowledged.

complexities of reconciling short- and long-term resource-management perspectives.

- **Paper 50b** documents the interaction between a university research team and farmers' groups in horticultural production in Tanzania, and the subsequent emergence of a network of farmer groups.
- **Paper 50c** describes how farmers' groups in Guinea were instrumental in obtaining and spreading the new technology necessary for potato production, and in bringing about changes in government policy which had previously favoured potato imports.
- **Paper 50d** traces how new methodologies of interaction between researchers and farmers' groups evolved in new "frontier" settlements in Brazil, in order to move from a situation in which researchers dominated the process of technology development to one in which farmers have a voice.

Taken together, these papers provide a rich empirical background against which some of the preliminary ideas coming out of the ODI/ISNAR study (see Network Paper 47 with this mailing) can be examined. We look forward to continuing interaction with network members and with the authors of these papers on these issues.

Paper 50b

**DIVERSE AND LINKED:
FARMERS' ORGANISATIONS IN TANZANIA**

Amon Z Mattee and Thierry Lassalle

ABSTRACT

Experiences from research and extension projects being run at Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) and elsewhere in Tanzania, indicate that farmers' groups can play an instrumental role in the generation of appropriate solutions to small farmers' problems. An approach which uses farmers' groups as points of entry in the rural development process must take into account the diversity of these groups, their inter-linkages or networking, their independence and their relationships with professionals. Both farmers and professionals have to be willing to devote time to know and work with each other. This approach poses two challenges: for professionals to accept (and promote) the increasing emancipation of farmers, and for all concerned to challenge pre-conceived notions of the valuation of time and of the process of development.

INTRODUCTION

Farming systems research and extension have evolved as approaches that are farmer-oriented and problem-focused and which incorporate a systems perspective in the development of recommendations compatible with farmers' perceived needs and preferences. The approach therefore enables researchers to work directly with farmers and extension workers with the objective of understanding better the farmers' circumstances and influencing research and extension policies and practices in order to come up with more effective research and extension programmes.

In FSR&E, researchers and extension workers target the household as the point of entry in interacting with farmers. However, experiences from a research and extension project being run at Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) have shown that small farmers' groups can play an important role in the generating of appropriate solutions. This paper discusses the experiences of the Upper

Mgeta Horticultural Development Project (UMHODEP) and draws some lessons with respect to the role of farmers' organisations in the research and extension process, including the factors which must be taken into consideration in facilitating the emergence of such groups.

THE UPPER MGETA HORTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (UMHODEP)

UMHODEP is a research and extension project in the Faculty of Agriculture of Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) based in the Upper Mgeta ward of Morogoro District on the slopes of the Uluguru Mountains. The project area is famous for the production of temperate fruits such as plum and peach, and such vegetables as cabbage, cauliflower, garden pea, bean, lettuce, parsley and leek. More than 90% of the farmers in this area are engaged in highly intensive horticultural production for commercial purposes (Paul, 1988). Because of its favourable climatic conditions, population density is high and natural resources over-exploited.

Because of the precarious nature of the farming system in the area, it was deemed necessary to have some form of intervention to try to improve sustainability. A farming systems analysis was therefore carried out in the area by a team of SUA researchers. The results of the farming systems study indicated that the major problems were: poor facilities for handling, storage and transportation of the fresh product, leading to heavy losses due to spoilage; over-production of some vegetables, leading to very low producer prices offered by middlemen; high prices of inputs (agrochemicals and seeds) which were being sold by private traders and environmental deterioration due to poor soil and water conservation practices, over-use of agrochemicals and continued planting of the same crops (Paul, 1988).

During the study, the researchers were the main actors, observing, questioning and listening to farmers in order to describe and analyse the functioning of the Upper Mgeta farming systems. This gave the researchers a good understanding of farmers' circumstances and problems.

The second phase of the project was to intervene with an extension programme to address the problems and constraints identified. Initially, such interventions consisted of limited but specific steps designed to attract the farmers' attention and raise their interest in becoming partners in the development programme. These included assistance with the improvement in input supply, the establishment of a village demonstration plot, and the organisation of a study tour of a group of farmers to an area of similar agro-ecological conditions to see

how their fellow farmers were tackling similar problems. These initial activities, which were carried out through the existing multipurpose farmers' cooperative societies, helped to forge a sense of partnership between the farmers, the SUA researchers and the extension workers.

After the initial "starter" activities, care was taken to avoid advocating ready-made solutions or technical innovations to farmers. Rather, farmers, SUA researchers and extension workers engaged in a constant dialogue to identify priority problems and to suggest possible solutions based on the following principles:

- **multidisciplinarity** in recognition of the fact that farmers' problems are multifaceted and have to be addressed in a multidisciplinary way by involving different areas of expertise.
- **the use of group approaches** in recognition of the fact that decision-making is almost always based on group consensus, and that "in unity lies strength".
- **on-farm development of technical innovations**, so as to involve farmers in developing only those innovations which are relevant to their identified needs and problems.
- **assisting with removing the critical bottlenecks** to farmers' agricultural production activities where such bottlenecks cannot be removed without outside assistance.
- **empowerment** of farmers through training, facilitation of the formation of farmers' groups, and the networking of such groups so that they may be capable of influencing policy decisions and promoting their own development on a self-reliance basis.

In facilitating dialogue with farmers, professionals relied on farmers' groups – both existing as well as emergent – as instrumental actors in the development process, in articulating farmers needs, problems and interests and in taking concrete actions to solve their problems or to further their interests.

EXPERIENCES WITH FARMERS' GROUPS AS ENTRY POINTS IN THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

It is generally recognised that farmers' groups can be instrumental actors in the rural development process (Bratton, 1986). However such recognition may

overlook the real challenges involved in working with, and for farmers' groups. For example, in Tanzania, farmers' groups were used extensively by the government in the country's failed attempts at creating rural socialism, resulting in political and economic exploitation of the rural people, and provoking a general loss of confidence of the rural population in any common venture (Meghji, 1992). From working with farmers' groups in the UMHODEP it seems that in order for such groups to be instrumental in the development process, four principles have to be respected:

- **the diversity of farmers' groups** to accommodate the diversity of interests in the rural community,
- **the linkages between farmers' groups** to take into account the global interest of rural communities,
- **the recognition of the independence of each group** in managing its affairs without interference.
- **a mutually trusting and respectful relationship between farmers and professionals** based on the professionals' genuine concern for the needs and interests of the farmers.

THE DIVERSITY OF FARMERS' GROUPS

Rural society is comprised of many elements with various roles and tasks. Although they live in the same social and agro-ecological environment, farmers have different interests and different ways of prioritising them. In some cases, one interest which farmers prioritise as important for all of them can serve as a rallying point for a common venture. The diversity of farmers' groups allows the emergence of a variety of such rallying points which become poles of decision-making and initiative among the rural community. This diversity of farmers' groups can be illustrated by Tanzania's experiences with the cooperative movement.

In the early eighties cooperative societies were supposed to assist members – then the whole adult population in the village – in all activities including input supply, marketing of all the products, providing savings and credit services, retailing of consumer goods and any other businesses. Many such multi-purpose societies failed to implement a single activity effectively and became just part of the government bureaucracy in the villages. Others became more successful by developing one of their activities e.g. input supply or savings and credit but they also remained the only official institution for all other activities preventing any other groups from emerging. From this experience, multi-purpose cooperative societies gained a bad reputation due to their poor efficiency, and for failing to work genuinely for farmers.

On the other hand, a single purpose cooperative society is characterised by clearly defined objectives answering to the members' interests. The Twikinde Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Cooperative Society in Mgeta, Morogoro, whose formation was facilitated by UMHODEP, was created to alleviate the main constraints of the fruit and vegetable growers in that area. It prospered thanks to activities directly linked to this aim. A cooperative operates viable economic-oriented activities that can generate incomes. The expertise and the management are performed more efficiently when all activities are linked within a production chain logic. Rather than expanding the activities horizontally at the village level as multi-purpose cooperatives, single purpose cooperatives expand vertically to strengthen their control over the activity. The Savings and Credit Societies which have recently emerged in the country are another example of single-purpose societies. Although they are federated into a national union, each group may define at the local level its own policy concerning eg criteria for obtaining credit, or interest rates.

Apart from such registered groups, a small number of farmers may form a group for a specific activity or interest. In Kilimanjaro region, small groups from five to twelve members decided to embark on income generating activities such as rice cultivation and vegetable production. Each farmer has his/her own plot but members are trained together in crop production and farm management. The group also becomes the guarantor to allow members to have access to credit (Kibwana 1993). In Lushoto District, almost one hundred women's groups constitute the entry points for an agricultural and afforestation programme. Each group identifies an activity worth undertaking in their area, and they organise themselves to implement that activity (Zongo and Wuseni, 1991).

In the Mgeta Division there exist three coffee marketing cooperative societies, two fruit and vegetable growers' cooperative societies, four saving and credit societies, a livestock-keepers' association and a fruit tree seedlings nursery owners' association. Each group has elected leaders who are directly concerned with the activities of the group.

The diversity of farmers' groups may appear to some as anarchy. Our experience shows on the contrary, that farmers are able to manage their resources better and more farmers have access to posts of responsibility. Such diversity structures the rural society along main activities identified by the farmers as their priorities.

THE NETWORKING PROCESS IN A GIVEN AREA

In a given area, to balance the centrifugal trend created by the diversity of farmers' groups, a communication process is initiated to respect the overall interests of all the groups. These overall interests are culturally rooted in the sense that rural dwellers still have the feeling of a global belonging. This "oneness" is strengthened if regular communication exists between the various groups even, and especially if, their activities differ. By networking on the various interests and experiences, each group is influenced in the same way that it can influence the other groups for the global interest of the community.

In Mgeta Division (25 villages, 50,000 inhabitants) about 20-30 leaders from 15 different farmers' groups meet once every month. Each farmers' group hosts the meeting on a rotational basis to allow all members to see the variety of situations in the Division. A new secretariat is elected each year. The technical staff (the SUA staff, extension workers, cooperative officers, etc.) attend these meetings. It is common to invite the local government leaders from within the area. However, these meetings belong to the farmers themselves. Each representative reports briefly on the activity of the group represented. Some leaders seek advice from the meeting. A common concern that had not yet been identified can provoke an endogenous innovation, as was the case with the savings and credit groups where the network decided to promote the creation of such groups in the four wards of the division. Some months later, the newly elected leaders of the savings and credit groups became members of the network.

The network also welcomes exogenous innovations introduced through projects, institutions, or companies. Sugar cane production, dairy cattle keeping, fish farming, roads and bridge maintenance are examples of such projects that were discussed by the network before being introduced to the area. Training programmes have also been conducted through the network. Such training has included proper soil and water conservation practices, and safe and proper use of agrochemicals. Finally the network elected delegates who represent it in various SUA based project steering committees.

In various other areas, such kinds of communication between farmers' groups have also been enhanced. In Mwangi District, since 1990, 44 farmers' groups have been linked, under the umbrella of the Mixed Farming Improvement Project, into a network called Union of Farmers of the Mwangi Plains (MUWATAMWA). Each group has between 10 and 15 members involved in various production activities such as sunflower, ox ploughing, agro-forestry and livestock production. Fifteen delegates have been elected from the network to meet regularly in order to exchange information on each other's activities. They

are also the partners of the professionals in the area with whom they discuss needs for training or for any other form of assistance. In the Usangu plains, Mbeya region or in Lushoto, Tanga region, women's groups form their own networks to develop their activities and break their social isolation. Activities include composing and recording songs which concretise the existence of their network. In Iringa District, leaders from small farmers' cooperative societies were meeting incidentally at the Regional Cooperative Union office when pressing for their rights. When they understood that they were all facing the same problems, they took steps to create their own association which took over the inefficient fertiliser distribution system.

At the national level, all these various local groups are linked by a network of farmers' groups. This national network was formed during a workshop organised at SUA, where farmers' representatives decided to institutionalise the network of exchange of information between farmers, farmers' groups and research and extension. Farmers' representatives held a meeting where they agreed on a constitution, elected leaders and chose the name MVIWATA which stands for "*Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania*" (Farmers' Groups Network in Tanzania) for the network. The objectives are: (i) the exchange of ideas and experiences, and (ii) the dissemination of solutions, reports and recommendations about those ideas and experiences to all concerned (Gilla, 1993).

The following principles guide its functioning:

- i) The network enrolls members on their own free will.
- ii) A member is free and he/she is entitled to protect this freedom.
- iii) A network cannot force another organisation to do something and cannot be forced by another organisation to do something (Farmers' Communication Charter, 1993).

The network limits its role to the transfer of knowledge and information. However, the way this transfer occurs facilitates a real transfer. A scientific publication with all the references and tables needed for academic recognition is useless to such a farmers' network. Communication can be done by any media: written words, pictures, sound, drama, discussions, dance, songs, music etc. The network decided to publish its own newsletter called *Pambazuko* (The Rise). It organises workshops on themes selected by the members where they, along with professionals and delegates from neighbouring countries, can participate. Proceedings are published in Swahili and widely distributed amongst the members and potential members. Recent themes for such workshops have included credit for small farmers and the new Cooperative Act.

International ties have also been created with the pan-African network "Farmers, Agriculture, and Modernisation in Africa" (FAM-Africa). Twice, the Tanzanian network has been represented in FAM-Africa meetings (Mercoiret and Berthome, 1992).

As far as farmers are concerned, such a move is a significant step in the direction of what Ki-Zerbo (1992) calls the "right and duty to know ourselves and to make ourselves known" in order to enhance an endogenous development process.

The Independence of Each Group

To be successful, networks as they have been described previously must respect the independence of each group. To become a member is free even if some services provided by the network have to be paid by each group. In a network relationship, nothing binds the members to the centre by contrast with a typical cooperative society where members buy capital shares. The binding element, in the case of MVIWATA for example, may be the existence of mutually respectful relationships between members who meet. Groups must also be independent vis-à-vis external institutions. In other words, institutions have to respect farmers' groups as independent centres of decision-making. This may be called external independence.

Member-controlled groups will defend their independence since the members will have invested some funds, their time and their hopes in the group. As such, objectives of the group have to be clearly defined and shared by all members. In addition, within each group, each member must feel an autonomous individual with equal say in running the affairs of the group. Sometimes, the group may not have a say in the implementation of the activities or in the definition of the programmes due to a leader or leaders who always speak for everybody without checking if the group members agreed. It is important therefore to adopt mechanisms to check such leaders and to avoid a differentiation process between leaders and other members. This internal independence of the group vis-à-vis their own leaders is crucial to the survival of the group (Nieuwkerk, 1991).

A mutually trusting and respectful relationship between farmers and professionals

The emergence of farmers' groups and their networking has rekindled farmers' interests and motivation to participate actively in the definition of their

development priorities and in seeking solutions to their problems through a process of sharing and mutual respect. However, farmers' groups are not natural entities. The conditions for their emergence have a crucial influence on how they can play their roles. Although economic viability is necessary, socio-cultural cohesiveness which binds members together confers more strength to the groups and a natural sense of responsibility to their leaders. The sharing of experiences in and outside the organisation develops this cohesiveness.

In addition, the role of professionals is crucial to this process. The first condition is to establish mutual respect and confidence between farmers and professionals. This requires frequent contacts in the village during official and private events. The link must be reciprocal: it must not be taken for granted that farmers will automatically accept and agree with professionals. Rather professionals have to prove their ability and their concern for farmers, by engaging in some concrete activities (demonstration plot, assistance with input supply) which will gain farmers' confidence in the first place (Lassalle *et al.*, 1990). Once a trusting relationship has been established between farmers and professionals, it is necessary to make the farmers think about their own situation as a social group.

Exchanges with peers from other rural communities can play an important role in helping farmers to identify and prioritise their problems. The selection of farmers to travel or to host a guest farmer, the days during which the whole community receives guests, the common deliberations, all these events create a climate which is favourable for a common understanding.

Another way of creating social cohesiveness is through the use of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which allows farmers and professionals to work together for a period of time and which can result in the joint definition of priorities and decision to act.

Once the priorities of farmers' groups are known, the professionals should provide guidance to these groups so that they can take concrete steps to address those priorities. This involves training and experimentation. The training is based on the felt needs of the farmers' groups. Care is taken to avoid training for its own sake, that is, the transmission of content devoid of any practical or local relevance. Training is conducted only to the extent that information is required by the farmers to take a particular action. Care is also taken to ensure that training is based on the actual situation of the farmers and also on their practical experiences. Thus training is always conducted in the villages, on farmers' or demonstration plots, and farmers are encouraged to share their experiences in various ways such as role-playing, drama, and visiting or hosting

fellow farmers (farmers' exchanges). In this way, farmers can easily assess the importance of what is taught, and its suitability for their situation.

Alongside the training, farmers are encouraged to experiment with the innovations which are proposed and, together with the SUA staff and the extension workers, to assess their suitability. Thus farmers become real participants in the on-farm development of the technical innovations; they have as much stake in the outcome as do professionals. On the other hand, the professionals' interest in the experimentation is to guide the farmers in decision-making, rather than to generate statistically-valid data.

CONCLUSIONS

Our experiences show that the effectiveness of the farming systems approach can be improved upon by integrating it in a process that recognises farmers' groups as entry points.

However, this process poses two challenges to researchers, extension workers and farmers. In the first place, this process requires a redefinition of the relationship between researchers and extension workers on the one hand and farmers on the other. For example, professionals must be willing to accept the increase in farmers' power which will be brought about by the strengthening and networking of farmers' groups. Likewise, farmers have to be willing to accept the enhanced responsibilities in decision-making and in actions to fulfil their dreams and ambitions. They will act every day, dream from time to time, plan accordingly, fail part of the time, but succeed most of the time.

The second challenge is with regard to the long gestation period which this process requires. The issue is whether time can be found for this process particularly bearing in mind how we should value time and how we should perceive the development process. To quote a Swahili saying, *mvumilivu hula mbivu*, only the one who is willing to wait can eat a ripe fruit, everyone else gets the stomach ache.

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