7 Farmers’ organizations and agricultural innovation in Tanzania. The sector policy for real farmer empowerment

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7.1 Introduction

Over the past decade, agricultural sector reforms in Tanzania have been characterized by strong decentralization and deconcentration. Agricultural research was largely deconcentrated to the zonal level, while agricultural extension was deconcentrated and eventually decentralized to the district level. Tanzania’s main public agricultural research organization, the Department of Research and Training (DRT) coordinates seven deconcentrated Zonal Agricultural Research and Development Institutes (ZARDIs). There are also a number of national thematic and commodity research programmes and institutes, some of which are partly privatized (coffee, tea and tobacco), while others have relative autonomy and are financed by the sectors concerned. The ZARDIs have a long history of working with farmers’ groups such as farmer research groups (FRGs), farmer extension groups (FEGs) and farmer field schools (FFSs). Since 1998, farmers have been represented on the various zonal-level research planning committees.

The next phase of the Agricultural Sector Development Programme (ASDP) is expected to support both agricultural services and investments across all levels (national, regional and district/local) and will be implemented by the Agriculture Sector Lead Ministries (ASLMs\textsuperscript{40}). ASDP will be financed through ‘basket funding’ (i.e. joint donor and the Government of Tanzania (GoT) and farmer empowerment will play an important role. Although client-orientation of agricultural services has improved significantly during the last decade, serious shortcomings (mainly related to the lack of specific farmer empowerment) have resulted in poor downward accountability. The poor past performance of extension (and research) partly led to the revision of the Tanzania Rural Development Strategy (RDS) and subsequently to the reformulation of ASDP, with renewed emphasis on accountability for performance and farmer

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\textsuperscript{40} ASLMs include the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS), the Ministry of Water and Livestock Development (MWLD), the Ministry of Cooperatives and Marketing (MCM), and the President’s Office – Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG).
involvement in AR&D priority setting and resource allocation. The role of farmers in AR&D, through both formal and informal FOs, can be analyzed from two perspectives:

i the role of community-based farmer groups in agricultural innovation; and

ii the representation of farmers in decision-making bodies at higher levels (national, zonal and district levels).

7.2 Policy context

Agricultural research in Tanzania has a long history dating back to the colonial era. It started with the main emphasis on cash crops, but after independence the main food crops were given higher priority. After a broad reorganization of the NARS in 1989, two major World Bank funded projects, the Tanzania Agricultural Research Projects (TARP I and II) and the National Agricultural Extension Projects (NAEP I and II) were implemented over a period of about 14 years. By adopting the farming systems approach, these two projects strongly emphasized demand-driven research. More recently, the GoT and the private sector have taken several initiatives to involve farmers and FOs more intensively in agricultural innovation. The main intention has been to empower farmers and the other actors involved to articulate demands for services that will improve their livelihood security and to involve them in decisions regarding the allocation of resources to respond to their demands.

The current overall objective of AR&D in Tanzania is to promote sustainable food security, income generation, employment growth and export enhancement by developing and disseminating appropriate and environmentally friendly technologies, with an emphasis on sustainability of production systems and maintaining the productivity of natural resources.

At the end of TARP II, the NARS in Tanzania was aiming at the following broad characterization:

- Demand-driven research: stakeholders set the research agenda and influence the selection of research projects and resource allocation.
- Diversification of research supply: a greater number of qualified technology suppliers play a role and compete for resources through competitive agricultural research funds.
- Diversification of demand: not only public extension, but also farmer groups, FOs, the private sector, agro-industry and NGOs express research and information needs.
- Focus on adaptive research: the ZARDIs concentrate on adaptive research and producing appropriate technologies that address the aforementioned local stakeholder priorities.
- Sustainability: research institutes are increasingly financially sustainable because their research is funded from other sources, not just from government funds.

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41 According to the TARP II Project Completion Report (World Bank, 2003).
In order to achieve these objectives the involvement by farmers and other NARS clients in conducive organizational arrangements has proven to be critical. However, there was no social capital at the community level for effective and demand-driven technological innovation.

7.3 Key actors in agricultural innovation

The main players in the Tanzania NARS are the national agricultural organization, the Department of Research and Development (DRD) of the MAFS, the agricultural universities, privatized research institutes and private-sector AR&D. However, the challenge of actually using innovations includes many other actors that are involved in formal and informal research and technology adaptation and dissemination activities, such as extension services, NGOs, the private sector and those involved in the actual adoption and use of the information and technologies. The end-users (i.e. companies and farmers) are the key players in innovation. FOs organize and represent farmers in agricultural innovation.

7.4 Farmers’ organizations

Several formal FOs exist in Tanzania. Farmers no longer consider the traditional umbrella organization (the Tanzania Federation of Cooperatives), which is organized into cooperative unions, as providing reliable advocacy. As a result, MVIWATA emerged in 1993 as a new representative network of farmers’ groups, with NGO status, representing around 60,000 farming households. MVIWATA aims to ensure effective representation of farmers’ interests and takes part in a number of national fora for the agricultural sector. MVIWATA and its local networks are strongly involved in AR&D and actively approach many different sources of information and knowledge-for-innovation sources. MVIWATA has developed experience with farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange for innovation and the contracting of agricultural services. Apart from MVIWATA, which is the only multi-issue FO, other specialized FOs exist that focus on particular commodities. In relation to coffee research there are several such FOs, some resulting from the old cooperative sector, such as the Kilimanjaro Native Cooperative Union (KNCU) and Tanganyika Coffee Growers Association (TCGA), others from the newly developing specialty markets overseas such as the Association of Kilimanjaro Specialty Coffee Growers (AKSCG). Representatives of some of these FOs have become board members of privatized coffee research bodies such as the Tanzania Coffee Research Institute (TACRI).

Since Tanzania’s structural adjustment phase during the mid-1990s, there has been a pressing need at Local government authority (LGA) level to develop a pluralistic approach to service provision and effective local interaction with farmers that creates an enabling environment for the private sector and civil society organizations to expand their roles in agricultural innovation. Many NGOs are involved in farmer empowerment, group formation, adult education and technology transfer. Some area-based development programmes, as well as NGO-supported projects, have experimented with improving access to
technology for poorer smallholders through farmer empowerment and through carefully targeted investments aiming to deliver public goods and rectify market failures, especially in drought-prone and risky areas. Tanzania has a rich diversity of farmers’ groups with many purposes, which have been in existence for many years. Many agricultural development projects have facilitated group formation and worked with farmers groups in various ways, often building on indigenous, mostly informal village producers’ groups. Not all of these groups are genuine and some exist only for a particular project.

Some groups are legally registered entities with strong binding governing constitutions (e.g. the seed growers’ associations in the Lake Zone and FFS groups in Bukoba, Morogoro and Mbinga districts), while others are legally registered under the Cooperatives Act (No. 15, 1991), or simply listed by the Community Development Department (CDD). A range of legal mechanisms exists for group registration, including as cooperatives, associations or trusts (URT, 2004). However, few informal groups are actually registered and there are no formal registers available concerning the numbers of such groups, although many surveys record their existence and activities. Informal groups have neither a legal status nor written constitution. It is increasingly the policy and practice of district agricultural service providers (ASPs) to work with groups. The ZARDIs are an example: they have large mandate areas that include many different agro-ecological and socioeconomic environments. In order to achieve improved coverage and a farmer-focused research system, FRGs were formed to represent different environments. Having a relatively limited number of sites on which to focus has helped the ZARDIs to implement, monitor and evaluate the on-farm research activities more effectively. As partners in adaptive research the FRGs became platforms that provided feedback from farmers to researchers and other stakeholders. Since both farmers and extension staff collect most on-farm research data, this approach has contributed to greater efficiency and better sharing of experiences among stakeholders (Lema et al., 2003). However, nearly all of these groups involved in AR&D are facing a core problem of insufficient organizational capacity. Another prominent feature of most of these groups is the weak resource base and their poor access to rural finance.

7.5 Farmer representation

In research and extension service provision, farmers have become members of a wide range of planning and decision-making fora. At national level, farmers are part of the National Agricultural Research Fund (NARF) board as well as steering committee members of a large World Bank funded Participatory Agricultural Development Programme (PADEP). At zonal level, two farmers are members of the 10-person Zonal Agricultural Executive Committees (ZAECS). Farmers are also members of Zonal Technical Committees (ZTCs) and Zonal Agricultural Research Fund Management Teams (ZARFMTs); in the latter case, sometimes as FO representatives.\footnote{See Tanzania case studies in Heemskerk and Wennink (2005).} Research priority setting starts...
with researchers receiving specific requests from farmers or groups. These requests are then translated into draft research proposals and presented at the annual zonal Internal Programme Review (IPR) meetings, which are attended by researchers, farmers, extension agents, NGOs and policy makers. The IPR reviews the proposed AR&D projects to ensure that they are demand-driven and address farmer priorities, while also taking into account total resource availability (zonal, national, public, private etc.).

Although farmers have some influence in these zonal committees this is relatively weak, and is similar to that of the farmers’ groups at community level, which are also involved (to some extent) in decisions concerning the research focus. This situation is partly caused by research institutes managers selecting farmers on the basis of proposals by the government’s regional agricultural office rather than the farmers themselves deciding who should represent them. Many of these selected farmers largely represent their own personal interests and concerns, and contribute little to real downward accountability of ASPs. Another problem is that not all farmers are yet organized into groups; those who are organized are not yet formally recognized, and all face an across-the-board capacity problem. The situation at district level is slightly better in the sense that representatives of FRGs, FEGs or FFSs are occasionally invited to attend district fora.

7.6 Farmer empowerment

The Tanzania rural development strategy highlights the need to transform and diversify agricultural and livestock production towards prevailing patterns of demand in local, regional and international trade. It also focuses on strengthening capacities to investigate and identify investment potentials in a more liberalized and competitive economic environment, and outlines the government roles at each level. Participation by the private sector, civil society, and rural communities is crucial in implementing rural development strategies. The Agriculture Sector Development Strategy (ASDS) focuses on agricultural productivity and profitability, as well as on promoting private sector, public sector and processor/contract-grower partnerships, and on the participatory implementation of the strategy through District Agricultural Development Plans (DADPs). To complement the strategic priority areas identified in the ASDS, it envisages investments through three sub-programmes:

i activities undertaken at a local (within district) level;

ii activities that are public sector functions at the national (and zonal) level in support of agricultural development, including interventions concerning the policy and regulatory framework, research, advisory services and training, private-sector development, support to marketing and rural finance; and

iii cross-cutting and cross-sectoral issues such as gender, HIV/AIDS and environment, land tenure, rural infrastructure, energy, education, etc.

Farmer empowerment is a precondition to successful partnerships between farmers and their groups and organizations on the one hand, and public, private and community-based ASPs on the other. It is also essential for ensuring
effective client participation in formulating and implementing Local Agricultural Development Plans (LADPs). Farmer empowerment for agricultural innovation in Tanzania has two components (URT, 2005):

- Strengthening farmer empowerment. Through knowledge, control of funds, influence on organizations and institutional change, farmers can then acquire the capacity to better analyze their constraints and identify opportunities, articulate their specific needs, exchange knowledge, access the services they need, become active AR&D partners, and improve their bargaining power.
- Strengthening FOs. Farmers or community-based organizations and networks should be promoted and strengthened to become key development partners.

7.7 Participatory planning at district level

Planning guidelines require that LADPs originate from villages and are synthesized at district level. In some regions, Ward Facilitation Teams assist communities to develop plans through participatory processes as well as providing backstopping services in the wards. However, experience shows that these LADPs are often prepared at district offices and seldom involve real input from other stakeholders, including farmers. Such plans often do not address farmers’ actual needs. In many situations, new technologies are still developed and disseminated using conventional research methods rather than participatory approaches; as a consequence many farmers continue to rely on their traditional practices. This is thought to be partly due to the fact that researchers and extension agents are insufficiently conversant with participatory problem-solving and decision-making tools and communicate badly. Farmers do not actually control decisions on the planning and implementation modes of AR&D activities. Inadequate rural financial services have made it difficult for farmers to access credit and hence they fail to adopt and/or utilize improved technologies that are capital-based, e.g. seeds, fertilizers and farm equipment (URT, 2004). This situation underscores the need to follow a much more comprehensive agricultural innovation approach.

7.8 Monitoring and evaluation

Under the local government reform, M&E is supposed to be conducted in a bottom-up fashion, from village, ward and district up to national levels. However, as yet M&E is mostly conducted at national and district levels without much involvement by farmers and other key stakeholders. There is no emphasis on participatory M&E. The monitoring indicators are also not clearly defined and are not fully understood by the key stakeholders. In addition, people in most districts have no instruments or tools that they can use for monitoring research and extension activities.

7.9 Main innovation challenges for Tanzanian farmers’ organizations

Tanzania has a rich tradition of organizing its farmers. The FOs are formed with varying objectives according to levels of development that vary widely across the country. However, there is no defined coordination mechanism for
FO formation, operations and evolution, and their overall impact on AR&D decision-making processes can therefore not be easily evaluated. Furthermore, there are many FOs that do not take advantage of the assistance offered by rural (public) service providers because such FOs tend to operate informally and do not comply with official legal requirements. Also, when organizations are formed under resource support from external forces, they tend to lose sustainability once that external support is phased out.

Farmer group establishment and organization has been particularly strong in areas with a large concentration of externally funded projects, implying that external initiatives (including logistics support and sensitization to support the organization process) are helpful in initiating the process. The primary focus behind such group formation is to serve members’ interests and enable them to make decisions, while projects tend to see FOs as instruments for increasing the effectiveness of technology generation and diffusion. They often provide more relevant extension services to members and link them better to both public and private ASPs. However, the formation is often carried out by outside agents of change, as a vehicle for reaching many farmers in a cost-effective manner (and thus also useful to achieve the objectives of the outside agent). This external drive has often led to unbalanced farmers’ groups and organizations that are dependent, unstable and (after external assistance ends) have few resources. The main challenges therefore concern:
- reinforcing the resource base of these organizations;
- creating links with grass-root institutions to provide backup and represent farmers’ voices; and
- forming groups and organizations beyond the traditional associations based around crop production.

As for agricultural innovation, institutional factors strongly influence the uptake and further development of agricultural technologies by poor farmers. Technological innovations can facilitate changes in farmers’ institutions and these institutions can significantly influence the process of technology generation and adoption. Therefore smallholder farmers must organize themselves to improve their access to technology through representative organizations (farmers’ unions), legally registered bodies (such as cooperatives, savings and credit unions or water users’ associations), or special-interest farmers’ groups (formed to receive advice or facilitate the processing/marketing of produce). The overall challenge is to develop capacity with farmer groups, local networks and FOs for active representation in decision-making fora and resource-allocating bodies. At the same time, a capacity within ASPs needs to be developed so that they actually listen to farmers’ representatives.