

CONCEPT NOTE TO FORD FOUNDATION

RESERCH-EXTENSION-FARMER LINKAGES (REF) for East and Southern Africa.

WHERE IS THE PROBLEM

Whereas all groups involved in agricultural research claim to focus on poverty and food security for the poor, this rhetoric has not been followed through to the strategic principles operational in programmes. The poor remain subjects of discussion, monitoring and evaluation, and have not been actively involved in research processes intended to benefit them. This has become the main concern of the NGO committee of the consultative Group for International Agricultural research (NGOC), and preoccupation of the members in the regions. There is need to build capacity and a collective voice of Civil Society Organizations, CSOs (especially farmer groups) to constructively participate in agricultural research. The main issue however is that although several donors appreciate and will want to see farmer's organizations and CSOs active in research, very few readily support programmes that will mobilize, coordinate and equip CSOs to do so. To this end farmer's organizations (and therefore farmers) fail to engage with higher institutions for lack of capacity.

Problems in Sub-Sahara Africa

Sub-Sahara Africa has been one of the focus regions for international Agricultural research, concerned about the persistent food insecurity and poverty while at the same time a lot of public funds are spent each year on agricultural.

Agricultural research was initiated in most African countries to inform agricultural development, and was rooted in the agro-ecological zones. At National levels, research was integrated into the agriculture departments with the extension as the link between research and the farmers.

Post independence preoccupation of most governments concentrated on the more political structures than the social infrastructure. Schools, health, community centers and extension/community outreach, e.t.c. were starved of resources necessary to maintain quality and effectiveness. Agriculture became fragmented, isolating research from extension, weakening the link between extension and farmers. The cumulative effect has been:

- Research based on speculations, not rooted in farmers' priority needs, research de-linked from extension and farmer reality.
- Research fragmented from the mainstream of rural agricultural development.
- Extension devoid of research input, job descriptions hardly include linking research and farmers,
- Farmers without technical support and with limited access to technologies from research.

The NGO movement of the 1980s evolved to fill the technical gap for small holder farmers. The mid 1980s saw a mushrooming of NGOs in the agricultural sector, most focusing on technical support to small holder farmers. But they too have not actively linked with research. To take the example of Uganda, NGOs were compelled to seek out research expertise by the outbreak of the African cassava mosaic virus. Since then a few links have remained but mainly to transfer

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technologies, never for feedback to inform future research agenda. The feedback loop is missing all together.

HOW DO WE RESTORE THE BALANCE?

The full potential of agricultural research can only be unleashed if the feedback loop between the three main stakeholders is completed and functional. Roles and responsibilities need defining, surplus value for feedback, two-way engagement appreciated. For until all stakeholders subscribe to the logic of real engagement, collaboration will remain superficial and ineffective.

The first step towards restoring the balance is creating awareness and facilitating the stakeholder to appreciating the roles they each have towards research and development.

The second step is defining roles and responsibilities, added value and benefits.

The third and perhaps most important is facilitating the first attempts of collaboration, reflections, learning and fine-tuning the strategies, and coordinating these efforts.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE ROLE OF NGOS

NGOs have spear headed the participatory movement in rural development while governments and research institutions follow cautiously. And while most researchers and governments have employed passive and consultation participation, NGOs have built on existing or facilitated the more engaging types of participation: Functional participation, Self-mobilization and Interactive participation.

Therefore role of NGOs should not be seen as competitive or duplicating government efforts, but rather sharing experiences/lessons/good practices to enhance government initiatives in agricultural development.

Specific areas NGOs have developed competence are facilitation, initiating and sustaining participatory processes, reflecting to draw out lessons to inform future plans. NGOs have also embraced organic farming that has had profound impact on the productivity of marginal areas.

Of course this does not over look the fact that NGOs extension services are also as de-linked from research as government extension staff. The added value of NGO extension is the participatory expertise they have developed over the years.

Opportunities.

There are significant opportunities for REF include;

- **PELUM Country Working Groups (CWG)** in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia, Botswana, Malawi, and door are opening for Mozambique. These CWG are composed of organizations focusing on and with competencies in participatory ecological land use management, sustainable agriculture, natural resource management with rural communities.
- Limited **engagement of CSOs** with International agricultural research centers (CIAT, ILRI, IITA, ICRAF)
- **REF initiative** by a few CSO in Uganda and probably Zimbabwe, willing to serve as pilots for the proposed REF initiative.

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PROPOSED PROGRAMME.

To develop national forums that regularly meets and reviews research priorities (NGOs, Research Institutions and Government department). Through this forum, capacity needs for the different players to constructively engage in collaborative research will be identified and strategies developed to address them, with special attention/preference for farmer groups.

This is envisaged to build up the constituency of CSOs need to give credibility and a strong collective voice to the CSO representative organs in the CGIAR, GFAR, such as the NGOC, and proposed Farmer Organizations council.

- *Develop a strategic plan with specific steps to initiate and sustain linkages between the three key stakeholders at field levels.*
- *Develop an information flow mechanism to collect, synthesis and disseminate information*
- *Develop a coordinating and management structure to provide back-up support to the initiative.*

Proposed budget for the inception of the REF programme in Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Objective	Description of expenditure item	Unit cost Us \$	Total cost US \$	TOTAL US \$
Three days workshop for strategy development and planning	Food and accommodation	50 X 30 X 2 persons	3000	
	Transport for participants	20 X 30 X 2	1200	
	Facilitation	200 X 5 days X 2	2000	
	Materials	200 X 2	400	
	Venue	100 X 3 X 2	600	
	Communication and coordination	500 X 2	1000	
	Personnel Assistant	50 X 3 X 2	300	
Contribution to implementation of the strategic plan		2000 X 2	4000	
Coordination and follow-up	Contribution to Personnel time	700 X 12 months X 2	16,800	29,300

The proposed workshop will also address issues of future financial support for the initiative. The US \$ 2000 proposed above for each country is to facilitate the kick off activities while concrete funding is being sought.

NB. For Uganda VECO a Belgian NGO has committed approximately US. 1500 per year to the process but needs facilitation and coordination from external sources for participants from areas outside of their programme area. At the moment we plan to piggyback on this programme while we develop future strategies.