



BRIEFING NOTE 14

Local Learning Topics on How to Improve Farmers' Access to Markets

How Learning Topics Emerge

Learning topics are decided by the learners themselves. Representatives of the learning groups on the First Mile team decided on their action learning programme at their April assessment workshop held in Morogoro, Tanzania. This experience was carried to Uganda where members of the Demand Driven Services learning groups using a similar process decided on their action learning programme. In Tanzania the AMSDP¹ district core group members² discussed what they needed to learn to ensure that the impact they had achieved on improving farmers access to markets would be sustained in the long run. They agreed that sustaining impact beyond the life of the AMSDP would require the establishment of commercial rural services companies. Farmers and service providers in Uganda's NAADS decided that the formation of district core groups and the strengthening of higher level farmer associations would pave the way to improving market access for small holders.

Learning Challenges of Farmer Associations

Over the next six to nine months service providers and farmers from Honey, Dairy, Sweet Potato and Fruit growers associations will firstly learn how to strengthen, or where necessary develop higher level farmer associations. Joint marketing by the hundreds if not thousands of association members under one umbrella would improve their access to markets.

¹ Government of Tanzania Agricultural Marketing Systems Development Programme funded by IFAD.

² Core groups comprise AMSDP and district officers, NGO's and Service Providers as well as representatives of Producers, Processors and Traders.

The action learning programme they developed comprised the following actions:

1. Take and inventory of existing Associations including numbers, what they do, membership and geographical coverage.
2. Review organisation of the associations' by-laws, bank accounts and executive structure, and where necessary formalise the registration of higher level associations.
3. Organise relevant trainings to improve weaknesses in financial management, savings and credit schemes.
4. Establish linkage for networks and improve office communications, and where necessary procure office space, furniture and communication equipment.
5. Hold reflection meetings to assess results and ease to forge ways forward.
6. Hold Sub-County Farmer Forum meetings to organise joint marketing, including a code of discipline for members.

Farmer association executive committee members will lead the programme of action learning working with their member farmer groups. They will exchange experiences on the Demand Driven Services Learning Team at www.linkinglearners.net. Farmer Association members decided there were other things they could do to improve their access to markets. One thing identified was improving the quality of their produce. Each commodity group developed their own action learning programmes as follows:

- Dairy Association members will ensure high quality milk determined by: white colour, density, butter fat content, no smell, sweet taste and UNBS standards compliance through: a) mobilising funds with NUSAF to install a cooling plant, b) improving the health and nutrition of milkers by correct disease and parasite control, and providing a balanced nutrition and observing hygiene and sanitation, c) purchase of proper packaging materials for yoghurt and ghee making, and d) mobilising funds to purchase good crates and packs for their milk.

- Sweet Potato quality determined by uniform colour and size, pest & diseases free, absence of chemical residues and UNBS compliant moisture content will be ensured through: selecting proper size tubers, b) using quality slicing machines for correct thickness of slice, c) purchase of good quality packaging paper for use by the members, and d) use of correct storage in a warehouse.
- Members of the Orange Association will ensure high quality fruits through: a) correct variety selection, b) proper budding and selecting only ripe fruits at harvest, c) proper sorting and grading techniques using only correct sizes of fruits, d) purchase of recommended materials for packing fruits, and e) purchase good crates for transportation of fruits.
- High quality honey determined by dark brown colour, honey smell, and 80% Brix by UNBS refractometer will be achieved if members: a) store comb honey that is free from insects, b) store liquid honey at 37°C with no direct light and free from any scent, c) use bottles at standard capacities and standard levelling, d) develop local capacity to construct modern beehives Langstroth, Dadard types, and e) purchase equipment, refractometer, clothing, hive tools and air tight buckets.

Associations want to increase the profits of producers by processing their own crops to add value to their harvests. Adding value, however, is not easy. Farmers decided that they first had to learn about "how to maximize adding value to their raw produce" and then, where necessary "how to get the processing equipment needed". To learn how to add value association executive committee and farmer groups will: a) carry out training on quality control practices starting in the field on post harvest handling and storage; b) conduct market research on values of packaged products; c) check on standardization and certification with UNBS contact local private lab to get product composition test for UNBS on sweet potato flour and milk products; and d) acquire equipment like sealing machine, labelling machine and weighing scales with the appropriate packaging materials. Getting into processing is a big step so for most it requires the preparation of a business plan. For most this would mean finding a technical expert in business plan preparation and then gathering all the information needed to prepare the business plan. Drafts would have to be presented to the general membership before any approaches were made for possible funding with donor projects, Government programmes (NUSAF), and local financial Institutions.

Improving access to markets does require farmers to make more efforts to find new customers like processors, wholesalers and big buyers. They cannot afford to just wait for the middleman or go to the nearest market. Learning how to find new customers would require farmer associations to: a) identify the production potential of all their members, b) form a marketing leadership committee to carry out the partnership negotiations, c) get information from news papers, radio and media houses, stakeholders' in our market chain and from the internet on potential new customers, d) follow up with contacts on new customers and convene regular meetings with members to decide on negotiations with designated new customers.

Learning Challenges of Service Providers

In contrast to the domination of farmer associations in Uganda service providers' outnumbered the farmers, processors and traders in the First Mile learning team assessment in Tanzania. For these learners sustaining the improvement of farmer's access to markets meant that the district core groups should nurture the development of commercially viable rural service companies. They realized that their network of clients or customers would have to grow significantly. New skills in how to prepare business plans and how to access loans would also have to be learned. Experiences in these learning topics are shared in the First Mile Market Linkages Learning Team on www.linkinglearners.net. The following programmes of action learning were developed for the district core group members:

- How to set up a Rural Service Company included the following actions: a) conduct a survey on ICT providers/existing ICT business to identify viable partners, b) identify interested people/individuals to start up a services company, c) convene stakeholders meeting in the district and discuss the possibility of partnership or other form for the company, d) form a working group to establish a rural services company, and e) consult and register the business and acquisition of a TIN number, tax clearance, licence, etc..
- How to extend the 'client' or customer network in the District included the following actions: a) identify stakeholders in the district through questionnaire and face to face meetings, b) identify means of communication between network members ie. cell phones, billboards, c) document and share information between network members using mobile and internet, and d) monitor and evaluate network performance.

- How to prepare market information for sharing using mobile phones and internet included the following actions: a) identify sources and types of information needed, b) document key information, and c) share of information among market centres and key players.
- How to run business platforms for market chain key players to sustain and grow market chains included the following actions: a) undertake rapid market analysis to identify key market chain actors, b) convene one business platform meeting involving all concerned stakeholders, c) follow up and monitor progress and c) conduct an evaluation of performance of business platform.
- How to get loans from microfinance institutions for developing market chains included the following actions: a) contact microfinance bodies to know their working procedures and policies, b) organize workshop for all stakeholders working on microfinance and market chains, and c) exchange experience among the districts concerning microfinance assistance.
- How to organise and run effective warehouse receipt systems and savings and credit societies included the following actions: a) gather information from areas which have experienced and achieved the warehouse system, b) find out conditions for running strong SACCOS in consultation with ACE and AMSDP, and c) arrange study tour to places which have successful warehouse receipt systems and SACCOS.
- Make sure that you make real experience in the learning area on a small scale at first
- Make “wake up” call to Districts who are not responding on the exchange schedules
- Organise a reflection process by the end of the action learning period.

The exchanges of experience between these local learners can be view in the First Mile and Demand Driven Services Learning Teams on the 'LLL' internet learning support service can be viewed at <http://www.linkinglearners.net>.

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Learning Contract for Linking Local Learners

The learners involved in developing the programmes of action learning reported above decided to adopt a learning contract between them. They agreed that a special code of conduct for their behaviour was needed to ensure successful peer-to-peer exchange of experiences and achievements. The code of conduct included the following commitments:

- Aim for monthly and weekly exchange over the internet
- Share any information that you think other districts will might find useful
- Share your plans for making trials as well as the achievements of each activity
- Respond to the questions from other groups

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