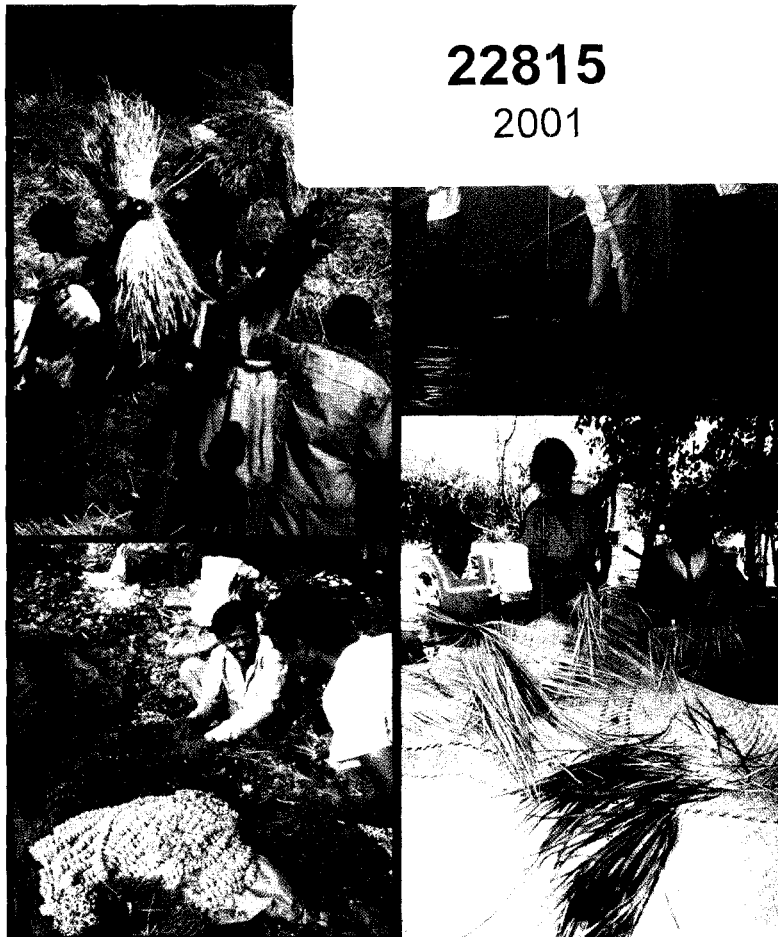


Agricultural Producer Organizations

Their Contribution to
Rural Capacity Building
and Poverty Reduction

22815
2001



Collaborating Institutions

**Agriterra
CECI
CIRAD
Club du Sahel
INERA
Inter-Reseaux**

Pierre Rondot
Marie-Hélène Collion
Editors

Cosponsored by
International Federation of Agricultural Producers
and
The World Bank

and financed by
The Governments of France and The Netherlands

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Contents

Editors' Preface	v
Acknowledgments	ix
Acronyms and Abbreviations	x
Background, Discussions, and Recommendations	1
Defining Producer Organizations	1
Traditional Versus Formal	2
Rationale for Strengthening POs	3
Capacities Requiring Strengthening	5
Strategic Capabilities	5
Financial Capabilities	6
Actions and Support Needed	7
Increasing Financial Resources	9
Issues to be Considered	9
Empowering POs: Some Suggestions	10
Risks and Problems	11
Partnership with Agricultural Services	12
Restructuring Research and Extension	12
PO Initiatives	13
Lessons Learned	13
Strengthening Technical Capacity	14
Other Issues	14
Donors and POs: Lessons Learned	15
Guidelines for Donors	16
Follow-Up Actions	17
Handbook	17
Monitoring the World Bank Portfolio	18
Creating Demand at Country Level	18
A PO National Fund	18
Other Suggestions	19
Reference	19

Issues Papers**Empowering Producer Organizations: Issues, Goals, and Ambiguities**

*Marie-Rose Mercoiret, Bara Goudiaby, Silvio Marzaroli, Diogou Fall,
Samba Gueye, and Jean Coulibaly* 20

What Services Should be Supported in the POs and Under What Conditions?

Pierre Lessard 29

Can Producer Organizations be Strengthened by Provision of Funding and Human Resources?

Denis Pesche 32

Partnerships Between Producer Organizations and Research and Extension Institutions

Jean Zoundi, Marie-Hélène Collion, and Henri Hocde 38

Donors and Farmer Organizations: Lessons Learned from Ongoing Experiences in the Sahel

Serge Snrech 46

Participants 57

Editors' Preface

We use the term “producer” rather than “farmer” because it covers all aspects of agricultural production, including livestock and fisheries, and the processing of agricultural products on-farm or in the rural areas (such as the women’s cottage industries).

The producer organizations (POs) considered are formal rural organizations whose members organized themselves with the objective of improving farm income through improved production, marketing, and local processing activities. POs deal with: policies on issues such as pricing and export and import of agricultural products; improvement of agricultural production practices; access to inputs and services, including agricultural credit; marketing of agricultural production; and local processing of agricultural production and its marketing.

The willingness to build rural capacity through empowerment of producer organizations is often hampered by implementation problems: *how to do it*. Field-based practitioners and World Bank staff have expressed a strong need for practical guidance to help producers in the design, implementation, and evaluation of producer organization capacity-building projects and programs. To this end the World Bank and the International Federation of Agricultural Producers sponsored an International Workshop on Strengthening Producer Organizations as a contribution to rural capacity building.

The objectives were: (1) to draw lessons from good practices on practical ways and mechanisms to strengthen the capacity of producer organizations; (2) to identify priority actions and pilot projects to be designed and implemented in collaborative arrangements between producer organizations, governments, and interested donors, including the World Bank; and (3) to select material and information for a Source Book.

The participants are practitioners drawn from producer organizations, researchers, extension workers, staff from NGOs, and donor representatives.

The workshop was held in English, French, and Spanish, in two phases: (1) *an exchange of experiences and knowledge among participants*: presentation of case studies, field experiences, and lessons learned from practitioners; and (2) *priority actions*: in small working groups, the participants developed practical recommendations and actions to be undertaken to strengthen capacity of POs, including some concrete pilot project proposals.

To facilitate drawing lessons from experiences, case studies were presented that addressed specific issues related to PO capacity building. Each session was introduced by a session leader/resource person, who highlighted the issues and introduced the case studies. The case studies are available on a CD-ROM supplied with this

book. The material can also be accessed on the World Bank website (www.worldbank.org/producer-organizations) under producer-organizations, key readings.

Session 1 posed the questions: *What is the objective of supporting POs? Is this an investment in social capital, or a convenient way to deliver agricultural services?* (Session Leader: Marie-Rose Mercoiret, CIRAD-TERA—with B. Goudiaby, S. Marzaroli, D. Fall, S. Gueye, J. Coulibaly).

An effective partnership between POs and research and extension may improve the efficiency and effectiveness of agricultural services. PO capacity must be strengthened, however, so they can help improve technology generation and delivery. POs are then considered as useful agricultural research and extension vehicles/instruments to improve the delivery of services needed by the producers, at a reduced cost.

Support to POs can also be viewed as an investment in social capital, building “social infrastructure” that is recognized as a vital complement to investments in other forms of capital. POs are then viewed as part of a country’s social capital, because they provide services to their members as well as a framework for sharing information, coordinating activities, and making collective decisions, and they help farmers capture added value from linkages to agricultural production.

Session 2 addressed the issue of: *What POs, what functions to strengthen, and who decides?* (Session Leader: Pierre Lessard, CECI—with Marly Boonman, AGRITERRA and R. Quiros, MNC). Producer organizations generally perform three broad functions:

Policy formulation and advocacy. Syndicates or unions or the so-called “chambres d’agriculture” perform advocacy

functions. They also play a representative role and lobby for their members’ interests. *Economic.* Cooperatives, or “les groupements d’intérêt économique (GIE)” or other types of economic organizations provide services or access to services to their members that include: agricultural inputs and credit, support for storage, processing and marketing services, information, and extension. *Local development.* Associations or multipurpose, community-based organizations seek to support local development and improve the quality of village life. These organizations often substitute for local government in countries where decentralization has not yet taken place.

POs need to develop their capacity in the following areas:

- Accountability to members/Representativeness/Legitimacy/Democratic procedures; Membership services: members’ rights and obligations;
- Effective two-way communication channels;
- Transparent and effective financial management; and
- Internal technical knowledge.

Other questions of relevance to donors were debated: Should the strengthening of producer organization capacity concentrate on all the common needs of these organizations? Should the focus be only on economic organizations or on any existing grassroots organizations dealing at least with the advocacy or economic function? Who will make the decision?

Session 3 sought to answer the question: *How do we channel financial and human resources to strengthen PO capacity?* (Session Leader: Denis Pesche, Inter-Reseaux). POs may exist at various levels, from the village or inter-village level, to the regional and national levels, and may be organized on a commodity basis, or be multipurpose. The size and nature

of their constituency varies. Because of their diversity, it is difficult for them to come together as larger but still viable representative units, with a national, or at least regional, mandate, and to speak with a unified voice.

The discussion centered on the following:

- Institutional frameworks that exist at local, regional and national levels, through which financial and technical resources could be channeled to POs;
- Does decentralization provide a useful framework to channel funds to POs and for them to make their own decisions?
- Can POs get together at the local, regional, and national levels to: (1) discuss their strategies; (2) define and prioritize their needs for capacity building; (3) organize themselves to select providers of services they need and ensure quality of such services? What kind of support is needed for that purpose?
- Can learning by doing be a way to empower POs?

If the support to POs is an investment in social capital, with the objective of building up local capacity, can it be done within agricultural services projects? There is a risk of making POs agricultural research or extension instruments. Should it be done as a stand-alone national program? The response will, of course, depend on priorities of POs.

Session 4 addressed two important issues: *How should POs and agricultural service providers work together? What are the necessary institutional reforms for agricultural services to be accountable to POs?* (Session Leader: Jean Zoundi, INERA—with Marie-Hélène Collion, World Bank, and Henri Hocde, CIRAD-TERA). For a partnership between POs and agricultural research and extension providers to be successful, research and extension

institutions need to adjust in a number of ways:

- *From a linear paradigm toward partnerships:* Under a linear paradigm, research develops technologies, extension services transfer them, and farmers are expected to adopt them. The potential benefit from integrating farmers' knowledge into the process of knowledge and technology development and transfer will be fully captured when producers are recognized by specialists as full partners, who can produce and disseminate knowledge and technology. They must not be seen only as consumers of knowledge and technology produced and disseminated by others. What does it take to encourage this evolution?
- *Partnership with POs as official and effective policy:* How can such a policy translate into the management of agricultural research and extension institutions? What does it mean in areas such as: the composition of governing bodies, staff incentive systems, procedures for programming, monitoring, and evaluating agricultural research and extension programs?
- *Autonomy of the institutions:* Are these changes possible if agricultural research and extension services remain public institutions run by civil servants? What are the fundamental institutional changes for agricultural services to be provided by institutions that are also accountable to POs?
- *Decentralization of public services:* Most agricultural decisions, even programmatic ones, are made at the national level. If POs are recognized as the leaders of agricultural development, an effective partnership with POs demands an effective decentralization of decisionmaking at the local/regional levels.

Session 5 asked: *What are the implications for donors?* (Session Leader: *Serge Snrech, Club du Sahel/OECD*). POs have enormous potential, for example in making research and extension more effective. Donors therefore need to focus their support on ways to strengthen PO capacity, with a view to *empowering* them vis-à-vis public institutions. They should not be made instruments of research and extension services, or substitutes for these institutions. Helping POs to gain financial leverage is therefore a necessity. How can this be done? What are the donor institutional constraints to financing POs directly?

Not all of the questions posed found easy answers, as reflected in this Report. Much progress was made, and there emerged a strong commitment to action so that the momentum generated at the Workshop is not lost.

The five Issues papers presented at the Workshop are included in this Report.

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A field trip was organized by Paul O'Connell, and we express our gratitude for

his help. Many World Bank staff contributed to the success of the workshop, and special thanks go to Jason Paiment for organizing the web site, Sarian Akibo-Betts and Cecily Spooner for their administrative help.

We are especially grateful to the many participants who contributed throughout the workshop, and express particular thanks to the session leaders and panelists for their contributions. Reginald MacIntyre assisted with the editing of this report and with the preparation of material for the CD/ROM.

This volume was desktopped by Ding Dizon.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFD	Agence française de développement
ANADER	National Agency for Rural Development (Côte d'Ivoire)
ANOPACI	National Association of Côte d'Ivoire Professional Agricultural Organizations
APM	Small-Scale Agriculture and Modernization Network
CATIE	Centro de Agronomia Tropical para le Investigacion y la Ensenanza
CECI	Centre Canadien d'Etudes et de Cooperation International
CIMMYT	Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maiz y Trigo
CLUSA	Cooperative League of the USA
CMDT	Mali Textile Development Company
CNCR	Rural Dweller Consensus and Coordination Council (Senegal)
CNRA	National Centre for Agronomic Research (Côte d'Ivoire)
FONGS	Senegal Federation of Nongovernmental Organizations
FUPRO	Federation of Producers' Unions of Benin
ICTA	Instituto du Ciencia y Tecnologia Agricola
IFAP	International Federation of Agricultural Producers
INERA	Institut National de l'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles (Burkina Faso)
IRAM	Institute for Research and Implementation of Development Methods (Mali)
ITRA	Institute of Agronomic Research (Togo)
KARI	Kenya Agricultural Research Institute
KNFU	Kenya National Farmers Union
MNC	Mesa Nacional Campesina
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PRONATTA	National Agricultural Technology Transfer Program (Colombia)
SYCOV	Malian Union of Cotton and Food Crop Producers
URECOS-CI	Regional Union of Cooperatives in the Côte d'Ivoire Savannah Zone
WTO	World Trade Organization

Background, Discussions, and Recommendations

In his opening remarks, vice-president of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers Leonardo Montemayor stated: *Many years ago, at the beginning of structural adjustment programs, there was a simple sentence in World Bank literature. The Bank was saying that its objective was to get governments out of agricultural operations and “to put farmers in charge.”* This important phrase is still valid, especially today. To be in charge, farmers need strong and independent farmers’ organizations. Measures to strengthen farmers’ representative organizations are therefore vital.

Today, there is a similar enthusiasm among bilateral donors and nongovernmental organizations to strengthen farmers’ organizations. They recognize the usefulness of these organizations, especially as a vehicle for sustainable development. It is important, however, that they avoid the same errors that were committed by governments. In their zeal to strengthen farmers’ organizations, they must not turn these groups into extended arms of themselves.

The president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, welcomed the participants to the Bank and the workshop, and made the following key points: *... the only way that we are really going to make a big difference in terms of farmers around the world is if we focus less on individual projects of improving yields and of dealing with the immediate questions of extension—all of which we should do but at the same time we must work to establish organizational links—a framework*

in which we can work with and support Producer Organizations. Because if you do a project and you don’t have a Producer Organization, it could be a successful project, but it doesn’t carry forward. It may affect the people who are lucky enough to be part of the project; that’s a good thing, but it’s not enough. As you know, 75 percent of the people who are poor in the world are in rural areas: in Latin America it is just under 50 percent. But if we are to make a big impact on the issue of poverty and the issue of development, the impact cannot be done project by project. It has to be done on the basis of linking with existing organizations that themselves have links with the many farmers in those organizations. So we are really committed at the Bank to find new ways, and strengthen old ways, to deal with Producer Organizations...

The major theme of the workshop, therefore, was: How can the capacity of POs be strengthened to help them become the lead participants in agricultural development?

Defining Producer Organizations

What constitutes a PO? It is often difficult to sort through the numerous and diverse types of rural organizations that exist for different purposes and at different levels (local, regional, and national levels).

Traditional Versus Formal

Traditional. Organization is necessary for the smooth functioning of family-based agriculture. Farmers have not waited for the development institutions to organize themselves. In most rural societies we still find some form of organization inherited from the past, the main purpose of which is to reduce the uncertainties of an agricultural activity, stabilize production conditions, and cope with peak labor demands. These organizations are the instruments that rural societies have developed to “regulate the relations” between their members concerning access to means of production (land and water), the agricultural calendar, technical practices, and other issues. Being internal in nature, they make it possible to foresee and resolve conflicts between the members of the local society; being dependent on other forms of social control, their functioning is marked by the relationships that exist within the society.

Formal. As Haubert and Bey (1995) emphasize, it is important to stress that the *new producer organizations* are of a “radically different nature”; their purpose is not “the regulation of the relationships within the groups concerned...,” but their “essential function is to organize the relations with the external world.” They are interface structures that, depending on the case, can be:

- Either a means for facilitating/accelerating the integration of rural people into the market and global society; or
- A means for improving the relations of rural societies with their environment (market, global society).

Producer organizations are (or would like to be) structures for mediation between rural producers and others who act in their economic, institutional, and political environment. They are, as a result, “hybrid”

structures in which two different types of logics and two “meaning systems” are involved.

POs are membership organizations created by farmers (or other groups) to provide services to them, with objectives that include:

- Better management of their natural resources and assets (for example, water user associations; herder associations);
- Expansion of their access to natural resources, their basic means of production (that is, access to land, forest, pastures, and water resources);
- Improved access to services, credit, and market outlets by leveraging them as a result of their representative and advocacy activities, or their combined financial clout; and
- Making their voices heard in decisionmaking processes in which asset allocations are determined, as well as policies that affect the context in which they produce, market, transform, and export their products. In larger numbers, farmers gain bargaining power, and can have a more effective input in decisionmaking processes that affect their lives.

POs can assume several functions:

- *Advocacy or policy:* Associations or unions perform a representative role, lobby on behalf of members, represent their members’ interests in negotiations with government, donors, or the private sector;
- *Economic and technical:* Cooperatives or other groups (unions, producer associations, cooperatives, and economic groups) provide services to their members such as: information, facilitating access to inputs and market, credit, support for storage, and processing and marketing services; and
- *Local development:* Whatever their primary function, POs are frequently

requested by their members to support local development processes, and improve the quality of village life. Services expected by the local population are similar to the kinds of public/social service that would be provided by a rural commune (or district) in a decentralized government. These organizations, in fact, often substitute for local government in countries where decentralization has not yet taken place.

POs can be only local entities (at the village and inter-village levels). They can be represented at the regional and national levels where policy decisions are taken. Function and level of organization are often related. Local problems requiring local collective actions tend to be better resolved by one or more grassroots producer organizations. Hence technical and economic organizations tend to be stronger and more effective at the *local and regional level* (for example, to access services, rural credit, and primary markets, manage their own natural assets, or resolve natural resource access issues). Conversely, the national or regional level is appropriate to resolve policy issues: advocacy groups therefore form a level where they can most effectively have an input into decisionmaking. Issues on which they can have strong input include land reform, international trade, import-export policies, and fiscal policies. However, they often have great difficulties in building a sustained relationship with the local level, because of problems of transparency and accountability. Some advocacy groups exist only at the regional or national level without any local base. They consider themselves as representatives of the local or technical organizations that are not organized at the regional or national level.

Rationale for Strengthening POs

The reasons for strengthening and supporting POs vary depending on your point of view.

POs exist and it is difficult to ignore them. The interest shown in producer organizations in certain countries results from the fact that they present themselves as partners. It then becomes difficult to circumvent them. Some POs are organized into federations at the local, regional, and national levels (CNFR in Uruguay, CNCR in Senegal), and demand to be associated with decision-making on matters that concern them.

POs are part of a new mode of economic and social regulation. The coordination hierarchy imposed by government in a number of countries is slowly disappearing. As a consequence, new forms of coordination among actors, including POs, have to be invented, whether these modes of regulation are sectoral or territorial, or at local, regional, or international levels. Producers, through their organization, participate in the negotiation of *institutionalized agreements*, such as the setting up of supply or marketing services, the structuring of a production/processing industry, the definition and implementation of local development plans, or the formulation of public agricultural policies.

POs want to be involved in rural development policy. The role of POs cannot be limited to “managing” situations created by agricultural policy, and decisions made without producer input. Their role also cannot be reduced to obtaining simple adjustments of reforms already under way. Producers want to be involved in shaping the future of agriculture, its place in the local and national economy, and the functions that it should perform in the global economy.

POs are sometimes called upon to compensate for public or private institutional failure. The producer organization is too often perceived as a substitute to which donors, in

particular, tend to turn because the other players (public services, private economic operators, and others) have not come up to their expectations. POs often fill the gaps created when government pulls out, or when the commercial private sector is slow to take over (for unprofitable operations in particular).

POs may, at other times, be considered as default institutions. This is the case, for instance, with natural resource management in sub-Saharan Africa, because the public services have often shown themselves to be largely ineffective.

POs can be vehicles to push forward technical, economic, or institutional changes. The impact of structural adjustment has, in many cases, been devastating to the most vulnerable socioprofessional groups of the population; poverty has increased, especially in rural areas, and living standards have deteriorated. Fearing that the credibility of the neoliberal model on which these reforms are based will be severely eroded, many institutions are investing in production rehabilitation programs from which they are expecting swift and significant results. POs appear to be potentially valuable partners, particularly when they are structured around subsectors (cotton, cocoa, vegetables, fishing).

The new paradigm in agricultural services (research, extension, and agricultural and rural advisory services) is to align themselves with what their “clients” want. It is therefore indispensable that the “clients” be able to express themselves, and to make themselves understood. This can lead to the creation of specific organizations (for example, Mali’s Research Institute, which provided itself with an ad hoc rural talking partner through the establishment of user committees), or can give rise to partnerships between the renewed agricultural services and existing producer organizations (for example, projects

supported by the World Bank in Senegal, Mali, and Guinea).

Support of POs is sometimes a response to donor country public opinion. Concern for consistency with the democratic project promoted by a number of sources of financing also leads them to support producer organizations. When one advocates political openness, can one refuse increased producer participation in the debates and decisions concerning economic life?

Support to POs is an investment in social capital:

- *To fight rural poverty.* The POs are the only way for the rural poor to pull themselves out of poverty. Improving the capacity of producer organizations will improve their bargaining power, thus contributing to a more growth-enhancing allocation of public goods at all levels (local, regional, and national); and
- *To improve the return of other types of investment.* The recent interest in POs displayed by certain institutions is connected with the rediscovery of the importance of networks, and of the role of institutional capacity in the management of prevailing economic opportunities and constraints.

POs often need construction or reconstruction phase support. In most cases POs do not have the means to achieve completely the goals they have set, nor do they generally match the expectations of development agencies or donors. It is also true that they do not always receive the support from the latter that they are entitled to expect.

A central challenge for many POs is the building of balanced technical, economic, and political partnerships. It is a “learning by doing” process that cannot be reduced to the establishment of simple procedures, and that will progressively modify the power relationships among donors, government, and civil society.

With their limited resources, POs cannot cope with the technical, economic, social, and political challenges facing rural society. Alliances and partnerships are therefore necessary, and support and assistance can help POs to forge these alliances and to build these partnerships.

Discrepancies exist, however, between the expectations/demands of the POs and the propositions put to them by those who want to “support” them. POs are generally in an unfavorable position in the relationships they set up, with inequalities in access to information, levels of expertise, or in control of financial resources, or input into the political decisionmaking process. Donors or government can easily impose their views and aims, which may lead to some serious misunderstandings and frustrations for all concerned. Although rarely explicit, this mismatch tends to transform POs into instruments of donors or government.

Capacities Requiring Strengthening

Two principles are proposed to characterize POs and to identify what capacities to strengthen:

- *The principle of utility:* Whatever its origin or its size, an organization can qualify as a PO if (a) it is useful for its members; and (b) members are actively committed to making it work to achieve the objectives they have set; and
- *The principle of identity:* A PO’s identity includes: (a) a history and a geographic space shared by members; (b) operating rules (governance) that regulate the relations between members and between members and the outside world; and (c) a vision of its future and what it wants to achieve. Without such an identity a PO becomes a formless group used by others to accomplish their own objectives.

These two principles are not set in stone. They need to be adjusted depending on activity and environment of a particular PO. For POs to be useful to producers and have their own identity, they need to have their own agenda, know how to interact with their political and economic environment, understand the agenda, constraints, capacity, and limitation of other groups, and be able to mobilize financial and technical resources (internal and external) to implement their activities.

The ultimate objective of strategies to strengthen POs is to make them capable of analyzing their own needs, formulating their requests in realistic and operational terms, and negotiating with others involved in the POs’ own sphere of activity. When POs have reached this stage, they are capable of managing the process of adapting their enterprises to whatever needs arise.

They need support, therefore, to be able to strengthen their strategic, technical, and financial capacity. The strategic capacities will enable them to define how they intend to achieve their objectives and exist as institutions. It presupposes the capacity of the POs to assess their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The technical capacities are those needed to implement the activities for which the PO was created.

Strategic Capabilities

Producer organizations need an effective communication program to access external information, circulate information to members and to other POs, and access national and international market and policy information sources.

PO leaders often need help to improve their management skills to better understand, for example: (a) market intelligence: liberalization and globalization of the economy; (b) donors’ operating mechanisms and strategies; (c) policy analysis and

formulation at local, regional, national, and international levels including the World Trade Organization (WTO); (d) government decentralization and devolution strategies, with the related redistribution of power.

There is a long list of areas where PO staff could be helped to improve their effectiveness:

- Functional literacy and numeracy;
- Accounting and financial management;
- Running an efficient information system;
- Ensuring producers have access to services needed to increase agricultural production: access to inputs, markets, financial institutions, and processing of agricultural products;
- Providing technical services or advice to producers;
- Facilitating and ensuring that producers have access to existing public or private services; and
- Internal management capacity:
 - “ Identification of producer (members and nonmembers) needs and capacities (financial, technical);
 - “ Prioritization of producers’ needs, constraints, and requests;
 - “ Formulating producers’ requests;
 - “ Defending producers’ interests;
 - “ Reporting and accountability to members and producers;
 - “ Managing internal conflicts;
 - “ Designating, implementing, and evaluating work, done internally or contracted out; and
 - “ Saying no to members and explaining why.
- Participating in board or other management meetings of public or private institutions that are to provide technical or financial services to producers.

Financial Capabilities

There is no empowerment without financial autonomy allowing POs to manage their own funds, to report and be accountable to

members and other PO partners. Accountability to members is essential but only possible when members contribute financially to their organization. All producers, including the poorest, must make an effort to contribute. This is the basic condition for them to feel involved, and demand accountability from their leaders. Donors should also contribute to the regular operational costs of POs (on a decreasing basis, for example), and not only finance technical capacity-building activities or projects.

The strengthening of PO financial resources applies therefore to the organization’s capacity to mobilize and manage funds from members and income from capital or services provided, and external funds from government, donors, and the private sector.

Farmers are generally willing to pay for services provided by POs that have a real benefit, and if they feel they are part of the organization. The decisionmaking structure of the organization is therefore an essential element.

The cost of PO lobbying activities should be borne by the PO. Producers have to develop financial mechanisms to pay for advocacy and public bargaining, and also to fund decentralized projects (Agriterra, for example, developed a budgeting and planning method for that purpose—SOMPLAN). When producers work collectively on a contract basis with agricultural product buyers, the terms of the contract should include cost of lobbying.

Capabilities should be reinforced in aid agencies and support organizations. The strengthening of capabilities should not be a one-way street. The point is not only to bring POs up to the level of aid agencies, but to allow aid agencies to become better listeners and to understand the strengths of POs and the constraints under which they operate. Aid agencies and support organizations must therefore improve:

- Their ability to listen and understand economic and social developments in a rural setting;
- Their ability to respect the PO's own rhythms, which do not necessarily match the bookkeeping rhythms of aid agencies. This requires innovations in funding procedures and greater flexibility in controls, with a lighter hand on the reins; and
- World Bank staff should listen more attentively to developing country farmers who "know how to speak about complex things using simple words."

Actions and Support Needed

There is no universal approach to supporting POs. Support must be a tailor-made, learning-by-doing process that will vary according to the country circumstances and to the specific needs of POs in that country. In some countries, the political environment does not allow for civil society to become organized. In such extreme cases, there is not much to do except offer encouragement. When the political context is favorable or at least not obstructive, supporting POs becomes feasible. A support program for POs should embody the principle of empowerment, follow some general guidelines, and respect certain principles. PO leaders and members are responsible for identifying their needs, to organize themselves to access the services they identified to respond to their needs, and to negotiate and contract with any service provider they select.

Given the weaknesses of public institutions and state withdrawal from many services, POs are often seen as an alternative to improve the cost-efficiency and sustainability of existing public or private services delivery. Support provided under donor- or government-driven agenda is likely to have a limited impact on PO capacity building, if it is not provided with the ultimate

objective of empowering the PO and the farmers. Otherwise it would make them instruments of public or private service delivery.

Strengthening technical capabilities of POs is often done as part of classical rural development activities, which generally consist of education in literacy and the well-known areas of accounting and basic activities management. There are various participants (in classical projects, NGOs, government departments), and the mechanisms chosen may vary, including standard instruction in a center, on-site training, producer exchanges, and consulting. The weaknesses most often noted are that the technical abilities acquired are often difficult to maintain or develop. Additional training programs are therefore needed that tend to perpetuate the training of producers by outsiders, who do not necessarily know the expectations of POs. The relationship between POs and training institutions has to be switched from "supporter-supported" (donor-receiver) to a follow-through in which the outside institution makes the most of the PO's potential and know-how. The experience of the Senegal Federation of Nongovernmental Organizations training program (identification of knowledge within the POs and exchange and visiting programs) shows the importance of PO employees, a group often overlooked by outside organizations.

Innovations in strengthening PO technical capabilities are linked to the type of institutional mechanism set up and methods used. In Mali, two programs involving the Institut de recherches et d'application de méthodes de développement—IRAM (Institute for Research and Implementation of Development Methods) set up independent service centers controlled by the producers. They provided quality services in accounting, management consulting, and legal and financial advice (*support in reconciling PO*

accounts). The approach adopted was to set up progressive technical and financial conditions for operating service centers in the long term: specific expertise brought in under contract by the POs, and searches for financial partnerships with banking institutions and other operators involved locally.

The learning-by-doing process, better than any training program, ensured that the PO had a true grasp of what was learned: In Zambia, CLUSA strengthened the technical abilities of POs by running a crop year (preparation for the year, inputs, credit, and marketing). Through progressive involvement in the credit management and inputs distribution committees (Depots Committees), the producers gradually took on operating responsibilities until they became reliable participants in the products (sunflower, soy, pepper, sorghum) destined for export markets (South Africa).

Strengthening strategic capabilities is related to the development of human and financial resources within the PO.

Development of human resources (members and leaders). Increased schooling in rural areas and reforms in farmer education are undoubtedly key areas for the future of POs. The importance of leaders, however, has been recognized as a key issue for development of POs. Although it is difficult to define precisely what a leader is, the role is a vital one for any organization. Major qualifications for leaders include competence, honesty, technical skills, ability to earn the trust of members, and knowing how to work on a team.

PO leaders need specific types of training because they are often seen as a threat to political leaders when they express the views of their organizations. Training PO leaders can be contracted to outside (non-PO) organizations, with the objective to enable PO leaders to design their own training programs, and negotiate their implementation with foreign donors or, in certain cases,

implement them themselves. An exchange of experience between producers and leaders, and supporting their participation in outside seminars, are considered the best learning opportunities for them.

We should support PO efforts to recruit their own personnel. Once a PO reaches a certain level of activity, it needs to hire staff or call on advisers. Recruiting personnel helps the agricultural leaders develop their human resource management capabilities—an area in which classical support organizations are still deficient. POs must be able to offer adequate salaries to attract the most competent individuals. Access to expertise in strategic areas (knowledge of markets, rural financing mechanisms, operation of aid agencies) enables POs to improve their negotiating positions with the entities they meet regularly (government, agro-industrial companies, and exporters). POs must be able to decide which studies they wish to conduct, and recruit the people they choose to do the work.

Aid agencies have an important responsibility in reinforcing the strategic capabilities of POs. Governments are used to speaking on behalf of producers, so government or government-related institutions are therefore probably not the best choice to help strengthen POs to learn to speak for themselves. Strengthening strategic capacity of POs should be done by institutions that provide guaranteed independence from government or donors, have a reputation for quality work, and are open and honest. Classical aid tools are often not up to this challenge. The rigidity of public aid procedures, usually subject to rigid accountability and industrial country public opinion, runs counter to the need for flexibility and adaptability. There are some exceptions, however: the Swiss aid agency monitored a number of farmer movements in western and central Africa. Other agencies such as the French development agency

(AFD), the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the World Bank are experimenting with new forms of direct support to POs. It remains to be seen whether these agencies' procedures and tools are able to adapt to the requirements of flexibility and reactivity called for by direct partnership with producer organizations. In Côte d'Ivoire, French cooperation provides ANOPACI (Association nationale des organisations professionnelles agricoles de Côte d'Ivoire—National Association of Côte d'Ivoire Professional Agricultural Organizations) with the means to organize training programs, and mobilize expertise, without specifying in advance the content of the services. This support enables the association to prepare effectively for negotiations and discussions with partners, including government representatives.

Increasing Financial Resources

It is difficult for POs to mobilize internal financial resources, because the agricultural sector is already heavily taxed to finance government operations and development programs. Member dues usually bring in little, and profits from the PO's economic activities are limited due to increased market competition. Outside funding from aid agencies is a major portion of a PO's financial base, raising fundamental questions about the durability of this situation and its ambiguous nature. Increasingly, revenue-generating alternatives are being sought by setting up mechanisms to mobilize negotiated sources related to agricultural activities. Funding from fees charged to the sectors, or on lending (STABEX type), are resources over which POs can legitimately claim control and, in some cases, use to fund their activities. *The development of PO financial resources raises the question of financing development of the agricultural sector, and the position that producer organization representatives should play.* A case in point is poultry farming funds

mobilized in Côte d'Ivoire through agreements between the producers and other participants (processors and feed suppliers).

Demanding self-financing of POs is not realistic. A pragmatic approach would be to identify participants concerned with the broadening of PO capabilities. Political will is vital in implementing financing mechanisms that would sustain POs. In Mali, for example, the Niono service center is seeking to negotiate a long-term loan with the Agriculture Bank to strengthen managerial capabilities of the producer groups, and hence their capacity to repay loans and access others.

Issues To Be Considered

PO communication programs. POs need to access strategic information if they are to grow and become more effective. Gathering and processing information requires skilled personnel. Independence of information is crucial, and POs should be supported to develop their own communication program. The experience of the Réseau agriculture paysanne et modernisation/Afrique—APM (Small-Scale Agriculture and Modernization Network/Africa) in this area is of interest. This network provides cotton-producing POs with strategic information, and assists them in analyzing this information to improve their capabilities. The international nature of this network also enables PO leaders to broaden their horizon, to diversify their contacts, to broaden their knowledge, and expand their alliances with other POs—all important ingredients for a sustainable increase in strategic capabilities.

PO development cannot be done without government. The willingness of government to empower POs is essential. Long-term development of producer organizations requires that governments be ready to share some of their prerogatives in the design and implementation of rural development policy. Governments are the referees and need help (a) to define a legal enabling environment for

the development of POs; (b) to design macroeconomic and fiscal policy measures that will ensure sustainable development of PO financial resources; and (c) to ensure a balanced power relationship between POs and private companies.

POs must diversify their partnerships. A face-to-face relationship between a PO and a support organization or an NGO places POs in an unbalanced position. The diversity of partnerships (as in Senegal) can be an opportunity for POs to be less dependent and to affirm their own identity.

It is vital to support POs and facilitate their participation in decisionmaking processes. Aid agencies often combine direct support to POs with promotion of measures to allow POs to participate in negotiations and/or decisionmaking processes. Donor agencies, primarily the World Bank, have a special responsibility in this area. The World Bank can facilitate the recognition of POs needed contribution in forums where rural development policies, as well as macroeconomic and fiscal policies, are discussed. Decentralization, for example, is an important change in the political landscape of African countries. It will reshape the distribution of local power and the place of the POs in the local political arena. In Madagascar, the Southwest Project is a good example of combined actions that directly strengthen the capabilities of POs (technical capabilities and representation through the *Maison du Paysan*), and foster dialogue and consensus among government authorities, private operators, and POs (the Regional Development Committee). This project shows that achieving dialogue and consensus at the local level is not an easy task.

New procurement and disbursement procedures are needed. One of the challenges is to allow POs to participate in negotiating and decisionmaking processes without interfering with their approach or their choices. Donor agencies must agree to

release the a priori control of the financial and human resources channeled to POs.

Empowering POs: Some Suggestions

- Guarantee equal access to support to all POs in a country, providing they meet the criteria for funding;
- Support existing POs providing they are legally registered, and have transparent governing rules, procedures, accounting, and reporting systems;
- Accept PO limitations and diversity, working with them at their pace;
- Negotiate support to be provided, taking into account the PO's own agenda;
- Support POs in the activities that *they have chosen, according to their working capacity*. Project objectives should be adjusted to PO capabilities and not the opposite;
- Support should be guaranteed independent from government or aid agencies;
- Let POs decide which POs to support and what capacity to strengthen, on the basis of procedures and criteria agreed upon with governments and donors; appropriate mechanisms must be developed as necessary; and
- Ensure that POs are receiving support to deliver the services for which they have been created, while also ensuring some support for general capacity building and institutional development.

A tool to effectively empower POs is the demand-driven Fund. The demand-driven Fund lets POs define which activities to finance, choose the service providers, and determine the timing and pace of implementation. It allows POs to manage the funds they have been granted. By implementing activities themselves, and being allowed to make mistakes, POs will strengthen their own capacities. Demand-driven funding, however, requires that donors, POs, and the government agree on

procedures and criteria for POs to access the funds. POs should not necessarily manage the funds, but the decisions to allocate funding should be theirs. The role of the agency managing the funds should be strictly to implement PO decisions. The criteria and procedures should be public and ensure transparency in the way POs make decisions to allocate funding, as well as in the way the demand-driven fund is managed. Finally, demand-driven funds should be extensively advertised, through all possible communication channels, to ensure that those who have problems accessing the information, often the poorest, are aware of the existence of the Fund.

Risks and Problems

POs may suffer from a lack of legitimacy of their leaders. The leaders may be out of touch with members, and lack accountability to their members. Although programs to strengthen POs are intended to resolve these problems, with access to funds PO leaders may act to the members' detriment. Thus strengthening POs may result in giving more power to already powerful local groups, or individuals, who will capture the benefits of access to funds. A well designed communication program should ensure openness of all groups, and should mitigate against that risk.

Empowerment of POs through a learning-by-doing process may result in misuse of funds. Appropriate ex post controls and audits are required. In case of misuse of funds, the groups or individuals involved should be immediately excluded from future access to finances.

The empowerment of producer organizations often leads to a shift in the existing power relationship, thereby creating counter forces in the society. Although counter forces have not yet been developed, there is a critical need for various stakeholders (local institutions, donors) to

keep a close check on the process to ensure that all individuals and groups are kept informed and participate actively. Existing elite groups may otherwise prevent the development of such counterbalancing checks.

Stronger POs will likely result in a redistribution of power. Governments and civil servants are likely to resist the change, will be afraid of losing control, their prerogatives, or even their jobs, because they will be unsure of what they will gain in the process. Political parties and individuals will try to co-opt the process and use POs as a vehicle to promote their own cause. The empowerment process may then be hijacked by hidden political objectives. Support to PO programs should involve a stakeholder analysis to identify potential opponents and resistance, and the design of specific activities to overcome those, creating as much as possible a win-win situation.

Not all producers belong to an organization. Although organized producers are not necessarily the wealthiest, supporting only existing POs will by-pass the unorganized poor. They should be recognized as a target group that needs specific support. A professional private organization could be used as an intermediary to help them get organized, and to access the financial and technical resources they need to pull themselves out of poverty.

Capacity building of producer organizations is a slow and uneven process, regulated by existing social behavior and cultural norms, not by economic principles alone. Donors may get impatient and force the process artificially, resulting in unsustainable growth.

Outside pressures to form nationwide producer organizations tend to be a drag on the slow process of PO strengthening. Tugged in several directions, courted by some, and ignored or denigrated by others, nationwide POs have to expend considerable energies to learn the complex interplay of

multiple dialogue frameworks, and other POs reinforcement programs set up by aid agencies, without consultation among themselves. These tugs-of-war can weaken painfully acquired capacities. Aid agencies have a heavy responsibility. They should establish an ethical framework to support POs with a view to empowering them.

Partnership with Agricultural Services

Changing the way research and extension institutions work with producers has been often done under pressure from increasingly well-organized producer organizations, and questions raised by donor agencies. Changes introduced by research and extension institutions have encouraged a greater participation of producers in the functioning of their institution. Some of these changes are:

- Focusing programs on research and development or on production systems research;
- Introducing participatory diagnostic methods to identify real needs of producers;
- Decentralizing of research and extension institutions;
- Establishing consultative forums between researchers, extension agents, and producer organizations; and
- Providing incentives to encourage researchers to listen more carefully to producers and their organizations, and respond promptly to their needs.

Restructuring Research and Extension

These changes were not enough for research and extension institutions to be accountable to producers for their results. Drastic institutional changes were needed to allow producers to be involved in managing research and extension institutions, and in formulating their program of work.

Changing to public/private institutions. Examples of such changes in status include: Senegal's National Agricultural and Rural Advisory Council (*Agence nationale de conseil agricole et rural*), Côte d'Ivoire's National Agency for Rural Development (*Agence nationale de développement rural*, ANADER), Côte d'Ivoire's National Center for Agronomic Research (*Centre national de la recherche agronomique*, CNRA), Togo's Institute of Agronomic Research (*Institut togolais de recherche agronomique*, ITRA), and the National Institute of Agronomic Research (INIA) in Uruguay. The fact that direct users of research findings are in the majority on executive boards enables them to ensure that research and extension work meets users' needs, via the institution's program budget, that is voted on by the executive board. Once these institutions are no longer public entities, personnel management arrangements that encourage a results-oriented and client-oriented culture, and reward top performance, can be more easily introduced. The shift in attitude on the part of INIA researchers in Uruguay provides a striking example. Until 1990, civil service management arrangements prevailed in INIA, and researchers were not accountable to producers. Researchers now have grown attentive and responsive to producers' needs. Producers vote on a program budget covering specific activities, and the researchers report to them at the next session of the Executive Board.

Separating research financing from research implementation. Various types of research Funds or Foundations have been established in Latin America in particular, and to a lesser extent in Asia. They are now starting to develop in sub-Saharan Africa as well. The aims of these Funds include: (a) targetting financing more precisely to meet specific objectives; (b) promoting collaboration among all national entities involved in research, thereby making optimum use of the country's human and

physical resources; and (c) improving the quality of research by introducing competition and rigorous procedures for selecting research topics. Examples of funds can be found in Latin America (the Foundation for Agricultural Research (FIA) in Chile, Brazil's PRODETAB (Project to Support the Development of Agricultural Technology), the Agricultural Technology Fund (FPTA) in Uruguay, and the Competitive Fund in Ecuador). In Africa there is Kenya's Agricultural Research Fund, and in Asia, Indonesia's Competitive Fund.

Allowing POs to buy agricultural research or extension services. Mechanisms exist for POs to buy services through the research or extension funds for users managed by public entities, NGOs, or by POs directly.

The research funds for users managed by public institutions or project teams are often set up by donors as a way to ensure that the research or extension carried out reflects actual demand. Mali's User Research Fund (*Fonds de recherche des utilisateurs*), managed by the National Agronomic Research Committee (*Comité national de la recherche agronomique*), is one example. Venezuela has a Fund to which users can apply to recruit agricultural experts to assist with extension activities. PRONATTA, Colombia's National Agricultural Technology Transfer Program, which focuses on research and development and technology transfers, is a Fund best positioned to meet user demand. Funding can be triggered either when researchers submit research proposals, or more commonly when users prepare technical and financial requests seeking support for services (such as training, extension activities, or research), and submit them to PRONATTA, which then invites bids. The users can be POs, rural communities, NGOs, or private entities.

Examples of research or extension funds managed by NGOs include cooperation between the Institute of Agronomic Research

in Guinea (*Institut de recherche agronomique de guinée*) and the Coffee Growers' Federation of Guinea (*Fédération des planteurs de café*); cooperation between the Federation of Unions of NAAM Groups (*Fédération des unions des groupements NAAM*) in Burkina Faso and the Institute for the Environment and Agricultural Research (*Institut de l'environnement et de recherches agricoles*), which is financed in part by NGOs and by the Federation itself.

POs receive funding, which they manage, from donors to allow them to contract the services they need with research or extension institutions directly. Examples are the National Federation of Coffee Growers in Colombia, a similar organization for tea growers in Kenya, Morocco's Citrus Growers Cooperative, and the Fouta-Djalon Farmers' Federation (*Fédération des paysans du Fouta-Djalon*) in Guinea.

PO Initiatives

In certain situations, such as Costa Rica, research and extension institutions can no longer meet the needs of producers. Small farmers do not get much attention from the research establishment, and therefore some groups of farmers have demonstrated that *they* can do research and come up with results directly applicable to their lands. Many of these experiments have to do with natural resource management, soil fertility management, introduction of new varieties, diversification, or integrated pest and disease management. The diversity of their results, which are finely tuned to their situation, stands in contrast to the routine responses that researchers tend to offer. Farmers are gaining experience and are becoming more professional.

Lessons Learned

A favorable policy environment is indispensable. A definite prerequisite for

institutional reorganization is the withdrawal of the state from such activities, and the involvement of the private sector and civil society in the formulation of agricultural policy. Another essential factor is the willingness of governments to create a legislative framework favorable to the emergence and development of POs.

Institutional commitments are also necessary. Research or extension institutions should be committed to decentralization if they wish to establish close links with users. Incentives in the evaluation and promotion of researchers should also take into account consultation mechanisms with POs, and the adoption of participatory ways of developing technology.

Government controlled institutions often do not work to the benefit of producers. As long as the institutions responsible for research and extension are government controlled, it will be difficult to find ways to make research organizations accountable to users for the results they produce. The chronic financial instability of research institutions hinders the establishment of links with POs, as demonstrated in Central America.

Strengthening Technical Capacity

Technical capacity of POs must be strengthened to make them effective partners of research or extension institutions. The key factor that enables institutional change to lead to effective partnerships is the existence of farmers' organizations that are well structured and empowered, offer real prospects to their members, and are capable of negotiating with other partners, including research and extension. It is essential for POs to develop their organizational and technical capacity if they are to establish partnerships or act as effective members of executive boards, or finance directly research and extension programs. *Developing programs to*

strengthen PO capacities is a priority to improve research and extension efficiency.

Researchers are likely to be more responsive to demands of farmers if research is financed using Funds. This will depend on: (1) the way in which the research topics that are to be subject to bidding processes are selected; (2) the degree of autonomy existing between the governing bodies and the research institutions; and (3) the effective participation by users in the governing bodies and the independence of those bodies vis-à-vis the research institutions.

Other Issues

Not all POs possess a real capacity to establish partnerships with research and extension institutions. Real partnerships can exist only when they involve POs that are fully capable of maintaining a dialogue with other partners. It is undeniable that the ability of POs to articulate their wishes, conduct negotiations, and mobilize the resources necessary to establish partnerships depends directly on the strengthening of their capacities.

What institutional reorganization is needed to incorporate PO demands in research and extension activities? What should be done to ensure that researchers and extension agents are accountable to producers for the results they produce? One solution is to steer institutions toward establishing joint public-sector and private-sector organizations, as in Côte d'Ivoire and Uruguay. What should be done in situations where it is not possible to call upon producers to finance research through taxes or parafiscal levies, or in which those taxes and levies cover only certain crops? *PO leaders clearly stated that they did not request privatizing public research and extension institutions, but they want these institutions to work more for them.*

Can the use of research funds similar to PRONATTA (Colombia) or the Users'

Research Fund (Mali) provide an alternative to the appropriation of research institutions by POs? Such a fund can allow organizations to contract with research and extension services. Procedures to establish such funds should be made clear and shared among all stakeholders, membership of the governing bodies, selection criteria and procedures applicable to projects, and training for POs.

If research and extension are not responsive to farmers' organizations, what can be done? Should POs be supported to do their own research and disseminate their findings? How reliable and replicable could these be? When producers have gone as far as they can, how can they be helped—in their particular locations—to contact the most effective research service? Would they be able to use the “globalization” of research to their best advantage, establishing partnerships that transcend national boundaries?

In conclusion, when producers are well organized and capable of dialoguing with research and extension personnel, there is a dramatic improvement in the effectiveness of research and extension, and POs become the first advocates to defend these institutions.

Donors and POs: Lessons Learned

Each year, OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development)

member countries spend about US\$50 billion on public aid to developing countries, of which US\$5 billion goes for agriculture. At the same time, they spend US\$360 billion annually to subsidize their own producers, which averages 37 percent of the farmer's income. By contrast, farmers in developing countries are usually heavily taxed to finance government operations, and economic diversification. OECD countries, which cultivate 47 percent of the world's arable land, and possess 4 percent of the world's farmers, have a stake in the way agriculture develops, and their interventions in this area are not impartial (see Table 1). In addition, among the so-called “developing” regions, there are highly diverse situations:

- In Africa, the problem is first a general one of economic take-off and of emerging from a still largely subsistence-oriented agriculture;
- In Latin America, average incomes are much higher and the proportion of farmers much smaller: the problem here is an internal one of distribution of wealth and access to international markets;
- In Asia, home to 71 percent of the world's farmers, the problem is mainly technical, due to the very high population density; and
- Finally, in Eastern Europe, the main problem involves a transition from planned economies to a market economy.

Table 1 The main regions of the world in the debate on agriculture

<i>Region</i>	<i>Population as percentage of total world population</i>	<i>Agricultural population as percentage of the world's farmers</i>	<i>Cultivated area as percentage of world-wide cultivated area</i>
Sub-Saharan Africa	9	14	10
North Africa and Middle East	5	5	6
East Asia	31	41	12
South Asia	21	30	14
Latin America	8	5	11
Developing countries as a whole	76	96	53
Industrial countries as a whole	23	4	47

Farmers in various parts of the world do not necessarily share the same concerns. These statistics also indicate that Asia was underrepresented at this workshop, even though it has the highest stakes in terms of population.

The major support lent to POs is based on three main themes: agriculture (or agro-economics), rural development (which more or less refers to “local development”), and farmer identity (a social and political concern). These themes have spurred different types of approaches:

- Direct support to grassroots farmers’ organizations;
- Support to POs to help them gain a foothold in the economic system;
- Support to POs to help them gain a foothold in the political system; and
- Support for cooperation between farmers.

There was little discussion at this workshop on North-South cooperation from an economic standpoint, that is joint ventures and other forms of interest-sharing that surely deserve further exploration.

Guidelines for Donors

From the various forms of support to POs, one recommendation emerged: support to POs is part of a “process-oriented” approach, and there are no recipes to be applied uniformly in all circumstances.

The following could be considered as guidelines:

Improve the flow of information: POs would benefit from receiving more useful information for their own decision-making processes (and not just information that justifies interventions that have been proposed to them), and more information on development cooperation itself. It is also important for POs themselves to be able to contract for studies and surveys so that they can develop their own strategic positions.

Supply the tools and the opportunities to use them: What is needed is not just support projects for POs, but also a place for POs in the day-to-day operation of development work, contractually based responsibility for certain tasks, and flexible Funds that could respond to farmers’ proposals. This would require a collective effort to think of ways to improve transparency and confidence in the relationship between POs, government officials, and development partners.

Develop a fluid market for rural development services: It is especially important to avoid creating a new rural development monopoly held by POs, as governments and NGOs did before them, and to avoid the proliferation of structures. Each organization must define clearly its objectives and anticipated results, and evaluation must be redirected in such a way as to make a greater allowance for the point of view of beneficiaries rather than of donors, so as to foster a more natural process of selection amongst service providers.

Support POs to resituate them in the changing context of agriculture in developing countries. The rural world’s place in economic and social development is undergoing rapid change, as is the international environment. The rural milieu itself is characterized by growing social differentiation. POs must be helped to develop a strategic vision of their future in a changing world, and to identify some long-term priorities.

Do not apply western models to farmers’ organizations, since the historic and economic context is radically different. POs in each country should instead be helped to find their own institutional solutions, thereby strengthening their interactions with the various social groups in their countries (and not just with their governments). Industrial countries should, instead of exporting their models, reflect on the coherency of their policies regarding development cooperation

(as well as on other matters such as trade and the environment).

Seek a middle ground between idealism and cynicism. One must not expect from POs in developing countries a perfection not of this world, otherwise disappointment can lead to an excessively critical attitude in a few years. Nor should one “use” POs just because they are fashionable, and exhibit them at all the meetings without giving them the tools to make progress toward their own goals. In this connection, it might be useful to draw up an “ethos” governing partnerships with POs.

In short: restraint, patience, and sense of timing. The development of POs requires constant attention in the day-to-day work of the various participants in development. We must once again show restraint and patience, by offering POs as many opportunities as possible to assume responsibility at all levels, and to learn lessons in terms of action and organization, without forcing them to assume responsibilities at any cost. We must also allow the diverse personalities that lead POs the time to feel their way along, to make mistakes, to get to know each other, and finally to find their common path, as is already the case in several countries.

A strong consensus emerged on the following points:

- It is important to encourage the emergence and strengthening of POs, but there are no magic solutions to accomplish this. Pragmatism and perseverance are called for;
- Governments and their services must be persuaded that the development of POs is not contrary to their interests, since POs will have a hard time succeeding in the face of government opposition. Donor agencies can help get this message across.
- There is a need to promote the participation of POs in the design of development and cooperation policies in areas relevant to them, and to mobilize the financial resources to facilitate their participation;

- The implementation of development programs (or components thereof) should be delegated to POs by means of contracts;
- Every project should contain some latitude for responding to farmers’ initiatives and, if possible, for developing funds that would be managed autonomously by POs, especially in the areas of training, information, and communication;
- Procedures for project submission and accounting for expenditures must be simplified for projects involving collaboration with POs;
- The proliferation of structures to accommodate multiple actors should be avoided, in favor of information exchange and closer collaboration; and
- The democratic workings of POs, and the management of funds entrusted to them, must be transparent to inspire confidence, which will be the basis of further progress in streamlining procedures.

Follow-Up Actions

Three areas were suggested for potential follow-up actions: (1) development of a “*Source Book*” was seen as a concept to identify, document, and share experiences, good practices, and relevant information rather than necessarily a “hard copy” book; (2) monitoring the World Bank portfolio with respect to producer organization projects or components of larger projects; and (3) creating/strengthening demand at the country level.

Handbook

There is a need for a “source book” to be an information tool. A website should not be the only means to collect and disseminate information. A newsletter is also important to

maintain the momentum developed at this workshop. The content of the source book should include: (a) documentation of “good practices” and new innovative approaches; (b) practical information relating to World Bank procedures and the evolution of the World Bank portfolio; (c) information and contact data on other donor programs relevant to producer organizations; (d) a “contact book” with a short description of organizations, addresses, and links to web pages if available. The workshop organization committee should be the implementing group to prepare the source book. The World Bank was recognized as the relevant institution to manage the project, in close cooperation with IFAP.

Monitoring the World Bank Portfolio

President Wolfensohn’s Welcoming Address should be widely disseminated to World Bank staff, at headquarters and in resident missions. His presentation will be posted on the website.

The World Bank portfolio must be closely monitored with respect to support to farmers’ organizations, as a follow-up of the workshop. The suggestions made to do this, however, were diverse, probably because of a lack of knowledge of World Bank procedures. The role of IFAP was strongly supported, although some concerns were expressed about a risk of a de facto monopoly on information and linkages.

Creating Demand at Country Level

There was strong recognition of the importance of the country level for consolidation of the PO empowerment process. The primary role of producer organizations is at that level, whether it relates to economic, market issues, or policy dialogue. It is at the country level that project preparation and implementation are carried out.

Producer organizations must have regular contact with the World Bank resident mission, not only to be linked to specific projects, but to be engaged in country assistance strategy. Producer organizations, governments, and the World Bank could have a national agriculture policy conference, once a year, allowing them to review the main trends of the agriculture sector. Such a conference would facilitate the consultation of producer organizations for the establishment of the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS), which defines the areas in which the country and the World Bank have agreed to cooperate.

A PO National Fund

There was a consensus to recommend the establishment of a “PO National Fund,” open to all POs. Such a fund should be made available not only at the national level, but also at the local level, to be accessible to those producer groups that are not yet organized at a higher, national level. POs should be able to decide on the allocation of the funds. The funding of PO proposals should be transparent, according to objective criteria. Donors would not be able to determine a priori what the funds would be used for, except in broad terms and through approving the criteria and procedures regulating access to the Fund. These criteria would have to be jointly agreed upon between the donors, the POs, and the government. Donors and the government, however, would be able to monitor the use of the Fund through regular technical and financial audits. The World Bank, however, has limited instruments to create a national Fund. It would be difficult for the World Bank to create a Fund outside a project. The two potential instruments are the agricultural services projects and the community-based rural development projects. It should be kept in mind that the

latter emphasizes decentralization and community-based organizations rather than POs.

Others Suggestions

Two groups have underlined the importance of regional cooperation as an effective means to strengthen PO capacity at the national level. In the context of globalization, regional markets are a good start to understand and access the global market.

Participants agreed that a small group of the cosponsors (IFAP and the World Bank), and a few interested participants representing the various stakeholders of the workshop, should monitor the follow-up process in a transparent and proactive manner. The World Bank website was seen as an effective tool to do so, along with a newsletter.

Reference

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Issues Papers

Empowering Producer Organizations: Issues, Goals, and Ambiguities

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Organization is essential for family farming, and producers had organized themselves long before the advent of development institutions. Rural societies still have forms of organization inherited from the past, and some are more vibrant than others. Their purpose is to deal with the many variables of farming life, to stabilize production conditions, and to manage peak labor demands. These organizations were developed to “regulate the relationships” between their members, and to provide access to means of production (land and water), the farming calendar, and farming practices. Their purpose, an inward rather than an outward one, was to forestall and resolve conflicts between members of the local society; depending on other forms of social control, the producer organizations are subject to the power relationships within that society.

Haubert and Bey (1995) emphasized the *new producer organizations* (POs) are of a “radically different nature.” Their function is not to “regulate internal relationships in the groups concerned...” Their “essential function is to organize relationships with the outside.” They are interface structures conceived as being:

- Either a means of facilitating/accelerating the integration of rural dwellers into the

market and into society at large, or

- A means of improving the relationships of rural societies with their environments (market, society at large).

Thus, POs are (or would like to be) intermediaries between the rural producers and the other stakeholders in their economic, institutional, and political environment. They are, in fact, “hybrid” structures governed, each in their own way, by two types of thinking and two “meaning systems.”

They are generally organized around two types of issues:

- First, creating/managing the services producers now need because of modernization in techniques (for example, procurement of supplies and equipment, loans) and to their integration into the market (product marketing); and
- Second, representing the producers and defending their interests with other economic and institutional stakeholders, and the government.

Different Concepts of the Organization

The history of producer organizations—interfaces between the rural producers and their environment—is as old as “development” itself.¹ For several decades, one development

option after another (official and unofficial) has promoted specific models of POs (cooperatives, groups, and associations) whose objectives and rules for joining and operating were, and continue to be, based on positions largely foreign to the societies concerned.

At least initially, these POs were conceived as taking over from outsiders, and as a means to achieve objectives often defined by the outsiders, often with little or no discussion with the people concerned. They were, on occasion, merely pipelines for messages from the institutions. Such organizations can, however, have a broader role. They can be a means of reducing tensions and contradictions generated by outside intervention in the social groups concerned; although set up by outsiders, they can also be a framework for dialogue between the representatives of the rural people and the development organizations.

There have been many POs of this type (and in many cases they are still numerous). They come under an organizational concept called "functional" (Farrington 1994) or "instrumental." The organization is perceived as a tool for effecting change in family production units, sending out messages from development organizations, and accelerating the adoption of these messages by the producers.

A good example is the producer groups set up in the cotton companies of French-speaking Africa. In Mali, in particular, village associations were set up for primary cotton marketing (self-managed markets). They initially restored confidence between the cotton company and the producers, which was essential if cotton production was to work properly. As time passed, the resources generated by marketing enabled the associations to invest in the economic sector and in general infrastructure, thus reducing the tensions sometimes arising from the social stratification encouraged by cotton growers. The cotton company was

eventually able to transfer time-consuming and resource-intensive functions to these associations (such as management of agricultural inputs and credit, and gathering statistical data).

The functional or instrumental concept of POs is dominant because most of the players are institutional. It might be a slight exaggeration to suggest that the interest of outsiders in POs depends on the comparative advantages they appear to have in attaining objectives that, in the minds of the outsiders, are priorities. These advantages may be evaluated in terms of cost effectiveness (POs can, in some cases, reduce "transaction costs"), but also in terms of equity and continuity of results obtained. In this regard, the increased interest that certain institutional players now have in POs, perceived as able to improve farming service performance, is part of this thinking (see details below).

In other cases, the building of POs is based on a different type of thinking. The organization is (or tries to be) a response of rural dwellers to disruptions in their environment. The organization emerges from the local society, at the initiative of specific individuals, around technical, economic, social, or cultural issues, and becomes structured around objectives that are more or less precisely defined, and a differently constructed global or sectoral project. In some ways, the organization is a reaction on the part of the entire rural society expressing the wish of (minority) farmers to "have a voice" (Hirschman 1995), take the initiative, and be recognized as full partners by the others.

Association Movement in West Africa

The following groups combine farmer support functions with the role of representing and defending the interests of such producers: The NAAM groups in Burkina Faso, the federal Senegalese

associations within FONGS, CNCR, and the *Fédération des unions de producteurs du Bénin*, FUPRO (Federation of Producers' Unions of Benin): a number of Latin American organizations (*Comisión Nacional de Fomento Rural* [National Rural Development Commission] in Uruguay, UNORCA in Mexico, CONAIE in Ecuador, CONTAG and association umbrella organizations in Brazil, and many others) combine farmer support functions with the function of representing and defending the interests of such producers.

The distinction between the two types of organizations is far from clear. Organizations promoted from the outside, with an "instrumental" approach, gradually acquire knowledge, know-how, and tools encouraging their independence from their guardians.

Thus, the *Syndicat des producteurs de coton et de vivriers*, SYCOV (Union of Cotton and Food Crop Producers) in Mali is the "unexpected product" of the activities of the *Compagnie malienne de développement des textiles*, CMDT (Mali Textile Development Company), supporting the village associations it promoted. Literacy programs in villages and training of certain producers to carry out specific tasks have given some farmers knowledge and skills that some of them (once again, initially a minority) were willing to use beyond the framework initially envisaged.

"Know-how has led to the whys and wherefores" according to the first president of SYCOV, with village associations evolving from an instrument of technical and economic modernization into a federation structure. This "union" represents producers under a performance contract, signed by the government and the cotton company.

Organizations reflecting the producers' desire to assert themselves as development stakeholders sometimes find it difficult to draft original proposals to do the negotiation. Because they are anxious to achieve concrete

results, if only to strengthen their internal and external credibility, they establish partnership relationships with the outside stakeholders, and as a result have to go along with the models promoted by the dominant players. They therefore become "instrumentalized" in arrangements into which they are forced by the need to access resources, or their leaders exhibit the same behaviors toward the members that they criticized in outside agencies.

Institutional Stakeholders and POs

The renewed attention being paid today to POs by institutional stakeholders is based on many factors, often in combination, and is not entirely unambiguous:

- The producer organization is sometimes perceived as a *substitute* to which donors often turn because the others (public or parapublic services, and private economic operators) have not come up to their expectations. It may therefore seem essential to rely on POs to fill the gaps created by disengagement of the State, when the commercial private sector is slow to take over (for example, for unprofitable functions, when the market is irregular and unprofitable, and in areas with low agrogeologic potential). POs can then lose their attraction quite rapidly and be passed over for others such as individual entrepreneurs (retrained farmers or new rural dwellers, for example).
- In certain cases, the institutional stakeholders resort to POs *by default* because there is nothing else. This is the case, for example, with management of natural resources in sub-Saharan Africa where government agencies have proved ineffective in this area. New groups, however, have appeared resulting from administrative decentralization and planned land reforms (privatization) in

- some African countries, and may take over the functions of some organizations specializing in this sector.
- As in the past, POs remain attractive as *facilitators and accelerators of technical and economic change* in rural areas. The many changes that have come about (disengagement by the State, liberalization, and globalization of trade patterns) make it urgently necessary to adapt the family farm to the economic situation that has become more complex, less stable, and more competitive. The effects of structural adjustments have often hit the most vulnerable social and occupational groups hardest; poverty has increased, particularly in rural areas, and standard of living has declined overall. Fearing that the credibility of the neo-liberal model on which these reforms were based would be lost or questioned, many institutions are investing in production relaunch programs, from which they expect swift and significant results. Some POs can then appear to be preferred, especially if they are structured around subsectors (cotton, cocoa, but also truck farming, fishing, and other activities).
 - Recourse to POs may also be perceived as a *means of effecting institutional reforms*. Thus, in order for farm agencies (research, dissemination, farmer advisory services) to adapt to the demands of their “customers,” it is essential for the “customers” to be able to express themselves and be heard. This may lead to the creation of specific organizations (for example, a farmer spokesperson has been added to research in Mali through user committees). It may also give rise to partnerships between rehabilitated agricultural departments and existing POs (for example, projects supported by the World Bank in Senegal, Mali, and Guinea).
 - It is not impossible that a *concern for consistency with the democratic project*, promoted by a number of funding sources, will lead the latter to support producer organizations as well: Anyone promoting political openness can scarcely deny the producers an increased participation in discussions and decisionmaking in the economic life of the country. Moreover, in many countries where there is a substantial rural population, a “civil society” that, one hopes, will emerge and consolidate, is difficult to imagine without POs structured on various geographic and decision levels—especially since they can be counterweights to a state that is supposed to be simplifying and refocusing government functions.
 - The recent interest of certain institutional stakeholders in POs is also linked to the (re)discovery of the *importance of stakeholder networks*, and the role of *institutional depth* in managing the opportunities and economic constraints specific to each period. Partially in agreement with Crozier and Friedberg (1977), who demonstrated that “the ability of any group of human beings to change is determined by its wealth and surpluses—not in the material sense, but relational and institutional wealth,” the term “*social capital*” returns in full force to the debate on economic development. It accentuates the importance of “the glue that holds societies together ...” (Serageldin and Grootaert 1997): “the social capital enhances the benefits of investments in physical and human capital”; “in other words, it is not just an input into the production function but, like technology, a shift factor (or exponent) of the entire production function ...” according to Serageldin and Grootaert (1997). These authors chose an “integrative definition” of “social capital” that covers the various

definitions above. It includes “horizontal associations” (networks of civic engagement and social norms) that facilitate coordination between members, but also includes “vertical organizations such as companies.” In its most general definition, it also includes “formalized institutional relationships” such as governments. They also agree with North (1990) by pointing out that “institutions and other forms of social capital as well as public policies determine the “returns” that a country may get back from its other forms of capital.”

Hence, the reasons why institutional stakeholders become interested in POs are many and diverse. In all cases, the role expected of organizations is accompanied by the need of the producers in the organization (leaders and members) to acquire new resources: the general and specific skills required to perform the functions and tasks expected of them, and material and financial resources, and definition of decisionmaking mechanisms and appropriate types of action. Outside support obviously becomes necessary to set up information systems, technical and/or management training, to set up funding mechanisms to support local initiatives, and institutional support.

New Issues

As part of this brief review that helps explain the reasons for the renewed interest in POs by institutional stakeholders, it is appropriate to look at the three issues underlying the current debate on the position and role of POs in support mechanisms for family farms.

- The *first issue* to note is that, in many countries, POs want to be stakeholders when decisions about their support programs are made. They are stepping forward as active participants. They

want to be considered full partners by the institutional and political participants, and it becomes difficult to disregard or bypass them.

In many cases, POs are claiming, and rightly so, support for performing what they consider is their role at the local level, the national level (as in the case of CNCR in Senegal and AOPP in Mali), and the subregional level (for example the *Coordinadora de Productores Familiares* [Coordinator of Family Producer Organizations] of MERCOSUR or the *Plateforme des organisations paysannes d’Afrique de l’Ouest et du Centre* [Platform for Producer Organizations of West and Central Africa]). These are recent highly positive developments, particularly in Africa, although they are taking place at different rates in different countries and regions, and in some cases are still emerging.

Defining the role of POs in producer support mechanisms is an important issue for the future of farming families. Institutional restructuring, however, does not take place all by itself. A new sharing of functions between the organized producers and the other partners assumes that there will be new working arrangements, new relationships between the partners, and a new sharing of responsibility and power.

- A *second important issue* is the formation of contractual links between rural producers and other economic and institutional partners. Disengagement of the state brings about gradual disappearance of hierarchical coordination which, in many cases, was provided by government agencies, so *new forms of coordination* must be created. Promotion of farming in a liberalized economy—and sometimes its very survival—is linked to the definition of *new methods of economic and social regulation*, whether sectoral or territorial

methods on a local, regional, or international level. All the participants have an interest in negotiating *institutionalized compromises* to govern their relationships in the long term.

These compromises may involve a large number of areas: setting up a procurement service for inputs or a product marketing mechanism; setting up and managing new financing systems; structuring a production/conversion facility (between sectors); creating and implementing a local development plan; or defining public agricultural policies negotiated between the partners.

The compromises negotiated can be productive and durable only if the various parties concerned derive mutual benefits from them, and believe them to be at least acceptable if not satisfactory.

This is not a given: Producers are not always well disposed, and negotiations often take place in a political and legal context that is unfavorable for the producers.

- A *third issue* is participation of rural dwellers in thinking ahead to the place and role of agriculture in a liberalized and globalized economy. They must participate in defining new agricultural policies, for the longer term, define new technical models, redefine the position of agriculture in the economy and land use planning, define the new functions that agriculture can and must assume in society, and combat marginalization and exclusion. These are the challenges that societies must face. The responses reside in the definition of long-term orientations concerning all the stakeholders, including producers and rural dwellers.

The definition of strategic orientations to articulate the various levels at which farming activities are organized and to make decisions (from the local to the international level) is not

the responsibility of farmers alone, and must involve society as a whole. However, experience in industrial countries (such as France and The Netherlands) has shown the usefulness (and limitations) of a strong alliance between government and farmers to define the agricultural plan, and how it is to be implemented, and to assume jointly the consequences of the inevitable and often painful restructuring of the social plan.

POs can validly participate in this debate only if they are able to map out and negotiate their own strategic plan. If they do not participate, they can only amend the proposals made to them, and they may become the involuntary instruments of strategies that are at odds with their medium and long-term interests.

These three issues (defining the place and role of POs in producer support mechanisms, creating new forms of coordination between partners and new types of regulation, and envisioning the future of farming in a liberalized and globalized economy) all come back to setting up new relationships based on *partnership, collaboration, and negotiation* of contracts and compromises.

Good intentions aside, in practice there are conflicts of interest, and entrenched power structures are jeopardized.

Supporting POs means an often arduous process of consensus and negotiation. The first task is to *reduce the asymmetries* characterizing the relationships between those concerned in many current "partnerships," that often place POs in an unfavorable position relative to other economic and institutional players: inequalities in access to information, expertise (ability to size up a situation and make a proposal), but also asymmetries in the control of material and financial resources, and access to political decisionmakers. The unfavorable position that POs generally occupy in the many relationships they form, and the resulting ease with which the dominant partners can put through their

proposals, are likely to end in deep disappointment for all parties concerned, leading to: erosion of the organization's membership base when the members no longer recognize the objectives adopted by their leaders; opportunistic behaviors; attempts to divert the relationship to the benefit of implicit objectives; mutual loss of confidence; and loss of credibility in contractual relationships.

If they are to participate convincingly in negotiating and setting up contractual decisions, it is essential for POs to be able to boost their "strategic capacities" (ability to make proposals and negotiate) and their technical action capacities.

The next step will be to set up frameworks of collaboration that are transparent and equitable, and ensure that the decisions taken are applied in a negotiated fashion.

Logically, governments should ensure that there is a balance in negotiations between the partners concerned within institutionalized collaborative structures. This may be problematic, however, in certain countries where the government has largely lost control, and may appear to be serving private rather than public interests. Recognition of the important role government has to play reveals the need to pay special attention to political options, and the ways in which government carries out its responsibilities.

Support for POs should therefore aim at fostering their ability to influence political decisionmaking (centrally and within decentralized public organizations). This empowerment of POs may favor government intervention to correct the "failures of the marketplace" (public property, externalities, economies of scale, moral hazards). It can also contribute to company reforms being based on an actual "state of things as they are," debated and validated by the parties concerned, and to their orientations and the

way in which they are implemented through negotiation.

Finally, POs will be better prepared to negotiate with others if they have a long-term plan (technical, economic, social, and cultural) matched to the new challenges confronting family farms, and in which their members recognize each other. Indeed, the role of POs cannot be confined to "managing" situations created by farm policy decisions that are largely taken without their input, and cannot be reduced to making minor adjustments to company reforms with the ups and downs of the business cycle.

Preparation of such a plan by POs means that their strategic abilities and supports must be strengthened:

- To understand the changes that operate in an environment that has become more complex, more unstable, and more competitive;
- To characterize new constraints and identify new opportunities; and
- To build alliances and partnerships.

Developing this plan also assumes that the leaders of POs remain attentive to the expectations of their members, and that they have the power to mobilize them. In some cases, these leaders are strongly pulled by the outside world: the many demands on them and their legitimate desire to have a voice in the discussions and decisions that concern them may stretch the bonds between the top and bottom of the organization. If the organization's problems of internal communication are not solved, it may lose its legitimacy in the eyes of its members. This affects its ability to mobilize and act, and may discredit it in the eyes of the outside world. Methodological and financial support in the running of the organization is therefore essential.

This is all the more necessary because POs invariably stem from the energies of certain individuals who, to begin with, are in a minority in the local society. Their ability to broaden the membership base is linked to the

identification of incentives, and their skill in translating general objectives into operating programs, and implementing them.

In many cases, however, the driving force is a union of groups, masking the diversity of agricultural situations and producer strategies as well as diverging interests, the power relationships, and contradictions within the local society. It is essential, however, for the POs to take these into account when making their choices. This is always a difficult issue for the leaders of POs; although it is not up to the outside agencies to open the discussion, they can help to clarify it.

Conclusions

Producer organizations are today in a building or rebuilding phase. They legitimately claim stakeholder status but usually do not have the means fully to play the role they claim. They do not match the projections the development agencies make of them, and they do not find the support they are entitled to expect from these agencies.

The building of balanced technical, economic, and political partnerships is therefore a central challenge at the present time, and this building is a "process" that cannot be reduced simply to setting up "standardized procedures." It involves a learning curve on both sides (inevitably with some stumbling along the way) and continuing adjustment of the power relationships between the participants.

With their limited human, material, and financial resources, POs cannot meet the technical, economic, social, and political challenges faced by rural dwellers. Alliances and partnerships are necessary, and so are support and assistance in forging these alliances and building these partnerships.

This support calls for substantial investment, the duration and effectiveness of

which will largely depend on the way in which it is provided. There must be clear recognition of POs as stakeholders, and the inclusion of support is essential. The goals and content of this support must also be negotiated with the POs. There is a risk that support aimed at strengthening POs will, in fact, divert them from their own objectives, turning them into instruments of objectives defined elsewhere.

Note

1. "Development" is understood here as setting up a specific mechanism to direct and speed up technical and economic change in family production units and rural societies.

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What Services Should be Supported in the POs and Under What Conditions?

Pierre Lessard

The ultimate objective of strategies for strengthening producer organizations (POs), from an organizational point of view, is to make them capable of analyzing their own needs, formulating their requests in realistic and operational terms, and negotiating with government agencies and others. Once the POs have reached this stage, they are themselves capable of managing the process of adapting their enterprises to whatever needs arise.

Strategies for the organizational strengthening of POs have to be implemented in the following two sets of circumstances:

- Through privatization and economic liberalization policies, governments are refocusing their roles and responsibilities on the establishment and management of a framework that will be favorable to the development of the private sector. POs are now operating in an environment in which new socioeconomic spaces are opening up for them. As a result, some of the responsibilities that historically had been carried out by the state are being transferred to these organizations.
- In a process frequently associated with political democratization, the state is decentralizing its system of governance. The overall strategy is to devolve

responsibility for development to the local level, under the assumption that there will be increased participation by civil society and political and administrative bodies. POs are now, and will increasingly be, called upon to play an active role in the various consultative bodies established at the community and regional level, as well as nationwide.

To meet these new challenges, the POs should increase their capacity to provide the following three services:

- Training their members/producers;
- Designing and implementing strategic planning for their activities; and
- Interfacing with applied research specialists.

Training Members/Producers

Because POs must gradually increase their absorptive capacity to fulfill their future role, any strategy for strengthening these organizations should take advantage of their organizational potential, and develop it. The main parameters that allow for such potential to be developed are as follows (they occur in varying degrees from one organization to

another, and are presented here in order of their importance):

- The presence of a leader who is capable of sharing information, rallying the members to the organization's objectives, inspiring confidence, explaining how the PO operates, and taking decisions that will be shared in by the majority of members;
- A genuine capacity for overcoming crises and difficulties;
- Cohesion among the membership, reflected in: (1) a community of interests (clearly perceived by the members) with respect to financial and, to a lesser degree, organizational matters; and (2) a capacity to mobilize in defense of their interests and to solve problems;
- The existence within the organization of efficient communications (formal and/or informal), so that information circulates freely at all levels;
- An appropriate system of financing, mainly reflected in the organization's level of assets, access to credit, and solvency, as judged by financial institutions;
- Expertise with management functions and tools; a transparent and efficient system of accounting; standard documents or mechanisms for planning the organization's activities; documented records of the proceedings of its management and/or coordinating bodies; written or oral descriptions of the staff's responsibilities that are thoroughly understood by the officers of the organization;
- The existence of a suitable marketing strategy, mainly reflected in up-to-date knowledge of the state of competition and the opportunities offered by the market, in contracts or agreements with clients, in the ability to place products in profitable niche markets, in a thorough knowledge of costs and of net margins, and in specific action for developing new

markets or acquiring shares of existing markets.

The following are the main areas of training that an organization seeking to become more viable should develop and provide for its members/producers, its representatives, and its staff:

- Management, with respect to the organization's finances, administration, and/or its main economic activities;
- Operation of the organization; and
- Methods of production and/or processing.

Strategic Planning

The long-term survival of POs also depends on their ability to analyze their environment in strategic terms. They should, therefore, develop a grasp of their role and position within their subsector, and the status of their competitors, and have a thorough understanding of the markets for their products and services.

Interfacing with Applied Research Specialists

The development, sustainability, and profitability of PO activities depend, among other things, on an ability to find and apply technical solutions to their production and processing problems. POs should establish close relationships with organizations specializing in applied research. Efficient interfacing between the POs and these organizations depends, above all, on the following factors:

- The credibility of the PO with its members and the research specialists;
- The legitimacy of the PO in the eyes of those producers concerned with technical innovations; and

- The capacity of the PO to clearly articulate problems relating to fields of research, for testing solutions, and for implementing changes.

Conclusion

Which of the main services of a PO should be strengthened depends on the organization's *potential and/or real* absorptive capacity to integrate innovations in a sustainable manner, without compromising its medium-term profitability. The issue is professionalism, that is, the process of ceasing to be a "farmer" and becoming a "producer."

In our view, the organizations that show such potential are essentially economic, and have the following characteristics:

- They operate in sectors where demand will be buoyant over the medium term (providing for financial and economic viability);
- They possess a social credibility, based on their recognized legitimacy; and
- They possess a real or potential organizational viability.

These organizations will be better positioned to serve as actors in local development (the concept of "social capital" underlies the role of "actor in local development" that the POs will increasingly be called upon to play) for the following reasons:

- Their participation in local political, administrative, and/or civil bodies concerned with establishing priorities for necessary social and local-community investments;
- Their participation in regional or national political, administrative, and/or civil bodies, making it possible, among other things, to further the process of social and economic change in the communities where they are active;
- Their ability to inject income into their localities; and
- Their capacity for placing their relationships with local government bodies (traditional foci of power), producers, and financial and business interests in the private sector on a professional footing.

Can Producer Organizations be Strengthened by Provision of Funding and Human Resources?

Denis Pesche

Producer Organizations (POs) combine two types of functions:

- *They represent the interests* of a given social group, often in the form of a union. The PO mediates between the farmer group represented and other stakeholders surrounding the producers (government, merchants, service providers, and others); and
- *They provide services* to the PO members. These may be provided by the PO itself or by outside institutions, in which case the PO tries to ensure the quality and relevance of these services to its members.

Usually POs combine these two general functions, but current economic and political developments tend to push the POs into specialization. Those providing outside support sometimes try to separate these two functions, although the main issue seems to be *how better to articulate them* (without the same organization necessarily playing both roles). To protect and serve their presentation interests, farmers are often required to be involved in several organizations that look out for their economic viability as a producer, but also their interests as residents of an area and citizens of a country. The example of the Union régionale des entreprises coopératives

de la zone des savannes de Côte d'Ivoire, URECOS-CI (Regional Union of Cooperatives in the Côte d'Ivoire savannah zone) also shows that an organization essentially structured around an economic activity (cotton production) was also engaged in union-type activities for the benefit of its members by investing in the cotton company.

In general, for either type of PO, the outside agents act by reinforcing technical and strategic capabilities.

Technical capabilities means a set of skills necessary to conduct the activities undertaken by the PO, or to monitor activities entrusted to outside organizations. The technical capabilities of a PO, for example in production and marketing, would require it to manage the conception, conduct, evaluation, and monitoring either internally or with a partner institution. Technical capabilities are usually acquired through classical training programs, but are actually part of the assets of the PO when those who have acquired them are able to put them into practice, and/or have developed exchanges with others doing the same (learning process).

Strategic capabilities means the skills that enable a PO to define its strategy, taking into account its immediate and remote environment, the aspirations of its members, and the various constraints and opportunities

it identifies. This type of ability is rarely acquired by classical training, but rather through travel, personal contacts, and specific experiences. These strategic abilities are intimately entwined with the personalities of the PO leaders, and their ability to maintain a common focus and vision within the PO, mold its identity, and mobilize the human resources needed for its activities. It also includes the ability to organize, and make the organization run efficiently, with outside help ranging from standard approaches that favor classical organizational models (association/cooperation) to more complex approaches that offer leaders the tools to run their organization: general management skills, human resources management, and strategic development.

Both sets of capabilities are important, and are usually combined within one PO. The distinction is made simply to pinpoint the type of outside support offered.

Before looking at the question of how POs should be supported and strengthened by provision of human and funding resources, it is necessary to make these concepts clear, not forgetting the fundamental question: *who can support POs?* There is no standard answer, but the legitimacy of outside support may be greater in the area of strengthening the technical capabilities than strategic capabilities, which are more difficult to tackle. Increasing the technical abilities of a PO requires the outside agent to have recognized types of expertise. It requires not only recognized expertise and professional experience, but also ethics (confidentiality and respect), and a relationship of trust that *current aid mechanisms do not* always encourage: for example, the bidding procedures force operators to compete for markets, to the detriment of reflections on the ethics of intervention to strengthen social movements.

How Are POs to be Supported?

Strengthening Technical Capabilities

This is often done as part of typical rural development activities, generally consisting of education in literacy and the well-known areas of accounting and basic activities management. There are various participants (typical project, NGO, government department) and the mechanisms chosen may vary: instruction in a center, on-site training, producer exchanges, and consulting. The weaknesses most often noted are that the technical abilities acquired are often difficult to maintain or develop within the PO. They become the pretext for new invitations to bid on training programs that tend to perpetuate the institutional structure of outside agents. They often reveal the difficulties these agents have in understanding the actual expectations of the PO, developing follow-up, and adapting the instructional content and methods to the rapid changes under way in rural societies of developing countries. It is probably necessary to switch the relationship between the PO and the supporting institution from “supporter-supported” (donor-receiver), to a kind of follow-through in which the outside institution makes the most of the PO’s potential and know-how.

The experience of the FONGS training program in Senegal (identification of knowledge within the POs and exchange and visiting programs) shows the importance of human resources within the PO, often overlooked by outside organizations.

Innovations in strengthening technical capabilities appear linked to the type of *institutional mechanism* set up, and the *methods* used than to the content itself:

In Mali, two programs involving the Institut de recherches et d’application de méthodes de développement, IRAM (Institute for Research and Implementation of Development Methods) set up independent service centers controlled by the producers,

which provided quality services in accounting, management consulting, and legal and financial advice (support in reconciling PO accounts). The approach adopted was to set up progressive technical and financial conditions for operating service centers in the long term: specific expertise brought in under contract by the POs, and searches for financial partnerships with banking institutions and other operators involved locally (see earlier).

Better than any training program, the learning processes and scenarios also ensure that the PO has a true grasp of what it has learned:

In Zambia, CLUSA strengthened the technical abilities of POs by running a crop year (preparation for the year, inputs, credit, and marketing). Through progressive involvement in the credit management and inputs distribution committees (Banking Committees), the producers gradually took on operating responsibilities until they became reliable participants in the product sectors concerned (sunflower, soy, peppers, sorghum) destined for most export markets (South Africa). The producers gradually tried, assisted by the CLUSA team, negotiating with their technical partners (vendors and credit institutions) and trading partners (purchasers of agricultural products (see earlier).

Strengthening Strategic Capabilities

The strategic capabilities of a PO are based on two elements: human resources and funding.

Human resources. The most important groups are the *members and leaders of the PO*. Basic training of PO members is recognized as essential, but it is often too expensive for the PO. Increased education in rural areas and reforms in farmer education are undoubtedly key areas for the future of

the PO. There is a great deal of discussion about training farmer leaders, monitoring strategic functions, and planning, but concrete actions are few and far between. This is the central issue of the relevance of outside support in this area, which all too often comes down to contracting with a foreign organization to train producer leaders. The major goal, however, is to enable the PO to design its own training programs, and negotiate their implementation with foreign donors or, in certain cases, implement them themselves. As well as standard training programs, farmer exchanges and participation in outside seminars are learning opportunities for leaders.

Once it reaches a certain volume of activity, the PO also needs to *recruit personnel* or *call on ad hoc experts*. Recruiting PO personnel helps agricultural leaders boost their human resource management capabilities, an area in which typical support organizations are still deficient. The need to offer sufficient salaries to these PO managers has been emphasized. Using specific expertise in strategic areas (knowledge of markets, rural financing mechanisms, operation of aid agencies) enables POs to improve their negotiating positions with the entities they meet regularly (government, agroindustrial companies, and exporters). Probably more than for technical capabilities, success in this type of consulting is based on real learning and actual scenarios. Foreign expertise should also be *truly independent*, which is not often possible with the typical structure in which the donors choose the experts provided to the PO. The POs must be able to decide which studies they wish to conduct, and place them with persons they select.

The aid agencies have an important responsibility in this area of reinforcing strategic capabilities: in many developing countries, aid agencies are the key players in the definition and implementation of agricultural policy. This responsibility does

not necessarily mean that they have to engage in direct action to support POs. They should also foster an environment conducive to development of strategic capabilities on the part of the PO. Only when the PO has a handle on strategic capabilities can it take its place in a newly forming civil society, and meet the aspirations of the groups in that society through political channels.

Because the government is usually the main voice for a PO that has reached a certain size, the government should probably not be the entity that strengthens the strategic capabilities of the PO. The mechanisms in place should guarantee the independence, quality, and minimum confidentiality required for this type of support. Do the typical aid tools match this challenge? The rigidity of aid procedures, usually subject to public aid accountability as far as public opinion in donor countries is concerned, runs counter to the need for flexibility and adaptability in reinforcing strategic capabilities. There are a few exceptions: Swiss officials monitored a number of farmer movements over a long period in western and central Africa. Other agencies such as the French Development Agency (AFD), the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the World Bank are experimenting with forms of direct support to POs. It remains to be seen whether these agencies' procedures and tools are able to adapt to the requirements of flexibility and reactivity called for by direct partnership with an organization.

In Côte d'Ivoire, French cooperation supports ANOPACI (Association nationale des organisations professionnelles agricoles de Côte d'Ivoire—National Association of Côte d'Ivoire Professional Agricultural Organizations), which is made up of ten national farmer federations. It provides ANOPACI with the means to organize training programs and mobilize expertise, without specifying in advance the precise content of the services. This support enables the association to prepare more effectively for the

negotiations and discussions it will have to conduct with government representatives. ANOPACI is progressively becoming a major player in the Ivorian agricultural context. The main donors (European Union, World Bank, and AFD) have recognized the important role of an association such as ANOPACI to serve the interests of farmers in the currently unsettled context of the agricultural sector.

Funding. Many participants recognized the difficulty POs have to mobilize internal financial resources. Member dues usually bring in little money, and profits from the PO's economic activity are limited due to increased market competition. Outside funding from aid agencies is often a major portion of a PO's financial base, but this raises fundamental questions about the durability of the situation and its ambiguous nature. Can a PO that is heavily dependent on outside funding legitimately claim to be independent? Alternatives are increasingly being sought by setting up mechanisms to *mobilize negotiated sources stemming from agricultural activities*. Funding from fees charged to the sectors or on lending (STABEX type) are resources over which the PO can legitimately claim control and, in some cases, use directly to fund its activities. This type of mechanism poses the more general question of funding agriculture, and the position that farmer representatives should occupy in this area.

This is the case, for example, for poultry farming funds mobilized in Côte d'Ivoire through agreements between the producers and other participants (processors and feed suppliers). Inter-sector frameworks need to be set up, and their durability depends largely on the will of government authorities. It is often the results of lobbying that indirectly enable this very lobbying activity to be financed.

Analyses calling for self-financing of the PO do not appear to be realistic. The pragmatic approach would be to try to identify the participants truly concerned with

the broadening of PO capabilities, then create the means and have the political will to implement the financing mechanisms that would sustain POs on an ongoing basis.

In Mali, the Niono service center is seeking to negotiate a long-term loan with the Agriculture Bank to strengthen the managerial abilities of the groups, thereby enhancing their capacity to repay loans and take out others.

Issues and Avenues for the Future

Importance of Information. The need for strategic information for POs has been mentioned. Gathering and processing this information (“digesting” it) calls for high-quality personnel serving the PO. Independence of information is just as important: often it is the stakeholders with the money that have the power (for example, cotton companies would like to control the information flow to producers).

The experience of the Réseau agriculture paysanne et modernisation/Afrique, APM (Small-Scale Agriculture and Modernization Network, Africa) in this area is of interest. Through its members in the field and the expertise it is able to mobilize, this network provides cotton-producing POs with strategic information, and assists them in analyzing this information so that they can set up resources to strengthen their capabilities and negotiate in their best interests. The international nature of this network also enables PO leaders to sidestep face-to-face negotiations with their direct spokespeople, widen their references, and diversify their alliances with other POs—all ingredients for a lasting improvement in strategic capabilities.

Not Leaving Out Government. The political will of the government is crucial. It is difficult to imagine how POs can increase their technical and strategic capabilities in the long term without at least some government backing. Even if this constraint is temporarily

removed by the power of certain aid agencies, long-term development of a viable farmers’ movement requires a sympathetic government, ready to share some of its prerogatives in the design and implementation of public policy for rural areas. The government is also the guarantor of *regulatory and legal aspects*: it is the government’s job to work out favorable frameworks that are not copies of foreign models. Finally, macroeconomic and fiscal policy, driven by finance ministries, has a direct effect on the development of farming and POs.

There is also a growing involvement of private companies in developing country farming (suppliers of inputs, and purchasers and processors of farming products), occasionally being the dominant partner in their relationship with POs. In this area as well, governments need to *establish the rules of the game*, and to balance power relationships between POs and private companies.

Diversifying Partnerships. An often-observed trend is a head-to-head relationship between a PO and a support organization or NGO, a type of two-way partnership that is often unbalanced. Experience has shown the diversity of multiple partnerships between a PO and various organizations (FONGS and CNCR in Senegal). This diversification represents an opportunity for the PO to create what one might call an “owner-partner” relationship.

Supporting POs While Giving Them Space. Aid agencies and support organizations often combine direct support of POs with monitoring so that the POs can have space to negotiate and participate in decisions affecting them. Aid agencies, primarily the World Bank, have a special responsibility here. Because they talk to government authorities, they can suggest that the PO be taken into account when farming,

macroeconomic, and fiscal policies that directly impact PO activities are being shaped.

Decentralization is one of the components of change in the political landscape of African countries. This process, which varies widely from one country to another, usually contributes to the eventual introduction of new players in the local political game, and creation of new kinds of political and financial power. The question of linkages between the PO and local politicians may affect the mechanisms by which the PO's capabilities become reinforced: local financing opportunities and the possibility of holding political office at the local level increase the strategic capabilities of agricultural leaders.

In Madagascar, the Southwest Project is a good example of combining actions aimed at directly strengthening the PO's capabilities (technical capabilities and representation through the Maison du Paysan), and of actions designed to foster local dialogue and consensus among government authorities, private operators, and others involved in the rural issues (participation in the Regional Development Committee). The experience of this project shows that achieving dialogue and consensus is not easy, and requires experience by all concerned.

Outside pressures to form nationwide producer organizations tend to delay the already slow process of PO strengthening. Pulled in several directions, courted by some and ignored or denigrated by others, nationwide POs have to expend considerable energies learning the complex interplay of multiple dialogue frameworks, and other PO reinforcement programs set up by aid agencies, without consultation among themselves. Like the sometimes destructive effects of aid with respect to institutions (see

studies by the Club du Sahel), these tugs-of-war can weaken painfully acquired capacities. Aid agencies have a heavy responsibility in this area, and an ethical framework could be established for outside intervention in PO strengthening.

One of the immediate challenges is to allow the PO to invest in negotiating and decisionmaking activities without interfering with its operations, and agreeing to relinquish control of the financial and human resources channeled to POs. This mindset is the opposite of the present dominant culture in aid agencies, which tends to emphasize procedures to control financial and human resources made available to developing countries in general and to POs in particular.

What Capabilities Should be Reinforced?

Agricultural leaders at this workshop very properly emphasized that the strengthening of capabilities should not be a one-way street. The point is not only to bring POs up to the level of aid agencies, but also to allow aid agencies to become better listeners and understand the strengths of POs and the constraints under which they operate.

Aid agencies and support organizations must improve their abilities to:

- Listen and understand economic and social developments in a rural setting;
- Respect the PO's own rhythms, which do not necessarily match the bookkeeping rhythms of aid agencies. This requires innovations in funding procedures and greater flexibility in controls, with a lighter hand on the reins; and
- Dialogue and coordination—although declarations of intent abound, most of the time everyone is trying to coordinate everyone else.

Partnerships between Producer Organizations and Research and Extension Institutions

Jean Zoundi, Marie-Hélène Collion, and Henri Hocde

Since the 1980s, many countries have become aware that, since agricultural producers are the beneficiaries of technology, they must be more effectively involved in generating and disseminating it. Research and extension institutions have changed the way they approach and link up with producers, and the institutions themselves have changed under pressure from increasingly well-organized producers. In some instances, the producers have organized themselves to fill the void left by ineffectual research and extension institutions. Financing mechanisms have also changed as a result of steps taken by stakeholders, mainly donors, but also by governments and organized producers. The circumstances conducive to such change are discussed, as is the extent to which effective partnerships can survive in times of change.

Changes by Research and Extension Institutions

Many national research and extension systems have introduced institutional mechanisms and intervention techniques to encourage greater participation by producers. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, measures introduced to promote the

participation of the primary beneficiaries include:

- Changes in intervention techniques to encourage greater producer participation, particularly through: (1) programs focusing on research and development or on production systems research; and (2) the introduction of participatory diagnostic methods in extension work to identify producers' real needs in the area of advisory support;
- Measures that make it easier for beneficiaries to be consulted on a regular basis and to participate in the design of research and extension programs. Examples include: (1) efforts to decentralize research so that it more accurately reflects user needs; (2) ways to encourage periodic consultation between researchers, extension agents, and producers (for example, regional technical committees, regional steering committees, research and extension liaison committees, and user committees, depending on the country); and
- Incentives to encourage researchers to listen to producers and their organizations and respond promptly to their needs. These include introducing criteria for evaluating and promoting researchers that take into account the

fact that research must be in the service of development.

In Central and South America, the same concern has been evident for some 20 years, and similar methodologies have been tried—via the systems approach—to involve producers. In 1974, 80 percent of the researchers at Guatemala's Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology (Instituto de Ciencia y Tecnología Agrícola—ICTA), an institution specializing in rural research, were using the systems approach in their work with farmers. The Institute had become famous throughout the region for its expertise. ICTA established its own training school, CAPA, to teach its researchers the systems approach. Honduras followed suit for a number of years, as did Costa Rica. Costa Rica was able to sustain a measure of continuity in its efforts to improve links between its research and extension institutions. Many projects and programs applied the process to actual practice: PIPA (a project to increase agricultural productivity), the INVEX program (research and extension activities), the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG)-FAO program (on watersheds and extension efforts), and the MAG-PRIAG program (to improve agronomic research). The Tropical Agricultural Research and Training Center (Centro de agronomía tropical para la investigación y la enseñanza—CATIE) was a prominent advocate of the production systems approach. The International Center for Maize and Wheat Improvement (Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz y Trigo—CIMMYT) was a key promoter of the approach and trained many of the region's researchers, extension agents, economists, and trainers in the method. Several (though too few) universities included the approach in their curricula.

Restructuring of Institutions to Make Them Accountable

At the same time that research and extension institutions were shifting their approach, a new dynamic was emerging within producer organizations (POs), which are the new stakeholders. This dynamic reflected a new trend toward government disengagement and the assumption by POs of responsibility for certain functions. In many countries, this led to the establishment of POs of various sizes. Once organized, producers can become the spokespersons for research and extension services, in part because they represent an organized force and in part because of the financial and social impact they have on institutions.

Spurred on by organized producers at a time when government disengagement was the order of the day, institutions restructured themselves and new financing mechanisms were introduced. The objective was to involve producers in managing institutions and formulating research and extension agenda, and to hold research and extension institutions accountable to their beneficiaries for their results. Developments in this area included: (1) the status of institutions being changed from that of a public entity to a public/private entity; (2) research funds being established that separated research financing from its actual implementation; and (3) financing made available directly at the PO level.

Shift of Institutions Toward Public/Private Status

In sub-Saharan Africa, the status of some research and extension institutions evolved into companies wherein the state retained a majority or minority share of the equity, a step that enabled the institutions to include users on their executive boards. In extension,

one example of this is Senegal's National Agricultural and Rural Advisory Council (Agence nationale de conseil agricole et rural), 49 percent of which is owned by private entities (including POs) and the local community. Another example is Côte d'Ivoire's National Agency for Rural Development (Agence nationale de développement rural—ANADER), 65 percent of which is held by producers. In research, examples are Côte d'Ivoire's National Center for Agronomic Research (Centre national de la recherche agronomique—CNRA) in which producers hold 60 percent of the equity, and Togo's Institute of Agronomic Research (Institut togolais de recherche agronomique—ITRA) in which producers hold a 40 percent interest.

Latin American institutions have also evolved, the most striking example being the National Institute of Agronomic Research (INIA) in Uruguay. In 1990, that institute, which had until then been a public entity, became a semiprivate organization in which producers hold 50 percent of the institute's equity, and finance 50 percent of operating costs via taxes and other levies. The State pays the remaining costs.

It should be kept in mind that these changes are possible where taxes and other levies can be used to finance research, as in Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, or Uruguay. In Senegal, such mechanisms have yet to be introduced. Where such levies on agricultural production are not possible, these institutional changes are probably not feasible.

The fact that direct users of research findings are in the majority on executive boards enables them to ensure that research and extension work meet their needs through an adequate program budget, which is voted on by the executive board. Once these institutions are no longer public entities, personnel management arrangements that encourage a results-oriented and client-oriented culture that rewards top performance can be more easily introduced.

The shift in attitude on the part of INIA researchers in Uruguay provides a striking example in this regard. Until 1990, civil service management arrangements prevailed in INIA, and researchers were not accountable to producers. Since 1990, the researchers have become more attentive and responsive to producers' needs. Producers vote on a program budget covering specific activities, and the researchers report to them at the next session of the Executive Board.

Separating Research Financing from Implementation

Various types of research funds or foundations have been established in Latin America in particular, and to a lesser extent in Asia. They are now starting to develop in sub-Saharan Africa. The principle underlying their operations is that the financing of research should be separate from the actual performance of the research. The aims of these funds vary, with the primary goal being to target financing more precisely to meet specific objectives. This is not the case when funds are provided directly to research institutions. Another goal is to promote collaboration among all national entities involved in research, thereby making optimum use of the country's human and physical resources. Finally, the funds improve the quality of research by introducing more rigorous procedures for selecting research topics.

To achieve a better fit between supply and demand, these funds require researchers to satisfy demand. The process is as follows: bids are invited for a certain number of research topics. Research teams respond to the invitation by submitting research proposals selected by a committee on the basis of scientific merit. Final approval is then given by a management committee (whose membership includes users), which reviews proposals preselected by the scientific

committee. The funds bring users into the process at an early point when research topics are competing, or later, during final selection of the proposals to be funded.

There are many such research funds or foundations. In Latin America, for example, there are: the Foundation for Agricultural Research (FIA) in Chile; Brazil's PRODETAB (Project to Support the Development of Agricultural Technology); the Agricultural Technology Fund (FPTA) in Uruguay; and the Competitive Fund in Ecuador. In Africa, there is Kenya's Agricultural Research Fund, and in Asia, Indonesia's Competitive Fund.

Research and Extension Contracted Out by POs

There are two funding mechanisms for POs to contract out research and extension: activities are financed either by research or extension funds for users, or with the POs' own resources.

Research funds for users. Donors often set up these funds as a way to ensure that the research or extension carried out reflects actual demand. These funds allow producer organizations to pay to have research done on topics that they themselves have selected. They differ from the above-mentioned funds in that the users initiate the funding process. Mali's User Research Fund (*Fonds de recherche des utilisateurs*), managed by the National Agronomic Research Committee (*Comité National de la recherche agronomique*), is one example. Venezuela has a fund to which users can apply to recruit agricultural experts to assist with extension activities. The users are either officially recognized POs or interest groups whose members are producers or rural communities.

Colombia's National Agricultural Technology Transfer Program (PRONATTA) which focuses on research and development

and technology transfer is well positioned to meet user demand. Funding can be initiated either when researchers submit research proposals, or—more commonly—when users prepare technical and financial requests seeking support for services (such as training, extension activities, or research). They submit them to PRONATTA, which then invites bids. The users can be POs, rural communities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or private entities. In each region, teams of consultants hired by PRONATTA preselect a number of projects. The list of preselected projects is then submitted for final approval to a national selection committee. Regional dialogue forums (called "*nodos*") provide a venue in which all the participants in development and stakeholders can be kept informed. The system makes it possible to separate project preparation (carried out by the user), project selection (the task of PRONATTA), and implementation (handled by a service supplier or under a tripartite contract.)

Financing operations managed directly by POs. In this type of operation, producers contract for research or extension services directly, using either their own funds or funds made available to them by donors. The first case involves POs with sufficient income to finance research activities themselves, such as the National Federation of Coffee Growers in Colombia, a similar organization for tea growers in Kenya, or Morocco's Citrus Growers Cooperative.

Increasingly, however, many donors provide funds directly to POs, enabling them to arrange for research in areas of interest to the producers. An example in Africa is the Fouta-Djalon Farmers' Federation (*Fédération des Paysans du Fouta-Djalon*) in Guinea, which receives funds from the Agence française de développement (AFD), and then uses them in part to conduct research. In Latin America, El Ceibo (a federation of cocoa-producing

cooperatives) has received substantial funding from donors, and particularly from the Swiss Development Agency (Coopération Suisse pour le développement) for technological development. The federation has even established its own research and advisory support unit (Coopeagro).

This mechanism resembles the first one, except that in this case the PO handles the financing arrangements, whereas in the first case the fund is managed by an independent agency (as in Mali, where the National Agronomic Research Committee manages the fund).

Under another scenario, collaboration between a PO and a research organization may be financed not by providing funds directly to the PO, but instead by an NGO or under a project already providing assistance to the PO. Examples include cooperation between the Institute of Agronomic Research in Guinea (Institut de recherche agronomique de guinée) and the Coffee Growers' Federation of Guinea (Fédération des planteurs de café), which is financed by AFD; cooperation between the Federation of Unions of NAAM Groups (Fédération des unions des groupements NAAM) in Burkina Faso, and the Institute for the Environment and Agricultural Research (Institut de l'environnement et de recherches agricoles), which is financed by NGOs and by the federation itself.

Initiatives Undertaken by POs

In some situations, and particularly in Central America, research and extension institutions can no longer meet the needs of producers. Small farmers—who are concerned with their local environment and often face crises—prefer to maximize their own resources within a technology-intensive structure requiring few external inputs. They do not get much recognition from the research

establishment, for several reasons. First, the accumulated experience of these institutions is based largely on systems requiring heavy inputs. Furthermore, the structure of research institutions, their organizational setup, and the fact that their researchers have little training in the complexities of relationships with users, pose serious obstacles to the establishment of a genuine partnership. Finally, the current shortage of available financing and the resulting exodus of researchers have left institutions with insufficient resources to redirect their research efforts to meet producers' needs. This applies to most technical areas (for example, integrated pest and disease control, soil conservation, soil fertility, and diversification).

Faced with unresponsive research institutions, some groups of farmers have begun to experiment. They have demonstrated that even under difficult conditions (such as mountainous or marginal areas), they can begin to work out solutions adapted to their circumstances, crops, and management techniques. These farmers are engaged in a wide variety of experiments, and have come up with results directly applicable to their lands. Many of these experiments have to do with natural resource management, as well as with soil fertility management, the introduction of new varieties, diversification, or integrated pest and disease control. The diversity of their results, which are finely tuned to their situations, stands in contrast to the routine responses that researchers tend to offer. Farmers are gaining experience and are becoming more professional.

In addition to having generated a new dynamic and, indeed, a new movement, these farmers are proving that research can be conducted in different ways and that, far from being merely users of information, farmers can also generate information and disseminate it effectively. Structured exchanges between these farmer-

experimenters from different countries, or different regions within the same country, are becoming increasingly important in Central America. Such exchanges, which reflect clearly defined strategies, are being included in action plans, and focus on specific objectives, are proving their worth. In some situations, these groups of farmer-experimenters can serve as the privileged partners of farmers' organizations in their dealings with research institutions.

Lessons Learned

- *What sorts of environments are conducive to these changes?*
- *To what extent will these changes enable effective partnerships to be established among POs, research institutions, and extension agencies?*

Institutional Environment

A prerequisite for institutional reorganization is the withdrawal of the State from such activities, as is the involvement of the private sector and civil society in the formulation of agricultural policy. Another essential factor is the willingness of governments to create a legislative framework favorable to the emergence and development of POs. In some countries, where the state has played an active role in creating a legislative and legal framework conducive to strong POs, it has also helped create POs that lack credibility or legitimacy because they have been imposed from above. In other instances, the state has sought—for purely political reasons—to stifle any move toward creating POs. The state on occasion has co-opted those that do exist, while in still other cases—and consistent with its policy of withdrawing from this area—it has failed to empower these new groups, indulging in what some POs call “abdication” of responsibility. Although such situations by

no means provide a sound foundation for establishing partnerships between POs and other groups (particularly the research and extension institutions), this is the reality that has to be faced in many countries.

At the institutional level, agencies must show a real commitment to decentralization if they are to establish close links with users. Similarly, research policy must be directed toward support for development, as demonstrated in the use of incentives in the evaluation and promotion of researchers, the use of consultation mechanisms for furthering the dialogue with POs, and the adoption of participatory ways of developing technology.

As long as the institutions responsible for research and extension continue to be government controlled, it will be difficult to find ways to make research organizations accountable to users for the results they produce. In the civil service, for example, it is difficult to introduce personnel management procedures that take proper account of results achieved, and the quality of service provided to clients. Finally, the chronic financial instability of research institutions hinders the establishment of links with POs, as experience in Central America shows.

Producer Organizations

The key factor that enables institutional change to lead to effective partnerships is the existence of farmers' organizations that are well structured and empowered, that offer real prospects to their members, and are capable of negotiating with other partners. In many cases, top organizations lack legitimacy and are not always representative of grassroots POs, and therefore may not have any credibility among the research and extension institutions. These organizations must also be capable of diagnosing the constraints affecting them, and be able to define their objectives and priorities and *negotiate* with the research and extension

institutions for the services they need. It is essential for POs to develop this organizational and technical capacity if they are to establish partnerships, act as effective members of executive boards, if financing mechanisms (for example, Mali's "user funds" or the Colombian PRONATTA) are to come into operation, or if donors are to be able to offer financing directly to the POs. In fact, such financing will never materialize unless the POs are capable of articulating their needs.

There is a definite relationship between the strength of POs and the presence of farmer representatives who possess leadership qualities and who have a vision for the members of their organization. Strong POs also depend on the creation of an enabling environment by the state which, even as it withdraws from this arena, must provide specific support measures to help operators from civil society play their new role. Finally, the other participants (NGOs and projects) must play their part by facilitating these developments and providing support.

Strong POs are the result of effective training in all its guises. Training is therefore an essential ingredient in successful partnerships with research and extension institutions.

Funds as Mechanisms for Promoting Services On Demand

The degree to which providing research financing by way of funds encourages researchers to be more responsive to producers depends on: (1) the way in which the research topics that are to be subject to bidding processes are selected; (2) the degree of autonomy existing between the governing bodies and the research institutions; (3) the effective participation by users in the governing bodies and the independence of those bodies compared with the research institutions. This is an essential factor in

ensuring that the wishes of users prevail. Some of these funds (such as the Indonesian Research Fund) present their countries' strategic agricultural research plans as research topics for bid, whereas others are controlled by research specialists and still managed by the research institutions themselves. Kenya Research Fund, for example, is managed by KARI (the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute), and PRODETAB is managed by EMBRAPA (Brazil).

Membership of a fund's governing body is also a key factor. If it is simply a scientific commission that makes decisions on the basis of scientific criteria, in the absence of a management committee that might include user representatives, the proposals that receive financing may be far from satisfying the wishes of users. In other cases, users may be underrepresented—or inadequately represented—on management committees. The membership of governing bodies, the way they operate, and their procedures for identifying topics for bidding will largely determine whether a fund will be an instrument that enables users to direct resources toward their own priorities. Colombia's PRONATTA is one of the best examples of a fund that involves users in the identification of research topics and the selection of proposals.

Areas for Further Study

The following issues require further study:

- *POs possessing a real capacity to establish partnerships with research and extension institutions.* Real partnerships can exist only when they involve POs that are fully capable of maintaining a dialogue with other partners. The POs' ability to articulate their wishes, conduct negotiations, and mobilize the resources necessary to establish partnerships depends directly on the strengthening of their skills. The role

of training needs to be clarified, and the responsibilities of state and other partners need to be articulated.

- *Forms of institutional reorganization to incorporate the wishes of POs into research and extension.* What can be done to ensure that researchers and extension agents are accountable to producers for the results they produce? Should institutions be steered toward establishing joint public- and private-sector organizations, as in Côte d'Ivoire and Uruguay? What can be done in those situations where it is not possible to call upon producers to finance research through taxes or parafiscal levies, or in which those taxes and levies cover only some crops?
 - *Can the use of research funds similar to PRONATTA (Colombia) or the Users' Research Fund (Mali) provide an alternative to the appropriation of research institutions by POs?* This arrangement would enable the organizations to contract for research and extension services that meet their own specific needs. If the answer is yes, what recommendations at the institutional level can be made regarding the establishment of such funds, the membership of the governing bodies, the selection criteria and procedures applicable to projects, and training for the POs?
 - *If the research establishment is unresponsive to the wishes of POs, and the emergence of experimenters among the farmers, should we help POs to strengthen their own research capacity and disseminate their findings?* How reliable and replicable are findings obtained in this way, and how efficient is such research?
- When producers have gone as far as they can in this area, how can they be helped—in their particular locations—to contact the most effective research service? Would they be able to use the “globalization” of research to their best advantage, establishing partnerships that transcend strictly national boundaries?
- The *first study* concerns the partnership between the Fouta-Djalon Farmers' Federation (*Fédération des Paysans du Fouta-Djalon: FPF*) and the Institute of Agronomic Research of Guinea (*Institut de Recherche Agronomique de Guinée: IRAG*). It provides an example of changes made by research and extension services in response to specific requests from a PO that possesses a genuine capacity for analyzing constraints and identifying solutions, is capable of mobilizing its members to produce profitable crops, and is in full control of conditions throughout the entire production process.
 - The *second study*, at the local level, is based on experiences of a recently formed producer association in southern Costa Rica. It shows the interaction between researchers and producers, which leads the PO to develop its own capacity to conduct research and negotiate with the various services in its locality. It therefore illustrates one of the possible ways in which a PO can cooperate with research specialists.
 - The *third study*, at the national level, concerns farmer-to-farmer relations in Nicaragua. It presents a very different situation, one in which there is a dearth of research support, so that the farmers are obliged to devise their own solutions.

Donors and Farmer Organizations: Lessons Learned from Ongoing Experience in the Sahel

Serge Snrech

The lessons learned from the various forms of collaboration that the Club du Sahel has maintained with farmers' movements in that region since the late 1980s are presented. The situation in the Sahel differs from that of the rest of Africa because: there is a massive volume of foreign aid (20 percent of GDP on average in the region); uncertain climatic conditions limit agricultural potential, and encourage rural people to pursue a high degree of economic diversification; and there is a relatively good level of peace and stability compared to the rest of the continent, which allows for more medium- and long-term planning. However, while keeping in mind these specific characteristics of the region, we feel that the lessons and questions that emerge from the Sahelian experience are to a large extent applicable to the whole of Africa.

Providing the Tools and the Opportunity to Use Them

The priority is not so much to develop support projects for producer organizations (POs) but to make room for POs within

projects and, especially, to support the POs' own projects. POs forge their identity essentially by doing, that is, in practical successes and failures in the field. An effort therefore is required to increase the opportunities for rural organizations at various levels to assume responsibility, and to give them the means to prepare for, and draw conclusions from, this practice while bearing full responsibility for operations. In this sense, the development of POs is less a matter of specific projects than an entirely different approach to interventions in the rural area.

Among the interventions that develop the capacities of POs, there are those programs specifically intended to strengthen POs and that emphasize:

- The acquisition of information;
- The acquisition of internal management methods (for example, outreach and communication techniques); and
- The acquisition of external management methods (for example, lobbying techniques).

The most essential change, however, needs to occur in the functioning of rural support projects generally. Wherever possible and desired by the POs (that is,

without pressure for too-rapid change), the following should occur:

- POs at various levels should be exposed to the practice of making responsible choices and then of managing the implementation of the choices made;
- POs should be able to choose the type of support they receive, as well as its pace and mode of intervention;
- POs should be subject to impartial monitoring and evaluation, the results of which should be widely disseminated so that leaders and members can evaluate their results and the extent of the progress made; and
- Certain discussions should be open to nonmember POs, to encourage them to get to know each other, share experiences, and thereby develop their critical faculties.

How can POs be encouraged to assume greater responsibility? Possibilities include: common donor funds; an “aid menu” from which POs can choose the services they want; continuously available technical assistance that POs could use to mobilize ad hoc assistance at their own convenience.

How can farmers' movements obtain a margin of latitude to organize their own discussion forums to which they could invite other participants in the development effort?

Establishing A Flexible Market in Rural Development Services

There is some confusion about the expression “producer organization,” since the term covers simultaneously:

- Organizations that are “functional” in nature, ones that provide certain services to their members. Most field-level POs are of this type;
- Organizations that are like unions, where membership is voluntary, and that propose to defend the interests of certain socio-professional groups; and
- Organizations characterized by “democratic representation,” along the lines of chambers of agriculture, that propose to represent all producers.

In addition, the term “PO” is not yet clearly differentiated from the term “NGO” (nongovernmental organization), which embraces a certain number of the functions mentioned, as well as many others.

Governments and development agencies can either help clarify these different mandates, or they can contribute to the confusion. To allow for a gradual shaking out of the various tasks assumed by POs, and to achieve optimal development effectiveness, there is a need to create conditions conducive to a “market for rural services,” wherein various service providers can be freely chosen on the basis of value for money (in the broader sense of that concept). In our opinion, the creation of such a “space” or opportunity would require, among other things, the following:

- A fairly explicit regulatory framework, specifying mandates and capacities of the various kinds of groups (for example, economic interest groups, village groups, unions, chambers of agriculture, and group federations), and identify at the same time the areas of exclusive competence as well as the arenas in which competition could occur;
- Disseminating information on the activities and management of the POs, and a greater effort made to inform members and to account for PO leaders' activities than now occurs in the typical *tête à tête* between leaders and donors;
- A gradual harmonization, by means of common specifications, of the condition attached to financial support of POs, to avoid scrambles for the most generous donor taking precedence over the quest for effectiveness;
- Pluralism and reasonable competition between POs and other service

providers, to avoid succumbing to the “all PO, all the time” mentality; and

- Encouragement for NGOs to define themselves positively based on the kinds of services they provide (training, research, technical or financial intermediary, militant advocacy), to limit their tendency to speak for the POs.

How can we introduce the notions of efficiency and value for money into the development of POs, keeping in mind that their institutional and political function is sometimes difficult to quantify?

Helping POs to Find Their Place

Producer organizations are emerging and developing in an environment that is fluid in several ways:

- Economically, due to liberalization, urbanization, agriculture’s reduced share in GDP, and the parallel rise of agribusiness;
- Institutionally, with the redefinition of the role of government in the wake of structural adjustment, and the decentralization process underway in many countries; and
- Agriculturally, given the evolution of cropping practices, land tenure arrangements, and production techniques, the emergence of a salaried agricultural workforce, and growing social stratification. If one accepts as a given that POs and the farmers’ movement need a long time to structure themselves, then it is important to help POs improve their ability to identify the issues and people who will be crucial over the medium term, and to position themselves in relation to those players, and not just in relation to temporary crises. Those crucial issues and participants include the following:

In the field, absorbing the implications of decentralization:

Many field-level POs have established themselves by serving as a backup for their government’s deficient economic and social services. These same shortcomings have spurred a strong move toward decentralization, supported by international aid. What impact should the creation of local collectives, which are now seen as the legitimate dispensers of grassroots public services, have on the goals of POs and the ways in which they are supported?

At every level, integrating the newly diverse world of producers: This would include poor farmers, well-off farmers, new farmers, multi-tasking farmers, and farmers committed to the various production stream approaches. This new scenario is being superimposed upon the old divisions (the ones between ethnic groups, farmers, and herders), and we need to better understand the impact that the same economic and technical measures can have on these different groups. Do these diverse groups of producers have common interests, and how should their conflicting interests be reconciled?

At the national level, helping governments and administration representatives to express their own vision of the transformation now underway: Paradoxically, the expression of a *farmer’s* vision of development is rendered more difficult by the absence of a *public* vision of development articulated by a government aware of the strategic aspects. This would be a vision to which the farmers’ movement could refer in constructing its own discourse. Without advocating a return to planned economies, one

could suggest that the era of structural adjustment might have caused us to lose sight of the state's role. That role includes being the repository of a society's long-term goals for itself, and as the arbiter, in this context, of the choices, priorities, and interests of the various socio-professional groups.

How can research help POs (and other stakeholders in the rural development debate) identify—in an environment undergoing profound change—the main challenges of the future, and to understand the implications of the choices to be made? In particular, how can POs be helped to develop a macroeconomic vision that provides a linkage between their knowledge of field conditions and the prevailing economic point of view?

Do Not Impose Western Models on POs

Aid to POs must not bring with it the western model of aid to agriculture. It is instructive to remember that OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) member countries spend US\$360 billion annually to subsidize their farmers, an amount much larger than the total development aid. These massive subsidies (amounting to nearly 50 percent of farmers' incomes) are only possible because rural producers are a small demographic and economic minority in the OECD countries.

The economic and financial situation of Sahelian countries, where agriculture still employs most of the population, and is one of the state's main sources of income, does not permit them to adopt a western-style model. The state can tax only some of the more prosperous sectors or agricultural regions and redistribute a portion of this wealth to other sectors or regions, but over the long term it cannot ensure a net transfer toward

agriculture from the rest of the economy, which is still too fragile to allow that.

Because of their institutional culture, even the most liberal aid agencies are instruments of direct public intervention in society and, as far as we are concerned, in rural development. In African countries, where governments have only a modest stake in the economy and most public investment comes from external aid, fostering a strong PO/government relationship essentially means steering POs toward the implementation of aid-supported works. Although the volume of aid is large in the Sahel (nearly 20 percent of GDP), POs must take care to cultivate relationships with those who create and circulate wealth (merchants, exporters, and processors). All participants in the process must avoid dramatizing the role of POs vis-à-vis governments that are stressed by adjustment, and that see in the development of POs an additional threat to their own influence.

How can aid indirectly support the relationship between POs and the people who impact the economy (merchants, exporters, and processors) and who complement their activities, instead of steering POs toward governments and the implementation of aid-supported works? Could guarantee funds and cross-fertilization meetings between socio-professional networks be helpful?

Neither Idealism nor Cynicism

External partners often seem to expect from POs an unrealistic degree of perfection. They would like the members and managers of POs to be motivated solely by an abstract ideal, devoid of materialistic concerns, and for member representation to be perfectly equitable. However, POs are technical and political organizations led by men and women who, like people everywhere, are to varying degrees driven by vocation and personal ambition. They must also, on a daily basis,

forge a difficult consensus among the diverse interests of their members, and between those interests and those of their external partners. Leaders of POs must often be exceptional people to maintain this precarious equilibrium, whose talents have a potentially high value on the development market. Demanding extraordinary austerity from these organizations only encourages dishonesty about the power game, that is, the PO's stake in its own continued existence and that of its leadership, which are stakes that all organizations face. From this standpoint, donors often seem to demand less of NGOs, which are seen as intermediaries, than they do from POs, which are condemned by their role as grassroots representatives to the bottom of the resource heap. It would probably be desirable to find some intermediate position that aid agencies would apply more equitably to all their field-level partners.

How should one handle the issue of paying PO leaders for their services at various levels, and for their logistical expenses?

At the other extreme of the "purity" often demanded of POs is their use by the aid establishment and governments. This entails a risk, and the more fashionable the concept becomes, the greater that risk will be. More specifically, POs are in danger of being obliged to play the role of the new justifiers of foreign aid, in an era when governments, and especially their rural development administrations, are being frequently discredited.

POs are invited, in various capacities, to attend more and more meetings and to lend a "peasant touch" to processes that remain essentially decided and steered by technicians. How many of these meetings are really concerned with helping the farmers' movement to acquire information, prepare collective positions, construct an identity, and obtain the means to prepare proposals? Shouldn't there be a requirement that POs, in

order to participate in meetings, must commit themselves to making a valuable contribution to the meeting? Such a requirement would force both parties (meeting organizers and POs) to choose their venues carefully.

How can POs participate in forums and conferences in such a way that they are not simply serving to display and justify external processes, but instead are actually making progress themselves as a result of this participation?

Restraint, Patience and a Sense of Timing

There is no magic recipe for the development of POs. Their development requires constant attention in the day-to-day work of the participants. Unfortunately, this type of diffuse, day-to-day effort is probably the hardest to achieve. If a collective discipline aimed at encouraging direct project management by POs had been systematically brought to bear 10 or 20 years ago, in a partnership context demanding quality and accountability, then the institutional landscape in the Sahel would be much stronger today. Any regrets, however, about lost time in adopting such procedures should not encourage us to rush things now.

We must show restraint and patience, offering POs as many opportunities as possible to assume responsibility at all levels, and to learn lessons in terms of action and organization. POs should not be forced to assume responsibilities at any cost. We must also allow time for the diverse personalities who lead POs to feel their way along, to make mistakes, to get to know each other, and to find their common path. This is already happening in several countries in the region.

It would probably not do the farmers' movement any favor to make it a new fad and put it under the bright lights, since this creates the danger of disappointment, and premature burnout of individuals and their

organizations. We should not encourage heavy media coverage of POs, which would draw them into an international agenda that we know can be fickle. The aid establishment should encourage PO connections with others involved in the economic and social development of their countries. This gives a much better guarantee of their lasting stability. Will the aid establishment be able to exercise such restraint?

How can we avoid excessive media pressure on the most charismatic leaders? How can we help POs without pushing them toward priorities and fads peculiar to the aid establishment? How can decisionmakers and public opinion in industrial countries be sensitized to the growing importance of POs, without distracting PO leaders from their field-level responsibilities?

Implications for Donors

The implications for donors concerning conditions under which producer organizations can be strengthened were examined.

The discussion session was organized into two sections: in the first, participants were grouped into six homogeneous socio-professional groups: francophone POs, anglophone POs, Spanish-speaking POs, government representatives, NGOs, and

donors. Each group prepared a short summary of observations, and particularly of practical recommendations. In the second part, each group presented its conclusions for debate. The wrap-up session was presided over by Henri Jouve, President of the AFDI, a French organization that supports farmers' movements in developing countries, and a farmer himself. The session opened with an overview presented by Serge Snrech of the Club du Sahel (OECD), who recapped the main lessons learned and the stakes involved in supporting POs, as seen by the development agencies.

The introductory presentation covered:

- A recapitulation of the stakes involved in agricultural cooperation and development at the international level;
- A summary of the experience garnered thus far by the development agencies; and
- Main recommendations for the future.

Background

The table below gives some details on the contribution to world agriculture of each main geographical region, and the population involved.

Each year, OECD member countries spend about US\$50 billion on public aid to developing countries, of which US\$5 billion

<i>Region</i>	<i>Population as percentage of total world population</i>	<i>Agricultural population as percentage of the world's farmers</i>	<i>Percentage of cultivated area</i>
Sub-Saharan Africa	9	14	10
North Africa and Middle East	5	5	6
East Asia	31	41	12
South Asia	21	30	14
Latin America	8	5	11
Developing countries as a whole	76	96	53
Industrial countries as a whole	23	4	47

goes for agriculture. They also spend US\$360 billion every year to subsidize their own producers, which averages 37 percent of the latter's income. On the other hand, farmers in developing countries are usually heavily taxed to finance government operations and economic diversification. OECD countries, which cultivate 47 percent of the world's arable land and possess 4 percent of the world's farmers, therefore have a stake in the way agriculture develops, although their interventions in this area are not impartial.

In addition, among the so-called "developing" regions, one can observe highly diverse situations:

- In Africa, the problem is first a general problem of economic take-off and of emerging from a still largely subsistence-oriented agriculture;
- In Latin America, average incomes are much higher and the proportion of farmers much smaller: the problem is an internal one of distribution of wealth and access to international markets;
- In Asia, home to 71 percent of the world's farmers, the problem is mainly technical, due to the high population density; and
- Finally, in Eastern Europe, the main problem involves the transition from a planned economy to a market economy.

Farmers in various parts of the world therefore do not necessarily share the same concerns. These statistics also suggest that Asia should have had more representatives at the Workshop, because it has the highest stakes in terms of population.

Main Types of Interventions

The support lent to POs is based on three main themes: agriculture (or agro-economics), rural development (which more or less refers to "local development"), and farmer identity (a social and political

concern). These different themes have spurred different types of approaches:

- *Direct support to grassroots producer organizations:* This type of support is highly developed, but institutional donors are tending to move away from it for reasons of cost and efficiency. The decentralization under way in many countries is changing the way problems are handled at this level. There are many new entrants into the development scene (especially a decentralized type of development cooperation).
- *Support to POs to help them gain a foothold in the economic system:* This is the most common approach, and has the advantage of helping POs establish themselves on the basis of concrete services rendered to their members, and occasionally to achieve financial autonomy in a short time. The main limitation of this approach is that, as long as farmers remain caught up in technical areas, they cannot influence the numerous political decisions that determine their future.
- *Support to POs to help them gain a foothold in the political system:* This approach is promoted by development partners who feel that rural sector problems are multidimensional, and require a global political approach. This approach has the following advantages: it raises farmers' issues in all their complexity; it strengthens the capacities of farmers (who are still in the majority in most developing countries); and it promotes their interests, but it also extends into power issues that are quite remote from the daily preoccupations of individual farmers. The absence of a good economic foundation often results in heavy dependence upon external funds, and entails a danger of political interference.
- *Cooperation between producer organizations of industrial and*

- developing countries:* This revolves around technical and institutional support, and alliances among farmers to exert pressure on the large international negotiations. Although this system is based on some interesting principles, it has several drawbacks: POs in industrialized countries are heavily dependent upon public financing, which limits their ability to propose truly alternative approaches. In international negotiations, farmers from industrial and developing countries have common interests, but they are also in competition for limited shares of world markets.
- *North-South cooperation from an economic standpoint:* There was little discussion at this Workshop on this, which would include joint ventures and other forms of interest-sharing that surely deserve further exploration.

Main Lessons Learned

Out of the various forms of support to POs, some recommendations emerged that should be considered part of a “process oriented” approach, rather than as recipes to be applied uniformly in all circumstances.

- *The problem of the emergence of POs:* Development agencies want to work with POs, but when POs do not exist, these agencies are at a loss as to how to encourage their creation without influencing their priorities and operations, and thus being accused of paternalism.
- *Improve the flow of information:* This would be a strategic advantage for POs, which would benefit from receiving more useful information for their own decisionmaking (and not just information that justifies interventions that have been proposed to them), and more information on development cooperation itself. It is also important for POs to be able to contract studies and surveys to help them develop their own strategic positions.
- *Supply the tools and the opportunities to use them:* What is needed is not just support projects for POs, but also a place for POs in the day-to-day operation of development work, contractually based responsibility for certain tasks, and flexible funds that can respond to farmers’ proposals. This would require a joint effort to develop ways of improving transparency and confidence in the relationship between POs, government officials, and development partners.
- *Develop a fluid market for rural development services:* It is especially important to avoid creating a new rural development monopoly held by POs, as governments and NGOs did before them, and to avoid the proliferation of structures. Each organization must define clearly its objectives and anticipated results. Evaluation must be redirected in such a way as to make a greater allowance for the point of view of beneficiaries’ rather than of donors, to foster a more natural process of selection amongst service providers.
- *Help POs to resituate themselves in the changing context of agriculture in developing countries:* The rural world’s place in economic and social development is undergoing rapid change, as is the international environment. The rural milieu itself is characterized by growing social differentiation. POs must be helped to develop a strategic vision of their future in a changing world, and to identify some long-term priorities;
- *Do not apply western models to producer organizations:* The historic and economic contexts are radically different. POs in each country should instead be helped to find their own institutional solutions, thereby strengthening their interactions with the

various social groups in their countries (and not just with their governments). Industrial countries should reflect on the coherency of their policies regarding development cooperation (as well as on other matters, such as trade and the environment), instead of exporting their models.

- *Seek a middle ground between idealism and cynicism:* One must not expect from POs in developing countries a perfection not of this world, otherwise disappointment can lead to an excessively critical attitude in a few years. Nor should one “use” POs just because they are fashionable, and exhibit them at all the meetings without giving them the tools to make progress toward their own goals. It might be helpful to draw up an ethos governing partnerships with POs.
- Support to POs entails patience, restraint, and a sense of proper timing.

Discussion

The discussion focused relatively less on the group presentations than on additional information, new ideas, and questions of general relevance. The points are summarized below, although they do not represent a consensus but a collection of individual observations.

Emergence and Functioning of POs

- The requirements for creating POs are more or less known: a suitable regulatory environment, dissemination of information, and support to newly created organizations. It is the will to do these things that is lacking.
- Can we define criteria to recognize a good PO that would be a candidate for various types of programs and support? If there is an effort to come up with a

definition, difficult as that may be, POs must obviously be involved in it.

- Should there be time limits within which POs must attain a certain degree of autonomy? Can a PO that receives long-term support be considered viable and representative?
- NGOs are often considered supporters of POs, but that POs often possess skills that are underexploited.
- Support given by NGOs must be under the control of POs, which must remain the managers of this cooperation.
- What place do women have in POs?

Relationship between POs and Governments

- Governments are often against the development of POs. Development agencies can help demystify the role of POs by demonstrating that they are in everyone’s interest, even if they sometimes require a redistribution of tasks. Study trips by civil servants to countries in which the farmer’s movement is highly developed can often be useful in breaking down resistance to the idea.
- POs are involved in evaluating projects and policies, but there do not appear to be any sanctions for civil servants who perform poorly. They are often transferred to another department, but remain involved in rural development. If this is the case, what is the use of such participation?
- POs can negotiate subsidies with their government, but they must keep in mind that most of the time these subsidies are financed out of taxes on agriculture. They are, in fact, only transfers from one group of farmers to another, and must therefore be carefully thought through.

- Latin American governments often consult first and foremost the large-scale producers and international firms, but rarely the small producers who are, in fact, in the majority. Donors should therefore ensure that the consultation between governments and POs is truly pluralistic.

demonstrate their authenticity, since they have few financial and human resources, and this is an enormous task. Development partners wishing to work with POs should do the information gathering and get to know the various POs.

POs and Cooperation and Development

- There is currently a lively interest in POs, but this interest is fragile. We have seen other subjects come into fashion and then go out of style just as quickly. We should, therefore, not let this opportunity pass, but exploit it seriously. In Cameroon, we have had the unfortunate experience of having an innovative PO-support project go wrong because the various partners, including the POs, did not take it seriously. This failure has damaged the credibility of the “flexible funding” approach in the entire region for years to come.
- There are already successful instances (for example, in Senegal) of World Bank funds managed directly by POs with the agreement of their government. Such approaches should be further developed.
- Rapid change should not be expected, because development agencies have a portfolio of ongoing projects that are difficult to modify, and the processing of new projects often takes 18 to 24 months.
- POs should not focus exclusively on agricultural policies, but should also be concerned with weighing in on decisions that are being made on related subjects, such as infrastructures (for example, rural roads) and macroeconomic issues.
- There is a danger that opportunistic POs could proliferate if the topic becomes fashionable. Genuine POs, however, cannot be constantly required to

Conclusions

A strong consensus emerged on the following points:

- It is important to encourage the emergence and strengthening of POs, but not to expect miracles; pragmatism and perseverance are needed.
- Governments and their services must be persuaded that the development of POs is not contrary to their interests. POs will have a hard time succeeding in the face of government opposition.
- There is a need to promote the participation of POs in the design of development and cooperation policies in areas relevant to them, and to mobilize the financial resources to permit such participation.
- The implementation of development programs (or components thereof) should be contracted to POs.
- Every project should provide some opportunity to respond to farmers’ initiatives and, if possible, to develop funds that would be managed autonomously by POs, especially in the areas of training, information, and communication.
- Procedures for project submission and accounting for expenditures must be simplified for projects involving collaboration with POs.
- The proliferation of structures to accommodate multiple participants should be avoided, in favor of information exchange and closer collaboration.

- The democratic workings of POs, and the management of funds entrusted to them, must be transparent if they are to inspire confidence, which in turn will be the basis of further progress in streamlining procedures.

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