Learning for rural change

11 stories from Zambia

IFAD
Investing in rural people

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Centre for learning on sustainable agriculture

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11 stories from Zambia

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Contents

Partnership and participation

Preface

In Zambia, IFAD, as a UN agency specialised in smallholder agricultural development, is investing in rural people. We are supporting the government's efforts to improve the lives of smallholder family farmers, to help them get out of poverty and to attain food security. Support focuses on helping rural people secure access to rural finance, livestock and disease control, water and other natural resources, to services including finance and markets and, last but not least, to technology.

The IFAD country programme in Zambia focusses its intervention on four on-going projects: Rural Finance Programme (RFP); Smallholder Livestock Investment Project (SLIP); Smallholder Agribusiness Promotion Programme (SAPP) and Smallholder Productivity Promotion Programme (S3P).

In general, IFAD-supported programmes target small-scale farming households who are organised in enterprise groups that can be better linked to markets. The groups receive training in entrepreneurship and governance. In the training sessions, weaknesses are identified and typically these concern management / poor farming practices and lack of access to resources and support services. One of the projects, the Smallholder Agribusiness Promotion Programme (SAPP) is a public-private endeavour stimulating rural economic development driven by transformation of small-scale producers into profitable family farmers. A collaboration established between private-sector players and the public sector is one of the key ingredients of success. The benefits arising from partnerships create long-term opportunities which take into account what each stakeholder can do to ensure a win-win situation for all parties involved.

As part of the collaboration with the Centre for Learning on Sustainable Agriculture (ILEIA), a strong partner in knowledge management, staff from IFAD-supported projects and those from Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock were trained to improve their skills to gather and analyse successful practices from development projects. Practices from the various IFAD-funded interventions in Zambia are presented in this booklet.

Knowledge is key to informing government, policy makers, researchers and the wider public about the change which is urgently needed to improve the lives of the rural poor. This booklet aims exactly at this: to inform both practitioners and policy makers about recent developments and approaches in sustainable rural development. It is a first step towards a more consistent way of learning and sharing knowledge. IFAD stands ready to support government, civil society and research, and to contribute to learning that leads to efficient interventions and finally impact on rural livelihoods.

Enjoy reading this interesting collection of experiences!

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April 2014

Introduction

In September 2013, the IFAD Zambia Country Programme Management Team worked together with ILEIA to enable the documentation and systematic analysis of what was taking place in the field. Eleven practitioners working in agricultural development in Zambia gathered in Lusaka, documenting achievements and challenges. The importance of describing and analysing the results of agricultural initiatives is widely acknowledged. It helps to draw lessons and generate practical knowledge. Often these lessons remain implicit, as highlighted by one of our Zambian authors, Alfred Mkonda. "*We do a lot of work, but as long as we do not write it down there are a lot of blank pages in our institutional diaries.*" As such, documentation is a first step towards scaling up successful efforts.

Aiming to enhance national and regional competences and to develop skills, ILEIA, the Centre for Learning on Sustainable Agriculture, is working together with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to initiate documentation processes in several East African countries. This booklet is one of three produced within the project. The other two tell the stories from Ethiopia and Swaziland.

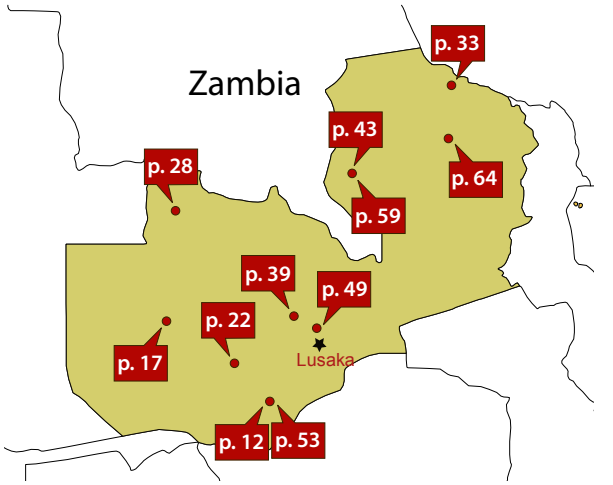
Information about the results and procedures of IFAD's activities needs to be collected and reflected upon in order to understand which factors support positive change, and which pose a barrier. As a result, the Zambia Country Programme can come to learn lessons that can improve methods to achieve IFAD's mandate. Careful documentation and dissemination of the impact of activities will also assist other actors to avoid repeating mistakes in the future. Decision-making affecting support to smallholders will be evidence-based, enabling governments as well as IFAD to better target their support of enabling poor rural men and women more effectively and efficiently.

Some improvements may be immediate, such as increasing the number of youth and women participation in farmer groups. Some

will be medium-term, like developing and strengthening synergies within and between IFAD-supported programmes and, where possible, even beyond. Others will be long-term, such as incorporating lessons learnt in new programmes. The stories in this book show many different lessons for supporting family farmers, but some stand out. It becomes clear that technology sharing and credit availability are two key ingredients for IFAD programmes to achieve their goals. But also, the experiences show that engaging farmers – notably women – in the design and implementation of projects is an important contributor to successful initiatives. Their needs and knowledge form a key input for developing programmes that impact the lives of rural communities. Thirdly, the importance of farmer organisation is evident in most of the stories presented in this book. And lastly, there is an increasing recognition that effective multi-stakeholder processes, in particular public-private partnerships, are key to project success.

Lusaka 2013

In this workshop, following ILEIA's time-tested method for documentation, participants were provided with basic documentation skills. But the work did not end there. They used the documentation process as a basis for writing an article that allows participants to share experiences effectively with their audience. These articles are presented in the following pages.



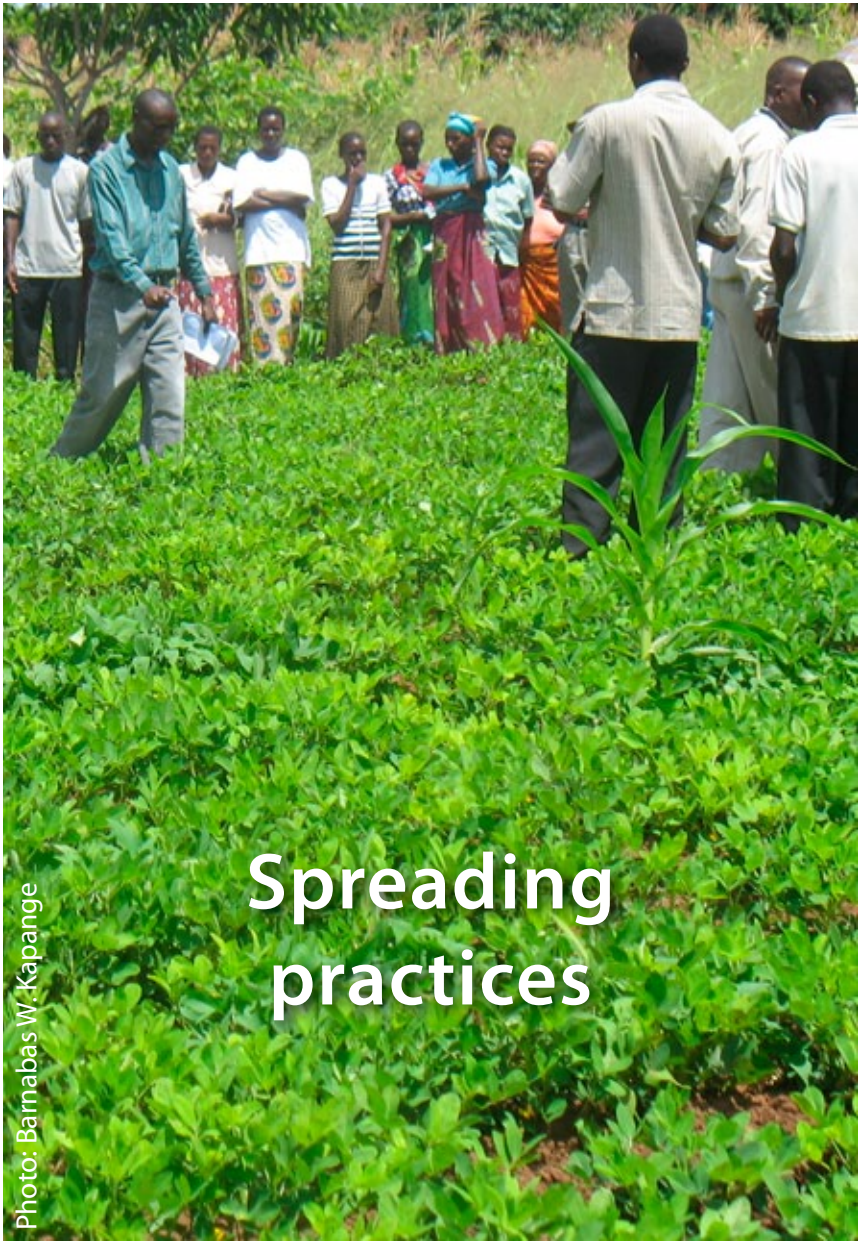
All authors have different backgrounds, interests, and styles to tell their stories. Many authors are representatives of different IFAD-funded projects. As this was an exercise, authors were free to choose what they wanted to document. As a result, some stories may overlap, and some stories may not depict IFAD initiatives. Nonetheless, all stories are based in the real experiences of the authors.

For the first time in these workshops, there was also a significant number or participants from the National Agricultural Information Service (NAIS), the main mouthpiece of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and of agriculture and rural development information in the country. The Country Programme Management recognised the importance of the documentation process and the need to develop the programme's capacities in documentation, dissemination as well as systemisation of practices in programme implementation, for now and in the future. Projects and programmes are temporal by nature. NAIS is not, and therefore the sustainability of the documentation training will surely be relevant for future generations of IFAD-supported projects and programmes, as well as those supported by other development partners.

At ILEIA and the IFAD Country Office, we greatly respect the authors of the stories in this book and their dedication to improving the lives of people in the rural world – as well as their willingness and efforts to share this dedication through their articles.

IFAD Country Office Team (Dick Siame, Country Programme Officer & Karima Cherif, Communication Consultant)

ILEIA (Edith van Walsum, Director & Laura Eggens, Programme Officer Learning & Communication)



Spreading practices

Photo: Barnabas W. Kapange


Photo: Bernard Dupont

Climate smart agriculture using *musangu*

The non-governmental organisation Conservation Farming Unit (CFU) was founded in 1996 to tackle the problems of low productivity, environmental degradation, food security and climate change among small-scale farmers in Zambia. The NGO, which is a unit under the Zambia National Farmers Union, addresses these issues by promoting the adoption of simple systems of conservation farming, such as the digging of basins, crop rotation and the planting of the *musangu* tree, all of which have proven to be effective in the conditions of many Zambian smallholders.

Rhoda K. Silwamba

CFU works in four regions in the country: Southern Province, Central Province, Western Province and Eastern Province. Occasionally, CFU receives technical support from extension officers of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, who train and work with the farmers. In 2009, with the help of these field extension officers, CFU organised a two-day training course to teach 150 small-scale farmers in the Choma District, Southern Province how to plant the *musangu* tree. Since then, these courses have been held every year in July, just after the farmers finish harvesting, for both returning and new trainees.

Musangu matters

These courses focused on the planting of *Faidherbia albida*, or the *musangu* tree. This indigenous tree is also called "the fertilizer tree", because of its unique characteristic of providing nutrients to the soil. It is leguminous: its roots host the Rhizobium bacteria, which has the ability to fix nitrogen from the air to the soil. The issue of climate change is what prompted CFU to start encouraging farmers to plant this tree, and they focused on Southern Province because most of the small-scale farmers there who grow maize cannot afford to buy fertilizer. CFU aims to convince 160,000 farmers to plant *musangu*.

The regular courses that CFU provides to these farmers show the techniques on demonstration plots. In addition, CFU organises field days to educate others on the growing of the *musangu* tree, which are attended by the farmers in the area. These demonstration plots and exchange visits receive technical support from other farmers, the extension service and CFU staff.

As a result of these activities, farmers have now started switching to more sustainable and productive farming systems to grow food. This is urgently needed by the swelling population and in response to climate change.

Environmentally, economically and socially sound

Musangu does not only help improve yields, but it also delivers several important environmental benefits. It restores the health of the soil

because the leaves that the tree drops turn to compost. Chemical fertilizers turn their soils acidic after prolonged use, but planting the *musangu* tree in their fields has eliminated farmers' need for fertilizers. At six years of age, 100 trees are able to shed 500 kg of leaves and pods per hectare – the equivalent of 300 kg of chemical fertilizer. In addition to the environmental sustainability of the project, the economic sustainability is evident: for the farmers, no money is involved since they no longer need to buy inputs.

Musangu

Musangu grows under different climatic conditions across several African countries. It is generally grown from seedlings. Before sowing, farmers rub the end of the seed on a stone: breaking the seed coat allows a fast uptake of water to speed up germination. An above-ground nursery for the seedlings is made in October, for which CFU provides the plastic and the seeds.

At five weeks, the seedlings can be carefully transplanted into well-manured planting holes in between the farmer's crops, at the onset of the rains. Farmers dig holes inside the crop row, allowing for 10 meter spacing between the trees.

Starting in May, after the rainy season, farmers water the trees every week using a knapsack sprayer. This speeds up the growth and reduces losses. Mulch thorns are placed to protect the trees from goats for the first two years.

The tree can grow up to 20 meters in height and may take 40 years to attain this size. A mature tree can have a canopy with a diameter exceeding 30 meters. It sheds leaves during the rainy season, adding nitrogen to the soil.

Crops under* musangu *tree shade (photo: Charlie Pye-Smith, World Agroforestry Centre)

In the past, these farmers cut down trees and burnt them in the field, ploughed the whole field before planting and never rotated their crops. In their training courses, CFU has taught farmers not to plough the whole field, but instead to dig holes only where they will plant the seedlings. This makes planting the trees on large pieces of land easier for the farmers, and it prevents them from turning over the soil. Because the soil is not ploughed, weed populations will decline over time, as long as they are not allowed to seed. The *musangu* tree is especially suitable for this. The tree's deep-penetrating tap roots help to break the dense upper layer of the soil between the roots of the field crops.

In addition, the initiative has done a lot of good in terms of social equality. Both men and women participate in the planting of *musangu* trees. In the Southern province, the dominant practice is that women do the agricultural work, while men supervise them. Women are generally more interested in attending CFU's training

Maize growing under* musangu *trees (photo: World Agroforestry Centre Archive)

courses and increasing their knowledge. Many of the women in this area are widows, and they gladly take the opportunity to improve their practices and support their families.

The *musangu* tree is the ideal candidate for the reforestation of farmland. This experience has shown that trees and farming can go hand in hand. As an added advantage, by expanding agroforestry initiatives like these, Zambia may also be able to benefit from carbon credit schemes in the future. But most importantly, by planting *musangu*, families can earn an income and do not need to depend on others to feed them.

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Cassava processing and packaging

With the support of the NGO Self Help Africa, the small scale farmers of Kaoma set up a system for cassava processing and packaging. Self Help Africa introduced training courses for cassava processing and packaging, in order to enhance marketing opportunities for the farmers in the area.

Dorothy Mulenga

Self Help Africa, a Lusaka-based organisation which works hand-in-hand with small-scale farmers, initiated and funded the cassava project with the goal of improving marketing opportunities for cassava farmers. Starting in 2010, the project will last until 2016. Kaoma, located in the Western Province, was chosen as the pilot area for the project, as its soils are conducive to growing cassava. Before 2010, most of the farmers in the region only pounded their cassava. They were unaware of the possibility of processing it into fine flour. In addition, farmers used a cut tin or an ordinary cup to measure their pounded cassava in the market, and the price they received depended on what the buyer offered.

Training farmers

Self Help Africa trained the farmers on how to process and package their cassava so as to fix the price and quantity of their sales. The training courses in Kaoma drew about 40 participants. After the

initial course, which was financed by Self Help Africa, the Ministry of Agriculture and its extension officers took over the provision of follow-up courses, up to four times a year. In addition to cassava processing, farmers learnt about other farming techniques. The Ministry provided farmers with various written materials on agriculture in the local language, to keep them continuously informed.

The courses were not only of benefit to individual farmers but also for co-operative groups, which were actually the focus of the project. Co-operatives had always told to depend on the government fertilizer support programme for their maize production, but now learnt that this was not necessary for cassava as it is a crop that grows even when the land is not fertile. Mr Nyamba Ngagula, the project manager for Kaoma Cassava Processing, believes that "*to grow cassava, farmers can do without fertilizers – even if they have been using them for a long time*". Farmers can grow their cassava on a large scale without the environmental harm caused by using fertilizers.

From farmer to farmer

The farmers who benefitted from the training courses committed to sharing their new knowledge widely. They organised farmer-to-farmer exchange visits, allowing neighbouring farmers and communities to learn first-hand about what they were doing. The farmers have also been sharing their experiences with their fellow farmers through a radio farm forum and even on television, where their approaches are explained in detail.

Co-operative groups were the focus of the cassava project

The involvement of co-operatives contributes to the replicability of the approach. Up-and-coming co-operatives with a willingness to start processing and packaging cassava can count on the assistance of existing co-operatives. They provide the newcomers with cassava stems to enable them to grow cassava and with the knowledge to add value to their produce afterwards.

The success of the programme can be seen in the involvement of the farmers

Selling success

Kaoma farmers now package their processed cassava flour into 2 and 5 kg bags, which have a set price of 5 ZMW and 10 ZMW respectively. Organised into Kaoma Cassava Processing, the farmers have approached the bulk supermarket Shoprite to sell to them.

Kaoma farmers package their processed cassava flower, which meets a growing demand among consumers

The demand for cassava flour is growing, especially among urban consumers. The attractive packaging contributes to this increasing demand. A rented warehouse can accommodate many bags of flour, which can now be kept for a long time without going bad.

In addition to the increasing demand, processing and packaging has allowed farmers to set a good price for their product. This is reflected in the increased incomes farmers now receive. Rural families can now cover their medical costs and they can send their children to school.

Unexpectedly, many consumers wish to buy the flour in smaller quantities than those produced through the project. As a result, at times the farmers failed to meet the demands of those consumers. In the future, processed cassava flour might also be packaged into 1 kg bags, allowing farmers to fill this gap for consumers who prefer not to buy in bulk.

In addition, farmers face the problem of transportation. There are no local manufacturers of the packages themselves, forcing farmers to travel to urban areas to buy them. Also the processed packs need to be transported, which remains a problem.

Moving forward

In the future, more attention can be paid to gender equality in the processing and packaging courses. Women play an important part in the process of adding value to cassava, but are not always recognised for doing so. Women often soak and dry the cassava, while men are involved in other jobs. By including more women in the training courses, women and men can better collaborate in producing quality flour.

The success of the programme can be seen in the involvement of the farmers. More people should volunteer to work together to build up the cassava industry, which will benefit them financially in the end. The knowledge built up by the farmers of Kaoma will be invaluable in this.

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Spraying away East-Coast Fever

The farmers in the Maala agriculture camp in the Namwala District, located in the Southern Province of Zambia, had experienced a drastic change in cattle production due to East-Coast Fever. This disease drastically reduced the number of animals, in many cases by as much as 88%. With each passing year, the farmers' struggles became more evident and much harder to ignore. Southern Province, the major area for livestock production in Zambia, had become one of the poorest in the country. A special public-private initiative changed the fate of these farmers.

Kayama C. Akakandelwa

In 2007, it was discovered that cattle mortality rates were not going down, despite the vaccination and treatment programmes of the past two decades. It was for this reason that the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock formed a team composed of a Chief Veterinary Officer, the Provincial Veterinary Officer, several Livestock Development Officers, a Veterinary Assistant Officer, and the village headmen and farmers. This team carried out a livestock census to verify the number of farmers that were affected and the number of cattle remaining within the Namwala district. This process was carried out with the help of local communities over a period of two years.

The mortality rate was found to be up to 78% over a period of five years. Ticks are the major carrier of the bacteria which cause East-Coast Fever. After ticks bite an infected animal, they transfer the disease to their next victims. There were also some incidences of

Mobile spray races prove to be an advantage over dip tanks in many ways

secondary disease infections due to the poor health of the cattle. The quality of meat and other by-products were not meeting the recommended market standards set by the Zambia Bureau of Standards, and farmers' incomes were low.

A losing battle

Several factors caused the high incidence of East-Coast Fever in Namwala and other places in the Southern Province. Farmers were forced to move their cattle over long distances to places where communal dip-tanks were located, which at that moment were still the only way to fight East-Coast Fever. Due to the long distances they would have to travel, farmers were not consistent in dipping their animals, which led to a high tick infestation.

The dip-tanks needed to be (re)filled it with water deep enough to plunge the cattle in. This was a challenge, as the dip-tanks required

large volumes of water, at least 2500 litres, which was not always available and/or had to be fetched from far away. Further, five litres of chemicals are required for a dip-tank, which makes it an expensive method, and in some cases farmers could not afford to buy large quantities of chemicals. The recommended frequency of dipping cattle is once per week, but with such challenges months could elapse without dipping. This allowed for high incidences of ticks.

For several reasons, farmers were not consistently dipping their cattle

Namwala district in the Southern Province was selected to be a pilot project area because it had the largest cattle population in Zambia. The Kafue Flats floodplains provide good pasture for cattle, which enabled the farmers to supply meat to meat-processing companies in Zambia. A second reason is that most of the farmers in this area have two home villages: one on the plateau and one on the flat plains. During the dry season farmers stay in areas along the Kafue Flats for seven months, and return to the plateau for the remaining five months. Access to the dip tanks was even more difficult in this area, as the communal dip-tank was located on the plateau and there was not one on the Flats. Access to dipping facilities from the Kafue Flats was difficult, so farmers had to wait until their return to the plateau. Consequently, ticks and disease control was not consistent, leading to high tick infestation and prevalence of disease.

Government and private sector

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock engaged Fens Investment Company, a private firm which manufactures mobile spray races, to supply this equipment to the farmers in Namwala. A mobile spray race has rows of pipes with nozzles, which sprinkle the chemicals on the cattle. Only a fifth of the water and chemicals used by the dip tank method is needed with this technique. The mobile spray race can spray 1,000 cattle per hour – a big improvement over the dip-tanks.

In February 2009, the company conducted a short training course for farmers on how to operate the mobile spray race. This was one way of

showing the farmers a new technology for controlling the spread of ticks and convincing them of its effectiveness. After the training programme, the farmers had learnt about how the chemical could reach all parts of the animals' bodies. The course also enabled the farmers to increase their knowledge of how to detect the early clinical signs of the disease and how to treat it. They appreciated the change this new technology brought in controlling ticks in order to prevent East-Coast Fever. In addition, this technology has helped the farmers who used to have to travel long distances to have their cattle dipped.

Factors for success

In the past, farmers never used to take the cattle's health very seriously. For instance, as one farmer, Mr Milimo Mazuba, said, "*All they consider is having more cattle for prestige and as a symbol of wealth*". But problems like East-Coast Fever have been serious. The success of this initiative has brought changes in the livelihoods of most of the farmers in the region. They are able to keep their cattle healthy, allowing

A short training on the spray race technology and chemicals helped farmers control the spread of ticks

them to produce good quality meat, even meeting export standards. The mortality level of cattle has been reduced from 78% to 5% in the past two years.

The number of cattle has increased significantly and a large number of farmers have benefitted. Some individuals have more than 1,000 cattle, while others have 2,000 or more. More than prestige, this is contributing significantly in terms of incomes. Farmers are now able to pay school fees for their children, which helps to reduce illiteracy levels.

Farmers have also increased their crop production, because they are now able to sell some of the cattle in order to purchase farming inputs. The yields obtained are enough for both home consumption and for the sale of surplus products. With a stable source of income farmers are able to buy the drugs used for controlling diseases and to pay for other veterinary services. They have also bought vehicles for transporting their farm products to the marketplace. This used to be a big challenge for most Zambian farmers. Finally, Maala agriculture camp becomes a demonstration area every year in February, where farmers from all over Zambia come to learn how the mobile spray race works. Farmers from other areas are encouraged to pay a fee for the service to ensure the project becomes sustainable.

Due to this project, farmers in Namwala have improved their economic standards. They are stronger and have benefitted directly from this introduction of new technology. The project has shown that when government partners with the private sector and farmers, tangible results can be attained.

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Organising farmers

Photo: Ray Magagula

Sweet solution to obesity

Obesity is gradually becoming a serious health concern for health promotion practitioners in Zambia. Research has revealed that honey can play a very important role in preventing obesity as it is a healthier substitute for refined sugar. As the demand for and consumption of honey is gradually increasing, the promotion of apiculture (beekeeping) as a sustainable business has become more prominent.

Natasha Mhango

In Zambia's North-Western Province, beekeeping has been a cultural practice for many years. Most beekeepers use traditional honey hunting methods, which involve the use of hollow log-beehives in which bee colonies settle. Once the honey is produced, the hollow log is destroyed to collect the honey. Modern methods of beekeeping entail the construction of permanent beehives, making the rearing of bees and honey-hunting easier and more convenient. Unfortunately, traditional beekeepers have been struggling

to generate enough capital to upgrade their traditional practices to modern beekeeping practises. With the inception of the IFAD-funded Rural Finance Programme (RFP) in 2007, beekeepers in the Kasempa district in the North-Western province have been given easier access to necessary resources to add value to their products.

Why beekeeping?

Honey is a preferred substitute to refined sugar and hence a solution to healthy eating for clinically obese people. This ensures that bee-keepers in Kasempa have a guaranteed market for their products. Also, bees help sustain the environment through pollination of flowers and crops, therefore offering another benefit to those beekeepers who are also practicing crop agriculture. In addition, the North-Western Province in general has a somewhat equatorial type of climate. As such, compared to some other provinces in Zambia, the province experiences higher amounts of rainfall and is characterised by a forest type of vegetation. Environmental research has emphasised the importance of conserving forests. According to a 2009 report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) entitled *Bees and their role in forest livelihoods*, beekeeping is an effective way in which inhabitants can exploit the benefits of their environment without causing damage.

Beekeeping is an effective way to exploit the benefits of the environment without causing damage

Empowering the beekeeper

The main objective of the RFP is to support proposals that assist in improving value addition among small scale farmers. As one of its many activities, RFP supported the Keepers' Zambia Foundation with USD 90,000, which was channelled into training beekeepers in the North-Western Province on how to save the income they receive from their activities.

According to Jasper Hatwiinda, RFP Monitoring, Evaluation & Planning Specialist, 126 beekeeper groups in the Kasempa district were trained with modern beekeeping skills and on how to save and lend the

accumulated savings amongst themselves. Beekeeper groups established a revolving fund in which they first saved and increased these funds, with each member contributing an agreed amount of money for the period of one year. Eventually, the group lent this money out to interested members, with an interest rate of between 30%-50% in total for each loan. This significantly high interest rate enables the beekeeper groups to generate income quickly and thus increase the funds available for subsequent loans.

For the beekeeper groups, the main objectives were to generate enough income to develop their beekeeping and honey hunting practices; as well as to encourage honey production in general.

Did RFP really help?

The RFP is set to come to an end in September 2013, but it will undoubtedly leave an impact on the communities that it worked in with regard to income generation. On the one hand, the programme involved the full participation and involvement of farmers who had control over monitoring the growth and utilisation of the finances they received. Moreover, the aspect of raising money through a revolving fund has ensured the sustainability of existing beneficiary groups and has enhanced the possibility of new groups being formed even after the programme ends.

Beekeeping can be a suitable livelihood option particularly for rural women

As bees work together, beekeeper groups also prove to be an effective way to help beekeepers raise capital (photo: Ray Magagula)

The sustainability of the RFP initiative has been further guaranteed through the concept of village agents, which was started in 2012. Village agents are members of existing beneficiary groups who are chosen by their fellows. They have been trained under the RFP on how to facilitate the establishment of new beneficiary groups, as well as on how to help solve specific problems among already existing farmer groups. The existence of village agents will help the revolving fund to continue working and make it easily replicable among beekeepers living outside Kasempa district.

Judging from how easily RFP beneficiary beekeeper groups in Kasempa are generating accessible funds, one can agree that the concept of a revolving fund is an effective way to help traditional beekeepers in rural areas raise working capital amongst themselves. Close to USD 20,000 was saved from September 2012 to June 2013. Out of this amount, USD 15,000 is currently on loan among 100 borrowers.

Journey to sweet success

An unfortunate challenge that stills remains in the promotion of beekeeping in Kasempa is the issue of gender inequality. Sixty percent of the beekeepers benefitting from RFP are male. The assumption is that women are not suited for beekeeping because of the occasional need to climb trees or move hollow logs to construct beehives. Suggestions have been made that interested female beekeepers could incorporate male relatives to assist in that area rather than shun the practice entirely. Through the initiative of a revolving fund established by the RFP, female beekeepers can also attempt to construct modern beehives rather than using the hollow log practice, and hence solve the problem of tree climbing and moving hollow logs. It is hoped that women follow these recommendations and report on how they have worked for them.

Beekeeping could even be a very fitting occupation for rural women in a country where laws governing land ownership still favour men in terms of rights of access. Since beekeeping does not require arable or valuable land, female beekeepers do not need to struggle to look for such an environment. Because of its potential to grow into an economically viable and sustainable business, beekeeping can significantly assist female-headed homes (which are usually the most vulnerable to poverty) to generate steady income.

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Village agents: A tested approach

After more than six years of supporting the creation and consolidation of the Village Savings and Lending Associations (VSLAs) in Zambia, the Rural Finance Programme (RFP) came to an end in September 2013. The major question to be faced is how the more than 1,500 VSLAs can continue without the programme's financial and technical support. Village agents might be the answer to this question.

Jasper Hatwiinda

Since 2007, the IFAD-funded RFP has been facilitating sustainable financial support for Zambian farmers. This support has included the creation of community based financial institutions and Village Savings and Lending Associations, the promotion of rural banking services, the setting up of a credit line to support smallholder producers and the giving of matching grants for innovative financial services.

In the last five years, the RFP has worked to create and consolidate VSLAs with four different NGOs, including Africare, Keepers Zambia Foundation, Micro Bankers Trust and Rural Economic Expansion Services. However, without a workable framework for supporting the VLSAs continuous provision of financial services to the poor, the RFP's achievements could be lost. Among the approaches tested for providing this support is the utilisation of village agents, who can continue

to support both old and new VSLAs and help them meet the ever increasing demand for access to low-cost financial services.

The REES initiative

Early in 2011, the RFP partnered with Rural Economic Expansion Services (REES) with the aim of creating VLSAs in the Kasama, Mbala, Mungwi, Mpika and Luwingu districts of Northern Province. By the end of that year, REES had trained and consolidated almost 100 groups; at the same time, the demand for more support to create additional VSLAs groups had doubled, overwhelming the project staff case load.

In July 2011, the RFP facilitated an exchange visit where the four partner NGOs observed the functioning of the village agent framework implemented by the NGO CARE Malawi. Some lessons learned during the visit were the importance of the voluntary nature of the village agent, the need for community acceptance of the village agent, and insights into the village agent's motivation and their roles and responsibilities. CARE Malawi also shared potential strategies for sustaining the village agents using community resources.

Following this visit, REES commenced piloting the use of village agents to supplement the field staff in their support of VSLAs. In early 2012, REES rolled out the village agent framework across the five districts and laid a foundation for continued support to both new and old VSLAs in its project area.

Village agent initiation

Village agents are members of the VSLAs who have demonstrated extraordinary skills and interest in the VSLA methodology, and who are motivated to occasionally provide backup for project field facilitators. Members of the VSLAs select potential candidates for the village agent position; candidates must have been members of a VLSA for at least one year. The candidates are endorsed at a public community meeting ceremony and certified with an official certificate bearing the name and logo of REES.

Photo: Erik Törner

Village Savings and Lending Associations

VSLAs are made up of as few as five and as many as 30 members. The members are self-selected. Membership is open both to women and to men, but at least two of the five committee members elected should be female in the case of mixed groups. If groups are larger than 25 members, they are encouraged to divide into smaller sub-groups because the transactions in larger groups tend to make meetings longer and all processes less efficient.

VSLAs meet on a regular basis, at intervals that they select, but never less frequently than once a month. VSLAs are comprised of a general assembly and a management committee. The general assembly is the supreme body from which the management committee is elected and from which it derives its authority. Each member has only one vote. The management committee of a VSLA consists of five people: a chairperson, secretary, treasurer and two money counters. Committee members are subject to annual re-election at the start of a new cycle. They may be removed at extraordinary meetings.

A female village agent receives a utility bicycle from the Mbala District Commissioner

On the 9th of June 2012, the first 26 village agents, six of whom were women, were certified by REES, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture. At the ceremony, the village agents also received initial support in the form of bicycles.

Once the village agents are appointed, REES field staff train them in VSLA mobilisation, formation and consolidation and enhance their technical assistance skills – especially in record keeping and group mobilisation and cohesion. In addition, REES staff mentor the village agents through hands-on field visit exercises. The village agents are challenged to mobilise 8 to 12 new VSLAs over a period of 12 months.

REES has observed a threefold increase in the number of VSLAs in the last 12 months, mobilised with the support of the village agents. In early 2011, there were 86 VSLAs; by June 2013, there were 468 VSLAs, with 7,228 members of both sexes.

In the same period, as a result of the work of the village agents, REES saw an increase in demand for new VSLAs budding from old ones. The

new cadre of village agents also helped wean the older associations off direct project support by taking over assistance to the association, with staff technical support provided only on demand. The mature VSLAs also had increased capacity and confidence to manage their own activities. This was seen in all the districts covered by REES.

These older associations were often willing to continue without direct support from the project after two cycles of Sharing-Out their savings. Sharing-Out involves the accumulated shares that have earned interest, earning each member a higher share value of double the saved amounts. In these mature groups, village agents have only needed to come once per year to support the Sharing-Out exercises.

A replicable initiative

Field facilitators believe in the village agent solution to sustain the VSLAs because it can be easily replicated in other communities. The evidence of its success is the satisfaction expressed by the VSLA members and the economic benefits experienced by them. village agents explain that the VSLA methodology is low cost and its simplicity allows for the methodology to spread across many other villages.

The village agent is integrated into an already self-sustaining VSLA approach that allows community members to voluntarily mobilise local resources and reduce investment costs. The mobilisation of village agents from the previously consolidated VSLAs promotes access to technical assistance services at almost no cost. Apart from this, VSLA members say that they have been motivated by seeing the economic benefits for other community members from older VSLAs. This has triggered them to volunteer to support expansion of the VSLA methodology to other communities. The village agents have been quick to note that the VSLA methodology encourages them to volunteer because it is a simple approach, easily managed and sustained.

Experimenting with incentives

Even though the results have been positive, both the VSLAs and project staff observed some challenges. village agents cover long distances offering support to VSLAs and have to volunteer a lot of time

away from their economic activities. Even in districts where distance is not an issue, members of the VSLAs are mindful that large amounts of work for the village agents could stall volunteer potential. village agents indicated that one of the factors that motivated them was the support offered to them in terms of bicycles, which has made their work a lot easier, as they are able to cover longer distances without investing too much time. Though the village agents do not receive substantial financial incentives from the VSLAs, members of the VSLAs are aware that this may be necessary in the future as the demand for village agent services grows.

To respond to these potential challenges, the VSLAs have been piloting a few methods to encourage the village agents. Village agents are now being remunerated for their services in kind through donations of small livestock or in the form of payment. Some VSLAs have created a village agent fund, which is similar to the social fund where members pool some moneys from members to use during family illnesses or bereavement. Other initiatives include allowing a village agent to have memberships in each of the VSLAs that they support. In this case, each time a village agent is present offering support, they also have an opportunity to save.

In the last three years the RFP has discovered that the use of village agents is effective for the sustainability of the VSLAs. The village agent support framework requires community voluntarism through the use of motivated VSLA members whose services can be remunerated through a community approach. With some support at the start of these initiatives, RFP has learnt, they can become a great success.

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Dairy production for sustainability

Co-operatives often depend on external institutions for their existence. The Liteta Dairy Co-operative has a different story. This co-operative came up with an initiative to sustain their income even in the absence of financial institutions to provide loans.

Barbra Mukuni

In Liteta, in the Chibombo district of the Central Province of Zambia, a small group of dairy farmers started organising meetings twice a week. This group started with four women and one man in 2007 and grew to about 20 members, still mostly women. The

group arranged consultative meetings with other relevant parties, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, which invited veterinary officers to look at the health of the farmers' animals, and the Golden-Valley Agriculture Research Trust, which was asked to teach the farmers about animal husbandry to help improve their milk production.

The expansion of success

The IFAD-funded Rural Finance Program (RFP) visited these farmers and offered them funds to further improve their initiative. RFP introduced the farmers to Micro-Bankers Trust, a financial institution which offers relatively low interest rate loans (down to 48% per annum). With access to these loans, the farmers were able to acquire a high quality breed of heifers, build a storage shelter with about 1,500 litres of cooler tanks, buy strong packaging materials such as metal cans, and buy bicycles for easy transportation of their product to the market.

In the past, the farmers had used plastic containers to pack milk, which made the milk spill easily on the way to the market or even allowed the milk to go bad. Now, with the use of the metal cans, losses have been reduced. These cans are also easy to clean and provide a good standard of hygiene.

A rare opportunity then presented itself to the co-operative. They signed a contract with a milk company called Parmalat,

The co-operative receives veterinarians and other service providers to help maintain their animals' health

Farmers in the co-operative are able to fund their own future

in which they agreed to produce 1,200 litres daily. The farmers have been able to meet this demand, every day. This is a rare opportunity, because most farmers do not have the chance to sell directly to a big company and usually sell instead to local people at a much lower price. At first, any excess milk was to be taken back home by the farmers, but later the farmers were allowed to sell the excess milk to other milk companies, such as the Finta milk company. Even the low grade milk, which would normally have been disposed of, was bought by the depot and turned into sour milk to be sold locally.

Facing challenges

Despite these successes, the co-operative farmers faced some challenges. Even with the money to buy the heifers, they were not always available on the market. As a result, only 20% of the demand for heifers has been met so far. Secondly, the co-operative's production was lower during the dry season because of the limited availability of fresh grass for their animals. In these months, low milk production forced the farmers to repay the loans from their own pockets instead of using the profit from milk sales. In addition, several diseases that affect cattle, such as foot and mouth disease and corridor disease, influenced the production of milk. Fortunately, the co-operative was able to hire a veterinarian and extension officers from the Ministry of Agriculture now do check-ups every three weeks and are notified in the case of a disease outbreak.

Participation of women

Women are regarded as a key element to all dimensions of development. However, we find that they often have other duties which affect their full participation in farming for the market. This initiative has done a lot for women in the area because it particularly included women and helped them generate an income. It has also identified some constraints faced and put measures in place to limit these constraints, such as asking veterinary officers to provide constant visits and help where needed. Co-operative members are now also providing sensitisation activities to encourage more participation of women.

Next steps

To enhance the positive effects of this initiative, more veterinary officers could be engaged to provide the maximum services needed. In addition, more linkages to other companies that produce processed milk products, such as cheese and yoghurt, could help expand the market for the co-operative's products. To overcome the limited availability of heifers, artificial insemination should be encouraged.

Sustainability heavily depends on the economic opportunities available. The Liteta co-operative is sustainable because it has identified a way to ensure a good flow of money – not only with their quality milk but also through selling their low grade milk. Their milk now reaches consumers in the cities, as the agreement with Parmalat greatly expands their consumer base. As a consequence, the farmers in Liteta do not depend on the project anymore and are able to fund their own future on a sustainable basis.

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Seeds of success:

Creating community seed banks in Luapula

Lack of access to high quality certified seed is one of the bottlenecks limiting productivity in smallholder agriculture in Zambia. A collaborative partnership between a development programme, a farmer organisation, a research and extension agency and a seed certification service established community seed banks as a sustainable pathway for providing quality seed to farmers.

Alfred Mkonda

Luapula Province is one of the ten provinces in Zambia and is ranked as one of the poorest. In 2006, the Finnish and Zambian governments partnered and funded the four-year Programme for Luapula Agricultural and Rural Development (PLARD). The programme aimed to increase incomes and food security among targeted small-scale farmers, focusing particularly on agribusiness and agricultural and fishery development. In consultation with stakeholders, a value chain analysis and livelihood approach was used; this selected cassava, beans and groundnuts as crops with a comparative advantage in the area. Farmers were already growing local varieties of these crops but their yields were low and their crops were not resistant to diseases.

The community seed bank initiative

The value chain analysis revealed that a shortage of certified high-quality seed contributed to the low productivity of cassava,

Harvesting groundnuts (photo: IITA Image Library)

groundnuts and beans. In order to increase the availability of good quality seed, a seed multiplication initiative for beans and groundnuts was started in the 2008/2009 farming season, using the community seed bank model. In this type of programme, farmers are given seed to plant and are required to pay back a portion of their harvest in seed. The part that they pay back is kept collectively in common storage facilities. This seed is then redistributed to other farmers who may not have benefited from the previous distribution. This continues until the whole community can benefit from the seeds on an ongoing basis.

The preferred variety of groundnuts seed was *Chishango* and *Chalimbana* whilst that of beans was *Lukupa*; all of these are high

yielding and have flavours that are more appreciated than those of local varieties. These three crops are also well adapted to the acidic soils that are characteristic to this area.

Four other institutions and organisations worked with PLARD on the initiative: the Zambia Agricultural Research Institute (ZARI), the Department of Agriculture, four District Farmer Associations (DFAs) and the Seed Certification and Control Institute (SCCI). Each of the different partners played a different role.

The success of this initiative comes from the collaboration of all partners involved

PLARD sourced the seed from research centres and primary seed growers for onward distribution to the DFAs, and guaranteed that the procured seed was authenticated by SCCI. The four DFAs – in Mansa, Kawambwa Mwense and Milenge districts – were responsible for famer mobilisation. They conducted training sessions to build members' capacities in areas such as "farming as a business" and co-operative management. The SCCI trained the extension workers from the Department of Agriculture and the leadership of the DFAs. They also trained the farmers in standard seed production procedures and carried out field inspections during crop growth and at the harvesting, processing and packaging phases. The extension workers from the Department of Agriculture supported the leadership of the DFA in monitoring. They also facilitated the field inspections of the seed crop by SCCI as they knew the areas well and could ensure that inspectors did not spend unnecessary time looking for the fields to inspect.

The community seed bank in action

From their general membership, the DFAs selected farmers who were interested in growing seed and had adequate land to do so. The selected farmers formed Area Seed Producer Associations in each agriculture camp (the smallest administrative agricultural unit in Zambia, each containing about 30-50 villages) that was selected to be part of this initiative. The DFA ensured that each member multiplied the seed as planned. With support from Department of Agriculture,

they monitored each member regularly to ensure that the standard practices were followed. Each Area Seed Association was required to assist their members who were unable to pay in full.

A total of 22 agriculture camps in Mansa, Milenge, Mwense and Kawambwa Districts participated. These four districts were chosen out of seven districts in Luapula Province because they had higher production of the three crops as well as an already established market for the crops.

Four hundred and fifteen farmers grew groundnuts and 360 farmers grew beans. Each farmer selected was given 10-20 kg of beans and ground nut seeds. In total, 3,115 kg of groundnuts and 2,990 kg of beans were distributed to farmers. The total harvest was 13,661 kg of beans and 8,187 kg of groundnuts. The farmers paid back 4,718 kg of beans and 3,780 kg of groundnuts to the Area Seed Producer Association. The community seed bank committee was responsible for safe storage and protection of the seed

The 415 farmers who grew groundnuts successfully repayed the amount of groundnuts they received (photo: Ryan Paetzold)

from storage pests. The farmers kept a certain quantity to sell, plant and eat.

The initiative was successful in terms of the payback rates: 121% in groundnuts and 158% in beans. This is high in comparison to most similar initiatives, where the pay back rate is often lower than 50%. The excess seed was distributed once again in the 2009/2010 farming season. This increased productivity of beans and groundnuts has led to increased incomes and food security in the area.

What went right?

The success of this initiative may be attributed to the fact that all the partners involved collaborated very well. Each of the six partners ensured that they carried out their roles as planned. All the partners shared a vision that came out of a consensus building meeting at the outset of the initiative. Each partner had a defined role that meshed with that of the others and there was good sharing of information and expertise, as detailed above.

The community seed banks have continued attracting new members and producing more seed, both for farmers to sell as well as for sustaining the community seed bank. The initiative has continued under the second phase of PLARD. It is recommended that the IFAD-supported Smallholder Productivity Promotion Programme (S3P) should scale up the initiative to other target communities in Luapula Province, working closely with PLARD II to synergise activities.

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Partnership and participation

Photo: Paul Mapfumo

Dambos: A land of knowledge for farmers

Inadequate water supply and a lack of irrigation facilities are one reason why many Zambian family farmers suffer from food insecurity. But for the farmers in the district of Chibombo the story is different. They are growing more food than ever. The Phiri family farm in the wetlands made a remarkable discovery, which eventually led the government, researchers and other co-operating partners to start to recognise the importance of farmers' indigenous knowledge.

Eletina Lungu-Jere

Chibombo District, in Zambia's Central Province, has a long stretch of wetland, locally known as *dambo*. In the past, the *dambo* area was not used for farming, as communities feared the muddy soil, capable of "burying somebody alive". When the region experienced terrible droughts in the late 1980s, desperation initiated a change in attitude towards farming in the *dambo* fields. The story begins with one innovative farming family.

John Phiri, his wife Maggie and their five children were one of the families that were affected by the drought. On one fateful day, after a poor harvest from the last rainy season, Mr Phiri and his family decided to try planting different crops in the *dambo* field as a last resort. While they took a break to rest, they shared a watermelon that Maggie had brought with her. To their surprise, the watermelon seeds

***Many other Chibombo farmers started producing juicy watermelons in the* dambo**

that had been scattered by the children in the field grew by accident and produced big, very good quality, juicy fruits. The tomatoes and vegetables that the family planted were also of high quality. Because of the good soil fertility and an abundance of moisture in the soil, the crops grew well. The family had enough to eat and surplus to sell.

Seeing is believing

Seeing the food produced by the Phiri family encouraged neighbouring farmers to also start planting in the *dambo*. Some families were hesitant at first, because of a fear that *dambo* fields were dangerous

places to farm and the belief that crops would not grow there. However, the majority of farmers in the region took advantage of the fact that these fields are wet throughout the year, which means they do not need to wait for the rainy season to start growing food.

Farmers were encouraged to learn from each other about what crops they can (and can't) grow and about diseases and pest control methods. Family farmers, such the Phiri family, are experts about their own lands. The value of their knowledge is increasingly being recognised by other actors. As government extension officers made their routine farmer field visits, they started to catch up with what the farmers in Chibombo district were doing in the wetlands. Agricultural researchers started looking into the use of the *dambo* fields for cultivation,

Family farmers are experts on* dambo *cultivation now, and teach not only fellow farmers but also researchers and extension agents

taking the time to learn from the Phiri family about the methodologies they used. Extension officers used the Phiri *dambo* crop field for demonstrations for other farmers in the region.

Regrettably, Chibombo farmers now face new problems. Now that more vegetables and watermelons are produced in the *dambo* fields, the market for watermelons and cabbages in the district has become flooded. As a result, the prices have gone down and the farmers feel they are being exploited by middle men. It remains important to assist the farmers in developing market linkages and technologies for value addition, building on their own needs and knowledge.

One should not underestimate farmers' knowledge: it is a valuable resource

Farmer knowledge

The experience in Chibombo has shown that one should not underestimate family farmers' knowledge – it is a valuable resource that can be adopted and incorporated into national and regional development programmes. Family farmers are not just recipients of knowledge, but they also experiment and find out what works best in their farming systems. As such they are also important knowledge builders. This is a lesson that needs to be recognised more widely. The Zambian Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and other co-operating partners are encouraged to take up this principle and scale it up to other areas to help increase farmer productivity and food security.

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The winning triangle: Smallholders, private investors and government

Access to markets is one of the greatest challenges faced by smallholder livestock farmers in Zambia. Attempts to address this problem in the past have not always succeeded or have produced mixed results. A new business model in Zambia's Southern Province is yielding positive results – it involves all of the key actors and is based on collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Kwibisa Liywalii

A new business model is being piloted in Choma district in the Southern Province, one of the major food baskets in the country. This district is approximately 300 km south of the capital, Lusaka, and has an active farming community. It is characterised by relatively high populations of small livestock and beef cattle.

How it all began

More Beef Ltd., a private company engaged in processing and supplying meat products to major super market chains, is constructing an abattoir in the district. While initially the abattoir facility was meant for beef cattle, the business will also purchase and process goats from local farmers. This area is served by the Smallholder Agribusiness Promotion Programme (SAPP), which is funded by the Government of Zambia (GRZ) and IFAD. The programme's intervention in this sector is part of SAPP's commodity-focused value chain development work in the province, which in turn is part of GRZ and IFAD's broader strategy

aimed at reducing poverty. SAPP supports interventions in the small livestock value chain, targeting goats, pigs and local chickens.

SAPP started the groundwork for entering partnerships with different stakeholders in 2012, using commodity mapping and analysis exercises to measure small livestock activities, with active participation of the community. Others were involved as well: technical departments of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock contributed their expertise; the Department of Community Development of the Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health was involved in mobilising and capacity building activities of mostly women farmer groups; and non-governmental organisations and local authorities acted as civic leaders.

The mapping and analysis process brought out a multiplicity of problems and challenges affecting the smallholder farmers, as well as

The most immediate issue in Choma district was increasing the number of livestock, making the area attractive for market players (photo: Kate Longley, WorldFish)

opportunities that could be exploited for their benefit. The exercise also identified a number of principal players and actors in the sector, including More Beef Ltd. While analysing the actors' activities, the opportunities available and the possible solutions for addressing key constraints, there was a general consensus that the issue of marketing was the overarching one and that SAPP was best able to handle the vexing issue of market access, because of its agribusiness orientation. Once bottlenecks were removed, the market pull would stimulate production – although it was also agreed that something needed to be done about the quality of the products. This pointed to the need for improved husbandry practices.

The unfolding story

In addressing the issue of markets, one immediate proposal was to first address the issue of increasing the volumes of livestock available in the farming areas in the district. This would make the areas attractive to traders and generate enough beef to meet the volumes required by the new abattoir in Choma. The possibility of establishing bulking points or collection centres, where farmers would bring market-ready livestock, was explored. In the end it was agreed that the surrounding communities would embark on this road, with facilitation from SAPP. A total of six such facilities were planned in satellite areas; these will be constructed in the latter part of 2013. Once constructed, the bulking points will serve a population of over 5,000 farm households.

SAPP planned community meetings in the surrounding areas to plan for the establishment of the bulking centres. Two rounds of meetings were held in six satellite communities in 2012 and early 2013, reaching a total of fifteen farmer groups. Communities identified the required resources for putting up the infrastructure, the resources they could contribute themselves and the type and level of support they required from the project and others. Community contributions were narrowed down to labour, building sand and gravel. In addition, the community agreed to contribute ten per cent of the total cost in the form of cash.

SAPP arranged several meetings with More Beef Ltd. to determine what the company's contribution would be. It was agreed that their role would involve mentoring the smallholder farmers in improving their production for the market, in addition to providing a ready customer for the farmers. The firm planned to put up a demonstration plot to facilitate farmer education on improved husbandry practices. The idea was to ensure the improved quality of animals that were to be sold, so that farmers got a better price and therefore increased their incomes – one of SAPP's key objectives. In addition, More Beef Ltd. was identified as the target market for goats, and the firm would go to the communities and purchase the animals, eliminating the transportation costs and inconveniences on the part of the farmers, as well as doing away with middle men who were known for their unfavourable trading practices and low prices.

What it means now

From the beginning of the initiative, there has been a strong sense of community ownership of the effort – from mapping to the prioritisation of possible solutions, identification of the site and willingness to contribute to the infrastructure to be put up. In addition to the involvement of the farmers, there was support from the community at large, as can be seen from the participation of the chiefs. The traditional leadership took part in the community

IFAD Country Office and SAPP Team visiting More Beef Ltd

SAPP staff discussing with the manager of More Beef Ltd

meetings, and, as "owners of the land", were instrumental in ensuring that the earmarked bulking centres were allocated land that is accessible to all. A total of six village headmen as well as representatives of the local chief attended the first meeting. As an effort in which all were involved directly or through representation, the community seemed to be united around this project. The level of social cohesion that this particular initiative built in communities around Choma and among smallholder livestock farmer groups is unprecedented in the area. This remarkable achievement was attributed to the wide range of stakeholder involvement and participation.

The collaboration between the private sector players – the farmers and More Beef – and the public sector was one of the key ingredients of success. While a mentorship plan has not yet been fully developed, bringing two parties together and eliminating the "untrusted" middlemen has brought trust between the two parties. SAPP, within the framework of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, is working on modalities to facilitate completion of the mentorship plan and put in place mechanisms for managing and monitoring this relationship between the smallholder farmers and More Beef Ltd.

The benefits arising from the linkages thus created look to be long-term and will help to ensure economic sustainability. The public sector, comprised of the Ministry of Agriculture's Departments of Agribusiness and Marketing, Cooperatives, and Livestock Development, as well as the Ministry of Community Development,

was equally involved. The latter Ministry's work in community mobilisation and women farmer groups was key to how the community organised itself.

Looking ahead

The developed trust between the farmers, More Beef and public sector was one of the key ingredients for success

The initiative clearly demonstrates how the challenges of market access can be overcome, by using an approach that is inclusive and taking into account what each stakeholder can do to ensure a win-win situation for all parties involved. The win-win scenario, as demonstrated clearly by this pilot, will help remove the suspicions and mistrust that characterise relationships between public sector bureaucrats and the private sector players, particularly in areas where the former is supported using public resources.

The relatively simple model presents an opportunity for replication elsewhere as the problems farmers in other districts in Zambia face are similar to those of the groups in Choma, provided that private investors are encouraged to open abattoirs in these areas.

More importantly, this initiative shows that inclusive business models work, and can work in programmes and projects that support smallholder farmers. Initiatives like this have the potential to maximise impact and contribute to IFAD's bid to bring 80 million people out of poverty.

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Sweet but sour

Are there possible exceptions to the rule of always involving the primary stakeholders at all stages of the planning process for enhanced ownership and sustainability? The reaction of stakeholders from Luapula showed that some prefer not to be wholly involved in all of the planning and preparation stages of a development programme, especially in aspects where they had mutually exclusive vested interests. The reaction against being fully involved that was witnessed at the Mansa workshop in the province of Luapula seems to give a thought-provoking perspective on taking for granted a conventional thought: that stakeholders should be treated as partners and as such they must be involved in all the planning and preparation processes.

Geoffrey Ndawa Chomba

The Smallholder Productivity Promotion Programme (S3P), whose goal is to reduce poverty among the smallholder farmers in the selected districts of the Northern and Luapula provinces, is co-financed by the Government of the Republic of Zambia, IFAD and the Government of Finland. The seven-year programme aims to strengthen farmer groups and associations, provide pluralistic participatory extension, do agricultural research for development, develop infrastructure related to agriculture production and marketing, and facilitate the formulation of pro-farmer policies. The programme is designed to take a phased approach, starting with

Extension staff from Luapulu's eleven districts at the Mansa Workshop listeni to the presentation of selection criteria

four districts in each of the two provinces, then expanding to eight districts in each province and finally to a yet-to-be-identified third province.

Luapula is located in the northern half of Zambia and it is bordered by the Democratic Republic of Congo on its western side. It has eleven districts, three of which were just created a year before our work started in June 2013. The province is one of the poorest in Zambia with a poverty incidence of slightly over 80%. The farming system is cassava based, and fishing has been a dominant activity in the province for a long time.

Who gets the programme?

The Programme Management Unit (PMU) was created by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in conjunction with IFAD to manage the programme. One of its major tasks was to select eight out of the eleven districts in Luapula in which the programme activities could be undertaken, based on objectively set criteria. Given the available resources it was not considered feasible to be present and try to meaningfully make an impact in all of the districts. Representatives of the Ministry's Extension Department's field staff were drawn from all

the districts to participate in a four-day strategic planning workshop held in Mansa, the provincial headquarters, in June 2013. The other participants for this workshop included agricultural planners, provincial and district agricultural co-ordinators, local authority representatives, and other selected staff from related agricultural projects active in the area.

On behalf of the PMU, I presented the selection criteria, which prominently showed that the "scores" that districts could receive would be based on items such as the production potential of the crops of interest to the programme, access to markets, and on supporting infrastructure. Upon soliciting the views of the participants, they almost unanimously challenged this selection process. "*As district representatives who have particular interests in having the programme in our respective areas, we cannot objectively be part of this selection!*" they said. "*You should have independently selected districts without our involvement, and then just presented this selection to us for ratification or veto. If it is not well handled, the process is just going to create unnecessary antagonism.*"

I was personally taken aback by this reaction, because I thought that the proposed selection criteria were very objective and that the participants would be glad to determine their own destiny. My colleagues from PMU and I tried to explain the main idea behind this process, and that it was not our intention to dictate to the provinces which districts should participate. Possibly, if we had followed their suggestion from the start, we would have been criticised for not consulting them!

I thought that participants would be glad to determine their own destiny

Finding a solution

There was an apparent deadlock on how to select the districts. Ultimately, the participants reasoned that a solution needed to be reached due to the time limitations of the workshop. It was decided that the project was going to intervene in all the old districts. The participants used the selection criteria to choose the first four

The S3P Programme Manager presents the group scores of each district

districts for Phase 1 of the programme and then those that were going to be brought in after two years for Phase 2. This decision preserved unity and gave an impetus to continue making meaningful contributions to the strategic planning process. On the other hand, the programme now faced the risk of spreading the available resources too thinly across the province. In addition, the choice of only old districts was likely going to create discontentment among political leaders of the new districts.

How could this have been handled better? Does not conventional wisdom call for stakeholder involvement from the onset? What essential mistakes were made? The major lesson that I learned from the whole process is that, even though there might be nothing wrong with the principle and possibly the application of stakeholder involvement, the approach matters. The stakeholders are more likely to be keen to be involved in the planning process when it is felt that the benefits will accrue directly to all of them.

Which way next

Stakeholder participation in the development agenda is an important concept. Where mutually exclusive interests and benefits exist, it is imperative to carefully consider the approach to use in involving stakeholders. If we fail to do this, what in principle is sweet and noble may yield sour results. It is recommended that future projects that

need to select only some of many areas for implementation, should consider taking one or both of the following measures:

- Consult partners or secondary partners in setting the criteria and selecting the areas, without involving the primary beneficiaries.
- The beneficiaries, with guidance from programme facilitators, have to come up with their own selection criteria of programme areas.

The level of engagement with stakeholders is paramount. This process could have worked better if the representatives could simply have selected sub-areas from their own pre-selected implementation areas. The lessons derived from this workshop were used to select districts in the Northern Province in the next workshop, and we intend to apply these insights in the selection of a third province and its respective districts in 2014.

Stakeholders are more likely to be involved in planning processes when they feel like they will benefit from it

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The magical trick of inclusiveness and flexibility

The phrase "Participatory Approaches" is commonly used today. However, it is a lot easier to preach the phrase without actually practicing it and experiencing the benefits that you can derive from it. I practiced what I preached and benefitted from it during the process of selecting the operational areas for the Smallholder Productivity Promotion Programme. This process was part of the broader two-year planning for the implementation of the programme.

Martin M. Liywalii

In June 2013, the team I head, from the Programme Management Unit of the Smallholder Productivity Promotion Programme (S3P), was faced with the difficult decision of selecting eight of the nine districts, and 50 out of the 139 agricultural camps in the Northern

Province of Zambia to participate in a programme to support productivity and production among smallholder farmers. The S3P is a programme which is financed by IFAD and the Finnish Government. The Northern Province is one the targets of the S3P, but one such intervention cannot cover the whole province, so we needed to limit it to the eight districts. After we selected these, we would then need to select four districts that that would start programme activities immediately and four that would join after two years. So, equipped with pre-set selection criteria, we organised a workshop in which implementers could decide on the operational area for the programme.

Straight-forward, objective criteria… or not

The idea behind using the criteria was to remove biases and subjectivity from the process of selecting participating districts and camps. Biases are natural, as everyone wants to receive more of the resources that are associated with development interventions. But we wanted an objective selection. So, my team asked one of the workshop delegates, Kasama District Agricultural Co-ordinator Mr Gaston Phiri, to present the selection criteria to the participants at the workshop held in Kasama. We felt, as a team, that the criteria were not only objective but straight-forward.

Lack of inclusiveness and flexibility in participatory approaches can lead to crafting of solutions that don't work

It turned out that it was not as straight-forward as we thought, as we had also just experienced in another target province, Luapula. Workshop participants had difficulties agreeing on the criteria and on the data presented to them to help them decide whether the criteria were met. Some workshop participants felt that the official production statistics given to them were not accurate and could not be relied upon. Others were of the view that certain criteria should be applied inversely. For instance, they thought that the presence of other projects should not be the basis for selecting a participating camp but should instead be used as an exclusion criterion so that more camps could be reached by various interventions.

The process in Kasama, unlike at our earlier workshop in Mansa in the province of Luapula, was "derailed". However, in the end, we managed to select the required number of districts and agricultural camps with all participants seemingly satisfied that the process was transparent. We were also able to select, with ease, which four would go first, and which four would follow in two years.

The magic of inclusiveness and flexibility

While some of our colleagues felt we lost time in the discussion, it turned out that our success in the planning process actually lay in overcoming the monumental hurdle of agreeing on the basis for selection of participating districts and agricultural camps. Overcoming this hurdle depended largely upon having a thorough debate on, and a full appreciation of, the criteria. When the criteria were fully understood and accepted, the rest of the downstream activities flowed smoothly. We reflected later as a team on the factors that were responsible for the success. Two key and magic words – "inclusiveness" and "flexibility" – did the trick!

The ownership was fully transferred from facilitators to implementers

First and foremost, our workshop included the potential implementers of programme activities from all nine districts in the province. Not only that, the participants' views were fully debated and accommodated, where applicable, in shaping the decision-making process. As facilitators, we got the implementers to own the process and take full responsibility for the final decision. After all, they would not just be the implementers, but they also had full knowledge of the local environment. Where data reliability disputes arose, a simple method was employed for reaching agreement on which area produced more than the other. This involved getting the participants to substantiate their misgivings about the data and openly discuss the issue until proven justified or otherwise. We left participants to debate production figures per district until consensus was reached. Such consensus, in almost all cases, confirmed the official production statistics. The ownership of the process was fully transferred from the facilitators to implementers – a key principle in effective participatory approaches.

As a team we did not allow rigidity to rule over flexibility. Although we set out to have the pre-determined criteria applied judiciously to the process of selecting the programme's operational area, we were flexible enough to accommodate new ideas and thinking and incorporated these into the process. For example, we adopted the decision that the absence of other projects, rather then their presence, would be a criterion for selecting agricultural camps.

The way forward

One major lesson I learned from the process, common but rarely underlined, is that solutions lie with those affected by the problem. Be flexible enough to accommodate their concerns and fears. Let the affected people lead the process of identifying solutions to their problems and challenges. Do not dictate, but steer the process. Let the affected people own the process. This lesson will be valuable as we go into the third target province, expected to come on board in two years. We will employ a similar approach in selecting districts and agricultural camps there.

This approach can be employed by practitioners as they implement participatory extension approaches, not only under the S3P but in other interventions seeking to address problems and challenges faced by smallholder farmers. It is amazing how much this approach can transform smallholder agriculture as a vehicle for poverty eradication and wealth creation in rural economies. The full employment of inclusiveness and flexibility in participatory approaches reduces, and can even eliminate, the risk of low adoption of productivity-enhancing technologies among small-scale farmers.

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Many rural development initiatives attempt to improve the lives of small-scale farmers. Some succeed, some fail – but all of them can offer valuable lessons for the future. In a two-phased documentation workshop, a group of experts working in IFAD-funded projects in Zambia described, analysed and wrote down some of their most promising experiences. This book presents the results of their work. The eleven articles provide different lessons and challenges relevant for professionals in the field of agriculture and rural development.

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