

Dossier Social inclusion

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Scope

This dossier is about the role of rural producers' organizations in inclusive innovation systems; it focuses on the role that farmers' organizations play in enhancing the poorest farmers' access to agricultural advisory services such as research, training, advice and extension.

Farmers' organizations can play a key role in agricultural innovation, since they have the capacity to pool, aggregate and disseminate knowledge and information. Moreover, they are increasingly positioned in both service networks and supply chains to coordinate activities and promote an enabling environment for innovation.



The services that are being provided to members, whether by farmers' organizations themselves or by third parties, include knowledge services such as agricultural research, advisory (extension and technology dissemination) and other types of farmer training.

Farmers' organizations are increasingly involved in orienting services towards the specific needs of their members and/or providing these services themselves. However, although the role of farmers' organizations is rapidly increasing in importance, there are significant risks that individual members and/or groups are being excluded from these services. There are also many farmers who do not join farmers' organizations. Sometimes this is because they are particularly poor or belong to vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households and widows, and in other cases because they are from a minority social or ethnic group, or disabled (e.g. HIV/AIDS-affected households). As a result, the specific needs of these categories of farmers are often not provided for, and they are excluded from effective service provision.

Inclusive access to agricultural services by all categories of rural households, from the poorest to the richer, is supportive in achieving sustainable rural innovation. Farmers' organizations are key to enhancing the demand-orientation of these services. Strategies are needed to strengthen the capacities of farmer organizations to improve access of the "poorest of the poor" to agricultural advisory services or to provide these services themselves.

Ensuring inclusive access to services requires, among other things, analysis of the role of farmers' organizations in exclusion/inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups. Such an analysis can yield strategies for strengthening the capacity of farmer organizations to further social inclusion.

The dossier presents an analytical framework, and the findings and recommendations from a case study. It also outlines KIT's involvement, and provides resources, a glossary, and news.

In-depth

Analytical framework

Analyzing the role of farmers' organizations in access of the poor to agricultural services requires an understanding of the way in which farmers are organized, and the mechanisms of social exclusion/inclusion of service provision.

Wennink, Nederlof & Heemskerk (2007; Part I) designed an analytical framework comprising six main criteria:

- Membership of the farmers' organization. Social inclusion hindrances such as lack of resources to pay the annual subscription fee may restrict the "poorest of the poor" from becoming members of an organization and hence having less access to services.
- Gender. Women play an important role in agriculture; however, they are often submitted to "traditional" rules and norms (e.g., power relations, land tenure), which may lead to their marginalization within rural society, to limited or even no access to services, and little opportunity to join farmers' organizations.
- Social capital. The main drive for farmers to organize themselves is that collective action, rather than individual action, provides a better opportunity to gain a suitable response to their needs. Social relationships, both within the organization and with the outside world, are crucial to develop collective action. For more information about social capital, see Heemskerk and Wennink (2004).



- The role of farmers within the organization. Social inclusion hindrances may hamper certain (groups of) members to freely express their needs and fully exercise their rights as members. Criteria and rules, whether formal or informal, may exclude certain member groups from being represented or from fully participating in the organization. The composition of the governing and administrative bodies, and the mechanisms involved, are also a reflection of the role of farmer members within the organization.
- Representativeness of the organization. The organization may represent only farmer members or may also represent non-members (often the poorer households) within the sector or area.
- The role of farmers' organizations in service provision. The inclusive character of a service also depends on the provider of the service and is often the result of a continuous interaction between the farmer organization and the service provider. The role of farmers' organizations in this interaction can be threefold, i.e., to: I) persuade service providers to listen to the poor and vulnerable among their members and non-members, and facilitate the voicing of these groups; II) influence the agenda of services (e.g., setting priorities for research and extension); and III) provide and supply these services by themselves or on a joint basis with public/private providers.

Case study

Three commodity-based organizations (i.e., cashew, coffee and cotton) and two more general networks for farmer groups in sub-Saharan Africa were studied using this framework (Wennink, Nederlof & Heemskerk, 2007; Part II).

Analysis of the way farmers are organized and the functioning of each farmers' organization permitted:

- Identification of internal factors related to the organizations themselves (organizational weaknesses and strengths) and external factors (context-related opportunities and threats) that influence social exclusion and inclusion;
- Assessment of the role played by farmers' organizations in accessing services for their members, non-members and the poorest among them;
- Making recommendations to enhance access to services for the poor.

The following internal factors (#1-4) and external factors (#5-8) that influence service provision in terms of social exclusion/inclusion were identified:

1. Inclusive eligibility criteria for representing categories of members at levels or platforms where decision-making on service provision is taking place;
2. Capacity strengthening and skill development of both the members and staff for adequately voicing of needs and planning of services;
3. Financial resources and a certain level of financial autonomy as a leverage mechanism for orienting and providing services;
4. Building social capital for collective action by members and member organizations, and joint action with service providers
5. National policies for diversifying commodity crops (e.g., niche and specialty markets for cashew and coffee);
6. Institutions for voicing farmers' needs (e.g., local farmer fora for priority setting in service delivery);
7. Decentralization of agricultural research and extension services; and
8. Availability of technologies for the poorest.

Recommendations

A need for continuous interaction between agricultural service providers and farmers' organizations

The case study demonstrates the need for a continuous interaction between agricultural service providers and farmers' organizations. This would also allow farmers' organizations to better articulate inclusive demands.

Key roles for farmers' organizations in inclusive innovation systems

Farmers' organizations can play four roles in the pro-poor orientation of services:

- Lobbying for an enabling policy and institutional environment.
- Facilitating the voice of the poorest and other vulnerable groups to be heard;
- Exercising influence on advancing socially inclusive research and advisory service agendas; and,
- Becoming involved in the implementation of research and advisory services for the poorest and the most vulnerable.

Capacity strengthening of farmers' organizations: articulating inclusive demands

Farmers' organizations require capacity development for:

- Learning-by-doing and learning-by-interaction. These are key elements in order to strengthen socially inclusive service provision for new technologies and practices.
- Enhancing the level of inclusion enhancement for different types of services.
- Monitoring the social inclusiveness of agricultural innovation.

Furthermore, farmers' organizations can undertake specific actions as member-based and member-led organizations:

- Farmers' organizations can develop special programmes to enhance equal opportunities for members to become involved in leadership (at group and higher levels) through skill development and 'learning-by-doing'.
- Farmers' organizations require (and some already have), internal and external policies to advance the interests of women, young members and other vulnerable groups, such as people affected by HIV/AIDS, and specifically on mainstreaming such groups in service provision for innovation development.
- Farmers' organizations can develop their own gender strategies, without leaning towards window-dressing for donors. Gender involves changing cultural values and organizational strategies that help define favourable criteria for access to services and opportunities for women to express their voice.
- Farmers' organizations need to define criteria for the regular elaboration of membership profiles. This will allow the farmers' organization to develop strategies to include special target groups such as young members, households headed by women, HIV/AIDS-affected households, herdsmen, minority ethnic groups etc. More particularly, it allows them to generate innovation-development priorities for each member category and to articulate these accordingly.
- With respect to commodity-based organizations, product quality and related price incentives (instead of bulk quantities) provide an excellent opportunity for poorer farmers to gain a market share and improve their incomes.

Capacity strengthening of farmers' organizations: building social capital

Farmers' organizations require capacity development for their social capital.

- Farmers' organizations are most likely to have a socially inclusive membership through strong grass-roots groups. Inclusiveness can be further enhanced through a concentration on more socially mixed groups. Socially mixed groups can exist not only in relation to gender, but also in terms of poverty categories (e.g., small and larger farmers, households affected/unaffected by HIV/AIDS).
- To favour access for the poorest, farmer groups need low thresholds for entry of new members and active policies to include all types of farmers and rural households.
- There is a need to strengthen learning within the community, similar to the experiential learning approach used in Farmer Field Schools, but with an extra dimension that the poorest and other small-scale farmers, as well as all gender categories, are involved.
- Closer interactions between the grass-roots level and the intermediate/national levels of farmers' organizations are needed, also in terms of meeting innovation requirements at the grass-roots level and lobbying for an enabling environment at national level.

The overall picture shows that farmers' organizations and service providers increasingly work together as a result of public funding constraints and the desire by service providers to gain an "economy of scale". However, farmers' organizations are increasingly taking over services and, as such, provide services to the overall farmer community (both to members and non-members).

The study also showed the impact of private funding: the more private funding is involved (e.g., through commodity levies or services provided by private enterprises), the more the services are exclusively targeted towards members. Involvement of the public sector in service provision and a stronger focus on community-development-related goals seem to be a guarantee for reaching beyond the members of a farmers' organization.

References:

- Heemskerk, W. & B. Wennink (2004) [Building social capital for agricultural innovation: experiences with farmer groups in Sub-Saharan Africa](#)
- Wennink, B., S. Nederlof & W. Heemskerk (eds.) (2007) [Access of the poor to agricultural services: the role of farmers' organizations in social inclusion - Bulletin 376](#)

KIT's involvement

KIT Development Policy & Practice department

Ensuring equitable service delivery and better quality services requires an understanding of the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups. KIT works to evaluate the effectiveness of different inclusion strategies, and to enhance the accessibility of services for various groups.

KIT has over 30 years of experience in agricultural service delivery using innovative, client-oriented approaches. Currently, KIT's Development Policy & Practice department is working with farmer organizations to see how knowledge service providers can better reach the poor. Securing quality services and sustainable financing mechanisms are an important aspect of this work.

The department develops methods and tools, adapted to the African context in particular, that increase the effectiveness of all parties - agricultural service providers, farmer organizations, local governments and the private sector - to take part in the innovation process.

Publications

- [Bulletin 368 - Building social capital for agricultural innovation](#)
- [Bulletin 374 - Farmers' organizations and agricultural innovation](#)
- [Bulletin 376 - Access of the poor to agricultural services](#)
- [Bulletin 380 - Outsourcing agricultural advisory services](#)

Projects

- [Strengthening equitable demand in rural services delivery](#)
- [Capacity building for client oriented service delivery](#)
- [Producers' organisations support programme \(POSP\)](#)
- [Rural poverty report: access to agricultural services](#)

Related KIT items

- [Fact sheet: Innovation for rural development](#)

- [Dossier: Rural innovation systems](#)
- [Dossier: Rural innovation policies](#)
- [Dossier: Outsourcing agricultural advisory services](#)
- [Dossier: RAAKS](#)
- [Website: Agricultural services for rural development](#)

Resources

The following list of electronic resources provides rapid access to key references on the main topics of the dossier:

Documents

- [Access to agricultural services - Background Paper for the IFAD Rural Poverty Report 2010](#) (2008) E.S. Nederlof, B. Wennink & W. Heemskerk
- [Access of the poor to agricultural services: the role of farmers' organizations in social inclusion - Bulletin 376](#) (2007) B. Wennink, S. Nederlof & W. Heemskerk (eds.)
- [Farmers' organisations and contracted R&D services - Service provision and innovation in the coffee chain](#) (2007) Giel Ton & Don Jansen
- [Rural producer organizations and agricultural innovation](#) (2006) B. Wennink & W. Heemskerk
- [From "best practice" to "best fit": a framework for designing and analyzing pluralistic agricultural advisory services](#) (2006) R. Birner et al.
- [Institutional arrangements for increasing the dissemination role of farmer groups in agricultural innovation systems](#) (2006) K. Davis
- [Stocktaking of selected World Bank projects working with rural institutions for sustainable livelihoods and equitable development](#) (2006) N. Perrin, R. Van Der Riet & J. Sjorslev
- [Gender, social capital and information exchange in rural Uganda](#) (2006) Enid Katungi, Svetlana Edmeades & Melinda Smale
- [Bringing farmers together](#) (2005) J. Zake, C. Walaga & A. de Jager
- [Assessing impacts of farmer participatory research approaches : a case study of local agricultural research committees in Colombia \(CIALs\)](#) (2005) S. Kaaria et al.
- [Impact assessment of Local agricultural research committees \(CIALs\) in Yoro department, Honduras](#) (2004) L. Classen et al. In: Annual report / Rural innovation institute, CIAT; 2004, p. 207-224
- [Building social capital for agricultural innovation: experiences with farmer groups in Sub-Saharan Africa](#) (2004) W. Heemskerk & B. Wennink
- [Rural diversity, agricultural innovation policies and poverty reduction](#) (2002) J.A. Berdegúe & G. Escobar

Websites

- [Agro-info.net - Information platform for Producer Organisations](#)
- [FARA - Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa](#)
- [ICRA : International Centre for development oriented Research in Agriculture](#)
- [IFAP - International Federation of Agricultural Producers](#)

- [PROLINNOVA](#)
- [ILEIA](#)
- [Rural Innovation Systems](#)
- [IFAD - International Fund for Agricultural Development](#)

KIT Library Queries

- [Predefined search: Rural innovation systems and farmers' organizations](#)
- [Conduct your own library search for paper and/or electronic resources](#)

Glossary

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.

(<http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/empowerment.htm>)

Social inclusion of service provision essentially refers to the access to services by the most vulnerable farmers in rural society. (http://www.kit.nl/net/KIT_Publicaties_output/showfile.aspx?e=1333)