

CAPACITY BUILDING NEEDS OF FARMERS' LOCAL ORGANISATIONS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Farmers' Local Organisations (FLOs) are a myriad in Akwa Ibom State, but are faced with a lot of limitations and constraints. They can however be made to perform facilitatory roles in agricultural and rural development. Against this background, this study was conducted, to identify capacity building needs required to enable FLOs perform their expected roles in the State. Fifteen FLOs and 225 FLO members were sampled for the study and results revealed FLOs capacity building needs to include: how to mobilise local funds, human and material resources to empower members for active inputs into FLO activities, how to access and negotiate with external entities to draw down much required assistance and how to enlist and sustain the cooperation of FLOs membership. Recommendations are proffered for enhanced FLOs inputs into the grassroots development process.

KEYWORDS: Capacity building needs; constraints; farmers' local organizations; agricultural development; agricultural development

1.0 INTRODUCTION

It has been stated by Panos Institute (2001) that about 70 percent of Africa's poor live in rural areas and are largely dependent on small-scale agricultural production, and hence most of the poverty in Africa is related to agriculture. Against this background, consistent efforts have been focused on improving the situation of small-scale farmers, based on the premise that policies targeting them are likely to have a far-reaching impact on poverty alleviation and augmentation of food production. It is only through collective effort and organisation however, that the poor can reduce dependence and initiate a course of participatory and self-reliant development. In relation to this Roling (1995) declared that the organisation of smallholder farmers is the key ingredient for small farmer development and is essential for the success of agricultural development projects.

A lot of positive impacts have been attributed to the functional role of farmers' local organisations, (FLOs) in rural and agricultural development (Wennink and Heemsherk 2006; Heinrich, 1993). Specific benefits have been noted to include; higher adoption rates, wider farmer access to knowledge and researchers' becoming more aware of farmers' ideas and circumstances. It is however disheartening to note that these positive attributes are not being witnessed in Africa. The World Bank (1993) traced agricultural development failures in sub Saharan Africa (SSA) to the lack of effective beneficiary participation, occasioned by weak local institutional support. In a similar vein, Gubbels (1993) asserted that West Africa is the weakest sub-continent in terms of popular grassroots' organisations, as the farmers have generally failed at attempts to organise themselves. Similarly, Nigeria's FLOs have been reported (Arokoyo, 1998) to face a lot of limitations and constraints, arising from poor organisational capacity. It is imperative to note however that this situation is not peculiar to developing African countries. Blokland and Woodhill (2006) asserted that even in the developed economies, farmers' organizations (FLOs) are often weak, not fully inclusive in their operations and may only represent particular sectional interests. It is obvious that the above-enumerated limitations are justifications for capacity strengthening. This situation has led the Food and Agricultural Organisation to place particular emphasis on the capacity building of FOs with a focus on developing their human and organizational capacities (FAO, 2006).

It has been revealed that for farmers' groups to be involved in agricultural and rural development, they must be well organised and empowered (GTZ, 1996) to pool available

resources, to achieve strength and countervailing power. The ultimate aim being to inculcate manual and technical skills, planning and managerial competence, and analytical and reflective abilities in the people, as to enable them fulfil their potentials and capabilities. Kaplan (1999) regards organisations (or groups) with a surfeit of aforementioned attributes as "organisations with capacity". According to the Canadian International Development Agency (IDRC) an organization with capacity, is one with the potential to perform – in terms of its ability to successfully apply its skills and resources to accomplish its goals and satisfy its shareholders' expectations. Against this background, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stated that capacity development is an on-going process, which aims to increase abilities of an individual or an organization to perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve its objectives (Becker, 2000). Literature is replete [International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) 1992; Gnon, 1995] with various capacities needed to be developed by FLOs to enhance competence and enable effective participation and inputs into agricultural and rural development oriented programmes and projects. A lot of FLOs exist in Akwa Ibom rural areas and their inputs are being fervently sought for enhanced sustenance and refocusing of various development projects that are either being proposed or are at various stages of implementation by the various governments, NGOs and international bodies, like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It therefore becomes imperative to identify gaps to be filled in the structure and operations of these FLOs, as a first step towards seeking to capacitate them for effective inputs into rural development programmes. Rocheleau (2003) opined that capacity development is an emerging property and it comes from a process of interaction to decide what it means in our context. In deference to this, the IDRC (2004) asserted that capacity development could take place at the micro level of individuals (capacity building) and project teams. It is against this background that this study was conceived, to ascertain the capacity building needs of FLOs operatives, in terms of constraining factors affecting the effective operations of these organizations. This is a first step towards seeking to capacitate FLOs for more effective inputs into the rural development process. The specific objectives of the study included: an identification of the socio-economic characteristics of FLOs operatives and a determination of constraints affecting FLOs in the study area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The universe for the study consisted of all members

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of FLOs affiliated with three apex development agencies in the State, viz; the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), the UNDP and the Akwa Ibom Women Cooperative Association (AKIWOCA). A multi-stage sampling procedure was utilised to select a sample of 225 respondents from 15 FLOs, based on length of membership in viable FLOs. Primary data was generated through interviews with the aid of a structured Interview Schedule. Instrument validation was through content validity, while a test-retest reliability yielded a coefficient of 0.80. Data was analysed with the aid of descriptive statistics.

To determine constraints affecting FLO operations, a list of 16 constraints was drawn up through intensive literature review and interactions with FLO operatives and apex bodies' officials. Respondents were thereafter requested to indicate their responses in the affirmative (Yes) or in the negative (No). All the items with more than 50 percent affirmative responses were regarded as constraints.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Results on Table 1 revealed that 80 percent respondents were female, a trend that indicates the preponderance of the female gender in FLOs, and is in conformity with the World Bank's (1996) finding. More than 77 percent respondents were married and a related finding revealed mean family size and mean number of children, to be 7 and 4, respectively, per household. Eighty seven percent respondents were in the 31-50 years age range, a finding that approximates Reddy and Horton's (1973) assertion that participatory action increases to a peak in the 40-55 years age range. The respondents were also revealed to be predominantly literate, a trend which Blum (1991) has attested to, as a facilitatory factor towards achieving group service. It was also revealed that 90.2 percent respondents observed leisure periods, although only about 24 percent observed a recreational mode of leisure undertaking. The remainder regarded a strenuous activity like palm kernel cracking, as a leisurely undertaking.

With reference to economic characteristics, Table 1 reveals that 55.1 percent respondents cited farming as their primary occupation, with yearly income from farm operations accruing to less than ₦10, 000.00 for more than 60 percent.

Table 1: Distribution on Socio-economic Characteristics of FLO Members

S/NO	CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1.	Status		
	FLO Executives	51	22.7
	Ordinary members	174	77.3
2.	Marital Status		77.3
	Married	174	22.7
	Single	51	
3.	Sex		
	Female	180	80.0
	Male	45	20.0
4.	Age (Years)		
	Less than 20	7	3.1
	31- 40	127	56.5
	41 - 50	68	30.2
	51 - 60	18	8.0
	> 60	5	2.2
5.	Educational Level		
	None	18	8.0
	FSLC/Adult. Lit Class	78	34.7
	SSSC/GCE/WASC	113	50.2
	Graduates	16	7.1
6.	Leisure Period Observance		
	Laborious	35	15.6
	Recreational	93	41.3
	Both Modes	79	35.1
	No Response	18	8.0
7.	Pry/Sec. Occupation		
	Farming	124(46)*	55.1(20.4)
	Civil Servant	77(-)	34.2(-)
	Private Endeavour	24(161)	10.7(79.6)
8.	Yearly Farm Income (₦)		
	< 10,000	137	60.9
	10-50,000	63	28.0
	> 50,000	7	3.1
	no Income	18	8.0
9.	Proportion of Income from Farm		
	Less than half yearly income	120	53.3
	Half yearly income	58	25.8
	More than half yearly Income	29	12.9
	No Income	18	8.0
10.	Farm Size (ha)		
	Less than 1	135	60.0
	1 - 5	77	24.2
	> 5	9	4.0
	None	4	1.8

Note * Figures in parentheses = Secondary occupation

respondents. This is a very disheartening trend, which had earlier led Bebbington (1994) to question the capability of agriculture to address the felt needs of the poor. This precarious situation has led respondents to depend on other business endeavours especially trading (71%) as a secondary income source. This trend is amplified on Table 1 where it is revealed that only 12.9 percent respondents earned more than half their total yearly income from farming activities and also concurs with Farrington's (1998) assertion that farming makes only a marginal contribution to the livelihood of many poor households. Majority of farm sizes were also revealed to be less than 1 hectare (ha) most of which were acquired through inheritance, and on which 83.7 percent respondents planted only arable crops.

Constraints Affecting FLOs

Table 2 reveals that seven constraints were identified to include: inadequate finance (70.7%), inability of FLOs to fulfil members' expectations (59.1%), members' refusal to perform their own share of club work (56.9%), lack of

government assistance (56.4%), members' refusal to repay loans (51.6%), and long distance between FLOs locations and the state capital, where apex meetings are held and where financial assistance is available (50.7%).

The issue of finance acting as a major impediment to group success has been well documented (especially, Onibokun and Faniran, 1995). Kaplan (1999) however faults the tendency of incapacitated organisations to attribute their predicament to lack of material resources. According to Kaplan, organisations that attribute their failure to lack of material resources simply lack the ability to counter these problems. Current development literature (de Klerk, 2004; Blokland and Woodhill, 2006) also caution against a massive injection of funds into local groups, because they claim that this may undermine sustainability and lead to organizations being set up to just receive aid. Against capital is raised from members' savings. With reference to the inability of FLOs to this background, the World Bank (1996) opined that the most successful groups are the ones in which a large proportion of lending

Table 2. Distribution on Constraints Affecting FLOs

S/NO	CONSTRAINTS	NO	YES	REMARK
A.	Poor organisation	138(61.3)*	87(38.7)	Non-constraint
B.	High dues/levies	133(59.1)	92(40.9)	Non-constraint
C.	Quarrel among members'	133(59.1)	92(40.9)	Non-constraint
D.	Unfulfilled Expectations	92(40.9)	133(59.1)	Constraint
E.	Distance from state capital	111(49.3)	114(50.7)	Constraint
F.	Strict club rules	152(67.6)	73(32.4)	Non-constraint
G.	Poor attendance at FLO meeting	103(45.8)	122(54.2)	Constraint
H.	Lawlessness	133(59.1)	92(40.9)	Non-constraint
I.	Inadequate finance	66(29.3)	159(70.7)	Constraint
J.	Only FLO executives benefit	160(71.1)	65(27.6)	Non-constraint
K.	Non-listening to advice	124(55.1)	101(44.9)	Non-constraint
L.	Corrupt leadership	122(54.2)	103(45.8)	Non-constraint
M.	Lack of govt. Assistance	98(43.6)	127(56.4)	Constraint
N.	Lack of registration	137(60.9)	88(39.1)	Non-constraint
O.	Refusal to repay loan	109(48.4)	116(51.6)	Constraint
P.	Refusal to perform FLO work	97(43.1)	128(56.7)	Constraint

*Percentages in parentheses

fulfill membership expectations, Chen et al. (2005) opined that people seek to create and join groups that would provide them with critical economic and social needs. In essence, people may not just join and participate in any organized activity, but are motivated to participate based on their needs and on the ability of particular local groups to meet their expectations. In other words, successful local groups are those engaged in activities that have a significant impact on membership socio-economic activities (Bebbington, 1994). With regard to lack of government assistance, Bebbington (1994) pointed out the attributes of successful local groups, to include: sustained donor and technical support from other institutions, strong and transparent leadership, and dedication and honesty of group members', in terms of enthusiasm for group activities and timely loan refund. It is pertinent to note that a basic objective of major social groups is to ensure sustainability, in terms of pooling together resources to assist needy members and ultimately, to embark on group and community development activities. Table 2 (items G, M, O, P) shows that the FLOs under study do not possess the attributes itemized by Bebbington (1994) and may therefore not be regarded as self-sustaining. It is obvious that members lack interest in the activities of these FLOs. The situation is traceable to the inability of FLOs to fulfill membership expectations, and is as a result of the highly unorganised nature and very poor state of funds in these FLOs. These local associations cannot collate much fund from its members, and government and NGO sources from which they had high expectations are not forthcoming. The picture is therefore that of frustration due to misplaced trust. This has resulted in members' general

apathy and lateness, or poor attendance at FLO meetings. It has also resulted in members' rushing in to "grab" what they can, from these organisations and afterwards abandoning these associations to their fate, by refusing to redeem loan facilities extended to them.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has revealed that lots of constraints militate against the effectiveness of FLOs in the study area. FLOs members however possess some requisite social characteristics that may be harnessed to develop sustainable FLOs. It therefore becomes pertinent to embark on capacity building measures in order to assist FLOs to ameliorate identified constraints. The following recommendations seem pertinent:

- FLOs should develop linkage mechanisms in order to attract outside recognition and legitimacy, and hence derive operating funds from multiple sources;
- It is important to note that individual empowerment helps in the creation of self-reliant groups. Sustainable group development is also predicated on sustainable economic development. FLO executive would therefore need to identify potentially viable economic opportunities in their environment, so that they can become financially self-sustaining (and not overly dependent on external sources). They must also embark on measures to empower FLO members through activities such as: diversification of agricultural enterprises, to combine crop farming with poultry or small ruminant (rabbit) production;

emphasis on second season planting; cultivation of intensive and lucrative short maturing crops (fluted pumpkin, other vegetables and cowpea) to overcome problem of small farm sizes; and acquisition of communal land for the cultivation of crops like oil palm, ginger, cocoa, rice, etc. These activities would ultimately ensure membership participation and enhanced group cohesion.

- (c) Credit disbursement procedures and utilization activities should be well monitored in order to prevent diversion and concomitant repayment failures. Loan beneficiaries should also be consistently sensitized to the necessity to promptly repay credit facilities, in order to ensure a wider spread of credit facilities to deserving group members.

Arising from all the above, and for enhanced success and eventual sustenance, the following capacities need to be developed by Akwa Ibom State FLOs, viz;

- (1) Capacity to mobilise local resources (funds, human and material).
- (2) Capacity to negotiate with external entities (research, extension, NGO, credit agencies, etc.) to pull down essential services, to supplement local resources for developmental purposes.
- (3) Capacity to enlist and sustain interest and cooperation of members, for effective participation in FLO activities.
- (4) Capacity to identify and utilise economic opportunities within and outside their environment and,
- (5) Capacity to obtain and utilise beneficial information, especially on assured markets, for members' produce.

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