

HOW FARMERS' ORGANIZATIONS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO EMPOWERING FARMERS IN AFRICA

Poverty can be understood as the 'inability of people to meet economic, social and other standards of well-being' (OECD, 2001) and comes along with 'limitations of personal freedom and opportunities to participate in society.' Having abilities to cope with these limitations and to stop perpetuating patterns is one definition of being empowered (Spicker, 2007). Poverty itself needs to be addressed on several levels: the communal, governmental, societal, organizational and the individual level.

Role of farmer organizations in combating poverty

How can socio-economic actors such as farmers' organizations contribute to alleviating poverty and increasing food security? The concepts of poverty and food security are strongly interconnected, as the capability to face and handle the daily limitations and consequences of poverty require a stable individual food-related ability to live a healthy and active life. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2002), hunger and malnutrition reduce the individual's productive potential, his/her intellectual and physical development, etc. They thus keep the poor trapped in a repetitive loop of low productivity, hunger and poverty. If defining successful agricultural development as the positive development of a farmer's equity, his/her efficiency in farm production and thus his/her income, the sustainability of agricultural resources and systems and reaching his/her social goals (Gabre-Madhin and Haggblade, 2004), it will in consequence not be reachable if the causes of hunger and malnutrition are not addressed as well. Nevertheless, a membership of a farmers' organization can lead as well to unintentional changes in other aspects of daily life. A potential increase in revenues might change the gender-specific income distribution within the households, for example. Thus, it is neither to be expected that being a member of a group would instantly and out of itself increase the members' income, their productivity and the selling prices, nor is it to be expected that farmers will participate vigorously just because they became members.

Theories about how 'empowerment' works

Sen (1981) sees poverty mainly resulting from a lack of entitlement, and thus, a question of distribution and exercising economic, social, and political power (e.g. voting, participating in an opposition party, calling politicians to account, etc.) (Spicker 2007, 86-87). Power according to Bourdieu (1986) is composed by the volume of available and potential capital and the access to the profits resulting from the corresponding investments. Capital then again is described as economically, socially or culturally accumulated work or effort (Bourdieu; 1983). By accumulating capital, an individual can increase his power status within the society he/she lives in. Thus, in theory, a farmers' organization could have an impact on the empowerment of its individual members by additionally supporting them to accumulate capital and



resources and to change the inefficient routines they apply within their agricultural processes.

Integrating theory and practice

Starting point of the study was the search for a definition of 'empowerment' which included Bourdieu's conceptualization of an increase in accumulated capital and resources and changed habitus. In order to develop an implementable measurement of empowerment for practitioners, the concepts of capital and habitus were refined. Through discussing the indicators of empowerment with practitioners from related disciplines, such as economics, behavioral development economics, psychology, community psychology and social sciences, an interdisciplinary perspective was taken in the research questionnaire that thus differentiates capital and mental models into: structural social capital, information capital; economic capital; psychological empowerment; and community participation.

Comparing situations in Burkina Faso and Kenya

The aim of this study is to compare the empowerment approaches of selected farmers' organizations in Burkina Faso and Kenya and to learn about how they could be improved in order to increase their support to farmers' empowerment. By illustrating the gap between the current and the potential contribution a farmers' organization can make for their members, areas of leverage will be pinpointed where farmers' organizations might need support to continue building favorable structures for their members.

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