

DIIS

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Farmer Empowerment

Experiences, lessons learned and ways forward

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Preface

This policy study was commissioned by Danida to the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) and carried out between November 2003 and February 2004 by a group of development researchers and consultants from Department of Development Research at DIIS; Institute of Development Studies, Roskilde University Centre; Danish Agricultural Advisory Services and Carl Bro International. The desk study is the result of a joint effort and the chapters were written by the following: Executive Summary and Chapter 1 by Esbern Friis-Hansen and Neil Webster, Chapter 2 by Neil Webster, Stig Toft Madsen and Steen Folke, and Chapter 3 by Henrik Nielsen, Marianne Nylandsted Larsen and Sanne Chipeta. Dorthe Busch provided additional contributions to Chapters 1 and 3. Jannik Boesen and Peter Gibbon acted as a background reference group. Neil Webster edited the final paper and the study was coordinated by Esbern Friis-Hansen.

The authors wish to thank all those who have helped with the study. The study framework and preliminary results were presented and discussed at two meetings: (i) a conference titled 'Farmers' voice - a rural civil society?' in Copenhagen organised by CARE; and (ii) a preparatory meeting to promote international collaboration on: "Local institutions capacity building in rural areas: Lessons from the field" in Paris organised by International Federation of Agricultural Producers. Comments received during these meetings were highly appreciated. A draft of the paper was submitted for comments in March 2004 and discussed at a meeting with Danida in June prior to the final revision. For Danida, Jesper Ravn Hansen from the Technical Advisory Services of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has coordinated and provided important support to the work.

Technical support has been provided by Ellen-Marie Bentsen, secretary at DIIS, and Mette Lykke Knudsen, student assistant at DIIS.

The views presented in the report are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by Danida.

A note from the Technical Advisory Service, Danida, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Section for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

It is well known that increased productivity in agriculture is a tool of significant importance in the struggle for alleviation of poverty. History has demonstrated that general economic growth in a country is depending on preceding growth and increased productivity in agriculture – with a very few exceptions. The biggest economic growth has been achieved in countries where the productivity in agriculture has increased the most. Farmers and farmers' organisations have been – and still are in many industrialised countries – a strong, political power, influencing national policies far beyond agriculture.

In most developing countries the agricultural sector has the potential to initiate and fuel economic development and growth through increased productivity and efficient utilisation of available resources. Moreover, agriculture is the biggest productive sector, provides most employment and significant export earning already now. Despite this important contribution to the economy and the untapped potential for boosting the economic growth, farmers and farmer organisation have practical no influence on national policies – contrary to the situation in the now industrialised countries, when they developed.

The roles and rights of farmers have in the past often been neglected by governments and donors, and farmers usually have little or no involvement in the formulation of national policies for the agricultural sector and the management of the development programmes which affect their livelihoods. During recent years farmer empowerment has been put on the agenda and is now an integral part of many international development organizations, bilateral donors and international NGO's policies for supporting agricultural and rural development – and in particular for Danida. However, a consistent strategy supported by concrete activities, which may contribute to the empowerment of farmers and strengthen civil society, is still lacking in the design and implementation of projects and programmes, because of limited knowledge.

Small farmer groups are by many seen as a useful organizational mechanism to facilitate small farmers collaborative effort towards improving the economic and social situation of the individual farm household as well as the community they belong to. Small group approaches have shown some promise when organized around a common production activity and for purely economic reasons. However small groups have their limits; the market and bargaining power of small groups is obviously less than that of larger groups. Furthermore, one should not expect that small farmer groups could influence decisions taken at higher levels.

If rural poverty is to be alleviated it is necessary to create growth in market oriented agriculture, remembering that small holders are the backbone of agriculture in developing countries. It is necessary to increase production, create employment, increase flow of funds and demand for services in rural areas to kick-start the economic development process. For this to happen an enabling environment for the agricultural sector must be developed through a process of dialogues between government and the farmer community as equal partners. Farmer empowerment is a prerequisite for the farming community to participate as a partner in

discussions with government. A donor such as Danida has an important role as facilitator of this process in our partner countries and Denmark has a long-term tradition and strong resource base in support of this process.

The opportunities for agricultural growth in developing countries are greater now than for decades. However to exploit this potential we have to draw upon past experiences in order to provide insights in to what enables small holders to organise and how development agencies can best support this process to be sustainable, contributing to the empowerment of farmers and farming communities.

It is with this background that BFT.1/Danida has requested DIIS to prepare a report on "Farmer empowerment, Lessons learned and the way forward." It is our wish with this report to stimulate further debate that can result in "good practices" for development agencies seeking to support sustainable farmer empowerment and facilitate the establishment of farmer organisations at the grass root level.

Jesper Ravn Hansen og Jørgen Henriksen
BFT.1
August, 2004.

The opinions stated in this report do not necessarily coincide with that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Abbreviations

ASPS	Agricultural Sector Programme Support
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CMDT	Compagnie Malienne des Textiles
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
ELF	Extension Link Farmers
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of United Nations
FE	Farmer Empowerment
FFS	Farmer Field School
FIP	Farmer Innovations Project (CARE Uganda)
FO	Farmer organisation
FOC	Farmers' Organisations Component (Uganda)
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HASP	Household Agricultural Support Programme (Uganda)
ICRAF	International Centre for Research in Agro Forestry
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
iTRC	Information Technology Resource Center
KCC	Kenya Cooperative Creamery
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (Germany)
NAADS	National Agricultural Advisory Services (Uganda)
NAWFA	National Association of Women Farmers (Gambia)
NEMA	National Environment Management Authority (Uganda)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PADAV	Programme d'Appui au Développement Avicole Villageois (Benin)
PPP	People's Participation Programme (FAO)
RBA	Rights Based Approach
RPOs	Rural Producer Organisations
SAGs	Spécialistes d'Appui aux Groupements (Chad)
SGAs	Sesame Growers' Associations (Gambia)
SHGs	Self Help Groups
SYCOV	Syndicat des Producteurs de Coton et Vivriers (Mali)
T&V	Training and Visit
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	World Bank

Executive summary

While the agricultural sector continues to be a central element in the economies of most developing countries, poverty, marginalisation, and exclusion remain prevalent. For the poor and marginalised farming groups to become beneficiaries of rural poverty reduction efforts, relationships between farmers and the public and private institutions that influence and shape their livelihoods need to be changed. In pursuit of this objective the concept of farmer empowerment has found a place on the development agenda in recent years and is now an integral element in many international development organizations', bilateral donors' and international NGO's policies for supporting agricultural and rural development. Empowerment strategies vary considerably with quite diverse activities being pursued, a situation that not least reflects the lack of agreement as to how to define the concept of empowerment and how to operationalise empowerment policies.

This paper is based upon a desk study review of recent experiences from projects and activities involving farmer empowerment with a focus on case examples from Africa and Asia. Its primary aim is to support the development of Danida's strategy for farmer empowerment within its sector programmes and other aid interventions.

A central argument used by donors for pursuing farmer empowerment is that there is a strong relation between empowerment and development outcomes such as poverty reduction, improved agricultural opportunities for growth, and better governance. Farmer empowerment is seen to be important for developing demand-driven advisory services with farmers articulating their demands on the basis of improved knowledge and analysis of their situations. It can promote farmer groups and organisations that can secure better service provision and more efficient use of public resources. It can also support farmers to be more potent actors in areas that influence their livelihoods such as education, health, and land rights.

The current donor framework for understanding empowerment focuses upon ways that farmers can gain influence by being better organised and educated and how state institutions and markets can be made more responsive to farmer demands. Some of the more common problems with this current framework include (i) a tendency to approach farmer empowerment with interventions addressing only technical capacities; (ii) a tendency not to consider adequately the heterogeneity found within the category of farmer and the differing group interests present; and (iii) a failure to address broader political issues concerning structural changes that address more fundamental causes of poverty and marginalisation faced by large numbers of farmers.

Therefore in setting the parameters for a discussion of farmer empowerment it is important to go beyond the narrower and more conventional definitions of empowerment. Similarly it is necessary to acknowledge the diversity of farming systems and farmers, ranging from large commercial estates to smallholders and subsistence farmers supplementing farming with paid labour. It is also necessary to recognise the important status of women as farmers and their weak position in terms of land rights, access to information, and participation in decision-making needs to be addressed. Poor entitlements serve to deepening their marginalisation and to increase gender inequality.

With these considerations in mind the paper proposes to address empowerment in terms of a process that enables individuals and groups to influence decision making processes and to undertake transformative actions that can help them to improve their livelihoods. It further addresses empowerment as a means for addressing economic and social inequalities, thereby prioritising poverty reduction as an outcome.

The study defines farmer empowerment as:

“a process that increases the capabilities of smallholder farmers and farmer groups to make choices and to influence collective decisions towards desired actions and outcomes on the basis of those choices”

The study proposes an analytical framework to study farmer empowerment that rests upon two dimensions: the capabilities of individual farmers and the opportunity structures that they face. Farmer organisations seek to draw upon both in order to pursue activities directed at markets and the state designed to promote their cause. These in turn give rise to farmer empowerment outcomes that can change the capabilities of individual farmers, change the opportunity structures and further enhance the role of farmer organisations in pursuing their members’ interests.

Based upon this analytical framework, the study focuses on farmer organisations to assess a number of case examples in Asia and Africa. The selection of these examples was based upon the following:

- The type of farmer organisation (government-, NGO-, project- or self-initiated)
- The type of principal activities undertaken (service, market, advocacy)
- The level of activities undertaken (local or regional/national)
- The resources possessed or available
- The outcomes achieved
- The availability of suitable secondary materials or first hand knowledge on the part of the researchers undertaking the study.

The terms of reference for the study proposed that it be divided along continental lines, with the more detailed analysis of African and Asian experiences being handled separately. 14 case examples have been selected from each continent and these are handled separately in Chapters that address the continental characteristics and the extent to which these can be seen to have a bearing on the outcomes achieved through farmer empowerment interventions. The main findings that follow seek to draw upon experiences from both of the continents.

Main findings

The study has arrived at the following main findings. It should be noted that while some are based upon a majority of the cases, others are more ‘continent specific’.

(i) Linkages

- **Linkages between farmer organisations, market and state.** Support to the creation of farmer groups/organisations is an effective means to create linkages between

farmers, farmer organisations, and public and private agricultural service providers and financial institutions. These linkages are very important in ensuring farmers' access to credit, to agricultural input and output markets and to relevant forms of information and knowledge.

➤ **Linkages between farmer organisations and other organisations appear to correlate with success in development outcomes.**

Two types of linkages between organisations are noted for their positive influence on development outcomes that benefit farmers and their organisations:

- Horizontal linkages between farmer organisations and local governments (advocacy) and between farmer organisations and other organisations (networks based on interest, location and similar) are found to be significant, particularly in Asia.
- Vertical linkages from the local to regional and national organisations can bring complementary capacities together in support of farmers' interests; they can enable the scaling up of activities; they can also enable farmers to combine formal and informal institutional channels in pursuit of their interests. There are examples from East Africa such as the farmer field schools, but the more notable cases are to be found in Asia.

➤ **State-initiated farmer organisations have a strong potential for building linkages to interventions/programmes in other sectors.** This is based upon their status as government organisations and government's capacity to require inter-organisation cooperation. The inter-sector linkages can enable the collective improvement of farmers' livelihoods from a number of government- and donor-supported interventions. The presence of programmes for the decentralisation of government linked to sector and fiscal decentralisation, is the most conducive condition for such linkages. The legacy of the state-centred approach that had dominated for many years in many African countries continues to act as an adverse factor for the pursuance of such linkages.

➤ **Decentralised government based upon elected local councils** can play an important coordinating role in support of farmer empowerment when the accountability, equity and effectiveness of the local government organisations are adequately secured through participatory and regulatory mechanisms. Again top-down institutional practices and not least bureaucratic traditions continue to act as powerful obstructions to decentralisation reforms in many countries

(ii) Targeting

➤ **Targeting groups that are drawn from the more resourceful and less poor segments of farmers** can lead to farmer empowerment, but this can be at the cost of the small and marginalised farmers. Measures taken need to secure the pro-poor orientation of more heterogeneous farmer groups.

➤ **Targeting women through the establishment of women farmer groups** can both serve as framework for the extension activities and contribute to the empowerment of female farmers both individually and collectively. Findings from 'donor-initiated' projects in both Asia and Africa suggest that they have a higher degree of success in empowering poor(er) women. It is also found that the degree of dependency that can arise must be considered a problem for longer-term sustainability.

(iii) Access

- **Enabling access to input, output and financial markets as well as to extension provision remains a major problem in Africa.** In Asia such access appears to be less of a constraint. These findings point towards significant differences in the opportunity structures between Africa and Asia. In Asia decentralisation reforms, land reforms, changes in credit markets, cooperatives sectors, and extension services have created a more enabling environment for farmer empowerment with of better opportunity structures for farmers and farmer organisations.

(iv) Performance and Sustainability

- **Government initiated and led organisations tend to be more sustainable.** This is in comparison to donor-, NGO- and self-initiated local farmer organisations for which long term sustainability, particularly in terms of finance dependent resource capacities (staff, training, equipment, information) can be a problem.
- **The empowerment potential of self-initiated farmer organisations/cooperatives is quite high and can be effective in empowering farmer communities.** In some instances they are also found to reduce inequalities. The receipt of external support in the form of resources, information, inter-organisational linkages is an important factor for the scaling up of their activities. It is also found that their success in terms of development outcomes does not always include the reduction of inequalities for the more marginalised and poorer farming groups.
- **The adoption of process-oriented and participatory approaches** in farmer groups is found to be linked to improved development outcomes.
- **The quantity and quality of human resources present and the leadership role** taken by non-poor farmers are significant factors for successful development outcomes in the case of local level groups and particularly so for groups based upon women, marginalised and poor farmers.

(v) Monitoring

- **Monitoring systems and use of benchmarks and indicators** are not readily accessible in many of the examples. This raises the question as to whether they exist. They are not standard tools in the management and development of a significant number of the examples in the study.
- **Self-monitoring is an important means for securing motivation** amongst members of farmer organisations as well as for increasing their effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. Self-initiated organisations appear to have an initial advantage here in that their members tend to enter their organisations or groups with a strong commitment to succeed in bringing about change. Monitoring this change verifies this commitment.

Chapter 1. Conceptual framework for farmer empowerment

Introduction

The agricultural sector continues to be a central element in the economies of most developing countries. At the same time it continues to be a sector in which poverty, marginalisation, and exclusion remain prevalent. Despite the importance of the sector, governments' expenditures on agriculture, in particular in Africa, have been significantly reduced over the past decade (Friis-Hansen 2001). Similarly, donor investment in agriculture has declined over the past decade and the World Bank portfolio for agriculture in 2002 was at the lowest for more than a decade. Most Poverty Reduction Strategies fail to make the agricultural sector a priority despite the scale and extent of rural poverty and despite studies pointing to the sector's importance for economic growth.

In Asia there are two stories unfolding for farmers, the one of successful use of technologies, growth in food production, diversification into new cash crops for new markets. The other is of food insecurity, forced seasonal labour migration, the breakdown of family structures, increased vulnerability to natural and man-made crises, and a growth in inequalities within communities and within households. In Africa, productivity gains among smallholder farmers have been much more modest and the proportion of African farmers that have substantially improved their livelihood through agricultural change and growth is not so significant.

For the poor and marginalised farming groups to become beneficiaries of rural poverty reduction efforts, the priorities of policy makers, service providers and the private sector towards the agricultural sector need to change. For this to occur, the relationships between farmers and the public and private institutions that influence and shape their livelihoods must be modified. There must be great reciprocity in these relations such that farmers can realise better returns to their labour, to their production and improvements in the services they receive. But there also needs to be changes in the opportunity structures that shape and regulate these markets, the types and levels of services provided, and the wider policy environment affecting development in rural society. Both types of changes require that farmers can organise, that they can assert informed demands, and that they can affect decision-making at different levels with their needs and interests.

During recent years the concept of farmer empowerment has been put on the agenda and is now an integral part of many international development organizations', bilateral donors' and international NGOs' policies for supporting agricultural and rural development. Empowerment strategies vary considerably, however, not least because the concept of empowerment has been defined in different ways, and approaches and activities are directed at quite different processes and levels within a developing country. On the one hand empowerment is integral to democratisation; on the other hand it is directed at reducing gender inequalities within the household. It is not surprising that identifying the activities that might lead to farmer empowerment has proved to be a complex task and that the portfolio of empowerment projects is characterised by great diversity and no consistent strategy.

The present study is designed to review recent experiences from projects and activities involving farmer empowerment drawing upon case examples from Africa and Asia. The aim is to support the development of Danida's strategy for farmer empowerment within its sector programmes and other aid interventions.

Farmers' organisations may be important instruments for empowerment of farmers. It is generally accepted that some form of organisation of the farming community is required if the farmers are to engage successfully in policy debates, to improve their ability to demand and access services from outside agencies, and to negotiate with greater strength in agricultural input and output markets. However, the experience with supporting farmer organisations has been mixed.

This study was commissioned to DIIS by Danida in November 2003. The overall objective of the study is to provide insights on farmers' organisations, the extent to which they have empowered their members and the role that external agents have played. The last include governments, development assistance agencies and international NGOs.

The scope of work has included a literature review of experiences with assisting farmers in forming their own associations to enable them to gain a voice and influence decision that may affect their livelihood, comprising a discussion of:

- (i) The concept of empowerment and farmer organisations (approaches to farmers' empowerment by governments/donors);
- (ii) The experiences with farmer empowerment in Asia and Africa (different type of organisations and different contexts);
- (iii) The lessons learned for policy and programme implementation
- (iv) Recommendations (options for external support for farmer empowerment).

(See TOR in Volume 2, Annex 1).

The Report is divided into Volume 1 containing the Executive Summary and the Discussion Paper and Volume 2 containing the Terms of Reference, a review of donor approaches to farmer empowerment, and a summary of the case examples that the Africa and Asia sections are based upon.

The Discussion Paper (Volume 1) has four sections:

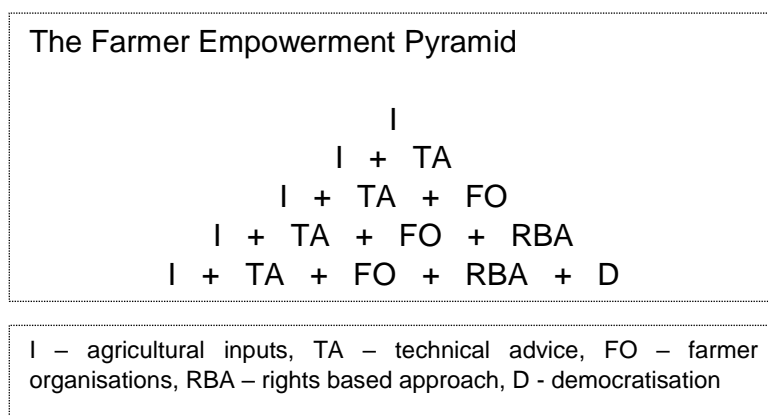
Chapter One includes a discussion of the concept of farmer empowerment used by different donor and government agencies; a presentation of a working definition for farmer empowerment; and the analytical framework for assessing farmer empowerment used in this report.

Chapters Two and Three comprise the analyses of selected farmer empowerment cases in Asia and Africa. These sections begin by discussing continental characteristics that might have a role in influencing farmer empowerment processes; this is followed by an analysis of farmer empowerment interventions for different types of farmer organisations, with their respective target groups and activities.

Chapter Four provides the main policy recommendations together with a set of steps that might help to guide support for farmer empowerment.

Defining and delineating farmer empowerment

The available literature reveals a lack of agreement amongst donors and academics as to what constitutes farmer empowerment today. As the idea of farmer empowerment has become more prominent in rural development policies it has proven difficult to agree upon a definition of empowerment and a delineation as to what it might and might not embrace. This can be illustrated by way of a pyramid in which the more classical/traditional approach at the top of can be seen to give way to the more multi-dimensional approaches occupying contemporary discussions and approaches found towards the base of the pyramid.



The pyramid is only indicative in its selection of the dimensions found in interventions for farmer empowerment, but it illustrates the problem faced by donors and governments today, namely, what should farmer empowerment embrace? The search for greater sophistication in farmer empowerment, not least linked to the move towards sector programme approaches and a growing emphasis on democratisation in development, has increased both the utility and the complexity of supporting farmer empowerment.

At the individual level, empowerment has been defined in terms of factors that give greater control over one's life. Factors include an individual's knowledge base, resources, rights, and assets. Reference is also made to the sense of well-being in terms of status and self-esteem that are both facilitated and give further support to the capacity to control key aspects of one's life. Empowerment strategies do not only focus upon the individual however. For example the World Bank writes: '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. Central to this process is actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets.'¹

Recently, empowerment has assumed a prominent role in rural and agricultural development with support to farmer groups and organisations entering the dialogue between donors and governments in Asia and Africa. A central argument used by donors for supporting farmer empowerment is that there is a strong relation between farmer empowerment and such development outcomes as poverty reduction, improved agricultural opportunities for growth,

and better governance. Today farmer empowerment is held to be important for developing demand-driven advisory services; farmers that can better analyse their situation can then better articulate demand; linked to farmer group organisation this can secure better service provision and the more efficient use of public resources. In the pursuit of the latter two, farmer empowerment embraces to varying degrees ideas of farmers as citizens who should play a central role in securing improvements in the functioning of government and of markets through their actions at the local level. The logic is a powerful one in today's development context.

The status of farmer empowerment is illustrated by the agricultural programmes of various donors in Kenya. The World Bank supported Kenya Agricultural Productivity Programme (KAPP) includes Support to Farmer/Client Empowerment. The GTZ supported programme "Promotion of the Private Sector Development in Agriculture" includes a component with the aim to strengthen private sector organizations in their internal organisational structure and empowering the organisations to raise their voice. USAID support aims to increase the capacity of smallholder business organizations to represent their farmer-members' business interests. Finally Denmark's Agricultural Sector Support Programmes includes empowerment of smallholders and small entrepreneurs.

Annex 2 in Volume 2 reviews the understanding and approaches to Farmer Empowerment among major agencies. Despite the growing attention paid to farmer empowerment, the literature available is not extensive and it illustrates the absence of any agreed definition as yet on the part of donors.ⁱⁱ The following is a brief summary of some of the main points to emerge.

In the World Bank trilogy "Voices of the Poor" (1999, 2001, 2002) 5 key elements are presented in what they call an "empowering approach to development". It is here that the World Bank reintroduces the state as a strong player in development in contrast to the "the market" and "civil society" policies of the eighties and nineties (World Bank 1998). The state is now accredited with the capacity to curb the predatory elements of capitalism under globalisation. If states are also to be more effective agents of poverty reduction, then support to the following is to be given:

- Promote pro-poor policies.
- Invest in poor people's assets and capabilities.
- Support partnerships with poor people.
- Address gender inequality and children's vulnerability.
- Protect poor people's rights.

To this agenda has been added empowerment with the aim of supporting key groups in becoming greater agents in their own development. In the international development forum "empowerment" has formed an important part of the discussions of gender equality, the importance of participation and the strengthening of the powers of the poorⁱⁱⁱ. Discussions drawing upon works such as Paulo Freire's (1970) and empowerment through informal adult education (Ashley and Carney 1999). Participation is seen to empower poor people by enhancing local management capacity, increasing confidence in their own abilities as individuals as well as a community, in bringing their interests into collective decision making.

A participatory approach took on the status of a mandatory requirement for local development interventions. More often than not it became reduced to a set of procedures in the project cycle, reflecting a technical rather than a political approach to the issue, beneficiaries being empowered when they had a menu of choices and a capacity to choose. Awareness has grown that social structures, cultural practices, and the local politics at work within a project locality are not being adequately considered. Unintended outcomes can be to reinforce existing hierarchies, social exclusion and economic marginalisation. It also became clear that in areas of social conflict, where problems are most pronounced, empowering poor groups without exacerbating relations with other groups, is difficult.

Empowerment can give greater ownership to a project and to a particular direction in development. A recent UNDP document states that *ownership* is the acceptance of *responsibility* through the process of stakeholder *participation, empowerment and consensus*" (UNDP 2002). Here the importance of empowerment within the broader process of democratisation is apparent. The transition towards more democratic political systems requires that citizens play a greater role within the political system. It is a role with respect to the state, with respect to markets, and with respect to other citizens.

Work on strategies for gender equality has contributed significantly to this discussion of empowerment, not least with its recognition of the personal and collective dimensions involved – from changes in the individual, to changes in personal gender relations, to changes in state policies. Donor agencies have a strong tradition for working with women's empowerment with amongst others IFAD, Danida, FAO, IDRC and others increasingly supporting interventions that use the informal adult education approach to farmer learning to develop the ability to select, test, compare and adapt appropriate technological, service and market options. It assumes that farmers have a wealth of experience and knowledge, which can be improved by providing them with the basic understanding of the agro-ecological dynamics of their farming environment.

Despite these positive developments in using empowerment as an instrument for greater equity and equality, improved agricultural growth and better marketing systems, broader political issues tend to be excluded from the farmer empowerment approach advocated and supported by donor agencies. There remains a seeming reluctance to consider the more structural causes of poverty and the role that farmers can play in pursuit of changes in trade regimes, for land reform, redistribution schemes, progressive tax reforms, market regulation and similar.

Towards a working definition of farmer empowerment

The main elements for a definition of farmer empowerment to emerge from the literature on empowerment and not least women's empowerment, are as follows:

- Empowerment is not something that can be done by outsiders "to" people. Development programmes can help to create the conditions whereby people become agents of their own development and empowerment.
- Empowerment is about strengthening the position of people in their multiple roles as members of families, societies and as economic actors. Experiences from attempts

to empower women show that it is not enough to focus on strengthening the agent's practical/economic outcome only.

- Empowerment is both process and result. The process is awareness and capacity building. The result (outcome) is: greater participation, greater decision making power and control and of transformative action. (Adapted from the DAC source book OECD 1998)
- There is need for a parallel political process in the creation of channels to enable farmer involvement in policy making if greater participation is to have meaning.

In the last point empowerment is linked directly to participation. Participation may be practiced at different levels ranging from information sharing (where people are passive receivers of information) to empowerment (people take full responsibility for their own development, using development agents as resource providers). The latter illustrates the way in which farmer empowerment is also an element in broader democratisation strategies. This should not be forgotten as it carries implications for governments as well as for farmers.

Farmer is a generic term covering many diverse groups and a rural community includes many types of 'farmer'. While some interests are held in common, they will also have widely differing needs and possess quite different capabilities with which to secure these within the prevailing economic and political context. In the spectrum from large commercial estates to smallholders and subsistence farmers supplementing farming with paid labour, it will be the latter that are economically weak and politically marginalised. Often they will be locked in a net of dependency relations to the wealthier farming elite. They possess a low priority in most governments' policies. Women are also important farmers, but their weak position in terms of land rights, access to information, and participation in decision-making serves to deepen their marginalisation and to increase gender inequality. Any discussion of farmer empowerment must begin with an awareness of the different groups of farmers present and their differing interests.

In order to conduct the study of farmer empowerment it is necessary to have a working definition of empowerment. From the previous discussion it can be seen that empowerment enables people to influence decision processes and undertake transformative actions, which help them improve their livelihoods. At the same time the contemporary use of "empowerment" seeks to identify power in the capacity of people to increase their self-reliance and individual strengths rather than in terms of a more political concept that stresses the relations between individuals and between groups. The empowerment of one group of farmers may also restrain the powers of others depending on the context; they will therefore resist. The price for empowerment of poor farmer groups paid by others might be only short term in nature, but it has political implications for development programmes and their outcomes.

Based on the considerations above, our working definition of farmer empowerment is:

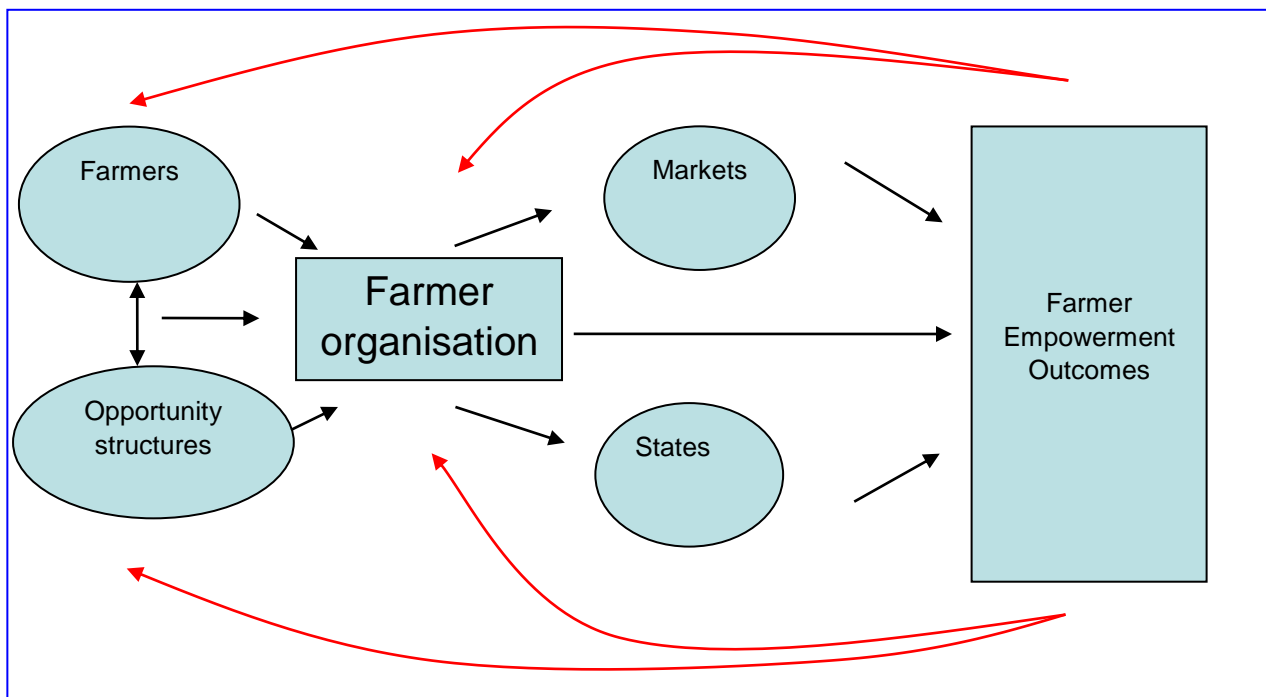
"A process that increases the capabilities of smallholder farmers and farmer groups to make choices and to influence collective decisions towards desired actions and outcomes on the basis of those choices".

Conceptual framework for analysing farmer empowerment

A farmer's individual capabilities are important factors in achieving improvements to his or her livelihood situation – e.g. increased income from production, improved service provision. However, they do not alone determine these development outcomes. These are also dependent upon the conditions present for engaging in production, for accessing services and resources, for controlling assets. Such conditions are structured by the policies, rules, practices found in social and economic institutions and not least the policies of the government. These we term “opportunity structures”^{iv} and they provide the context in which farmers act and influence the development outcomes achieved. The outcome of empowerment must result in changes both to the individual farmer and to the opportunity structures. Examples of the latter would be changes in women's right to inherit and own land; changes in the government's policies on agricultural subsidies; a decentralisation of government and the transfer of district agricultural departments to local elected bodies.

Farmer organisations are central actors in securing changes for farmers. They are also recipients with respect to the empowerment outcomes achieved. The following figure (Fig. 1) depicts the process of empowerment with the flow of development outcomes to the farmers, to the opportunity structures and to the farmer organisations.

Figure 1



Farmers

The study focuses upon farmers as individual producers of agricultural products intended for subsistence and for markets. The study recognises that the category of farmers embraces a

set of very diverse groups of producers and that farmers also possess other roles and identities than that of agricultural producer, all of which can influence the empowerment process and affect the development outcomes achieved. To limit the complexity of the discussion, a number of core areas in which farmer empowerment should generate improvements for the individual agricultural producer have been identified. These are:

- Productive assets: access to and control with land, water and labour
- Financial assets: access to financial services and ability to manage funds
- Human assets: skills, farming knowledge, technical knowledge
- Organisational assets: ability to articulate demands and interact with markets and other social actors
- Knowledge: analytical ability and tools to use information on markets, agricultural services, technologies, rights
- Self esteem: self respect, social esteem, relationships to authorities and other social actors.

Depending upon factors including project or programme design, context, type and capacity of the FO, farmer empowerment should bring about development outcomes in one or more of these areas.

Opportunity structures

Several of these factors are externalities over which the farmer and farmer groups have little direct influence in most political contexts. They tend to be structural in nature and institutionalised in terms of law, cultural and social practices, and not least economic and political interests. Nevertheless, the central role that these have on farmers' well-being requires that they are not excluded from interventions directed at farmer empowerment. In Figure 1 the relation between the individual farmer and the opportunity structures is presented as being dialectical. The capability of the farmer to make choices and to influence collective decisions towards desired actions and outcomes on the basis of those choices is influenced by national and local policies and regulations, decentralisation, information structures and market conditions, traditions, gender roles and relations between men and women, ethnicity etc. We call these the opportunity structures as they strongly influence the opportunities available to the farmer for developing his or her capabilities. At the same time, farmer actions, through farmer organisations, can influence and on occasion change the opportunity structures such that that a farmer can improve her/his condition. In general terms they establish a better enabling environment for agricultural growth and rural development.

Farmer empowerment outcomes in relation to the opportunity structure could be in relation to:

- Government: the state of elected, administrative and judicial government institutions
- Markets: rights, access, state regulations, price subsidies
- Informal institutions: ethnicity; gender equality; social rules; specific practices that give rise to social exclusion etc.

Current work by the World Bank, IFAD and FAO discusses farmer empowerment in terms of three main forms: knowledge empowerment, organisational empowerment and institutional empowerment^v

- Farmers' knowledge empowerment enables farmers to understand the causes and effects of their own agricultural problems and to articulate their technology, extension and development needs as informed demands. Knowledge empowerment allows farmers to actively participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of services, in effect transforming them into clients, managers and/or owners/partners, rather than passive beneficiaries.
- Farmers' organisational empowerment is realised when farmers are organised in groups that are coherent, independent and sustainable. Such groups can enable farmers to articulate their informed demands and interact with state institutions and private sector. They are also the basis for joining/establishing higher-level farmers' organisations that could represent their interests at local government and national policy level.
- Farmers' institutional empowerment is when individual farmers and farmer groups are organised in associations and organisations, with legitimate representatives, which assert direct influence on agricultural research and extension services and development activities.

It can be seen that the approach taken by the present study builds upon these dimensions, but it also seeks to capture the processes where they engage with markets and with the state. The purpose is to assess different farmer empowerment interventions and to see the ways in which they lead to development outcomes that promote the development priorities of governments, donors and not least farmers.

Farmer organisations

Farmer organisations (FOs) are one of the key mechanisms for supporting farmer empowerment for many donors. Organising farmers in groups has been used for decades by governments and development organisations as a cost effective method of providing services to farmers with no explicit attempt to empower farmers (e.g. the Training and Visit extension approach) while in recent years the farmer group has been key organisational instrument to facilitate small-scale farmers' collaborative efforts aimed not only at improving their own economic and social situations but also those of their communities. Examples include farmer groups in Danida's Household Agricultural Support Programme (HASP) widespread use of farmer micro-credit groups, water user associations, and Farmer Field School groups. At national or regional/district levels FOs are seen to possess considerable potential for representing farmers' interests with respect to government programmes as well as in the private sector.

Experiences from donor support provided to farmer organisations in the past have revealed a number of significant problems however. Capacity building of FOs is a slow and uneven process and the outcomes are often determined as much by factors of social behaviour and cultural norms as by economic logic. FOs also suffer from problems concerning their legitimacy as representative or membership organisations and the accountability of their leaders, in particular with respect to poorer farmers, to rural women and to other marginalised groups amongst farmers.

To gain a greater role for farmer organisations, donor agencies have combined direct support for FOs with pressure on governments to place farmer organisations representatives on the boards of state institutions in order to strengthen their status and role and thereby improvements in the livelihoods of their members (Rondot and Collion 2001).

The selection of farmer organisations has also played an important role in donor approaches to farmer empowerment. FAO has a tradition of supporting the capacity of large formal farmer organizations, including commodity organizations, collective bargaining groups, and Agricultural Chambers as found in West Africa. The World Bank has emphasized rural producer groups, while IFADs preference has been to support capacity building of rural organisations with broader goals. Danida has supported a wide range of farmer organisations, but generally local level in nature

It is apparent that there is a lack of consensus as to what constitutes farmer empowerment and a lack of clarity as to what aims can be pursued with donor support. Experience suggests that without the right mechanisms in place, poor and marginalised groups of farmers can be excluded from the benefits. The nature and constitutions of the farmer organisation through which an intervention is channelled can be a decisive factor in the generation and distribution of benefits.

Farmer organisations have the potential to enhance the capabilities of their members to make choices, institute changes and to influence the opportunity structures. This potential, however, may or may not materialise, depending on amongst other factors the organisational capacity and the legitimacy of its leaders. The argument is that farmer organisation is a platform for joint action, which can change the position of the farmer in relation to the opportunity structures and thereby influence the business environment of the farming community. Another factor is that small-scale farmers through their organisations can gain the advantages of economy of scale in accessing services and markets, which are otherwise limited to large commercial farmers.

The role and potential of the farmer organisation in relation to farmer empowerment therefore differs depending on the type of farmer organisations and as to who they represent within the farming community. In the following sections we will therefore look at the organisations, assess what dimensions of farmer empowerment the organisations have been supporting and, how successful the organisations have been in achieving the desired empowerment and development outcomes.

The analytical approach emphasizes the type of farmer organisation as an important factor in the farmer empowerment outcomes achieved. These organisational types can then be compared according to the context in which they operate, the types of activities undertaken, the levels at which they are undertaken, the resources possessed, thus enabling an assessment as to what appears to influence performance in terms of the functioning of farmer organisations and the development outcomes realised.

On the basis of this analytical approach selection of the case examples for the study of farmer empowerment initiatives in Africa and Asia has been guided by the following:

- The type of farmer organisation (government, NGO, project or self-initiated)
- The type of principal activities undertaken (service, market, advocacy)
- The level of activities undertaken (local or regional/national)
- The types of resources possessed or available
- The outcomes achieved
- Geographical diversity and coverage (cf. p. 15)

Two further factors governed case example selection, namely the search for experiences that had the potential for demonstrating both strengths and weaknesses in the farmer empowerment approaches adopted by farmers, their governments, and donor agencies. Secondly the availability of secondary source materials or first hand knowledge on the part of those undertaking the study.

Chapter 2 Farmer empowerment in Asia

Continental characteristics: Asia

Farming has been developed along a number of independent paths in Eurasia. Today this is reflected in considerable differences in crops, livestock and the agricultural systems associated with these. However, there has also been extensive trading networks for agricultural commodities, populations have moved taking agrarian social structures and agricultural practices with them, such that Asia has not remained isolated from the long term processes today referred to as globalisation. Thus it is that there are both diversities and commonalities across the countries and agricultural systems of Asia (Diamond1998).

Throughout Asia the majority of farmers live in nuclear villages, but scattered homesteads reminiscent of Africa are also found, particularly in more remote locations such as mountain areas (e.g. Nepal) and forests (e.g. India, Thailand) where cultivation is not so concentrated.

In the social organisation of agrarian communities, kinship systems continue to be important in Asia, with networks and networking being important in the access and control of resources, assets, determining social and political status, and in many instances a farmer's capacity to secure and utilise benefits from government and donor programmes. Certain farming areas in China and in the Northern parts of the Indian subcontinent retain strong patrilineal local kinship structures; such areas often have the clearest stratification into lords, peasant proprietors, tenants, landless, bonded labourers and slaves. Where land reforms have not been passed or have been poorly implemented, it can still be the case that the cultivator is effectively supporting several tiers of 'rent-receivers' with his or her production and labour.

There are also strong gender divisions. Some have been reproduced over many generations such as women's lack of inheritance rights or denial of land titles. Others are more recent such as the increasing dependency of South Asian farming on female agricultural labour. As women continue to receive only 50 to 70 percent of the male wage for the equivalent work, the implications of this for the rural sector are considerable. Table 2.1 illustrates the evolving nature of rural employment according to gender.

Table 2.1: Gender equality and female involvement in Asian agriculture.

	Agriculture			
	Percentage of Total Male Labour Force employed		Percentage of Total Female Labour Force employed	
	1980	1996-98	1980	1996-98
<i>SOUTH ASIA</i>				
India	63		83	
Bangladesh	67	54	81	78
Pakistan		40		66
Nepal	91	38	98	
Sri Lanka	44		51	49
<i>EAST ASIA</i>				
Republic of Korea	31	11	39	14
Dem. People's Rep. of Korea	39		52	
Japan	9	5	13	6
<i>SOUTH EAST ASIA</i>				
Thailand	68	52	74	50
Malaysia	34	21	44	15
Indonesia	57	41	54	42
Lao PDR	77		82	
Vietnam	71	70	75	71
Philippines	60	47	37	27
Cambodia	70		80	

Source: 2001 World Development Indicators (World Bank 2001)

The particularities of the main types of foodgrain production in Asia, in particular the management of complex irrigation systems, of complex tenancy structures, and the organisation of trade in foodgrains and other agricultural products across long distances, have also had important consequences for the development of institutions across the continent. These range from village level irrigation organisations through to state level formations.

Alongside the rich grain baskets of river basins and the commercial plantations generating large surpluses, swidden agriculture has persisted in hills and jungle areas, often with more egalitarian and tribal societies. In drier areas, there has been extensive pastoralism. But the overall tendency in recent decades has been the ascendancy of farmers almost everywhere.

Other characteristics of agriculture and agrarian systems in Asia include:

- monsoons
- the deliberate use of fire as a management technique
- the decimation of wildlife
- important differences between rice societies and wheat societies
- the use of small- and large-scale irrigation systems
- the prevalence (and importance) of land revenue generation, and
- famine

European colonization brought European institutions, including legal systems, pressure to generate greater agricultural surpluses, and many new crops. White settlers remained few. More often than not their role was to add one more tier to the revenue collecting hierarchy. The rack renting and other tenancy this gave rise to has been a powerful reason for Asian farmers' mobilisation in the anti-colonial struggles across Asia.

Over the last one hundred years, Asian farmers have achieved a degree of development. Large famines are now a thing of the past (excepting the quite special case of North Korea). There have been major breakthroughs in agronomy, veterinary sciences, and in extension services. Based on assured water supply, the Green Revolution has spread over vast areas surprisingly fast (Djurfeldt and Jirström 2003). Political interventions in the form of land reforms, land consolidation, decentralisation, village democracy, mandatory minimum wages, and a turn towards more integrated approaches in development interventions (e.g. watershed management, river basin management, sector wide approaches) have made the agricultural sector a powerful growth engine in a number of countries. Production increases and land reform have combined to improve many farmers' livelihoods: increased incomes, increased life expectancies, greater access to markets and commodities, higher levels of literacy (Berg 2000).

But it has not been a development for all farmers or those dependent upon farming for their livelihoods. Groups such as bonded labourers, particular ethnic groups, indigenous peoples in some localities, those on the geographical, social and political margins, have all too often been neglected or excluded with these improvements. As a consequence, rural poverty is still widespread in Asia. For example, eight per cent of the world's poor live in *one* Indian state, and by far the large majority of the world's poor are to be found in Asia.

Foreign aid has repeatedly played a prominent role in rural development and humanitarian relief in Asia, but its importance varies considerably from country to country. Continentally, aid has never possessed the status it has attained in the case of Africa.

In today's portfolio of aid interventions in Asia, the empowerment of the rural poor, of those without clear land titles, of rural women, of the landless, of marginalised and oppressed ethnic and caste groups, is regarded as being an important intervention for pro-poor rural development. The modus operandi of empowerment has been to establish relations of trust and co-operation between agents of development (often foreign donors and NGOs) and those individuals and groups, who have not otherwise been reached by previous projects and programmes. The empowerment of poor farmers is one focus activity within this approach. It draws upon participatory techniques, work in capacity-building of local organizations and groups, and much more. Empowerment is often considered to be regime-neutral, i.e. it is presumed to be equally relevant in democratic and non-democratic countries. It is also held to be scale-neutral, but so far it has primarily been used at the local level, albeit in national programmes.

Since status, rank, honour and shame are prominent features of many Asian societies, interventions designed to empower some and thereby reduce the power of others, may be expected to have quite profound impacts on these societies. History suggests that successful change in Asia in the past had the same consequence.

What do farmer empowerment initiatives do?

Methodology for selection of case examples

The analytical approach presented in Chapter 1 places emphasis upon the type of farmer organisation as an important factor in the farmer empowerment outcomes achieved.

Thereafter factors such as the context in which an organisation operates, the type and level of activities undertaken, and the resources available are seen as influencing both the functioning of the farmer organisation and the outcomes in terms of farmer empowerment realised.

On the basis of this analytical approach 14 case examples have been selected on the basis of the criteria presented in Chapter 1. Table 2.2 provides a brief summary of these case examples. They are grouped according to whether they have been initiated by government, by a donor project, a NGO, or are community/self-initiated. While there are clear areas of personnel overlap in some instances, e.g. between government and donor/project, the nature of the organisations are sufficiently different to warrant separate categories.

Thereafter the principal activities are categorised according to service (provision of training, literacy, credit) market (changing relations of beneficiaries to key markets) and advocacy (directed at economic and political rights, social and cultural attitudes, lobbying) and whether these are undertaken at local and/or national level.

Table 2.2: Case examples of farmer empowerment, Asia

Intervention	Country	Principal activities	Level of activities
<i>1. Government-initiated</i>			
Farmer Field Schools	Vietnam	Service	Local
Employment Assurance Scheme	W. Bengal, India	Markets	Local
Integrated Pest Management	Indonesia	Service	Local
Farmer Associations	Taiwan	Advocacy, later service	Local and regional
Bittahin Samabhaya Samiti	Bangladesh	Service & markets	Local
<i>2. Donor/Project-initiated</i>			
Farm Women Groups	India	Service & markets	Local
Poultry rearing	Bangladesh	Service & markets	Local
<i>3. NGO--initiated</i>			
Rural Development Organisation	India	Markets	Local
Proshika	Bangladesh	Markets	Local
BASE	Nepal	Advocacy & service	Local and regional
<i>4. Community-initiated</i>			
Nari Bikas Samiti	India	Markets & Advocacy	Local
Anand	India	Markets	National
Assembly of the Poor	Thailand	Advocacy	Local and national
Farmer Movements	India	Advocacy & markets	Regional

Assessment of farmer empowerment initiatives

The assessment is based upon the four types of farmer organisations into which the FE initiatives are placed. The experiences with respect to type and level of activity, the resources possessed and the outcomes achieved are then taken up within these type categories.

Government-initiated organisations

There has been a long history of government-initiated farmer organisations in both South and Southeast Asia. These have ranged from Primary Agricultural Cooperatives (PACs) providing the necessary agricultural inputs to 'progressive' farmers through to a variety of organisations through which extension services could be provided; the latter often being developed and assisted by a village extension worker (VEW). The majority of such interventions have been guided by a blue print approach to organisational form, type of service provision and the body of knowledge deemed necessary for 'modern' farming.

The extent to which such earlier interventions have also had an empowerment role is debatable. For the most part, they were not envisaged to be initiatives directed at strengthening engagement in decision-making beyond the technical field associated with agricultural production. Nor were they associated with social mobilisation or other forms of engagement in the broader arena of politics or policy making. However, many government-initiated farmer organisations have taken on new roles and have demonstrated success in changing farmer members' capacity to secure their entitlements in key markets, in their ability to access government services and on occasion to influence or change government policies.

A classic example of a farmer empowerment building upon government initiated local organisations are the Bittahin Samabaya Samiti (BBS) or 'Cooperatives for Poor Men' and Mohila Bittahin Samabaya Samiti (MBBS) 'Cooperatives for Poor Women' in Bangladesh. They were introduced through the state's Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) to provide credit to very poor landless and assetless men and women. The provision of the credit is to support income generating activities for those to whom the rural banking system is reluctant to lend. The cooperatives have been supported by Danida amongst others. Many of the activities taken up are linked to farming activities including cattle rearing, paddy husking, poultry rearing, and not least the purchasing of rickshaws that are generally used for carrying products to markets and agricultural inputs from markets. The empowerment has taken two general forms, first the poorer rural households passed over by the more traditional PACs (see above) have been provided with assets and resources enabling them to enter into specific markets around general farming activities, Secondly, gender equality is assessed to have improved as women gain greater status in their households, primarily through the generation of incomes^{vi}

Not such a classic farmer empowerment intervention, nevertheless the Employment Assurance Scheme in West Bengal is part of an All-India programme launched in 1993 to support landless and marginal landholding rural households during the periods of low agricultural employment. Similar to a Food-for-Work programme it carries the pro-poor bias

that wealthier households do not seek to take up the offer of paid manual labour. This can be seen to pursue farmer empowerment by intervening in support of poorer farmers' livelihoods in order that they might not lose their connection to land. Furthermore it is a central element in the broader pursuit of democratisation in which poorer farmer groups are linked to local government elected bodies and thereby can exert influence on policy by way of shaping the implementation of programmes implemented through these bodies. This type of programme has often been prone to 'leak' funds at very high rates when local politicians, civil servants and contractors secure considerable gains from the non-labour components involved.

In West Bengal, the government added the requirements that local village councils (Gram Panchayats) be responsible, that contractors should not be involved, that a scheme committee be formed for each scheme supported, and that a 'jobwatcher' be elected to oversee the work. The scheme is seen to be a success as sharecroppers, marginal farmers and agricultural labourers have increased their 'consumption' levels throughout the year, have not been forced into seasonal migration in search of employment, and have achieved greater food security. In addition village infrastructure including cultivation assets have been increased. Thus it can be argued that within the broader definition of empowerment, the 'farmers' have been successful in asserting their needs within the local government council (Gram Panchayat) and in monitoring the projects implemented under the programme.

Interestingly the success of the programme is seen in the 'upward accountability' involved in that the government's dominant political party has also monitored the programme in the Gram Panchayats where it is the party in control. This builds upon the particular political context present in West Bengal, namely the presence of a government with a strong ideological commitment to the rural poor and poverty reduction, but also the capacity of government to establish linkages between processes of policy and programme implementation at both the national and the local levels. Often seen as a disadvantage, in this case the national government appears to secure the conditions for local groups to pursue and secure their interests in ways not previously present.

The two Farmer Field Schools (Vietnam and Indonesia) are extension service interventions based upon more contemporary ideas of farmer empowerment. The approach is based upon local groups but with wide or national coverage. The empowerment would appear to take two forms, that achieved through the improvement of farmers' agricultural knowledge and thereby yields and the returns that follow; secondly, and more indirect in nature, through their capacity to take decisions and to organise on the basis of the perceived benefits that taking decisions can bring. The latter is seen to capacitate the farmer to engage in local decision-making institutions and thereby gain greater control of his or her life.

Experiences with Farmer Field Schools vary in the region. Success in farmer empowerment can be found in the "Community IPM in Gerung sub-district on Lombok in Indonesia" which is described in the FAO publication "Ten years of IPM training in Asia - From farmer field schools to community IPM" (Chapter 4.2) by John Pontius et al. (2002). Here there is a brief description on how farmers trained in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Farmer Field Schools have established a national organization to engage in advocacy work and lobbying.

The organization is known as the “Indonesian IPM Farmers’ Association”. The process started with the FFS but did not end with it.^{vii}

In a recent evaluation of IPM in Peru there has been a call for far greater emphasis upon participatory monitoring and evaluation (Groeneweg and Tavour 2003). This is partly as an apparent recognition of weaknesses in the social mobilization activities, namely that groups are not necessarily taking initiatives with respect to their own engagement in IPM. How far this critique can be applied to Asian experiences with FFS is difficult to assess on the limited material reviewed here. It could be the case that the opportunity structures for FFS to achieve broader empowerment objectives are to be found in a number of Asian countries. If this is the case and the Vietnam case does support it, then it supports the need for favourable opportunity structures and therefore the need to promote these as a part of a farmer empowerment strategy. Table 2.3 illustrates the popularity of the FFS approach in Asia.

Table 2.3: Indicative numbers from member countries of FAO Community IPM Programme in Asia implementing IPM Field Schools (through 2000)

Country	Year FFS Begun	Rice FFS	Farmers Trained	Other FFS*	Farmers Trained	Farmer IPM Trainers Trained
Bangladesh	1994	5,490	141,470	373	9,410	679
Cambodia	1996	670	20,000	85	2,500	254
China	1993	1,306	37,877	13	390	1,817
Indonesia	1989	37,429	935,152	6,388	159,600	29,522
India	1994	6,302	189,683			
Laos	1997	280	7,767	45	1,350	
Nepal	1998	209	5,415			156
Philippines	1993	6,000	180,000	1,200	336,000	
Sri Lanka	1995	510	9,700	34	610	240
Thailand	1998	525	12,027			
Vietnam	1992	19,876	515,927	1,993	55,098	6,178

*Primarily vegetable FFS, but also includes soybean and mung bean FFS.

Source: Bartlett et al: 2001:19.

The Farmer Associations in Taiwan are government-initiated associations originally formed by the Kuomintang with American support to support farmers in seeking land reforms. It had a political objective specific to the situation, namely to forestall possible rural revolts that could be exploited by the communist regime on mainland China. The situation was also favourable to a land reform programme as the end of the Japanese occupation left a vacuum in land management. Consequently ‘Land to the tiller’ as a political objective could be accommodated without powerful opposition from landlords. Support for the associations has continued since the early fifties; it has been provided by the US and periodically by other countries.

There is not doubt that the Farmer Associations have been important for the success of Taiwan’s agriculture. There is also little doubt that the opportunity structures have been quite favourable for farmers generally as the markets for their products have been quite favourable. The Farmer Associations, often favoured by the government in terms of credit and agricultural

input provision, have increased the farmers' capabilities to secure higher yields and increasing returns. The Associations have also provided leaders with a platform from which to enter local politics. In this sense the outcomes achieved by the associations have been to change both the conditions of the individual farmers and the opportunity structures in which they are located. The Associations have also become a fixed feature in the agrarian institutional landscape.

Summary of findings on Government-initiated farmer organisations

- National (state) involvement is not necessarily a disadvantage for farmer organisations' capacity to facilitate local development as some have held. 'Intervention from above' can lead to greater upward accountability, better resource allocation and mobilisation, and greater coverage (easier to replicate through the same department/organisational delivery system)
- State initiated Farmer Organisations have a strong potential for linkages to interventions/programmes in other sector interventions, particularly where there is a decentralisation of government underway. They can also possess a strong resistance to the same.
- FE reliant upon government-initiated organisations can lack flexibility in many instances and fall prey to a 'blueprint approach' in seeking to apply a standard organisational model. This is perhaps more so if the government involvement is from the administrative side (line departments) rather than from the elected side (local councils) although much depends on the interests present in the local elected government bodies.
- Furthermore, the involvement of the state through a single technical department can leave the empowerment element in a project as something added to standard ways of delivering a service or resource. The task of (technical) service delivery remains the primary concern rather than issues such as local ownership.
- Cooperatives, tailored to more specific needs of particular groups within the farming community, can be effective in empowering communities (Anand). In some instances they can also reduce inequalities (Bittahin Samabhaya Samiti).
- Farmer organisations with political linkages can be powerful mediators for farmer interests. The consequences for farmer equity in their achievements is less certain and quite dependent on the reform processes present, particularly land reform.

Donor/Project-initiated organisations

Many donors have funded a range of different agricultural projects in a number of Asian countries. One category is the *watershed development projects* aiming at improving natural resource management in rainfed agriculture. They have focused on better conservation of soil and water in order to increase agricultural productivity and in some cases also to improve procurement of timber, fuelwood and fodder. Many of these projects have been rather top-down, but in the last ten years or so the approach has been more participatory with involvement of the concerned farmers and establishment of *watershed and village committees*. Their contribution to farmers' empowerment, however, has been limited.

Another category of often donor funded projects is the major, medium and minor *irrigation schemes* (many of which are also financed by the national governments). Some of these are huge and vehemently contested dams, in some cases with World Bank funding, such as the Narmada Dam Scheme in India from which the World Bank backed down after the massive popular protests based on environmental and human rights concerns. Other schemes are much smaller and use a variety of technologies: canal irrigation based on dams of varying size, tank irrigation, tubewell schemes, lift irrigation etc. In most of the Asian countries donors – not least the World Bank - have strongly supported attempts to create *water users associations* in order to ensure orderly, equitable and sustainable use of water. The degree of success in these endeavours has varied a lot. In view of the relatively widespread uneconomic, inequitable and environmentally harmful irrigation practices, there is obviously a need for such associations. Where they have succeeded, they have also contributed to farmer empowerment, mediating the individual farmer interests, e.g. between head-enders and tail-enders in canal systems. But generally those involved belong to the more resourceful and less poor segment of farmers.

A third category is the *agricultural training and extension projects*. In most of the countries there is a government General Extension System organised under the Ministry of Agriculture, but a range of donors have intervened and supported the training and extension activities in various ways. Since around 1980 most of the extension activities have relied on the Training & Visit approach propagated by the World Bank. The advantage of this is the systematic and regular visits by extension agents to contact farmers, but the approach has been criticised for its rather one-way, top-down communication of simple, standardised extension messages with a narrow crop focus. In the last ten years the T&V system has gradually been replaced by more broad based, participatory and group focused approaches, notably the *farmer field schools* dealt with above (under government initiated organisations, although donors have played a significant role in their propagation).

Here we take up the case of *four training projects for farm women in India*, funded and supported in other ways by Danida. They have been innovative in an Indian context in so far as they have for the first time on a major scale targeted the women in their role as agricultural producers. In all the Asian countries the extension services are primarily directed to the male farmers in spite of the fact that the role of women in agriculture in most countries is at least as important as the role of men (and the tendency is for the men to become more and more engaged in off-farm activities).

Three of the four projects were started in the 1980s, and they have all applied the T&V approach through the major part of the project period. However, in the second half of the 1990s all four projects have introduced *farm women groups* as a better framework for the extension activities. This has undoubtedly resulted in more dialogue and more relevant extension. At the same time many of the groups have evolved into *self help groups* combining agricultural activities with savings and credit operations and other income generating activities. This has both increased their income and provided a forum for collective women's empowerment, e.g. by creating a capacity to make demands to authorities. The women have gained self esteem and are more respected by others (notably their husbands) and they have acquired a greater role in decision making, also in agricultural matters. Especially the project in

Tamil Nadu (a relatively developed state with high female literacy) is interesting in that the project almost has evolved into an embryonic women's movement. More generally many of the groups continue to rely on support from female extension officers.

It is noteworthy that projects, which originally were conceived as rather technical skill training projects, have contributed significantly to women farmers' empowerment. A more systematic emphasis on the empowerment aspects would evidently have enhanced the impact in this respect.

A fourth and last category of projects is donor funded *livestock projects*, which are found in many Asian countries. They can deal both with big animals such as cows and buffaloes, medium sized animals such as sheep, goats and pigs and small animals such as hens, ducks and geese. Although this varies along with the context, it can be said that poultry projects because of their limited capital requirements have a good potential in projects that target the very poor segments of the rural population (whether small or marginal farmers or landless labourers).

Here we focus on a relatively small poultry project in Bangladesh called the *Participatory Livestock Development Project*. Different elements in the project have been funded by amongst others ADBT and Danida. It has been supported by the Network for Smallholder Poultry Development. The use of livestock to empower women in particular is not new. The intervention is designed to improve the economic and social status of women in the household and in the community. The organising involved can also lead to group and thereby collective actions in support of individual women (e.g. facing domestic violence) and groups (e.g. with respect to local village-based government). The particular project in question provides micro credit to poor women who are interested in rearing crossbreed hens. Training and management assistance is offered through local NGOs, but in some cases this has been inadequate.

The women are able to make a small profit out of the operation, but in some cases they fail to do so because of inadequate training, neglect, disease or theft. Some of the micro credit is also used for other purposes, often by the husbands. The organisation of poor women as chicken and egg producers has contributed to a more equitable development with its focus on poor women who have often been left out of development efforts. Since the women in this project are supported as individuals, there appears to be little sense of collective women's empowerment suggesting that the potential of such a project has not been pursued in its implementation.

Summary of findings on donor/project-initiated farmer organisations

- Within watershed development programmes, organisations in the form of watershed and village committees have served a useful purpose but have only contributed to farmer empowerment in a limited way.
- The water users' associations established in many irrigation projects have an important function in trying to ensure orderly, equitable and sustainable use of water. They also contribute to farmer empowerment, mediating the individual farmers'

interest. But generally those involved belong to the more resourceful and less poor segment of farmers.

- In all Asian countries there is a tremendous potential in targeting women in their role as agricultural producers in training and extension programmes. Establishment of farm women groups can both serve as a framework for the extension activities and contribute to the empowerment of female farmers, both individually and collectively.
- Poultry programmes can be a highly relevant type of intervention targeted on the very poor segments and particularly poor women. By combining micro credit with a small amount of training such programmes can enable the poor women to earn a small net profit from poultry rearing. In terms of contributing to their empowerment, however, the impact is not very significant, partly because such programmes typically support the (female) farmers as individuals.

NGO-initiated organisations

In a number of Asian countries NGOs have played a major role in development activities in general and agricultural development in particular. This is true of most of the South Asian countries, India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, but also countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. However, in the former and present communist countries there has been no room for NGOs, given the state (and party) power monopoly.

The relationship between the states and NGOs has in most Asian countries had a chequered history (Farrington & Lewis, 1993, Farrington & Bebbington, 1993). The NGOs have generally held a critical view of the government policies and programmes and offered their own policies and projects for alternative development. The governments and state administrations on their part have often seen the NGOs as a nuisance and potentially subversive. There has been a great deal of mistrust on both sides, and sometimes governments and NGOs have openly clashed. But in recent years the tendencies in most countries have moved towards a degree of acceptance and cooperation or division of labour. Especially in the poorer countries the state neither has the capacity, nor the resources to provide the necessary services, and NGOs perform an important role in supporting the development efforts of poor people.

In the agricultural sector NGOs have been involved in a wide range of projects and programmes, either on their own or with donor support or in some cases in direct collaboration with state agencies. Within larger donor- or state-funded programmes NGOs often take on roles as mobilisers, trainers, facilitators, etc. NGOs have been in the forefront of developing more process-oriented and participatory approaches to development as alternative to previous generations of blueprint- and top-down interventions. Very often NGO interventions directly aim at empowering marginalised and underprivileged groups of landless labourers, petty farmers, poor rural women etc.

The NGO-administered micro-credit programmes in Bangladesh (Grameen Bank, BRAC, ASA etc.) have played an enormous role in offering credit to millions of poor rural producers, notably women, as a means for agricultural investment or other income generating activities. They are typically organised in a group with a degree of collective responsibility for the credit operations. Sometimes the credit activities are supplemented with NGO-sponsored training

programmes. In India NGOs have been involved in numerous watershed development projects, often in collaboration with foreign donors, and their role is frequently to facilitate the organisation of groups (watershed committees) that can act as intermediaries between the projects and the individual farmers. In a number of Asian countries NGOs have been instrumental in organising Self Help Groups that provide a framework for improvement of poor people's livelihoods, e.g. through small-scale investment in farm- as well as non-farm activities. Here we shall concentrate on three examples of – very different but relatively successful – NGO-initiated interventions, one from India, one from Bangladesh and one from Nepal.

In Nilgiri Hills in South India the NGO Rural Development Organisation (RDO) has supported the organisation of a number of Self Help Groups (SHGs) among landless labourers and marginal farmers (since the early 1990s). The German GTZ has funded some of the activities through its Self Help Fund. The main objective is to improve their livelihoods through the participants' own actions, mainly by getting access to land for cultivation and planting perennial crops (primarily tea) on the land to secure a stable income flow. A secondary objective has been the education of their children. An interesting element in their strategy is to occupy forestry land illegally, plant tea bushes, pay fines to the Forest Department over a number of years and eventually claim occupancy rights. The SHGs have contributed to collective empowerment of the very poor participants, and some of them have quite skilfully manoeuvred between different authorities. However, the SHGs remain somewhat dependent on RDO – and RDO is also somewhat dependent on keeping it that way! Moreover this remains a highly localized intervention.

A number of NGOs in Bangladesh have found an innovative way to organise groups of very poor, landless or nearly landless people - as water sellers. Such groups have been established in many parts of the country, mainly at the initiative of the big NGO Proshika, but in some cases by other NGOs, including the country's biggest NGO BRAC. The NGOs have helped the groups to get access to loans without collateral. The marginal farmers and agricultural labourers involved have then on a group basis bought or rented irrigation equipment and sold water to the farmers. In some cases this has been from shallow tube-wells, in other cases from low-lift pumps. Payment is either in cash or in kind (e.g. one third of the harvest) and the group shares the profits from the operation. Generally the schemes have been financially successful, providing a small income to a group of very poor people.

By separating water markets from land markets and putting the means of water extraction in the hands of landless or nearly landless people, who are generally subservient to the land owners, the schemes have enhanced the economic and political status of very poor people. The groups have provided a framework for collective action and thus contributed to the empowerment of these people. In principle the groups are sustainable, but the degree of financial success varies a lot.

In Nepal the NGO Backward Education Society (BASE) has been a leading force in the organisation of bonded agricultural labourers known as Kamaiyas. These were freed from bondage through a parliamentary act in 2000, but only to face new tough challenges in establishing sustainable livelihoods. The support they have received from the state for resettlement and rehabilitation has been patently inadequate. BASE runs education and

literacy programmes, savings and income generating activities, health and family planning and engages in national and international advocacy work. There have been some problems with proper targeting and with handling the complexities of donors' demands and expectations. BASE receives support from Mellemlfolkeligt Samvirke and a range of other international NGOs and donors.

The activities are primarily rooted in community based village committees. BASE operates with four tiers of committees and has a strong organisational presence in the Terai districts of Western Nepal as well as a national presence. In January 2004 – with MS (and 'Operation Dagsværk') support – BASE succeeded in having a meeting with the Nepalese Prime Minister in which he promised to establish a commission in order to investigate the need for a greater degree of state support to the Kamaiyas. Compared to many other NGOs BASE has thus had some success in coupling a range of concrete interventions (service provision) with taking up human rights issues and engaging in advocacy. Hence it has contributed to the empowerment of a very poor and oppressed group of people.

Summary of findings on NGO-initiated farmer organisations

- In many Asian countries (but not the present and former communist countries) NGOs play a major role in supporting the development efforts of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and other segments of the rural poor.
- The often strained relations between governments and NGOs have in recent years improved in most countries and paved the way for complementarity, division of labour and collaboration.
- Within agriculture NGOs have often been in the forefront of developing more process-oriented and participatory approaches to development as alternative to previous generations of blueprint- and top-down interventions.
- Generally the NGOs have a comparative advantage in targeting the poorer segments of the rural populations. Often NGO interventions directly aim at empowering marginalised and underprivileged groups of landless labourers, petty farmers, poor rural women etc.
- In several Asian countries NGOs have had a major development impact by organising groups around savings and micro-credit used for investment in farm- as well as non-farm income generating activities. In so far as these are often women's groups, they have also contributed to poor women's empowerment.
- In many Asian countries Self Help Groups have been organised at the initiative of NGOs and with their support. These groups engage in a range of different activities, many linked to agriculture. The groups contribute to collectively empowering their participants. Their viability and sustainability varies, but they often remain somewhat dependent on the NGOs.
- NGO interventions usually remain highly localized. In order to lead to empowerment at a higher level and greater scale, the interventions need to be coupled with advocacy activities.

Self-initiated farmer organisations

Self-initiated or community-initiated farmer organisations cover a broad range of organisations ranging from small informal cooperatives through to national farmer movements. The common factor is that they have been generated by particular groups of farmers and not by an external actor such as the government, a project or a NGO. If government and project organisations can be seen as lying in the 'government/donor' sector, NGOs as belonging to the private sector (beneficiaries as clients) then self-initiated can be seen to belong to the collective action sector (Uphoff 1993).

The adivasi (tribal) women's organisation in Bankura District, West Bengal, Nari Bikas Samiti, has received support from a number of donors over the past 20 years. What is interesting is that the women covered by the initiative represent a group facing social exclusion and economic and political marginalisation due the combined factors of gender, ethnicity, religion, geographical location and general economic condition. The initiative to pursue a collective action strategy came from demands made by the women at awareness camps organised for the land reforms underway. The requests were then taken by the government to a NGO. All three stakeholders: women, government and NGO were closely involved from the outset, but for different reasons.

The women's experiences in migrant labour gangs together with their adivasi and gender identity have been powerful elements to the successes experienced. Leadership has proved quite critical. Leadership has also been a point of periodic conflict. The economic gains have been considerable, most noticeable in the reduction of migration to the labour deficit areas to the East. The political empowerment has been clearly demonstrated by the women's role in the Joint Forestry Management programme in the area. Significant changes for both women (gender equality) and the villages (poverty reduction) have been achieved. These are documented by a number of reports and studies (Webster 2001).

The Assembly of the Poor (Samacha Khon Jon) in Thailand is a network of People's Organisations and NGOs formed in 1995 by activists. It is not a member organisation, but a network of member organisations mobilising around specific issues held in common. It focuses upon many issues, at the forefront recently has been farmers suffering loss of land and fishing opportunities due to the construction of the Pak Mun Dam. Previously it was victorious in preventing the eviction of villages that had occupied degraded forest and park land that the government wished to rehabilitate. In contrast to Nari Bikas Samiti in West Bengal, the Assembly of the Poor has a national base from which to organise around local issues.

In some ways the activities of the Assembly are similar to BASE, the NGO in Nepal, in its pursuit of rights through social mobilisation, lobbying and general advocacy work. In addition it represents farmers who face a national problem in so far as they occupy land for which they do not possess the security of a title. However the Assembly does not receive funds from donor agencies; it is still an organisation rooted in other more local organizations or associations of varying types; and in a number of ways remains to being a social movement with a loose leadership. Whether it survives beyond the quite particular problems facing many farmers in Thailand today is not possible to ascertain. Its strength lies in the potential 200,000

or more with land rights and similar problems, and the successes, often high profile, that have been achieved over the past decade.^{viii}

New Farmers Movements in India are closer to the Assembly, but with longer traditions of organisation behind them. The term covers a number of movements that emerged in the 1970s with the 'green revolution' – the technological approach to agriculture that placed its faith on the stronger farmers to increase India's food production after the failure of the previous community development approach. The movements are state rather than all-India in their nature, often changing in their organisation and leadership as splits and alliances occur over time, and sometimes affiliated to one political party or another. The issue and the leadership are the two most important factors. There are few assets, human resources or even finances that can be described as organisational. These are mobilised according to need.

Issues linked to the provision of irrigation have been a common factor, whether in terms of water provision, water distribution (e.g. between states) electricity subsidies (pump sets, mini-submersible water sets, etc), water levies, or similar. Other issues include other levies and taxes on agriculture, fertilizer subsidies, repayment of cooperative society loans, market regulations, crop prices (notably wheat, rice and sugar, but also cotton, cashew nuts, etc). That mobilising has empowered is without doubt. Electricity subsidies have been retained in several states despite very strong pressure from the World Bank, KfW and others to impose cost based user fees.

The Indian New Farmer Movements are important because of their capacity to defend farmers' interests. Whether these are the interests of small and marginal farmers, of sharecroppers and agricultural labourers, is questioned by many. Whether it serves the economic interests of India as a whole, or of the urban poor, who pay higher food prices or require greater food subsidies from the state is also an issue. That the farmers are empowered in terms of "a process of increasing the capabilities of individuals or groups to make choices and influence collective decisions towards desired actions and outcomes on the basis of those choices is certain. Whether such empowerment is reducing inequalities apart from those between industrial and agrarian India, is questionable in most instances. At the local level the marginal groups, women, sharecroppers, cultivators in poor ecological zones (often indigenous groups), gain little as the movements are organised at present.

The previous two examples have been social movements of farmers mobilising to protect and secure their interests. Anand (India's 'white revolution') is not a movement but a production based organisation that in its scale and success challenges many assumptions concerning contemporary farmer empowerment, namely that empowerment of small farmers is best pursued through local organisations. It is based upon small dairy cooperatives that have been promoted with direct government support into being a cooperative success story. Support has also come from Danida, the World Bank, the European Commission, amongst others. It is the biggest programme ever to be based on food aid (milk powder, etc). There are now 103,281 village dairy cooperatives with 11,488,000 members of which 2,641,000 are women. Anand's milk sales have grown by 4 per cent per annum over the past 5 years.

The benefits are to all milk producing farmers who are members, whether with one cow or a herd. Interestingly this can include landless households who own or lease cattle, feeding on the basis of common grazing lands. In this way the empowerment is equitable and broad in its reach, it is not necessarily reducing inequalities except possibly between regions and between urban and rural sectors. It does reveal the capacity for state cooperatives, with an imaginative and resourceful leadership, to bring significant benefits to rural communities.

Summary of findings on self-initiated farmer organizations

- Empowerment potential is quite high, but the reduction of inequalities for the more marginalised and poorer farming groups is not always a development outcome from the empowerment.
- Empowerment can aid any group in society to take up and pursue economic, political and social needs that they have. The art of empowerment here is to find ways by which those marginalised or excluded on the basis of these, and suffering poverty as a consequence, can achieve change.
- The importance of an associational base for the organisation (social capital of the poor) is evident.
- The importance of leadership is clear, this does not necessarily have to be of the poor, but very much for the poor.
- The need for external support in the form of resources, information, inter-organisational linkages is an advantage. Three possibilities have been documented: federation with other such organizations; state support; donor support.
- The capacity for 'community' mobilisation and to support diverse forms of action is a strength. It appears to rely upon a strong and innovative leadership.

Conclusion

Farmer empowerment has been achieved in Asia, but it has not always been sufficient to bring about substantive change for farmers, it has not always been able to sustain whatever gains have been achieved, and it has not always been poor farmers, women, agricultural labourers, those at the economic, social and political margins of a society that have gained.

It is clear that 'empowerment-for-the-sake-of-empowerment' is not a good thing. Asian farmers, in general, have experienced successful agrarian change over the past few decades. It is those for whom change has not been a positive experience, for whom inequalities have increased within the rural sector, that empowerment must be a tool with which to improve their livelihoods. To reach these, the objective of empowerment must be linked to other objectives of poverty reduction, gender equity, the inclusion of marginalised groups in decision-making affecting their collective and individual well-beings.

In South Asia farmer empowerment has been a mixed blessing. The success of the 'new farmer movements' has undoubtedly benefited many smaller farmers. It may also have benefited the agrarian economy more generally by bringing incomes and resources into the rural economy, and generating more agricultural employment. But such empowerment is

primarily elite farmer empowerment. It is the resource rich that have gained. The lessons to be learnt here concern the capacity to demand and gain changes in policy, and the capacity to secure rights through placing local issues on a national agenda, Farmer lobbies can be powerful actors alongside industrialists, powerful trading associations, the private sector transport, bureaucracies and others interest groups.

Other cases of empowerment investigated have been more local. Again the targeting of the farmer remains an issue. When the project is based upon an asset, a skill, a resource, then certain households by definition are included and others excluded. When targeting agricultural production, possession and other means of control of land is a determining factor. By contrast, savings and credit can target individuals. Then the capacity of the local organisation to secure more sustainable benefits from income generating schemes and similar, becomes critical.

Several of the initiatives studied point to the importance of building empowerment into specific activities from the initial design of the project. Linkages with local elected bodies can be a central element in this, depending upon the state of decentralised government in the country. This is to argue that empowerment cannot be an assumed outcome from group-based participatory activities. They need to be planned for and implementation requires that empowerment be practiced during the project. Women need to meet and discuss with (male) line department officials, landless agricultural labourers need to meet and discuss their needs with local elected bodies, forest user groups need to meet with forestry department officials. Rights must be learnt, location of offices known, lists of members and officials distributed, responsibilities discussed.

It is also clear that the type of activity can have very different outcomes for the poorer and more marginalised farming groups. Most activities have been combinations of service and market activities, with the emphasis more on the former. Training and extension work has always been a 'neutral' intervention except where extreme chauvinism, racism or casteism has asserted a presence. Markets are more sensitive as changing groups' and individuals' capacities to secure their entitlements to their labour or their production is often at the expense of others' capacities to realize part of that value to themselves. Those who process products (e.g. rice mills or sugar refineries), other intermediaries in the marketing farm production, those who rely upon under-priced agricultural labour, are all likely to resist when faced by the accompanying loss of earnings.

Empowerment is political and empowerment of the poor, of women, of the socially marginalised carries political costs when directed towards markets. These should be borne in mind, placed in a cost-benefit analysis, when promoting farmer empowerment for poverty reduction.

Advocacy requires alliances and thereby networks. It can be through personal networks and private lines of associations. It can be through open displays of strength and/or resistance as in a demonstration, a meeting, a petition. Without alliances the poor are vulnerable in their exposure. The positive with the new farmer movements in India was the protection they offered to the poor farmers who supported the cause. Patronage can also be empowering in the reciprocal relations involved.

Government-, donor/project- and NGO-initiated farmer organizations all have their support organisations at higher levels within the political system. Self-initiated organizations must build these up, but when they do establish networks and alliances with political organisations, they too can obtain a degree of protection from the linkages and alliances they establish.

Local organizations can achieve little sustainable change through empowerment initiatives without this more holistic and in practice more political approach. The alternative is to return to the simple approach of technical training, albeit with a participatory approach; filling the asset and resource inadequacies where no other stakeholder has a political or economic interest; treating the effects of poverty with skills and education provision, all of which is claimed to be empowering without ever quite demonstrating as to how.

Lessons learned and implications for policy design and programme implementation in Asia

Policy level

- Farmer empowerment must be linked to the main priorities of aid. Poverty reduction, gender equality, improving and protecting the environment are all central priorities.
- Poverty reduction and gender equality require that the processes of social economic and political marginalisation be understood within a country, a province/district and a specific locality in order that empowerment activities can target, both directly and indirectly, those in greatest need.
- In all Asian countries there is a tremendous potential in targeting women in their role as agricultural producers in training and extension programmes. Establishment of farm women groups can both serve as a framework for the extension activities and contribute to the empowerment of female farmers, both individually and collectively.
- National (state) involvement is not necessarily a disadvantage for farmer organisations' capacity to facilitate local development as some have held. 'Intervention from above' can lead to greater upward accountability, better resource allocation and mobilisation, and greater coverage (easier to replicate through the same department/organisational delivery system).
- Although the history of cooperatives in Asia is not a success story in general, cooperatives, tailored to more specific needs of particular groups within the farming community, can be effective in empowering communities, and in some instances they can also reduce inequalities by targeting the poor.
- In many Asian countries (but not the present and former communist countries) NGOs play a major role in supporting the development efforts of small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and other segments of the rural poor.
- The often strained relations between governments and NGOs have in recent years improved in most countries and paved the way for collaboration and a more effective division of labour.

- NGO interventions usually remain highly localized. In order to lead to empowerment at a higher level and greater scale, the interventions need to be coupled with advocacy activities.
- The empowerment potential of self-initiated farmer organisations is quite high, but the reduction of inequalities for the more marginalised and poorer farming groups is not always a development outcome from the empowerment.

Programme/project level

- Empowerment activities need to be built into the programme design from the outset. The manner in which the specific activity contributes to the broader development objectives must be clearly studied and understood.
- Benchmarks and indicators need to be developed to follow the programme's and its local projects' implementation. These need to be indicators that can be used by the farmers to monitor their own progress and that of their organisation.
- Linkages between farmer organisations and other organisations need to be encouraged. Local coordination can be through a local elected body, where it possesses the capability. Otherwise a coordinating body may need to be created, but members should be made on a representative basis with administrative officials acting as executive officers. Such a body should not be appointed from above.
- Farmer empowerment reliant upon government-initiated organisations lack flexibility in many instances and tend to fall prey to a 'blueprint approach' in seeking to apply a standard organisational model. This can be counterbalanced through involving elected bodies, incorporating greater self-monitoring and local responsibility for generating work plans.
- Poultry programmes can be a highly relevant type of intervention targeted on the very poor segments and particularly poor women. In terms of contributing to their empowerment, however, the impact may not be very significant, partly because such programmes typically support the (female) farmers as individuals.
- In several Asian countries NGOs have had a major development impact by organising groups around savings and micro-credit used for investment in farm- as well as non-farm income generating activities. In so far as these are often women's groups, they have also contributed to poor women's empowerment. Credit can target the poor more directly, but it needs to be built into the rural banking sector and other government programmes to secure greater financial sustainability and sustained benefit flows.
- The capacities of a farmer organisation for 'community' mobilisation and for supporting a number of diverse forms of action are associated with greater success in empowering poor and marginalised groups. These require a strong and innovative leadership. Capacity building of farmer organisations, including their leadership, can contribute to greater success.

Chapter 3 Farmer empowerment in Africa

Continental characteristics: Africa

Farmer societies in Africa are of course extremely diverse, and generalisations should be made with extreme caution. Nevertheless, African farmers share a number of common past experiences in agricultural development, more often than not linked to colonial legacies, which provides a basis for understanding some of the characteristics found in African farming systems today.

Agriculture has developed very slowly and with great difficulties in Africa. Shortfalls in the available labour-force have frequently operated as an important constraint on African farming. This was historically reinforced by the extensive trade of slaves out of Africa with devastating effects on the African communities in general and on agriculture in particular. Other constraints include the unpredictable climate in large parts of Africa with long periods of drought, the poor quality of soils away from the volcanic localities, and the fact that almost all the major agricultural crops and livestock species used in Africa are imported from other continents and have been only slowly adapted to the African environment.

The colonial period brought infrastructural development, but designed to meet the primary aim of trading raw products out of the continent and the import of finished products from the colonial countries. The development of local agriculture had a low priority outside the production of cash crops for the European market. The education made available under colonialism was aimed at educating personnel for the colonial administration and gave low priority to human development per se. Colonialism thereby helped to create an elite that possessed a negative perception of the potential in the rural population for agricultural development.

Approximately 80% of African countries' populations had their main livelihood from farming at the time of independence. In the years immediately prior to and following independence the high prices earned on the export of agricultural commodities led to the successful creation of a number of producer cooperatives. Farmers enjoyed high prices, states derived considerable revenues and there was a general commercialisation of African agricultural export crops. However, the state monopolisation of power and a belief in state-driven development led to increased pressure on the cooperatives and not least their politicisation,. It also led to the emergence of large parastatals responsible for both commercial and staple crops.

As the African states increasingly dominated the cooperatives and parastatals, these developed into extremely heavy bureaucracies that performed ineffectively. As prices gradually dropped the situation became disastrous and a reorganisation became inevitable. Their dismantling in the eighties thus became a painful and politically difficult transition, leaving an often chaotic void for an unprepared private sector to take over. An element in this process was the confirmation of the confusion between what is the public and the private sector in Africa. Some African parastatals found themselves functioning as private businesses within a

state framework. Leaders operated departments as their own companies, lower level employees made deals with farmers etc, and an impression of corruption became increasingly apparent.

The majority of African farms are small, family-based agricultural production units. The farming community is a village-based peasantry without large land-owners and a substantial group of landless peasants as found in parts of Asia. In many areas of Africa labour rather than land has been the limiting factor and acquiring ownership, or at least usufruct to land has not been a significant problem for African farmers. Today this has changed and pressure on land and landownership is rapidly becoming an issue leading to conflict. Availability of land had made the direct exploitation of African farmers more difficult as they were able to turn their back on the state to some degree. Reflecting this, power in Africa tends to be exercised through control over people rather than through control over territory and colonial and post-colonial states have had problems exercising such control. In this relationship to the state the African farmer in many locations retains a room for manoeuvre in his or her capacity to resist pressure to grow certain crops, to pay taxes etc. Attempts to exploit African farmers have been directed at pricing systems in the marketing of their produce; the response on their part has been a tendency to withdraw from the market and a return to subsistence production until the market is more favourable. Due to this the early cooperatives were seen as empowering farmers by facilitating and securing access to markets on more favourable terms through the leverage they could assert on prices .

Another important characteristic of African farming is the major role played by women in agricultural production. In rural communities farming is traditionally a women's business, as they are largely responsible for family food production. Men have become more involved in agriculture, but their involvement has been directed more towards cash crop production. Even then it remains the case that women provide most of the labour involved. It is in this connection important to note that women's participation in cooperatives and larger farmers' associations is extremely low not least because they are not practised in this type of organisation, but tend to be involved in informal groups, avoiding bureaucratic and male dominance in these activities.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is today probably one of the major threats to the African society in general and to agricultural production in particular. The overall negative impact on productive labourforce and human capacity in the agricultural sector is devastating. This creates great difficulties for food production but also for the development of farmers' organisations. The situation however calls for an even stronger emphasis to strengthen organisation of the rural community and it is characteristic that several African communities through their own efforts have developed coping mechanisms such as groups for labour sharing, saving and lending, and there are indications that the epidemic has a side-effect of increasing farmers' drive towards organising and solving problems in collective ways.

Farmers in Africa have often organised as a means to create effective linkages with potential external institutions, which could ensure access to markets, credits, inputs or the like. The organisations have rarely confronted the state, landlords or commercial interests directly. Organisational principles have therefore been built on clientelist principles rather than on

principles uniting farmers in order to confront states or commercial interests. In this situation it becomes difficult to assess whether the drive to organise comes from “below” or from “above”. The farmers at grassroots level tend to organise in order to obtain visibility to donors, government or private enterprises. For their part donors encourage farmers’ organisations with a genuine desire to see farmers become self reliant

Against the background of these considerations, the following points should be noted:

- Commercialisation of the agricultural sector has historically been weakly organised in Africa
- Human capacity and the available labour force are important and increasing constraints in rural communities
- The majority of agricultural producers are small-scale farmers
- Only few attempts to organise African farmers have aimed at empowering farmers. Many African farmers have bad experiences with external agencies (e.g. the state) when attempts have been made to organise them;
- Women are important agricultural producers but are rarely part of formal organisations
- The epidemic of HIV/AIDS is a major constraint to agriculture

Methodology for selection of case examples

The categorisation of farmer organisations presented below is used widely within development literature. In the case of Africa it should be qualified with the comment that the specific historic trajectories of individual countries and the heavy dependence on donors make it difficult to determine where farmer organisations are initiated, but as the categories also reflect the main source of support it remains a useful analytical device. The four categories are:

- Government-initiated farmer organisations, financed by external donors (multi- or bilateral). This form of support increasingly constitutes the most important form of aid to African agriculture – reflected in the implementation of agricultural sector programmes in many African countries. Agricultural sector programmes are development initiatives conducted with the government in “the drivers seat”, often through very elaborate negotiations and preparatory measures with multilateral and bilateral partners (See Harrison 2001). Nowadays many government initiatives are in fact donor backed to the extent that it becomes unclear, who the actual initiator is.
- Project/donor-initiated farmer organisations. Although project aid is becoming increasingly rare, a few cases of donor-initiated activities are included. These activities have been clearly defined by donors, on the basis of their assessment of local needs and problems.
- NGO-initiated farmer organisations. The cases included are from international NGOs, which in many ways work like bilateral donors. The fact that they have not worked through Government structures has however at times made a difference.
- Community- or self-initiated farmer organisations. There is a wide range of examples of African farmers, who organise in order to face certain problems, organisations built on reciprocity, solidarity, compliance or other principles, according to the local setting.

From a donor perspective it is important to note that at times these organisations are not initiated with the aim to engage in agricultural activities, but are often initiated for purposes like savings, ceremonies, security or other non-agricultural activities. Furthermore, organisations are often initiated according to what their expectations are in terms of possibilities of getting external support. External support can drastically change the way self-initiated farmer organisation functions. Furthermore, "self-initiated" should not be equated with "community-based", as this presupposes a sense of community, which tends to obscure the fact that farmers societies are often more socially divided than presupposed. "Self-initiated," is in other words no guarantee of achieving a reach beyond the richer segments of farmer society, as this type of organisation is likely to be initiated by rich and resourceful farmers.

The selection of cases of the 14 case examples of farmer empowerment initiatives has been based on considerations presented in Chapter 1. Table 3.1 provides an outline of the 14 selected cases.

Table 3.1: Case examples of farmer empowerment, Africa

Intervention	Country	Principal activities	Level of organisation
Government-initiated			
Farmer Field Schools	Tanzania	Knowledge development	Local; networks
National Agricultural Advisory Services	Uganda	Advisory services; market access; (advocacy)	Local
ASPS Programme	Uganda	Advisory services	Local
Agricultural and Livestock Services Project	Chad	Advisory services; access to market and financial institutions	Local
Rural Producer Organisations Capacity-building Programme	Burkina Faso	Advisory services; access to credit	Local and regional
Donor/project-initiated			
Smallholder poultry producers	Benin	Advisory services;	Local
People's Participation Programme	Zambia	Knowledge development; markets	Local; networks
NGO-initiated			
CARE FIP project	Uganda	Advisory services; access to market; (advocacy)	Local
Sesame Growers' Association	Gambia	Advisory services; access to market	Local, regional and national
Community- initiated			
The Malian Union of Cotton and Food Crop Producers	Mali	Advocacy; training	Local, regional and national
Dairy Cooperatives and Self-Help Groups	Kenya	Market access, livestock services, credit	Local
Bishakia and Nyakihanda Bataka Kweterena	Uganda	Social oriented; access to small scale credit	Local

Assessment of farmer empowerment initiatives in Africa

This section contains an assessment of the experiences of farmer empowerment in selected cases of organisational development in Africa. It is a common observation throughout most of the cases that empowerment might be stated as a major objective of the initiatives, particularly for the government and donor initiated organisations, but when it comes to review or evaluation assessments of the project performance, the documentation rarely contains clear indicators or benchmarks for farmer empowerment and it is therefore difficult to test the validity of claims of success of the cases in terms of farmer empowerment.

Government-initiated organisations

Most government-initiated aid to farmer empowerment is channelled through agricultural sector programmes. Sector programmes are complex intervention forms, covering many levels within the very heterogeneous agricultural sectors. In all countries there are however components which specifically address problems of organising farmers and providing services to these farmers. Based upon mixed experiences with credit and input provision to poor farmers, emphasis is now on extension and knowledge transfers.

Among the promising attempts to promote farmer empowerment within this type of aid in Africa, are the initiatives to introduce farmer experimental learning through establishing Farmer Field Schools (FFS). Farmer Field schools operate as learning groups connected to a facilitator for catalysing the learning process among the group members. The farmers are supplied with knowledge tools to make their own decisions on grounds of observation and experimentation. The success of the methodology rests much with the ability of the facilitator to lead farmers without being patronising. What is promising within an empowering perspective is that FFSs can be formed by farmers themselves, and by furthering the development into training and establishing good farmer-facilitator relations they can become cost-effective entities of knowledge dissemination and also overcome the problems of scaling up. The key to the success of these programmes seems to lie in the quality of the dissemination of knowledge, the ability of the facilitator to lead farmers without being patronising. Farmer field schools are implemented under the Agricultural sector Development programmes in a number of African countries, but have so far been most successful in Eastern Africa, where they are the result of basket funded programmes. Among the benefits for the farmers, the literature mentions

- Increased confidence to interact in a local and public forum
- Increased technical knowledge
- Increased appreciation of value and costs of technical learning
- Better use of resources
- Broadened views of potentials and opportunities for changes in their farming practice.

It is however not entirely clear how this has been assessed more precisely. There are no indications of clear benchmarks substantiating these important achievements. Another concern is that FFS do not specifically target poor farmers . The extent to which FFS is

inclusive of the poor is not known as the social composition of FFS groups in Africa is yet to be surveyed by independent researchers.

The World Bank supports a number of government programmes within which farmer empowerment constitutes one component. The initiatives have had a multiple focus, as empowerment is seen as an extra benefit along with the restructuring of the agricultural extension and service provision to smallholder farmers, a World Bank priority for many years in Africa. In Burkina Faso a Rural Producer Organisations capacity building programme aims to promote and empower farmers' organisations. This is tackled through revision of existing legislation and through enhancing organisational skills by training farmers. This programme is financed by the Bank, executed through the Ministry of Agriculture and an NGO acts as facilitator. Activities of the programme have included:

- Capacity building support of RPOs
- Preparation and submission of capacity-building project proposals within four main areas
- Provision of loans to RPOs against 20 percent own finance.

In terms of farmer empowerment, the programme claims to have achieved the following:

- 1,480 local RPOs (out of around 4,000 eligible RPOs in the nine pilot provinces) have submitted proposals, and the regional forum has approved 908 of them (mid-2001). However, only 201 contracts between the Financial Management Unit and RPOs have been signed (as per mid-2001).
- Involved RPOs have mainly obtained loans for small irrigation projects, training, improved soil fertility, soil and water conservation techniques, wells and dykes, collective production tools.
- Some RPOs have been able to develop their own objectives and gained power to request or demand agricultural services that are appropriate to their needs.

A similar World Bank initiative takes place in Chad with the aim to reshape the extension service into a demand-driven service; to establish a producer-oriented research method for agriculture and livestock research and strengthen the research-extension-user linkages, and to promote producer organizations that would assume a larger role in managing group activities in rural communities. In this case, the programme has achieved the following results:

- Yields and food security improved for the RPOs in the areas where agricultural and livestock technology that was disseminated and adopted. 20 percent of the farmers have been reached (national level).
- Income increased by 77 percent for involved farmers in the Sudanese zone and by 99 percent for the livestock owners in the Sahelian zone.
- Increased access to financial and extension services, although a lack of interest in rural producer organisations or an inability to provide financial services among few finance institutions in the country made it difficult to link RPOs with financial institutions (some positive results were obtained during the latter part of the project).
- The creation of RPOs appears to result in benefits beyond those that are strictly economic. RPOs promoted the position of women and improved understanding by villages of the importance of their environment and measures that could be used to maintain or improve it.

However, as mentioned above, there is a dearth of more concise benchmarks assessing these achievements, and the World Bank documentation is rather nebulous in revealing the methodology in the collection of data supporting all these achievements. The increases mentioned may not be attributed only to the programmes; other factors including exogenous factors such as weather conditions and increased prices might have contributed to increasing income. It does point out though, that there is a general challenge of meeting the demands that farmers are encouraged to formulate. Training and awareness building are not always moving at the same pace as service provision, or the general conditions to embark upon new techniques introduced through training are not available.

Danish commitment to farmer empowerment is high, and farmer empowerment is a central part of the Agricultural Sector Programmes as they are carried out in Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania, Benin and Burkina Faso, which constitute the bilateral support from Denmark to African agriculture.

The following summarises experiences from Uganda. Two sector programme components have had as an objective to support farmers' organisation: the Farmer Organisations-component and the HASP (Household Agricultural Support Programme) component. These two components can be characterised as having an "empowering" objective, inasmuch as they seek to create institutions through which farmers should be able to present needs and priorities to other stakeholders within the agricultural sector, thereby facilitating access to a range of assets, which should help them to combat poverty.

Committed extension staff work within the HASP setup in the five districts, and have succeeded in creating a large number of HASP groups. Furthermore, HASP has avoided that support becomes monopolised by a few of the richest farmers within the villages where support programmes operate. The HASP component has thus been successful in targeting what is termed "the active poor" among the small farmers, which however tends not to include the poorest third of the village population, but has been successful in attracting a majority of women in the groups.

There are many reasons why farmers form HASP groups. Group formation seems to be an element in an overall survival strategy. Many groups are formed as an attempt to counter the marginalisation they otherwise experience. By forming groups the farmers attempt to attract support from the outside.

Training is adapted to the local context, but also has to take point of departure in the level of training of the extensionists and what resources are available to them. In this case the model of extension is a modified Training & Visit approach. This is generally conducted in a professional way, but the approach is a top-down system of technology transfer and it remains weak in responding to the needs and demands of the users who have few means and options to obtain inputs and/or implements.

The major challenge for the HASP component now seems to be to avoid providing training which a) address problems and issues, which the farmers know already or b) provide training

within activities, which are prohibitive for poor farmers to go into. The organisation of farmers in groups, which should enable them to formulate needs and acquire the necessary support, has so far not been entirely successful in establishing the channels through which these formulations and needs assessments are translated into concrete new practices.

The farmers organisations component (FOC) constitutes the ASPS attempt to support farmers associations in their efforts to organize small farmers in order to mobilize support and secure knowledge transfers to rural communities. The associations work through the Extension Link Farmers (ELF) and Contact Farmers, who were trained to train other farmers (in an attempt to move from T&V to farmer to farmer extension). Being a membership organisation, with a membership fee, organised around Special Interest Groups, FOC has another target group than HASP. FOC largely targets the better off farmers, expecting there may be some “spill-over” effect on the poorer farmers, as new knowledge is passed on to them. An impressive number of farmers have received training this way.

In this system, the ELFs are the ones, who are most empowered. The challenge has been, however, to keep broadening the knowledge transfers beyond the ELFs. There is little incentive for the ELFs to do so within the FOC structure. Many ELFs have however been recruited by NGOs and are used as facilitators to implement their activities. Certain ELFs belong to the rural elite who succeed in accessing external support, and it appears that unless a very deliberate effort is made to target other groups, aid and “development” agents (including NGOs) tend to end up working with this category of dynamic and articulate people, who are among the richer segments of rural society.

Summing up, agricultural sector programmes provide a multitude of interesting experiences with farmer empowerment in Africa. However, the cases reveal a number of challenges:

- Making agricultural extension “demand driven” is problematic, when service provision is insufficient at most, prohibitively priced at times;
- Facilitating market access remains a central challenge in the set-up of farmer empowerment initiatives;
- Given the status and the institutional setup of African Government structures and levels of capacity, providing adequate training, that departs from the needs of the farmers, remains a central challenge;
- Provision of services (including input credit provision) is likely to reach mainly better-off farmers unless poorer segments are clearly targeted.

Generally, for the Government initiated organisations, it should be recognised that:

- Initiating formation of farmers’ organisation from a top/governmental level risks mostly mobilising farmers for the sake of getting access to government funding and the experiences indicate that this type of organisation attract mainly the wealthier and more powerful farmers.
- Targeting women seems a promising venture, as these constitute a “targetable” group at micro level. Success with extension among women is higher, for a number of locally specific reasons;
- Donors should be more careful in attributing all progress in the countries where they intervene to their specific support programmes. Furthermore many of the

achievement claimed are hard to measure in more concrete forms (awareness, capacity, empowerment) and little attempt is made to substantiate the claims.

Donor/project-initiated organisations

It is difficult to define any specific programmes nowadays as “donor initiated”. All development activities are carried out in some kind of dialogue with an African partner, be it a small farmers organisation or a Government ministry. When going through our cases, there are however two examples, where donors have been clearly determining the course of the programmes. The two cases which will be summarised here are the Danish Poultry Network’s PADAV project in Benin, which is in fact an element of the Danish Agricultural Sector Support Programme, implemented by two Beninese NGOs; and the People’s Participation Programme of FAO in Zambia, implemented by the Zambian Government, and financed by the Dutch.

The PADAV project in Benin is not an empowerment project, but has, without having it as an explicit agenda, succeeded in empowering poor poultry producers at village level, through providing targeted support to specific training and production activities within poultry rearing. This has been done through training of village poultry vaccinators, through training in improved poultry house construction, and through credit programmes to establish viable poultry production units. The project is based on ideas developed mainly by Danish and Beninese poultry experts, with the specific concern for poultry production as a means to combat poverty. The programme, designed by the Danish Poultry Network, has succeeded in enabling farmers to increase their assets and opportunities. In terms of empowerment, the project has contributed to:

- Establishing viable solidarity based credit- and savings groups
- Increasing poultry-derived income from commercialisation of village-raised poultry
- Increasing awareness of the profitability of improved poultry rearing
- Increasing awareness of the value of training.

Furthermore by virtue of the choice of activities, and through careful selection within the villages, the project has succeeded in targeting a wide range of villagers, including the poor, and with a majority of women. It is thus an interesting example of a case, where empowerment occurs in a context, where this was not explicitly on the agenda, and where the process was not particularly “community based” or “demand driven”. Women have clearly gained influence on their domestic economy. It is finally clear that a major reason for the relative success of the project is the availability of market outlets for poultry in the area, and the relatively high profits that can be made.

The aim of The People’s Participation Programme (PPP) of FAO in Zambia is to reduce rural poverty by people’s participation through organisations controlled and financed by the poor. In this case donor priorities have been very influential in design and execution. The programme has been implemented since 1980.

The focus of the programme is to build organisations of the rural poor with a particular aim to organise poor rural women. This is done through establishing extension services within a

Government framework. The main objective has been to build capacity for self-reliance in the rural communities and to promote participation of women in development processes.

In terms of empowerment, the project has been instrumental in a number of ways:

- Participation of women in the development process
- Increased access to rural services, particularly for the female members, who had no contact to agricultural extension service before
- Access to discussions forums for sharing information
- Increased confidence and decision making ability
- Increased civic involvement of group members and increased tendency to take on leadership in other community work
- Access to capital for emergency needs

While the group members got access to agricultural training and extension, the benefits from this were however limited. The extension service provided information and training in the use of new varieties and cultivation techniques, but the lack of market and input supply made it impossible for the group members to apply the knowledge and skills.

It is interesting that in the case of PPP in Zambia, there is a fairly high degree of success in reaching the poor. The project, however, seems not to be able to overcome the problem that, when reaching the poor, these have problems transforming the knowledge acquired into improved productive and commercial practice, improving their living conditions.

These two examples of donor-initiated support seem to suggest the following:

- The cases indicate that donor-driven initiatives of rural development can be both poverty focused and have an empowering impact;
- The cases show that input access is as important as training and organising if empowerment is to materialise;
- The cases indicate that presence of market outlets is essential for project success;
- Donor initiation brings into question the problem of sustainability.

NGO-initiated organisations

There is a plethora of cases of NGOs attempting to engage in empowerment efforts. NGOs in Africa often have the comparative advantage, compared to the government, of not having a tainted reputation of exploitation, violence and broken promises. Furthermore, they are sometimes in the forefront when it comes to testing new methodologies for disseminating support. On the other hand NGO activities often suffer from a lack of coordination, and their interventions end up being rather patchy. Furthermore, they at times lack the necessary professionalism (Danida 1999). On the other hand, NGOs are a very diverse group, ranging from locally based small associations with very few means, opportunistic, and often quite skilled local urban elites forming NGOs, which often resemble project implementing agencies, to large international donor agencies with huge budgets. The examples that follow below are of the latter category.

CARE's Farmer Innovations Project (CARE FIP) in Uganda works through farmer groups and communities in order to employ new farmer experimentation methods and establish linkages between farmer groups, communities and service providers. It aims at increasing the capacity of farmers to access, assess, adapt, experiment with, and finally to adopt new technologies and farming practices (CARE 2001, 1999), which again are thought to have a positive effect on food security of poor farmers.

The support has been mainly technical, in participatory planning, agricultural and natural resource management areas: training staff and other community members on farmer experimentation, developing extension materials for staff, community and farmer groups, technical support in soil fertility management and crop husbandry practices. Furthermore, provision of some of the experimental materials, such as improved potato seed, agro fungicides and tree seeds. Finally the project has provided support to establish linkages between farmer groups and local research and agri-business organisations.

In terms of farmer empowerment, the project has been instrumental in the following ways:

- Increased realisation of own situation and understanding of setting priorities, planning and implementing programs;
- Increased knowledge about improved technologies and analytical ability to assess whether there is any benefit in applying and adopting these technologies;
- A learning process is taking place at the individual and at group level, like in the case where Farmer Field Schools had been successfully implemented;
- Communities and FIP groups have been able to interact with local government;
- Interaction with private input companies and service providers have increased slightly;
- Kabale District Farmers Association has own member groups across communities, which are only linked to local community based groups (such as FIP groups) through individual overlapping memberships;
- FIP has been able to link farmer groups to NGOs as service providers for training and provision of inputs, and village conservation projects have increasingly been able to function as community based service providers (organised visits to farmer groups, discuss experiences, provision of seeds).

The CARE case is an example of farmers who have *de facto* increased their ability to access local government through outlining plans, and apparently have equally increased their understanding about planning, setting priorities and implementing programmes. It also has a strong poverty focus, which can however perhaps partly be explained from the fact that the social segregation among farmers is not too pronounced. But it seems to be successful in targeting a wider range of farmers than the government programmes such as NAADS. It remains to be seen however whether this improved ability to plan and access service providers in reality leads to increased food security.

Another interesting project, implemented by an NGO, is the formation of Women Sesame Growers' Associations (SGAs) in Gambia. Initiated by the Catholic Relief Services in the 1980s and supported by IFAD through IFAD/NGO extended cooperation programme (from 2000). In the early 1980s, the international NGO Catholic Relief Services (CRS) took initiative

to promote sesame and oil production in Gambia. CRS's initial motivation was to introduce a dark variety of sesame in order to improve family nutrition through increased availability of cooking oil. This has led to the successful creation of 72 regional SGAs and a national apex - the National Association of Women Farmers (NAWFA).

The project has thus succeeded in establishing viable Sesame Growers Associations, and Sesame has developed into an important cash crop for the farmers involved, basing the organisation on traditional forms of local organisation. The relative success of the project is explained by the fact that women have been deliberately targeted. Another interesting conclusion to be made is however that it is the unintended development of sesame as a cash crop, rather than as a produce for local consumption, which has caused its success. What was meant as a project to increase food self-sufficiency turned out as a project introducing a new cash crop.

These two NGO- examples are in no way representative of the vast types of the experiences with NGOs in Africa trying to organise farmers. They nevertheless point to a number of findings:

- The establishment process of the activities is crucial for the outcome. Well adapted methodologies, skilled and well-trained staff is obviously of great importance;
- The NGOs have shown an ability to be flexible, in the sense that the objective of e.g. the Gambia project was considerably altered, going from being a food security project to being a cash crop project;
- Success in empowerment initiatives depends on the existence of an accessible market as much as on training elements.

Community- and self-initiated organisations

Community- and self-initiated organisations constitute a very heterogeneous category of farmer groups both in terms of scale and main activities – from small scale village-based self-help groups (SHGs) with a strong social orientation, e.g. groups created to help HVI/AIDS infected villagers, to groups, which are created in order to achieve some kind of visibility vis-à-vis external agents as donors, input suppliers, buyers of produce etc; to large national level unions/associations (often based on a single produce e.g. cotton unions in West Africa) oriented towards both markets and state.

In this section the focus is mainly on two types of community- and self-initiated groups: (i) small-scale self-help groups involved in agricultural activities and/or combining agricultural activities with 'social security' activities at village level and (ii) large-scale (national) associations oriented towards improvement of production and market conditions for members of the association and policy advocacy.

The first case is an example of Kenyan dairy farmers, who successfully created a number of SHGs to curb the considerable price differences occurring according to the vicinity of urban markets. By pooling together their milk for urban markets, farmers have been able to achieve higher prices for their produce. Together with the decreased public support for veterinary and breeding services, this has led to an increased role of dairy farmers' cooperatives, which

have the potential for delivering the service of milk marketing along with veterinary and breeding services, input supply and credit facilities.

This case has clearly empowered a segment of commercial Kenyan dairy farmers, and is a clear example of farmer empowerment. Empowerment has manifested itself in the following ways:

- Increased bargaining power of the milk producers
- Higher overall prices of milk
- Bonus payments
- Access to services such as credit, artificial insemination and veterinary services in some cases

It is however worth noticing that the farmers involved are among the rich and resourceful, and the case reveals that poorer farmers often prefer to sell through informal channels because they cannot meet the requirements and accept the delays involved when entering a more formalised cooperative structure.

Other examples of self-help groups include a community group in Kabale, South-Western Uganda, which functions with the objective to provide assistance to its members in times of hardships. When members are ill, they venture into small scale economic activities, selling timber and coffins, constructing bricks etc. This case reveals that certain groups are perfectly capable of managing small scale credits, outlining clear procedures for credit, including administering modes of sanctioning.

In West Africa there are strong traditions for reciprocal solidarity groups, especially the ubiquitous *tontines* which exist especially among women. These are savings groups, where a regular contribution to a common pool is given in credit to one of the members. The members then take turns. The principle also prevails in work parties, where people gather to work on a field of a given member of an association. Again farmers will take turns. This principle is often preferred to a principle where a common piece of land is cultivated by the members together. Supporting these organisations has however been difficult as the scale is very small, and support has tended to inundate the associations.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, producer associations have a strong hold in several countries in West Africa; representing farmers' interests at local, regional and national levels and directed towards markets and policy advocacy. Several of the associations are limited to farmers producing a specific produce (esp. cotton producers). In Mali, against a background of democratisation in the early 1990s, and increased dissatisfaction with the parastatal CMDT, village associations united and created a national cotton association (SYCOV). The creation of SYCOV has clearly increased farmers' and village associations' bargaining power vis-à-vis CMDT.

Following the creation of SYCOV, the CMDT accepted the principle of collective bargaining by non-governmental organisation representing cotton producers and agreed as well to its participation on the National Agricultural Pricing Board. This has resulted in announcement of producer prices before planting and that producer representatives would be allowed to

participate at the village level in the classification of harvested cotton and other cotton related activities.

Finally, the association has been able to influence conditions related to individual farmers (e.g. cotton prices; announcement of prices prior to planting) and the 'opportunity structures' i.e. influence decisions at national level with respect to cotton production and marketing. The organisation is however at the same time increasingly split, and gaps between the top and the members at local level are increasing.

The cases above point to a number of reflections regarding empowerment from self-initiated farmer groups:

- Self-initiated farmers groups tend to consist of rich, powerful and influential farmers. This is not a reason not to support them, even if you are a "pro-poor" donor. Giving voice to this kind of organisation may benefit others as well. Intervention forms, that wish to address poverty issues, should however pay attention to this;
- Small self-help groups risk being inundated once they start receiving aid, as they are often based on very sparse means, and are very informal. This is not in itself problematic, but aid is likely to change the dynamic of the association.
- The Malian case indicates that advocacy work can in certain contexts lead to a highly improved bargaining position of farmers. Larger associations (as the SYVOC in Mali) are often characterised by a skilful leadership, which however is at risk of losing its local embeddedness.

Conclusion

Lessons learned and implications for policy design and programme implementation in Africa

Farmer empowerment initiatives in Africa constitute a wide array of experiences. It is obvious that this calls for caution in generalising and establishing blue-print approaches, as insights into local forms of organisation, compliance and market structures are crucial for programme success. The cases, nevertheless, point to the following lessons learned:

- Support for farmer empowerment and organisations has to be combined with explicit mechanisms that target the poor and women.
- Support to creation of farmer groups is an effective means to create linkages between farmers, farmer groups and public and private agricultural service providers and financial institutions. These linkages are crucial in order to ensure farmers' access to credit, inputs and output markets as well as access to knowledge and technology.
- Support to informal adult education and local farmer organisations may enhance farmers' abilities to articulate informed demands and more effectively interact with public and private service providers. However, improvements of agricultural service provision also require public sector reform.
- Farmer organisations is a key vehicle to strengthen farmers in their interaction with market forces. However, farmers' interaction with input and output markets remains a key challenge to African farming. Improved service provision does not necessarily materialise as an effect of empowerment initiatives, but is an effect of public and private opportunity structures.
- Farmer associations in West Africa have been able to gain political influence, but these constitute exceptions rather than the rule in Africa.

At the project and programme implementation level it is noted that:

- Targeting women seems to be a both feasible and recommendable point of departure, as women constitutes a targetable group at local level, often showing high commitment to empowerment initiatives. This is also a way to ensure a higher degree of poverty focus.
- Taking point of departure in traditional informal forms of organisation increases the likelihood of farmer organisations being sustainable, and thus increases the likelihood of addressing entities with a certain level of coherence and compliance. It is however no guarantee of addressing the poorer farmers, as village societies are often quite hierarchical in their social structure.
- Empowering through support to input provision or credit may be effective, but is at risk of not being pro-poor and/or gender sensitive. In programme implementation, particular attention should be paid to targeting vulnerable farmers;
- Support based on knowledge transfers is often easier to direct towards poorer target groups. However, this type of intervention risks being less relevant to farmers, either because the knowledge is already known to the farmers, is inappropriate given the local

social and agro-climatic context, or because it is prohibitive, involving investments which are not possible for poor farmers to mobilise.

- Development of (vertical) linkages and networks (village/district, regional and national levels) appears to be a major challenge. In East Africa organisation of Farmer Field Schools groups into regional and national networks and associations provide an encouraging example of a successful process of farmer organisation. Provided a useful form of training, farmers are capable of establishing viable institutions, which can develop beyond the often very local scope of the farmer training efforts.

There are finally a number of policy implications to be considered:

- It is important that initiators of farmer empowerment initiatives make it clear what it is, that they exactly attempt to achieve. Work needs to be done in order to develop clear benchmarks enabling some kind of assessment regarding the success or failure of farmer empowerment initiatives.
- Attempts should be made to make clear distinctions between what is farmer organisation and what is farmer empowerment. The two notions are used at times quasi-synonymously, and very often without clear definitions of what is actually meant.
- Successful examples of African farmer empowerment do not often take place among the poor. Attempts have to be made to analyse what has led to empowerment of richer farmers, in order to learn from these experiences, and then put this to effective use among specifically targeted poorer farmers, if a poverty focus is attempted.
- Farmer empowerment is more than just technical farmer training. Extension in itself does not necessarily lead to empowerment. Empowerment in the form of training and awareness building however equally does not lead to much if it is not accompanied with improved access to service provision.
- In order for empowerment to be effectively implemented a sector-wide approach is necessary. At local levels, decentralised institutions need to be involved in programme planning.

There are limits to what can be expected from empowerment initiatives as long as they do not address more fundamental issues of distribution, commodity pricing and rights. Empowerment through giving increased access and voice should therefore not be seen as a panacea to problems of African rural development.

Chapter 4 Policy recommendations and practical steps to farmer empowerment

Policy recommendations

Farmer empowerment remains a central component for agricultural sector development and an important pillar for a country's overall development. The pursuit of farmer empowerment has to take both of these dimensions into consideration at the policy, programme and project levels. To this end:

- 1) Support to mobilisation and strengthening of Farmer Organisations can be an effective means to farmer empowerment in general
- 2) Farmer empowerment must be directed at influencing the opportunity structures through policy change, better implementation of policy and general support for decentralisation and democratisation as a means towards more effective, efficient, accountable and equitable governance that are responsive to farmers' demands
- 3) Monitoring and bench mark indicators for farmer empowerment should be important parts of agricultural programming as they are crucial for the capacity building of the farmer organisation, the planning of the sector programme, and assessment of impact on development outcomes.
- 4) Farmer empowerment should not focus upon farmers through individual organisations. The organisational landscape is more complex today and the expected development outcomes are broader.
- 5) Government (administrative) bodies should be recognised as being important for farmer empowerment and their roles cannot be replaced by NGO or donor organisations if the outcomes are to be sustainable. However at the local level, government bodies are often not present or poorly represented and lack accountability in the eyes of farmers. NGO and Self-initiated organisations can play an important role here
- 6) Donor initiated farmer organisations tend to perform well, but suffer from donor dependency. The sustainability of the farmer organisations must be taken into account in planning and provision of donor support with a clear exit strategy on the part of the donor
- 7) Self initiated farmer organisations/cooperatives serve important roles in the farming communities and have high potential for farmer empowerment. In order for them to be able to break through and change opportunity structures they should be supported with resources, information and capacity building to create linkages to other organisations
- 8) Linkages with other farmer organisations are important for both the success and sustainability of farmer empowerment Linkages between farmers' organisations

and networks, vertically at local level and horizontally to regional and national level, in order to strengthen and the coordinate complementary interventions, increase impact on opportunity structures, avoid duplicating functions and monitoring of impact, dissemination of good practices. should be facilitated

- 9) Linkages between farmer organisation and other and other organisations are likewise vital. Linkages should be facilitated and will support access to resources, in formation, staff and services
- 10) Identification of the poor and the nature of their poverty should be undertaken at the outset and subsequently monitored at regular intervals in the locality of the intervention. While it is not necessarily only the poor or the poorest of the poor that should be targeted, their involvement in the intervention and the monitoring of its impact upon their livelihood condition should be central activities of the programme's planning and monitoring systems.
- 11) Leadership of the poor by the poor is not always possible and not necessarily desirable. However, it is important that mechanisms are in place ensuring a farmer organisation remains inclusive of the interests of the poor. This involves the need to secure that capacity building of the poor is taking place in such a way, that these will be able to voice their interests, when these differ from the wealthier members
- 12) Most farmers are concerned primarily with short term outcomes and benefits. Their judgements and decisions tend to be on this basis. Given the longer timeframes of poverty, gender and environment development objectives, investments in capacity building and strengthening the organisational functioning can help to strengthen the sustainability of the farmer organisation and thereby the fulfilment of these development objectives. This supports the earlier recommendation on linkages.

Practical steps for farmer empowerment interventions

The following three steps are intended to serve as initial guidelines to be considered when preparing and implementing an intervention directed at farmer empowerment. They are based upon the lessons gained from the study of the case examples and reflect some general *good practices*.

Step One: Baseline Situation Analysis

The situation analysis would assess the basis situation and condition under which the intervention will function and provide information about the potential for farmer empowerment and guidelines for effective targeting and planning of interventions. The analysis would consist of three studies:

National Farmer Empowerment Assessment

- The assessment would entail mapping the condition of farmers across the country on the basis of available data on economic indicators of production, income, land distribution and ownership patterns. It would provide the basis for an initial

identification of potential localities, existing or potential farmer groups and organisations for FE interventions.

The organisational landscape

- This would include the identification of the types, numbers, sizes (membership, beneficiaries, geographical coverage) and activities of farmer organisations or local organisations working with farmers within each locality. This should be at district and sub-district levels could use the general category types of government-, donor-, NGO- or self-initiated utilised in this report. Data collected on these organizations should include the organisation's methods for targeting farmers and the types of farmers targeted in practise. This would provide basic information about the stakeholders in farmers empowerment

Assessment of Farmers' poverty at the local level

- This would assess the dimensions of poverty most prevalent amongst farmers within the locality and identify the types of capabilities lacking, The assessment will provide information for targeting of organisations that include the interests of poor farmers in the particular context of poverty

Step Two: Support for local farmer organisations

The support for farmer organisations should include formal and informal networks, coordinating committees, higher level associations and functional local cooperatives The support would include the following interventions:

:

- Identification and mobilisation of farmer organisations with potential to support farmer empowerment outcomes
- Support to organisational development of the identified organisations. This will include awareness raising, organisational and administrative capacity building for transparency and accountable functioning of the organisation
- Facilitation of networking and linking to other organisations at the same or higher levels
- Linkages with other organisations in order to secure human resources, credit, strengthening processes (monitoring, planning, capacity building, etc) and sustainability
- Support to development of service provision according to the activities pursued by the organisations
- Monitoring including indicators and benchmarks. Possibility of action research based upon local research capacity; building and developing that capacity as required.
- Pursuing a rights-based approach (RBA) and the democratisation of government and service delivery with particular stress on activities that can promote good governance, participation, information and communication, decentralisation of service delivery, strengthening of local elected government through fiscal decentralisation, promotion of user groups, etc.
- In connection with the previous point, pursuing synergies with related sector programme and project activities.

Step Three: Promoting an enabling environment for FE

- Support development of national policy for creation of enabling environment of farmers' empowerment towards general agricultural development, particularly devolution of

- power to local levels, that enhances the farmers influence on local planning processes and service delivery.
- Promoting synergies between interventions in the agricultural sector and interventions in other sectors that have a direct or indirect impact upon farmers' livelihoods (education, health, rural roads, decentralisation, etc) and in which empowerment can be pursued and enhanced.

ⁱ The most recent World Bank definition of empowerment may be found on a newly established Empowerment website that provides an overview or WB support for empowerment: <http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/68ByDocName/WhatIsEmpowerment>.

ⁱⁱ An international donor meeting titled: 'Local institutions capacity in rural areas: Lessons from the field' took place in the World Bank in March 2004 to discuss experiences with different approaches to support farmer empowerment.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Chambers: PRA as a method for enabling people to do their own appraisal, analysis and planning, take their own action.

^{iv} The concept of opportunity structures is discussed in a WB discussion paper (not yet published) in relation to monitoring farmer empowerment.

^v WB/IFAD/FAO formulation mission 2004.

^{vi} Here we are taking gender equality as being the relationship between a husband and wife. See Kabeer, 2003.

^{vii} The underlying strategy for the work is usually referred to as "Community IPM", a strategy that in modified forms is being applied in a number of countries in South- and Southeast Asia.

^{viii} Land rights in urban areas are also a major issue as the cities grow in size explaining the support coming from urban groups as well.

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