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Collective Action and Market Access for Smallholders: A Summary of Findings

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The Research Workshop on Collective Action and Market Access for Smallholders aimed at enhancing the conceptual and empirical understanding of the role of collective action institutions (e.g. rules and norms, producer organizations, cooperatives, etc.) in improving market access for the rural poor. It also examined the diverse opportunities and constraints that different groups of producers face in organizing to increase their market shares as well as the factors that affect collective action in marketing activities.

The discussions during the workshop touched upon many angles of collective action and market access for smallholders. Some case-studies dealt with the appropriate choice of markets and commodities for effective farmers groups, while others touched upon the “who” and “how” of such organizations. The common theme that emerged from the examples presented was that collective action brings certain advantages into commercialization activities. Since smallholders in developing countries still face multiple barriers to entry into markets, collective action may be useful in overcoming these constraints and ultimately contributing to poverty reduction. However, several case-studies revealed that collective action may not be a “silver bullet” in securing market access for smallholders.

Keywords: collective action, market access, smallholders, institutions, producer organizations, cooperatives, commercialization

1. INTRODUCTION

The issues concerning small agricultural producers figure prominently in the global discussions about poverty reduction as the majority of the world’s poor belong to such households. While some of these households are autarkic, most are linked to the markets in one way or another. Thus, the opportunity for smallholders to raise their incomes from agricultural production, natural resource management, and related rural enterprises increasingly depends on their ability to successfully participate in the marketplace exchanges.

However, this participation is complicated by the numerous internal and external challenges that smallholders face. First, much of the literature points to the pervasive imperfections that characterize markets in the developing world. Lack of information on prices and technologies, high transaction costs, and credit constraints make it difficult for smallholder farmers to take advantage of the market. In addition, with the increasing number of the free trade agreements affecting both national and international commodity markets, the smallholder farmers are being forced to compete not only with their local cohorts, but also with farmers from other countries as well as domestic and international agribusinesses.

One way for smallholders to overcome market failures and maintain their position in the market may be through organizing into farmer groups or producers organizations. When acting collectively, these smallholders may be in a better position to reduce transaction costs for their

market exchanges, obtain the necessary market information, secure access to new technologies, and tap into the high value markets, which would give them an advantage when competing with large farmers and agribusinesses.

Many factors influence the formation and the operation of farmer organizations. For example, domestic political environment and the presence or absence of a facilitating agent are among such factors. To discuss the conditions that would allow small agricultural producers to organize into groups to invest in value addition and compete on local, national, and international markets, CGIAR Systemwide Program on Collective Action and Property Rights (CAPRI) sponsored a workshop, which was held on October 2-5, 2006 at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Cali, Colombia. Researchers from 11 CGIAR centers and several affiliated institutions came together to share their case-studies of smallholder organizations engaged in collective marketing of their products. The CG centers represented at the workshop included Bioversity International, CIAT, CIFOR, CIMMYT, CIP, ICARDA, ICRISAT, IFPRI, ILRI, IWMI, and ICRAF. UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), GFA Consulting Group, and Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) were among the affiliated institutions that participated in the conference.

The program consisted of three days of case-study presentations on the topic of collective marketing for smallholders generally divided into three thematic areas. Each presentation was followed by discussions which aimed at highlighting the cross-cutting issues that emerged during the presentations. In addition, several working group sessions were held throughout the workshop to share expectations for the event, synthesize common themes, brainstorm a potential framework for analyzing collective action in marketing, and consider policy implications arising out of the presentations and discussions.

2. WORKSHOP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of this research workshop was to enhance the conceptual and empirical understanding of the role of collective action institutions in improving market access for the rural poor. Specific objectives included:

- To highlight the need for alternative institutional or non-market arrangements given coordination failures in rural markets as a result of the vacuum left by the lack of effective state involvement and the underdevelopment of the private sector in areas with limited market infrastructure;
- To identify ways that collective action can contribute to remedy the existing inefficiencies, coordination problems, or barriers to contract formation;
- To assess the extent to which collective action for improving market access for the poor has contributed to intensification of production, adoption of new technologies, diversification of income sources, improved market participation, and poverty reduction;
- To examine the diverse opportunities and constraints that different groups of producers and traders such as indigenous communities, women's groups, and farmer cooperatives face in organizing to increase their market shares;
- To synthesize findings of multiple case-studies and translate them into concrete policy recommendations.

3. WORKSHOP THEMES

Three broad themes had been identified as the main issues that the workshop aimed to address. All case studies presented dealt with at least one of the themes, and the majority touched upon several of them. The papers drew upon diverse social science disciplines to present empirical evidence and best practice approaches to the study of how collective action can increase market access for smallholders. This report summarizes cross-cutting findings from case-studies presented and discussed on each theme as well as methodological issues that were raised during the workshop.

A. Collective action to access which markets?

In a situation of well-functioning rural markets, small agricultural producers in developing countries, like their better-endowed peers, can choose to sell their products to several types of markets: local (rural), emerging urban, regional, and international. While smallholders face many barriers to entry into any of these markets, local markets are by far easier to reach than the other three due not only to the logistical differences (transportation, quality standards, scale issues), but also because of the competition in the face of larger domestic and international farmers. In addition, in many countries, domestic markets, which include both rural (local) and urban markets, are being transformed beyond the simple exchanges for immediate local consumption with the appearance of domestic and multinational chains (grocery stores, restaurants) that are in search of suppliers.

Despite the seemingly easy access, local markets may not present a viable and profitable option for the majority of smallholders since most of the households around them most likely grow the same crop; the price for this crop is low due to either the lack of demand or overflowing supply. Therefore, in most cases the farmers do not see a need to organize to market their products locally. Where collective action comes into play is in the attempts to reach larger markets, i.e. urban, regional, and international, where acting collectively enables small farmers to deal with transportation and storage issues, acquire technologies and certificates to comply with required quality standards, and reach the necessary scale to supply the desired quantity of their products.

Domestic and international markets can be further differentiated into staple goods (traditional) markets and niche/specialty markets. The latter is comprised of consumers who are interested in a particular product (for example, a certain type of grapes in India or potatoes in the Andes) or those who are looking for compliance with certain environmental or labor standards (organic, Fair Trade). Based on the case-studies presented at the workshop, collective marketing can be effective in reaching both types of markets.

The area where organizing of producers into groups is particularly important for smallholders is in gaining access to the quality-conscious markets, be it for staple or specialty goods. These markets, sometimes referred to as “high value markets,” offer higher premiums and, thus, are more desirable. For example, organizations of small potato producers in Uganda were successful in selling their crops to a South African fast food chain in Kampala when they worked on improving the quality of their outputs to satisfy the company’s quality requirements. In the same way, farmer cooperatives in the Philippines were able to obtain the needed quality certificates to market their tree seeds and seedlings (specialty products) with technical assistance from the World

Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF). In both cases, acting together allowed the smallholders to attain the necessary quality levels, which in turn enabled them to access new, quality-sensitive markets.

However, one issue that emerged during the discussions of this theme is the influence of the political and economic context on the types of markets that producer groups can access. In the situation of government subsidies for a particular crop, the focus of collective action may shift from marketing of outputs to jointly accessing markets for inputs. In Mexico, farmer groups have formed in the context of maize subsidies with the purpose of collectively overcoming imperfections in the inputs market (securing access to credit and seeds). In other situations, government or donor subsidies may in fact help farmers to scale up production and reach new larger markets while at the same time offering perverse and unsustainable incentives for group formation (as in the case of self-help groups in Western Kenya, assisted by USAID). Moreover, opening up of domestic markets to international trade may further complicate access to all types of markets for producer organizations and put to test the applicability of collective marketing in the liberalized economy.

Overall, the discussion of case-studies and cross-cutting issues on this theme led to the conclusion that the type of markets that can be accessed by organizations of smallholders heavily depends the following factors: policy environment that sets the rules for national and international markets, outside technical and financial assistance necessary for addressing quality and scale issues, and the type of commodity that the group cultivates (high value versus “low” value products). In addition, the case-studies highlighted that smallholder organizations have been more successful in reaching domestic (local urban and regional) than international markets, with some exception of international “niche” markets. The discussions revealed that collective action by small agricultural producers is often necessary to overcome barriers to entry into most markets.

B. Collective Action for which types of products?

Closely connected with the question of the markets is the issue of the types of products that are most suitable for collective marketing. Papers presented under this theme attempted to shed light on collective action in marketing of different product and clarify how collective action could be an appropriate strategy to increase the market share of smallholders in alternative markets. The discussions revolved around the differences in terms of incentives, constraints, and facilitating factors for groups producing different products.

Even though the case-studies dealt with different food and non-food products, the discussion differentiated between three main types of commodities: high value products, local varieties (or staples), and products important for biodiversity conservation. Despite these differences, it was commonly agreed that participation in producer groups most often depends on the incentives offered by the market demand and natural properties of a specific product. If the demand for a commodity is weak, farmers may not see any incentives to organize around that particular crop. On the other hand, if the demand for a commodity is high, there may be greater motivation to join groups and market the product collectively. For example, there was weak demand for minor millets in Tamil Nadu as the market was dominated by cash crops such as cassava and pineapple. However, after investments in quality improvement and the identification of a niche market for minor millets, self-help groups and enterprises of small farmers were set up to market their millet crops as the demand for these products increased.

Similarly, the properties of a product, such as its perishability, may serve as incentives or disincentives for joining groups. Vegetables, which are rather perishable, may motivate farmers to organize in order to jointly deal with transaction costs that are associated with marketing of such products, such as storage and transportation issues; however, if the markets for these products are too distant or cannot offer a good price, farmers may choose to act individually and sell the products locally. Crops such as potatoes and cereals that can be preserved longer may provide impetus to collectively secure storage facilities and later sell these products at a higher price.

Along with natural properties of a product come its “commercial” properties. Some case-studies clearly showed that collective action is more effective and beneficial in the marketing of high value products than staple crops. For example, marketing of cassava in India (grown for export) was more successful than marketing of the minor millets in the same area. In Central America, collective marketing of vegetables (a high-value commodity) was more effective than the marketing of staples. However, recent experiences from Uganda provide evidence that the opposite is true there: marketing of cereals (a staple) was done more effectively by farmer organizations than by individual producers.

The discussions of the relevance of physical and commercial properties of a product for its marketing led to a conversation of what constitutes a high-value commodity. It is commonly acknowledged that it is the transaction costs associated with marketing of a crop that enable it to demand a higher price. Typically, it is the perishable goods such as fruits and vegetables that become HVA due to the costs associated with storage and transportation. However, some case studies showed that a staple crop can also get a higher price as a result of agroprocessing and quality improvements (as in the case of minor millets in India or potatoes in the Andes), allowing it to be marketed at the higher rate similar to high value commodities. The example of the Mexican maize also raised a question of whether it can become a higher value crop through a process of market differentiation, i.e. determining if there is a market for some types of maize that would allow the producers of this maize to get a higher price than the one currently set by government.

Based on these assumptions, the lines between high value and low value commodities become blurred. What reconciles both sides of the debate is the notion that the product choice for collective marketing depends on the context of each country or region; it is the economic policies orchestrated by the governments (trade liberalization, subsidies, etc), geographic and climatic conditions of an area, product perishability, and local and international consumption demands that ascribe higher value to one product over another.

Another important issue dealing with the types of products most appropriate for collective marketing comes from the examples of “conservation cum commercialization,” i.e. creating commercial incentives for farmers to join conservation efforts. Collective action can play a unique role in such situations: by organizing farmers around commercial incentives, collective marketing can contribute to the preservation of local biodiversity as in the case of tropical fruit trees in Thailand and India. In addition, as shown in the examples of both minor millets in Tamil Nadu and potatoes in the Andes, organizing farmers around their native crops fulfills an important role in attracting attention to native varieties that have fallen in the shadow of the money-making crops or have been stigmatized as culturally inferior.

The discussions of marketing in light of biodiversity preservation have raised questions about what the proper focus of collective action should be. In the case of the Andean potato, which has many varieties, the debate revolved around the question of whether collective action is more effective in preserving the biodiversity of one product (potatoes) or in working towards a diversity of products that a group producers and markets. While the former has intrinsic conservation value, the latter serves as a risk-mitigating mechanism by promoting portfolio diversification.

In addition to the choice between preservation of biodiversity and crop diversification the discussions touched upon the issue of the main purpose of collective marketing and whether its objective should be beyond just obtaining a better price for one commodity. Even in the situations where collective marketing led to “conservation cum commercialization,” most case-studies provided evidence that collective action by smallholders was essential in addressing product quality issues and, thus, getting a better price, be it for staples, high-value crops, or for underutilized native species.

C. How to organize producers? Who organizes producers?

While focusing on two different aspects of collective marketing, the case-studies and discussions of the first two themes always touched upon the last theme, which deals with the basic issues concerning collective action in marketing. Papers presented on this theme reflected on the questions of how smallholders organize, what activities the groups undertake, who assist in the organization process and operations, and what the role of government, private sector, and NGOs in facilitating these processes is and should be. The discussions that followed shed more light on the reasons for organizing around marketing, ways that farmers go about it, conditions for successful collective marketing, and the appropriate role for facilitators.

a. Group Characteristics

The main course of discussion on this issue was along the lines of group composition. In some case studies, the groups were fairly homogenous (women’s cowa groups in Thailand, Farmer Field School groups in East Africa), while in others these organizations included members from different wealth strata of society (stakeholder platforms in the Andes) and of different gender (producer groups in Tanzania). However, across the examples of smallholder organizations, member homogeneity was prevalent. Appropriate group size was also discussed, with examples of successful marketing groups in Africa providing evidence that a smaller organization (20-30 members) is most suitable for marketing activities.

When describing group composition, several case-studies mentioned a high number of women in the farmer organizations, such as in the case of potato producer groups in Uganda, where 60 percent of members are women. Female representation in these organizations was not mentioned in many presentations, which spurred discussions about whether women were excluded from participating in collective marketing. These information gaps gave an impetus for more research on barriers to entry into such groups for women and other community members.

The discussions of the membership of smallholder organizations uncovered the issue of group dynamics and their effect on group’s success. Based on the example of the seedling associations in the Philippines, whose activities were hampered by poor group dynamics and weak leadership, it was concluded that interactions between members and management approaches play an integral

part in the outcomes of collective marketing. Case-studies illustrating both positive and negative group interactions highlighted the need for greater attention to organizational development and capacity building of the leaders.

The type of organization that is most appropriate for collective commercial activities was another point of discussion as various case-studies presented different levels of organizations capturing different points along the market chain. In some instances, smallholders were organized into groups of actual producers such as the potato farmers in Uganda, rice growers in Sri Lanka, or rattan farmers in Indonesia. In others, the group is formed at the level of traders and processors (milk traders in Kenya and cheese makers in Syria). Some organizations such as the networks of potato farmers, processors, and buyers in Peru and Bolivia encompass the whole market chain, highlighting the possibilities of effective collective action between various actors involved in the commercialization of a product. The pattern that emerged from examples of various organizations showed that for successful collective marketing, there is a need to match farmers' skills, needs, and managerial experience with different forms of organizations.

Related to the issue of organizational type is the question of the role of public-private partnerships in facilitating collective marketing. There was a difference in the case-studies between the degree of interaction of public and private spheres, and the discussion focused on whether the public or private investments were better fitted to help smallholders overcome market imperfections. While private sector may seem more effective since it avoids bureaucratic inefficiencies, public sector investments may be necessary for scaling up and generating policy change in favor of small farmers. However, it was generally agreed that different types of public-private partnerships may be an important tool to secure greater market access for smallholders. For example, in the case of grape producers in India, marketing of the crops was done through Mahagrapes, a private company, that served as a partner to the cooperatives of grape farmers. In the case of the Mexican maize producers, the public-private dialogue occurred around inputs and business development services.

Lastly, the discussions touched upon the degree of formality that such organizations should have to be effective in their marketing efforts. In some case studies, the groups were organized on an informal basis, such as the cheese makers in Syria. In others, such as the seedling farmers in the Philippines, smallholders were integrated into a formal network with coordinated production and marketing activities. While it was agreed that formalization comes with a cost, cases of successful organizations revealed that formalization may allow smallholders to access larger markets, obtain necessary quality certifications, get credit, and take advantage of technical assistance and business development services.

b. Types of Activities Undertaken

As mentioned in the previous section, the case-studies presented accounts of group formation along different stages of the market chain, which generated discussions about which types of activities are more appropriate for collective action. The examples ranged from organizing around production (potato farmers in Uganda) to processing (dairy groups in Tanzania, dairy and fruit agro-enterprises in Colombia) to trading (cheese makers in Syria). In addition, several examples from Africa highlighted that collective activities can be undertaken around bulking, sorting, storage, and quality grading.

While it became clear that the type of activities undertaken jointly depends on motivations and incentives provided in a situation, a thorough analysis of the market chain is necessary to determine where collective action provides a better option than acting individually. An example of such analysis is the exercises carried out under the Participatory Market Chain Approach (PCMA) used in the Andean highlands to enable small potato farmers to access markets for their crops by “connecting the dots” along the market chain and fostering innovation, information exchange, and cooperation among all those involved in commercialization of potatoes.

In addition, the type and range of activities taken up by farmer groups depend on the skills and knowledge that exist among the members or are brought in by an outside agent. Most of the case studies showed that it was the skills, abilities, and interests of the so-called “chain champions” have been crucial not only for the focus of collective activities and commercial orientation of the group, but also for the success of the undertaken activities. The later section devotes more attention to the characteristics and the role of the “chain champions.”

c. Motivations and Incentives for Collective Marketing

The issue of motivations and incentives for organizing around marketing activities was dominant throughout all discussions. In order for farmers to act collectively, there must be incentives that would make forming groups attractive and desirable, which, in turn, will ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of such groups. The central role of incentives is emphasized by their influence on the stage at which collective action enters into the marketing activities, as demonstrated by the Bioversity’s case-studies of agrobiodiversity efforts in Thailand, India, Syria, and Vietnam. In addition, lack of appropriate incentives can deter some smallholders from engaging in collective activities, as seen in the case of Indonesian non-timber forest product (NTFP) farmers.

As stated in the previous section, a thorough analysis of the market chain can uncover the incentives that are present and could motivate farmers to undertake collective activities which would be more advantageous to them than acting individually. The example of the potato commercialization networks in Peru and Bolivia reveal that while collective action carries some indirect benefits, it is the commercial incentives that should be used to attract people to join with others. Once such groups are formed, commercial incentives may be replaced with other motivations to continue acting collectively, which would lead to change in attitudes, rules, and relationships, i.e. broader institutional change.

Cultural aspects may also provide motivations for collective action. In some cases, such as the minor millets in India or potatoes in the Andes, certain crops have an important cultural meaning, providing an impetus to organize around marketing thus ensuring greater visibility and preservation of these products. In other cases, it is the pre-existing “tendency to organize,” or high levels of social capital and mutual trust, that serve as a basis for collective activities around marketing.

While these factors may offer another benefit to collective action around marketing, cooperation may also carry direct and hidden costs, which makes some farmers hesitant about joining groups. Such costs may include the trade-offs between self-interest and collective good, membership fees, and the possibilities of free-riders benefiting from the collective efforts. Even though an economic cost-benefit analysis may reveal some direct commercial “pluses” and “minuses” of cooperation, a deeper examination of the surrounding context is necessary to uncover the “hidden” barriers to

group formation. The literature on collective action in the natural resource management can provide some further insights on this issue.

d. Context

It is evident that the topic of incentives is closely connected with the issue of appropriate political and economic context, which can provide incentives or serve as a deterrent for collective marketing. The existence of government subsidies was mentioned as one of the factors heavily affecting the need to organize around marketing, both in positive and negative ways. In India, for example, the government gives politically-desirable rice and wheat subsidies, while minor millets and other underutilized species remain “unnoticed.” These policies provided an incentive to form groups to market the “unsubsidized” products. Similarly, in Mexico, the government controls prices for maize through subsidies reducing the motivation for producers to organize around marketing of their maize crops since they are guaranteed a certain price when selling their crops individually. (However, in the Mexican case, the collective activities emerge around inputs).

Trade liberalization is another factor that can create both an enabling and a deterring environment for collective action. On the one hand, it can open up opportunities for certain producers to find niche markets abroad and organize to obtain the necessary quality certifications to sell their products to larger markets yielding greater returns. On the other hand, opening up of the markets was detrimental to the staple goods (maize) producer organizations in Malawi and Tanzania. However, as in the case of the maize cooperatives in Uganda, market liberalization, although damaging initially, allowed these groups to “reinvent” themselves by reducing the group size, introducing accountability and clear communication flows into the internal structure, shifting the focus of activities to simultaneous marketing and intensification, and making quality improvements by engaging with the UN World Food Program. All of these changes led to the increase in revenue received by these producer organizations.

Infrastructural development and bureaucratic context are among other factors revealed by the discussions as influencing collective marketing. For example, African smallholders have been more successful in the marketing of horticultural products than their cohorts in India as a result of less stringent bureaucratic procedures. In addition, political support behind a commodity can undoubtedly create an enabling environment for collective marketing of this product.

e. Facilitation

The issue related to collective marketing that emerged in all case-studies concerns the role that outside assistance assumes in organizing smallholders for integration into supply chains. While some groups emerged internally (i.e. formed by farmers themselves), the formation and activities of the majority were initiated by an outside facilitator, be it an NGO, the state, or a private company. It was generally agreed that outside assistance, both financial investment and capacity strengthening, is necessary for enabling smallholders to access markets; without it, these groups will not be able to effectively deal with market imperfections and other barriers to entry. However, what form this facilitation takes and should take depends on the context, as demonstrated by the case-studies. Overall, the discussions revealed several forms of outside assistance:

- Catalyst of collective action (“chain champions”): as shown in the case-studies of different agrobiodiversity groups studied by Bioversity or the example of Farmer Field Schools in Kenya, the impetus for collective action may come from the “inside.” However, in the majority of the cases discussed, it was an outside organization, such as a research institution (CIP in the Andes, CIFOR in Indonesia), a governmental agency (Uda Walawe Irrigation scheme in Sri Lanka), or a local NGO (Mahagrapes in India), that serves as a catalyst for organizing farmers into organizations for more effective marketing activities.
- Training and technical assistance: even when the farmers organize into producer groups on their own, they often lack the technical skills and knowledge needed to access market information, meet quality requirements, obtain needed inputs, and implement necessary technical innovations. The information and communication technology (ICT) training and services made available to Ugandan farmers by outside agencies was crucial in correcting market information asymmetries. Access to in-kind credit (fertilizer and seeds) in addition to extension assistance, provided as part of a government-led irrigation scheme in Sri Lanka, helped a group of rice farmers to obtain higher prices for their crops.
- Organizational innovations: in addition to the technical training, institutional capacity development offered by outsiders has proven to be crucial to the success of producer organizations. In the case of the seedling producers in the Philippines, their association was strengthened by the organizational training and support provided by the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF); technical assistance alone would not have been enough to sustain the momentum of collective marketing without corresponding leadership development and group dynamics facilitation. In the case of the Ugandan potato farmers, without proper training in accounting, communications, and management, provided by CIAT and several NGOs, the group would not have been able to secure a steady buyer, a South African fast-food chain.
- Financial assistance: as demonstrated across multiple case-studies from Africa, financial assistance to groups of small farmers is often required for them to form and operate, and especially to scale up and access larger markets. Without some type of financial investment, be it public or private, these groups are not able to gain the necessary momentum to increase their operations and area of reach. Such forms of financial assistance may include loans provided by both private and public agents, as well as NGOs. In some cases, financial inputs may come in the form of government subsidies; however, the benefits of this type of assistance are not always clear.

While most participants agreed that some form of outside assistance is needed for organizations of smallholders to access markets, the timing and degree of outside involvement was debated. Many case-studies demonstrated the advantages that outside help brings into the marketing operations of producer organizations. However, in several instances it was noted that this assistance may create dependency and undermine sustainability of these groups. The facilitating agent, be it a government, a research institution, or an NGO, must carefully assess its role and level of participation and design an exit strategy.

Value chain analysis, which allows to identify bottlenecks to the smooth functioning of the chain, can help to determine what level of external intervention, when, and by whom (private or public sector) is needed to reduce the bottlenecks. The PCMA tool, an example of such analysis described earlier, was useful in identifying the type and timing of external assistance (by Papa Andina) necessary to form networks of potato producers and buyers in the Andes that would effectively deal with the constraints in the potato value chain. PCMA strategy implies that the

degree of a facilitator's involvement should change from high to low corresponding to the evolution of the organization.

In addition, it was brought up that the level and type of the outside assistance may limit the ability and diminish the incentives to scale up the marketing operations of the group. This potential pitfall of an outside agent as a facilitator of collective marketing reinforces the need to carry out a careful cost-benefit analysis to determine the need, extent, and type of assistance that would be most suitable and beneficial in each context.

f. Sustainability

Related to the role of outside assistance is the issue of sustainability. In fact, as mentioned above, sustainability often depends on the proper role of the outside facilitator and whether this assistance becomes a crutch or a necessity for the continued operations of producer organizations. Some case-studies, such as the example of the seedling association in the Philippines, stressed the need for the on-going facilitation and "repair and maintenance" support in order for the organization to succeed. In addition, in order to scale up or sustain a place in the market, constant quality and organizational improvement may be needed; those are often not possible without outside assistance as seen in the case of the potato farmers in Uganda.

However, in other examples, the discussions pointed out the potential danger of an outside agency creating dependency, which would undermine the sustainability of the collective effort. The case-studies from Africa highlighted that subsidies, even though they may provide the initial financial push to farmer organizations, may generate perverse incentives for collective action. In addition, while some groups are only meant as transitory, for the others that are meant to last, the appropriate role and exit strategy for the outside assistance should be analyzed. For example, in the case of the potato chains in the Andes, the facilitating agencies phased out their role once the networks were established.

In addition, many cases, including the ones mentioned in this section, emphasized the crucial importance of the use of local structures in the development of marketing schemes. These structures, based on the contextual factors such as existing local institutions and culture, create a foundation for sustainability by ensuring the ownership of the concept of collective marketing by the farmers themselves, which is an essential ingredient for the organizations to survive. The example of potato farmers in Uganda demonstrates that when organizations are formed on such principles, the producers will have a continual interest in the group's success and scaling up of operations by searching for new markets and opportunities.

Discussions also highlighted that sustained incentives are of vital importance for the long-term operations of a producer organization. Direct economic benefits that the groups receive as a result of collective marketing activities are, perhaps, the most critical factor for the continued operations of such groups. Most case studies showed that when the farmers see a direct increase in their profits as a result of cooperation around product commercialization, they will be more likely to continue working together in the future. Appropriate role of outsiders and enabling policy environment can contribute to the sustained interest of farmers in organizing around marketing.

g. Scale Issues

The topic of scaling up also arose during the discussions of the benefits and applicability of collective action for market access for smallholders. Examples of collective action in natural resource management show that even though pilot projects have been successful in their ability to scale, special conditions that surround such pilots may not be replicable on a larger scale. In marketing, there are additional problems with scale issues. While scaling up of the activities of the existing groups may lead to efficiency gains, there are possibilities that increased production and improved marketing might flood the market with a particular commodity, forcing its price to decrease.

In addition, several case-studies pointed to the question of whether the resources that are being put into a small number of producer groups could be better used in activities that would benefit a larger group of smallholders. Moreover, as demonstrated by the case of producer marketing groups in the semi-arid Eastern Kenya, the small scale of operations of many such groups has not yet generated high returns to investment. Whether scaling up is possible and actually profitable remains unseen.

4. DISCUSSION OF METHODS

The case-studies presented during the workshop used various methods of analysis ranging from participatory action research, as in the case of Indonesian NTFP producers, to econometric models, as in the example of the Colombian agro-enterprises. This variety of methods led to the discussions of the type methods that are more appropriate to the study of collective action in marketing. It was suggested that while quantitative methods can add a rigorous dimension to such research, qualitative data can provide much of the necessary information without the cost of collecting large amounts of data for empirical estimations.

However, it was pointed out that where rigor seems to be of importance is in the calculation of economic benefits of collective marketing such as returns, volumes, and costs. Many examples did not present evidence of such benefits, therefore casting a shadow of doubt on real profitability of acting collectively versus individually to access markets. Such important computations can be done using relatively straightforward accounting data and methods. In the end, it was agreed that both quantitative and qualitative approaches are necessary as each presents a different angle on the multi-faceted topic of collective marketing.

In regards to data issues, several case studies presented findings based on cross-sectional data (information technology for marketing in Uganda), while others relied on longitudinal data (seedling associations in the Philippines). Each approach pointed out hazards of drawing conclusions from snapshots of a few sites: cross-sectional studies show the variability of experiences across different conditions, while longitudinal studies demonstrate the fluctuation of group performance over time. It became evident that data from multiple sites is needed for comparing outcomes of collective action in marketing across various groups, while longitudinal data is necessary to draw conclusions about the results of collective marketing over time.

5. WORKING GROUPS

A. Towards a Conceptual Framework

The papers presented at the workshop highlighted multiple aspects that come into play when studying collective action and market access for smallholders. The discussions highlighted the need for a central framework that could provide guidelines for research in collective marketing. The central question dealt with the factors that affect the likelihood of collective action in improving market access for smallholders. The goal of the session was to brainstorm a “checklist” that could be used as a tool to analyze marketing structures and the role of collective action in supporting these structures. Two Working Groups were formed to work on drafting this framework. The key units of analysis (as envisioned by each group) are presented in the left column, while the right column lists factors that have an effect on collective action in marketing.

a. Working Group 1

Group 1 focused the discussions on the characteristics of actors and activities along the market chain in the drafting of their vision for the conceptual framework. The other categories of analysis included barriers to entry into collective marketing and the role of services available for marketing activities. It was agreed that there must be tangible benefits to collective action around marketing that would outweigh the costs of cooperation. The profitability aspect is related to both the chosen commodity and the surrounding context (political situation, services available, and characteristics of the farmers themselves).

Group 1: Summary of discussions

| Points of Analysis | Factors Affecting Collective Action in Marketing |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Market characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market structure • Location (spatial aspects) • Market infrastructure • Logistics • Type of markets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Traditional or new ○ Local-domestic regional-export ○ Fair trade, organic |
| Product characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelf life • Product value • Need for intermediate processing • Technology • Demand-driven production • Sufficient quantity of common products • Ability to produce quality products with reliable supplies • Transaction costs (can be further disaggregated by type) |
| Farmer characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-cultural factors that support CA (inclination to group work/cooperation) • Degree of previous positive involvement in collective action • Amount and quality of other collective action ongoing in a group • Asset holdings, especially key market assets • Differences between members and non-members |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heterogeneity among members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gender ○ Education ○ Risk aversion |
| Group governance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scalability • Farmers have ownership of group/member centrality • Shared understanding, expectations, and commitment of group members (bonding social capital) • Group formation and form of membership • Group size • Presence of a member with external linkages (bridging social capital) • Type of poverty of majority of members • Ability of group to maintain its objective in terms of market access • Transparency and accountability of group members and leaders • Penalties for defaulters • Equitable sharing of profits, loss, risk • Strong leadership • Ability to provide social and marketing support • Adaptability of group initiatives (e.g. to new market opportunities) • Ability to save • Ability to experiment and innovate • Effective market and management information systems |
| Barriers to entry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-cultural barriers: extent of social distance that must be traversed to reach a new market • High investment costs • Long time lag before first benefit accrual |
| Facilitation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market facilitation skills • Strong corporate links • Chain champion • Internal ability to “chain link” into higher value markets or assume higher levels on the chain • Coordination along the chain • Adaptive learning • Public and private sector buy-in, especially as initial catalyst |
| Access to services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive government policies • Provision of (is this available or must be provided by group): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Marketing ○ Transport ○ Storage ○ Inputs ○ Credit |

b. Working Group 2

Group 2 focused on the factors that influence the formation, effectiveness, and mode of operation of producer groups. Similar to Group 1, its framework included questions on group composition, but also highlighted the importance of group dynamics and links along the market chain. The discussions also touched upon the role and origin of catalysts and whether the external catalyst,

such as natural disasters or activities of a neighboring village, could trigger collective activities around marketing. It was generally agreed that one of the important pre-conditions for collective marketing is the inability of farmers to successfully sell their products individually, echoing the findings of Group 1.

Group 2: Summary of discussions

| Points of Analysis | Factors Affecting Collective Action in Marketing |
|--|--|
| Trigger | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catalyst (internal-external; public/private) • Constraints to individual action |
| Driver | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimation of the magnitude of benefits |
| Internal preconditions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Successful management of the group • Group cohesion through functioning activities • Core set of natural assets (water, land, soil fertility) • Trust • Adaptability/flexibility in group structure • Common interests of group members • Level of commitment of group members (different from cohesion) |
| External conditions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of alternative approaches (no automatic promotion of groups) • Existing markets, marketing channels, and market information |
| Group composition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group homogeneity in terms of shared attitudes, beliefs, and vision • Awareness of effects of heterogeneity within the group • Group heterogeneity in terms of wealth and gender • Distinctive characteristics of group – ethnic, origin, place • Group size |
| Modus operandi (External support) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of initial subsidies (who absorbs initial transaction costs) • Long-term commitment – exit strategy based on achievement of aims (requires donor commitment) • Bottom-up: ownership of problem and solution (participatory methods?) • Multiplicity of partners best avoided (need to share common aim) • Targeting of suitable markets for type of group, farmers, crops • Collective action integrated in local economic development policy or strategy |
| Group strengthening | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building of smallholders • Improved access to information of smallholders • Examples of successful experiences of others • Numeracy training |
| Value chain relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable partnerships • Scope of collective action broadened to other actors of the value chain • Trust and partnership with buyers |

B. Policy Recommendations

While two groups were discussing a conceptual framework to study collective action and marketing, the third group worked on drafting recommendations for programs seeking to increase market access for smallholders through collective action. The group came up with a set of suggestions ranging from ensuring the appropriate policy context to taking into consideration lessons from the past. A significant point that arose throughout the discussions was whether collective action for marketing was universally applicable. It was concluded that a careful examination of the market chain, pre-existing factors, and present motivations and incentives is a crucial step in designing programs that aim to increase market access for smallholders.

Group 3: Summary of findings

| Recommendations | Factors to consider in decision-making |
|--|---|
| Structure for the long term | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure endogenous buy-in at an early stage • Continuously aim for scaling up • Determine who the leaders are |
| Take context into account | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take into account that farmers may be the source of innovation • Seek to mitigate risk of elite capture |
| Acknowledge and avoid past mistakes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caution funding agencies about danger of repeating past mistakes • Strengthen in-country/regional coordination among funders/promoters • Make use of peer review and independent external reviews • Ensure that collective action is used to help farmers achieve their objectives (not to be equated with donor priorities) • Evaluate collective action relatively (in comparison with other cases) and comprehensively |
| Ensure appropriate policy environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handle the tricky issue of government support • Look at/revisit policies (for example, export) that would benefit smallholders • Provide clear legal incentives • Avoid perverse incentives |
| Take into consideration “success” factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine if there is a strong/growing demand for a commodity • Evaluate the prospect of efficiency gains through collective action • Initially focus on relatively simple activities: inputs, bulking, technical assistance, joint liability for credit • Determine comparative advantage at farmer level • Find appropriate group size • Examine any existing collective efforts • Ensure collective action in knowledge generation • Determine if there is motivation for collective action based on efficiencies • Strive towards group homogeneity • Foster linkage-dependent relationships |
| Set priority areas for action | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build capacity of smallholders to link to markets • Develop criteria for revolving fund recipients • Encourage loans for marketing groups of smallholders • Provide recognition to groups/organizations of farmers with legal arrangements • Improve access to market information and invest in market information networks |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote local organizations that provide additional services (for example, financial and market information services) • Ensure the access of smallholders to new/better technologies • Develop capacity of groups to have realistic/feasible goals • Provide training programs on business skills for marketing groups |
| Ensure appropriate targeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify target participants and acknowledge heterogeneity among them (wealth, gender) • Target programs to the poorest to enable them to participate in market exchanges • Take into consideration spillover effects (both positive and negative) |
| Engender public policy support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure property rights over smallholders' resources • Encourage linkages with public and private organizations • Promote grading and quality standards for commodities |
| Aim for synchronicity and sequencing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set realistic timeframe to go with goals/targets • Promote continuous investment in maintaining social capital • Evaluate rationale for collective action, but allow for gestation lags |

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A. Synthesis of findings

The discussions during the workshop touched upon many angles of collective action and market access for smallholders. Some case-studies dealt with the appropriate choice of markets and commodities for effective farmers groups, while others touched upon the “who” and “how” of such organizations. The common theme that emerged from the examples presented was that collective action brings certain advantages into commercialization activities. Since smallholders in developing countries still face multiple barriers to entry into markets, collective action may be useful in overcoming these constraints and ultimately contributing to poverty reduction.

First and foremost, acting collectively for market access can correct some of the market imperfections that are pervasive in the developing world. The presence of high transaction costs, information asymmetries, and technological gaps can be overcome by farmers organizing around these activities. Numerous case studies emphasized that one of the main strengths of collective action is in bridging the information divide and allowing producers to obtain better prices for their crops. Similarly, when farmers act jointly they can overcome the barriers to market entry, arrange for transport, and are less likely to be dependent on exploitative brokers. Moreover, farmer organizations are more apt to obtain the needed technology or reach quality standards than individual smallholders since they can pool financial and labor resources.

In addition, donors and other outside facilitators are more interested in maximizing their investment, which translates into a preference to assist groups rather than individuals. As a result, producer groups receive the much-needed “jump-start” investments in form of finances, technical assistance, information, and business development services, which allow them to access broader markets. While some assistance may jeopardize sustainability of the groups by creating perverse incentives and perpetuating dependency on funds and technology provisions, most case-studies demonstrated that such assistance is critical in order for producer organizations to succeed.

Even though collective marketing entails transaction costs of organizing groups and may have other problems, like dealing with free riders, it also offers some benefits that go beyond monetary gains. For example, organizing around marketing activities can increase the bargaining power of smallholders allowing them to negotiate better prices. The leverage that acting together gives smallholders may also serve a socio-cultural function, if the smallholders are an ethnic minority or the products chosen for commercialization are underutilized, but culturally important species. Moreover, it can promote linkages across the market chain and connect producers, processors, and buyers into networks that would be beneficial for all actors.

However, despite the advantages and benefits that collective action introduces into the marketing activities of the smallholders, several studies showed that it may not be a “silver bullet,” applicable and replicable in all situations. In addition, it became clear that collective action has its caveats that cast doubts on its desirability and effectiveness as a unique solution to make the markets work for the poor.

The issues of creating and sustaining incentives and determining the appropriate level of outside assistance may add to the high physical costs that are involved in organizing farmers around marketing. Several of the case-studies illustrated that large financial and non-monetary investments put into collective marketing often do not yield high returns. In addition, the distributional consequences of such activities on women and the very poor remain somewhat unclear. The possible negative effects of group marketing on the non-participants (such as higher prices for inputs, limited market access, lower prices for outputs) may present another piece of evidence that collective action may not be able to make all markets work for all poor.

B. Issues for further consideration and research

The workshop ended with a debate on whether collective action should be viewed as an end in itself or as a means to an end. On the one hand, in the strictly economic sense, smallholders acting individually face diseconomies of scale, which may be surmounted when they organize. On the other hand, collective action in marketing may not be greatly efficient in widening market access for small farmers since small agro-enterprises do not have the resources and capacity to make large and timely investments to maintain their place in the market. The solution to this dilemma, which was not fully resolved at the workshop, provides food for further thought and research.

Another issue that demands more examination is the question of benefits and costs of cooperation around marketing activities. The advantages of acting collectively have been pointed out by almost every case study; however, the subject of costs has not been widely discussed. Greater attention is needed to assessing the costs of organizing and operating collectively, and whether these costs are borne by the members or by external programs. Moreover, most of the case studies focused exclusively on the direct beneficiaries of collective marketing, i.e. members of the marketing groups. For the purpose of determining the economic and social returns of collective marketing, there is a great need to examine both positive and negative spillover effects—on other producers and on consumers--of such activities. Both costs and spillover effects also relate to the critical issue of whether (and how) collective marketing initiatives can be scaled up to benefit large numbers of smallholders, rather than being limited to pilot projects with intensive external assistance.

Related to the aforementioned issues and in a way summarizing them is the notion of the ultimate goal of development programs and research that work on organizing smallholders to jointly market their products. Is the main objective of these efforts to reduce poverty by making the markets work for the poor? In this case, collective action may be a phase in market development, an important means to an end of improving the welfare and broadening the scope of opportunities for millions of small farmers.

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APPENDIX 2

Papers Presented at the Workshop

All papers can be accessed at http://www.capri.cgiar.org/wks_marketrel.asp.

- 1. Collective Action for Marketing Agroforestry Tree Seeds: Dynamics, Issues, and Challenges -- The case of Agroforestry Tree Seeds Association of Lantapan (ATSAL) in the southern Philippines**
D.C Catacutan, M.G Bertomeu, L.J Arbes, N.D Butra
World Agroforestry Centre, Philippines
- 2. Farmer organization, collective action and market access in Meso-America**
Mark Lundy¹, Jon Hellin² and Madelon Meijer³
¹International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT)
²International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT)
³Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- 3. Role of Local Institutions in Linking Small Ruminant Producers to Market**
Malika Abdelali-Martini and Aden Aw-Hassan
International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA)
- 4. Improving the Marketing Performance of Producer Groups through Human Capital Building Measures**
James Barham
CIAT Visiting Researcher, Tanzania
- 5. Social Capital and Organizational Structure in Colombian Rural Agro-enterprises**
Carolina González, Nancy Johnson, and Mark Lundy
Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT)
- 6. The role of public-private partnerships and collective action in ensuring smallholder participation in high value fruit and vegetable supply chains**
Clare Narrod and Devesh Roy, International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington DC
Julius Okello, University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya
Belem Avendaño, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, Tijuana, Mexico
Subhasish Gangopadhyay, India Development Foundation, Gurgaon, India
Karl Rich, International Livestock Research Institute, Nairobi, Kenya
- 7. Collective action and marketing of underutilized plant species: the case of minor millets in Kolli Hills, Tamil Nadu, India.**
Guillaume Gruere and Latha Nagarajan
International Food Policy Research Institute
- 8. The Emergence of Farmer Field School Networks in Eastern Africa**
Arnoud R. Braun, Farmer Field School Foundation, Rietveldlaan 3, 6708 SN Wageningen, The Netherlands
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Godrick Khisa, Kakamega FFS Network, PO Box 1490, Kakamega, Kenya

Habakkuk Khaamala, FAO/IFAD FFS Project, PO Box 2, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and
Julianus Thomas, FAO/IFAD FFS Project, PO Box 917, Kakamega, Kenya.

9. A Farmers Company for better Price: Case of Chandrika Wewa Farmers' Company, Sri Lanka

Deeptha Wijerathna

International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Colombo, Sri Lanka

10. Rural Institutions and Producer Organizations in Imperfect Markets: Experiences from Producer Marketing Groups in Semi-Arid Eastern Kenya.

Bekele Shiferaw, Gideon Obare and Geoffrey Muricho

International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, Nairobi, Kenya

11. The role of ICT, market information and collective marketing in responding to market dynamics in Eastern Africa

Shaun Ferris, Patrick Engoru and Elly Kaganzi.

International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), Uganda

12. Using potato diversity as an opportunity for improving market access for Andean potato farmers

A. Devaux¹, K. Manrique², A. Guidi³, C. Velasco¹, G. Lopez¹, H. Pico⁴, G. Thiele¹ and D. Horton⁵

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³ PROINPA Foundation, Cochabamba, Bolivia

⁴ INIAP/FORTIPAPA, Ecuador

⁵ Adviser to Papa Andina program

13. The role of collection action in overcoming barriers to market access by smallholder producers: some empirical evidence from Northern Vietnam

Ma. Lucila A. Lapar, Nguyen Tuan Son, Marites Tiongco, Vu Trong Binh, Mohammad Jabbar and Steve Staal

Respectively, International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Hanoi Agricultural University, International Food Policy Research Institute, Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences, ILRI, and ILRI

14. Sustaining linkages to high value markets through collective action in Uganda: the Case of the Nyabyumba Potato Farmers

Elly Kaganzi, Annette Abenakyo, Pascal Sanginga, Patrick Engoru and Shaun Ferris

International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT)

15. Linking Collective Action into Non-Timber Forest Product Market for Improved Local Livelihoods: an Indonesian case

Heru Komarudin and Yuliana Siagian

Forests and Governance Programme, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)

16. Collective Action and Milk Market Access for Smallholders: A Case of Mobile Milk Trader groups in two milk producing zones in Kenya.

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17. Collective action and market institutions to foster equitable participation of small- scale producers of agricultural biodiversity products.

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¹ IPGRI, Rome, Italy.

² IPGRI Regional Office for Asia, the Pacific and Oceania, Malaysia

18. African Leafy Vegetables evolves from underutilized species to commercialized cash crops for poor urban and peri-urban women farmers in Nairobi¹

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19. Farmer Group Enterprises and the Marketing of Staple Food Commodities in Africa²

Jonathan Coulter, Uganda Commodity Exchange, GFA Consulting Group

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- CIFOR - Center for International Forestry Research
- CIMMYT - Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maiz y Trigo
- CIP - Centro Internacional de la Papa
- ICARDA - International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas
- ICRISAT - International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
- IFPRI - International Food Policy Research Institute
- ILRI - International Livestock Research Institute
- IPGRI - International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (now Bioversity International)
- IWMI - International Water Management Institute
- World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)

¹ Paper co-funded by IPGRI

² Keynote address