

Capacity Building Needs of Farmers' Local Organisations in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Farmers' Local Organisations (FLOs) are a myriad in Akwa Ibom State, but are faced with a lot of limitations and constraints. They can however, be made to perform facilitatory roles in agricultural and rural development. Against this background, this study was conducted, to identify capacity building needs required to enable FLOs perform their expected roles in the State. 15 FLOs and 225 FLO members were sampled for the study and results revealed FLOs capacity building needs to include: How to mobilise local funds, human and material resources to empower members for active inputs into FLO activities. Recommendations are also proffered for effectiveness.

Key words: Capacity building needs, farmers' local organizations, agricultural development, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

It has been asserted that about 70% of Africa's poor live in rural areas and are largely dependent on small-scale agricultural production (Panos Institute, 2001).

It has also been asserted that most of the poverty in Nigeria is related to agriculture (FOS, 1999). Against this background and based on renewed efforts to accelerate the level of food production, Sonaya (1993) advocated a focus on small scale farmers, on the premise that policies targeting them are likely to have a far reaching impact on poverty alleviation and augmentation of food production. It is only through collective effort and organisation however, that the poor can reduce dependence and initiate a course of participatory and self-reliant development. In relation to this Roling (1995) declared that the organisation of smallholder farmers is the key ingredient for small farmer development and is essential for the success of agricultural development projects.

A lot of positive impacts have been attributed to the functional role of Farmers' Local Organisations, (FLOs) in rural and agricultural development (Garforth, 1993; Heinrich, 1993). Specific benefits have been noted to include; higher adoption rates, wider farmer access to knowledge and researchers' becoming more aware of farmers' ideas and circumstances. It is however disheartening to note that these positive attributes are not being witnessed in Africa. The World Bank (1993) traces

agricultural development failures in SSA to the lack of effective beneficiary participation, occasioned by weak local institutional support. In a similar vein, Harrison (1987) asserted that West Africa is the weakest continent in terms of popular grassroots' organisations, as the farmers have generally failed at attempts to organise themselves (Gubbels, 1993). Similarly, Nigeria FLOs have been reported (Francis *et al.*, 1996) to face a lot of limitations and constraints. The poor impacts of these FLOs have also been attributed to poor organisational capacity (Arokoyo, 1998).

It has been revealed that for farmers' groups to be involved in agricultural and rural development, they must be well organised and empowered (GTZ, 1996) to pool available resources, to achieve strength and countervailing power. The ultimate aim being to inculcate manual and technical skills, planning and managerial competence and analytical and reflective abilities in the people, as to enable them fulfil their potentials and capabilities. Kaplan (1999) regards organisations (or groups) with a surfeit of aforementioned attributes as organisations with capacity. According to the Canadian International Development Agency (IDRC) an organization with capacity is one with the potential to perform-its ability to successfully apply its skills and resources to accomplish its goals and satisfy its shareholders' expectations. Against this background, the UNDP in Bector (2000) states that capacity development

is on-going process which aims to increase abilities of an individual or an organization to perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve its objectives. Literature is replete (IFAP, 1992; Gnon, 1995) with various capacities needed to be developed by FLOs to enhance competence and enable effective participation and inputs into agricultural and rural development oriented programmes and projects. A lot of FLOs exist in Akwa Ibom rural areas and their inputs are being fervently sought for enhanced sustenance and refocusing of various development projects that are either being proposed or are at various stages of implementation; by the various governments, NGOs and international bodies, like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It therefore becomes imperative to identify gaps to be filled in the structure and operations of these FLOs, as a first step towards seeking to capacitate them for effective inputs into rural development programmes. Boza in Rocheleau (2003) opines that capacity development is an emerging property and it comes from a process of interaction to decide what it means in our context. In deference to this the IDRC (2004) asserts that capacity development can take place at the micro level of individuals (capacity building) and project teams. It is against this background that this study was conceived, to ascertain the capacity building needs of FLOs operatives, in terms of constraining factors affecting the effective operations of these organizations. This is a first step towards seeking to capacitate FLOs for more effective inputs into the rural development process. The specific objectives of the study included: An identification of the socio-economic characteristics of FLOs operatives and a determination of constraints affecting FLOs in the study area. Against this background, this study was conducted to identify the capacity building needs of FLOs in Akwa Ibom State.

Definition of term: Farmers Local Organisations (FLOs) refer to groups of individuals mainly (but not solely) involved in farming and who come together on a community basis to find ways and means of improving their present circumstances (Akpabio, 2000). Chamala and Shingi (1996) categorised FLOs into:

- Community based and resource orientated organisations
- Community based and market orientated organisations. The former i.e., (i) are very many in Akwa Ibom State and are the focus of this study.

Study area: Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria's 21st state has a population figure of 2.4 million people and a high

population density of between 285-400 persons per square kilometre. The pervasive nature of poverty, unemployment and high cost of living inherent therein calls for the people to actively cooperate by forming sustainable local groups through which they can actualize their developmental potentials. A clarion call for cooperation is also predicated on the fact that farming is a way of life among the people and particularly because the very first socio-political organisation, in Nigeria (The Ibibio State Union) was founded in 1928 in present day Akwa Ibom State.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The universe for the study consisted of all members of FLOs affiliated with 3 apex development agencies in the State, viz; the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), the UNDP and the Akwa Ibom Women Cooperative Association (AKIWOC). A multi-stage sampling procedure was thereafter utilised to select a sample of 225 respondents from 15 FLOs; based on length of membership in viable FLOs. Primary data was generated through interviews and structured questionnaire. Instrument validation was through content validity, while a test-retest reliability yielded a coefficient of 0.80. Data was analysed with the aid of descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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

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

Table 1: Distribution on socio-economic characteristics of FLO members

Characteristics	Frequency	(%)
Status		
FLO executives	51	22.7
Ordinary members	174	77.3
Marital status		
Married	174	77.3
Single	51	22.7
Sex		
Female	180	80.0
Male	45	20.0
Age (Years)		
Less than 20	7	3.1
31-40	127	56.5
41-50	68	30.2
51-60	18	8.0
> 60	5	2.2
Educational level		
None	18	8.0
FSLC/Adult. Lit class	78	34.7
SSSC/GCE/WASC	113	50.2
Graduates	16	7.1
Leisure period observance		
Laborious	35	15.6
Recreational	93	41.3
Both modes	79	35.1
No response	18	8.0
Pry/Sec. Occupation		
Farming	124(46)*	55.1(20.4)
Civil servant	77(-)	34.2(-)
Private endeavour	24(161)	10.7(79.6)
Yearly farm income (₦)	< 10,000	137
60.9		
10-50,000	63	28.0
> 50,000	7	3.1
no Income	18	8.0
Proportion of income from farm		
Less than half yearly income	120	53.3
Half yearly income	58	25.8
More than half yearly Income	29	12.9
No Income	18	8.0
Farm size (ha)		
Less than 1	135	60.0
1-5	77	24.2
> 5	9	4.0
None	4	1.8

Note *Fig. In parentheses = Secondary occupation

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

Constraints affecting FLOs: To determine constraints affecting FLO operations a list of 16 constraints was

Table 2: Distribution on Constraints Affecting FLOs

S/No	Constraints	No	Yes	Remark
A.	Poor organisation	138(61.3)*	87(38.7)	
B.	High dues/levies	133(59.1)	92(40.9)	
C.	Quarrel among members	133(59.1)	92(40.9)	
D.	Unfulfilled expectations	92(40.9)	133(59.1)	Constraint
E.	Distance from state capital	111(49.3)	114(50.7)	Constraint
F.	Strict club rules	152(67.6)	73(32.4)	
G.	Poor attendance at FLO	103(45.8)	122(54.2)	Constraint
H.	meeting	133(59.1)	92(40.9)	
I.	Lawlessness	66(29.3)	159(70.7)	Constraint
J.	Inadequate finance	160(71.1)	65(27.6)	
K.	Only FLO executives benefit	124(55.1)	101(44.9)	
L.	Non-listening to advice	122(54.20)	103(45.8)	
M.	Corrupt leadership	98(43.6)	127(56.4)	Constraint
N.	Lack of govt. Assistance	137(60.9)	88(39.1)	
O.	Lack of registration	109(48.4)	116(51.6)	Constraint
P.	Refusal to repay loan	97(43.1)	128(56.7)	Constraint
	Refusal to perform FLO work			

drawn up through intensive literature review and interactions with FLO operatives and apex bodies officials. Respondents were thereafter requested to indicate their responses in the affirmative (Yes) or in the negative (No).

An Item was with more than 50% affirmative responses were regarded as a constraint.

Table 2 reveals that 7 major constraints were identified to include; inadequate finance (70.7%); inability of FLO to fulfil members' expectations (59.1%) members' refusal to perform their own share of club work (56.9%), lack of government assistance (56.4%); members' refusal to repay loans (51.6%) and long distance between FLO locations and the state capital where apex meetings are held and where financial assistance is available (50.7%).

Surprisingly, none of FLO leaders related factors (Table 2 F.J.K. and L) was regarded as a major constraint, a direct contrast to Akpabio and Okpongette's (2001) finding with regards to some farmers cooperatives in Akwa Ibom State. The contrary finding in the research work may however be attributed to members' general lack of interest in the activities of these associations; a situation traceable to the inability of FLOs to fulfil member's expectations. A consequence of this situation has been members' general apathy and lateness, or poor attendance at FLO meetings. It has also resulted in members' rushing in to grab what they can, from these organisations and after wards abandoning the association to its fate, by refusing to redeem loan facilities extended to them.

The aforementioned constraints are primarily attributed to the highly unorganised nature and very poor state of funds in these FLOs. FLOs cannot collate much fund from its members and government and NGO sources from which they had high expectations are not forthcoming. The picture is therefore that of frustration due to misplaced trust. The issue of finance acting as a

major impediment to group success has been well documented (Onibokun and Faniran, 1995). The World Bank (1996) is however, of the opinion that the most successful group are the ones in which a large portion of lending capital is raised from group members savings. Kaplan (1999) also faults the tendency of incapacitated organisation to attribute their predicament to lack of material resources. According to Kaplan organisations that attribute their failure to lack of material resources, simply lack the ability to counter these problems.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has revealed the very high level of financial constraints being experience by FLOs in Akwa Ibom State. This is as a consequence of their highly unorganised nature and the high level of apathy among its members. FLO members however possess some requisite social characteristics that may be harnessed to develop sustainable FLOs. In essence FLOs need to be capacitated to mobilise their own resources, as a prerequisite to enable them draw down external resources and services, to help solve their developmental problems.

In this regard and for enhanced success and eventual sustenance, the following capacities need to be developed by Akwa Ibom State FLOs, viz:

- Capacity to mobilise local resources (funds, human and material).
- Capacity to negotiate with external entities (research, extension, NGO, credit agencies, etc.) to pull down essential services, to supplement local resources for developmental purposes.
- Capacity to enlist and sustain interest and cooperation of members, for effective participation in FLO activities.
- Capacity to identify and utilise economic opportunities within and outside their environment.
- Capacity to obtain and utilise beneficial information, especially on assured markets, for members produce.
- It is expected that the following recommendation, would enable FLOs to actualise their potentialities.
- It is important to note that individual empowerment helps in the creation of self-reliant groups. Sustainable group development is also predicated on sustainable economic development. FLO executives must therefore take steps to empower FLO members through measures such as: Diversification of agricultural enterprises to combine crop farming with poultry or small ruminant (rabbit) production; emphasis on second season planting; cultivation of

intensive and lucrative short maturing crops (fluted pumpkin, other vegetables and cowpea) to overcome problem of small farm sizes and acquisition of communal land for the cultivation of crops like oil palm, ginger, cocoa, rice, etc.

- Governments and NGOs should avoid injecting large amounts of funds as gifts, to FLOs, to substitute for their internally generated funds. They should rather be proactive in supplementing funds that FLOs have been able to mobilise.
- Extension agencies, should train their officers to be proactive in helping farmers to develop skills in: Social organisation and club development; establishment of beneficial linkages and communication of needs and grievances to appropriate authorities.

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