



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



IN COLLABORATION WITH



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BOOSTING GOVERNANCE AND EQUITY IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCER ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH COOPEQUITY

MAKING SMALLHOLDERS' VOICE LOUDER AT THE GRASSROOTS AND POLICY LEVELS TO IMPROVE LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY

INTRODUCTION

Pursuing social and economic goals, producer organizations (POs) play a critical role in reducing poverty and improving food security of small producers, and are powerful vehicles for empowerment of men, women and young people. They facilitate access to agricultural services for their members and defend their interests in policy processes. When they are well-governed, equitable and economically viable, POs are more likely to offer services that respond to the needs of both rural men and women, thus improving their livelihoods, and strengthening their food security and resilience to shocks and crises.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Despite increased commitment by governments, many POs experience difficulties in offering adequate services to their members, defending their interests and influencing policy processes. Their capacity is often hindered by internal governance and management weaknesses, lack of communication, negotiation and leadership skills. Furthermore, women and young people often have difficulty accessing the services, opportunities and benefits provided by POs, and participating in decision-making processes. With the CoOPequity approach and through the EU-FAO Improved Global Governance for Hunger Reduction Programme,

FAO provides a framework for developing effective and equitable POs as a means for reducing poverty and achieving food security and nutrition. It is guided by the principles of participation, gender equality, sustainability and country ownership.

Adopting a peer to peer approach, some of the activities were undertaken in partnership with the private sector.

“There is a need to empower more small producers and farmers’ organizations in agri-food value chains and national strategies to achieve food and nutrition security in a sustainable manner”

Dacian Cioloș, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development

WHY DOES GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN POs MATTER?

In Africa, women’s participation in producer organizations is rising. However, their access to decision-making and leadership positions remains limited. This strongly affects the way the POs perform. This is because women farmers perform different activities and tasks than men, and have different competencies and needs. An active and equitable participation of women in POs is a decisive element for the improvement of their economic performance and the reinforcement of their capacity to influence policies.

By strengthening internal governance and gender equality within target POs, the EU-FAO Programme, through CoOPequity, works to ensure that both men and women can effectively benefit from services and opportunities offered by POs.

BY THE NUMBERS: PO GENDER MAKE-UP

- * In Niger, women constitute 60% of total PO membership but less than 20% of them participate in their organization’s decision-making and leadership positions.
- * In Ethiopia, women constitute only 18% of cooperative members (FCA data cited in Emana, 2010).
- * In Kenya, women constitute 30% of cooperative members.

www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/ent/coop/africa/download/woman_eastafrica.pdf

A CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH



INNOVATION AND RESULTS

As part of the Improved Global Governance for Hunger Reduction Programme, CoOPequity supports countries in developing strong and equitable producer organizations. In country-level activities, CoOPequity has been innovative in working at three levels:

* Facilitating dialogue between POs and governments

Through the programme, CoOPequity facilitates networking and collaboration among POs to improve their capacity to speak with one voice and represent small-scale producers' interests in policy negotiations. It also supports the strengthening of existing multi-stakeholder platforms of dialogue and consultation between POs and governments for inclusive and gender-sensitive policy-making and implementation processes.

* Supporting organizational change for improved governance and gender equality

CoOPequity supports POs in strengthening their internal governance and equity as critical conditions for enhancing their access to markets and their economic performance. This includes support to more equitable and transparent management, communication and information sharing, and reinforcing participation of women and youth in the organizational management.

PROMOTING INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

CoOPequity supports the implementation of innovative partnerships, such as the one between FAO and the organization "Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec – Développement International (UPA-DI)", based on the principle of solidarity between farmers from developed and developing countries.

CoOPequity also partners with the Swedish We Effect (formerly Swedish Cooperative Centre). We Effect emanates from national federations representing all major cooperatives in Sweden and the sectors in which cooperatives play a central role, such as agriculture. It provides support to self-help development initiatives in developing countries: cooperatives, farmer's associations and informal groups. UPA-DI and We Effect speak the same language as the POs CoOPequity works with, what contributes to build confidence and trust among partners.

* Promoting women and youth empowerment and leadership

CoOPequity promotes collective action of women and young producers, strengthens group dynamics and entrepreneurship, as well as their leadership skills through training and coaching. It builds on successful approaches such as the DIMITRA Community Listeners' Clubs and the Farmer Field Schools to enable the most disadvantaged groups to play an active role within POs, voice their needs, improve their agricultural capacities and take ownership of their development.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

CoOPequity responds to the EU's call for increased support to producer organizations and women's empowerment. The capacity development process, initiated thanks to the Improved Global Governance for Hunger Reduction Programme, resulted in strengthened capacities of rural men and women to understand and reshape their organizations, and their environment, and to strengthen collaboration and dialogue between POs and governments. In the long-term, it will contribute to the design and implementation of more sustainable and gender-equitable agricultural policies, laws and programmes, leading to better food security governance and positive changes in the livelihoods of thousands of small-scale producers and their organizations.

EXAMPLE OF COOPEQUITY WORK AT COUNTRY LEVEL

INCREASING CAPACITIES OF POs TO TAKE PART IN POLICY-MAKING IN NIGER



* In Niger, CoOPequity promotes a multi-stakeholder approach by partnering with key ministries and producer organizations. It works with Niger's Ministry of Agriculture to develop tools and methodologies for gender-sensitive organizational analysis and development, and builds a pool of national facilitators composed of government officers and PO members.

* At the policy level, CoOPequity operates within the framework of Niger's 3N (Nigeriens Nourish Nigeriens) Initiative - the national strategy for food security and sustainable agricultural development. It supports the national network for collaboration among POs (called CDD-G9) established by five main federations, their professional networks and the Chamber of Agriculture. After two years of CoOPequity support, the CDD-G9 has developed its rules of procedure, it is engaging regional level PO federations and counting more women in leadership positions. It is also formulating a joint PO position on the draft Law on Agricultural Policy that will influence the formulation and implementation of national policies affecting thousands of small producers and food security throughout the country.

Map accurate as of September 2014. © Wikipedia CC/ Commons

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