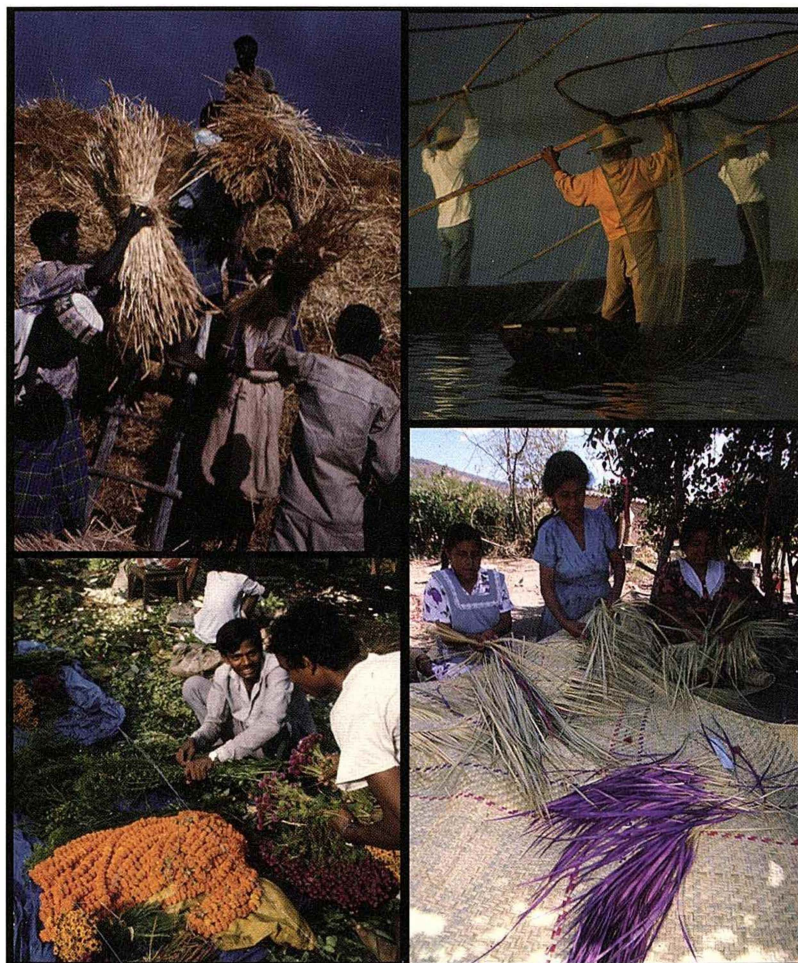


Agricultural Producer Organizations

Their Contribution to
Rural Capacity Building
and Poverty Reduction

Collaborating Institutions

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Partnerships between Producer Organizations and Research and Extension Institutions

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Since the 1980s, many countries have become aware that, since agricultural producers are the beneficiaries of technology, they must be more effectively involved in generating and disseminating it. Research and extension institutions have changed the way they approach and link up with producers, and the institutions themselves have changed under pressure from increasingly well-organized producers. In some instances, the producers have organized themselves to fill the void left by ineffectual research and extension institutions. Financing mechanisms have also changed as a result of steps taken by stakeholders, mainly donors, but also by governments and organized producers. The circumstances conducive to such change are discussed, as is the extent to which effective partnerships can survive in times of change.

Changes by Research and Extension Institutions

Many national research and extension systems have introduced institutional mechanisms and intervention techniques to encourage greater participation by producers. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, measures introduced to promote the

participation of the primary beneficiaries include:

- Changes in intervention techniques to encourage greater producer participation, particularly through: (1) programs focusing on research and development or on production systems research; and (2) the introduction of participatory diagnostic methods in extension work to identify producers' real needs in the area of advisory support;
- Measures that make it easier for beneficiaries to be consulted on a regular basis and to participate in the design of research and extension programs. Examples include: (1) efforts to decentralize research so that it more accurately reflects user needs; (2) ways to encourage periodic consultation between researchers, extension agents, and producers (for example, regional technical committees, regional steering committees, research and extension liaison committees, and user committees, depending on the country); and
- Incentives to encourage researchers to listen to producers and their organizations and respond promptly to their needs. These include introducing criteria for evaluating and promoting researchers that take into account the

fact that research must be in the service of development.

In Central and South America, the same concern has been evident for some 20 years, and similar methodologies have been tried—via the systems approach—to involve producers. In 1974, 80 percent of the researchers at Guatemala's Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology (Instituto de Ciencia y Tecnología Agrícola—ICTA), an institution specializing in rural research, were using the systems approach in their work with farmers. The Institute had become famous throughout the region for its expertise. ICTA established its own training school, CAPA, to teach its researchers the systems approach. Honduras followed suit for a number of years, as did Costa Rica. Costa Rica was able to sustain a measure of continuity in its efforts to improve links between its research and extension institutions. Many projects and programs applied the process to actual practice: PIPA (a project to increase agricultural productivity), the INVEX program (research and extension activities), the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG)-FAO program (on watersheds and extension efforts), and the MAG-PRIAG program (to improve agronomic research). The Tropical Agricultural Research and Training Center (Centro de agronomía tropical para la investigación y la enseñanza—CATIE) was a prominent advocate of the production systems approach. The International Center for Maize and Wheat Improvement (Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz y Trigo—CIMMYT) was a key promoter of the approach and trained many of the region's researchers, extension agents, economists, and trainers in the method. Several (though too few) universities included the approach in their curricula.

Restructuring of Institutions to Make Them Accountable

At the same time that research and extension institutions were shifting their approach, a new dynamic was emerging within producer organizations (POs), which are the new stakeholders. This dynamic reflected a new trend toward government disengagement and the assumption by POs of responsibility for certain functions. In many countries, this led to the establishment of POs of various sizes. Once organized, producers can become the spokespersons for research and extension services, in part because they represent an organized force and in part because of the financial and social impact they have on institutions.

Spurred on by organized producers at a time when government disengagement was the order of the day, institutions restructured themselves and new financing mechanisms were introduced. The objective was to involve producers in managing institutions and formulating research and extension agenda, and to hold research and extension institutions accountable to their beneficiaries for their results. Developments in this area included: (1) the status of institutions being changed from that of a public entity to a public/private entity; (2) research funds being established that separated research financing from its actual implementation; and (3) financing made available directly at the PO level.

Shift of Institutions Toward Public/Private Status

In sub-Saharan Africa, the status of some research and extension institutions evolved into companies wherein the state retained a majority or minority share of the equity, a step that enabled the institutions to include users on their executive boards. In extension,

one example of this is Senegal's National Agricultural and Rural Advisory Council (Agence nationale de conseil agricole et rural), 49 percent of which is owned by private entities (including POs) and the local community. Another example is Côte d'Ivoire's National Agency for Rural Development (Agence nationale de développement rural—ANADER), 65 percent of which is held by producers. In research, examples are Côte d'Ivoire's National Center for Agronomic Research (Centre national de la recherche agronomique—CNRA) in which producers hold 60 percent of the equity, and Togo's Institute of Agronomic Research (Institut togolais de recherche agronomique—ITRA) in which producers hold a 40 percent interest.

Latin American institutions have also evolved, the most striking example being the National Institute of Agronomic Research (INIA) in Uruguay. In 1990, that institute, which had until then been a public entity, became a semiprivate organization in which producers hold 50 percent of the institute's equity, and finance 50 percent of operating costs via taxes and other levies. The State pays the remaining costs.

It should be kept in mind that these changes are possible where taxes and other levies can be used to finance research, as in Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, or Uruguay. In Senegal, such mechanisms have yet to be introduced. Where such levies on agricultural production are not possible, these institutional changes are probably not feasible.

The fact that direct users of research findings are in the majority on executive boards enables them to ensure that research and extension work meet their needs through an adequate program budget, which is voted on by the executive board. Once these institutions are no longer public entities, personnel management arrangements that encourage a results-oriented and client-oriented culture that rewards top performance can be more easily introduced.

The shift in attitude on the part of INIA researchers in Uruguay provides a striking example in this regard. Until 1990, civil service management arrangements prevailed in INIA, and researchers were not accountable to producers. Since 1990, the researchers have become more attentive and responsive to producers' needs. Producers vote on a program budget covering specific activities, and the researchers report to them at the next session of the Executive Board.

Separating Research Financing from Implementation

Various types of research funds or foundations have been established in Latin America in particular, and to a lesser extent in Asia. They are now starting to develop in sub-Saharan Africa. The principle underlying their operations is that the financing of research should be separate from the actual performance of the research. The aims of these funds vary, with the primary goal being to target financing more precisely to meet specific objectives. This is not the case when funds are provided directly to research institutions. Another goal is to promote collaboration among all national entities involved in research, thereby making optimum use of the country's human and physical resources. Finally, the funds improve the quality of research by introducing more rigorous procedures for selecting research topics.

To achieve a better fit between supply and demand, these funds require researchers to satisfy demand. The process is as follows: bids are invited for a certain number of research topics. Research teams respond to the invitation by submitting research proposals selected by a committee on the basis of scientific merit. Final approval is then given by a management committee (whose membership includes users), which reviews proposals preselected by the scientific

committee. The funds bring users into the process at an early point when research topics are competing, or later, during final selection of the proposals to be funded.

There are many such research funds or foundations. In Latin America, for example, there are: the Foundation for Agricultural Research (FIA) in Chile; Brazil's PRODETAB (Project to Support the Development of Agricultural Technology); the Agricultural Technology Fund (FPTA) in Uruguay; and the Competitive Fund in Ecuador. In Africa, there is Kenya's Agricultural Research Fund, and in Asia, Indonesia's Competitive Fund.

Research and Extension Contracted Out by POs

There are two funding mechanisms for POs to contract out research and extension: activities are financed either by research or extension funds for users, or with the POs' own resources.

Research funds for users. Donors often set up these funds as a way to ensure that the research or extension carried out reflects actual demand. These funds allow producer organizations to pay to have research done on topics that they themselves have selected. They differ from the above-mentioned funds in that the users initiate the funding process. Mali's User Research Fund (Fonds de recherche des utilisateurs), managed by the National Agronomic Research Committee (Comité National de la recherche agronomique), is one example. Venezuela has a fund to which users can apply to recruit agricultural experts to assist with extension activities. The users are either officially recognized POs or interest groups whose members are producers or rural communities.

Colombia's National Agricultural Technology Transfer Program (PRONATTA) which focuses on research and development

and technology transfer is well positioned to meet user demand. Funding can be initiated either when researchers submit research proposals, or—more commonly—when users prepare technical and financial requests seeking support for services (such as training, extension activities, or research). They submit them to PRONATTA, which then invites bids. The users can be POs, rural communities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or private entities. In each region, teams of consultants hired by PRONATTA preselect a number of projects. The list of preselected projects is then submitted for final approval to a national selection committee. Regional dialogue forums (called “*nodos*”) provide a venue in which all the participants in development and stakeholders can be kept informed. The system makes it possible to separate project preparation (carried out by the user), project selection (the task of PRONATTA), and implementation (handled by a service supplier or under a tripartite contract.)

Financing operations managed directly by POs. In this type of operation, producers contract for research or extension services directly, using either their own funds or funds made available to them by donors. The first case involves POs with sufficient income to finance research activities themselves, such as the National Federation of Coffee Growers in Colombia, a similar organization for tea growers in Kenya, or Morocco's Citrus Growers Cooperative.

Increasingly, however, many donors provide funds directly to POs, enabling them to arrange for research in areas of interest to the producers. An example in Africa is the Fouta-Djalon Farmers' Federation (Fédération des Paysans du Fouta-Djalon) in Guinea, which receives funds from the Agence française de développement (AFD), and then uses them in part to conduct research. In Latin America, El Ceibo (a federation of cocoa-producing

cooperatives) has received substantial funding from donors, and particularly from the Swiss Development Agency (Coopération Suisse pour le développement) for technological development. The federation has even established its own research and advisory support unit (Coopeagro).

This mechanism resembles the first one, except that in this case the PO handles the financing arrangements, whereas in the first case the fund is managed by an independent agency (as in Mali, where the National Agronomic Research Committee manages the fund).

Under another scenario, collaboration between a PO and a research organization may be financed not by providing funds directly to the PO, but instead by an NGO or under a project already providing assistance to the PO. Examples include cooperation between the Institute of Agronomic Research in Guinea (Institut de recherche agronomique de guinée) and the Coffee Growers' Federation of Guinea (Fédération des planteurs de café), which is financed by AFD; cooperation between the Federation of Unions of NAAM Groups (Fédération des unions des groupements NAAM) in Burkina Faso, and the Institute for the Environment and Agricultural Research (Institut de l'environnement et de recherches agricoles), which is financed by NGOs and by the federation itself.

Initiatives Undertaken by POs

In some situations, and particularly in Central America, research and extension institutions can no longer meet the needs of producers. Small farmers—who are concerned with their local environment and often face crises—prefer to maximize their own resources within a technology-intensive structure requiring few external inputs. They do not get much recognition from the research

establishment, for several reasons. First, the accumulated experience of these institutions is based largely on systems requiring heavy inputs. Furthermore, the structure of research institutions, their organizational setup, and the fact that their researchers have little training in the complexities of relationships with users, pose serious obstacles to the establishment of a genuine partnership. Finally, the current shortage of available financing and the resulting exodus of researchers have left institutions with insufficient resources to redirect their research efforts to meet producers' needs. This applies to most technical areas (for example, integrated pest and disease control, soil conservation, soil fertility, and diversification).

Faced with unresponsive research institutions, some groups of farmers have begun to experiment. They have demonstrated that even under difficult conditions (such as mountainous or marginal areas), they can begin to work out solutions adapted to their circumstances, crops, and management techniques. These farmers are engaged in a wide variety of experiments, and have come up with results directly applicable to their lands. Many of these experiments have to do with natural resource management, as well as with soil fertility management, the introduction of new varieties, diversification, or integrated pest and disease control. The diversity of their results, which are finely tuned to their situations, stands in contrast to the routine responses that researchers tend to offer. Farmers are gaining experience and are becoming more professional.

In addition to having generated a new dynamic and, indeed, a new movement, these farmers are proving that research can be conducted in different ways and that, far from being merely users of information, farmers can also generate information and disseminate it effectively. Structured exchanges between these farmer-

experimenters from different countries, or different regions within the same country, are becoming increasingly important in Central America. Such exchanges, which reflect clearly defined strategies, are being included in action plans, and focus on specific objectives, are proving their worth. In some situations, these groups of farmer-experimenters can serve as the privileged partners of farmers' organizations in their dealings with research institutions.

Lessons Learned

- *What sorts of environments are conducive to these changes?*
- *To what extent will these changes enable effective partnerships to be established among POs, research institutions, and extension agencies?*

Institutional Environment

A prerequisite for institutional reorganization is the withdrawal of the State from such activities, as is the involvement of the private sector and civil society in the formulation of agricultural policy. Another essential factor is the willingness of governments to create a legislative framework favorable to the emergence and development of POs. In some countries, where the state has played an active role in creating a legislative and legal framework conducive to strong POs, it has also helped create POs that lack credibility or legitimacy because they have been imposed from above. In other instances, the state has sought—for purely political reasons—to stifle any move toward creating POs. The state on occasion has co-opted those that do exist, while in still other cases—and consistent with its policy of withdrawing from this area—it has failed to empower these new groups, indulging in what some POs call “abdication” of responsibility. Although such situations by

no means provide a sound foundation for establishing partnerships between POs and other groups (particularly the research and extension institutions), this is the reality that has to be faced in many countries.

At the institutional level, agencies must show a real commitment to decentralization if they are to establish close links with users. Similarly, research policy must be directed toward support for development, as demonstrated in the use of incentives in the evaluation and promotion of researchers, the use of consultation mechanisms for furthering the dialogue with POs, and the adoption of participatory ways of developing technology.

As long as the institutions responsible for research and extension continue to be government controlled, it will be difficult to find ways to make research organizations accountable to users for the results they produce. In the civil service, for example, it is difficult to introduce personnel management procedures that take proper account of results achieved, and the quality of service provided to clients. Finally, the chronic financial instability of research institutions hinders the establishment of links with POs, as experience in Central America shows.

Producer Organizations

The key factor that enables institutional change to lead to effective partnerships is the existence of farmers' organizations that are well structured and empowered, that offer real prospects to their members, and are capable of negotiating with other partners. In many cases, top organizations lack legitimacy and are not always representative of grassroots POs, and therefore may not have any credibility among the research and extension institutions. These organizations must also be capable of diagnosing the constraints affecting them, and be able to define their objectives and priorities and *negotiate* with the research and extension

institutions for the services they need. It is essential for POs to develop this organizational and technical capacity if they are to establish partnerships, act as effective members of executive boards, if financing mechanisms (for example, Mali's "user funds" or the Colombian PRONATTA) are to come into operation, or if donors are to be able to offer financing directly to the POs. In fact, such financing will never materialize unless the POs are capable of articulating their needs.

There is a definite relationship between the strength of POs and the presence of farmer representatives who possess leadership qualities and who have a vision for the members of their organization. Strong POs also depend on the creation of an enabling environment by the state which, even as it withdraws from this arena, must provide specific support measures to help operators from civil society play their new role. Finally, the other participants (NGOs and projects) must play their part by facilitating these developments and providing support.

Strong POs are the result of effective training in all its guises. Training is therefore an essential ingredient in successful partnerships with research and extension institutions.

Funds as Mechanisms for Promoting Services On Demand

The degree to which providing research financing by way of funds encourages researchers to be more responsive to producers depends on: (1) the way in which the research topics that are to be subject to bidding processes are selected; (2) the degree of autonomy existing between the governing bodies and the research institutions; (3) the effective participation by users in the governing bodies and the independence of those bodies compared with the research institutions. This is an essential factor in

ensuring that the wishes of users prevail. Some of these funds (such as the Indonesian Research Fund) present their countries' strategic agricultural research plans as research topics for bid, whereas others are controlled by research specialists and still managed by the research institutions themselves. Kenya Research Fund, for example, is managed by KARI (the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute), and PRODETAB is managed by EMBRAPA (Brazil).

Membership of a fund's governing body is also a key factor. If it is simply a scientific commission that makes decisions on the basis of scientific criteria, in the absence of a management committee that might include user representatives, the proposals that receive financing may be far from satisfying the wishes of users. In other cases, users may be underrepresented—or inadequately represented—on management committees. The membership of governing bodies, the way they operate, and their procedures for identifying topics for bidding will largely determine whether a fund will be an instrument that enables users to direct resources toward their own priorities. Colombia's PRONATTA is one of the best examples of a fund that involves users in the identification of research topics and the selection of proposals.

Areas for Further Study

The following issues require further study:

- *POs possessing a real capacity to establish partnerships with research and extension institutions.* Real partnerships can exist only when they involve POs that are fully capable of maintaining a dialogue with other partners. The POs' ability to articulate their wishes, conduct negotiations, and mobilize the resources necessary to establish partnerships depends directly on the strengthening of their skills. The role

of training needs to be clarified, and the responsibilities of state and other partners need to be articulated.

- *Forms of institutional reorganization to incorporate the wishes of POs into research and extension.* What can be done to ensure that researchers and extension agents are accountable to producers for the results they produce? Should institutions be steered toward establishing joint public- and private-sector organizations, as in Côte d'Ivoire and Uruguay? What can be done in those situations where it is not possible to call upon producers to finance research through taxes or parafiscal levies, or in which those taxes and levies cover only some crops?
 - *Can the use of research funds similar to PRONATTA (Colombia) or the Users' Research Fund (Mali) provide an alternative to the appropriation of research institutions by POs?* This arrangement would enable the organizations to contract for research and extension services that meet their own specific needs. If the answer is yes, what recommendations at the institutional level can be made regarding the establishment of such funds, the membership of the governing bodies, the selection criteria and procedures applicable to projects, and training for the POs?
 - *If the research establishment is unresponsive to the wishes of POs, and the emergence of experimenters among the farmers, should we help POs to strengthen their own research capacity and disseminate their findings?* How reliable and replicable are findings obtained in this way, and how efficient is such research?
- When producers have gone as far as they can in this area, how can they be helped—in their particular locations—to contact the most effective research service? Would they be able to use the “globalization” of research to their best advantage, establishing partnerships that transcend strictly national boundaries?
- The *first study* concerns the partnership between the Fouta-Djalon Farmers' Federation (*Fédération des Paysans du Fouta-Djalon: FPF*) and the Institute of Agronomic Research of Guinea (*Institut de Recherche Agronomique de Guinée: IRAG*). It provides an example of changes made by research and extension services in response to specific requests from a PO that possesses a genuine capacity for analyzing constraints and identifying solutions, is capable of mobilizing its members to produce profitable crops, and is in full control of conditions throughout the entire production process.
 - The *second study*, at the local level, is based on experiences of a recently formed producer association in southern Costa Rica. It shows the interaction between researchers and producers, which leads the PO to develop its own capacity to conduct research and negotiate with the various services in its locality. It therefore illustrates one of the possible ways in which a PO can cooperate with research specialists.
 - The *third study*, at the national level, concerns farmer-to-farmer relations in Nicaragua. It presents a very different situation, one in which there is a dearth of research support, so that the farmers are obliged to devise their own solutions.