

## THE EXPERIENCE OF SMALL FARMER GROUP (SFG) ORGANISATIONS IN PROMOTING AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN TANZANIA<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper is based on experience of a study that was undertaken to strengthen farmers' access to information, inputs and markets in Tanzania through small farmer group (SFG) organisations. The population of this study consisted of all forms of SFG organisations in Morogoro region of Tanzania. Data were collected through participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools, focus group discussions (FGDs), structured interviews, informal discussions, and observations; and were analysed using "content analysis" technique and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Computer Programme. Poor leadership and lack of constitution were found to be some of the key factors that contributed to the problems of corruption, mismanagement, conflict and lack of clear goals in small farmer groups (SFGs). The study recommended modification of group leadership; development of location specific constitution; planning and implementation of SFG micro-projects and formation of self-managed SFGs and small farmer group associations (SFGAs) as new forms of organisations. Based on action research, implications on how to promote agricultural extension, and thus reduce rural poverty, through SFG organisations are provided.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The organisation of rural population in local development efforts is not a new phenomenon in rural development. Indeed formal organisational structures, such as co-operatives and unions were among the first structural imports into rural areas of the Third World countries in order to provide various inputs, marketing and education services to the farmers (Chamala and Shingi, 1997: 193-201). Such formal organisations have been inadequate in facilitating the participation of the rural poor (Levi and Litwin, 1986: 261). Pertev and King (1998:28-30) note that many farmers' organisations (FOs) remained active during the period that government subsidies were distributed, but did not actively create co-operatives or partnerships and mobilise local resources to help achieve agricultural development. Mostly, the elite members of rural communities captured all the services and resources, while the poor and women were left out or achieved negligible benefits.

According to Chambo and Cooksey (2000:15), the co-operative movement in Tanzania started way back in 1925. The co-operatives formed were economically and financially strong. After independence in 1961 the success of the co-operative movement that surfaced in some parts of the country made the government take the lead in co-operative development. The state actively promoted the establishment of co-operatives. In the process, the co-operatives became increasingly integrated with national objectives rather than members' aspirations and interests. This caused capital formation within co-operative movement to drop drastically. Ultimately, co-operatives became completely dependent on the state through loans. Even the human resource development undertaken by co-operatives collapsed and became the responsibility of the state. Chambo and Cooksey further observe that, in general, the co-operative movement has been weak in Tanzania because of corruption, mismanagement, conflict and lack of clear goals. It has been noted (Larsen *et al.*, 2003:67) that, in due course, the government recognised this mistake and started to revive co-operative principles through the establishment of the Co-operative Societies Act of 1991 which required: voluntary open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; education, training and information; and concern for community. Larsen *et al.*, 2003 further note that the Co-operative Societies Act of 2003 is the new legal instrument that operationalises intentions and

substances laid down in the new Co-operative Policy of 2002, which spells out the new direction of the co-operative movement in Tanzania on the Government's recognition and adoption of co-operative values, which are based on self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equity, and solidarity and which will be pursued and maintained in all co-operative development efforts within Tanzanian socio-economic environment.

Arnesen *et al.* (2002:48) note that rural people in Tanzania, for centuries, have lived and worked with strong communal groups such as farmers self-help associations and farmers co-operatives. Many of the more successful extension interventions involving group formation have been drawn on traditional farmer groups, which have too often been ignored in donor funded development programmes. Extension personnel have always known that they will not succeed without co-operation of local or community leaders. What they have not done is to strengthen such critical institutions without exploiting them for their own purposes. The widely accepted approach of agencies promoting farmers' organisations is increasingly to build on and strengthen indigenous institutions. It has been observed (Wambura *et al.*, 2003:289-295) that farmers' organisations in form of co-operatives have emerged as critical rural development institutions in Tanzania. Promotion of genuine member participation and member control in co-operatives is, therefore, the major means that will resurrect the co-operative capacity to contribute to poverty reduction in Tanzania.

It has been noted (Banturaki, 2000:158) that Tanzania has taken important steps to promote the agriculture sector as the backbone for economic and social development. The Government's strategy is to empower people at the grassroots level, and encourage the formation of farmers' organisations as instruments for the realisation of poverty reduction. The primary co-operative societies, but also the more informal farmers' groups, consisting of both women and men and emerging in many regions of Tanzania, bear the signs of a movement that is farmer driven. These groups constitute the basis for active and demanding memberships in a new and revitalised movement. However, despite the crucial roles women play in agriculture, experiences have shown how easily women can be "sidelined" in primary societies. A main reason for the formation of the many informal groups and networks of women all over Tanzania is to avoid

being dominated by men. Membership in cash crop co-operatives, for example, requires access to land and farm production units. And because men traditionally lead households, it is also they who represent membership in the primary societies, except when the man dies and the widow takes over the leadership in the family. Hence, it is men who receive the cash crop revenues (Larsen *et al.*, 2003:67).

Oakley (1991:284) notes that, given the need to develop sustainable livelihoods and peasant farming systems, the attention is being paid to strategies to re-orient research and extension policies to better address the needs of the rural poor, especially women, who are living in relatively complex, diverse and risk prone environment which include weak infrastructure, low prices and lack of inputs and credit in developing countries. This paper, therefore, presents the experience of SFG organisations in promoting agricultural extension in Tanzania, in order to provide an understanding of the forces that influence the functioning of SFG organisations which must emerge as a result of people's own deliberations.

## **2. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES**

In Tanzania, the political power that determines the economy of viable farming is at the national level, and this can only be influenced when smallholder farmers, especially women, take part in relevant decision-making processes. Building on existing knowledge, and given the situation specificity of poverty, the main purpose of this study was strengthening SFG members' access to information, inputs and markets through existing and new forms of farmers' organisations for promoting agricultural extension and therefore alleviation of poverty. The specific objectives were to: (1) identify and describe existing and emerging forms of SFG organisations; (2) based on the results of (1), to provide strategies for strengthening existing SFG organisations and establishing new forms of organisations; and (3) carry out SFG organisations micro-projects.

## **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study which started in 2001 and ended in 2004, adopted a case study design. The geographical unit under the study was Morogoro region, Tanzania. Two districts, namely Morogoro rural and

Kilombero districts from the region were purposively selected, based on the presence of existing and emerging forms of farmers' organisations (FOs) in rural communities. The study focused in the two districts since they are areas where crop production and other related FOs had either failed to take off or were at the brink of collapse; and farmers, through their own initiatives, organised and worked in participatory SFGs. Based on the secondary data obtained from each district on existing/emerging SFG organisations (under primary co-operative societies, community development, and agricultural extension services), diagnostic surveys were carried out in four purposively selected villages from each of the study districts. These are Mkindo and Lusanga villages (from Morogoro rural district) and Sonjo and Mbasa villages (from Kilombero district). The purposive sampling technique was also used to obtain units of analysis for this study, which involved: village leaders; local leaders, community members of FOs and extension agents.

Data were collected through review of FOs records and other relevant information from files of the Ministry of Co-operatives and Marketing, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Morogoro region, Morogoro rural and Kilombero districts, and the study villages. The officials at regional and district levels responsible for promoting and/or managing FOs provided insights on types of FOs that existed or still existed or were in a process of emerging in the study area. The types of data collected from the study districts included: socio-economic data; list of existing FOs; list of emerging FOs; current sources of information on FOs; current situation of availability of inputs and markets; current FOs strategies used; identification of factors influencing participation in FOs; list of current constraints of FOs; and current FOs relationship with other institutions. Qualitative and quantitative primary data were collected after consultations with officials, through participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and focus group discussions (FGDs), structured interviews with randomly selected smallholder farmers, informal discussions with key informants and observations of farmers' activities and interactions. Qualitative data were processed and analysed using "content analysis" technique, while the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Computer Programme was used for quantitative data analysis.

Through action research, the researchers and extension agents followed

several steps in strengthening existing SFGs and establishing new SFGs and small farmer group associations (AFGAs), including encouragement of the groups to start up group enterprises which would earn a profit for re-investment in future activities. These undertakings were based on local experience and low-cost technology. They were not meant to replace but to supplement members' normal production. Farmer Field School (FFS) Extension Approach, which is described as a platform and "school without walls" for improving decision making process for farming communities and stimulating local innovation for sustainable agriculture, was one of the agricultural extension approaches used in the selected study villages. The extension agents had a crucial role in helping the groups to develop a successful enterprise which would generate income through planning and implementation of SFG micro-projects. Income generation was treated as a process with a number of steps and the members were guided through the process. Most of the micro-projects were agricultural in nature, since agriculture is a major activity of the farmers in the study area. In the beginning the project team spent a lot of time with the groups for facilitation of effective planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of their micro-projects, but after one year, the assistance had been reduced to irregular visits to monitor progress and to discuss new problems and issues. A SFG organisation was seen as a means of bringing about empowerment and change towards a better standard of life rather than an end in itself. It is on the basis of this methodology that we present results on the experience of farmers' organisations in promoting agricultural extension in selected villages of Morogoro region, Tanzania.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1 Formation of Small Farmer Groups (SFGs)**

The study identified 13 existing SFGs in the 4 study villages (Mkindo, Lusanga, Sonjo and Mbasia) in Morogoro region in February 2001 which were formed under primary co-operative societies, community development and agricultural extension services. In addition, general characteristics and features related to the study villages' activities were examined in order to ascertain their development potential. It was found that the percentage of adult workers ranged from 14 percent (Mkindo village) to 36 percent in Lusanga village, with Sonjo and

Mbasa having 21 and 32 respectively. All the villages had most of the community services needed, which included services like dispensary, primary school, water, access to transport and extension services. FFS extension approach was used for agricultural field related activities in all the study villages. The status of SFGs in the study villages from February 2001 to June 2004 is indicated in Table 1. Table 1 shows that existing SFGs had a total number of 256 members (84 males and 172 females), when the strengthening of farmers' organisations (FOs) project, under Tanzania Agricultural Research Project Phase II – Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) (TARP II-SUA Project), started.

**Table 1: Status of SFGs in the study villages from February, 2001 to June, 2004**

Village	Existing SFGs: February 2001			Self-managed SFGs: June 2004			Total Number of SFGs	
	N	Members		N	Members		M	F
		M	F		M	F		
Mkindo	2	24	27	9	42	45	66	72
Lusanga	3	21	28	2	11	14	32	42
Sonjo	4	15	78	4	11	52	26	130
Mbasa	4	24	38	5	5	54	29	92
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>336</b>

*N= Number of SFGs; M=Male; and F= Female*

*Source: FOs Project, 2001-2004*

By June 2004, through action research, the number of SFGs had increased from 13 to 33 through formation of 20 community initiated self-managed SFGs, with a total number of 223 members (69 males and 154 females) in the study villages. Unlike existing SFGs, the self-managed SFGs were not formed under any organisation, they were initiated by community members themselves by joining and working together to improve their income and living conditions. It was noted that the act of joining indigenous group activity was found to consist of the following elements: (i) individuals coming together in pursuit of common interest; (ii) pooling own resources for common use and mutual benefit; (iii) joint sharing of risks and responsibilities; and (iv) controlling and managing the affairs of the economic enterprise through the process of joint decision based on democratic procedure. Men were able to accept and support the formation of women groups which were dealing with development activities based on women's

socially ascribed roles. Also, women expressed interest in forming groups of their own in all the study villages, after realising that working together in income generation was a good way for members to learn to co-operate and achieve other women goals.

The increase in size and number of SFGs (Table 1) recorded through formation of self-managed SFGs was due to training (which aimed at enlightenment as well as empowerment) of existing and potential SFG members in the study villages on pertinent issues revolving around SFG formation and management so that members could reflect on constraints currently facing their groups and try to overcome them. As such, training was provided in two phases. While the first phase started with all members, including group leaders in all the study villages, the second phase of training focused on group leaders alone. By the end of June, 2004 the following had been achieved: (i) trained 489 SFG members (153 males and 336 females) on how to form and register SFGs, how to develop a location specific constitution; and (ii) trained 99 SFG leaders (3 from each group: Chairperson, Secretary; and Treasurer) from all the 33 SFGs (13 existing and 20 self-managed community initiated SFGs) on group leadership, savings and credit, record keeping, financial management, project planning and implementation. As a result of training, it was noted that the SFG members in the study villages were able to put in practice the knowledge and skills obtained by encouraging other villagers from within and outside their villages to initiate and work together in SFGs in order to improve their income and living conditions.

#### **4.2 Formation of Small Farmer Group Associations (SFGAs)**

At the beginning of this study in February 2001, the SFGs in the study area usually operated in isolation of one another and had little idea of what other groups were doing. Co-operation was formalised through formation and registration of SFGAs in 2 out of the 4 project villages (Mkindo and Lusanga) by December 2003, known as Savings and Credit Association (SACA) in each village, as shown in Table 2. This happened after several SFGs had started to see distinct benefits to be gained from inter-group co-operation, and had clearly defined common objectives. The process which was used in facilitating the formation SFGs by extension agents was utilised in the formation of SFGAs in the study villages. In this study, a SFGA refers to a local

level informal, voluntary and self-governing association of SFGs. It is created and financed by the individual members of its affiliated groups to provide them with services and benefits that help them improve their economic and social conditions. In addition, a SFGA represents two distinct levels of membership: (i) its group membership (the groups affiliated to the SFGA); and (ii) its base membership (individual members of all the groups affiliated to the SFGA).

**Table 2: SFGAs formed from SFGs in the project villages**

Project Village	Name of SFGA (SACA)	No. of SFGs	Group Members		Date and No. of Registration
			Male	Female	
Lusanga	LUJIMAMO	5	32	42	19.9.2003 (SO.NO.12116)
Mkindo	UVIMO	11	66	72	15.12.2003 (SO.NO.12130)

*Source: FOs Project, 2001-2004*

The differences between SFGs and SFGAs in the study villages conform with what has been observed by the FAO (1995:122). First, a SFGA serves a much larger membership than a single SFG (usually 8 to 15 individual members). A typical SFGA is made up from 5 to 10 SFGs. Total membership ranges from 25-150 individuals, normally located in a single village. Second, the main decision makers in SFGs are individual members. In a SFGA, each of the affiliated groups elect a representative to act on behalf of its members. These representatives make most of the SFGA's decisions. Since the role is to represent the SFGA's broader interests in discussions with local authorities, their members became increasingly self-confident, earned greater recognition from the wider community, and were able to make a greater contribution to group development within their groups and beyond.

### **4.3 Characterisation of SFG Members Behavioural Changes**

At the beginning of this study in February 2001, it was found that poor leadership and lack of a constitution were some of the key factors that contribute to the problems of corruption, mismanagement, conflict and lack of clear goals in SFGs. The SFG members' behavioural changes

that took place as characterised in year 2001 and 2004 before and after the project intervention, respectively, are given in Table 3. The behavioural characteristic features given in Table 3 were captured and analysed in SFG members participatory rural appraisal workshops (PRAs) in the beginning and end of the FOs project under TARPII-SUA Project in February 2001 and June 2004, respectively. In February 2001 the workshop participants came from 13 existing SFG members while in June 2004 the participants came from all the SFGs in the 4 project villages which had by then increased to 33, as shown in Table 1. However, during June 2004 PRA workshop, no significant difference in qualitative aspects was recorded between existing and self-managed SFGs (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Characterization of SFG members’ behavioural changes in year 2001 and 2004 in the project villages**

<b>SFG members behaviour in 2001</b>	<b>SFG members behaviour in 2004</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No motivation</li> <li>• Accept paternalistic approach</li> <li>• Passive</li> <li>• Suspicious</li> <li>• Exploited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling of solidarity</li> <li>• Willingness to make an effort</li> <li>• Thinking outside immediate context</li> <li>• Better organised</li> </ul>

*Source: FOs Project, 2001-2004*

As a result of the qualitative behavioural changes shown in Table 3, the SFG members grew in strength and began to take steps to seek solutions to their problems (as described under part 4.4 below). In purely numerical terms the work of FOs project under TARPII-SUA Project facilitators had resulted in increasing size and numbers of SFGs in the study villages as given in Table 1, which shows that the FOs project started with 13 SFGs in February 2001 having 256 SFG members and by June 2004 had increased to 33 groups with 489 SFG members involved in SFG micro-project activities. In addition, each of the 5 SFGs and 11 SFGs from Lusanga and Mkindo villages, respectively, formalised their co-operation through formation and registration of a small SFGA known as SACA, as given in Table 2. This implies that the work of the FOs project under TARPII-SUA Project external facilitators had increased people’s interest of joining and working together in groups to improve their income and living conditions in the study area.

#### 4.4 Increased income

After the SFG members had developed and refined their record keeping system, and their group constitution and objectives, they were guided by the extension agents towards self-reliance and sustainability through identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their micro-project activities. As a result, each of the SFGs identified, planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated at least one micro-project each year (2001/2002, 2002/2003 and 2003/2004) as shown in Table 4. Table 4 presents information related to change in SFG members' income accrued from existing SFGs micro-projects in each project village during 2001/2002 to 2003/2004 implementation period as a result of participation in FOs project. The increase in income ranged from a minimum of 2,320,000 TShs in Mbasas village to a maximum of 4,581,150 TShs in Mkindo village. The increase in income differed from village to village but increased from year to year due to increase in size and number of group members. As a result, the SFG members were able to get loans from their groups which enabled them to invest in housing, education, increasing acreage, farm inputs, livestock and household items. The SFG members are likely to sustain their self-managed income generating activities because, through FOs project training, they were able to utilise knowledge and skills of group organisation and management, as well as planning and implementation of development activities which address the needs of their households.

**Table 4: Income accrued from SFG micro-projects in 2001/2002 to 2003/2004**

Village	SFG micro-project income by project villages in *TShs: 2001/2 - 2003/4					
	2001/2002		2002/2003		2003/2004	
	No. of SFGs	Income (TShs)	No. of SFGs	Income (TShs)	No. of SFGs	Income (TShs)
Mkindo	2	833,000	8	3,332,000	11	4,581,150
Lusanga	3	1,400,000	4	1,866,667	5	2,333,333
Sonjo	4	1,339,000	7	2,343,250	8	2,678,000
Mbasas	4	1,040,000	7	1,820,000	9	2,320,000
<i>Total</i>	13	4,612,200	27	9,361,917	33	11,932,483

Source: FOs Project, 2001-2004

\* TShs 1,000 = 1US\$

Income generated by SFG members before and after FOs project in the study villages is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Income generated before and after FOs project per SFG member**

Village	Income generated before and after FOs Project			
	Before 2001/2002		After 2003/2004	
	No. of SFG Members	Average Income (TShs)	No. of SFG Members	Average Income (TShs)
Mkindo	51	*-	138	33,197
Lusanga	49	-	74	31,532
Sonjo	93	-	156	17,167
Mbasa	62	-	121	19,174

*\*There was no record of any financial SFG income accrued from existing SFG activities when the project started in February, 2001.*

*Source: FOs Project, 2001-2004*

Table 5 reveals that despite the fact that SFGs in the study villages existed before the project, there was no record of any financial SFG income accrued from existing group activities by each SFG member when the project started in February, 2001. On average, the increase in income per SFG member at the end of the project in June, 2004 ranged from 17,167 TShs in Sonjo village to 33,197 TShs in Mkindo village. The difference in average income accrued per SFG member from micro-project activities in the study villages is a reflection on the extent to which the members were involved in group activities. However, the increase in SFG members income as a result of their participation in FOs project activities is associated to their being better organised and their increased production in SFG micro-projects, following the use of improved production technology, ability to improve production due to access to information, input, credit and expanded acreage.

#### **4.5 Adoption and dissemination of innovations**

Innovations advocated by this study included: group management through education and action learning on how to form and register SFGs, how to develop location specific SFG constitution and how to plan, implement and evaluate SFG micro-projects; group leadership,

savings and credit, record keeping and financial management. Through action research, the SFG members modified their group leadership; developed location specific constitution; planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated their SFG micro-projects; and formed self-managed SFGs and SFGAs as new forms of organisations. In addition, the majority (60 percent) of all the SFG members in the study villages were able to train other villagers from within and outside their villages on most of the technologies they had practiced. Therefore, continued use of the technologies is likely because SFG members organisation activities addressed the needs of SFG member's households and other community members from neighboring villages.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

The experiences of strengthening existing SFGs and establishing self-managed SFGs and SFGAs in the study sites in selected villages of Morogoro region by FOs project under TARPII-SUA Project presented in this paper is one of the many hundreds of initiatives to further the participation in development process of previously excluded smallholder farmers in Tanzania. Such initiatives are rarely recorded but together they represent the network of government and non-government involvement in development process. The study has shown that SFG organisations have a potential role to play in promoting agricultural development in the study area. The study experience therefore implied that: (i) rural and voluntary organisations formed by rural people and managed by them, and (ii) participation, self-help initiatives, and autonomous management, are important and effective instruments to promote agricultural extension, and thus reduce rural poverty in Tanzania.

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