

What future for family farming in ACP countries?

Agriculture remains a key sector for most ACP countries, hence has to be placed higher on development agendas. Family farming has proved to be amazingly resistant in hostile conditions, but the sector still urgently requires revitalization for improved competitiveness. Besides making money family farming contributes to social cohesion in rural areas and to rural-urban dynamics; it helps to provide food security, to create employment, to curb migration and to manage natural resources.

Dr Hansjörg Neun
Director
Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA)
Wageningen, The Netherlands
Neun@cta.int

Philip Mikos
European Commission
Head of Unit B4, DG Development, EC
Philip.Mikos@ec.europa.eu

The agricultural sector in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries is grappling with a number of serious problems. Productivity is decreasing, market conditions are unfavourable and investment in research and dissemination of research results is inadequate. Gender inequality is another major constraint; most farming activities are undertaken by women, yet in some countries they are not entitled to own land or to grow cash crops.

Family farming is particularly hard hit. In the context of economic liberalization the sector is under constant pressure to improve its productivity and competitiveness in spite of the unfavourable circumstances highlighted above among many others. A financial and legal environment conducive to long-term investment would improve supply and sales capacities, as well as the incomes and living standards of the farmers themselves. Farmers need to improve their professional skills, in-

crease their resources and consolidate farmers' organizations.

Despite of the unfavourable circumstances, family farming is under constant pressure to improve its productivity and competitiveness.

Agriculture should be a priority in development agendas

If poverty in ACP countries is to be reduced meaningfully, aid to agriculture must be increased substantially and made to work more effectively. This is increasingly recognized among key actors such as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the Commission for Africa. The Commission for Africa, for example, calls for doubling of aid to the African continent and recommends a 50 percent increase by 2010 in donor funding for small-scale irrigation and post-harvest infrastructure as a means of providing direct support to small-scale farmers. NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) also highlights the need to support food security by increasing productivity on small-scale farms.

ACP countries need to establish agricultural and rural development policies and allocate at least 10 percent of their financial resources to the agricultural sector as agreed at the African Union Summit held in Maputo from 10 to 12 July 2003.



Photo: laif



In the ACP-EU context, the ACP countries must include farming in their development priorities – and more particularly in National and/or Regional Indicative Programmes – if they wish to receive funding in return. The farmers' organizations have expressed their needs to the EU to allocate resources to agriculture and the development of farmers' organizations under the 10th European Development Fund. Other organizations such as the Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation (CTA), together with bilateral and multilateral donor agencies must also provide support in areas such as information and capacity building.

A seat for farmers at the policy table

Farmers' organizations must be recognized as important players in initiatives impacting the rural and agricultural sectors at different levels and must be involved in the framing, implementation and assessment of agricultural policies at those levels. At present their participation in the group of «non-state actors» is practically nil. In this context, a mechanism for consultation between the EU and regional platforms of farmers' organizations, and meetings with EC delegations in ACP countries would foster better mutual understanding among various stakeholders. The involvement of farmers' organizations in the ACP-EU initiatives such as those on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), commodity action plan, water facility, micro-loans, disaster management, health and plant-health standards, is desirable to get the views from the field stakeholders themselves. The ability of farmers' organizations to understand and analyse agricultural policies as well as engage in lobbying work needs to be improved if they are to be more successful in upholding their interests at various levels. Their human, financial and technical resources need to be

For many young people in ACP countries, the agricultural sector is not very attractive.

improved to promote consultation within their respective organizations and with the external world.

Farmers' organizations must foster alliances and exchanges of experience within their ranks and with other stakeholders, as well as better representation and genuine participation of women and the youth. Agriculture is often not seen as attractive, financially rewarding or innovative by the youth. Specific strategies and incentives are needed to reverse this situation. On the occasion of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly held in Vienna (19-22 June 2006), ACP farmers sought stronger links with Members of Parliament from ACP and EU countries at national, regional and international levels. Farmers' organizations realize that they need to be more proactive, more visible and better known by those who enact legislation.

The devastating effects of HIV/AIDS on rural farming

Although the focus on HIV/AIDS programmes has often concentrated mainly upon the health sector, the disease has had a tremendous impact upon the agricultural sector in developing countries. Up to 80 percent of the people in the most seriously affected countries rely upon agriculture for subsistence. HIV/AIDS predominantly affects the productive labour force. FAO estimates that seven million agricultural workers have been killed by the pandemic and 16 million more could die by 2020. In the nine most affected African countries, it has been projected that AIDS will reduce the agricultural workforce for the period 1985-2020 from 26 to 13 percent. This translates into lower productivity, lower diversity in farming

systems, decreased food security, deteriorating nutritional status, and lower sustainability of resource use.

The key role of communication

Information is a basic element for any development activity. Information must be available and accessible to all, as it is useful only if it is available, if the users have access to it, in the appropriate form and language – i.e., if it is communicated, if it circulates among the various users with appropriate facilities, if it is exchanged.

Farmers' organizations should be involved more in the production of information materials suitable for their needs. Helping farmers find an answer to a problem they face is different from giving them information about a problem identified by the researcher. Both approaches are important, though, depending on the kind of information shared.

CTA and other partners contribute to better serve the farmers in various ways:

- It is important to improve the interaction among researchers, policy-makers and community-based actors, to strengthen the production, to manage and use information by ACP partners by promoting local content and local authorship.
- The more information is available, the more essential it is to facilitate access to it. CTA builds capacity of farmers' organizations through services such as the Question and Answer Service, training, and rural radio networking among other approaches.
- New Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet have facilitated communication significantly. But its use in ACP rural areas is hampered by a number of factors, notably poor telephone and IT connectivity as well as limited IT skills.
- It is important to find ways on how best to inform and guide policy. CTA does advocacy work for the rural communities and farmers' groups within the international arena by facilitating their attendance and sharing of information in major events in the agricultural and rural sector.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that strong producer organizations are vital to facing the numerous challenges of today. Facilitating access to credit, farming inputs, information and extension services, access to markets and strengthening farmers' position in the policy making process at national and international levels is key for improving the livelihoods of producers.