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## Capacity building in Advocacy and Lobbying transforms smallholder farmers' lives in Mubende District, Uganda

The Government of Uganda is a signatory to the Maputo declaration of 2004 in which African governments made a commitment to increase public spending to the agriculture sector to 10% by the year 2010. However, the Government of Uganda's funding to the sector has remained far below the agreed percentage. In the 2008/2009 national budget, the agriculture sector was allocated only 4.2% of the national budget. The low support to farming activities is translated into low input, low-output, consumption oriented production and low incomes with the majority of the Small Scale Farmers (SSFs) who comprise 80% of Uganda's population living below the poverty line, earning less than a dollar a day and therefore unable to afford the basic necessities of life including health care, education and housing.

There could not have been a better way for the Small Scale Farmers (SSFs) of Bagezza and Kiyuni sub-counties in Mubende district to get their voices heard by their sub-county leaders. For several months, their leaders had held countless futile meetings and written letters to the Sub-county and district administration expressing their desire to be given more say in the development, planning and budgeting processes but their pleas were never heeded.

With this pent up frustration, the farmers in 2008 said 'enough is enough' and boldly rejected poultry houses that had been poorly constructed by service providers from outside the two sub-counties selected under the government's National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) whose extension services are delivered by private providers who are awarded short-term contracts to promote specific enterprises. The farmers had requested the administration to either involve them in the selection process or allow them select their fellow progressive farmers whom they believed were more knowledgeable and trusted to offer extension services.

Through a vigorous and well orchestrated lobbying, in which they selected opinion leaders to meet privately and officially with the sub-county leadership, the farmers managed to persuade the officials to allow them select their own service providers after articulating their demands for the type of poultry keeping technologies they desired and expressing their disillusionment at being marginalized.

*"We did not want them to take decisions on our behalf. We know we have a stake in the development of our area so we felt that we should be consulted or get actively involved in the decision making processes,"* said Julian Agaba.

For the leadership in the two sub counties, the skill and eventual success with which the farmers pulled off this initiative left them wondering as it had never been expected. But for the farmers, this was a practical

application of the skills attained from trainings conducted under an umbrella farmer's organization, Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF). The regional small scale farmer-led movement was formed in 2002 to create a forum where SSFs could voice their concerns. It consists of 8 member African countries and was conceived during the World Summit on Sustainable Agriculture in Johannesburg, South Africa, by Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM), a regional network facilitating learning, networking, advocacy and lobbying in East and Southern Africa.

In Uganda, the farmer organization brings together 2,000 farmers in 14 districts including Mubende where operations started in 2005. Since then, 293 farmers spread out in 10 SSF groups in Kiyuni, Kasambya/Nabingola and Bagezza sub-counties are members of ESAFF. Thanks to support from the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and OXFAM-GB whose support enabled mobilization of members, capacity building, institutional strengthening, information exchange and exposure as well as training in campaigning, advocacy and lobbying.

### Capacity building and institutional strengthening

With the support of PELUM, ESAFF developed a plan of action to enhance the capacity of SSFs to participate in collective lobbying and advocacy. A grant of US \$26,104 from SNV/UNDP Capacity Innovation Fund enabled ESAFF in 2007 to conduct three sensitization workshops for 330 farmer leaders, on the national planning and budgeting cycle, national agricultural policies, advocacy and lobbying.



**ESAFF Mubende members in a group discussion during training on community action planning**

The training enabled them to receive sufficient knowledge on issues concerning their lives and to build confidence to while advocating for prioritization of funding to the agricultural sector. To ensure that everyone was brought on board, ESAFF published information materials on the planning processes in 3 major local languages which turned

out to be a stimulating factor for the farmers to participate in campaigns, advocacy and lobbying of policy makers for an increase in budget allocation to the agricultural sector.

With additional funding of USD 17,687 from Oxfam-GB in 2008, PELUM implemented activities aimed at promoting participatory planning and budgeting by training 10 farmer groups in how to develop Community Action Plans (CAPs) through identification and prioritization of their needs and sharing the plans with their local leaders for incorporation into sub-county plans and budgets. The trainers went on to train farmer groups on how to make CAPs for presentation to village and sub-county authorities. The community members also identified the leaders and policy makers responsible for bringing about the desired changes.



**Mubende SSFs attending a public dialogue on SSFs participation in national planning and budgeting at grassroots level**

According to the ESAFF Uganda Co-ordinator, Nancy Mugimba, the training was prompted by a survey that established how SSFs were not actively involved in planning and budgeting processes because they had little knowledge about the budgeting processes. In addition, most participants feared approaching local government officials as well as participating in the planning process. The participants were also found to have insufficient knowledge on key roles and responsibilities of local government officials and their competency in lobbying and advocacy were found to be inadequate.

*"We discovered a gap between the leaders and the community which made consultation by both sides difficult. For example the relationship between farmers and extension workers left a lot to be desired. Farmers complained about the little time the extension staff interacted with them and yet as technocrats they needed to interact more with them"* added Mathias Kitandwe, Chairperson for ESAFF Mubende.

### **Advocacy and lobbying**

ESAFF facilitated farmer groups to participate in phone-in radio talk shows to assess their contribution to programmes that directly affect SSFs and strengthen collaboration between SSFs at the different levels. The radio programmes which were conducted in the local language were found to be an effective medium of reaching out to many rural farmers who were unable to access information.

*"The response for the radio programmes was terrific. It showed the level of farmer interest and knowledge about global agricultural issues including organic farming. We are looking for funds to enable us to sustain the radio programme"* said Mr. Kitandwe who has been a regular radio panelist on Mubende Broadcasting Service during the month of October 2008 and February 2009.

The Chairperson of Mubende Womens Agro-Processors Association (MWAPA), Beatrice Katsigazi, attributed the enthusiasm in the 'farmers voice' radio programmes to the Farmers' realization of the need to participate in sub-county and district planning meetings so that issues affecting them are budgeted for. The major issues discussed included the role of farmers in the planning and budgeting process, the role of government in agriculture development, land matters and how ESAFF could link small scale farmers to community leaders.

*"We were able to reach out to the different audiences to tell them what ESAFF farmers in Mubende are doing. More farmers were called upon to add "their voices" to ESAFF's voice to have more impact in their communities. We have realized that if farmers speak out with one voice, most of our pressing issues will be attended to"* said Consolata Nalukyamuzi, a member of MWAPA.

Round table meetings and public dialogues were found to be another effective campaign technique or platform for brainstorming, sharing opinions and discussing issues affecting the community. The meetings brought together key stakeholder groups ranging from representatives of farmer groups including local sub-county leaders and technocrats from the district to exchange views on a number of issues.

The meetings were rotated in the three sub counties of Kiyuni, Kasambya/Nabingola and Bagezza to strengthen collaboration between ESAFF members and the Local leaders at sub county level. It was realized that once this partnership was cemented, the farmers would comfortably interact with their leaders and present their needs or ask for information with ease.

*"At these meetings individuals show openness, honesty and mutual respect for the opinions of others. Everybody has a say and their input is considered equal"* said Sawuya Gafabusa, an ESAFF member.

### **Advocacy and lobbying bears fruits**

The Bagezza farmers' lobbying voices paid off again when in the months of September and October 2008, the farmers, during separate meetings, persuaded Sub County District Agricultural officials to fund their Action Plans. Following the meetings, four groups were able to access coffee seedlings worth US\$ 1,200 (Ushs 2,400,000/=) per group. Whatever income that will be generated from coffee sales to be re-invested in the group's activities.

For the farmers of Kasambya/Nabingola the appointment of one of their own, Innocent Mulinda, as a member of the influential sub-county NAADS procurement committee was