



Madagascar

CPM-Madagascar: rearticulating farmer groups in a weak state

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The Coalition Paysanne Malgache (CPM) was selected and recommended by IFAP as the Malagasy partner for the implementation of the ESFIM collaborative component. This is a relevant choice, as CPM was established on January 2002 as a platform for supporting and strengthening Malagasy Farmers Organisations' (FOs) actions for advocacy. It was originally co-founded by five major farmer organisations (FEKRITAMA - Confederation des Agriculteur Malgaches, SCAE - Solidarité Coopérative des Agriculteurs et Eleveurs, KPI/FIKRIFAMA - Comités de gestion Communautaire des eaux potables, TITEM - Mutuelle d'Epargne/Crédit Agriculteur, FMTK - Mouvement des jeunes ruraux catholiques malgaches), with the support of Agriterra. CPM's vision of the rural development process is based on reinforcing rural institutions such as Chambers of Agriculture, supporting farmers' integration into

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markets through the promotion of fair marketing mechanisms, and the sensitisation of the rural population on environmental issues. CPM’s position in the agricultural institutional setting has evolved as a result of various administrative changes. Its role as a platform for the voice of Malagasy farmers was contested by the former administration, which established Chambers of Agriculture at the national and regional level to fulfil a function resembling that of the CPM. Furthermore, major farmer organisations became more reluctant to channel farmers’ claims through the CPM, arguing that this institutional setting was too costly, and that they also preferred to remain more autonomous in formulating their own advocacy priorities. Thus CPM gradually developed an hybrid status, combining the role of an apex body and one of a classical farmer organisation, formed by the direct subscription of local farmers groups as direct CPM members and not through another Farmers Organisation. As of 2011, the organisation was composed of 244,000 individual members and 2,648 other farmer-organisation members. It has a classical organisational structure, with a National Bureau elected by a General Assembly and regional entities. CPM is a functional institution with headquarters located in Antananarivo, having administrative (clerk/accountant) and technical capacities (project manager) operating under the supervision of a General Secretary.

Development challenge

Madagascar ranks among the poorest countries in the Human Development Index (151 of 187 in 2010). Like other least-developed countries, Madagascar is characterised by a large rural population (70 per cent of total population), thus agricultural production plays a crucial role as a source of income. Most of the agricultural production, however, is geared towards home consumption, especially the major staple, rice. Beyond the immediate utilisation of food and other natural resources by rural households, the local urban market is the second outlet for agricultural products, although marketing opportunities are limited by the small share of the urban population in the country. The third outlet for agricultural production is the world market, with agricultural exports representing approximately 20 per cent of the agricultural GDP. Even though the export share of the total agricultural production remains rather low, this outlet has historically played a catalytic role in connecting subsistence-based agriculture to a market-driven economy, through expanding export of certain crops (e.g., coffee, cloves, and vanilla). However, the growth in agricultural exports has been slower than the growth recorded for other major exports (textile, clothing), resulting in a continuous decline in the share of agricultural products in the total value of export.

This relative stagnation of agricultural exports is an illustration of the challenges faced by the development of Malagasy agricultural marketing systems for linking producers to end users. Agricultural marketing development is hampered by a number of constraints, including low productivity, little access to capital, market inefficiency, etc. Moreover, one major obstacle faced by Malagasy agriculture to

expansion of its market is inadequate transportation infrastructure. While government and donors have prioritised the renovation of main roads, feeder roads are often lacking. According to the transport division of the World Bank, Madagascar has one of the lowest Rural Access indices in Sub-Saharan Africa; only 25 per cent of the rural population is within 2 km (or about 25 min walking time) of an all-weather road (the average Sub-Saharan rate is at 36 per cent, 59 per cent for South America and above 80 per cent for Asia).

While agricultural development and smallholders' inclusion in markets are constrained by structural factors, they are also suffering from the political instability and uncertainty that has marked the last decade. The recurring political crises do not provide an enabling environment for implementing agricultural development strategies requiring continuity. The latest phase of political instability started in 2009, at the time that the inception phase of the ESFIM collaborative component in Madagascar was planned. After consultation between International Federation of Agricultural Producers (which is now defunct), AGRINATURA and local partners it was eventually decided to pursue the implementation of the programme.

It is important to underline that the political crisis and its development did not directly affect the implementation of the Malagasy ESFIM component. However, the context was particularly challenging for achieving the objectives pursued by the programme, as lack of political stability meant a lack of adequate incentives for developing a strategy for advocacy. More precisely, the formal state and public decision-making mechanisms were and are still in place in spite of the political transition, but it is obvious that the capacity to implement and enforce any decision is rather weak. This failure, or interruption, of the public decision-making process not only becomes evident in a lack of public resources (the political crisis has resulted in a sharp reduction of foreign aid and economic stagnation), but also exacerbates the incursion of a hidden political agenda into the policy debate, including the one addressed by ESFIM. Furthermore, this lack of public capacity in leading the policy debate places donor institutions (multilateral, foreign and NGOs) at the forefront of the policy dialogue, which can in turn induce other potential distortions or biases in the policy agenda because of the donors' priorities. However, it should be noted that in spite of these adverse conditions, the public servants forming the intermediate layers of the administration (officers, heads of technical department) have always participated actively in the ESFIM process.

Collaborative research process

In May 2009, a workshop on issue identification was organised, including 40 participants. Approximately 30 participants were members of major farmer organisations in Madagascar, whereas the others came from two ministries (Agriculture and Commerce), the National Agricultural Research Systems, and representatives of major rural development projects (such as the IFAD-funded project: Programme de Soutien aux Pôles de Micro-Entreprises Rurales et aux Economies Régionales PROSPERER). It should be noted that participants from local research institutions did not play a major role in the discussion (there was no participation from the University), illustrating not only the weak links between CPM and research institutions, but also the limited interest of research institutions for collaborating with FOs. Following presentations on key agricultural marketing issues in Madagascar, the workshop combined parallel and plenary sessions to gradually select and rank six priority areas associated with various actions to support the policy dialogue.

TABLE 10 RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY AGENDA

RANK	PRIORITY AREA	PROPOSED ACTION
1	Rural business development services	Desk study and workshop
2	Market organisation – collective marketing	Study tour and workshop
3	Market information systems	Field study
4	Access to credit	Desk study
5	Management of agricultural product quality	Desk study and workshop
6	Strengthening the role of the CPM in the policy dialogue for rural development	Support to CPM

Among the challenges encountered by participants during the workshop, one was to minimise the tendency to make a “shopping list”, which would lead to an excessive list of priorities. Another challenge was to clearly explain the nature of the project, focusing on the process of understanding issues and defining priorities for action and advocacy, rather than supporting the actual implementation of institutional arrangements. The delay in funding, ultimately proved beneficial. It pushed CPM to revise its list of priorities and to have a more focused agenda. Funding limitations did not allow for the convening of a new broad meeting to reduce the priority list. This was done during a meeting of key representatives of CPM, who had contacted other farmer organisations beforehand to obtain their views on the priorities.

Three priorities were identified based on the initial list and taking into account their relevance with respect to ESFIM thematic priorities and the need for up-to-date information. The three selected and reformulated themes were:

1. Support to farmers in decision making on the marketing of agricultural products
2. Market Information Systems
3. Collective actions for marketing

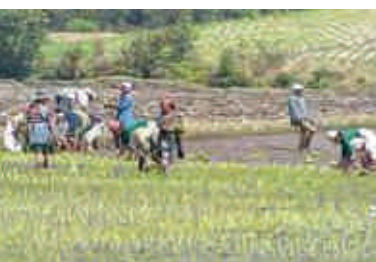
In terms of actions, it was decided to carry out one study for each theme and to organise one common workshop to discuss the outcomes and to develop goals for advocacy. The translation of the three selected priority areas into feasible terms of reference was done by CPM with the support of an AGRINATURA scientist. Eventually, in order to limit the cost of management and supervision, it was decided to gather the two first themes (i.e., farmers’ capacities in marketing decision making and MIS) into one, as they are closely related. The finalised ToRs were widely disseminated among the community of consultants in Madagascar through CPM and AGRINATURA networks. It should be noted that the project did not succeed in linking CPM and farmer organisations to research institutions per se; neither researchers in rural development at the University of Madagascar nor scientists from the national agricultural system responded to the call. On the research side, this outcome may have been due to the lack of interest of local research institutions to develop links with farmer organisations because government institutions funding agencies and foreign research institutions remain their privileged partners. This lack of interest could also reflect the preference of local research institutions in allocating scarce resources to other thematic areas and the limited importance of this type of issue in current academic curricula. From the side of the farmer organisation, academic and research institutions were not considered as potential partners because more emphasis was put on implementing “ready-made” solutions rather than reflecting on the most viable and promising development options.

The selection of the consultants was done by the CPM National Bureau, the AGRINATURA scientist having advised on the quality of the various technical submissions. However, the AGRINATURA scientist was directly involved at the inception phase of the two studies for finalising the methodology. Both studies combined various sources of information: a review of the existing literature, interviews of key players on the development side (NGOs, projects managers, central and local administrative officers) and discussions with farmers and representatives of farmer organisations in selected areas.

In September 2011, the preliminary conclusions of the two studies were presented and discussed in a workshop with approximately 30 participants, mostly representatives of various farmer organisations and CPM members, and a limited participation of stakeholders in order to minimise a potential bias towards non-farmers' opinions in the dialogue.

The major insights from the three studies can be summarised as follows. With regards to farmers' decision making capacities, the study underlined the lack of continuity in the actions implemented by various stakeholders (NGOs, development projects). Furthermore, the study did not come to any clear conclusions regarding the relevance and benefit for farmers of the various types of training provided throughout the country. With respect to the multiple agricultural market information systems implemented in Madagascar, the consultant highlighted farmers' views on the complexity induced by the multiplication of sources of information (area- or product-wise). The study on collective action for marketing stressed the weakness of most of the farmer-based marketing institutions identified, when support is no longer provided by development institutions.

Both studies provided a fair review of the various actions implemented in Madagascar in the three selected domains; the material gathered and processed offered a good and comprehensive base for supporting in-depth opinions. However, the complexity and the magnitude of the challenge faced by farmers in Madagascar to improve their marketing position made it difficult to translate these outputs into straightforward and clear claims for advocacy.



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Advocacy outcomes

The difficulties faced by CPM and the representatives of farmer organisations to clearly formulate lobby issues to be defined within the policy dialogue are due to several constraints that bring into question the expected impact of the ESFIM paradigm (i.e., strengthening the efficiency of farmers’ advocacy on marketing issues through research).

The first challenge in formulating a relevant advocacy proposal on marketing is the overwhelming problem of access to markets. Market access is physically limited, as most Malagasy farmers live in rather isolated environments and economic access to markets is limited because the volume of the domestic as well as the foreign demand remains small. In such a context, it makes sense that farmers place no emphasis on marketing. One striking discussion about the outcomes of the studies revolved around “cultivating for production” or “cultivating for marketing”. When transportation remains the major constraint, any alternative institutional arrangement to private marketing for reducing market asymmetry has a rather limited attractiveness. Changing the rules of the game may not necessarily increase the demand for agricultural products. Difficulties faced by farmers’ representatives in identifying and formulating a clear policy proposal in this domain is most likely due to their inability to assess the advantage of any change made.

Another set of challenges relates to the institutional context in which Malagasy farmer organisations operate. They face institutions (NGOs or donor projects) that have more means to shape the farmers’ institutional environment than the farmers themselves. Each study has revealed a perception of “unfair competition” between farmer organisations and the so-called Financial and Technical Partners (FTP), who define the rural development priorities, while the FOs’ views in the policy dialogue are negated and made to adapt to the FTPs ideas. This weaker position of farmer organisations illustrates the constraints in the endogenous capacity to shift from a “traditional” rural society to a more dynamic and modernised rural social and political life. The FOs’ capacity for increasing their ownership of this process of transformation, or at least increasing their influence in the decision-making process, is still very limited.

The last, but not least obstacle to making the ESFIM paradigm operational is the policy context, in which there is a lack of active and reliable public partners in the policy arena. The deadlocked political situation does not provide the right incentive to farmer organisations for investing in advocacy, nor does it give them the hope that formulating any specific advocacy activity on agricultural marketing could have any results.

Following the discussions during the 2011 workshop, farmer organisations eventually decided to follow up the field Market Information System, for which the studies provided pragmatic and tangible elements for action. The representatives gathered agreed on the formulation of one advocacy issue, to centrally and widely broadcast pricing information on the public radio network. They decided that the collective marketing issue would require additional internal discussion among their constituencies, in order to come up with a position that would be more consistent with farmers’ practices and priorities.

In January 2012, the CPM bureau also took the initiative to convene a one-day meeting with other major farmer organisations as a follow-up to the September workshop, to present the major results of ESFIM to their main partners (NGOs and development agencies).

Given the rather short period of the project implementation and the overall context, it is rather difficult to assess to what extent the ESFIM process led to a durable change in the perception of CPM with regards to using research-based evidence for building advocacy strategies. CPM members did acknowledge the need for having a more rigorous assessment of their policy positions, backstopped with an analysis of the pro and the cons of any policy recommendations. Along this line, the ESFIM process did reinforce the awareness of the bureau of the need for strengthening their analytical capacity. However, the ESFIM impact in terms of strengthening links between researchers and farmer organisations in Madagascar has been limited.

While CIRAD, the AGRINATURA institution in charge of backstopping the ESFIM collaborative component in Madagascar, has a rather extensive experience in collaborating with farmer organisations and doing research on empowerment of farmer organisations, its previous partnership with Malagasy farmer organisations focused more on technical issues and rural credit. The collaboration between CPM and the CIRAD scientist assigned to the task was rather fruitful and educational with respect to learning to understand each other's ways of thinking. In terms of local partnership, CPM stressed that the ESFIM project offered a tangible opportunity for the organisation to fulfil its task and mission of stewarding the policy debate among FOs. ESFIM also did provide an opportunity to establish links between CPM and the faculty of agro-management of the University of Madagascar through CIRAD. The short duration of the project did not allow this first contact to develop into the formulation and implementation of a research agenda.

Lessons learnt

- The first lesson learnt from the Malagasy case is that the ESFIM paradigm is less operational in a context in which the public policy formulation process is idled. The Malagasy case also illustrates the need to adjust the thematic area that could stimulate collaboration between farmer organisations and research: farmers' empowerment in markets might not have the same level of relevance across countries.
- In terms of collaboration, it is not easy to define the farmer organisations and research institutions' rationale and objectives: farmer organisations naturally look for research outputs that could easily be put into operation, while research institutions might not have the same priorities. Similarly, research outcomes do not necessarily lead to a clear agenda in terms of action or lobbying, and farmer organisations may have some difficulty in considering such outcomes as useful or practical.
- ESFIM provided an adequate framework to build up and strengthen interactions between the Malagasy farmer organisations and research institutions. The capacity given to farmer organisations to define the research agenda was key to ensuring their involvement in the whole process. However CPM ownership and mastering of the project was hampered by the human capacity available within the organisation, which was not adequate enough to fully exploit the volume of knowledge accumulated in the studies. In future, it could be valuable to include in such a project a training component for farmer leaders on how a scientific approach and research outcome can improve their position in the policy dialogue. The contribution of research to the FOs' capacity may not be limited to the formulation of a research agenda for the organisation as a whole but may also be relevant for feeding a debate within the farmer organisations about key issues that may not be mastered enough to formulate a claim at the policy level.

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