



Introduction

Strengthening the advocacy capacities of national farmer organisations through collaborative research

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Generally, policy instruments and institutional arrangements emerge from a political arena in which smallholders have limited power compared with other interest groups. Even when smallholders are positioned to represent their interests in these policy arenas, they often lack the information and capacity to play this role in a pro-active manner (Bosc et al. 2001; Carney 1996; Hussein 2001). Currently, many countries have an agricultural policy and poverty reduction strategy that explicitly supports the inclusion of smallholders in markets. In many countries, it is therefore not the policy– the set of laws, as such– but the budgetary, technical, administrative, implementation arrangement and governance aspects of the

specific laws that falls short and needs to be adjusted to generate positive impact for smallholders (Ton 2008). Evidence and creative thinking is needed in the policy design of effective rules and regulations and working institutional arrangements to empower smallholders in markets.

Research has a role to play in feeding this creative and pro-active thinking, supporting the advocacy of smallholders with information and analysis. However, most of the current research and discussions about enabling policies and innovative institutional mechanisms for smallholder market access takes place within international donors, specialised universities and the international research centres working on rural development. These debates and findings, as good as they may be, are however scarcely used in the national farmer organisations (NFOs) internal processes of learning and deliberation, and are seldom reflected in their proposals for policy change.

In spite of the intentions -e.g., as documented in the report of the first 2010 Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GFAR, 2011)- there is still too little done to bridge the gap between the research community and farmer organisations. There is a willingness on both sides to cooperate but there are few instances in which this really happens. There is a need for a flexible and effective interface between farmer organisations and national and international researchers to help farmer organisations obtain more accurate and timely evidence on policy proposals and topics that matter most to them and their members. Support to farmer organisations in the selection of key issues and upgrading their advocacy methods can help these organisations to be more effective campaigners for the interests of smallholders.

NFOs are often not seriously involved in consultation processes, be it as a result of neglect by policy makers or as a result of their own limited capacities, skills and experiences in engagement with national policy processes and in the formulation of advocacy strategies. The capacity of NFOs in developing countries to interact with researchers and collect and process information is generally quite weak. To address this problem, the Empowering Smallholder Farmers in Markets programme (ESFIM) started as a pilot project to help bridge the gap between NFOs on the one hand and the research community on the other. The ESFIM programme sought to strengthen the capacity of NFOs to use evidence in their farmer-led advocacy processes. In this paper, we present the experiences with this specific modality of research support piloted between 2007 and 2012, and reflect on its impact on the advocacy capacities of NFOs. To do so, in this introductory chapter, we first detail the background of the programme and describe the intervention logic that forms its rationale. Then, we present the key issues prioritised by the NFOs and we give illustrations of the dynamics around the related research and advocacy processes. We finish with some lessons learnt from the ESFIM experience to fine-tune future research-for-advocacy support to national farmer organisations.

Background

The Empowering Smallholder Farmers in Markets (ESFIM) programme was born in 2006, in response to a call for proposals by the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) to the European Consortium of Agricultural Research and Technology (ECART, which later merged into the European platform of research institutes AGRINATURA. During the inception phase (2007), an inventory was made of key relevant research and policy-focused programmes that complemented and reinforced, or could be reinforced by, ESFIM activities. At that time, amongst the most important other programmes identified in a preparatory study by Proctor (2007) were the ‘Regoverning Markets Programme’, led by IIED (Vorley et al. 2007) and the work projected by the Global Forum on Agricultural Research in its Linking Farmers to Markets programme. Important insights had been gained already by organisations that take part in this forum, including FAO, CIAT, CIRAD and the World Bank (Shepherd 2007; Markelova et al.

2009; Bienabé et al. 2004; Hellin et al. 2009). IFAP was represented in the GFAR Steering Committee and insisted that research had to be more farmer-focused to resolve problems in production and marketing (Wilkinson 2006). In 2007, the farmer organisations represented by IFAP considered that the GFAR was in need of on-the-ground pilot experiences to put this policy discourse into practice. IFAD supported this initiative with a grant to AGRINATURA to assist IFAP in finding a way doing so. AGRINATURA developed a concept note for such a programme, which was assessed during the ESFIM International Workshop held in Tunis in October 2007. The backbone of the ESFIM programme was defined in three components: collaborative research in pilot countries; comparative research on some priority issues; and learning for action to make research outputs useful for smallholder farmers (see Table 1).

The tentative selection of NFOs for the collaborative research partnerships was made during the ESFIM Inception Phase in 2007. This was based on the quality and smallholder focus of the membership organisations, their ability to lead the process in their country and their commitment and experience to engage in advocacy for pro-poor policy development. This led to a selection of countries for which the contours of a research partnership were explored: Benin, Costa Rica, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Peru, the Philippines, South Africa, Uganda and Uruguay. Most of these organisations were supported by Agriterra in the Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme. As such, ESFIM support could build upon the organisational capacities and staff in these NFOs, and focus on research support and advocacy needs only. In 2008–2009 the ESFIM programme, with funding from IFAD and AGRICORD, started the collaborative research component with a round of participatory national workshops to define the issues for improving market access of smallholders and to influence related policies and institutions. Based on these prioritised research needs, a follow-up three year process of research-for-advocacy started in 2010, with co-funding from IFAD and the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, led by the farmer organisations and supported by thematically specialised local researchers and with technical backstopping from AGRINATURA staff.

TABLE 1 OBJECTIVES OF THE ESFIM PROGRAMME

Goal	Strengthen the capacities of farmer organisations in developing countries to empower their smallholder members in markets, create an enabling policy and regulatory environment and effective economic organisations.
Objective	The overall objective is to generate demand-driven action research supporting the activities undertaken by farmer organisations in proposing changes in the institutional and legislative context, in order to strengthen their economic organisation and institutions and the power of smallholder farmers in markets.
Specific objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assist a number of national farmer organisations in developing countries with formulating feasible, evidence-based propositions for changes in key elements in the institutional environment that will enable effective marketing strategies for smallholders. COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH 2. Support farmer organisations with information and learning processes on innovative and replicable policies and institutional arrangements that empower smallholder farmers in markets through the study of relevant market empowerment initiatives drawn from both industrialised and developing countries. COMPARATIVE RESEARCH 3. Facilitate learning of national farmer organisations in both developed and developing countries to enable them to use evidence-based information to increase their capacity to influence the lobby agendas and policy and market processes related to smallholder farmers' access to markets. LEARNING FOR ACTION

Source: ESFIM Concept Note (2008)

Collaborative research activities

The elaboration of the precise research priorities for their lobby agenda and marketing strategies is the responsibility of each of the NFOs leading the research in their respective country (see Table 2). They used participative workshops with their constituents, together with government officials and NGOs and supplemented with contributions from national researchers, who presented existing and emerging research outputs. Each workshop aimed to identify key issues related to the empowerment of smallholder farmers in markets. A follow-up participatory process was essential to refine the themes in the research partnership. In each country, an ESFIM country co-ordination team has been established to supervise and co-ordinate the research process. The process of priority setting and activity planning is cyclical, whereby research proposals could be amended when progressive findings/developments alter the research priorities.

TABLE 2 NATIONAL FARMER ORGANISATIONS PARTNERING IN THE ESFIM PROGRAMME

COUNTRY	NAME OF LEAD PARTNER ORGANISATION
Benin	Fédération des Unions de Producteurs de Bénin (FUPRO)
Bolivia	Coordinadora de Integración de Organizaciones Económicas Campesinas de Bolivia (CIOEC-Bolivia)
Costa Rica	Coordinadora de Mujeres Campesinas de Costa Rica (CMC)
India	Federation of farmer organisations in Andhra Pradesh (FFA – AP), India
Kenya	Kenya National Federation of Agricultural Producers (KENFAP)
Madagascar	Coalition Paysanne de Madagascar (FTM/CPM)
Malawi	National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM)
Peru	Junta Nacional del Café (JNC), Perú
Philippines	Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), Philippines
Uganda	Uganda National Farmers' Federation (UNFFE)
Uruguay	Cooperativas Agrarias Federadas (CAF), Uruguay

Research support to harness and analyse the issues and to refine their proposals with technical and evidence-based research was provided by AGRINATURA and local research consultants. Local research institutes and independent consultants were subcontracted according to the thematic issues that emanated from the workshops and provided their research support under terms of references drawn up by the NFO with AGRINATURA support. Contracted local research and participatory workshops were funded through a €30,000 grant to each NFO.

The experiences of the ESFIM programme in Table 3 are described in detail in the different chapters in this book. They serve to illustrate the diversity of issues that the national farmer organisations identified as research priorities to determine their advocacy agendas. In different ways and with varying levels of impact, each activity served to support the particular national farmer organisation as they took forward their prioritised agenda to public policy debate or private sector development.

TABLE 3 KEY THEMATIC FOCUS IN ESFIM IN EACH COUNTRY

NATIONAL FARMERS ORGANISATION	KEY THEMATIC FOCUS IN ESFIM PROGRAMME
FUPRO-Benin	Maize sector policy; Value chain development support programmes
CIOEC-Bolivia	Law for preferential policies for collective marketing organisations
CMC-Costa Rica	Farmers' markets; Food sovereignty legislation
FFA-India	Innovative market linkages and collective marketing
KENFAP-Kenya	Impact of input subsidies; regulations for Warehouse Receipt Systems
CPM-Madagascar	Rural service provisioning
NASFAM-Malawi	Seed supply systems; Market information system
JNC -Peru	Taxation policies; Investment funds; Government procurement
FFF-Philippines	Electronic Commodity Trade
UNFFE-Uganda	National rural advisory system
CAF-Uruguay	National innovation policy

Outcomes of the research and advocacy process

In Benin, FUPRO took an active role in leadership and coordination of the local researcher activities and was central to the identification of challenges and to the development of option for innovative action and strategic research topics. FUPRO organised debriefings, regional workshops, exchange visits, and a writeshop and strategic workshop. The federation also recruited local researchers for thematic studies in a transparent manner, including facilitation of their connections to the field, and coordinated systematic member consultation. The work provided an evidence-based foundation for FUPRO's dialogue with the government on better governance within the maize sector. However in 2012 the Dutch Embassy, which was to fund a maize value chain development project, had a change in personnel and political priorities. The maize project was discontinued and replaced by a new project with FUPRO to improve the uptake of research results by farmers. This latter project is a follow-up of ESFIM activities, as essentially the same partners are involved in support to FUPRO; ESFIM activities were seen as the prime reason for taking these partners on board.

CIOEC-Bolivia identified the need for a re-launch of their advocacy on a Law on Rural Economic Organisations (OECAs). The essence of the OECA Law initiative, developed by CIOEC in 2004 and approved in Parliament in 2008, was the recognition of OECAs as organisations having both economic and social objectives, and thus calling for preferential policies to stimulate the sector and trigger inclusive rural economic development. Due to major political turbulence between in 2008-2009, the OECA Law did not result in implementation. With ESFIM support, the proposal was put into place as a fine-tuned and effective advocacy process. The OECA Law was accepted onto the agenda of Parliament in August 2012, approved in parliament in November 2012 and enacted on 26 January 2013. This is a tremendous advocacy success for CIOEC and ESFIM.

In Costa Rica, a dialogue was conducted within the platform of NFOs in 2010. The rural women's organisation CMC had a central role in this process. The main approach to advocacy was the realisation of forums in the national assembly to promote the theme of food sovereignty. The mobilisation of a large number of producers for a demonstration and the alliance with a national parliamentarian directly influenced policy and resulted in a law on food sovereignty. Moreover, this mobilisation led to the creation



of a new structure - the farmer Platform for Agro-Food. Whereas alliances with powerful organisations were somewhat lacking during the ESFIM programme, this new specialised platform now provides a good opportunity for future follow-up activities.

In India, after a promising start, the ESFIM process was disrupted and finally the partnership terminated. FFA/CIFA showed leadership and charisma in national and international advocacy but lacked the structure to commit to and manage an adaptive research process within the framework of ESFIM. This experience shows the importance of having a minimum threshold of organisational capacity within the farmer organisation for partnering, especially where a mutually agreed and transparent implementation responsibility is required.

KENFAP commissioned four studies. The first study involved an assessment of Kenya Government's interventions in agricultural input (maize seed and fertiliser) and output markets (maize grain). Its aim was to determine the impact and sustainability of the interventions involving delivery of subsidised fertiliser and certified seeds to smallholder farmers. KENFAP presented a formal resolution, which reflected the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report, to the President of the Republic of Kenya in June 2011. KENFAP initiated a second set of policy research studies on the role of the Warehouse Receipt System (WRS) in improving produce marketing, and the role of financial services in improving produce marketing, both focusing on smallholders. The studies provide evidence to support contributions made by KENFAP in the on-going consultation process with the government, although external credibility was somewhat reduced due to the fact that all studies were implemented by KENFAP staff.

In Madagascar, the proportion of smallholder production sold on markets is very low due to infrastructural constraints (roads) and, therefore, the ESFIM process was hampered by the lack of interest of farmer groups to invest time and money on advocacy to the government, as changing the 'rules of the game in the market' would not necessarily increase the demand for their products. With transportation a major constraint, any alternative institutional arrangement such as forms of collective marketing or innovative policies to empower smallholders in markets did not resonate as much as issues related with infrastructure, extension and credit. This was aggravated by the institutional context in which CPM operates, with a very weak government. The studies drew attention, however, to the fact that development NGOs and international donors tend to define rural development priorities, whereas the views of farmer organisations in the policy dialogue are almost and markedly absent.

In Malawi, two local consultants were commissioned by NASFAM to develop proposals for case studies to be carried out under ESFIM, one on Market Information Systems (MIS) and a second one on smallholder seed multiplication systems. The aim of the case studies was to gather information that could be used by NASFAM for policy advocacy. NASFAM was active in different fora where these studies could have been used, for example the multistakeholder policy initiatives around MIS and the Agricultural Commodity Exchange launched by Auction Holdings Limited. The distance between NASFAM and the consultants, however, limited the potential impact of the studies.

In Peru, JNC knew that many policies that affected the coffee sector had to be tackled through an intersectoral platform, the Convención Nacional del Agro Peruano (CONVEAGRO). Therefore, JNC used ESFIM activities to articulate the voice of these economic farmer organisations and to develop a pro-active advocacy agenda. This had an unexpectedly large effect on the advocacy strategies of the sector, when in November 2010 several of these economic organisations were elected to the board of CONVEAGRO, including its presidency, and could use its networks and reputation to take their agenda forward. To do so, JNC and CONVEAGRO combined evidence-informed advocacy to key persons in government and parliament with street demonstrations to put the issues on the political agenda. For example, JNC addressed the decision of the fiscal authorities to tax internal transactions between the organisation and its members. This would have severely affected both the cooperative banks and the coffee cooperatives. It took several years of advocacy to ultimately release the cooperatives from such fiscal constraints.

The focus of the ESFIM collaborative project in the Philippines was defined during a two-day workshop organised in February 2009. This workshop decided to do the collaborative research on a single objective: the implementation of an Agricultural Commodity Exchange System (ACES) to improve market transparency and efficiency. A joint assessment by the National Food Authorities (NFA) and other agricultural institutions, including the FFF of the shortcomings of previous initiatives concluded that it was necessary to open and share the formulation and the design of the ACES with all the stakeholders involved in agricultural marketing (agro-food industries, traders, farmers and NFA). In order to support and trigger discussions between the various stakeholders, NFA and FFF asked consultants to develop a simple game simulating how the system operates, including how transactions would be set up. Through these activities, FFF was also able to bring farmers' views and concerns into the ACES steering committee debate and provided key inputs on the potential impact of the projected ACES.

The National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) was established in 2001 by the Government of Uganda. It became part of wider policy reforms at the end of the 1990s, which aimed to alleviate widespread poverty by transforming the country's agriculture into a market-oriented, commercialised sector. UNFFE decided to undertake a survey to audit the effectiveness of legislation and policies that affected farmers, with specific reference to NAADS. Farmer groups that participated in NAADS, as well as some that did not, were interviewed about their experiences with NAADS during so-called 'fire-place meetings'. On the basis of these results, the consultant and two UNFFE members drafted a proposal ("A Green Print for NAADS reform"). UNFFE discussed this proposal with the Minister of Agriculture. The Minister assured the UNFFE that NAADS will revert to a focus on the provision of extension and advisory services. In addition, the Minister appointed UNFFE to the committee which is planning a new project under NAADS called 'Agriculture Technology and Agri-business Advisory Services'.

The focus of CAF was on the Innovation Policy that forms the backbone of Uruguay's support to the development of the private sector. The relevance of this theme was evidenced by the rapid development and growth in the Uruguayan agricultural sector. Uruguayan economic policies have innovation as their core objective. The board of CAF hired two senior consultants in July 2011, who undertook a range of interviews with the key persons in Uruguay's innovation system, assisted by an advisory board with delegates from CAF, ANII/INIAA and AGRINATURA. They selected three sector experts to conduct research on the innovation obstacles affecting cooperatives in agriculture, dairy, and livestock. Each sector has particular characteristics in terms of relative competitiveness of cooperatives and logistical

challenges in their value chains. The research made CAF-staff and the cooperatives aware of the value of their practices as innovation processes. As a result, innovation became prominent in CAF's public relation activities. In 2012, two high-level advocacy events were held, during which the cooperatives and CAF discussed the findings from the reports.

Monitoring change

In the last chapter of the book, we present the results of an exercise to assess the outcomes and impact of the ESFIM collaborative research support, using a theory-based evaluation method (Weiss 1997; Ton et al. 2011). As advocacy on market access issues in developing countries takes place in a dynamic and complex social environment and the participative process is inherently adaptive to changes in this environment, the monitoring and evaluation system had to be tailored to cope with changes and uncertainty (Morell 2010). In each country an initial 'logic model' for the ESFIM support was established. These models indicated how the research support inputs was expected to translate in terms of outcomes and impact and helped to discover the key assumptions in this causal reasoning. These logic models were adjusted regularly to reflect on-going dynamics in each country. The changes were reported to the project management to make sure that the planned dynamics still fell within the general objectives of ESFIM.

The ESFIM programme played its role in bridging the gap between the research community and national farmer organisations (NFOs) and specifically in providing research support to NFOs that strengthened their capacities to formulate feasible, evidence-based propositions for their focussed advocacy on smallholder market access. The programme delivered tailored outputs on issues prioritised by the NFOs. The work also contributed to learning on workable institutional mechanisms to bridge the gap between the different institutional cultures of research and NFOs.

ESFIM used this country-specific logic to design a system to track the impact of its activities in the future. We developed a graphic representation of the intervention logic that reflects the expectations of how the ESFIM programme impact on smallholder market access was realized. Advocacy activities benefit the economies of smallholder households indirectly. In the intervention logic it is assumed that advocacy will enable non-traditional marketing arrangements to emerge and expand (e.g., contract farming, niche marketing and collective marketing), bringing economic benefit to smallholder farmers. The ESFIM action sought to enhance social capital and to strengthen the capacities of farmer organisations and their networks, specifically in the context of organising market access for smallholders. To do so, ESFIM dedicated resources to research that sought to enhance the capacities of NFO partners to influence and shape a more conducive institutional environment. As such, partner NFOs will become more closely involved and proactive in contributing to the creation of public policy, research agendas and donor community programmes.

Ways forward

The ESFIM programme played its role in bridging the gap between the research community and national farmer organisations (NFOs) and specifically in providing research support to NFOs that strengthened their capacities to formulate feasible, evidence-based propositions for their focussed advocacy on smallholder market access. The programme delivered tailored outputs on issues prioritised by the NFOs. The work also contributed to learning on workable institutional mechanisms to bridge the gap between the

BOX 1

We developed a framework for funding four components that together can institutionalise and follow-up ESFIM collaborative research:

- **Participatory processes of policy generation.** Budget for NFOs to facilitate the elaboration of research proposals based on their advocacy needs, including the necessary participative processes of policy generation and targeted advocacy.
- **ESFIM Research Support Fund.** The fund has to be managed by an advisory team in each country, comprised of independent experts proposed by the national farmer organisation, the regional network in which they participate, and include at least one representative of a national research institute. The advisory team will review the quality and eligibility of submitted research proposals.
- **Backstopping.** International and national researchers can support the NFOs in the discussion on and drafting of the proposals submitted to the Research Support Fund, provide professional/technical backstopping to the funded research assignments, and help to link NFOs with relevant research outputs, networks, programmes and expertise.
- **Dialogue with the research community.** Through workshops and meetings with researchers and farm leaders, the NFOs need to link up with the wider on-going and relevant research undertaken by the national research system and locally represented international research institutes.

different institutional cultures of research and NFOs. The experience in ESFIM shows the positive value of linkages between farmer organisations and research to resolve challenges in smallholder engagement in value chains. It also provides lessons to fine-tune the modalities of farmer-led research.

To make collaborative research effective, the NFOs need to value the role of research to validate and refine their policy proposals. Organisations that already had an extensive trajectory of advocacy provided better conditions to focus the research activities than the organisations that had little experience in doing so. Through the ESFIM programme, all NFOs increased their experience with managing research assignments, articulating their research needs more precisely and discussing research outputs. They gained experience working with a wider group of researchers and consultants, and strengthened their relationships with the ones that have gained their trust and respect. We consider that ESFIM has been successful in triggering and facilitating these processes. These institutional arrangements require a sufficient time frame to build the confidence of both the researchers and NFOs in the synergy between research and evidence in the research community, as well as between advocacy and learning in the farmer community.

The experiences of ESFIM, documented in this book and presented in international fora like the Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD 2012), has drawn attention to the need for similar farmer-led collaborative research approaches in other research and development programmes. The ESFIM experience points to the need to earmark separate funding for NFO-led contracted research and for participatory processes, including planning and advocacy. For the former, we recommend the establishment of a Research Support Fund as a country-specific competitive fund, eligible to farmer organisations only, and to be used exclusively for contracting research support for them. The principles that guide this ESFIM follow-up, as highlighted in Box 1, may guide farmer organisations, development partners and research institutions to take forward their work in supporting and linking evidence based research with farmer-led advocacy to empower smallholder farmers in markets.

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