

CHIPATA DISTRICT FARMERS REPORT

ON

THE FINDINGS OF

THE 2007-8 FERTILIZER SUPPORT PROGRAM

Prepared by: Chipata District Farmers Association after a participatory Community Based Monitoring & Evaluation project

INTRODUCTION

Chipata District Farmers Association {CDFA} is a membership-based association representing small-scale farmers in Chipata District. CDFA's vision is of a self-sustaining farming community with secure livelihoods. Its mission is to unify, protect and empower small-scale farmers to lobby and advocate for pro-poor policies that promote secure livelihoods, poverty eradication and development.

Pursuant to its mission of empowering small-scale farmers, the association undertook a project to introduce the community based monitoring and evaluation system {CBMES} in chipata district. CBMES is a rights based approach which builds on the strengths of the local communities and empowers them to monitor and evaluate poverty reduction programs. In this project, CDFA empowered community monitors to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the 2007-8 fertilizer Support Program {FSP}

The need to undertake this project arose from the realization that FSP manual item 1.2 section iv has a provision for stakeholders like NGOs to monitor the implementation of the programme. There was also an out cry from the small scale farmers that the FSP was not benefiting the intended beneficiaries. Catholic Centre for Justice Development and peace {CCJDP}, now Caritas, also concluded that Co-operatives have done very little to improve food security and reduce poverty {CCJDP study, 2005} has not achieved the governments intended objective of helping small scale farmers to access inputs for increased food production largely because the beneficiaries have not been involved in the planning, implementation and most importantly, in the monitoring and evaluation of the program.

This report therefore brings to light the farmers' findings during the monitoring of the 2007-8 FSP and details recommendations from those monitored and from the beneficiaries themselves in a bid to chart the way forward in the implementation of the FSP.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The CDFA CBME project was funded by the Embassy of Finland.

Monitoring of the 2007-8 FSP started immediately after elected community monitors from all agricultural camps in Chipata were trained in participatory community based monitoring and evaluation. The project had the following objectives:

- 1) increased awareness among 91,507 rural farming communities on their civic rights to engage government in delivering quality agricultural services under decentralized local government for increased incomes and food security by mid 2008
- 2) improved participation of farmers, civil society, private sector and media in influencing FSP decision making processes in Chipata District by mid 2008
- 3) increased contribution of 20,251 rural female headed households in the FSP to narrow income differences between men and women in Chipata District by mid 2008

- 4) Lessons learnt shared and reported for scaling up monitoring and evaluation of other government programmes in Chipata District by mid 2008

The project covered all the 8 agricultural blocks of the district as demarcated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives {MACO} and had the full participation of the rural communities. CDFA facilitated the project along with other partners and stakeholders like the Civil Society for Poverty Reduction and MACO departments. It is worth noting that all the monitoring was based on the FSP implementation manual which gives guidelines on how the program should be implemented. Among the aspects monitored were: The selection criteria used for individual beneficiaries, selection criteria for participating cooperatives, selection criteria for participating transporters, gender considerations, managements of inputs at the co-operative level, transparency and accountability during input distribution by MACO and program management by private input distributors. Following are the findings of the participatory community monitoring.

FINDINGS OF THE MONITORING EXERCISE

The findings are consolidated from individual block monitoring findings in each of the 8 agricultural blocks thus while some findings are specific only to some blocks, most of the findings in this report are common and cut across the whole district. This report also comes after block public dialogues were held in each agricultural block to present and validate findings by community monitors to the whole community

1. Input prices were not announced in good time and therefore many farmers did not have time to mobilise resources for the 40% payment leaving out beneficiaries.
2. Late payments for farmers produce by the Food Reserve Agency {FRA} affected many farmers negatively because by the time input prices were announced, many of them had not received their payments from FRA and therefore could not make payments through their cooperatives or groups.
3. According to the FSP implementation manual, beneficiaries should be vulnerable small-scale farmers farming 1-5 hectares, however, some of these small-scale farmers are not able to afford payment for a full pack and are thus unable to access any inputs.
4. Urban cooperatives in Chipata town were allocated more inputs than cooperatives in the rural areas who are the real beneficiaries.
5. The majority of people including cooperative leaders are not aware of the existence of the FSP implementing manual which gives guidelines on the program.
6. The FSP implementation guidelines are not followed.
7. Bribery and corruption was common in all phases of input distribution.
8. Some beneficiaries came from outside the co-op catchment area and other people even managed to access inputs from more than one co-op
9. Co-operatives are big culprits in the gross mismanagement of the FSP and its no wonder that a previous study by the Catholic Church for Development, Justice and peace {CCJDP}, now Caritas, concluded that Co-operatives have done very little to improve food security and reduce poverty {CCJDP study, 2005}. Most of the Cooperative societies are not genuine. Following are some of the FSP findings at the cooperative level.

- Most of the cooperatives are not genuine. Some cooperatives are formed by family members
 - More cooperatives are found within and around town and are formed by working class people.
 - Cooperative leaders hide the actual number of packs allocated to the respective cooperative society. Leaders show very little transparency and accountability.
 - Some co-operatives were allocated more packs than their members or registered beneficiaries. In one such case, a co-operative was allocated 25 packs but members could only pay for 8 packs. The rest were bought by outsiders. Another cooperative was allocated 10 packs but members only bought 2 packs. The co-operative leaders then sell the remaining packs or divide them among themselves. This was found to be a breeding opportunity for corruption.
 - The rich in the co-operatives access more inputs
 - Co-operative leaders connive with government officials on the ground to either sell inputs or to mis-allocate them
 - Other cooperative leaders are so selfish that they allocate themselves more inputs than members regardless of the number of packs received. Many of these leaders use other members names to buy more inputs especially the names of those who cannot afford a pack
 - Some co-operatives were allocated very few packs despite having many paid up members who had paid for inputs and vice versa
10. Selection of transporters is not done according to the set guidelines and some transporters delay in delivering inputs to beneficiaries.
 11. Some transporters asked for bribes in order to give priority to some cooperatives.
 12. Some transporters mishandled inputs during loading and offloading due to either lack of supervision or because they transport inputs for different destinations at the same time. In Chankhadze block, inputs were said to be transported at night causing a lot of damage to the inputs
 13. There is a lot of congestion at the sheds which delays transportation of the inputs and breeds corruption.
 14. Many satellite depots were un operational thus beneficiaries had to travel long distances to collect their inputs or had to pay extra in transport costs.
 15. Some transporters were offloading inputs far from the intended destinations
 16. A lot of corruption was found to exist among some warehouse staff
 17. MACO, the implementing ministry was found to have many anomalies in the allocation and distribution of inputs. The implementation manual is not followed in selection of beneficiaries or transporters and other malpractices abound among their staff as below:
 - Block and Camp Extension officers {BEOs & CEOs} ask farmers for bribes during the selection process. In one area, the extension officers were said to ask for fuel.
 - The MACO staff arrange with cooperative leaders to allocate more inputs to where the extra is sold to outsiders

- BEOs and CEOs access inputs from many different cooperatives in different locations. In one such case, a BEO bought 6 packs from 3 different cooperatives. Another CEO refused to sign application forms unless allowed to access inputs from the cooperative.
 - There are cooperatives which are found within government ministries like MACO, ministry of Education, ministry of home affairs and these also accessed inputs.
 - Some staff from government ministries like MACO individually bought inputs from cooperatives using farmers' names.
18. The weight of some inputs was found to be under weight
 19. The seeds requested are not the ones provided instead poor quality seeds were given and in southern block the DK seeds given were expired
 20. The content of some input bags was found to be sand in Chanje and Southern blocks
 21. Many women groups accessed inputs meaning many women were beneficiaries in the 2007-8 FSP distribution
 22. Some farmers were reported to have accessed inputs but later sold them to fellow farmers and traders
 23. A trader in Chipata's down shops was reported to be selling inputs but when community monitors visited his premises, he claimed that he bought the same from farmers then resold.
 24. All through the monitoring exercise, the community monitors came across many cases of quantity of inputs not adequate, corruption among co-op leaders, MACO officials, transporters or at the warehouses and complains about FRA in connection to the FSP where farmers cant pay for inputs because their money is still held by FRA.
 25. In and around Chipata town, part time farmers who rent farms from peasants managed to access inputs through town co-operatives even though most of their farms fall below the required 1-5 Hectares.
 26. Uncertainty on the continuation of FSP was reported as cause of concern for most farmers who do not know whether the government will continue to provide inputs. During the distribution exercise, government announcements on added inputs and top-ups were unreliable and confusing to many. Number of packs allocated by the government is constantly being reduced. Last years allocations were less than expected by farmers and yet this years budgetary allocation is even lesser for the FSP.
 27. From the findings, it is clear that the beneficiaries have been excluded in the planning of FSP and have no choice in what inputs they receive or when they receive them and in what quantities. The program employs the top-bottom approach

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Agriculture plays a very important role in development. The agricultural sector alone contributes 20-22% of the national GDP and 67% of the country's labour force is employed by the sector. Of the total poverty reduction strategy plan {PRSP} budget of USD 1.2 Billion for 2002-2004, the agriculture sector received USD 173M {14%}, part of which was allocated to the FSP to build the capacities of the private sector and small holder producers during the transition when the government would gradually disengage itself from providing agricultural services. This not only shows the importance of the agricultural sector but also shows the government's commitment on the FSP and its objectives. In subsequent budgets, agricultural sector has continued to receive a substantial budget. Some quarters however have it that the 2008 budget did not have enough allocation for proper agricultural development.

In the Fifth national Development Plan {FNDP}, the agricultural sector is described as one of the driving engines for economic growth since a well performing agricultural sector means increased production, food security, increase in the country's wealth and contribution to employment generation. The goal of the agricultural sector in the FNDP is to promote increased agricultural productivity in order to ensure food security, income generation, creation of employment opportunities and reduction in poverty levels. The communities appreciate the efforts of the government to promote agricultural production through provision of subsidized inputs and through this project they have given their recommendations and the way forward on the FSP as below:

- 1) The price of inputs should be announced early enough to enable farmers to mobilize enough resources to pay for the inputs
- 2) Payment of inputs should be left open throughout the year so that small scale farmers can make payments for FSP inputs when they get their monies especially after sale of their tobacco and groundnuts from March.
- 3) The distribution exercise should commence around August/September so that farmers access the inputs in good time before the start of rains. This will also reduce transportation difficulties during rains.
- 4) Selection of beneficiaries should strictly be according to the FSP implementation manual to avoid corruption and other mal-practices
- 5) Participatory monitoring by the communities/beneficiaries must continue to curb corruption and mismanagement of the FSP. In fact independent monitoring by Non-governmental organizations and other bodies should be encouraged as it is provided for in the FSP implementation manual.
- 6) Corruption is a crime and therefore all those perpetuating it should be charged. Citizens should be encouraged to come forward without fear or favour and report all corruption practices.
- 7) The government should now employ the bottom-up approach and consult the beneficiaries during the planning and implementation of the FSP. Citizen participation will ensure that the beneficiaries are getting what they need, in the right quantities and at the most effective time.
- 8) The FRA is appreciated as a buying agent but beneficiaries want the agency to either pay for their produce in cash or pay in two installments. Some beneficiaries

- suggest that the FRA should be independently run or privatized. Whether this is possible or not, the message is that the FRA should be run better to benefit small scale farmers.
- 9) Inputs should be thoroughly inspected before being distributed to beneficiaries to check weight and content.
 - 10) 'You reap what you plant' and therefore farmers want to be given the good quality seeds that they request for not expired or poor quality ones.
 - 11) Community sensitization and education on the FSP should be carried out by MACO before payment of inputs by farmers. These will mitigate against ignorance which has been taken advantage of by some.
 - 12) The FSP implementation manual sets the guidelines for implementation and should therefore be popularized among the communities, co-operatives and local leaders.
 - 13) Close supervision and monitoring from the implementing ministry and other independent bodies should be done throughout the distribution exercise.
 - 14) Since a lot of corruption exists in warehouses, farmers recommend that the warehouses should be managed by a farmers organization or any independent institution chosen by the farmers.
 - 15) Co-operatives must be monitored. The activities and management of co-operatives must be checked by MACO to ensure that the co-operatives do not exist only for FSP and are not run by family members. It is the responsibility of the ministry to train co-operative leaders in various skills.
 - 16) The program should be well planned so that there is no uncertainty on its continuation or provision of inputs.
 - 17) Inputs must be allocated to co-operatives according to their membership; co-ops with few members should be allocated less packs while those with many members should get more. Inadequate quantity of inputs was cited as a big problem to beneficiaries some of who paid but did not access inputs.
 - 18) Satellite depots must be operational to enable beneficiaries to collect inputs without problems or walking long distances. This will also reduce other associated expenses like for transporters who charge extra to deliver inputs closer to beneficiaries.
 - 19) Since there are farmers who could not afford a full pack of inputs, there were calls that the FSP manual be revised to allow them pay for half packs while others want the manual revised to allow those farming less than 1 hectare to access inputs.
 - 20) Selection and screening of private transporters must be done according to the FSP manual which states that only transporters who have their own trucks be contracted. Beneficiaries also want the selected transporters to have their own loaders to reduce corruption at the loading sheds where transporters demand for extra money for loaders.
 - 21) Proper planning should be done to reduce congestion at the loading sheds which were reported to be a den for corruption due to congestion with transporters loading inputs all at the same time.

CONCLUSION

As per the findings and records from the District marketing and cooperatives {DMCO} office, 274 out of 625 cooperatives managed to access inputs under the FSP. A total number of 7 110 farmers accessed inputs. This is a small number of farmers as compared to the number of small scale farmers in Chipata district. It is not because the rest of the farmers did not need the inputs but because the government did not allocate enough packs. This can be attributed to the top-bottom approach that the government is employing where the farmers are not consulted to know how much inputs they need on the ground and when they need it. Many beneficiaries agree that FSP is a poverty reduction program which has good objectives but has in the past failed to achieve the objective of improving food security and reducing poverty due to poor planning, mis-management and lack of proper monitoring and evaluation. This project has therefore concluded that the biggest reason why the program has not achieved its objective of improving food security and reducing poverty is because of lack of community participation in its planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This lack of participation by the communities/beneficiaries has led to less packs being allocated to beneficiaries, corrupt practices and lack of transparency and accountability in the implementation of the program.

Beneficiaries and all those interviewed agree that the FSP is a good program for the small scale farmer and the government should continue with it BUT with revised management and implementation where guidelines are revised and strictly followed.

Chipata District Farmers Association {CDFA} wishes to thank the Embassy of Finland for funding this important project and appreciates the government's implementation of the FSP. The association further thanks the government for allowing the monitoring exercise in the district and hopes that the findings and the recommendations tabled in this report will help in improving the implementation of the FSP. It is envisaged that if the recommendations herein are taken into consideration, the government, stakeholders and the beneficiaries can chart the way forward in the implementation of the FSP for it to achieve its well intended objectives. CDFA also thanks all its members especially the community monitors who championed this monitoring exercise and went further to compile reports, collect and disseminate information and hold block dialogues to table findings to the community.