

STATUS BRIEF FOR FARMER EMPOWERMENT/ORGANISATIONS

Background

The Research into-Use programme intends to help address widespread concern that much Natural Research outputs have not been utilised effectively. RIU is guided by an “innovative systems” approach on the understanding that innovation systems approach will prove more effective than linear approaches at getting research into use for the benefit of the poor.

The main focus of Malawi RIU is to strengthen the demand for research-based knowledge and to strengthen those organisations and enterprises that are able to provide services between the suppliers of knowledge and those that need to use it for innovation. Malawi RIU is designed on building on already existing RIU-type activities and promotes them over the life of the programme.

The agricultural sector in Malawi remains confronted with the problems of low yields, over-dependence on rain-fed farming, low level of irrigation development, and despite a seed and fertilizer subsidy programme, low use of improved farm inputs. As a result smallholder agriculture remains largely unprofitable. This low profitability has been exacerbated by weak links to markets, high transport costs, and few functioning farmer organisations at grass root level, poor quality control and lack of information on appropriate technologies, markets and prices.

Lack of strong farmer organisations was identified as one of the key strategic priority areas in the Malawi RIU. Strong farmer organisations at all levels have a critical role to play in increasing smallholder’s productivity and livelihoods, improving competitiveness and increasing bargaining power for markets, services and improving the policy environment.

The vision for M-RIU therefore includes the empowerment of farmers through strengthening of smallholder farmer organisations to become truly representative of their members to provide equal opportunities and benefits for all members; play an effective role on commodity-based innovation platforms negotiating as equal partners, articulating their demands and holding each other accountable; provide greater benefits to members than operating individually.

The purpose of the status brief on farmer empowerment learning group is:

- To provide M-RIU with a concise starting point for its future work in relation to farmer empowerment;

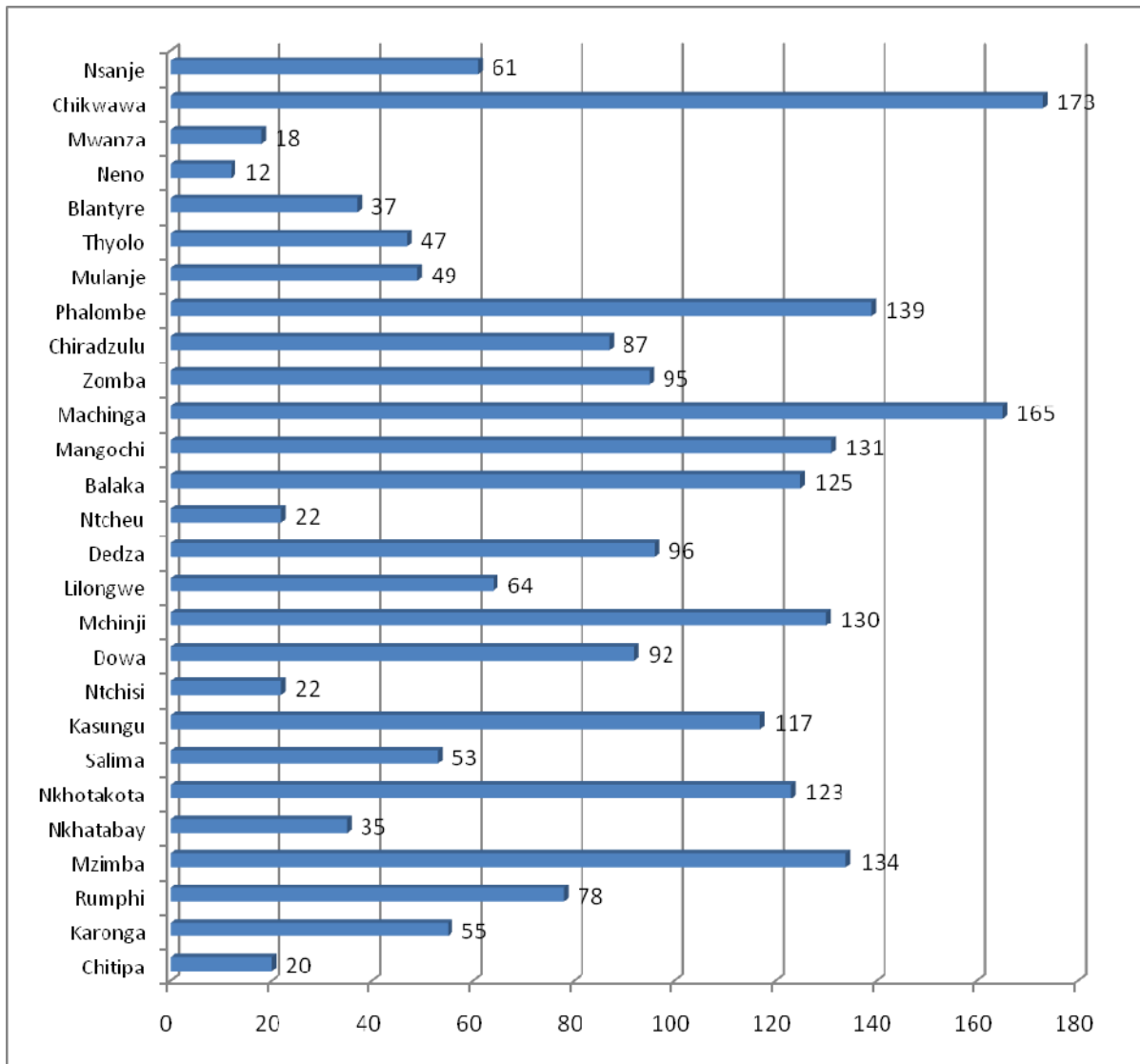
- To brief the proposed farmer empowerment/organisation learning group about major issues on which they should consider working in relation to farmer empowerment.

Legal context

Legally, farmer organisations are guided by two laws in Malawi: the Cooperative Societies Act of 1998 under the Ministry of Trade and Private Sector Development and the 2000 Trustees and Incorporation Act under the Ministry of Justice.

Number of Farmer Organisations

In 2007, there were a total of 2,180 farmer organisations in Malawi. Chikwawa had the highest number of farmer organisations with 173 farmer organisations while Neno had the least number of farmer organisations with 12 farmer organisations.



Farmer organisations by core commodities

There is great variation in terms of number of core commodities that most farmer organisations handle.

As shown in table, half of the farmer organisations handle maize. Being a multipurpose crop, some farmer organisations could be specialising in maize to boost both household food and income security.

The other major commodities are high value crops: tobacco (8.8%), groundnuts (8.4%), poultry (6.5%), rice and cassava (5.6%) each. This means farmers come into groups to boost their economic security through bulk production and selling of high value crops.

Commodity	Proportion of Farm Organisations handling commodity
All Commodities	100%
Maize	50.4%
Groundnuts	8.4%
Rice	5.6%
Cassava	5.6%
Irish potatoes	2.7%
Tobacco	8.8%
Cotton	4.2%
Sugar	0.6%
Tea	0.1%
Wheat	0.2%
Cattle	2.3%
Goat	3.1%
Pigs	1.3%
Sheep	0.2%
Poultry/chickens	6.5%

Type of partnerships

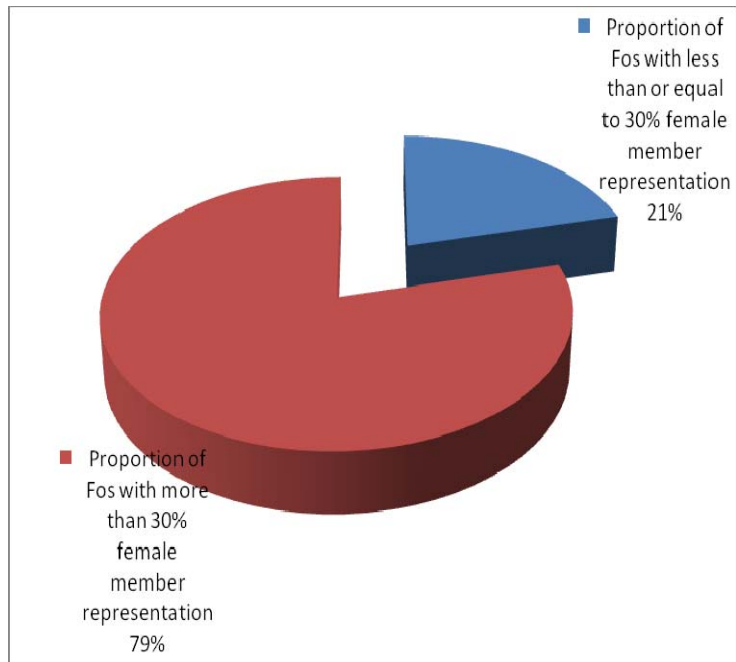
In order to acquire skills, farmer empowerment organisations enter into partnerships with other institutions. Table on the right show that the majority of the farmer organisations (46.7%) did not go into partnership with other organisations. This could have a positive impact on sustainability of the farmer organisation in that they have little support and hence implies they are self reliant. On the other hand this could mean lack of skills for the farmer organisations to negotiate partnership agreements and memorandum of understanding.

Type of institution FO has partnership with	No. of FO	Percent
Farmer organisation	194	8.9
Private	195	8.9
Public	269	12.3
Other	503	23.0
None	1019	46.7

Gender representation in farmer organisations

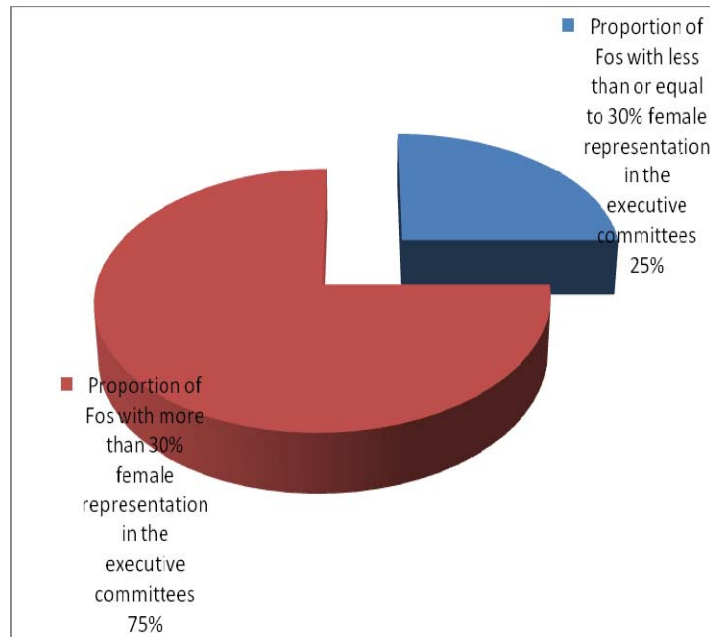
Participation of women in different activities is critical to ensure that women issues are addressed in the farmer organisations.

As shown in figure below, 79% of the farmer organisations had more than 30% representation of women in their total membership while 21% of the farmer organisations had less than 30% representation of women in their total membership.



Proportion of women in farmer organisations

Furthermore, women also need to be part of the decision making process in these farmer organisations. Figure below indicate that 75% of the farmer organisations have more than 30% representation in the executive committees, while 25% have less than 30% women representation in the executive committees.



List of actors

Organisations that are involved in farmer empowerment in one way or the other include FUM, NASFAM, MALEZA, ASMAG, GALA, World Vision, FIDIP, IRLAD, IDAF, NGOs, I-life, MoAFS, TAMA

Achievements

1. Formation of FUM as an umbrella organisation for all farmer organisations
2. Farmers have recognised the importance of working together through associations for better commodity price negotiations and access to inputs

Key issues in farmer organisations

1. What is the definition of farmer empowerment? What do we expect farmers to do when they are empowered?
2. Most farmer organisations are not sustainable if measured by a composite indicator of representation, governance and business. A 2007 study revealed that only 1% of farmer organisations are sustainable while 52% are average (meaning that the

farmer organisation is moving towards sustainability or towards non-sustainability) and 47% of farmer organisations are not sustainable.

3. Overreliance on donors for running farmer organisations functions. Most farmer organisations would collapse after donor withdrawal. For instance, about only 15% of NASFAM costs are financed by own resources while the other 85% is financed by donors.
4. Lack of technical capacity among farmer organisations including FUM relative to their mandates.
5. Lack of extension staff to support farmers and need NGOs and other organisations to train extension staff and not leave responsibility to government. There are 700 farm families for each one extension worker.
6. Ineffectiveness of farmer organisations as channels for market information sharing between farmers and other stakeholders in some commodity value chain.
7. Farmer organisations need to share their vision and values with all members
8. Farmers not actively participating in policy development processes.
9. Changing the mindset of farmers to run farming as a business and not think government will do everything for them. Farmers should produce according to what the market demands.
10. Culture of farmer organisations working in isolation instead of partnership arrangements with other organisations. One association cannot do everything because certain things are better done by other organisations.
11. Lack of coordination among farmer organisations at national level. NASFAM as one of the major farmer organisations is not a member of FUM.