IMPROVING SUNFLOWER PRODUCTION AND REDUCING POST-HARVEST LOSSES

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A project in Singida, Tanzania, is working with smallholder producers to stimulate market-based agriculture. To increase the quantity and quality of products available for the market and address poverty in the region, the project focuses, in particular, on overcoming the barriers smallholders face to participating profitably in the sunflower market.

Strategic implementation

Mellon Consult(s) Tanzania Limited is a private company that deals with capacity building and empowering smallholders. They were contracted by the Manyoni District Council to increase the capacity of poor rural households in Singida to gain effective access to financial services, and to provide them with the market linkages they need to ensure household food security and increased per person income.

In contrast to earlier initiatives undertaken to deal with such problems, the main objective of the Singida project was not only to increase the quantity and quality of products available for market, but also to address income poverty by dealing with the factors that limit sunflower market access. Sunflowers are among the most prominent crops in Singida, where land, climate and other environmental factors favour their growth. The Singida people depend on sunflower oil and seed cake business for their livelihoods.

In Tanzania, the smallholder producer sector continues to be a major source of employment; on the mainland, 75% of the labour force works in agriculture. These rural producers tend to be resource poor, have limited food security and income, and are primarily engaged in cultivating staple crops.

A project based in Singida, established by the government of Tanzania under the Market Infrastructure and Value Added, Rural Finance (MIVARF) programme, set out to address the factors that prevent rural producers from fully exploiting the potential of their holdings. These include their limited access to financial services as well as the region’s poor market infrastructure. Running since 2011, the project has been financially supported by the International Fund for Agriculture and Development (IFAD) and the African Development Bank.

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Eight out of ten producers accepted the new harvesting technologies suggested, and the collective procurement has had a positive effect.

and financial resources and take measures to improve their quality of life. Seventy-seven sunflower producer groups of between 15 and 30 members in the Manyoni district were organised in ways that enabled them to coordinate their efforts and resources. In addition to these farmer-oriented activities, traders and processors also received training designed to help increase their managerial and financial skills. Two representatives from each of the 77 groups were nominated by their members to attend a training-of-trainers (TOT) session to help those continuing project activities for ensured sustainability.

**The sunflower value chain**

In Singida, specific attention has been given to meeting the growing market demand for sunflower seed. Steps are being taken to enable farmers to take advantage of

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**A success story**

Andrea Robert, one of the beneficiaries of the project, has had an active and positive involvement in activities and has become an ambassador to his colleagues. From the start, Mr. Robert attended the project’s sensitisation meetings. During the first visit to his village in November 2015, he showcased what he was doing and was later appointed by his group to represent them at the 2-days TOT session organised by the project team at Itigi in October 2016. Furthermore, Mr. Robert was also actively involved in the stakeholders’ forum held at Manyoni district’s conference hall, which was attended by 97 participants. The photograph above of Mr. Robert was taken during a regional supervisory committee visit to his demo plot, and he can be seen explaining the benefits of the project’s interventions, especially those related to land management, seedling spacing, harvesting and post-harvest handling.

*Andrea Robert*
the fact that the soil and other physical characteristics of the region favour sunflower production.

To meet the increasing demand for sunflower seed means not only dealing with problems associated with the underutilisation of land, but also making adequate storage facilities available. Among the first steps taken to increase the strength and sustainability of the sunflower value chain was to identify and bring together key players. These included producers, processors, buyers, financial institutions and government officials, as well as experienced service providers from other areas.

In October 2016, a forum committee consisting of 12 members involved in the sunflower value chain was established, and a meeting was organised. Ninety-seven stakeholders who would also be actively involved in the development of project activities were also selected and invited to join the forum. Although some stakeholders were reluctant to be involved because no allowances were paid, the general atmosphere during the forum meeting stimulated enthusiastic discussions about how improvements in sunflower production and marketing could be realised. “Strict regulations will be established by local government authorities to remove illegal buyers, and marketing centres will be established so that the government gets its right revenue and producers enjoy the right buyers”, said Ally Minja, the Itigi district chairman.

The involvement of local leaders, producers and processors in the forum meeting, and the subsequent discussions, substantially contributed to increasing farmer confidence in the project objectives and in the approach being adopted. During the stakeholders’ forum, Mr Luende, district executive director said that “all ward chancellors and village executive officers are to include road and water system construction in their annual budget. This will help ease market access and reaching storage facilities”.

In 2012, post-harvest losses of cereals and sunflower seeds was estimated to be between 15% and 25%. This had a powerful negative effect on the prices farmers received for their products. Farmer groups that had been organised by the project set about working to ensure that by 2018, post-harvest losses would be reduced by at least 10%. Special attention is therefore being given to improving farmers’ bargaining power and negotiating skills so they can take advantage of collectively buying inputs, and be able to deal more effectively with middlemen who buy their quality products at very low prices.

The learning by practice approach has played an important role in all capacity building activities. For example, selected ‘lead’ farmers already adopting the technologies have been actively involved in transferring these skills to their farmer colleagues and farmer representatives. Of particular importance has been showing farmers how to calculate the amount they were losing per acre, given current practices, and how this affected their income.

Farmer Field Schools involving agricultural extension officers were also organised to coach farmers in best farming and harvesting practices. While in general many farmers took advantage of the changes being introduced, there were some who were reluctant to cooperate because they expected immediate returns. Developing policies that would secure further sustainable developments in this sector proved difficult. Policy makers were slow to react to the project proposals. It was not easy to reach agreement with those in policy making positions, despite the fact that the Ministry of Agriculture strongly encourages the development of policies that would facilitate this type of initiative.
Project activities designed to improve the way agricultural products were being harvested and packaged, in combination with the construction of a 1,000 t capacity warehouse, have led to an initial 5% reduction in post-harvest losses and an improvement in incomes and living standards. This has encouraged farmers to start saving to improve their financial stability. “Ukihifadhi mazao yako ghalani kwa muda wa miezi mitatso kwanza utahaonezea dhamani kwa kuwa sehemu salama, kuondokana na wadudu waaribifu, na pia kuyauza kwa bei nzuri kurupia kisicho cha msimu,” said Rebeca Mathayo, Chairperson for the Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Society at a Muhanga Village meeting in 2016. She shared a view held by most participants: that when you store your cereal in a warehouse, first you avoid risk in many ways, and you will also add value by selling the produce at a higher price when the produce is out of season.

**Main achievements**

Eight out of ten producers accepted the new harvesting technologies suggested, and the organisation of the collective procurement of inputs has had a positive effect on production costs. Farmers’ products can now be stored in the recently constructed warehouse and this has contributed to minimising post-harvest losses. On average, farmers can now produce seven bags of sunflower seeds per acre instead of four.

With improvements in product quality and collective marketing, arrangements have been made with TFDK – a private sunflower seed processing and packaging company – to buy all the produce from the project’s focal area. In addition, private investors have shown an interest in investing in activities, such as supplying post-harvest materials including canvas and weighing scales, as well as other agricultural inputs.

Financial service providers have also started negotiating with smallholders about how to deal with the warehouse receipt system, even if this has taken long as the warehouse receipt system is risky and failed in some areas. Currently, the project is trying to convince the Tanzania Agricultural Development Bank (TADB) to become involved in the warehouse system receipt system in the project area. Two major banks – the National Microfinance Bank and CRDB plc – have chosen not to participate because they have had bad experiences with a similar system in the past.

The TADB, established by the government to improve agricultural and rural livelihoods, could be in a position to support the warehouse receipts operation. The project’s positive impacts are on farmers’ income and food security, in addition to the fact that the Government of Tanzania has removed tax on selected agricultural inputs – in line with its decision to work towards improving the livelihoods of rural people – and this has had a positive impact on those involved in project activities. Lead farmers and extension workers are actively encouraging and organising smallholder producers in an effort to extend the impact seen.