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Capacity building for Rural People in Africa:
Policy agenda for improved focus on capacity building
Issues, strategies and actions

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1. Introduction

Rural people in Africa send their children to school with an objective that their children exit the rural community. They rear them to aspire for white-collar jobs. Parents and the children aim at, devote for, and value their performance at schooling in line with this objective.

Education policies and institutions in Africa have the same line of thought. The contents of the education curricula, the art of teaching, role-models being portrayed to the students, examples and other teaching aids, test and exam questions are carefully designed to produce students who may make it to universities and finally to white-collar jobs. The behaviour and perception of rural communities, parents' mentality and national education policies as well as students and educators themselves do not make connections between education and improved rural-life activities. The rift between production activities of the communities such as farming, livestock keeping, apiculture, forestry, horticulture, etc., and the role of education in adding value to these activities has never been an agenda either of the policy makers, parents or students themselves.

The sad fact is that less than 20 % of the students who complete basic education make it to universities and fewer get the white-collar job that they have aspired and got prepared for. More than 80 % of the students go back to rural communities to face the community that undermines them and the rural life activities for which they are no better than their parents. The failure of national education policy is not limited to the failure of 80% of the students' populations in the rural areas, the worst is its failure in adding value and improvement to farmers' productions and food security of the rural communities.

The later part is well enforced by the national economic development policies and/or implementation emphasis that wrongly equate food security to food-self-sufficiency on one-to-one basis. Consequently, budgetary and manpower allocation, schooling at tertiary level and institutional portfolios almost entirely focus on maximizing agricultural production and productivity (mainly foodcrops). They neglect the value addition and marketing aspects of the produces of the rural communities which could have offered off-farm job opportunities for the children and better cash income for improved livelihoods and food security. The policy agenda suggested here for improvement explains these issues.

2. Education policies, strategies and priorities and their impact on food security

The skills and approaches needed for poverty eradication and employment generation while addressing the environment, energy, and rural and urban development issues have evolved into multidimensional and multisectoral issues. Accordingly, they require rural development and education policies, which create up-to-date and down-to-earth professionals, with complementary institutional approaches. Policies that promote capacity building efforts tailored separately for each sector are ineffective, given the mounting complexity of economic development.

More so, the capacity building need for rural people in Africa is not more on theoretical understanding, which has been mostly so. Policies need to focus on building competence in off-farm skills and technologies connected to improvement of their on-farm productions. Capacity building policies that promote attitudinal and behavioural changes are equally important issues.

As it stands today, education for rural people in Africa did not adequately expose students to the benefits of linking off-farm job opportunities to land-based developments. Yes, supermarkets are mushrooming and national and regional markets are becoming more and more selective to quality, quantity of various agricultural products. Yet, education is not contributing to having the competences required for benefiting from these opportunities. Communities and individuals do not have the facilities and the competence to maintain the quality of their produce. They neither have the facilities nor the competence to process and/or preserve their products for increased shelf life. Capacity building issues for enabling farmers to come together and take collective action in planning and producing the same type of production for efficacy and credibility issues are often not addressed in the schooling systems. The success of organizing small-scale farmers into cooperatives for supplying farm products at economic size has shown failure in many instances.

Another major problem is a mindset issue. As much as parents' and students' mindset is valuing education as an exit strategy from the rural communities for qualifying to a white-collar job, government policies in Africa, for the most part, equate food security to food-self-sufficiency. They promote production for consumption neglecting the capacity needed for meeting market standards and marketing products for cash. This mindset of education and development policies in paying due attention to maximizing production and productivity for consumption alone prevails to this date even after the new world order has demanded specialization and complementarities.

Policy backing, budgetary emphasis and educational set-up continued to focus on the same line of thought. Supportive issues such as value-addition and marketing expertise, which could have helped in dislodging the farmers' children from already burdened land, remain neglected. At the same time, many agree and research from Kenya (Paswel, P.m. et al. 2003) confirms that households can not climb solely through growth in farm productivity when farms are too small in size. It further states that remunerative non-farm employments are necessary for income growth and also for investment in agricultural intensification. These all confirm that capacity building policies are needed to change strategies and back tailored generation and transfer of skills, awareness creation and sensitization roles both for off-farm and on-farm value addition interventions.

In conformity to the national policies that give emphasis and support to mainly agricultural production, capacity building policies in the region have also marginalized value addition and marketing sectors that could have increased the importance of farmers' productions. The following are few of such neglects.

- Capacity building policies so far, did not remedy the fact that education, awareness creation and development attitudes has remained within the production sector alone leaving out the service and industry sectors. Some farmers have a strong attitude that credible- farmer should not purchase food from the market.
- Because of lack of policy attention and strong policy backing, education in the value addition, marketing and service sectors remained weak and unable to provide job opportunities for school leavers and young farmers living in rural areas. Production of foodcrop remained as the mainstay of rural communities making land extremely overburdened.
- Education policies do not promote training and education in areas such as preservation, manufacturing, primary processing, quality grading, standardization, certification, branding, packaging and storage of farmers' produces even at tertiary education level. Such expertises are almost unknown to farmers' children to aspire for them. For instance (Bekele-Tesemma, A. 2004) reports that out of 92 % of the youth population in Amhara region (Ethiopia) who are interested in getting trained in 'basic skills' such as mechanics, installers, and other technical skills; construction, trade and occupation skills; production skills; marketing and sales skills; administrative and support skills; service skills; transportation and material moving skills; 85 % of them do not see policy prospects for getting trained in either of the above group of basic skills in the foreseeable future. Even when few get

trained in such off-farm skills that are necessary for connecting farm production to market, getting recognition is difficult due to lack of awareness on the benefits of these non-farm skills in rural areas..

- Capacity building policies continue to focus only on crop production maximizing competition for cropland. Marginal lands become cultivated beyond their potential. Environmental damage continues resulting in environmental hostilities.
- Capacity building policies that promote mindset changes that are required for appreciating the value of bulking production and forming commodity groups for market accountability and collective management are hard to trace. Policies are still entrenched in promoting fragmented and individual efforts in local food-self-sufficiency.

As a result, the contribution of capacity building efforts in Africa to food security is much below its potential. The fact-based story coined in the box in the following pages illustrates these shortcomings. New capacity building focus for Africa needs to be enshrined at policy level and it should be hand in hand with the overall change of policy focus in the national economic development. Countries need to reverse the situation with economic development policies that promote strong linkage between on-farm production and off-farm employment opportunities. Likewise, appropriate capacity building strategies, priorities and actions need to be prepared in support of such policy changes. Equally important policy agenda is enhancement of complementarities and synergy between institutions and professions of production, value addition, marketing, infrastructure and rural institutional building.

3. Current situation of rural development and capacity building

a) Linking production with livelihood challenges

The economy of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa is based on agricultural production and livestock keeping that both are sources of food commodities. They enjoy relatively the highest development and education backing too. Yet, food security and quality of livelihoods in the region continues to decline each year. This increased demand for food and absolute dependence of the majority of the population on food-based production alone as a mainstay has forced rural people to cultivate even marginal lands.

No doubt, much effort has been made to overcome poverty in Africa by committed involvement of national governments, and multilateral and bilateral donors with no change of focus from that of maximizing food production for consumption. For instance, the response to the great famine of 1974 in Ethiopia was embarking on massive land reclamation as a resource base for maximizing agricultural production and productivity. Almost 30 million person-day labour and \$20 was spent per year for no less than 10 years consecutively. At the end, Ethiopia did not win in food security. Likewise, many sub-Saharan African countries have not overcome poverty in this similar policy and strategy. Many still sleep with an empty stomach and these many are often rural communities living by agricultural production. Every one of us is thrilled with the challenge the problem has posed. It requires a new look to the obvious problem and strategy for a new solution. .

It is reported in many instances that there is enough food for all of us in the world. The African scenario, for the most part, is not different. There are places, even in the same countries, where food is in plenty while in other sections of the same countries, people are dying from hunger. Therefore, the development policy attention to food security needs to promote ways and means by which rural infrastructures (roads, markets, etc.) can be in place and by which purchasing power of the rural people can be improved.

b) Targeting capacity building efforts

The purchasing powers of rural communities do not have to come from food-based productions alone. Many of the forestry products, medicinal, aromatic, spice and condiments, horticultural plants, the apiculture and floriculture assets, eco-tourism, and many more could be important sources of cash.

Unfortunately, capacity building efforts are not focused to development and marketing of such economic sources. Many of the products are being processed using the same traditional processing tools. For instance, *Rhamnus* (commercial plant for local brewery in Ethiopia) is being pounded to powder for market using the same kind wooden mortar used thousands years ago in a wasteful, tiresome and laborious way.

Experience from developed nations and from countries of emerging economy in Asia has shown that the victory in gaining food security can best be achieved if all exert efforts to build the capacity of rural communities in skills and approaches that can help to link their productions to market and generate cash income. This, of course necessitates supportive infrastructures, energy, institutions and policy environments that need to be addressed side by side.



In this new market-focused look, capacity building efforts and development policies and strategies need to enhance strategic efforts towards building farmers' economic access to food. Both education and development policies need to back and promote off-farm employment and skilful development possibilities.

**Past capacity Building emphasis and facilitations problems as explained in the letters between
Subject Matter Specialist (SMS) and development agent**

Dear SMS,

Farmers in my area have argued for market-based production and requested for guidance on selecting economically advantageous crops that can make their produce suitable for national and regional markets. You know that there is nothing on this subject in my training or extension package. They have decided to produce honey, paprika, *Rhamnus*, garlic and a woodlot of commercial species. They insist they will buy grain from the cash return they obtain by selling these high-value crops. Is this not against our food-self-sufficiency policy?

They also have asked me for value-added seed; an improved bee stock and improved germplasm of commercial seedlings. Do we have these improved versions for distribution? They are planning to buy them on credit. Do we have credit facilities for such developments? They aim at using the honey to produce *Tej*. They believe *Tej* production will economically empower their women. The commercial woodlots are planned for production of fencing staves, roof shingles, transmission poles, floorboards and construction planks for marketing in our neighbouring countries. Additional issues:

They ask me for preservation, grading, certification and branding support on their products. What are the national, regional and global quality standards, grading, certification and branding procedures for garlic, paprika, *tej* and the wood products?

The *Rhamnus* product has been in markets for centuries; but, manufacturers do not have any processing tools or equipment that can process it. What kind of support can I give them on this?

As I am the only change agent for them, they count on me to link them with all the professionals who can help in these. If I do not help them in these issues they will not consider me as a credible development agent, I am frustrated. It looks I should have been trained differently. May I get your support on all?

Yours truly, DA Yeshewanesh from Tikurso Sub-watershed

The SMS responds,

Dear Yeshiwaneh, I regret to say it; none of these was covered in my education either. I do not think the head of departments is competent too. It is a fact that the capacity building focused on the production alone. I promise to communicate your problems to the highest authority.

With thanks, Yidenekachew.

There is wishful development intention for agri-business in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the emphasis for establishment of educational institutions and allocations of budgets and other essential inputs for the

production of critical mass of professionals are limited. As a result, the number of professionals who can effectively work on off-farm skills and connect production to marketing is extremely small. For rural communities to be engaged in off-farm activities that connect productions to marketing development of recognition of value addition and marketing and production skilled manpower in these fields need prior policy attention.

4. Alliances and partnerships

The Strengthening Institutions theme of World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) has been focusing on strengthening national agricultural research, development, education and systems, as well as in inter-institutional collaboration. It centres on strengthening human resources capacity for development of enabling policies; credible strategy, programs and modes operandi; physical resources institutional power/voice, and links with clients, peers and stakeholders in the area of agroforestry for rural livelihoods.

World Agroforestry Centre has fostered the development of two major networks that support educational institutions throughout Africa and Asia. These institutions incorporate multi-disciplinary approaches to land mangment into curricula and develop and improve teaching and learning resources and techniques in INRM. With regards to promoting the link between institutions and professions for linking on-farm production with off-farm value addition, marketing and policy (Link ProVaMP), national professional forums are being supported and strengthened in Eastern and Central Africa.

In this regard, experiences on how to synergize and complement one another may be shared to agricultural, capacity building and education ministries who are currently functioning independently. The major weakness is lacking synergy among activities being handled by various ministries. Creation of synergy-units within such ministries that promote complementarities becomes essential. Experts in farmers' productions, foreign and domestic trade, industry, energy, marketing and business, quality standards, education, and environmental concerns, as well as information and communications, may build a joint forum where they need to know one another and develop methodologies for complementarily contributing to the rural wellbeing. Such coordination mechanisms need to be introduced. Then, the territorial sentiments of the professionals created by the ministerial compartmentalization, becomes tailored towards synergy and success in waging a successful battle against food insecurity in Africa.

5. Priority areas of collaboration among ministries of Education and Agriculture

Farmers and their children have expanded their production by tilling whatever land has been available, including forest and marginal lands. Market and value-adding sectors have lagged behind as rural communities have depended solely on tilling such lands. The land has become overburdened, severely degraded and holdings fragmented into pieces that are no longer of economic size. People have become poorer and poorer. Environment continued to be more and more abused responding in hostility. This is not to be tackled effectively with out inter-institutional collaborations.

Because agricultural marketing—globally, regionally or even nationally—is not at the forefront of the economic development strategy, in sub-Saharan Africa, developing a common language and an understanding of quality grading and standards has not been included enough in the food security campaign. Therefore, even if the region is now to embark on market-focused food security efforts, it must race at double pace; and, this can only be achieved if there is functional inter-institutional collaboration.

The fact that the natural resource base is being depleted rapidly for foodcrop production in sub-Saharan Africa is an additional root cause of failure in the food security campaign. Continuous cultivation of cereals in response to diminishing farm size and declining quality of the land is perhaps the most important cause. Farmers cultivating small plots cannot produce the surplus required for them to invest in improving the land and using new technologies.

Increasing the attention to improving the off-farm job opportunities in the value adding and marketing sectors has become a necessity not a choice. It will help farmers in getting better income from their agricultural production for other livelihood expenses such as medication, schooling, nutritious food, hygienic clothing, improved shelter, and intensified land management.

The major issue in the economic development strategy of Africa is what direction to take and which institutions to contribute what complementarily. Past efforts were underlain by fragmented, isolated and piecemeal efforts and were not productive. If development and education for rural people is to make a difference in food security and improved way of life, the following are few priority agenda items that need policy backing and inter-institutional collaboration.

- Enhancing education and awareness creation efforts at all levels for aiming at dislodging the farmers' children from the already overburdened and an economical size of land and changing the mindset of institutions and the general public to 'production-for-marketing' in the overall economic development strategy rural people in Africa.
- Promoting and assisting in the establishment of mandated institutions that can mainstream market focused development and capacity building ideals in the line activities of governmental institutions, NGOs, civil society organizations and private entrepreneurs.
- Strengthening cash earning possibilities of the rural communities from off-farm activities that add value to their on-farm productions
- Strengthening value addition, marketing, infrastructure and other service delivery activities as off-farm job possibilities for farmers' children and gradually disconnecting them from the already overburdened and uneconomical size of land.
- Providing capacity building support in instituting the link between farmers' Production, Value addition, Marketing, supportive infrastructure and policy (Link ProVaMP) promotion units in each of the GO, NGO, Civil Societies, and the private sector institutions
- Allocation of balanced budgetary resources, manpower, institutional backing and government portfolio for the capacity building, value addition, marketing sector efforts.
- Selection and focus, by eco-regions, on economically advantageous resources that effectively penetrate market, offer multitude of job opportunities and generate cash income for the rural communities
- Promote, support and institute synergistic efforts in linking production, value addition, marketing and business, community-based organizations, and policy at all levels.
- Boosting professional morale and promote all stakeholders to come together to form units that will enhance links. (all these as above)

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