

Transfer of Governance and Partnership Skills Among Producer Marketing Organizations in Uganda

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Leaders of farmer-owned producer marketing organizations have received training in governance and partnership management. Research has shown, however, that receiving training does not necessarily result in knowledge transfer or use in the workplace unless certain conditions are fulfilled. The study presented in this brief was conducted to determine the factors and processes that affect the transfer of governance and partnership management skills for leaders of producer marketing organizations and to determine whether transferred skills enhance the prospects of long-term development and sustainability of the organizations. Results from qualitative interviews with leaders of the producer marketing organizations revealed that there was a moderate to high degree of transfer of governance and partnership management skills. This was due to a highly participatory and motivating training approach, opportunity to practice, close supervision, and built-in accountability structures. Most organizations exhibited positive prospects for long-term development and sustainability. Indicators of potential sustainability included formation of associations at higher levels, diversifying marketable agricultural products, initiating savings and credit schemes, and expanding membership.

Background

Producer marketing organizations (PMOs) are member-owned non-formal organizations that bring together smallholder farmers to access markets through produce bulking and to receive various services (Shiferaw et al., 2006). They are critical in poverty alleviation among smallholder farmers. As relatively new institutions, these member-owned collectives require sound governance and partnership skills to manage themselves and to deal with external actors such as markets and input providers. Governance is essential in ensuring member ownership, involvement and commitment to the collective marketing goals. Conversely, the obligation to work with buyers, input suppliers and service providers underscores the need for partnership management skills. Leaders of the producer marketing organizations are therefore targeted with training in governance and partnership management. The trainees are expected to transfer these skills to their workplace.

Transfer of training to the workplace. Training researchers and practitioners have been concerned that most of the training conducted for organizations is not transferred or used at the workplace (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). The term ‘transfer of skills or training’ refers to the application of knowledge, skills and attitudes obtained in a training context to the job or workplace over a period of time. It is the extent to which the learning obtained from training sessions is applied and maintained on the job to increase performance and productivity (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Sofo, 1999). Three main factors

affect the transfer of training to the workplace: training design, individual trainee characteristics, and the work environment characteristics. Training design relates to the way training materials are presented to facilitate cognitive retention by the trainee and eventual use in the workplace. Trainee characteristics are personality attitudes such as the cognitive ability, motivation to learn, confidence and motivation to transfer the training. Work environment factors include support by supervisors and peers, having the opportunity to use what has been learned, presence of needed resources, and accountability (Rodriguez and Gregory, 2005).

The case for Uganda. A USAID funded program in Uganda, the Agriculture Productivity Enhancement Program (APEP), promoted bulk produce marketing to raise incomes and boost food security among smallholder farmers (APEP, 2006). The program (initiated in 2003 and ending in 2008) formed producer marketing organizations using guidelines laid out in the producer organizations development training manual developed by the Cooperative League for United States of America (CLUSA) (APEP, 2005). PMOs then organized higher level Depot Committees (DCs) to facilitate bulk marketing and access to support services.

Methodology. The study described in this brief was conducted to understand the extent to which training design, individual trainee characteristics, and the work environment characteristics contributed to the transfer

of governance and partnership management skills by leaders (trainees) of producer marketing organizations. Governance was defined as the process of facilitating collective decision making and ensuring financial transparency and accountability. Partnership management refers to the skills in contract development and management between the PMOs and their business development partners. The non-formal nature and dependence of the organization on the commitment and goodwill of members presented an ideal setting in which to understand the processes and factors that affected transfer of the two sets of skills.

A research approach that combined qualitative and quantitative methods was used. Focus groups discussions and interviews were held with leaders and members of the PMOs whereby respondents indicated the primary factors contributing to the transfer of skill sets associated with governance and partnership management. A total of 24 groups were reached, including a total of 147 respondents from three districts of Uganda.

Major Findings

The transfer of governance and partnership skills. The transfer of governance and partnership skills was reflected in processes that formed and strengthened the producer organizations through building member ownership and fostering long-term existence of the organizations beyond the project life cycle. The major steps in forming the PMOs included:

- Awareness raising with the community about the collective marketing program.
- Holding a first group meeting to choose lead farmers to assist in organizational development, extension work, initiation of new producer organizations, business skills and partnership liaison activities. The selected lead farmers were subsequently trained.
- Development of a constitution and selection of the

organization's executive leadership including the chairperson, the secretary, the treasurer and committee members by the members.

- Training executives on their roles and responsibilities. For chairpersons, the focus was on facilitating collective decision making, while for the treasurers it was on records and accounts.
- Contract training for lead farmers and Depot Committee (DC) managers to prepare producer marketing organizations for signing contracts with input suppliers and marketing agents, with emphasis on exchange of information, communication and feedback skills between the PMOs and their partners.
- Training on DC formation and its role in bulk marketing.

Methods of training used. The training meetings were participatory in nature. The techniques used included: the Socratic method (a learning technique where questioning dialogues generate ideas), role playing, case studies, feedback, illustrations, individual and group exercises, and presentations. Following the trainings, the farmers in their PMOs started growing crops for the market on a contract basis with an identified partner or buyer. The primary level PMOs formed second tier DCs, a composition of representatives who oversee input procurement and bulk produce marketing. Technical support for crop production was given by specialists from APEP and from partner organizations with which the producer organizations had contracts or working relations. APEP producer organization trainers and lead farmers provided on-the-job coaching and support to the trainees.

Analysis of the process. Most trainees reported 70-90 percent transfer of governance and partnership training. The high rate of transfer of skills is attributed to the participatory, experiential and empowering nature of the training approach used. From the trainee characteristics perspective, the leaders were highly motivated to learn and to transfer knowledge.



*A group interview with members of a producer marketing organization.
Photo by Richard Muro.*



A Depot Committee business meeting. Photo by Richard Miiro.

The ratings for this were 80-90 percent and similar ratings existed for confidence and motivation to transfer the training. From the work environment perspective, the workplace was characterized by high dependence on voluntarism, heavy workloads and sometimes passivity by members towards attending meetings and bulking produce. The leaders often regarded the members as their 'employees.' The passivity of the members puzzled the leaders who were often motivated and forbearing. The leaders thus experienced a unique work environment.

As part of the work environment, there was regular supervision, peer support and accountability expectations from both the promoting organization and organization members. Other underlying contributors to successful

skill transfer included access to markets, actual engagement with marketing and income benefits for members from sales. Some of the partners, however, were not committed to contracts, primarily due to changing commodity prices. This meant that the PMOs could not fully use their newly acquired partnership management skills.

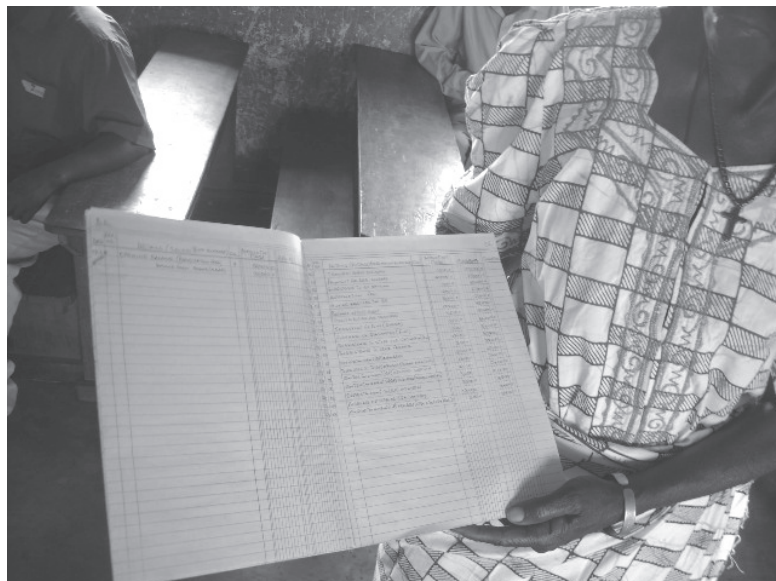
Long-term sustainability. The potential for sustainability was found to be high for almost two-thirds of the PMOs. The indicators of potential sustainability included diversification of marketable agricultural products, formation of higher-level associations (such as companies and umbrella organizations), initiating savings and credit schemes, and expanding membership.

Practical Implications

The research findings show that in order to enhance the transfer of governance and partnership management skills, attention has to be paid to the training approach, one that is empowering and results in a supportive and highly accountable work environment. This happens, however, when direct market opportunities and income are available and accessible by members.

More research is needed for characterizing the work environments of producer marketing organizations. There is also need for research on the transfer of training for producer marketing organizations that have existed for a longer time (over 10 years).

A treasurer displays financial records for her producer marketing organization. Photo by Richard Miiro.



Further Reading

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The project entitled "Governance and partnerships in producer marketing organizations in Uganda: Linking transferred learning to organizational sustainability" is a PhD dissertation research project which aims to determine the factors that facilitated the transfer of training skills of governance and partnership management by leaders of producer marketing organizations following training. The study rests on the premise that long term development of farmers' organizations depend on successful transfer of internal governance and partnership management training skills. The Norman E. Borlaug LEAP fellowship was important to this study as it facilitated research advice from both the U.S. and Consultative Group mentors, field research activities, student material support and access to U.S.-based study materials and publication opportunities.

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