

Cash Crop Promotion

Directly increasing on-farm income



Problem to be solved: Low income from cash crops

Low on-farm income was early identified as a core problem to eradicate poverty in the LAMP districts. The problem ranged from low soil fertility, water access, cultivation techniques to market promotion and access to inputs. Maize was the preferred crop, which in dry areas was a far too risky undertaking for poor farmers, so new income sources had to be sought. Singida and Babati embarked on two different roads to tackle the problem, both which were successful.

Results obtained: Increased income for the farmers

According to Singida District Council, promotion of cash crops increased the district per capita income with 10 to 15%. Visiting Singida today, it is obvious that the sunflowers and onions for the market are far more abundant. Harvest levels for sunflower has more than doubled over the past five years, and for onions the harvests per hectare has increased 25-50% over the same period.

In Babati, the results from increased harvests of improved pigeon peas is observed everywhere through better houses, investments, etc. There are now always bananas in the town market. A small sign of the popularity of the bananas is that they in a few years have spread to four times the initial area, and that the theft of saplings from improved banana varieties has become a real problem.

How it was done Moving from trusting the proposals from villagers to practical cooperation with research institutions

In Singida, the solutions how to tackle the low income from agricultural crops emerged from the Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPA). ([more information can be found here \(1\)](#)). The PPAs ended with a Village Development Plan, where the villages and sub-villages ranked and prioritized interventions. Cash crop improvements came very high on most of the VDP lists. The communities demanded service from the District Councils, prioritizing cash crop development.

During and after the PPA processes in 44 villages, the District Council and the Villages made a joint analysis in the field. As a result, sunflower and onions were selected for an improvement campaign. The selection was in line with the market at that time, both crops were in high demand, and Singida has a national reputation for producing particularly tasty sunflowers and onions. The District Council chose a multiple approach to increase income from cash crops. The following direct and complementary activities were all carried out simultaneously:

1. **Seed varieties were tested in on-farm trials**, where the farmers themselves were trained to design trials and to evaluate the results. The selected farmer for the trial would then sell seeds to his fellow farmers the next season. On an average, each farmer sold seeds to another five farmers already after the first crop was harvested.
2. **Soil fertility enhancement without using chemical fertilizers** was tested in other on-farm trials.
3. **The conservation farming (2) technique of the Magoye ripper** was introduced to increase the water retention capacity of the soil.
4. **Organic manure** was tested and promoted.
5. **Techniques for ox-drawn implements** were developed, promoted and farmers were trained. Especially for weeding, this eased the workload of women. The time saved could be used to better tend to the crops, marketing or other crucial issues.
6. **Assistance in linking farmers to the market.** The District Council staff also provided farmers with market information.
7. **Tackling the land rights issue** through **Village Legal Workers (3)** led to a much more intense involvement of women in the cash crop management.
8. All these activities were accompanied with a **large training effort**. In addition, the Council staff concentrated follow-up and technical assistance to the cash crop villages in multi-disciplinary teams. Training included agricultural cultivation aspects, but also how to make on-farm-trails, business skills, economic analysis of on-farm economy and negotiation skills for farmers dealing directly with traders and formation of interest and commercial groups.



Babati on the other hand initially embarked on cash crop promotion from a more “traditional” angle. Through contacts with **Selian Agricultural Research Institute (SARI) (4)**, Babati agricultural department discovered the potential of a new variety of Bananas, which gave higher yields and were more disease resistant. Babati District Council outsourced part of the activities to SARI to introduce the bananas in the district. In practice it turned into a joint venture, with Babati agricultural specialists doing most of the farmer contacts, thus also building their own capacity. As



was the habit from other LAMP activities, the specialists from the District Council continued to work in multi-disciplinary teams, and spent much more time in the field than they do during ‘regular’ campaigns.

After the bananas, Babati has successfully continued to use the outsourcing mechanism to introduce new pigeon pea varieties (with a traditionally strong and secure market in Babati) and simsim. A contract is always signed between the District Council and SARI, specifying tasks, responsibilities and budgets and cost-sharing between SARI and the District Council.

Key success factors

- Use a multiple **approach** as chosen by the LAMP District Councils, tackling production issues (seed, soil fertility, etc), market links, land issues and capacity building at the same time. District subject matter specialists shall work and go to the field in multi-disciplinary teams.
- **Motivation:** Let the communities select the activities themselves and they will be expecting and demanding service from the District Council.
- **Involvement:** Focus on ‘on-farm-trials’ when novelties are tested. Farmers should not only host trials, they shall manage them and more importantly evaluate the results themselves. The role of the technical staff of the District Council is to train them in scientific evaluation methods.
- **Increase field visits** According to staff and farmers, the time spent in the field was more than double that of a ‘normal’ campaign situation.
- **Make it simple: success does not always depend on inventive approaches.** While applying rather conventional extension methods, which did not consume much extra resources, Babati District Council managed to introduce a profitable cash crop, simply through an administrative trick: the **outsourcing**.

Challenges

- Access to investment capital for poor farmers. Even if the cost is very low, a cash input is needed to improve harvest levels.
- To maintain the soil productivity in the long term perspective.
- Low education levels make the training in economic analysis, record keeping and negotiating skills a major undertaking.



Further reading

- [Winning a living from the soil: Experiences from Farming as a Business \(5\) \(LAMP booklet series\)](#)

