



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Sharon Amani

Will defend her dissertation

Building and Assessing the Capacity of Farmers' Organizations: The Case of the United Nations World Food Programme's Purchase for Progress

Abstract

Intermediating between development projects and farmers, farmers' organizations (FOs) have the potential to improve rural market access and promote equitable growth by reducing transaction costs, strengthening producer bargaining power, and enabling collective action. Capacity building of FOs is a cornerstone of rural development policies and programs, such as the United Nations World Food Programme's Purchase for Progress (P4P) project, which partnered with 830 FOs, representing 1.7 million farmers, from 2008 through 2014.

Like sustainability, capacity building is a boundary term; its meaning imputed through application within specific contexts. Despite significant donor investment, a unifying framework defining the concept and measurement of capacity building has eluded development practitioners. In most cases, capacity building of FOs has been narrowly interpreted as augmenting technical capacities to produce and market commodities through investments in storage, equipment, and trainings. Drawing on the participatory development literature, this study presents a multilevel-framework emphasizing functional capacities for understanding and measuring FO capacity building. Functional capacities influence not only the distribution of asset use and maintenance costs, but also how members transform information transmitted through trainings into behavioral change. These capacities can be assessed through the organizational structures, processes, and motivation which build trust, improve effectiveness, and enable empowerment.

Organizational capacity assessments (OCAs) are pivotal to a participatory capacity building framework. With the potential to empower FOs by creating a forum to generate member feedback on FO objectives, performance, and vision, OCAs provide a springboard for incorporating endogenous knowledge into a customized capacity building strategy. The proposed framework contrasts with the P4P

approach in which external experts conduct FO OCAs and standardized capacity building strategies reflect donor and partner priorities, rather than targeting gaps between FO vision and current capacity.

This study reviews P4P and other FO OCA tools, develops functional capacity indicators, and proposes methodological changes to increase member participation in P4P assessments. The indicators are tested on primary data gathered from P4P and non-P4P FOs in Ghana and Malawi. Statistically significant differences between treatment groups and regions provide support for adopting functional capacity indicators into P4P and other FO capacity building development projects.

Friday, April 15, 2016
2-4 pm
Wrigley Hall, Room 481

Faculty, students, and the general public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:
Rimjhim Aggarwal, ASU (Chair)
Beth Polidoro, ASU (Member)
Erin Lentz, UT Austin (Member)