

Most capacity building programmes for farmers and their organisations focus on the development of the skills needed for linking them to value-chains, and only slightly, and to a diminishing degree, on policy-related lobbying and advocacy. More and more attention is being given to marketing and business management skills, and with it to higher incomes and profits.

Obviously, these capacities are desirable, yet they are clearly not enough. All over the world, farmers' businesses are seriously constrained by policies and regulations. As well as having the necessary business skills, farmer organisations also need to participate in policy dialogues and decision-making processes, influencing the rules and regulations that affect them and their businesses. This was highlighted almost twenty years ago by a World Bank study ("The plundering of agriculture", by M. Schiff and A. Valdez, 1992), showing the impact of the many different policies and regulations used by governments in developing countries to keep food prices low. The authors estimated that, between 1960 and the 1980s, farmers received 45% less than the real value of their produce. In short, farmers have been systematically plundered to ensure low food prices.

The current "food crisis" is already being widely discussed, with analysts and policy makers arguing for ways to lower food prices. But, paradoxically, farmers are regularly confronted with low prices for their products, and need to continuously innovate in order to reduce their costs. Who pays the cost of these innovation processes? Farmers. Their incomes and profits are hugely influenced by national and international regulations, which let this "plundering" process continue.

It is important that farmers and their organisations can meaningfully engage in policy dialogues and policy making processes. Efforts need to be made to develop the necessary capacities and appropriate conditions for them to participate effectively. As such, development programmes should pay attention to the policies and regulations that shape the different fields in which they are active. International institutions need to work with national governments and with the multilateral platforms in order to create open spaces for the participation of farmer organisations in local, regional and international policy making processes.

An approach such as the Participatory Generation of Positions and Proposals (PGPP, see page 30) can help link these organisations with policy makers. This type of approach is needed so that farmers' organisations can effectively participate in the processes that shape rules and regulations, tackling all those policies that affect farmers' incomes. This means, making good use of the opportunities for farmers to "upload problems" to decision makers, and to "download solutions" for those problems in the rural areas.

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## Beyond value chains