Agriculture and natural resource management are crucial for pro-poor growth; empowerment is key to the success and sustainability of development initiatives in these areas. Donors can support empowerment processes in rural areas where poor people face pressing challenges to their livelihoods by supporting their rights and access to natural resources; through participatory and accountable knowledge and advisory processes; by enhancing access of poor rural producers to markets; and by supporting their participation in policy and governance processes. Donors must strengthen poor rural people’s capabilities by supporting their organisations, facilitating and institutionalising constructive interactions among the different interests and taking a flexible approach to programming and engaging across a range of stakeholders.
1. Empowerment of poor rural people through initiatives in agriculture and natural resource management

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Key messages

- Agriculture and natural resource management (NRM) are crucial for pro-poor growth. In turn, empowerment processes are key for the success and sustainability of development initiatives in both realms.

- Donors can support empowerment processes particularly in areas where poor rural people face pressing challenges impacting their livelihoods, and especially through hands-on approaches focused on addressing these challenges.

- Types of donor good practices primarily fall into four domains, namely:
  - supporting poor people’s rights and access to natural resources;
  - supporting participatory and accountable knowledge and advisory processes;
  - enhancing the participation of poor rural producers in agricultural and related markets;
  - supporting poor rural people’s participation in policy and governance processes.

- Key modalities of donor engagement for fostering empowerment involve:
  - strengthening poor rural people’s capabilities through support to their organisations;
  - facilitating and institutionalising platforms for interaction among different stakeholders;
  - taking a flexible approach to programming, with an emphasis on accountability and on context adaptation.

- To achieve sustainable results, donors must engage with a range of stakeholders, including community-based organisations, non-local rural people’s organisations, government administrations, NGOs, and the private sector.

Introduction

Three quarters of the world’s poorest people live in rural areas, and their livelihoods depend on farming, pastoralism, forestry, and artisanal fishing – all of which can be subsumed under the term “agriculture”. Support to agriculture is well recognised as essential for poverty reduction and for securing people’s right to food. Agriculture is also recognised as an engine of pro-poor growth (OECD, 2006; World Bank, 2007; Oxfam, 2009). According to OECD DAC, “Agriculture connects economic growth and the rural poor” but “its importance goes beyond incomes and reduces poverty by lowering and stabilising food prices; improving employment for poor rural people; increasing demand for consumer goods and services, and stimulating growth in the nonfarm economy” (OECD, 2006). Secure access to natural resources and their sustainable management is, in turn, key for agriculture-based livelihoods. Today, this is particularly important as climate change and growing competition over scarce resources (notably land and water) affect the natural resource base for agriculture and for rural poverty reduction (Brunori, et al., 2008; World Bank, 2007; Nelleman et al., 2009). Moreover, secure access to natural resources is at the core of poor rural people’s entitlements as citizens, as rights over resources are often linked to membership in social organisations, recognition of collective identities, and access to services.

Donor experience shows that a focus on sustainability is key to the success of development initiatives in agriculture and NRM, and this is even more the case in a context of growing scarcities and climate change. Critical for sustainability is, in turn, fostering
the capacity of poor rural people and their organisations to pursue viable livelihoods and to shape the circumstances that affect them (IFAD, 2001; 2007). Equally critical is developing better institutions and policies shaping poor rural people’s environments and their interaction with others (IFAD, 2008b). Both capacity building and institutional and policy development are essential also in the process of scaling up successful initiatives. This is increasingly recognised by donors as an important aspect of sustainability and, more broadly, a critical aspect of the aid effectiveness agenda. Growing donor recognition of both sets of preconditions for the sustainability of their investments in NRM and agriculture translates into increasing preoccupation in donor discourse with empowerment – defined here as what happens “when people, individually or collectively, conceive of, define and pursue better lives for themselves. From a Pro-Poor Growth perspective, poor women and men need to change existing power relations and gain and exert influence over the political, economic and social processes that determine and, all too often, constrain their livelihood opportunities.” This has important implications for the content and approach of donor initiatives in this domain.

Where empowerment is most needed

In general, donor support to empowerment processes is most effective around issues that are seen as pressing challenges for poor rural people with NR-based livelihoods. These are often issues on which poor rural people themselves mobilise to achieve change (Narayan, 2009; Green, 2008). Recurrent issues often revolve around natural resources (NR) rights, access to technology and services, market access, and participation in policy processes (IFAD, 2007). Some of them are briefly outlined below.

Access and rights over natural resources

NR access and tenure are everywhere governed by power dynamics that contribute to the marginalisation of poor rural people. In many countries, rural poor people have limited or insecure NR access due to existing policies and institutions, resource degradation, land fragmentation, competition with state and private investors and conflict and its after-effects. Rural women, indigenous and ethnic minority groups, and mobile users of natural resources (e.g. pastoralists) often enjoy particularly limited or insecure rights of access, and this can be true both under customary NR systems and in systems based on state law. Today, the development of new land markets and growing (public and private) land investments pose both new threats and opportunities for poor rural people, which require renewed efforts to promote and protect their NR rights.

NRM and agriculture knowledge, technology and public services

NRM and agriculture knowledge, technology and public services are of key importance to support NR-based livelihoods, particularly in the face of environmental, climatic, and market changes that require new solutions and adaptation. However, production and access to knowledge and technology are areas in which existing power relations often marginalise poor rural people. Most research and technology development in NRM and agriculture aim to serve better-off or large-scale farmers and livestock producers, and smallholder-led technology and knowledge production remains insufficiently recognised and supported in formal R&D. In addition, knowledge and technology are often managed, distributed and priced in ways that mostly benefit non-poor people, men rather than women, and irrigated rather than rain fed farms, for reasons that have to do with ease of access and outreach,
financial capacity, market potential, and pervasive misrecognition of women’s roles as farmers. The same is largely true of other services that are important for agriculture and NRM – such as financial and advisory services. Today, poor rural people remain marginal participants in knowledge and technology processes concerning new issues such as climate change and biotechnology, and often continue to have inadequate access to education opportunities, particularly beyond the primary level and also related to agriculture.

**Agricultural markets**

Agricultural markets have been changing rapidly in recent years, with rising quality standards, growing demand for high-value products, new types of market arrangements, and the emergence of some new markets (e.g. environmental service markets) (Bryan *et al.*, 2008; Chapple, 2008). Small producers often face obstacles in accessing these markets, partly due to their higher requirements, and partly due to the often very asymmetrical power relations that characterise them. For those who participate in these markets as wage workers, power asymmetries also constitute a problem that often results in poor and insecure employment conditions. For those who participate in these markets as wage workers, power asymmetries also constitute a problem that often results in poor and insecure employment conditions. In addition, smallholder farmers and agricultural workers operate under strong power asymmetries in the context of international trade in agriculture. Finally, though small producers often organise into rural producers’ organisations (RPOs) at various levels to better engage with markets, many RPOs are constrained by poor governance, limited capabilities and resources and non-enabling policy environments.

**Policy and governance processes**

Policy and governance processes around agriculture and NRM are both shaped by existing power structures and *vice versa*. Opportunities for participation and for influence tend to mirror power dynamics sustaining social inequalities. As a result, the poorest groups, youth, and rural women everywhere tend to participate less, or less influentially, in these processes. Opportunities for broad-based participation are sometimes more available at the local level or under decentralisation. However, local institutions are often beset by elite control and by weak capabilities. Even when representatives of marginalised groups sit on local governance bodies, their voices rarely have clout. Influential participation is even more challenging at the national level and beyond, where poor rural people suffer the combined effects of their marginalisation and of neglect of agriculture.

**Challenges and controversies facing donors**

Donors work with different understandings and approaches to empowerment in agriculture and NRM. For some, empowerment is mostly about poor rural people being able to influence policymaking. This is in line with the OECD DAC view that pro-poor growth requires policy change, which rests on well-functioning states and on empowered poor women and men, who can influence policy in their interest (OECD, 2007). For others, empowerment is mostly about building up economic assets, or it is about nurturing human and social capital through education, better access to information, or support to rural people’s organisation. For many donors, empowerment is about promoting rights-based approaches, *e.g.* around gender, decent labour in agriculture, etc. Some take a broad approach to empowerment – for instance, IFAD approaches it in terms of “assisting poor rural women and men to build the skills and the social capital that they need to sustainably increase their incomes and enhance their food security, and assisting national institutions to provide an effective policy and organisational framework to support this.” (IFAD, 2007)
While not a problem *per se*, this variety of understandings complicates distilling of good practices, and makes it virtually impossible to address the issue comprehensively (which is, indeed, not attempted here).

Besides variation, there is often a gap between commitment to empowerment and donor practice. This is partly due to the objective difficulties of promoting empowerment, and partly to the highly political nature of the task. Some of the difficulties have to do with addressing “controversial” issues, to which the appropriate answers may vary significantly across contexts. For instance:

- There is debate about the pluses and minuses of different institutional approaches to securing the NR rights of poor rural people, as each may have tradeoffs, entrench power inequalities, or create new ones. One example concerns land reform. Some donors maintain that promoting individual land titling is the best way for poor rural people to be “empowered” to invest better, to make changes in land use for adaptation to climate change, to capture new market opportunities, and to better manage risk. Others counter that individual titling undermines the user rights of a variety of stakeholders, when resources have been traditionally held under communal tenure or with overlapping bundles of user rights. Pastoralists and rural women are often particularly marginalised by conventional land reforms. Another set of controversies has to do with institutional approaches to water management for agriculture, particularly as concerns reliance on (existing or newly established) water users’ groups. While many donors have and continue to rely on this approach to strengthen rural poor people’s rights to water for irrigation, and to improve water resource management, critics point to research evidence that these groups are not always best placed to achieve these goals, that they can exclude certain groups (often women, but also non-farmer users such as pastoralists), that they are often plagued by little sustainability and are poorly integrated into their institutional context (customary and state-related). Similar controversies exist on the pluses and minuses of various forms of collective NRM, both in terms of inclusion and of sustainability.

- R&D and advisory services can be crucial for adaptive NR-based livelihoods, but much depends on how they are developed and used. In this regard, there are no blueprints about how to square the goals of scientific rigour and inclusiveness, affordability and quality, efficiency and outreach. Also, there are various participatory approaches to R&D and advisory services, but there are different views on their inclusiveness, costs, and suitability in all circumstances. There are also different views on the possibility of building on local knowledge to address new challenges, such as those linked to climate change. Other controversial questions include: Who should set the R&D agenda? How to balance supply- and demand-led approaches to advisory services? How to balance financial sustainability and inclusiveness? How to build mechanisms for accountability to the poor? Are public systems always the best venues where empowerment opportunities can be nurtured for poor rural people, or can these be harnessed also in private R&D and advisory systems?

- A number of controversies also exist around donor engagement on issues of market access and value chains. For instance, there are different views on the role that RPOs and in particular farmers’ organisations (FOs) can play. Another controversial issue concerns the role of middlemen and traders in agricultural markets: Are power relations between middlemen and farmers only of an exploitative nature, or is it possible to imagine empowering forms of interaction between them? In fact, is it possible to imagine empowering forms of interaction between farmers and the
1. Empowerment of Poor Rural People through Initiatives in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management

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1. Empowerment of Poor Rural People through Initiatives in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management

1. On participation in policy and governance processes, there are controversies on the role of organisations of poor rural people, their (un)democratic or (un)inclusive nature, and whether they can be the most effective actors to facilitate political empowerment or whether others (e.g. political parties) are. There are also controversies about the opportunities offered by decentralisation and the role of donors in these contexts. Partly related to this are controversies around the level or scale at which political engagement and empowerment are most feasible for poor rural people to influence processes related to agriculture and NRM: Is it the local level? Is it the national level (or beyond)? Should donors help organisations of poor rural people to engage at all these levels or only at one? Finally, there are controversies about the proper role of donors in policy processes: Should they be facilitators only or should they advocate on behalf of the rural poor (and if so, who sets the agenda)?

In addition to controversies, donors sometimes face conflicting priorities between supporting government-owned processes related to agriculture and NRM and supporting an empowerment agenda. This is because government policies and programmes may be oriented towards goals (e.g. concerning agricultural productivity, food prices, investment in specific sub-sectors and crops, etc.) that are unlikely to generate empowerment opportunities for poor rural people, or that may in fact have a disempowering or marginalising impact on certain groups. In addition, donors themselves may face conflicting imperatives in their own agendas. For instance, donors operate in environments shaped by their governments’ or members’ agricultural and trade policies, which may hinder the empowerment efforts of poor rural people in developing countries. In this respect, donors need to be especially self-reflexive about conflicts and tensions with regard to:

- their agriculture and trade policies;
- their energy policies and investments (e.g. in biofuels, hydropower, etc.);
- climate change policies and related initiatives;
- policies and initiatives on humanitarian (including food) aid;
- environmental policies and biodiversity conservation initiatives;
- labour policies and codes (national and international).

Learning from good practice

Donors wishing to promote empowerment through support to agriculture and NRM face three main sets of questions, namely: i) What to do? Or, what areas of activity to focus on? ii) How to engage? iii) Who to work with? In what follows, we will address each set of questions in turn. The main answers to these questions are summed up in the text box in the following box.

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1. Empowerment of Poor Rural People Through Initiatives in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management

What to do?

Good practice can take place in any area of donor support to NRM and agriculture. However, as noted, donor-supported empowerment processes have the greatest chances of success in areas where poor rural women and men face pressing challenges. This is because it is in these areas that people may be particularly motivated to envision and enact change. Analysing such challenges, how actors perceive them, and what constraints and possibilities are there for change, is the first step to take to support empowerment. In good practice, there is no substitute for this analysis in the field and in each context, together with the primary stakeholders.

Without wishing to be comprehensive, we can identify four recurrent areas of activity in which donors should support empowerment processes in NRM and agriculture, and three types of good practices in each area, as follows:

Securing poor people’s rights and access to natural resources

Types of good practices that donors can undertake in this domain include:

- supporting rural poor people’s efforts to secure their NR rights;
- participatory design and implementation of state policies and initiatives on NR governance;
- promoting inclusive and effective local NRM institutions.

Donors can support empowerment processes around NRM and agriculture first of all by supporting rural people’s efforts to secure their NR rights. This can take different forms, depending on the resources, rights, and institutional and political contexts at issue. In recent years, there have been many opportunities to support communities to engage in NR mapping, demarcation, and preparation of legal documents to certify individual and community entitlements, when existing policies require this, or to avert risks of dispossession or to claim compensation for loss of user rights. Given the growing large-scale land investments in many countries, this is likely to remain an important area for donor engagement in the future. NR demarcation and certification can be challenging processes of change, and the consequences of formalisation can be disempowering particularly for some groups (e.g. rural women and mobile people) (Kanji et al., 2005). However, NR mapping, demarcation, and formalisation also present opportunities for empowerment, which
donors should help to seize by promoting inclusiveness, voice, and capacity development of all stakeholders (notably those who are more likely to be silenced in these processes) (IFAD, 2009). In addition, donors can help marginalised groups to take these processes as opportunities to organise, to establish themselves as legal entities, and to better articulate their agendas (Box 1.1).

**Box 1.1. Demarcating and registering indigenous territories in Bolivia and the Philippines**

IFAD has supported indigenous communities in Asia and Latin America in demarcating and registering ancestral territories. This has involved supporting capacity development among indigenous communities, facilitating state recognition of indigenous peoples when needed, and participating in the titling process. In Bolivia, for instance, IFAD has supported indigenous organisations at local and regional levels in the Beni region to obtain legal recognition, which is an important step for empowerment as it institutionalises a foundation for indigenous voice in political processes. Legal recognition was also a prerequisite for achieving collective land titles. IFAD then supported and facilitated processes led by indigenous organisations, along with the Agrarian Reform Institute, to identify and demarcate land and negotiate with its occupants. The results include secured indigenous land rights, rehabilitation of one million hectares of land, and strengthening of indigenous institutions. In the Caraga region in Northern Mindanao, the Philippines, IFAD has partnered instead with the Philippine Association for Intercultural Development to assist rural communities in securing or reclaiming their ancestral domains. Support to indigenous mapping and demarcation of these domains was important for local communities to be able to claim their rights under existing legislation on ancestral domains. While the communities initiated the negotiation process with the state, donor support ensured access to participatory mapping tools, facilitated management planning of ancestral domains, and contributed to capacity building of indigenous groups. Thanks to this initiative, over 100 000 hectares of ancestral domains were claimed.

*Source: IFAD project document, unpublished.*

An important dimension of this type of good practice concerns helping to ensure that mapping and demarcation processes, or indeed any process through which NR rights are defined, facilitate more viable livelihood opportunities. Donors can often make a difference by helping poor people to use newly-secured rights productively, thanks to better access to inputs, services, and finance. For instance, in a World Bank-supported land access programme in Honduras, the promotion of women’s equal access to land purchase schemes has been accompanied with support to their access to services and capital for productive enterprises, and the combination of the two lines of activity has impacted significantly on household wellbeing and on gender relations (World Bank, FAO and IFAD, 2008). Donors have also helped develop income generation opportunities within indigenous territorial demarcation initiatives (as GIZ for instance has done in indigenous reservations in the Amazon), enabling communities to simultaneously enjoy more secure NR rights, be more capable environmental stewards, and have new opportunities to overcome poverty. In addition, donors can support legal education and counsel to the poor on their NR rights. In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has partnered with a provider of legal aid services, so that it provides legal services (notably on land rights) to poor rural people for a small fee (Good Practice Note 6. Legal empowerment of the poor and its relation to pro-poor growth). This is also likely to be particularly important when rights are being redefined.
A second type of good practice concerns engagement in the participatory design and implementation of state policies and initiatives for NR governance, which is of paramount importance not only for processes of empowerment to take place, but also to create conducive institutional and policy environments in which successful experiences of empowerment in NR governance can be replicated, adapted, or scaled up at the country level. In this domain, donors should focus both on facilitating broad-based participation of poor rural people and on ensuring that the results of policy processes further facilitate empowerment. Donors can support poor rural people to participate effectively, which requires organisation, resources, information, affirmative action measures to ensure voice and representation of marginalised groups (e.g. women, youth, pastoralists), and dialogue platforms. RPOs and NGOs can be key allies in this, but they often require donor support. Secondly, donors can help governments take on the inputs of poor rural people in reforming their own policies and programmes, advocate on behalf of the interests of poor rural people, and help mediate between their views and inputs and those of other interest groups in government and in society. Promoting rights-based approaches can be an effective way to do this, as shown in the case of SDC, Sida, DANIDA, and UNICEF support to water sector reform in Kenya (Good Practice Note 6. Legal empowerment of the poor and its relation to pro-poor growth). Donors also have a role to play in ensuring that implementation and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of NR policies provide opportunities for empowerment, by helping set up participatory M&E systems, advocating for and facilitating participation of RPOs and communities in policy implementation, fostering accountability in implementing agencies, financing implementation pilots, and engaging in policy dialogue to facilitate the scaling up of the latter when they are successful.

A third type of good practice concerns promoting inclusive and effective local NRM institutions. Donors can initiate institutional innovations or support reform, depending on local opportunities and needs. For instance, DFID and CARE have supported the piloting of innovative institutions for co-management of lake resources in Uganda, taking advantage of an enabling environment in terms of decentralisation and government support (Box 1.2). Favourable political contexts are a precondition for donors’ engaging in institutional innovation, but this can take different forms. For instance, post-conflict phases may offer opportunities for innovation, whereas elsewhere it is NRM devolution that does so, as illustrated in the case of GIZ’s support to devolution of forest management in Vietnam (Box 1.12). Clear political awareness of the limits of existing institutions can also provide an entry point for donors. In Nepal, for instance, IFAD has supported institutional innovation through leasehold forestry, whereby small blocks of degraded public forestland are given on 40-year leases to groups of poor households – with primarily women’s involvement and through the mobilisation of women group promoters (World Bank, FAO & IFAD, 2008). Besides contributing to the regeneration of forestland and improving incomes, this has given poor rural women a chance to be more active in forest management and local governance, and to have land registered in their name. This innovation was driven by the need to address problems besetting community forestry approaches in Nepal, such as elite capture and a failure to produce asset redistribution to the poor.

In general, developing sound economic, financial, and social bases for new or reformed NR institutions is essential for change to stick and to be empowering. For instance, lack of adequate economic incentives for participation in improved institutions for water management for agriculture, which require rural people’s direct contributions in terms of fees, construction, and/or maintenance of water infrastructure, has been found to undermine the sustainability of these institutions. Promoting local ownership of new institutions and their integration with existing ones is also essential. Again, this has been found to be a critical
aspect of success for water users’ associations in agriculture, where examples of bad donor practices in terms of engineering new user groups in disregard of (often very complex and multi-layered) existing water management institutions are rather frequent. Promoting local ownership of change can be challenging, as shown in donor experience in seeking to improve gender equality in water management associations, forestry groups, etc. In most cases, there is no shortcut to take, and what is needed is the patient work of advocacy, sensitisation, cultivation of allies and capacity building. Some cases of “bad practice”, leading to minimal or no empowerment effects, have resulted from donor over-reliance on formal mechanisms such as setting aside quotas for women in NR institutions, expecting this to automatically trigger empowerment processes. Other cases of bad practice have involved promoting gender-equalising innovations without adequate investment in cultivating local buy-in, or without a clear strategy to link institutional changes to better livelihood opportunities for both women and men. While in some cases the results of bad practice are limited to no empowerment effects or to unsustainable results, in other cases they can also include local backlash, which can be an obstacle to later attempts at promoting positive change.

Box 1.2. Integrated lake management in Lake George, Uganda

In Uganda, DFID and CARE have piloted new inclusive institutions for integrated lake management (ILM) in Lake George. This has been in response to challenges faced by local poor people (especially women and boat crews) in accessing and using lake resources, in the absence of effective and accountable local institutions. The first step towards the establishment of ILM was change in the policy environment. This included decentralisation and the government’s orientation towards co-management of fisheries. DFID, CARE, and the Marine Resource Assessment Group took advantage of this favourable environment to pilot ILM starting in 2000. Using this approach, they created and built the capacity of new institutions to manage lake resources in an inclusive manner, including beach management units (BMUs) and lake management organisations. BMUs are empowered to exercise certain devolved powers, such as collection of information on fisheries, participating in the licensing process, and developing and enforcing by-laws. They are inclusive bodies with democratically elected committees in which 30% of seats are allocated to occupational groups and for women. The BMUs operate through regular meetings and participatory planning, with involvement of the community of local stakeholders. They have developed an enforcement capacity through joint patrols with local government and police. In Lake George, community-based planning has been successfully channelled into parish development plans and into lake management plans. Success has spurred further policy change, e.g. a 2004 National Fisheries Policy aiming to increase involvement of fishing communities in NRM.

Supporting participatory and accountable knowledge and advisory processes

Types of good practices that donors can undertake in this domain include:

- supporting participatory reform of public agricultural advisory services;
- supporting peer learning;
- recognising and capitalising on local knowledge and innovation.

Some of the issues involved in promoting empowerment in this realm are addressed in Good Practice Note 3. Empowerment through local citizenship. These concern voice, inclusiveness, and accountability in local services. Yet others, such as improving access to education in rural areas, are not specific to the realms of agriculture and NRM (even though they can be crucial factors of empowerment for rural poor people as individuals, and also as agents in these realms), and they will not be dealt with here. There are, however, also issues that are specific to the domain of NRM and agriculture and to the dynamics of power that marginalise poor rural people in knowledge and advisory services. Donor practices in this area are diverse, as they range from participation in the reform of public advisory systems to support to the development of certain aspects of these systems (e.g. gender budgeting), service decentralisation, or implementation of specific advisory programmes. Some of these practices aim to create an environment that will ultimately be empowering for poor rural people, while others also aim to nurture empowerment opportunities in the very process of reform (it is only these that are addressed here). Donors also have a varied experience in supporting participatory and downward-accountable processes of knowledge generation at the local level. While the two lines of activity do not always overlap, and different donors may be better versed in one or the other, it is also the case that donors can more effectively engage in supporting “system-level” processes as empowerment processes in their own right when they can also engage more effectively with poor rural people.

One first type of good practice concerns donor participation in the reform of agricultural advisory systems to render them more accountable, inclusive and better targeted to the needs of poor rural people. There are in particular two kinds of approaches that donors can take. The first concerns promoting reform of services through participatory processes, and helping to set up and institutionalise multi-stakeholder platforms around R&D, service design and service delivery. An example of good practice in this regard is the experience of the World Bank with the reform of agricultural services in Senegal (Box 1.3). A second type of approach concerns helping to integrate local knowledge processes into formal R&D and advisory services. This can be done, for instance, through dedicated funding to research institutions, in the context of rural development programmes, in the context of SWAP and PRSP processes, or by supporting national competitive research funds with mechanisms to involve small farmers and rural communities in agenda-setting and evaluation. It can also be done by engaging with local stakeholders in participatory knowledge processes feeding into evidence-based policy making. An example of good practice is DFID’s engagement with various stakeholders through action research in the aquaculture sector in Northern India, which has fed into the agenda of public services as well as into better NRM practices and greater social inclusion (Box 1.4).

Concerning production and sharing of knowledge, a second type of good practice concerns support to peer learning approaches. These can have tremendous empowerment
Box 1.3. Reforming agricultural services together with farmers’ organisations

Starting in the mid-1990s, the World Bank has engaged with the Senegal government and the Conseil National de Concertation des Ruraux (CNCR), a consortium of national agricultural producers’ organisations, to reform the agricultural service system in such a way that farmers would no longer only be clients but also participate in the governance of services. A dedicated programme, the Programmes des Services Agricoles et Organisations de Producteurs (PSAOP) was funded by the Bank, aiming at: (i) RPOs recognition and transfer to them of public resources for capacity building; (ii) promoting accountability to small farmers; (iii) devolution of services and a shift in the role of the ministry to focus on co-ordination and policy development. The PSAOP has supported the creation of a National Agricultural and Food Technology Research Fund, with a scientific committee screening research proposals and a management committee chaired by the CNCR president and with a majority of farmer representatives as members. A National Agency for Agricultural and Rural Counsel (ANCAR) has also been created, with capital shared among government, producers’ organisations, and the private sector. Under the new system, ANCAR and local RPOs set up contracts to determine the work of agricultural and rural counsellors in each community, ensuring their downward accountability to local farmers. Funds have been set aside to strengthen RPO capacity, and local “concertation frameworks” of producers’ organisations choose RPO projects to be funded. In terms of empowerment effects, the project has provided among other things an important opportunity to strengthen the CNCR. At the local level, RPOs report feeling at the centre of the governance of services, and appreciate their new roles in setting priorities and in managing public funds to implement RPO-chosen projects.


Box 1.4. Developing evidence-based and participatory aquaculture policy and services in India

A research-based process of collaboration among the government of India, DFID, and Indian research institutes has enabled grassroots participation in policy change to meet the service needs of aquaculture-dependent people in Eastern India. The process started in 1996 with joint research between DFID and local farmers around low-input aquaculture, aiming to address immediate livelihood concerns among marginalised population groups (including women and scheduled castes and tribes). To scale up research results, DFID funded a second project in 2002, working with farmers and fishers to produce recommendations for policy change to develop better services. Various tools were used to gather people’s views and for policy communication, including workshops with poor rural people, policymakers, service providers and technicians. Eventually, policymakers agreed on a list of priorities for change in service programmes for aquaculture-dependent people based on research evidence and on poor people’s inputs. Over time, the process has fed a dynamic of mutual recognition and better understanding among government, service providers and scheduled castes and tribes.

potential if they are inclusive, supported with adequate resources (financial, human, institutional, technical), and rooted in concrete livelihood needs and opportunities. They can also be crucial to complement scantily available or poor quality rural education opportunities, including in agriculture, without thereby making the importance of improving these opportunities and poor rural people’s access to them any less urgent. Peer learning also has great empowerment potential if it is an opportunity to strengthen organisation among poor rural people, which can also make peer learning processes a springboard for empowerment in various realms (e.g. production, marketing, governance).

Donor experience mainly involves the use of peer learning to develop agriculture and NRM knowledge. One common type of practice concerns farmer field schools (Box 1.5), but other approaches exist (e.g. farmer research groups, farmer study circles, etc.). However, peer learning can also nurture local technical assistance markets, to provide locally adapted support to innovators and entrepreneurs, and to institutionalise positive achievements from donor-funded programmes. The Learning Routes experience (Box 1.6) is a good example of this. The donor’s role is at times to pilot peer learning mechanisms, sometimes to organise and (co)finance them, and also to leverage resources and provide technical assistance to address exclusionary power dynamics in peer groups. Good practice requires supporting the sustainability of peer learning processes, which depends in part on their relevance to livelihood needs, and in part on strong linkages between learning activities and livelihood opportunities. Donors can further enhance the sustainability of peer learning initiatives through policy dialogue to integrate these approaches in sector-wide programmes, advisory service budgeting, training, and staffing. They can also do so by facilitating linkages between peer learning initiatives and formal R&D. Finally, and particularly when strong peer learning mechanisms exist independently of donors, as in the case of the Indian Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), donors can foster empowerment by supporting advocacy around the results of peer learning (e.g. as in ILO’s engagement on issues facing informal women workers in SEWA’s case).3

Box 1.5. Farmer Field Schools (FFSs) as a peer learning approach

FFSs are groups of small farmers who meet regularly to study a particular issue through experiential discovery and learning in the field. They exist in all regions and are used to address many topics, depending on farmers’ livelihood interests. FFSs have been supported by donors (FAO, DANIDA, IFAD, ILRI, etc.), NGOs, and governments. Though membership of FFS groups varies, women are often well represented, whereas the very poor are more rarely so. FFS empowerment effects have been observed in terms of farmers gaining a sense of greater control over their lives and being able to stand up to others based on knowledge gained through experiential learning. Empowerment effects are stronger when FFS groups engage in common activities beyond the study period, or move on to form networks and larger associations. For instance, in Western Kenya and Uganda donor-supported FFS groups have evolved into networks with marketing and input supply functions for their members. In Western Kenya, women in FFSs have developed a practice of maintaining group production plots adjacent to learning plots, allowing them to earn money to finance learning activities. In Latin America, FFSs have evolved into networks for production and marketing for some high-value markets. In some areas, collective action based on FFSs has led to better farmers’ participation in governance processes. In Uganda, for instance, the presence of FFS alumni in farmers’ fora in Soroti has strengthened their ability to negotiate and organise demand-driven services.

A third type of good practice involves recognising and capitalising on local knowledge and innovation. As noted, improved local opportunities for access to education in rural areas are critical for empowerment, notably for rural children and youth, and not limited to the realms of agriculture and NRM. In addition, however, rural poor people are already holders of knowledge and a capacity for innovation that donors can capitalise on in different ways to support empowerment processes that also contribute to the success of their initiatives in NRM and agriculture. Donor recognition of indigenous ancestral knowledge is, for instance, crucial for locally adapted NRM, but it can also help indigenous peoples' communities gain recognition of their identities and claims. Donors should recognise that local knowledge in NRM and agriculture is capable of change and innovation, which requires support. For instance, the World Bank rewards rural innovators in its development marketplace programmes. IFAD has promoted rural innovation fairs, and it has also supported the documentation of local knowledge. For instance, in Western Mindanao, the Philippines, IFAD has partnered with the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) to support the Subanen people in documenting ancestral knowledge (notably women's) about local plant varieties, and to accompany a process of certification of the intellectual property rights of these communities (IANGWE, 2006). The results of supporting local knowledge and practices can be impressive. Recently, for instance, SDC, USAID, and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) have drawn attention to the achievements of farmer-led regeneration of trees in densely populated areas of Niger, which has affected 5 million hectares of land (Spielman and Pandhya-Lorch, 2009). These include increased soil fertility, yields, fodder, less time spent by women in wood collection and income growth. Some donors have set out to support scaling up and replication of this initiative. However, scaling up and replication of local knowledge practices can present both opportunities and risks for local empowerment. In this regard, donors should help create opportunities and appropriate institutional conditions for rural people to capture the benefits from their innovations as well as from the knowledge they hold.
**Enhancing the participation of poor rural producers in agricultural markets**

Types of good practice that donors can undertake in this domain include:

- supporting organisation and professionalisation of RPOs;
- improving interaction and addressing power asymmetries among stakeholders;
- making available to poor rural producers new tools to gain market information.

Poor people’s participation in agricultural markets is shaped by many power dynamics, which impact on it both directly (e.g. power shaping space allocation on local markets for different producers’ groups, power asymmetries between small producers and traders, power asymmetries in access to market information, power inequalities limiting women’s access to markets, etc.) and indirectly (e.g. power dynamics shaping trade policies, investment in infrastructure, product quality regulations, etc.). This section concentrates on some donor activities that can support empowerment around the circumstances that directly shape market participation. However, the circumstances that indirectly shape market participation, notably concerning policies, are also of paramount importance for donor engagement, and may in some cases provide opportunities for empowerment processes (as noted for instance in relation to the EPA negotiation example below in this guidance).

The first type of practice is about donor support to RPOs and to their professionalisation as market agents and facilitators. RPOs, and particularly farmers’ organisations (FOs) are growing in most parts of the world, and many are undergoing change to become more market-driven, sustainable, and/or more inclusive. Several donors (e.g. IFAD, ILO, KIT, SIDA, and French cooperation) have supported RPOs in achieving such changes, and so have agri-agencies (as described in Box 1.7, concerning the support to Faso Jigi in Mali). Agri-agencies are often particularly well placed to support RPOs to become more effective market agents, and support to them is often a good entry point for donor practice. Many NGOs are also on the front line of support to RPOs for market access, especially at the local level. The local level is, in fact, where donors most often work to support empowerment around market access. Local FOs can be important facilitators of empowerment for small producers, enabling them to enhance their market power by improving product quality, enabling bulk supply, negotiating with other market actors on better terms, sharing risks, etc. However, local RPOs are often beset by weak capacity and linkages beyond the local level. On the other hand, non-local RPOs are often poorly linked to local groups and also suffer from weak capacity, sustainability, and inclusiveness (e.g. of women producers and of the poor). On balance, donors should avoid generalisations about the role that RPOs can play in facilitating empowerment around markets. Lotheré and Delmas (2009) note that FOs can help their members be more effective market agents only if they have the means to provide adequate services, have a comparative advantage over others in providing these services, and operate with a mix of flexibility and stringent rules. On all three fronts, however, donors can contribute to strengthening FO capacity.

In general, promoting empowerment processes around RPOs as market agents means helping them to negotiate tradeoffs among economic performance and inclusiveness, so they can gain market power but also be sites of empowerment for their members. Donor efforts to promote effective integration of women producers in existing RPOs, or to develop branches of existing organisations or affiliates catering to women producers, are often one dimension of
good practice. Cases of bad donor practices are also rather common, and they are often about donors engaging with RPOs only in the timeframe of individual projects, about donor-led creation of new organisations on a supply-driven basis, and/or about over-burdening of existing organisations with too many functions and with conflicting accountability lines. Also very common is a failure to engage with linkages between local and non-local RPOs, which can undermine sustainability of new local organisations. Good practices are instead those in which donors can commit for a significant period of time, confront power asymmetries between themselves and RPOs, and are careful not to impose models of organisation, accountability, and management from outside but rather partner with RPOs to develop appropriate solutions, with a focus on the capacity of RPOs to serve their members. Again, agri-agencies are often particularly better placed to do this than are governmental donors.

Box 1.7. The story of Faso Jigi in Mali – institutional development through support from an agri-agency

An example of good donor practice comes from UPA DI’s contribution, financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), to the development of the cooperative union Faso Jigi in Mali, which was formed to deal with challenges related to market liberalisation in the cereals sector. The basis of functioning of this organisation is collective marketing, combined with advance payments to farmers, common purchasing of fertilisers, and provision of technical advice to improve yields. In this case, good practice has been in the quality of the relationship that the agri-agency has established with the FO, which has been marked since the beginning by a focus on fostering FO autonomy. UPA DI has never replaced the FO in its functions regarding marketing and organisation of producers. However, it has consistently promoted the values of a democratically-managed organisation as well as strict adherence to professional standards – leaving Faso Jigi to bear the costs of occasional failings. Today, inclusive and representative decision-making bodies are in place in the organisation, ensuring transparent sharing of information and internal governance. Women farmers have enjoyed growing representation in Faso Jigi, and their different crop specialisation with respect to men has been recognised and is catered to by the organisation. Overall, the slow development of Faso Jigi as a highly professional, but also democratic and inclusive organisation has enhanced not only its internal governance but also its status in the market, leading it to become a leading market actor, selling around 8,000 tonnes of cereals per year in West Africa.

Source: Case story by UPA DI and IFAD available at www.oecd.org/dac/poverty.

A second type of good practice concerns improving interaction and addressing power asymmetries in market chains. Donors are rarely the ones to initiate positive change in market chains – in fact, bad practices are sometimes those in which donors attempt to engineer new value chains and supply-driven arrangements (see, however, the case of a value chain developed through donor support on a demand-driven basis in Box 1.9). However, they can play important roles in supporting change initiated by small rural producers, the private sector – sometimes also in the context of public-private partnerships – or NGOs. Good practice often involves donors’ taking on costs that it does not make economic sense for the private sector to assume, at least during the initial phases of change, acting as facilitators and mediators in key transactions (Box 1.8), helping to build capacity among small producers (including through organisation), and providing added incentives for stakeholders to seek win-win arrangements (e.g., helping reduce risks, investing in infrastructure, facilitating access to new markets, etc.). When working around empowerment processes involving workers in agricultural markets, donors can also sometimes play a mediating and
facilitating role. For instance, they can support local organisations, NGOs, national FOs, and other parties (e.g. research institutions, trade unions) to conduct research on empowerment needs and opportunities, to undertake training and sensitisation of workers and employers, to facilitate dialogue platforms, and to promote a decent work agenda and enabling policies with governments.

**Box 1.8. Honey Care Africa**

Various donors, including DANIDA, EU, UNDP, and World Bank, have supported the efforts of Honey Care Africa, a firm working with small honey producers and rural communities in Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya, to establish win-win arrangements with small producers. The firm works on the basis of a “tripartite model,” which involves sharing responsibilities with rural communities, donors and NGOs. The role of the firm is to provide equipment and training and to regularly purchase honey from small farmers at a negotiated price. Farmers and communities are also given access to extension through the firm or through NGOs and donors. The firm works with Africa Now, a British NGO, and with Premier Foods, a large retail distributor. Other NGOs or donors work as mediators between the firm and rural communities, and also pay for training to small farmers. Communities negotiate arrangements with the firm, and producers obtain equipment and training (and sometimes loans), and eventually deliver honey to a mobile collection centre. Overall, the model is conducive to empowerment for a number of reasons. In particular, it allows people to negotiate prices with the firm and to demand transparent information concerning costs, profit margins, and other issues concerning Honey Care. In this regard, the role of donors and NGOs as mediators and guarantors of transparent transactions has greatly contributed to ensure that empowerment opportunities materialise.


In many cases, good practices to promote empowerment through better interaction among market actors require nurturing the capabilities of poor rural producers for adding value and meeting new market opportunities, and using this as a basis for better interaction with other market actors and a renegotiation of power asymmetries within value chains. For instance, ACDI/VOCA, funded by USAID, USDA, and others, has worked with rural communities to seize new market opportunities in the SUCCESS Alliance programmes in the Philippines, Ecuador, Liberia, Indonesia and Vietnam. These programmes engage communities through FFSs and other methodologies to improve the quality of cocoa production, provide seeds, inputs, and quality assurance, encourage organisation, and then seek new, win-win marketing arrangements in cocoa value chains. Another example of this sort of initiative, which has involved fostering participatory innovations in production and in marketing, can be found in SDC’s (and DFID’s) support to indigenous potato producers in some Andean countries, which has entailed working with research institutions and public-private partnerships (Box 1.9). Some donors are also exploring ways to engage small farmers and poor rural communities in environmental service markets through win-win arrangements. In this case, good practice appears to require simultaneous attention to securing the NR rights of poor rural people, understanding how changes in livelihood strategies associated with participation in these markets may shift power distribution within communities, and seeking ways to at least offset possible negative power shifts.
1. **Empowerment of Poor Rural People through Initiatives in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management**

A third type of good practice concerns making available to poor rural producers new tools to gain market information. Better (more affordable, adequate, and inclusive) access to market information is essential for empowerment around market participation. In this regard, recent cases of good practice often revolve around the use of ICTs. Some examples of bad practice exist, mostly where ICT diffusion has been supply-driven, not adapted to the needs and capacity of poor rural people, or financially unsustainable. A mere focus on ICTs or on market information per se is also not conducive to good practice, as small producers need support to act upon information, for instance through tools for better storage, processing, transportation, and financing of production – as well illustrated for instance in the case of SCD and IFAD support to the First Mile project in Tanzania.4

Important elements of good practice include working with service providers to expand rural coverage of ICT services, building on low cost technologies and providing training in the use of new technologies. Good practice also involves attention to the relationships that evolve around the use of ICTs for market information – who is providing the information to whom and on what terms, who gets excluded, how relations of trust can be established between providers and users of information, and so forth. Quite often, FOs are well placed to act as intermediaries and/or direct providers of information services, in partnership with private suppliers of the needed technologies, and this is an area where donor funding can make a difference to pilot context-adapted solutions and to provide incentives for private sector and RPO agents to team up to create new services (Box 1.10).

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**Box 1.9. The Papa Andina Initiative: Fostering innovative value chain dynamics around an indigenous crop**

Papa Andina is an initiative coordinated by the International Potato Center and funded by SDC, DFID, and others through national projects in Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador. The initiative aims to enhance the market capabilities of poor potato producers. It takes a holistic approach, using a variety of participatory methodologies for technological and institutional innovation, to strengthen the organisation of small farmers, and to improve their interaction with other actors in market chains. One of the key elements of the Papa Andina approach is the use of participatory market chain approaches to enable stakeholders to identify new opportunities and to devise strategies to seize them – through technological change and R&D, new marketing initiatives, or new linkages with other stakeholders. An important dimension of this initiative is the involvement of R&D institutions alongside other market actors (including poor rural producers) to identify R&D needs. Stakeholder platforms are a key element of the approach. The platforms enable the different actors to understand their different interests, and they are always set up on the basis of the identification of market opportunities. Another important empowerment tool is the use of “horizontal evaluation”, which involves peer groups from different areas assessing aspects of the initiative as implemented in other areas. The initiative has led to, among other things, small farmers producing better quality potatoes, building on the specific features of local varieties. Small farmers have also been able to find better local, urban, and international market outlets for their products, including through the creation of new brands (e.g. T’ikipapa in Peru).

*Source:* Based on various publications available at [www.papandina.org](http://www.papandina.org).
Poverty reduction and Pro-Poor Growth: the role of empowerment – © OECD 2012

1. Empowerment of Poor rural People through initiatives in Agriculture and natural resource management

Participation in policy and governance processes

Types of good practice that donors can undertake in this domain include:

- supporting participation in national and regional policy processes;
- strengthening empowerment processes in local governance of agriculture and NRM;
- promoting recognition of RPOs as legitimate interlocutors for government.

Supporting empowerment in this domain means essentially supporting people’s exercise of their rights as citizens, with a focus on processes that have to do with NRM and agriculture. To some extent, the issues covered here belong to the domains of other Good Practice Notes, notably on local citizenship and on legal empowerment. Issues such as voice, inclusion, accountability, and legal empowerment are however even more crucial for rural poor people. This is because rural constituencies (notably poor constituencies) in many countries are poorly represented in policy debates, less organised than their urban peers, less connected to information flows around policy debates, and far from decision-making centres. In many countries, moreover, a substantial part of the rural population lacks ID cards, and this is particularly the case of women and of minorities. In addition, the interests of people with livelihoods based on agriculture and NRM may be at odds with those of other constituencies, for instance when it comes to policies affecting food prices, or policies and decisions on energy.

Box 1.10. Better market information systems: Improving the market power of small producers in Zambia

Starting in the early 2000s, ILO and Sida supported the development of better market information systems serving the needs of small rural producers in Zambia. This was approached through various tools, including the development of the concept for an SMS-based information system. This was piloted and developed over time by Celtel Zambia, a mobile phone company, and by the Zambia National Farmers Union (ZNFU). ZNFU secured support from local RPOs and other market actors to set up this system in partnership with Celtel and with financial and technical support from IFAD through the Smallholder Enterprise and Marketing Program. In the ZNFU/Celtel system, the mobile network provider is in charge of organising a bulk messaging process to mobile phones, whereas the RPO manages and facilitates the collection and communication of information, acting also as a guarantor of its quality and reliability. In addition, Celtel subsidised the cost of an initial number of mobile phones for small farmers, and the RPO has trained farmers and traders on how to use the system, which provides the latest prices for different commodities and also enables farmers to directly contact traders to conduct sales through the system. ZNFU has also set up a mechanism to reach farmers with no mobile phones, appointing contact farmers in district offices who regularly publish the price and trader information they get through the system website or through mobile messaging. The system has been dealing with a growing number of commodities, and it has become increasingly important not only to improve farmer-trader interaction but also to improve the information base of other market and political actors.

supply and infrastructure (e.g. in the case of large-scale investments for biofuel production, construction of dams for hydropower production, etc.). Both as rural people and as people with livelihoods based on NRM and agriculture, therefore, poor rural people are often de facto second-class citizens.

A first type of good practice regards supporting poor rural people’s participation in formal policy processes at national level and beyond, which is, as noted, not only an important opportunity for empowerment processes per se, but also a precondition for scaling up a variety of other processes of empowerment – for instance concerning local successes in institutional reform around water management for agriculture, forestry, or advisory services. This type of good practice typically requires working on a number of fronts at the same time or in a continuous sequence. In particular, donors need to address questions of rights, organisation, facilitation, support to policy design and to implementation, enforcement, and M&E – which are especially important given that even very “empowering” processes of policymaking are no guarantee of “empowering” implementation or impact. Substantial, often long-term commitment and a gradual approach to scaling up and deepening engagement with both rural people and other actors (notably governments) are often essential, and so is hands-on knowledge of local contexts and political dynamics. Bad practices often result from short-term engagement or from a focus solely on policy design, but they may also result from an excessive focus on process rather than on the outcome of policy making. Many bad practices also come from donors’ poor understanding of local-national or local-regional power asymmetries affecting poor rural actors.

Good practice requires mapping context well, understanding stakeholders, and identifying entry points where donors can bring value added. At times, this may simply be expertise to help produce knowledge that poor rural people and their organisations can use to advance their views. Donors can also help share the costs of non-traditional participatory processes at the national level, when there is clear political support for this. Sometimes, the particular experience and geographical focus of a donor may enable it to facilitate empowerment processes in policy processes across borders. In the REAF process in the MERCOSUR, for instance, IFAD has capitalised on the “regionalisation” of its work in this area to help create a platform for RPOs to interact with policymakers. This has triggered greater recognition of family agriculture at the national level, strengthened the capabilities of RPOs, and helped place family farming on the regional agenda. Elsewhere, FAO and IFAD support to regional FO networks in sub-Saharan Africa and to their participation in some international processes (e.g. the EPA negotiations) has triggered empowerment processes at the regional and national levels, resulting in increased FO capacity, better interaction with other national, regional, and international actors, and pressure on FOs to improve their outreach, governance, and accountability. In this case, the donors’ sectoral competence and perceived trustworthiness as “honest brokers” have been preconditions for good practice, but so has also been their willingness to let the networks set their agenda and drive the process.

A second type of good practice concerns strengthening empowerment processes in local governance affecting agriculture and NRM, which partly overlaps with issues covered above. Here too there are examples of bad practices, notably when donors concentrate on governance innovation “from above” without planning for local ownership and sustainability (again, the case of users groups set up for the management of water for agriculture in relative disregard, or even ignorance, of local water institutions is one in which bad donor practices are perhaps particularly common). As this is a realm in which empowerment processes can be very slow, project-bound donor support is likely to yield bad practices. On the other hand, there are many examples of good practice related to community-driven development, support to decentralisation, and territorial development, which are not specific to agriculture and NRM but are also relevant to...
this good practice note. The case of the IFAD-funded Puno-Cusco Corredor project (Box 1.11) is a good example of the main elements of good practice in this realm, notably: long-term commitment and strong linkages between donor-funded project, government, and communities; solid, hands-on knowledge of the context by project staff; capacity to identify changing opportunities to promote empowerment linked to the governance context, and readiness to seize those opportunities; simultaneous attention to building better governance capabilities among poor rural people, government, and other stakeholders; and, accountability to poor rural people as citizens – often requiring particular attention to gender equality.

A third and final type of good practice has to do with promoting recognition of rural people’s organisations as legitimate interlocutors for governments. Capacity building of citizens and of membership-based organisations is at the basis of good practice here, and this may require a range of supportive actions, from education to leadership development, development of a capacity to hold government accountable, etc. Donors may also need to engage in sensitisation and communication around issues that prevent the growth of inclusive membership-based organisations, e.g. gender inequalities. Organisations also often benefit from donor support to better manage internal processes, without impositions of external models. As in all other realms of donor practice, context is key – and this includes not only the institutional and legislative context, but also the political context. Good donor practice may involve leveraging donor-funded projects to promote the adoption of easier, less costly procedures for registering rural associations and RPOs – as IFAD for instance has done in two projects it has funded in Mozambique in recent years. It may involve advocacy to advance the political rights of marginalised groups or people with practical constraints to active citizenship (e.g. women lacking ID cards or facing social sanctions on political participation).

**Box 1.11. The Puno Cusco project in Peru: Improved local governance for development**

In the Puno Cusco Corredor area in the Peruvian Sierra, an IFAD co-funded project has contributed to empowerment processes by enabling local individuals and groups to directly manage public resources. The lynchpin of the project approach is the *concursos*, or public competitions through which local people can access public funds and use them to contract technical assistance for entrepreneurial or local development projects. Besides presenting proposals for funding under the *concursos*, local women and men take part in the resource allocation process with local government representatives. The process of preparation, presentation, and selection of proposals is transparent and open to public scrutiny. Over time, the *concursos* have evolved into a mechanism to improve local governance, and have been adopted by a growing number of municipalities. Government support has been essential for success, as has been the presence of an enabling institutional and policy environment, including decentralisation and the growing role of municipalities. Also important has been the ability of the donor to identify opportunities in this changing environment thanks to its strong presence in the field. An essential element of good practice has been the accountability of project staff and activities to poor local communities. Another key element has been the dual focus on fostering the capabilities of poor rural people as entrepreneurs and as citizens, and on transforming mechanisms of local governance (e.g. municipality budget management) to foster accountability and effectiveness. Finally, critical to success has been the decentralised and flexible approach of project implementation, which has encouraged staff to be responsive to the needs and proposals of stakeholders, and to find creative solutions to local issues.

Donors are often best placed to facilitate recognition of rural people’s organisations by providing opportunities for their hands-on engagement in governance processes relevant for their livelihoods, starting from donor-funded activities. An example of this comes from DANIDA’s engagement with pastoralist groups in Ngorongoro, Tanzania, where the involvement of these groups in resource management in a donor-funded programme has been the basis for their becoming de facto, if not necessarily de jure, interlocutors for state authorities. When working with RPOs, promoting recognition is also often best achieved by supporting their capacity as market agents. In particular, when RPOs are able to acquire a strong coordinating and governance role in one or more value chains, this can eventually establish them as interlocutors to reckon with in the eyes of government, donors and other actors. For instance, this has been the experience of Fouta Djallon Federation, an FO supported by AFD in Guinea, which, starting in the early 1990s, has acquired the ability to greatly enhance production and distribution of specific commodities (notably potatoes and onions) on local and export markets, and thereby established itself as an influential interlocutor in national politics – one able, for instance, to lead the government to make an exception for potatoes under a general ban on agricultural exports in 2007. In this case, the donor’s role has facilitated empowerment by engaging in a long-term partnership with the FO, helping to meet a wide range of technical, economic, and institutional needs of the organisation, and trusting the FO and its leadership to take growing responsibility for organisational and value chain development.

How to engage?

Strengthening capabilities through rural people’s organisations

It is clear from the discussion so far that promoting empowerment processes in agriculture and NRM requires that donors seek to strengthen the capabilities of poor people, so they can better engage in processes of change. This requires first of all a change in attitude, to recognise that poor rural people have the right and the capacity to take responsibility for their future. Beyond this, however, there is no set blueprint for how to support people’s capabilities. Depending on the contexts, donors should use a variety of forms of engagement at the country and local level as opportunities to invest or facilitate poor rural people’s access to education (including general education as well as agricultural education), information, organisation, advocacy, legal support, etc. In many cases, the supporting organisation – with a focus on existing organisations – is a key entry point, even though individual capabilities such as the ability to access good quality rural education are also important.

The importance of supporting rural people’s organisations is evident in all the types of good practices referred to above. However, the form that this support takes depends on the context, on the type of donor engagement, and on pre-existing capabilities. Two different examples illustrate the range of possibilities. In the case of SEWA, for instance, starting in the 1990s donors have been dealing with a very capable organisation with strong internal empowerment mechanisms. In such a situation, donors have mostly been able to contribute to empowerment in SEWA’s work by providing support to activities already on the agenda of the movement (including through focused budget support), allowing the organisation to maintain primary accountability to its members. This has reinforced the capacity of SEWA members to envision change, and ensured that change is pursued in a direction and at a pace that makes sense to them. Also important has been donor support to improve the institutional and policy environment in which SEWA operates. The experience of ILO illustrates this aspect of good practice, as the donor in this case has collaborated with SEWA
on an “equal but different partners” basis, promoting international norms supportive of the rights of home-based workers partly driven by SEWA’s experience, and supporting SEWA’s own advocacy capabilities and networks to promote this legislation at the national level.

A different example is that of UPA DI’s support to Faso Jigi. In this case, the donor-supported agri-agency has accompanied the process of organisation from the ground up. Key for the success of this experience in terms of promoting empowerment has been the simultaneous focus on developing the internal democratic structure of the organisation and on the economic, financial and market capabilities of Faso Jigi. The role of UPA DI has been that of a mentor and a peer at the same time – discussing, sharing principles and experiences, but recognising that the ownership of the organisational process rested with participating farmers and their representatives.

Though the modalities of donor engagement with these two organisations have been different, both examples show first of all that supporting capabilities for change through rural people’s organisations can be done effectively in a hands-on manner, as part of donor support to the pursuit of people’s concrete livelihood issues and of the specific agenda of each organisation concerning agriculture and natural resource management. Second, in both cases donor support to develop an enabling institutional and (in the case of SEWA) policy context has been essential to enable organisations to promote positive change (and also to institutionalise and, if appropriate, scale up their successes). Third, in both cases donor engagement has respected, fostered, or generated opportunities for cultivating leadership capabilities within rural people’s organisations. All three lessons hold true in all cases of good practice as regards this first aspect of donor engagement to promote empowerment.

*Nurturing better interaction among stakeholders in NRM and agriculture*

All types of good practice require that donors help foster dialogue and more constructive interaction among different actors to enable change. This is of course linked to the first modality of engagement, since creating new patterns of interaction among stakeholders requires that their capabilities – and particularly those of the less powerful, namely poor rural people and their organisations – are strengthened, and that their rights are enhanced and protected. However, there are at least two further dimensions to this. The first is to create spaces and opportunities for dialogue and constructive interaction, with a hands-on focus on issues and agendas of immediate relevance to poor rural people. The second is to foster (through policy dialogue, advocacy, piloting of institutional innovations or other means) the appropriate legal, policy, political, and more broadly institutional conditions that can enable new platforms and opportunities to operate effectively. All three aspects of this modality of donor engagement serve to ensure not only that constructive interaction contributes to empowerment (and yields concrete results in terms of pro-poor growth), but also that it outlives donor support, and that it can be replicated and/or scaled up if appropriate.

Among the cited cases of good practice, the Corredor project is worth mentioning, due to the central role of multi-stakeholder committees adjudicating competitions over public funds in promoting empowerment processes, better governance, peer learning, and confidence and skills development among poor people. One key factor for success, as well as for the subsequent institutional mainstreaming and scaling up of the use of these committees for public budget management at various levels, has been the existence of a policy environment that established broad-based participation in managing public budgets as a matter of rights for local citizenship. Also critical has been the fact that the rationale for seeking constructive interaction, namely the demonstrated effectiveness of the *concursos*
in stimulating local development and making local governance more effective, has been apparent to stakeholders irrespective of donor pressure. Another example of constructive dialogue opportunities concerns the Learning Routes experience, which has also triggered the formation of platforms for exchange, technical support, and joint initiatives among local and non-local actors. In this case as well, the economic and social impact of such experiences has served as an incentive for interaction that will outlast donor support. The same is true of platforms for dialogue among researchers, policymakers, and rural communities around aquaculture in India, where enabling political conditions and the enhancement of the rights of marginalised aquaculture producers have been key factors of success just as much as the economic and service-effectiveness rationale of dialogue platforms.

Yet another example of good practice concerns the promotion of integrated lake management in Uganda, where the creation of multi-stakeholder platforms has, over time, improved local governance, enhanced trust and accountability between government and local stakeholders, and stimulated local development. As a result, these platforms are well placed to outlive donor support because the involved actors have a stake in what constructive dialogue can bring.

Adopting flexible design, funding and implementation modalities

Empowerment processes are essentially about envisioning and achieving change. Therefore, donor initiatives that support them must be designed and managed to accommodate new proposals, possibilities and capabilities. The case of the Puno Cusco Corredor project is an example of good practice, as it has involved granting project staff autonomy to reconsider various elements of the project when new problems or opportunities arose. In particular, staff and project stakeholders were able to redesign together elements of the project (e.g. a financial services component). This is a good illustration of flexibility, in the sense of clear setting of project goals, accompanied by an open approach to identifying and developing in context the most suitable activities for achieving these objectives, which enables learning both on the part of the donor and on the part of other stakeholders. A crucial complement to flexibility is funding arrangements that enable adaptation to support changing activities, inclusive targeting, innovative ideas from project participants, and piloting of innovations. It is important to note that it is not always the case that a donor-funded initiative is designed from the very start in an adaptive and flexible manner – flexibility may come from a continuous presence in the field, by virtue of seeking solutions to new issues as they emerge with local stakeholders. A good example of this can be found in the case of GIZ support to devolution of forest management in Dak Lak, Vietnam (Box 1.12).

Another case of good practice in terms of flexibility and long-term donor engagement is that of the PSAOP project. In this case, the donor was able to support empowerment processes because of its willingness to accept long-term engagement (ten years to assist institutional reforms under the PSAOP program, largely with the same team of people involved), plus a few preparatory years of facilitating joint reflection among stakeholders. This long-term donor commitment was crucial to motivate different stakeholders to engage and to come to arrangements that all parties considered as fair because they had had a chance to negotiate them. This sort of commitment also allowed the donor to learn during the process. Also important was the donor’s willingness to undertake changes in operational modalities (e.g. it changed its disbursement tools to allow RPOs to directly access project funding), which was crucial to strengthening the capabilities of farmers and their organisations.
1. Empowerment of Poor Rural People through Initiatives in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management

Who to work with?

It is apparent from the examples of good practice that promoting empowerment processes in agriculture and NRM requires working with a range of actors. To begin with, a crucial set of interlocutors are community-based organisations (CBOs) and their individual members. CBOs may have very different potential as vehicles or venues for empowerment. Good practice involves not only working with them but also helping build their capacity to be representative, inclusive, well managed and accountable (including with specific mechanisms to ensure better participation of women, youth, the poor and minorities). Having clear exit strategies in projects working with CBOs is an essential element of good practice, and so is helping to root changes in CBOs in authoritative local institutions and in concrete development functions, so as to ensure their sustainability. Formalisation of CBOs can be another aspect of good practice, but this cannot be generalised to all CBOs or to all contexts.

A second key set of interlocutors are existing organisations representing poor people beyond the community level, and, again, their individual members. These organisations may include RPOs, women’s associations, indigenous peoples’ organisations and so forth. These can sometimes play key roles in helping donors design programmes, they can take part in programme implementation, they can facilitate or take on service provision roles and they can work with donors in advocacy on behalf of rural poor people. In general, working with existing organisations to foster empowerment requires simultaneously investing in institutional development (notably better, more inclusive and transparent governance) and

Box 1.12. Support to local devolution of forest management rights in Dak Lak, Vietnam

Since the 1970s, forest resources in the Dak Lak province of Vietnam were in many areas plagued by unsustainable use and deforestation. In the late 1990s, the central government called on the provincial government to address the problem. At the time, GTZ was financing a project in the province, piloting participatory practices for sustainable forest management. The project then gradually changed focus towards technical assistance to the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to undertake local devolution of forest management. The project was involved in piloting land-use planning at the commune level, capacity building to local stakeholders, and land distribution with a focus on local ethnic minorities. After the allocation of forestland began, the project was also flexible enough to respond to the need to develop regulations for forest use, which required co-operation with the provincial Forest Protection Department. The project provided technical assistance on this front, starting from pilot trials involving local people in drawing up village regulations. Forestland allocation also led to a need to develop agroforestry systems, which the project team was also able to support, together with local multi-stakeholder groups. Overall, the openness of the project to respond to changing local needs and to accompany processes of empowerment around forest devolution has enabled better local participation in forest management (resulting also in declining deforestation rates), more secure tenure over forestland, and economic benefits for local people, as well as policy and institutional development. Also important was the decentralised structure of the project, which enabled the local government counterpart to take initiatives as the evolving context required.

in their ability to provide concrete services to their members, refraining from imposing agendas or diverting accountability outward. It may also require that the individual capabilities of their members are strengthened to ensure that they participate effectively in RPO activities and that these become opportunities for individual empowerment.

A very important aspect of promoting empowerment processes with existing organisations of poor rural people is to foster strong linkages between community-based and local organisations and non-local organisations – notably at the national level. While the latter need to draw strength and legitimacy from their ability to represent the interests of the grassroots, the latter often need to be able to influence processes beyond the local level to achieve significant and sustainable change. Building linkages has, in turn, both an institutional component and a component of leadership development, both of which deserve donor attention.

State agencies and local governments are a third group of key interlocutors. Empowerment processes need to involve state actors (both as institutional entities and as individuals) at whatever level is relevant to envision and achieve change, in a perspective of immediate impact but also of sustainability and of eventual, possible, scaling up of achievements. This includes both national-level agencies and institutions (e.g. ministries of agriculture, environment, infrastructure, finance, “national women’s machineries”, agencies administering forests, water, fisheries, livestock), and local agencies (e.g. branches of line agencies, provincial or district-level administrations, municipalities, local councils). Local governments are often key settings for empowerment processes in which poor rural people participate, but enabling conditions at higher levels of government are typically needed for this to occur. This includes enabling policy and political conditions, adequate resource generation and allocation processes in the national-to-local administrative set up of government, and government capacity to identify what policies and initiatives are more likely not only to favour pro-poor growth but also empowerment processes. Good practice also shows the need for donors to work not only on participatory processes and accountability in state agencies, but also to build their capacity to work effectively. Again, this requires both institutional and individual capacity building.

A fourth set of interlocutors includes the private sector and NGOs. Private sector agents can play important roles in empowerment processes, and donors should seek to engage them when possible through the creation of multi-stakeholder platforms, win-win contractual arrangements in market chains, collaborative R&D processes around NRM and agriculture, etc. Donors also need to recognise the comparative advantage that NGOs and agri-agencies often have in working with RPOs and in ensuring their sustainability beyond the timeframe of donor-funded projects. NGOs may also be particularly well placed to contribute to empowerment around agriculture and NRM in relation to legal empowerment, leadership development, capacity development of marginalised groups (e.g. indigenous communities, rural women) and rights-based issues. In general, good practice when working with this range of actors needs to be driven by ultimate accountability to poor rural people.

How can donors be better equipped for good practice?

Much of what has been discussed so far donors already seek to do. For good practices to be more common, there is a need for donors to be alert to empowerment needs and opportunities in the field and ready to seize them with the right attitude and resources. There may be particular capabilities that donors can develop to do a better job in this realm. These include the following:
**Flexibility.** Donor programmes are often inhospitable to empowerment processes because of rigid design, implementation, budgeting and reporting. Even when staff engages in learning through empowerment in the field, their ability to follow up on this may be constrained by lack of programme flexibility. Donors need to make progress in devising more flexible tools and programmes to support agriculture and NRM. In particular, while it is important to set clear objectives for donor-funded programmes, flexibility should be built into the design of activities, which should be open to adaptation and learning to enable empowerment.

**Accountability.** Support to empowerment requires accountability to primary stakeholders, respect for their entitlements, openness and transparency, and a willingness to listen and learn. This often requires both a shift in attitudes and in operating modalities vis-à-vis poor rural people, which should be reflected in donor values, HR policies, staff training programmes, and accountability mechanisms. It also needs to come out in procedural arrangements concerning what sort of entities may receive support, how reporting mechanisms are designed, how agendas are set and results evaluated.

**Working with poor rural people’s organisations.** It is clear from good practice that organisation is an essential aspect of empowerment processes linked to agriculture and NRM. Donors clearly need time and opportunities to experiment with and learn from their engagement with existing rural people’s organisations. Donors must also have enabling policies for engagement with these organisations and be willing to invest in their capabilities when contextual analysis suggests that this may help foster pro-poor growth.

- **Context.** All empowerment processes are issue, context and actor specific. Careful and continuous analysis of local institutions, stakeholders, and processes is necessary to steer donor actions in a direction conducive to empowerment. Contextual knowledge – including knowledge held by local actors – needs to come into the design and implementation of programmes. It is also important to systematically capitalise on knowledge coming from field staff.

- **Politics.** Empowerment processes are political as they involve building social capital to envision and achieve change and to shape decisions of public relevance. In some cases, there may be relative, short-term losers from empowerment processes. Donors should negotiate the politics of support to empowerment by ensuring that their initiatives are set within an evidence-based, contextually adapted agenda of empowerment as a factor of pro-poor growth, rather than empowerment per se.
Notes

1. The discussion of areas for donor engagement is limited to issues that have direct relevance to agriculture and NRM. However, it is clear that promoting empowerment processes of relevance for rural poor people and for overcoming rural poverty also requires initiatives in a number of areas that are not specifically related to agricultural and NRM, such as citizenship, education, gender equality, and others.

2. Project information is available on the IFAD website, at www.ifad.org.


6. In the PAMA project, for instance, IFAD and the local project management team have worked to advocate for less costly and simpler procedures of registration of rural producers’ co-operatives and associations. In the Sofala Bank Artisanal Fisheries project, it has worked with the Instituto de Desenvolvimento de Pesca de Pequena Escala (IDPPE), which is implementing the project, to establish community fisheries councils and to lobby to achieve their legal status, which has enabled them to play an effective role in managing fishery resources and also to influence policy. See www.ifad.org for project information.
