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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Enabling Rural Innovation - An Integrated Approach for Empowering Farmers in Managing Natural Resources and Accessing Market Opportunities

THOMAS PIRCHER, AMOS OWAMANI

Horizont3000 Austrian Organisation for Development Co-operation, Regional Office East Africa - Enabling Rural Innovation East Africa Project, Uganda

Abstract

Commercialisation of agriculture and the transition from subsistence into market-oriented farming is often driven by short-term benefits and result in a depletion of natural resources. This highlights the importance of an integrated approach for promoting agro-enterprise development in family farming systems.

HORIZONT3000 is implementing a project called Enabling Rural Innovation in East Africa (ERI EA) that aims at enhancing and balancing food sovereignty and increasing incomes through market oriented agriculture, while sustaining the natural resource base of farmers. The project is based on the Enabling Rural Innovation (ERI) approach, which has been developed in East Africa by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) to overcome the linear, top-down mode of technology development and market access in agriculture. In collaboration with various research and development partners, an interdisciplinary team developed the approach over several years.

In the ERI EA project, community development facilitators of HORIZONT3000's partner organisations in Uganda and Tanzania are carrying out trainings with farmer groups in their respective districts. The trainings are comprised of five modules: Participatory Diagnosis, Participatory Market Research, Farmer Participatory Research, Enterprise development, and Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation. The participating farmer groups identify local resources, collectively develop action plans to capitalize on available resources and continuously monitor them in the process of developing agro-enterprises. Based on a market research by farmer groups themselves, they learn how to produce according to product quality criteria from potential buyers and make trade agreements before producing. In Farmer Participatory Research, the groups experiment with different technological options of agricultural practices and evaluate those with criteria that include not only marketability and the value as food crops, but also context-specific preferences and sustainability of production practices.

Building on identified natural resources to develop profitable agro-enterprises, awareness of the importance to safeguard them is created. Hence, the ERI approach supports farmer-led development in a sustainable way and empowers farmers to manage their natural resources responsibly.

Keywords: Community-based management, farmer-led development, market oriented