

STRENGTHENING RURAL INSTITUTIONS PROJECT

Background to the project



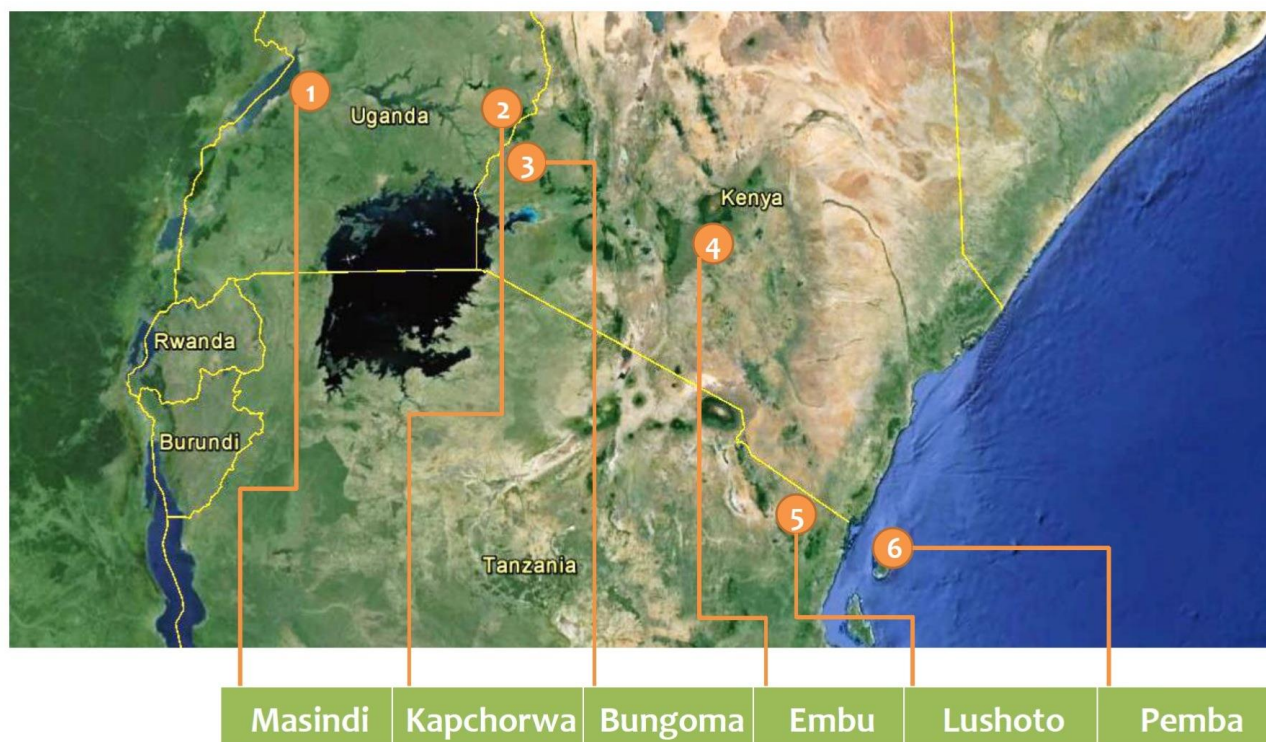
Collective action in natural resource management is a key feature of smallholder farmer systems. However, most studies on technology adoption for the smallholder farmers are more inclined to use the household as a unit in their research. In reality, problems faced by smallholder farmers are crosscutting in scope, and require the cooperation of various stakeholders. Weak rural grassroots institutions have low capacity; they do not exploit collective capital and have limited knowledge sharing abilities. This situation hampers the adoption of

sustainable land management practices, technologies and ultimately, the achievement of food security in the East African region. Available literature has shown that putting people together in well-organized groups, consulting and incorporating their knowledge during the planning and implementation stage of projects inculcates a sense of ownership and participation. This in turn leads to sustainability of the development projects. Therefore, strengthening rural grassroots organizations is critical to enhance their capacity to adopt sustainable technologies and practices, undertake innovations and influence policies that can positively benefit both their livelihoods and the environment.

Description of the project

The Eastern and Southern Africa regional office of the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), through an action research process to strengthen rural grassroots organizations in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, is undertaking a project: 'Enabling rural transformation and grassroots institutional building for sustainable land management and increased income and food security'. The research is funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and implemented by the **Strengthening Rural Institutions (SRI)** project. An Inception workshop was held in 2010 with activities commencing in May 2011 and scheduled to culminate in 2014. The project draws on principles of institutional and organizational analysis to strengthen and improve institutional capacity building in future development projects.

Activities are ongoing in six districts in three East African countries: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In each country, the project encompasses two districts: Embu and Bungoma in Kenya, Pemba and Lushoto in Tanzania and Masindi and Kapchorwa in Uganda. The project sample includes 583 rural grassroots organizations drawn from eight different projects. Six out of the eight projects are funded by IFAD, one each by the Landcare East Africa network and the African Highland Initiative (AHI).



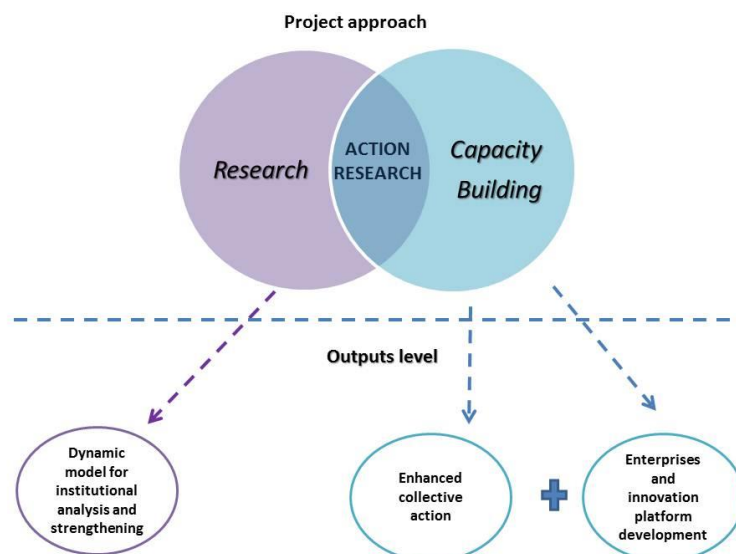
Map outlining project sites across Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania

Objectives:

- To enhance capacity of variant of grassroots institutions and provide support to harness broader collective action for rural service delivery
- To improve enterprise development within the context of conservation, and community level asset accumulation
- To build a regional institutional platform for knowledge sharing, scaling up, and participation in sustainable land management policy making and development processes in East Africa

Project Approach

The project uses an action research approach to simultaneously produce impacts in the selected sites and expand scientific knowledge on grassroots institutional strengthening and analysis. The key impact goal is strengthening policy engagement by policy makers and citizens, and enabling grassroots institutions to reach economies of scale, access services including rural finance, extension and legal aid, and weaken obstacles of change for improved production and incomes, and poverty reduction in East Africa. The main purpose of the project is to develop a model for strengthening grassroots institutions for effective engagement in policy processes that enable poor rural households to aggregate, mobilize, and access rural services.



Simplified project approach and main outputs diagram

Research Methodologies

Diverse data collection techniques were applied including a baseline survey aimed at capturing basic information about the project population (583 organizations), such as their origin and purpose, affiliation, years of activity, membership type and main challenges faced. A dynamic, empirically based and adaptable tool, Maturity Assessment Tool, was also utilized, capturing and categorizing grassroots organizations' maturity into three levels, namely beginners, intermediate and mature.

The indicators used in this exercise included governance, management, leadership, capacity development and resilience. The tool also determined selection of groups and their capacity to either engage in a workshop, start an enterprise or a platform and as a base to determine what modules of capacity building training a group may need in the implementation stages, all dependent on the project scope. Indicators used during the maturity assessment exercise were, however, more complex than those used in the baseline survey, presenting a gap between the two tools.

There was a need, therefore, for the project to develop a questionnaire that contained all the criteria used in both tools. This validation survey gathered all the relevant information to determine the maturity of the groups and validate the information collected during the maturity exercise. Additionally, it served as a standard survey to identify various correction factors to assist practitioners on the use of the maturity tool on other sources of data.

A capacity needs assessment was undertaken in each site through a four-day participatory workshop. The workshop was designed to explore the groups' knowledge, skills, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, assets and externalities affecting its operation. Data collected

during the workshops was analyzed at group and site levels, with specific reference to the technical and functional capacities of each group. Various recommendations have been highlighted in relation to specific training, platform and enterprise development, and any enabling environmental factors that would inhibit a group's achievement of the objectives.

The projects' monitoring and evaluation (M&E) exercise is an ongoing activity which is carried out on a two-track basis- project level and intervention level. At the project level, the M&E is concerned with high level goals and targets, such as development and delivery of products and services. At the intervention level, the M&E looks at assessing the effectiveness of the intervention methods proposed by the project team (i.e. the actual capacity building efforts). The intervention level has 3 main tracking mechanisms currently in place or being implemented – (i) work plan tracking, (ii) training feedback reports, and (iii) a short-form maturity tool.

In order to effectively track the work plans that the groups had formulated during their respective CNA workshops, 2 sets of M&E tools were developed and tested in early 2013 for use by the groups and by the site focal point persons (FPPs). For individual groups' work plans, the tool consisted of 2 sections – Work Plan Target tracking, where objectives and strategies were tracked numerically, and Work Plan Objectives journal, where qualitative information was solicited in support of the objectives and strategies. For the sites' work plans, a similar tool was developed, collecting both numeric and qualitative data on the progress of the work plan. Both sets of tools were tested with groups, and circulated amongst the sites for feedback on usability, ease of understanding, and appropriateness of depth of information being collected. This feedback was then incorporated into the final versions of the tools, and the sites and groups implemented the tools in June 2013.

A short-form maturity tool was also developed in late 2013, to serve as a periodic indicator of the progress of a group's maturity. 14 criteria were identified based on statistical significance, and the groups answered the criteria at the same time period as their regular Work Plan Target tracking. The assumption was that as groups continued to receive interventions from the project, their answers to the indicators under each criteria would progress from lower scoring indicators (signifying lower maturity), to higher scoring indicators (signifying higher maturity).

Activities

In addition to the baseline surveys, maturity assessment of the groups, capacity needs analysis, validation survey, and monitoring and evaluation exercises, the SRI project has also undertaken various activities in each of the sites including:

- Capacity development activities i.e. group and site workplan development in all the sites characterized by skills training, technology provision, and partnership development
- Annual focal point persons meetings



- Participation in various conferences and workshops within and without ICRAF for instance the World Congress on Agroforestry held in India, Science Week held annually, AFAAS conference held in Botswana, African Climate Change conference, just to name a few
- Enterprise/ Platform activity planning in March done alongside M&E activities
 - Innovation platform tool development
 - Simple partnership protocol development
 - Cluster partnership development
 - District level platform protocol development
 - Draft enterprise development strategy
 - Criteria for enterprise selection protocol
 - Support to site level enterprise activities
- Project review mission and work planning for the year 2013 and 2014
- Occasional fields visits to assess the progress of the groups in all the 6 sites
- Workplan monitoring and evaluation exercises
- Policy dialogue tool development
 - County/ district level tool
 - National level tool
- M&E and mini maturity tool run in March 2014 (done quarterly)
 - Participatory data collection
- Maturity tool software manual development
 - Statistical component development
 - ANNOVA/ CPA/ OLS
- Support and supervision to masters studies
- Support and supervision to masters research studies and theses writing (Nairobi university, Kenyatta University, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Massachusetts State University)
 - Sheila Tallam → Farmer group development process and its influence on the effectiveness of collective action
 - Joan Kimaiyo → Modeling women roles and attributes in influencing performance of farmer organisations
 - Douglas Bwire → The role of grassroots institutions in enhancing adaption to climate variability
 - Jephine Mogoi → Going to scale: leveraging on platforms, coalitions and networks for successful enterprise development
- Support and supervision to proposal development
 - Hanningtone Simiyu → Statistical validation of the classification rate of the rural institutions diagnostics software by application of artificial neural networks and structural equation models
 - Abdulahi Hassan Osman → Local institutions and natural resources mitigation: The case of biodiversity conservation in the humid high land of East Africa

Partnerships



Challenges with food security, poverty, climate change, ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss are highly interlinked. These interconnections are increasingly apparent in Kenya's growing economy, where ecosystem degradation enhances food insecurity and poverty, and poverty and food insecurity exacerbate the pressure on scarce natural resources.

Despite the many successes with integrated approaches to landscape management in Kenya, there remains considerable challenges, including poor

coordination among stakeholders within the landscape, inadequate training and skills, lack of awareness and information, inadequate funding and incentives, and poor infrastructure, to name a few. Furthermore, to be implemented effectively, integrated landscape approaches require a framework of enabling policies and institutions to support multi-sectoral coordination and planning at a landscape scale.

The Strengthening Rural Institutions project in partnership with EcoAgriculture Partners, under the coordination of the Landscapes for People, Food and Nature (LPFN) Initiative began a process to improve the policy and institutional framework for ILM in Kenya based on policy-maker and civil society engagement. This partnership aimed at understanding and supporting integrated agricultural landscape approaches to simultaneously meet goals for food production, ecosystem health and human wellbeing.

While there are roles for the public sector, private sector and civil society in the promotion of ILM, this process specifically focused on the role of the public sector in creating an enabling policy framework and supportive institutional environment for ILM. Researchers began by assessing the elements of Kenya's current policy and institutional framework related to the implementation and scaling up of ILM from the perspectives of both civil society and policymakers.

Five sites were selected for in-depth scoping studies to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the policy and institutional environment for ILM including: Embu; Bungoma; Naivasha; Lari and Laikipia. These sites were selected based on the type of agro-ecological zones, livelihood characteristics and the type of institutional arrangements or stakeholder platforms present to ensure a diverse set of integrated landscape initiatives operating in a variety of policy and institutional conditions.

A team of researchers spent three days in each site to meet the key actors, convene focus groups with important stakeholder groups, review documentation and visit important areas. Individuals

and groups in each of these sites were surveyed using a five stage process, which was composed of the following elements: Issues identification; Stakeholder mapping; Identification of innovations and challenges; Role of public policy in the ILM context; and Knowledge sharing and learning networks.

This process culminated in June 2014 with a facilitated national policy dialogue where civil society leaders and key county- and national-level policymakers worked together to improve the policy environment for ILM in Kenya.

Partnerships with other projects were and are still being established in order to ensure successful interventions and feedback at the ground level including:

- Testing policy tools for national level “Trees for Food Security” for ACIAR project in Ethiopia and Rwanda
- Providing support to participatory bottom up approach for grassroots institutions for the DGIS project for Kenya, Ethiopia, Niger and Mali

Deliverables

Some of the outputs developed thus far include:

- ✓ Enabling Rural Transformation and Grassroots Institutional Building for Sustainable Land Management and Increased Incomes and Food Security (2012/ 2013)
- ✓ Case study- “Strengthening Rural Institutions in East Africa”
- ✓ Assessing Capacity Needs and Strategy Development for Grassroots Rural Institutions: A Guide for Facilitators
- ✓ Capacity Needs Identification and Assessment
- ✓ Reports from capacity development activities from the sites
- ✓ Strengthening Rural Institutions communication plan
- ✓ Reports on focal point persons workshops
- ✓ Strengthening Rural Institutions and Evergreen Agriculture Stakeholders’ Workshop Report
- ✓ How to do note on Grassroots Institutional Organizational Analysis for Capacity Development Planning in Project Design and Implementation
- ✓ Strengthening Grassroots Institutions in Smallholder Farming Systems: An Emerging Model
- ✓ Reports from capacity development activities from the sites
- ✓ Enterprise and Platform planning work ideas from sites
- ✓ Facilitators Manual for Strengthening Rural Institutions



- ✓ Maturity Assessment Tool Software and manual
- ✓ District level policy dialogue reports (Embu, Bungoma, Lari, Laikipia, Naivasha, Ethiopia and Rwanda)
- ✓ National level policy dialogue reports (Kenya and Ethiopia)
- ✓ Policy dialogue tool
- ✓ Policy brief- Strengthening Rural Institutions: Strategies for effective capacity building of grassroots communities
- ✓ Papers in final draft in readiness for a write shop in October 2014
 - Designing A framework for analyzing the capacity needs of grassroots rural institutions in East Africa Clinton Muller, George Oketch, Rick Kamugisha, Douglas Bwire, Verrah Otiende, Siddharth Mohan, Joseph Tanui, Jeremias Mowo
 - Evaluating the organizational capacity of smallholder groups in rural development: A methodological approach Tanui Joseph, Verrah Otiende, Joan Kimaiyo, Mieke Bourne, Jephine Mogoi, Jeremias Mowo
 - Are Innovation platforms possible institutions for integrated NRM practices at landscape level platforms Verrah A. Otiende, Joseph Tanui, Kamugisha Rick, Mieke Bourne and Jeremias G. Mowo
 - Developing a model for strengthening rural grassroots institutional (organisational) together; a case of participatory action research in East Africa Mieke Bourne, Francesca R. Borgia, Alice Muller, Joan Kimaiyo, Siddharth Vishwanathan, Joseph Tanui, Jeremias Mowo
- ✓ Posters and papers presented during the World Congress in India:
 - Adoption of natural resource management technologies for sustainable land management: Experiences and lessons from South Western Uganda Rick Kamugisha, Joseph Tanui, Kenneth Masuki, Joy Tukahirwa, Clement Okia, Jeremias Mowo, Mieke Bourne, Jane Kugonza and Ronald Wabwire
 - Are Innovation platforms possible institutions for integrated NRM practices at Landscape Level Verrah A. Otiende, Joseph Tanui, Kamugisha Rick, Mieke Bourne and Jeremias G. Mowo
 - Agroforestry-based Enterprises: A framework for evaluating the enabling factors for Enterprise Development Siddharth M. Vishwanathan, Stepha McMullin, Joseph Tanui
- ✓ Abstracts presented in AFAAS Botswana:
 - Designing a framework for analyzing the capacity needs of grassroots rural institutions – an experience from East Africa Clinton Muller, George Oketch, Rick Kamugisha, Douglas Bwire, Verrah Otiende, Siddharth Mohan, Joseph Tanui, Jeremias Mowo
 - Understanding farmer institutional development in the context of rural transformation: A framework with case studies from East Africa Mieke Bourne, Joseph Tanui, Francesca Borgia, Alice Muller, Joan Kimaiyo, Siddharth Mohan, Jeremias Mowo
 - Tracking institutional change of grassroots organizations in rural development: Enabling capacity development for natural resource management in eastern Africa Tanui Joseph, Verrah Otiende, Joan Kimaiyo, Mieke Bourne, Alice Muller, Jeremias Mowo

Challenges for SRI

As an action research project, the period and funding allocated was limited to capture enough impacts at all levels from the SC to the farmer groups. Balancing between research and development as expected by the donors, research centre and the farmer organizations was challenging although very necessary.

Key Lessons from SRI to date

Participatory identification of gaps and needs by farmer organizations enabled ownership and commitment towards achieving the groups intended vision. Constant engagement of stakeholders at the site level in the implementation process has improved on the project buy-in by the rural community

SRI Activities for the Future



The project is still undertaking the Monitoring and Evaluation phase, which is being conducted on a two-track basis: project and intervention levels. The capacity development plan to implement the group and site work plans are being finalized alongside a draft framework for both enterprise and platform developments in the region.

A second run of the maturity tool software will be carried out in September 2014 and the enterprise and platform development components will initiate their activities in each

of the sites in the third quarter of the year. The project is also working on providing capacity building to the selected organisations and measure changes occurring at group and site level through a participatory M&E strategy.

A quick exploratory feel on the outcomes of the project was carried out in July, characterized by meeting with the project team and field visits to Embu and Bungoma. An independent reviewer has also been contracted by the project to assess the appropriateness of the project implementation process and the extent to which the groups have been strengthened.