

FINLAND'S SUPPORT TO AGRICORD  
*FARMERS FIGHTING POVERTY:*  
BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF FARMER ORGANISATIONS  
IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, 2012-2014

EVALUATION REPORT- MAY 2015



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Farmers Fighting Poverty* (FFP) is a farmer driven initiative implemented by AgriCord, an alliance of 12 agri-agencies, representing farmers' organisations from Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Senegal, Spain, Sweden, and a network of 10 Asian countries. In addition, a national farmer organisation in Italy is an associated member.

Finland has supported the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty programme since 2007. During the period 2012 to 2014 the total support was 3.0 million Euros, ear-marked for two main activities: *Support to farmer organisations* (2 million euro) and *Support to AgriCord coordination* (1 m. euro).

The objective of this evaluation is to review the 2012-2104 phase of Finland's support to the *Farmers Fighting Poverty* Programme and assess the achievement of objectives at project level and at the organisational level as part of the AgriCord network. The Terms of Reference provide for a very broad scope (Annex 1). The evaluation objectives were both summative (judging results), and formative (focused on improving or developing the programme). The specific objectives of the evaluation were paraphrased into three fundamental evaluation questions:

- a) How good has been the result of Finland's support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme on the ground? What has been the impact at beneficiary level, in particular in terms of poverty, gender equality, sustainability and governance?
- b) What can we learn for the future from the approaches, strategy and organisational arrangements, as adopted in the Finnish funded programme? What recommendations can be made for the future, at programme and at project level?
- c) What has been the contribution by Finland to the overall success of the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Programme? Is there added value in the Finnish funding modalities that provide lessons for AgriCord as a whole?

All projects funded by Finland over the period 2012-2014 were reviewed and eight projects were studied in detail. The evaluation approach was *qualitative*, based on *structured, participatory and discursive methods*, supported by simple statistical presentations. The qualitative approach was selected to meet summative and formative evaluation expectations, and to overcome the lack of statistical data sets. The evaluation was undertaken between January and March 2015 by a team of three external consultants, one international and two national consultants from Ethiopia and Tanzania respectively.<sup>1</sup>

The two first years of Government of Finland support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme, 2007-2008, were characterized as a 'learning phase'. The years 2009-2011 was a period of intensive expansion and growth. The third phase, 2012-2014, was aimed at reinforcing the Farmers Fighting Poverty results and consolidating the AgriCord coordination role. This evaluation has shown that substantial reinforcement of good results has taken place, but that additional work is needed to consolidate the achievements.

In general, Finland's support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty, the *BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF FARMER ORGANISATIONS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES* programme 2012-2014, performed very well against expected results and focal areas. During the project period, a total of 24 new projects were initiated by farmer organizations (FOs) in nine countries. The project portfolio targeted Finnish bilateral partner countries as planned, giving preference

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to projects that enhance economic activities; boosting twinning operations; and developing collaboration with forest producer organizations. A Finnish agri-agency (AA) was established. Overall programme management was good, though governance challenges were faced in some projects, and the Finnish agri-agency, and the AgriCord secretariat, were strained in human resources to provide effective backstopping to programme implementation.

Valuable lessons were learnt during the period 2012-2014. At project level, strategic achievements included wise use of a value chain approach; generating social capital through twinning; and exploring the added value of smallholder forestry development. For the future, strengthening the partnership approach between AAs and FOs; building stronger local presence to enhance accountability; shifting the focus from project-driven to membership-driven FO development; and meeting the challenges of simultaneously grooming economic activities and building organizational strength and governance, will yield further accomplishments.

The next implementation phase, 2015-2017, will bring several innovative processes to completion. The evaluation recommends that support to Component 1 is continued, to take the current crop of projects to completion, which will allow for results to mature and lessons to be learnt, in particular from smallholder forestry initiatives and the pilot-extension-scaling up model. Consolidating the social gains from twinning partnerships; strengthening the partnership approach between AAs and FOs; shifting the focus from project-driven to membership-driven FO development; and meeting the challenges of simultaneously grooming economic activities and building organizational strength and governance are some of the other expected accomplishments. In addition, the Finnish Agri-agency, FFD, should consider developing a long-term partner engagement strategy and organizational policies (e.g. gender). Much benefit will be gained from deepening the twinning approach and creating a stronger local presence. The dismantling of the programmatic enmeshment of AgriCord and FFD, actively pursued since 2011, should continue.

The Government of Finland provision of core funding to the AgriCord secretariat has been invaluable for the development of the Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme. To reap the full benefits from the leverage created by this rare opportunity, support to should continue. However, the content of future support needs to be redetermined within the context of the on-going '14all' restructuring exercise. Special consideration may be given provision of external support to the AgriCord M&E function, to produce impact data required by the MFAF (i.e. project impact on poverty and cross-cutting issues across farming populations).

Therefore, through continued, well-targeted support to AgriCord and MTK/FFD, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland may play a significant role in consolidating and allowing the Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme to mature, bringing about a new generation of participatory farmer-to-farmer development cooperation initiatives, that have demonstrated a huge potential to effectively impact on the livelihood and wellbeing of impoverished rural households in developing countries.

Chapter 1 of this report provides an account for how the evaluation was undertaken. Chapter 2 provides an overview of Finland's support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme, the *BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF FARMER ORGANISATIONS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES* programme 2012-2014. The detailed findings from the evaluation are discussed in Chapter 3, and recommendations presented in Chapter 4. A summary of the evaluation findings and recommendations are presented in the table below. Please consult Chapter 4 and thematic Chapters for clarifications.

**Summary of Findings and Recommendations:**

<i>Findings and Conclusions</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
1) The Finnish Support to AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme is <b>compliant with the policy goals</b> of Finnish development cooperation. The Programme is also compliant with policies and sector strategies in the partner countries, as represented by Ethiopia and Tanzania.	AgriCord should consider establishing formal presence at national level in key recipient countries, e.g. through accreditation with relevant ministries, to remove the current ambiguity surrounding the status of AgriCord prevailing among key national government stakeholders.
2) The <b>project-based intervention logic</b> is well suited to AgriCord operating as a multi-donor trust fund. In agri-agency and farmer organisations work it needs to be complemented by stronger efforts at long-term partnership building and organizational development. AgriCord's project cycle approach will be enriched and complemented by diverse and the broad-based approaches of different agri-agencies and farmer organisations.	The Finnish Agri-agency, FFD, who is still very young, should consider undergoing a participatory process to develop an engagement strategy that is based on long-term relationship building with a few partner FOs over a lesser geographical spread, rather than project-based interventions with many. A greater emphasis on long-term involvement, mutual reciprocity, strong twinning networks and developing protocols and procedures for managing work relationships will provide a strong base for agri-agency and FO collaboration for the future.
3) In general, Finland's support to AgriCord, the <i>Building Capacity of Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries</i> , <b>Programme performed well against expected results and focal areas</b> in maintaining a sizeable project portfolio; targeting farmer organisations in Finnish bilateral partner countries; giving preference to projects that enhance economic activities; boosting twinning operations; developing collaboration between forest producer organizations; supporting the establishment of a Finnish agri-agency; and overall management of the programme and projects. The Programme faced challenges in some projects promoting the position of women farmers, and the Finnish agri-agency and AgriCord secretariat were strained to provide effective backstopping to project implementation.	For FFD to develop as an agri-agency, additional staff resources and budgets are needed. The current human resource is adequate only to manage the current FFD project portfolio. As more responsibilities are transferred from the AgriCord secretariat, as the project portfolio grows and becomes more complex with pilot projects being extended and scaled-up, and as long-term partnerships develop, more organizational resources will be needed. The FFD Board must begin to look for additional funds to allow the agri-agency to develop as an organisation, put in place work procedures and protocols, develop an engagement strategy and build long-term partnerships in developing countries. If FFD is in for the long haul, the train needs to be equipped accordingly.
4) <b>Strengthen membership-driven approach.</b> From 2011, AgriCord began implementing a programme approach, which influenced the design and guided the implementation of the 2012-2014 Finland's support programme. The focus was two-pronged: to strengthen the farmers' organisation <i>and</i> to improve members' benefits. The Finnish-funded 'Building Capacity of Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries' programme adhered and contributed to the programme approach.	FOs will need to continuously generate updated information about their members in order to understand their needs and to provide appropriate services. This is particularly important when projects are scaled-up and the information needs of FO management changes. The agri-agencies are encouraged to build in activities that enhance and strengthen membership data base and organizational MIS. Participatory M&E and the adoption of a Human Rights Based Approach may provide channels for a sustained member-driven focus.
5) AgriCord supports farmers organisations in four different <b>work areas</b> – or "themes" in the FFP programme. In 2014, the majority of on-going FFD projects were registered in Agro-Info.net under Work Area # 4 (Farmer-led	The Farmer Organisations and the Agri-agencies are encouraged to ensure that organisational development precedes or is actively incorporated in projects that focus on farmer-led economic development. Training and capacity-building in organization management,

<p>economic development). In many projects, however, this approach poses a challenge to both the farmer organization and the agri-agency. Whilst doing business brings enthusiasm and motivation, many FOs are very weak and struggle with basic issues of organization management, governance, accountability and transparency.</p>	<p>governance, accountability and transparency should continue and be strengthened.</p> <p>It is recommended that FFD oversees a systematic review of the experiences of forestry projects, as the pilot-extension-scaling up model comes to first full cycle around 2016-7, to determine the success and learnt good practice from such a dual strategy.</p>
<p>6) <b>Monitoring and evaluation</b> of the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty programme takes place at four levels: project level (output and outcome of project activities); farmer organisation; farmer household (impact on food and livelihood security) and agri-agency level (quality of support to projects, FOs and members). The review found the actual practice to be different from the normative standards. The general observation was that project level 1 and 2 reporting rely more on methods and practice developed by the agri-agencies than the Agro-info.net data base. During 2012-2014, AgriCord strived to streamline organizational performance-based monitoring and less information is routinely generated at member level.</p>	<p>The AgriCord M&amp;E system, including the use of the Agro-info.net data base is currently undergoing a major overhaul as part of the Netherland funded 14ALL restructuring. This is a good development.</p> <p>AgriCord should ensure that the support from Ministry for Foreign Affairs to Component 2 (AgriCord secretariat) is aligned with the 14ALL exercise to match the revised FFP structure.</p> <p>AgriCord should set clear protocols and standards for level 3 and 4 data collection and systematizing periodic evaluations and specific studies as means to capture the broader programme impact to meet MFAF expectations.</p>
<p>7) <b>Finances.</b> Financial reporting by the AgriCord secretariat is of good standard. Available funds are used efficiently and the return to project expenditure is good. Small monies have had great impact at FO level. At programme level, the programme has suffered from delays in disbursements. At the end of 2014, approximately 1,3 million euro was carried forth to 2015. As the mode of implementation involves a budget roll-over, most of the funds are already committed, and this may not be a major issue at programme level. However, delayed disbursement did cause inconveniences at project implementation level. Negative effects include increased administrative cost and transaction time; clashes with agricultural seasons; and reduced transparency in fund use.</p>	<p>The contracting parties, AgriCord and MFAF, are encouraged to ensure that documents are submitted on time and that contracts are signed expediently. It is important for the future that AgriCord gains a better understanding of what brings about delays and to take appropriate measures to control the situation and increase the efficiency of timely fund management.</p> <p>Agri-agencies and farmer organisations should invest in continuous training of FO staff and management in financial management to build capacity. This is particularly important as pilot projects are scaled-up and operations become more complex and diversified.</p>
<p>8) A key focal area for Finland's support the period 2012-2014 was support to the <b>development and consolidation of AgriCord's coordinating</b> office in Leuven. The expected results were largely achieved, within the limitations of a very high work load. The provision of a Finnish advisor greatly contributed to the overall success of the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme.</p>	<p>Support to Component 2 should be continued to sustain the current positive momentum and bring on-going projects and processes to fruition. The detailed allocation of support should be adjusted to match organizational changes arising from the '14ALL' review and to complement funding from the Netherlands.</p> <p>It is further recommended that Finnish support is directed to produce the household-level impact assessments, called for by the MTE 2011, this review and as required by Government of Finland 2012.</p> <p>AgriCord management should look into means of addressing too high work load at the secretariat as it is counter-productive to programme objectives and achievements.</p>

<p>9) Most projects work with key value chains, as exemplified by the dairy, forest product, honey and vegetable chains in Ethiopia and Tanzania. In general, <b>good overall results have been achieved from structuring interventions along value chains</b>. Anecdotal data shows that improved functioning of the value chains has had a positive impact on farmer income. Increasing members' understanding of value chain operations was seen to build social capital. Value chain work will benefit from more training and capacity-building.</p>	<p>The agri-agencies and farmer organisations are encouraged to continue working with value chains, to invest in building the competence of FO staff and members, which will increase social capital. The agri-agencies and FOs are advised to revisit the untapped leverage that was found at the lower (producer) levels of the chain (addressing yield gaps, post-harvest wastage), and in broadening the forestry value chain (to include non-wood forest products and ecosystem services) in the future.</p>
<p>10) Project performance was found to be related to the frequency intensity of agri-agency support. Where agri-agencies had a strong <b>local presence</b>, projects performed well. Local presence is no <i>panacea</i> but boosts performance; provides better opportunities for capacity-building and a framework for better dialogue; lowers the threshold for FO staff to contact the agri-agency about emerging problems; and contributes towards long-term partnership building. Indirectly, local presence increases overall project sustainability and provides for better overall development impact.</p>	<p>As part of a process of preparing an engagement strategy for future partnership work, the Finnish agri-agency is encouraged to review and document its many past efforts in strengthening the agency's local presence, clearly stating the pros and cons. What worked well under different options? Placing young professionals at project sites, employing local coordinators, sharing the work with other agri-agencies? It would be advisable to identify the best medium- and long-term strategies and cost them. Local presence is likely to result in more efficient overall resource utilization, though the initial costs of establishment may be high.</p>
<p>11) <b>Horizontal collaboration</b>. Enhanced agri-agency local presence may also be augmented through increased collaboration between farmer organizations and their supporting agri-agencies, operating within a country or a region.</p>	<p>Agri-agencies and farmer organisations are encouraged to strengthen horizontal collaboration to build long-term partnerships and build capacity. Relationship building between AgriCord funded projects (in-country visits) allow for more frequent interaction; broader, membership participation; farmer-to-farmer learning; and they may address specific developmental needs</p>
<p>12) <b>Twinning arrangements</b> are particular to the projects supported by the Finnish agri-agency, FFD. The number of twinning arrangements in Finland-funded projects has increased during the period 2012-2014. This increase is based on advocacy and hard work on behalf of FFD, as the participation of Finnish professionals in development cooperation is constrained by structural shifts in the Finnish agri-sector and tax policies. The twinning arrangement is capable of enhanced project implementation, but also spawned new project ideas and initiatives. The <i>advisory support</i> provided by the twinning partners was generally well received. The experience with the <i>administrative support</i>, was more variable.</p>	<p>The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland is encouraged to establish dialogue with other wings of Government (e.g. Ministry of Finance) to determine how mainstream government policy (e.g. taxation and the regulation of civic organisations) may better support development cooperation. Clarity on the consistent application of VAT would be particularly beneficial, providing a level playing field. Written guidance, e.g. as an addendum to the Standard terms of Development Cooperation, would be helpful.</p> <p>The Finnish agri-agency is encouraged to look into ways and means of broadening the twinning base, bringing in Finnish, <i>and national</i>, organisations and individuals who have competences in rural development, organizational strengthening, development cooperation, gender, environment and other areas where FOs needs bolstering.</p>
<p>13) <b>Exchange visits</b>. In many instances, the technology gap between poor farmers in developing countries and the high-tech, industrialised agriculture of Finland is too broad. Exchange visits to Finland much appreciated, but</p>	<p>Horizontal collaboration (in-country and south-to-south) appear more successful and effective than exchange visits to Finland. Thematic exchange visits abroad, however, were successful – as in the case of professional participation in forest dialogue or</p>

<p>provide less tangible practical benefit to project implementation? In two instances (Tz and Eth), exchange visits aggravated leadership wrangles and created envy and jealousy between FO members.</p>	<p>international farmer meetings and should continue. Regional visits, e.g. industry and market related, should be timed so that they are undertaken when farmer organisations are able to effectively benefit from business relationship building. An indicator of readiness could be FO ability to participate in preparing for the practical arrangement of such visits.</p>
<p>14) <b>Smallholder forestry</b>, twinning partnerships as a form of farmer-to-farmer collaboration and flexible funding were characteristics of Finland's support that <b>added value</b> to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme and network.</p>	<p>The support to forest organisations provided by FFD and AgriCord is unique and should be continued. A systematic review of achievements and challenges is recommended to be undertaken towards the end of the next phase, to learn good practice for the future. AgriCord's collaborative agreement with the FAO Forest Farm Facility (FAO FFF) provides an opportunity to widen and deepen forest interventions, and should be explored also at local level.</p>
<p>15) During the implementation of the Finland funded <i>Building Capacity of Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries' Programme</i>, a few issues relating to <b>financial health</b> and governance were encountered, all of which were addressed expediently. However, the cost of querying and attending to irregularities is high in terms of staff time effort.</p>	<p>All parties involved, AgriCord, the agri-agencies and Farmer Organisations, should review the need to rebalance resources allocated to financial oversight (more prevention less cure); and consider putting in place stronger preventive measures for the future, e.g. consistent use of common tools to monitor and evaluate the financial health of projects; clear procedures and protocols; continuous training and capacity-building; and the adoption of new measures such as empowering 'whistle-blowers' and strengthening member progress monitoring (participatory M&amp;E).</p>
<p>16) Generating an understanding of the recipient farmer organization and <b>implementation context</b>. The information available on Agro-Info.Net provides relevant, but not adequate basic country information to agri-agencies. To generate the contextual information on farmer organisations and the environments where they operate. Some project documents were expertly done, with a very good situation analysis and very high level of detail, while the others omitted important information. Projects with poor situational background repeatedly missed out on cross-cutting variables.</p>	<p>The implementation partners (AAs and FOs) would benefit from undertaking a situational analysis prior to project start up. The Finnish agri-agency could consider outsourcing to (or establishing a twinning arrangement with) organisations and/or individuals to routinely backstop FOs conduct participatory situational analyses. If well executed, situational surveys at the beginning of project interventions will assist FOs understand the project situation and the needs of the membership better, and provide critical information towards the design of pre-project baseline surveys..</p> <p>In view of the vast information available on the Internet, AgriCord should revisit the need to upload and maintain contextual information on the Agro-Info.net.</p>
<p>17) <b>Impact assessment</b>. The AgriCord programme delivered on impact reporting, <i>as planned in the programme proposal</i>, in the form of story harvesting. During the 2012-2014 period, farmer impact stories were annually harvested and 20-25 of them presented in the annual Evidence of Impact reports. However, story harvesting alone is not adequate to determine project impact on farmer lives and livelihoods. Therefore, it was not possible to undertake an impact evaluation of Finland's support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting</p>	<p>Having weighed many options, the evaluation team proposes that AgriCord commissions a specific benchmark survey on the impact of the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme on poverty and cross-cutting issues at farmer and household beneficiary level to provide some conclusive data on impact. In view of the absence of baseline data, this will be a costly undertaking, and needs to be designed well. It may be done either for Finnish support only or as a comparative study that meets the requirements of several donors. From the point of view of Finnish assistance, it is</p>

Poverty Programme 2012-2014.	imperative that the Finnish agri-agency projects are included, and that special recognition is given the forestry projects.
18) <b>Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA).</b> The planning of the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty 2012-2014 programme largely precedes the introduction of the HRB approach to Finnish development cooperation. The Programme Proposal does not recognize HRBA in its intervention logic and design. The HRB approach is very relevant to AgriCord.	The HRB approach is very relevant to AgriCord and provides an untapped opportunity for AgriCord to channel funds to Farmer Organisations to build their capacity to address rights-related issues in their operations. The HRB approach may also provide a framework for more member-driven approaches. AgriCord should investigate the advantages and disadvantages of adopting a HRB approach at programmatic level, and the Finnish agri-agency in conjunction with developing an engagement strategy for long-term partnership building (as recommended elsewhere).
19) <b>Gender</b> is one of four key cross-cutting issues in the evaluation. In general, the evaluation team concluded that gender concerns are well taken into consideration in the on-going projects, but that gender gains may be consolidated and substantial leverage may be created from adopting a stronger gender focus.	AgriCord as a network should develop a gender policy and support the agri-agencies and farmer organisations build stronger gender competences, as this will enhance the effectiveness and impact of the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme.  The unique AgriCord network model allows for this activity to be undertaken in a novel way. For example, the Finnish Agri-agency gender policy could be prepared jointly by farmer women drawn from among Finnish twinning partners and from recipient farmer organisations, supported by Finnish gender specialists. To further capitalize on gender gains in the medium-term, FFD could consider establishing a twinning agreement with Finnish gender specialists to backstop project implementation
20) <b>Environmental sustainability</b> is one of four key cross-cutting issues in the evaluation. The general impression of Programme environmental sustainability is quite good. Many projects have an environmental profile or component, all of which are relevant and justified. Notwithstanding the significant achievements, we found an array of environmental concerns that may pose challenges to the Farmer Organisations in the future. In general, farmer organisations are weak in terms of environmental know-how and management.	AgriCord as a network should support the agri-agencies and farmer organisations build stronger environmental competence. The agri-agencies are well placed to assist build the capacity of FOs to address environmental issues, and they may assist in leveraging opportunities for climate smart agriculture practices through building capacity and partnering with relevant third party organisations. The Finnish agri-agency may consider developing a twinning arrangement with a Finnish environmental organization.
21) <b>OECD/DAC criteria.</b> An assessment against the specific evaluation questions posed in the Terms of Reference showed that Finland's support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme performed well against the criteria. A major concern is that the programme is not able to demonstrate conclusive impact on poverty and cross-cutting variables. Minor issues of effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability were recorded where findings were inconclusive or projects had not yet been concluded.	To supplement Story Harvesting, AgriCord would benefit from being able to demonstrate a positive impact, based on broad baseline data and follow-up surveys, at regular intervals of between 3 to 5 years. This recommendation complements the recommendation above (17) that AgriCord conducts a specific study on the impact of the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme on poverty and cross-cutting issues at farmer and household beneficiary level that meet Government of Finland evaluation requirements and recommendations from evaluations (2011 and 2015).



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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

14ALL	'One for all' - AgriCord Programme Review
AA	Agri-Agency
ADLI	Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (Ethiopia)
ADMAS	Admas Farmers Cooperative Union, Wolkite, Ethiopia
AIN	Agro-Info.Net ( <a href="http://www.agro-info.net">www.agro-info.net</a> )
CBO	Community Based Organisation
COSTECH	Commission for Science and Technology (Tanzania)
D	Deliverable (e.g. AgriCord WA4/D16 = work area 4, deliverable 16)
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)
DAs	Development Agents
EPRDF	Ethiopian People Revolutionary and Democratic Front
ETB	Ethiopian Birr
EU	European Union
F2F	Farmer-to-farmer (peer) approach
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation (of the United Nations)
FFD	Finnish Agri-agency for Food and Forest Development ry
FFF	Forest Farm Facility (of FAO)
FFP	Farmers Fighting Poverty
FFS	Farmer Field School
FGWA	Finnish Garden Women Association
FMA	Forest Management Association
FO	Farmer Organisation
FY	Fiscal Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GoF	Government of Finland
GTP	Growth and Transformation Plan (Ethiopia)
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFSP	Integrated Food Security Programmes (Ethiopia)
KIUMU	Koga Irrigation Users Marketing Union
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MFAF	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
MKUKUTA	Mkakati wa Kukuza Uchumi na Kupunguza Umaskini (Kiswahili) "National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP)" (Tanzania)
MKUZA	Mkakati wa Kuondoa Umaskini, Zanzibar Poverty Eradication Strategy, Zanzibar
MoFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (Ethiopia)

MTE	Mid-term evaluation
MTK	Maa- ja metsätaloustuottajien keskusliitto - Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners of Finland
MVIWATA ODA	Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania (Kiswahili), Network of Farmers in Tanzania Official Development Assistance (of the OECD)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PASDEP	Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (Ethiopia)
PCM	Project Cycle Management
Pellervo	The Pellervo Society, a service organisation for Finnish cooperatives and a forum for cooperative activities.
ProAgria	The Association of ProAgria Centres in Finland. Provider of expert services and know-how to develop competitiveness in agriculture and rural businesses.
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Program (Ethiopia)
REPOA	Research on Poverty Alleviation (Tanzania)
SLC	Svenska lantbrukssällskapens centralförbund – The central union of Swedish-speaking agricultural producers in Finland
TAHA	Tanzania Horticultural Association
TFC	Tanzania Federation of Cooperatives
URT	United Republic of Tanzania
UWAMWIMA	Umoja wa Wakulima wa Mbogamboga na Matunda (Kiswahili), Zanzibar Growers Group
WA	Work Area (e.g. AgriCord WA4/D16 = work area 4, deliverable 16)
ZAIDI	Zanzibar Agriculture Investment and Development Inc.
ZARI	Zanzibar Agricultural Research Institute
ZESA	Zanzibar Entrepreneurs and Suppliers Association
ZHLIP	Zanzibar Horticulture Link Project
ZNFU	Zambia National Farmers Union

## 1 INTRODUCTION

*Farmers Fighting Poverty* (FFP) is a farmer driven initiative implemented by AgriCord, an alliance of 12 agri-agencies, representing farmers' organisations from Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Senegal, Spain, Sweden, and a network of 10 Asian countries. In addition, a national farmer organisation in Italy is an associated member.

The objective of the *Farmers Fighting Poverty* Programme is to contribute to the overall effort of poverty reduction by strengthening the capacities and enhancing the operations of agricultural producer organisations in developing countries, through providing funding and advisory services. AgriCord supports different types of producer organisations that are relevant at national, intermediary, and at local producer level. From humble beginnings in 2007, five years later AgriCord supported over 220 farmer organisations through 570 projects, in more than 60 developing countries.

The AgriCord vision is based on a conviction that strong farmer organisations can tackle the systemic causes of poverty. The general objective of the *Farmers Fighting Poverty* Programme is **poverty reduction through strengthening of farmers' organisations**. The development aims are to contribute to rural democracy (better institutions), economic growth (better services to farmers) and more equal income distribution (increased involvement of smallholder farmers).

The *FFP* Programme operates as a multi-donor trust fund, steered by farmer organisations and managed by AgriCord. The Programme receives substantial financial support from governments in several OECD countries (Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland), and funding is also provided by the European Commission. Co-funding and technical co-operation is operational with IFAD (since 2006) and with FAO (since 2014). Agri-agencies and farmer organisations also mobilize resources from their own membership and from other private sources.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFAF) has supported the *Farmers Fighting Poverty* programme since its inception in 2007. In total, Finland has provided Euro 6.35 million towards implementation during 2007–2014. During 2012-2014, MFAF contributed 3 million euro.

### 1.1 RATIONALE, PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

In December 2014, AgriCord and MFAF commissioned the assignment, with the objective to evaluate the 2012-2104 phase of Finland's support (Programme) to the *Farmers Fighting Poverty* Programme and assess *the achievement of objectives at project level (producer organisation) and at the organisational level as part of the AgriCord network*. The Terms of Reference provide for a very broad scope. As outlined in the ToRs (Annex 1), the evaluation is intended to (i) assess the extent to which the programme delivered on expected results; (ii) assess the extent to which the 2011 MTE recommendations were taken into consideration; (iii) evaluate the programme against five evaluation objectives; (iv) address specific evaluation questions; and (v) provide input into on-going strategy and institutional development processes. During the inception phase, the scope was adjusted to match the resources available. The amendments to the ToRs are listed below.

- **The evaluation period spans only the 2012-14 funding phase.** The ToRs contain slight discrepancies in the period to be considered for evaluation. The findings of the 2011 mid-term review were accepted *prima facie*. Activities that pre-date 2012 are considered only when relevant to determining the success of the phase 2012-2104.
- **Priority given to the evaluation effort of Finnish support at project level.** The evaluation focus (impact) predisposed the evaluation effort (measured as consultant time allocation) towards reviewing support to Farmer Organisations (Component 1). Less effort was directed towards an assessment of Finnish support to the AgriCord network and secretariat (Component 2).
- **Emphasis on projects where FFD provided advisory services.** Finland funding has been channeled to farmer organisation projects in developing countries through several agri-agencies. This evaluation is biased towards projects supported through FFD (the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners of Finland, and the Finnish Agri-agency , FFD).
- **Purposive sampling of case studies.** Finland's support for the period 2012-2014 was distributed annually between some 15 projects across seven countries. All projects were subjected to a data base review, but case study projects were *purposively sampled* for closer study in Ethiopia and Tanzania. The method of purposive sampling is elaborated in Annex 3.
- **Moderated evaluation questions.** The ToRs lists many evaluation issues, at times overlapping, as they detail many facets of specific evaluation questions. To avoid repetition in the report, the findings are presented in the form of thematic clusters (Chapter 3). The reader looking for an answer to specific evaluation issues/questions will find links in Annex 2.
- **Availability of impact data.** The assessment of results and impact at beneficiary level rests on the availability of processed data at household level. When data is not available, and the evaluation resources do not allow for additional data generation, impact cannot be assessed. This evaluation was affected by limited data availability on poverty, development impact, sustainability and cross-cutting variables (Annex 3).
- **Omitting specific evaluation objective # 3 (i.e. assess how Programme has contributed to Finnish development discourse).** The methodological requirements were considered beyond the scope of the current ToRs. The objective was omitted during the inception phase.
- **Balancing summative and formative evaluation.** The purpose of the evaluation is summative *and* formative. Summative evaluation aims to judge results, while formative evaluation focuses on improving or developing the programme. They require different types of methodologies, sources of data and methods of collecting information (Patton 2001). To meet the dual purpose, the team opted for systematic application of inclusive and qualitative methods, e.g. semi-structured interviews and focal group discussions (Annex 3).

## 1.2 THE EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The objective of the assignment is to evaluate Finland's support (Programme) to the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme and assess the achievement of objectives at project level (producer organisation) and at the organisational level as part of the AgriCord network. The specific objectives of the evaluation are to (see Terms of Reference, Annex 1):

1. Evaluate the **results and impact** (in those cases, where possible) of Programme;
2. Assess to what extent the projects have integrated and have had an impact on **cross-cutting concerns** of Farmers Fighting Poverty (gender equality, environmental sustainability and financial health) and the human rights based-approach;
3. [Omitted objective: Programme impact on Finnish development discourse];
4. Provide recommendations for the future project **work and approach** (particularly twinning approach), and on **organisational arrangements** (division of tasks between AgriCord and FFD);
5. Assess the **role** of Finland's support to the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme as a whole and assess the **added value of Finland's support** to AgriCord network and agri-agency cooperation.

Keeping in mind the many issues and concerns in the ToRs (Annexes 1 and 2), we may paraphrase the evaluation objectives into three fundamental evaluation questions:

- 1) How good has been the result of Finland's support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme on the ground? What has been the impact at beneficiary level, in particular in terms of poverty, gender equality, sustainability and governance?
- 2) What can we learn for the future from the approaches, strategy and organisational arrangements, as adopted in the Finnish funded programme? What recommendations can be made for the future, at programme and at project level?
- 3) What has been the contribution by Finland to the overall success of the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Programme? Is there added value in the Finnish funding modalities that provide lessons for AgriCord as a whole?

### 1.3 EVALUATION SCOPE, METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

All projects funded by Finland over the period 2012-2014 were reviewed and eight projects were studied in detail. The evaluation approach was *qualitative*, based on *structured, participatory and discursive methods*, supported by simple statistical presentations. The qualitative approach was selected to meet summative and formative evaluation expectations, and to overcome the lack of statistical data sets. The structured methods included generic checklists to guide stakeholder interviews, and common meeting formats for focal groups, which allowed for comparison between projects. A participatory approach is well suited to the context of the FFP ideology – farmer-to-farmer exchange, collaboration and partnerships – as well as the back-donor human rights based approach. Using a discursive method involved presenting key findings to project managers and allowing them an opportunity to elaborate and reflect on their work situations, a method which proved very useful in digging deeper into project design and implementation issues. The evaluation methodology is detailed in Annex 3.

The main challenges to the evaluation were (i) the breadth and width of the Terms of Reference for the assignment. A broad scope reduced time available for in-depth analysis to determine impact; (ii) methodological challenges arising from changing policy and strategy frameworks during the implementation period 2012-2014, changing the parameters for programme implementation; (iii) the limited time available for detailed study of each project; and (iv) the insufficient availability of household level data across farming populations.

The main opportunities to the evaluation were (i) the possibility to contribute to an enhanced dialogue between programme and project levels; (ii) generating lessons from comparison of projects



vertically within value chains and horizontally within and between countries; (iii) strengthening partnership building through participation; and (iv) optimizing outputs as strategic and practical recommendations.

## 2 PROGRAMME OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

### 2.1 FINLAND- MTK - AGRICORD: FARMERS FIGHTING POVERTY, BUILDING CAPACITY OF FARMERS' ORGANISATIONS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES 2012-2014

The Finnish support to the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme was implemented from 2012 to 2014. The total support was 3.0 million Euros. The support from Finland was ear-marked for two main activities: *Support to farmer organisations* (2 million euro) and *Support to AgriCord coordination* (1 million euro) (AgriCord 2012a, p. 32). Several projects funded in 2011 were carried over for implementation in 2012.

- **Support to farmer organisations.** Projects proposed by the farmer organisations in developing countries that relate to their competencies in economic initiatives (input supply, producer marketing, processing, etc.); advocacy; organisational management; and for negotiation with governments and other stakeholders. The support also allows for FOs to participate in professional global policy discussions in the international for a (Component 1),
- **Consolidating the coordination and mobilization role of AgriCord.** Support to programme management, and the capacity of the AgriCord network to manage, monitor and evaluate an increasing volume of activities, and to continue efforts to build a platform for multilateral coordination (Component 2).

Finland's support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme is detailed in the proposal, '*Building Capacity of Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries*', which provides the content for Finnish support over the period 2012-2014 (AgriCord 2012a). The proposal is subject to the AgriCord broader *strategy framework, "Farmers Fighting Poverty. Strengthening Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries 2012"* (AgriCord 2012c).<sup>2</sup> Together, the two documents express the intentions of Finland's support to Farmers Fighting Poverty, against which the evaluation is done.

### 2.2 PROGRAMME CONTEXT

The implementation of the *Building Capacity of Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries*' Programme took place in the context of a dynamic and changing environment. Key developments that took place within the Finnish development policy environment were:

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<sup>2</sup> The terminology is somewhat confusing as the term 'programme' is used to describe (i) the overall AgriCord programme, 'Farmers Fighting Poverty', which includes all donors, all agri-agencies and all farmer organizations in developing countries; and (ii) Finland's support programme, *Building Capacity of Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries*'. In this report to distinguish the two by referring to the former as the **overall AgriCord Programme**, and the latter as the **Finnish support programme**.

- The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland launched a new development policy in 2012, reinvigorating the long-term focus on poverty reduction, equitable and sustainable development through the adoption of a human rights approach (GoF 2012);
- The new policy stresses the need for results and quality of development cooperation. Baseline assessments, clear target-setting as well as systematic activity monitoring and reporting will be enhanced in line the recommendations of evaluations (GoF 2012, p. 8). The MFAF Monitoring & Evaluation Guidelines were subsequently updated in 2013.
- In 2013, new country strategies were formulated for Finland's long-term partner countries in development cooperation, namely Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal, Tanzania, Vietnam, and Zambia for the period 2013(4)-2016(7).

AgriCord underwent a dynamic phase of *internal programme review*. From 2011 onwards, lessons learnt from the first phase of Farmers Fighting Poverty resulted in a reformulated two-pronged strategic approach, which focused on strengthening farmer organisations *and* improving member benefits. This approach formed the basis for the design of the 2012-2014 Finland support phase. The internal review, however, continued throughout 2012-2014 as annual performance reviews, committee work and in the general assembly meetings. The programme document and logical framework were updated in 2012 and again in 2014 (AgriCord 2012c, 2014e). Several evaluations and thematic reviews provided additional input (AgriCord 2014a,b,c,d). The structurally most profound changes are coming from the ongoing 14ALL ('one for all') initiative, which is intended to streamline agri-agency work under the AgriCord umbrella. The process adjusts the deliverables, molds the expected performance of the projects implemented by farmer organisations and agri-agencies. Metaphorically, one may say that it was not a question of shifting goal-posts, but rather modifying the rules of the game in mid-play.

During the same period 2012-2014, many partners also underwent transformational change. The new Finnish agri-agency, *Farm and Farm Development (FFD)* was born in 2012. The FFD start-up years, 2013-2014, were a time of creating a platform for the cooperation and designing the intervention modalities. Budding pilot projects gradually developed into long-term engagements. Some Farmer Organisations grew steadily, building capacity and consolidating their activities, while others experienced unexpected and tumultuous leadership change (see 3.2.6. and Annexes 9 and 10). In general, the conditions in Finland and the long-term partner countries remained stable.

## 2.3 STAKEHOLDERS AND BENEFICIARIES

The Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme is implemented in a networking model. **AgriCord** is an alliance of 12 member organisations, registered as a not-for-profit organisation under Belgian law since January 2003, and holds ODA-status with the OECD since 2008. The alliance maintains a central office, a secretariat in Leuven. The role of AgriCord is to coordinate the strategies and resources for implementing the Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme.

The AgriCord member organisations are called **agri-agencies (AAs)**. They are non-governmental organisations involved in development cooperation. They have structural links to farmer and rural organisation in their home countries, i.e. Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Senegal, Spain, Sweden and ten Asian countries. Agri-agencies that have benefited from Finnish

support during the 2012-2014 funding phase include AgriTerra (the Netherlands), FFD (Finland), Fert (France), Trias (Belgium) and WeEffect/SCC (Sweden).

The bulk of Finnish support has been channeled through MTK, *the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners of Finland*, an active member of AgriCord since 2006. In 2012, the Finnish Agri-agency for Food and Forest Development (**FFD**) was formed by four Finnish organisations (Pellervo Confederation of Finnish Cooperatives, MTK, SLC and ProAgria). FFD became a full member of AgriCord in 2013.

**Twinning** is a special feature of Finnish support to AgriCord. In the provision of implementation and advisory support to project implementation, the Finnish agri-agency, FFD, enters into a twinning agreement with a Finnish farmer organisation, e.g. a Forest Management Association (*metsänhoitoyhdistys*) or a professional interest association, e.g. the Association of Women Gardeners (*puutarhanaiset*). Project implementation becomes a tri-partite arrangement between the recipient Farmer Organisation, the Twinning Partner and the Agri-Agency (FFD).

Projects are managed and implemented by membership-based **farmer organisations (FOs)** in developing countries. During the period under review, the range of FOs eligible for support was broad, spanning from small groups of farmers that lack formal registration (e.g. West Kilimanjaro Potato Growers), to national level organisations (e.g. Zambia National Farmers Union). FOs were registered as cooperatives, associations, NGOs, women and youth clubs, member-owned companies (profit and not-for-profit) and as community-based-organisations (CBOs).

The ultimate beneficiaries of Finnish support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme are the **individual farmers** (and their families and households) that benefit from project support as improved services from their Farmer Organisations. **Other stakeholders** are the national governments and the actors in the agriculture and forestry sectors in the countries where projects were implemented between 2012 and 2014. AgriCord does not have an officially recognized status in the recipient countries, but is represented through the farmer organisations.

### 3 FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Finland has supported the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme since 2007. The two first years of collaboration, 2007-2008, were characterized as a 'learning phase'. The years 2009-2011 was a period of intensive expansion and growth with 36 projects in the portfolio at the end of 2011 (AgriCord 2012a, p. 7, 13). The third phase, 2012-2014, was aimed at *reinforcing the Farmers Fighting Poverty results and consolidating the AgriCord coordination role*.

Chapter 3 presents the evaluation findings in three parts. Section 3.1. examines the Government of Finland contribution to Farmers Fighting Poverty at **programme-level**. Section 3.2. focuses on findings from the **project level**, the activities and implementation arrangements of the agri-agencies and farmer organisations. Section 3.3. analyses the **beneficiary level**, examining the results and impacts of the interventions on farmers, farm families and households. Section 3.4. provides answers to the **specific evaluation questions** listed in the Terms of Reference (Annexes 1 and 2).

## 3.1 PROGRAMME DELIVERY 2012-2014

### 3.1.1 COMPLIANCE WITH POLICY OBJECTIVES

The development aims of the Farmers Fighting Poverty are to contribute to rural democracy. Its general objective is poverty reduction through strengthening of farmers' organisations. The development aims of the Farmers Fighting Poverty are to contribute to rural democracy (better institutions), economic growth (better services to farmers) and more equal income distribution (increased involvement of smallholder farmers) (ToRs, p. 3).

The AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme is compliant with the goals of Finnish development policy. Poverty eradication, which is the FFP development objective, and the strategy to overcome poverty through strengthening farmer organisations, in order to enhance their participation in development, are in line with the Finland's 2012 development policy. The FFP Programme is also compliant with development policies and sector strategies in the partner countries, as represented by Ethiopia and Tanzania (see Annexes 9 and 10 for details).

### 3.1.2 PROGRAMME DESIGN & INTERVENTION LOGIC

The design of Finland's Support Programme followed a nested approach. The *'Building Capacity of Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries'* programme, was implemented over the period 2012-2014, as a 'sub-programme' to the overall AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme (AgriCord 2012c).

The intervention logic therefore follows the overall Programme. The FFP development goal is *"Reduced rural poverty and hunger"*. The purpose is *"Stronger and more effective farmers' organisations improve (i) democracy and governance, (ii) economic growth and (iii) income distribution"*. The purpose is brought about by projects implemented by farmer organisations, undertaken in four work areas, involving seventeen deliverables<sup>3</sup> (Annex 4).

Projects are the building blocks of the FFP programme. Every project is linked to a particular work area, and to one or several of the deliverables in this work area. A deliverable is defined as a "short-term immediate outcome of a project".<sup>4</sup> A deliverable makes clear what capacity of what operation the farmer organisation is expected to realize through the project/contract. Indeed, the deliverables reflect the core business. This makes clear what is expected of the FO and the agri-agency. For each deliverable generic, measurable targets are set, and the means of verification and unit of measure

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<sup>3</sup> The deliverables, measurable targets, means of verification and units of measurement (indicators) have been revised over the project period and is undergoing further change as part of the '14all' organisation review process. The 2010 version of the log-frame is the benchmark for the 2012-2014 Finland support period.

<sup>4</sup> The programme proposal notes that "In the sequence of the OECD-DAC results chain a deliverable is the short-term immediate outcome of a project: in this case, a [deliverable is the] change that is directly attributable to a contract under the Farmers Fighting Poverty strategic framework. This is generally the level where the beneficiaries or end-users take ownership of the project (or contract)" (AgriCord 2012c, 23).

defined (Annex 4). The deliverable is to be confirmed and verified by examining financial information provided by the organisation and is expected to be sustained after the project is over.

The project-based intervention logic is well suited to AgriCord operating as a multi-donor trust fund. However, a project-based approach appears less suitable to agri-agency and farmer organisation long-term partnership building and organizational development, as will be discussed in section 3.2.5. The AgriCord project-cycle approach will be enriched and complemented by diverse and broad-based approaches of different agri-agencies and farmer organisations.

### 3.1.3 PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS 2012-4

According to the Programme Proposal, during the implementation period 2012-2014, the number of Finland-funded projects was expected to reach 10-20, representing most of Finland's long-term partner countries, reaching 4,000 farmers and 250,000 family members<sup>5</sup>, contributing to the long-term impact of improved rural livelihoods by 2012 (AgriCord 2012a, p. 18-19). Finland's support enabled AgriCord to be responsive to and fund project proposals that are submitted by Farmer Organisations, within the specifications of the programme. The specific projects and work areas were identified during the implementation.

In general, Finland's support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme delivered on the focal areas, as specified in the Programme Proposal (AgriCord 2012c, see Annex 5). A total of 24 projects were implemented by farmer organisations in nine countries, with support from four agri-Agencies (FFD, Fert, Trias, AgriTerra, AsiaDHRRRA). Programme reporting and the project data base do not provide information on the exact number of farmers involved. Extrapolating figures from sample projects in Ethiopia and Tanzania suggest that more than 6,000 farmers<sup>6</sup> had access to project activities offered by Farmer Organisations (see 3.1.6.). In addition, the projects include four multilateral initiatives sponsoring farmer participation in global dialogue.

In general, Finland's support to AgriCord, the *Building Capacity of Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries*' Programme performed very well against expected results and focal areas in maintaining a sizeable project portfolio; targeting farmer organisations in Finnish bilateral partner countries; giving preference to projects that enhance economic activities; boosting twinning operations; developing collaboration between forest producer organizations; supporting the establishment of a Finnish agri-agency; and overall management of the programme and projects.

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<sup>5</sup> The expected number of family members (250,000) is very high in relation to number of farmers, suggesting that the figure is a typing error (4,000 farmers would typically imply about 20-25,000 beneficiaries). Alternatively, the target refers to the AgriCord programme target as a whole. The 2011 target for Finnish support was 150,000 famers (women and men) and 750,000 farm family members. In this context, the latter explanation is more plausible. The programme document will benefit from more precise wording of targets.

<sup>6</sup> Based on computation of membership in four projects in Ethiopia and Tanzania, we derived at an estimated 1,243 beneficiaries. Scaled up to the portfolio of projects 2012-2014, this would approximate 6,215 beneficiaries. However, data does not sustain an analysis of the extent to which members who have access to projects actually participate in project activities.

The Programme faced challenges in some projects promoting the position of women farmers, and the Finnish agri-agency was strained to provide effective backstopping to project implementation. These issues are discussed in greater detail in sections 3.4.5. (gender) and 3.2.2. (local presence) and recommendations are provided in chapter 4.

A detailed analysis of achievements against the focal area of Finland's support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme, as requested in the Terms of Reference, is found in Annex 5.

#### 3.1.4 PROGRAMME APPROACH AND WORK AREAS 2012-2014

From 2011, AgriCord began implementing a new concept for Farmers Fighting Poverty. The revised **programme approach** influenced the design and guided the implementation of Finland's support 2012-2014. The focus was two-pronged: to strengthen the farmers' organisation *and* to improve members' benefits. The FFP key characteristics are shown in Table 1. The evaluation findings suggest that the focal areas were largely achieved during the implementation of the Finnish-funded 'Building Capacity of Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries' programme. The modalities for how the approach affected project implementation is discussed in section 3.2.

*Table 1. Key characteristics of the 2011 AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty implementation strategy*

Focused:	Support is provided to membership based farmers' organisations only
Demand driven:	Support to projects of the farmers' organisations themselves
[Funding distribution:]	Funding (70%) is combined with advisory services (30%)
Farmer-to-farmer:	Peer-to-peer work of farmers and farmers' organisations
Flexible:	Timing, procedures, budgeting and reporting can be adjusted and take into account crises and changing circumstances.
Comprehensive:	Support addresses specific deliverables, within the broad range of work areas of farmers' organisations, from internal organisational capacity to economic operations.

The Finnish support assists AgriCord meet targets through projects. AgriCord supports farmers organisations in 4 different **work areas** – or “themes” in the FFP programme. Within each work area, a series of “deliverables” are defined in order to specify the outcome of the activities. The approach is intended to provide solutions for best practise implementation and impact. Categorizing projects by work areas allows agri-agencies to cluster expertise on these topics to be clustered and makes AgriCord monitoring of activities. (AgriCord 2012c).

In 2014, the majority of on-going FFD projects (7 of 11) were registered in Agro-Info.net under Work Area # 4 (Farmer-led economic development). Two projects fell under WA # 1 (Organisational strength and inclusiveness), and only one project under each of the remaining WA # 2 (Institutional Development) and WA # 3 (Policy elaboration and advocacy). The observation is sustained when compared against the distribution of Finland funded projects over the period 2012-2014 (Annex 6).

The preference for business oriented interventions stems from several sources. A 2010 study recommended that AgriCord would provide operational support to FOs (and not only for capacity-building) (AgriCord 2012c, 12). Subsequently, the Finland-funded Programme places emphasis on building the capacity of Farmer Organisations to provide economic services to poor members (see

above and Annex 5). Combined with the perceived relative advantage of agri-business know-how in the MTK network of professionals and organisations (AgriCord 2012a, 27), it was natural to channel Finnish support to work area # 4, FO business development.

In many projects, however, this approach poses a challenge to the farmer organization and the agri-agency. Whilst doing business brings enthusiasm and motivation, many FOs are very weak and struggle with basic issues of organization management, governance, accountability and transparency. Adding economic responsibility onto weak local organization increases the need for external monitoring and supervision. In a context where the agri-agency does not have a local presence this rapidly increases risk in project management. The issue is discussed further in sections 3.2.7-8.

### 3.1.5 PROGRAMME DATA MANAGEMENT, REPORTING, M&E

The AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme focuses on outputs and outcomes in terms of strength of farmer organisations (FOs). During the 2012-2014 Finland programme phase, most activities had two-pronged outputs and outcomes – on one hand improving the performance of the FOs, on the other improving the income and livelihood security of members. What data does the AgriCord M&E system generate on farmer organisations and the well-being of members?

In the Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme, monitoring and evaluation takes place at four levels: project level (output and outcome of project activities); farmer organization FO-level; farmer household (impact on food and livelihood security) and agri-agency level (quality of support to projects, FOs and members) (Table 2). The normative standards and procedures prevailing for each level at the start of the Finland funded project, are detailed in AgriCord 2012c, pp. 32-37. The review found the actual practice to be different from the norm.

**Level 1: Project outputs.** Project reporting is the main means for generating information about progress, and they are the basic material for FFP programme reporting. Farmer organisations produce activity and annual reports of variable format and standard that are reviewed (in FFD projects by twinning partners) and combined with monitoring reports at agri-agency level. At times, the FO reports and project evaluations are up-loaded on the Agro-Info.Net. Few recipient farmer organisations, however, have adequate internet access and skills to access or work the data base. In most instances, FOs submit the information to the agri-agency, who then ensures that information is entered into the data base. Data entry was considered time-consuming and given low priority. Twinning partners reported that the system was cumbersome to use. Consequently, there is a substantial gap between the status of the project and the on-line data. Despite the challenges in the reporting chain, the output quality of AgriCord annual and donor reporting was very good.

**Level 2. Farmer organisations.** According to the Programme Proposal, agri-agency assessment of farmer organisations is to be based on profiling information available on the Agro-info.net. A

random check of six farmer organisations in long-term Finland partner countries, young and old, supported by different agri-agencies, showed that profiling information was not readily available<sup>7</sup>.

**Table 2 Farmers Fighting Poverty M&E Framework** (Source AgriCord 2014e)

FFP M&E framework	level 1 Project outputs, outreach	level 2 Farmers' Organisations' competencies	level 3 Farmers' income, livelihood, food security	level 4 Structural, societal changes
tool(s)	project reporting Agro-Info.Net	organisational assessment	storyharvesting; specific research	regional/ geographic, thematic, programme evaluations
product	project reports and project evaluations	profilings; evidence report on organisational strengthening	Evidence of Impact: focus on farmers' income	
cross-cutting concerns	evidence reports on gender, on environmental sustainability, on financial health			

Instead, for the purpose of assessing the strength of potential partner farmer organizations the agri-agencies have their own qualitative methods. FFD, for example, uses its own checklist for the evaluation of potential partner organisations, in conjunction with programme planning. The FFD checklist is relevant, but the extent to which it supports implementation beyond initial project appraisal and planning is not clear (see 3.2.7).

**Level 3. Farmer income, livelihood and food security.** The responsibility for reporting on member satisfaction and benefit was shifted from project level reporting (level 1) to specific M&E activities (level 3) during the programme period. The means of verification, which in the 2010 logframe provided for the assessment of member benefits through member satisfaction surveys, were removed by 2012 (Annex 4). As AgriCord streamlines organizational performance-based monitoring, less information is routinely generated at member level. This may be problematic. At field level, we observed that FO management is not always very receptive to member concerns, as exemplified by committees and chairpersons not responding to member grievances. And, the interests of minority groups, women and vulnerable are often difficult to safeguard. This draws attention to the significance of setting clear protocols and standards for impact data collection and systematizing periodic evaluations and specific studies as means to capture the broader impact of the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme on farmer livelihoods and wellbeing.

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<sup>7</sup> The farmer organizations were: Zambia National Farmers Union, Zambia (partner since 2004); ADMAS (Wolkite) Farmers Cooperative Union, Ethiopia (partner since 2009); Zenbaba Cooperative Union, Ethiopia (partner since 2010), Tanzania Horticulture Association, Tanzania (partner since 2011), Nepal Agriculture Cooperative Central Federation Limited, Nepal (partner since 2013), CONOSIL, Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones de Silvicultores, Mexico (partner since 2014). [www.Agro-info.net](http://www.Agro-info.net) accessed 18.3. 2015.



### 3.1.6 FINLAND FUNDED PROJECT PORTFOLIO

The Government of Finland, through the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, has supported the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty programme with 6.35 million euro over the period 2007-2014. AgriCord is directly responsible for the programme “Building Capacity of Farmers’ Organisations in Developing Countries” towards the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (AgriCord 2012c).

The budgeted distribution of funding is shown in Table 3 and disbursements in Annex 7. Before 2011, contracts were signed annually and funds released accordingly. To moderate the impact of the annual funding cycle, the AgriCord central office developed a system of rolling-over a part of the budget to the next calendar year. From 2011, multi-annual proposals were submitted in order to better meet the needs of Farmer Organisations operating under agricultural seasons. It was in also in response to the 2011 MTE recommendation for a three year programme cycle (Annex 2).

The 2012-2014 funding phase was the first full three-year programme period. Unfortunately, it did not come to a good start, as the signing of the contract was substantially delayed until late 2012, reportedly due to staff and administrative changes. Funds were released only in November 2012, which negatively impacted on programme activities. For example, in Tanzania late funding to the beekeeping project in Babati (AIN 5759), meant that the project had to be delayed for a year, until the next honey production season in 2013.

Funds are rolled over from one funding period to the next as a means to ensure that project activities could continue without disruption. Whilst this has added to flexibility, it does distort financial expenditure. On average, the programme has spent one million euro per annum, as per plan (Annex 7). However, the late disbursement of 2012 was not absorbed immediately and surplus funds have been carried forward thereafter. At the end of 2014, approximately 1,3 million euro was carried forth to 2015 (of which almost one million was already committed to proposals). Delays in fund release tend to cause implementation delays that are very difficult to address. To avoid such situations it is imperative that the contracting parties, MFAF and AgriCord, do their utmost to maintain timely contracting and disbursement procedures.

Other factors also cause delays. During the field visits in Tanzania and Ethiopia, it was observed that the two bigger projects, Zanzibar Horticulture Link Project (ZAHLIP) and the Continued Support to Forest Producer Organisations in Amhara Region, Ethiopia (Zenbaba), were delayed by to factors outside the control of the project staff, the farmer organisation, the agri-agency and/or the AgriCord secretariat. In both cases, the FOs were awaiting permission by government agencies to pursue construction and marketing projects respectively.

In general, scaling up poses huge administrative and financial challenges to Farmer Organisations and Agri-agencies alike that easily proliferate from delays. Scaling up means that greater amounts of funds are needed to maintain the flexibility provided by budget roll-over, and that small administrative delays may translate as substantially larger implementation delays. It is important for the future that AgriCord and MFAF develop a better understanding of what brings about delays and to take appropriate measures to address the situation. Delays increase administrative cost and transaction time to farmer organisations and frustrate their members. Administrative complications

will also bring about (an often unwanted) role for the agri-agencies as ‘brokers’ or ‘gatekeepers’ between FOs and AgriCord. To increase transparency delays should be minimized.

It is important to bear in mind that most Farmer Organisations in developing countries are ill-equipped to understand the financial administrative and reporting requirements of international development cooperation. The AgriCord programme provides an opportunity for agri-agencies to invest in continuous training of FO staff and management in financial management to build capacity. This is particularly important as pilot projects are scaled-up and operations become more complex and diversified.

The 2012-2014 funding period included some specific allocations in the budget. The programme approach specifies the distribution of project funding (70%) to advisory services (30%), which has been largely met (Annex 7). The programme proposal suggested an allocation of between 20-30% of funds to women producer associations as part of a gender-focused strategy (see 3.3.5). As 2014 financial reports are still under preparation, it has not been possible to ascertain whether these allocations were realised.

*Table 3. Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland grant funding to AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme 2007-2014.*

Funding period	Contract signed	Grant amount in euro
2007-8	n/a	850 000
2009-10	Signed early 2009	1 600 000
2011	Signed May 2011	900 000
2012-14	Signed late 2012	3 000 000
		6 350 000 €

During the 2012-2014 funding phase a total of 45 projects were implemented by Finland’s support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme (Annex 6). A total of 20 new FO projects in eight different countries came on board. Five multilateral initiatives were supported enabling FO representatives participate in global farmer dialogue. The implementation of 19 projects funded from the previous allocation was carried forth. In addition, seven projects were planned: five pilot projects were being scaled up in Ethiopia, Nepal, Tanzania and Zambia) and two new projects were in the pipeline for Nicaragua and Mozambique.

Table 4 shows that the volume of projects has remained stable during the 2012-2014 period, as planned, after the fast growth period in 2010-2011. Twinning projects have remained prominent while co-financing has increased. A ‘new’ type of project is the combination of twinning and co-funding. Two projects receive co-funding from EU/IFAD (AIN 5929 – Zenbaba Union in Ethiopia and AIN 5947 – Zanzibar Horticulture Project in Tanzania) and one project from DGIS (AIN 6123 - forest certification in Vietnam). Co-financing appears to bring new challenges to the collaboration between FOs and agri-agencies, though it may be difficult to distinguish challenges related to co-financing from challenges related to scaling-up.

Table 4. Number of AgriCord projects funded by Finland, by project type 2009-2014

Project type	2009	2010	2011 (estimate)	2012- 2014	Total
Twinning projects	0	5	15	11 (14)	34
Co-funded projects	7	8	5	5 (8)	28
Twinning <i>and</i> co-funding	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	0
Global dialogue	n/a	n/a	n/a	4	4
Planning and research	3	3	4	1	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>74</b>

Source: Porvali & Sumelius (2011) and AgriCord 2014 December records.

Finland's support was mainly directed through the Finnish agri-agency, FFD. Twenty initiatives were implemented with the support from the Finnish Agri-agency for Food and Forest Development (FFD) and five initiatives by other agri-agencies (Table 4 and Annex 6). Subsequently, the evaluation focused more on the FFD approach and procedures of than those of other agri-agencies.

### 3.1.7 PROGRAMME ORGANISATION

Finland's support to the AgriCord consists of two streams of funding – support to Farmer Organisations in Developing Countries (Component 1) and support to the coordination and mobilisation role of the AgriCord Secretariat (Component 2). The AgriCord central office is in charge of four functions: planning and monitoring of projects and farmer organisations; monitoring of work areas; information and communication; general management of the organisation, and stakeholder relations (AgriCord 2012a, 28-29). Finland's support has contributed towards all functions.

One focal area for Finland's support is the consolidation of AgriCord's coordinating office in Leuven. The expected results for the period 2012-2014 to develop and consolidate further AgriCord's role as a coordinating body were largely achieved (see Annex 5). The provision of a Finnish Adviser to AgriCord functioning was indispensable to the achievements of the programme. The adviser provided an opportunity for Finland to contribute to the development of the AgriCord-network; to maintain close contact and good working relations with MTK and to provide regular feedback on development issues to the farmers' world in Finland. Finnish advisors and researchers participated in development of producer organisations through short and medium term assignments as intended. The Finnish advisor in Leuven has done very good and professional work.

However, the problem of excessive work load (pointed out by the mid-term evaluation in 2011) was not resolved. The Finnish agri-agency was formed in 2012 and project management responsibilities have gradually transferred from Leuven to Helsinki during 2013, but the overall work load remained high – both in the newly formed FFD, and in the AgriCord secretariat, the latter increasing with growing donor and project portfolios. To sustain current levels of operations and consolidate programme achievements continued advisor support will be needed, but also the work situation augmented. Recommendations to the Boards of both FFD and AgriCord to look into the situation are found in Chapter 4.

To grow further, to enhance the outreach and quality of AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty programme, and provide the resources needed for AgriCord to ‘walk the extra mile’ that is needed to meet stringent donor reporting requirements additional resources will be needed. A logical way forward would be to redesign the support to AgriCord secretariat key functions within the context of the four work areas within the context of the ‘14all’ organizational review process. The dismantling of the programmatic enmeshment of AgriCord and FFD, actively pursued since 2011, should continue. During the next phase FFD should come of age as a fully-fledged actor in its own right.

## 3.2 PROJECT LEVEL: STRATEGIES AND WORK APPROACHES

This section examines the workings of Component 1, the implementation strategies and work approaches in the day-to-day project implementation. The analysis draws upon the findings from the field visits to Ethiopia and Tanzania. The presentation is formative, examining how current approaches, strategies and organisational arrangements may be enhanced in the future.

### 3.2.1 VALUE CHAIN APPROACH

Most projects work with key value chains, as exemplified by the dairy, forest product, honey and vegetable chains in Ethiopia and Tanzania. In general, good overall results have been achieved from structuring interventions along value chains. Project data shows that improved functioning of the value chains has had a positive impact on farmer income<sup>8</sup> - and has the potential to significantly reduce poverty at beneficiary level. The review made the following detailed observations:

- Where projects have invested in **increasing members’ understanding of value chain** operations (e.g. pole marketing chain in Amhara Region in Ethiopia) this has resulted in significant positive gains in the form of increased support for farmer-led enterprise. As members develop a better understanding of the pole business, they rally behind their cooperatives. This **builds social capital** that is likely to enhance the impact of the project and build sustainability.
- The farmer organisations are to **undertake a chain analysis** of key products as part of their work in marketing (i.e. Work Area 4, Deliverable 16, Measurable target 2). Examples of projects making good use of value chain information include ADMAS Cooperative Union/AgriTerra in Ethiopia and the West-Kilimanjaro Potato Farmer Groups/Fert in Tanzania. More work remains to be done with other FOs to make use of market studies and value chain analyses.
- Agri-agencies and farmer organisations may need to add **competencies to support value chain work**, through building capacity internally and/or among twinning partners, and/or outsourcing.
- In value chain development, **a sustained focus at producer level** may provide leverage that brings about positive results. Yield gaps and post-harvest losses were significant, especially among producers that adopted new production technologies such as vegetable producers at the

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<sup>8</sup> Data obtained from across six case study projects in Ethiopia and Tanzania demonstrated a positive correlation between project intervention and increases in farmer production, sales and/or income. The data, however, is inadequate to determine the extent and consistency of this positive trend on farmer income and household wellbeing (see 3.4.2.)

Koga Irrigation scheme in Ethiopia and beekeepers using top bar hives in Babati, Tanzania. Most projects are still at a stage where small improvements in production and post-harvest handling are likely bring about immediate increases in member income and livelihood security.

- FFD has built substantive experience in **forestry value chain development** since 2010, across five countries. The AgriCord FFP partners would benefit from undertaking a systematic review of forestry achievements as a platform for developing an engagement strategy for the future. It is imperative that a broad understanding of the forestry value chain is adopted – that the future will include all woodland ‘products’ relevant to the smallholder farmers - from butterfly farming to the medicinal uses of gums and resins, timber, carbon offset trading and eco-system services.

### 3.2.2 LOCAL PRESENCE

The 2011 mid-term evaluation reviewed the need for agri-agency in-country presence as a necessary condition for the success of the Farmers Fighting Poverty. The MTE concluded that in-country presence provided for better project performance because it (i) makes it possible to concentrate on farmer organization capacity development; (ii) learn from local circumstance; (iii) improve monitoring; and (iv) apply corrective measures quickly, when required (MTE 2011, p. 27).

Our review of projects and the interviews conducted with agri-agency staff, field officers, farmers organisations and other stakeholders, unanimously supported this view. **Where local presence is strong projects performed well.** Examples of such projects are the West-Kilimanjaro Potato Growers being supported by the nearby Fert office in Usa River, and the Zembaba Pole Marketing Union benefitting from the presence of a young Finnish advisor *and* the support of eminent senior staff in a nearby, Finland funded bilateral agribusiness development programme. Where local presence was weak, problems emerged. This was the case of the Kalali and Nronga Women’s Dairy Cooperatives in Tanzania, where governance-related matters brought the project to an unexpected halt. Local presence is no *panacea* and needs to be combined with other measures to detect and address implementation difficulties. Local presence boosts farmer organization performance; provides better opportunities for capacity-building and a framework for better dialogue; lowers the threshold for FO staff to contact the agri-agency about emerging problems; and will contribute towards long-term partnership building. Local presence will contribute to overall project sustainability and providing for better overall development impact, which again is likely to result in more efficient resource utilization in the medium- and long-term, though the initial costs of establishment may be high.

There are different options for agri-agencies to gain and maintain local presence. AgriTerra, which previously did not have offices outside the Netherlands, has recently established its first country-level office in Addis Ababa and is in the process of formal registration. Fert and Trias have considered presence at national level too remote to be effective and have established sub-national project offices in Tanzania. FFD does not have country presence, except in Ethiopia, where there is a young advisor. However, FFD has tested various forms of collaboration with agri-agencies (e.g. Fert and Trias); outsourced parts of project cycle management to national consultants; and has explored the opportunities arising from systematic tapping in on development networks (e.g. TA networks around bilateral Finnish flagship projects, and the networks of development professionals, such as foresters). Advantages and disadvantages have been found with each option. FFD will benefit from a systematic

review of the different options for establishing a stronger local presence that will support the organisation in taking strategic direction for the future.

Local presence is not just about establishing an agri-agency office, but may also be strengthened through **horizontal collaboration**. In the Bahir Dar area in Ethiopia, informal collaboration between staff in different projects have smoothed the implementation and provided opportunities for enhanced learning. Further leverage may be generated from intensifying horizontal collaboration. Strengthening the networking between farmer organisations within a country, developing linkages between projects, and considering focusing support to *clusters* of projects (rather than spreading efforts over a geographically vast area) should be considered.

### 3.2.3 TWINNING

Farmer-to-farmer cooperation is a key strategy in the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme. It is intended to mobilize long-term commitments, looking beyond immediate projects and contracts, into lasting improvements for farmers. Peer-to-peer exchange between professionals, backed by their organisations is expected to lead to realistic solutions, reliable services and sustainable results. Through such cooperation, farmer organisations in developing countries are expected to reduce their reliance on donor support (AgriCord 2012, p. 10). Other expected benefits include more effective transfer of knowledge and greater ease of attitudinal change (AgriCord 2011, p 25 and 27). A 2013 inventory of agri-agency farmer-to-farmer cooperation demonstrated a range of different approaches (IDIS 2013)<sup>9</sup>. Some AAs focus on exchange between competences/ expertise from farmers' organisations, while others had an explicit focus on permanent coaching of farmers organisations. Most agri-agencies support awareness raising processes in their constituent professional farmer organisations.

**Twinning arrangements** are particular to the projects supported by the Finnish agri-agency, FFD. Twinning refers to the active promotion of building networks between farmer organisations in Finland and in partner countries. It is institutional development by creating a peer-to-peer relationship between organisations with similar values with the purpose of working together for a common goal and learning from each other. The goal is to establish a long term relationship, based on a shared understanding of what is to be done, how it will be achieved, who will do what, and setting mutually agreed upon rules for the interaction. Twinning also aims at building mutual respect, trust and strong relations through regular communication, personal contacts, shared events, and positive feed-back.

The number of twinning arrangements in Finland-funded projects has increased during the period 2012-2014 (Table 4). This increase is based on advocacy and hard work on behalf of FFD. The participation of twinning partners in the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty programme is not a mere question of attitude and willingness. Structural constraints in Finland affect the possibilities of Finnish organisations and individuals to participate in development cooperation.

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<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the 2013 study did not capture the Finnish 'twinning' arrangement, currently only implemented by the Finnish agri-agency FFD (formerly MTK).

The constraints arise from on-going major structural change in the Finnish agri-sector. Results-based management and increasing competition demand that Finnish farmer organization reduce staff costs to cope with increasingly narrow economic margins. Their ability to subsidize staff time to development projects is reduced. Combined with the high overall tax burden, returns to pro bono work may be negative. In some instances professionals were found to use their leave days and pay from their own pocket to participate in projects. Furthermore, extending the Value Added Tax (24%) obligation to new types of services and to not-for-profit organisations drives up the costs (increasing the costs of advisory services, reducing on overall available project budgets). These structural constraints need to be addressed for the twinning strategy to be viable in the medium- and long-term, and for the Finnish agri-agency to be able to provide financially competitive services to FOs in developing countries. The added value of twinning and of Finnish professional services to MFAF development cooperation is being undermined by mainstream Government policies.

Our finding from the field visits, further showed that the *advisory support* provided by the twinning partners was generally well received. In all instances, did recipient FO show appreciation of the *technical* know-how of Finnish professionals. The procedure for provision of technical advisory services appeared to function well, though project staff wanted more frequent visits. Occasionally delays in visits and feed-back were mentioned. The provision of technical advisory services through twinning has been successful, not only providing technical solutions but shaping stronger professional networks around project initiatives, enhancing mutual learning and building sustainability and long-term partnerships. Through the projects, the Finnish agri-agency FFD has groomed networks of professionals that could be utilized in the future e.g. to train future twinning partners for enhanced partnership building with FOs.

The experience with the *administrative support*, however, was more variable. Whereas some twinning partners provided very reliable support services, others would go off communication for weeks and delay in reviewing reports. Instances when more serious administrative problems arose in two projects during 2012-2014 provide a good learning platform for twinning partners (see Annex 10). When the Mwikantsi beekeeping project in Babati, Tanzania disintegrated, brought about by deep internal disagreements among beekeepers at village level, none of the support organisations was in a position to resolve the problem despite repeated efforts. When ambiguities in governance arose in the Kalali/Nronga Women's Dairy Cooperative in Tanzania, neither the agri-agency nor the twinning partner was able to spot the discrepancies early and despite them taking immediate action the situation deteriorated. The examples show the need to boost the capacity to intervene when problems of administrative or governance nature arise. Such measures could be for the agri-agency (FFD) to build a stronger local presence, to continue the training in administrative procedures started in October 2014, and to develop clear protocols that will assist twinning partners address emerging problems.

The twinning arrangement is capable of producing remarkably strong personalized collaboration that have not only greatly enhanced project implementation, but also spawned new project ideas and initiatives. Evidently, not all twinning arrangements are successful, but most twinning partners appreciated and respected the relationship, especially when relations developed over time, from pilots to scaled-up project. When successful, twinning provided FO managers and board members with a mentor, whose recurrent visits and professional advice was acknowledged and appreciated.

We also observed that women farmers in many recipient farmer organisations, in a positive way, were curious of the female Finnish twinning partners, their motives and engagement. Creating more opportunity and space for woman-to-woman interactions around shared activities, with due recognition of language barriers and other constraints, may bring new dimensions, deepen and broaden the twinning relationships further.

The general conclusion of the evaluation team is that the twinning arrangements should continue and be developed further to match the changing conditions for farmer organisation development cooperation in Finland, and match the changing needs as FO projects are scaled up in recipient countries.

### 3.2.4 FINNISH VALUE ADDED

In the context of Finland's support to the AgriCord programme the following aspects were considered to provide an added value:

- Bringing in **smallholder forestry** to the AgriCord FFP portfolio. The first four years have produced interesting results in five countries, from Vietnam to Zambia that need to be systematically reviewed for the purpose of developing a strategy. It is recommended that the review work is shared by FFD and AgriCord (see Chapter 4).
- The **twinning arrangement** is a specific form of farmer-to-farmer cooperation developed in Finland. Whereas the results generally have been good and a broadening of twinning into partnerships and an expansion of the recruitment base is proposed elsewhere, the practice is currently at crossroads. Whereas **Finnish expertise and know-how** often is considered part of the added value of Finland's development cooperation (GoF 2010), it has not always been possible to make use of such expertise due to structural constraints.
- **Malleable and flexible funding**. The financial contribution from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland's to AgriCord has been malleable with many positive multiplier effects. By providing funding for the consolidation of the AgriCord coordination function and strengthening of the network, Finnish support has had a large, positive impact on the overall performance of FFP. Also, the flexible allocation of Finnish funds from the AgriCord central office to provide small but crucial amounts of bridging funding and add to implementation flexibility has been much appreciated by other agri-agencies.

### 3.2.5 PROJECT CYCLE MANAGEMENT [VS. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT]

The collaboration between AgriCord, agri-agencies and farmer organisations in developing countries takes place in the form of *projects*, i.e. collaborative sets of activities that have a clear focus, discrete funding, a clearly set beginning and an end. Projects are the building blocks of the four Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme (AgriCord 2012a, 22).

Projects typically follow a standard project cycle: identification, formulation, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Responsibility for the project flow is shared by officers within different organisations: AgriCord approves the FO applications, confirms the project idea and set up through its Programme Committee. The Farmer Organisation manages the project with



administrative and advisory support from an agri-agency. AgriCord monitors project implementation and evaluates the activities. The strong emphasis on the project cycle is relevant and meaningful to AgriCord as a multi-donor trust fund. Indeed, the central office is designed to meet the requirements of managing the different programme cycles of the various back-donors.

The agri-agencies have adopted different engagement strategies for their work in the recipient countries. Many agri-agencies are old development organisations. WeEffect (former SCC) was founded in 1958, Asia DHRRA dates back to 1974, Fert was formed in 1981 and AgriTerra in 1997. All of them do other development work independently of the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme. The youngest agri-agency, Food and Forest Development (FFD) was formed only in 2012, building on development work by MTK. FFD has not yet formally elaborated an engagement strategy for its work, within and outside the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme.

Findings from the field visits suggest that whereas the project approach has its advantages, not least in channeling scarce resources to specific targets, producing clear deliverables for change, there are challenges. Projects tend to be discrete – resources are intended for project use only, including staffing, activity funding, transport, etc. In well-established organisations this is not a problem. However, in fledgling, young farmer organisations, various problems may arise, especially when the project is the only major source of funding. The following observations were made on the predominantly project-driven engagement strategy of FFD:

- The duration of projects, currently 1 to 2 years may be too short and pose limitations for what can be achieved. The time span causes a selection of interventions and sets work conditions that are less conducive to long-term organisational development.
- The 2011 MTE recommendation to extend and up-scale pilot projects has been implemented. In preparing the documentation for project extension and up-scaling, FFD engages twinning partners and local (national) consultants to ensure the quality of the project document and thereby reduce implementation risk. However, unless the consultants adopt a strong collaborative approach, the FO management may be side-lined in proposal development.
- Heavy reliance on project cycle management (PCM) practices may reduce Farmer Organisation ownership. FO management and staff is seldom conversant in PCM. Therefore, consultants and twinning partners are brought in to produce key inputs, and coordinators have been employed to oversee and support FO management in implementation. Whereas the quality of the output may be better, the ownership of the end-product may be less among FO management and committee/board.
- Project cycle management is given more emphasis than long-term organisational development. Example: The pole marketing activities in Amhara region appears more driven by what is stated in the project document than the goals set in the Zembaba Union business plan;
- A project focus encourages short-term one-off activities, but does not sustain recurrent activities. Example: agricultural extension services at Koga irrigation scheme were event oriented (e.g. seasonal crop demonstrations) rather than recurrent activities (e.g. provision of regular group extension support).
- Project activities may overshadow long-term organisational development needs. Example: Koga Irrigation Users Marketing Union in Ethiopia is facing a critical capitalization problem. Short-term project activities may succeed, but the Union will fail if the priority problem is not addressed.
- Competition between different priorities may strain project budget. Example: The perceived conflict between budgets for staff costs and for procurement of new technology caused strain between FO management and members in the beekeeping project in Babati, Tanzania.

- A project approach may be restrictive when problems arise, as FO and AA alike lack resources and means to assign the extra time and resources needed to conflict resolution and adaptive management.

The evaluation team concluded that whereas the project-driven engagement approach has served FFD well during the start-up years, both FFD and the AgriCord would benefit from the Finnish agri-agency developing a broader engagement strategy that is less project-driven, that emphasizes participation and long-term partnership building, bringing out the many positive lessons learnt from twinning and forestry value chain development. Broad-based agri-agency engagement strategies complement the AgriCord project cycle oriented approach.

### 3.2.6. FARMER ORGANISATIONS

The AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme works with a wide range of farmer organisations (FOs) in developing countries, ranging from informal farmer groups to national apex organisations. Demonstrating that strengthening of the farmer organisations takes place and that this yields positive impact on farmer income and livelihood is important to the AgriCord M&E system. Assessment of the viability of farmer organisations is done through methods, such as country mapping and checklists. Monitoring changes in the strength of farmer organisations takes place through quantitative and qualitative profiling. As observed above, these methods are not fully operational on Agro-Info.Net, and from this follows that result and impact are difficult to demonstrate (see 3.3.1. and 3.3.2).

Qualitative review findings suggest that the overall collaboration between AgriCord, agri-agencies and farmer organisations has been successful within the context of Finland's support. The review of selected farmer organization projects in Ethiopia and Tanzania rendered the following findings that provide guidance for the future:

- The Finnish agri-agency, FFD, supports a wide range of farmer organisations, many of whom are very weak organisations. To assess their strength, FFD has developed a qualitative checklist to complement Agro-Info.Net based tools;
- The capacities and capabilities of FFD support do not always match the needs of young and weak organisations. FFD ability to support organizational development is compromised by the lack of local presence, and the (relatively) low frequency of monitoring visits provided for in budgets;
- To achieve a better match between FFD capacity and FO needs: (i) FFD may adopt a more restrictive selection of farmer organisations to work with, giving preference to stronger organisations; and/or (ii) FFD may develop its engagement strategy towards a stronger local presence, diversifying the engagement strategy, and building internal capacity to support the organizational development of farmer organisations. The options are not exclusive, but support each other.
- A trend towards broadening and deepening the AA-FO partnership is emerging in the forestry projects, and it is worth grooming. This may involve broadening the partnership base, bringing in new twinning partners, and considering novel funding arrangements in the future.
- Planned short-term benefits have been delivered and received during pilot phases. The second phases of funding appear to be delivering on the process of organizational strengthening. The third phases of funding (scaled up) projects are still in implementation, progression is good, but there is need for changed modalities of agri-agency support. A broader partnership approach is recommended.

- Farmers organisations benefit from horizontal collaboration. In-country exchange visits were highly appreciated. The potential of collaboration within countries and South-to-South is largely untapped.
- Collaboration is never problem-free. In the review of field projects, conflicts and disagreements were frequently encountered. Including conflict management and resolution as part of training and capacity building programmes, to both FOs and Twinning Partners, is recommended.
- In two instances, two small FOs were combined for the sake of administrative convenience (AIN 5788 – Nronga/Kalali women’s dairy cooperative, and AIN 6008 Bahir Dar and Dehansit dairy cooperatives). In both cases, the cooperation did not work well and caused administrative stress. The agri-agency should try to avoid such ‘marriages of convenience’ in the future.
- The quality of FO management is key to success. The buying in of project staff (coordinators) has provided much needed management support to many farmer organisations. However, this temporary solution is not problem-free, as it has resulted in internal dual salary structures. Project-employed staff commonly earn salaries bigger than the General Manager, a situation which many will find very difficult to cope with. Harmonising support and strengthening training and capacity building programmes, to both FOs and Twinning Partners, is recommended.
- When collaboration between a farmer organization, the agri-agency and AgriCord has come to an (unexpected) end, this may sometimes leave members in the dark about what happened. There is need for clear procedures and protocols for how to disengage. Protocols that will guide a walk-away and thereto related exit strategies would be good to add to the implementation manuals accompanying the partnership agreements.
- To meet the diverse needs of farmer organisations in all work areas, FFD should consider broadening the twinning base, to include new partners that can take on novel roles in the collaboration.

### 3.2.7. ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTHENING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Many of the farmer organisations funded within the Finnish ‘*Building Capacity of Farmers’ Organisations in Developing Countries*’ programme face a dilemma. They have developed projects that build economic activities, promote business and market engagement. At the same time, they acknowledge that their organisations are still young and inexperienced and need substantial organisational and institutional capacity development to perform well in the market place.

The AgriCord approach advocates for the support to reflect and address FO priorities, as appropriate for their particular context, to sequentially match the growing capacity of the organisations: “It is possible to support new or starting organisations, to improve their capacities and later focus more on their advocacy role and their economic activities (AGriCord 2012c, 23). In reality, however, rural organisations in developing countries rarely progress according to a preferred developmental trajectory. For farmers to invest time and effort in developing their FO, they need incentives that more often than not must come in the form of economic benefits. There is need for the AgriCord network partners to configure a way of *simultaneously* building organisational capacity and developing economic activities.

During the field visit, we observed that striking a balance between the two is necessary for the agri-agency to succeed in its support function. In both Ethiopia and Tanzania, we encountered farmer organisations who rushed into economic activities, but whose foundation appear too weak to sustain

the risks and challenges involved, as exemplified by the collapse of the beekeeping project in Babati. Other projects progressed more slowly, gradually building up the organizational capacity over the long term, e.g. the West-Kilimanjaro potato growers.

The agri-agency, together with the twinning partner and the farmer organization, would benefit from an open discussion about the risks involved in embarking on economic activities before the organization is strong enough to meet the challenges. It would be advisable to consider more stringent minimum criteria for farmer organisations eligibility for support to economic projects. When such criteria are not met, the agri-agency would give preference to organizational development building activities during the pilot phase.

Lessons may be learnt from the experiences in the forestry projects. In 2010, an observation was made that in countries with good forestry market potential forest producer organisations were missing. The initial pilot projects therefore aimed at first developing the organizational basis for smallholder forestry development. As the projects have been extended and expanded, business activities came on board. In Ethiopia, the scaling-up strategy proposed “to focus on both building capacity among forest producer organisations for efficient management and service delivery as well as developing mechanisms that will deliver concrete financial benefits to cooperative members/forest producers in the pilot areas” (Niras 2011). Whether or not this strategy has been successful across the projects need to be determined.

Operating as a farmer-led enterprise requires not only as solid understanding of the business environment, but also the ability to make strategic choices, to act in the interest of and for the purpose of providing services to members. As work continues in the context of business development (Work Area 4), a matching effort should be placed on developing the organisational strength and inclusiveness of the FOs (Work Area 1).

### 3.2.8. FINANCIAL HEALTH

The 2011 mid-term evaluation reviewed the management and administrative arrangements of projects and concluded that “financial management, cooperation and communication seem to be no problem” (MTE 2011, p. iii). During this review, unfortunately, issues relating to financial management and governance at local level were found. The observations were:

- Irregularities in financial reporting had prompted the AgriCord and the Finnish agri-agency to undertake unscheduled external audits of at least three projects;
- In two instances, errors were found and corrective measures promptly taken by requesting the concerned parties to refund the projects;
- In two instances, allegations and counter-allegations of financial irregularities contributed to project collapse / suspension;
- In all instances, the monetary value of the alleged/confirmed financial misuse was relatively small;
- In all instances, when issues of financial management and governance arose, respect and trust rapidly vanished from partner interactions. In most cases, the relational damage was so severe that collaboration was discontinued, irrespective of the outcome of the external audits;
- The AgriCord central office and the Finnish agri-agency, having no local presence, incur substantial cost in time and human resource when issues of financial governance are sorted out;

- In all instances, the back-donor was informed through reporting; and
- Twinning partners may find it difficult to identify and address issues of financial irregularities.

The evaluation team concluded that all parties involved would benefit from putting in place stronger preventive measures. Since 2012, AgriCord considers financial management a cross-cutting concern for project implementation and provides guidance for how to handle irregularities. The agri-agencies play an important role in providing the backstopping and support for financially sound project management. Some of the measures that would increase the capacity of farmer organisations, agri-agencies and AgriCord central office to strengthen future financial health of the projects are:

- In the immediate term, more consistent use of a common tool to monitor and evaluate the financial health of FOs (ex: Mango Financial Health Check) would help define the need for AA support to FOs.
- In the immediate term, preparing a Protocol / Procedures for how to handle financial irregularities in the field, to support partners take correct and timely action. The Protocol should strengthen the responsibility and role of Farmer Organisations in financial management and provide guidance also for post-project action.
- In the immediate term, twinning partners, FO management and staff need to be trained in project administrative and financial procedures routinely as part of project activities.
- In the immediate term, various measures to empower 'whistle-blowers' could be considered. Such persons, e.g. project staff and committee members may observe irregularities, but do not know what action to take, or whom to inform.
- In the medium-term, projects may enhance governance through strengthened member progress monitoring. FFD may consider testing member participatory monitoring, on a pilot basis.
- In the medium-term, FFD would benefit from developing an engagement strategy based on local presence and long-term partnership building (rather than project support), as this will provide a more supportive environment for sound financial management.

The recent (2014) thematic screening and inventory of financial practice in AgriCord will provide further guidance for how to maintain the generally good financial track record of Farmers Fighting Poverty programme (AgriCord 2014c).

### 3.3. BENEFICIARY LEVEL: RESULTS AND IMPACT

The Government of Finland 2012 Development Policy emphasizes the *results and quality* of development cooperation. Development means sustainable and positive change as well as increased opportunities in people's lives (GoF 2012, 13). The ability to demonstrate such change is imperative. The policy provides guidance for how to demonstrate impact through baseline assessments, clear target-setting as well as systematic monitoring and reporting on activities (GoF 2012, 6).

How well does the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty programme demonstrate change at ultimate beneficiary level – i.e. at the level of individual farming households<sup>10</sup>? All four AgriCord M&E tools are relevant: (i) documenting direct activity outputs and outcomes within a project context; (ii) profiling the key capacities of farmer organisations over time; (iii) analysing incomes and livelihoods of farmer households, and (iv) undertaking regional / geographic, thematic and programme evaluations, which look beyond the situation of individual farmers to over structural and societal change (Table 2).

This section examines the extent to which the AgriCord Programme captures results and impact at beneficiary level. The findings are presented as themes, how the understanding of the implementation context is generated, how data is collected, and how well this data sustains an analysis of impact in terms of poverty, human rights, gender and environment.

### 3.3.1. IMPLEMENTATION CONTEXT

The projects implemented by agri-agencies and their farmer organisation partners under the umbrella of the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty across the world. The Evidence of Impact reports (2012-2014) provide an overview of the wide range of contexts in which activities take place. AgriCord offers ‘country mapping’ as the approach to examine the policy environment, opportunities and constraints for cooperation, and the structure and activities of farmers organisations in a new country of operations (AgriCord 2012a, p. 25). The evaluation team reviewed the country information available on the database, Agro-Info.Net<sup>11</sup>. Nine of ten countries supported by Finland were registered on Agro-Info.Net.<sup>12</sup> Short profiles in English were found for three countries (Ethiopia, Kenya and Vietnam); four country profiles were found in Dutch (Mexico, Nepal, Nicaragua and Tanzania) and three countries lacked basic profiles (Mozambique, Myanmar and Zambia). Country mapping reports had been prepared for six countries over the period 2007-2012. The information available on the data-base is relevant, but not comprehensive. Our conclusion was that the Agro-Info.Net provides relevant, but not adequate basic country information to agri-agencies. Therefore, the agri-agencies, need to go beyond the Agro-info.net data base to generate the contextual information on farmer organisations and the environments where they operate .

How did the agri-agencies, farmer organisations and projects funded by Finland during the period 2012-2014 attempted to understand their project environment? The Evaluation examined the situational analysis provided in project documents prepared for the current *FFD* projects in Ethiopia and Tanzania. Only the most recent documents were consulted. The findings were that some project documents were expertly done, with a very good situation analysis and very high level of detail, while the others omitted important information. Projects with poor situational background repeatedly

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<sup>10</sup> Finland’s Support follows the general monitoring & evaluation practice of the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme (AgriCord 2012a). During the 2012-2014 period the AgriCord M&E system developed significantly (see Agricord 2012c and 2014e).

<sup>11</sup> [www.Agro-info.net](http://www.Agro-info.net), accessed 16.3. 2015.

<sup>12</sup> The countries found were Finland’s seven long-term bilateral partner countries, Mexico and Nicaragua. Myanmar information was not available on the data base. Finland provides 50% co-financing for project 6104 Preparing the Ground: Start-up work for the Formation, Development, Strengthening and Growth of Farmers Organizations in Myanmar.

missed out on cross-cutting variables. During field work, it was often mentioned that the project staff later on had to undertake remedial action in order to fill data gaps in the project documents. However, there was no clear correlation between situational analysis and project performance.

The Evaluation concluded that that the partners would all benefit from a more comprehensive situational analysis prior to project start up, whose findings should be shared and mutually agreed upon. As will be discussed in the sections below, this would also improve on generating the parameters for data collection on poverty and cross-cutting issues.

There is need to carefully assess the information needed. To serve Agri-Agencies and FOs better, the Agro-Info.Net data base should provide access to more targeted information on the national context for FO operations (e.g. key legal and policy documents), organizational diversity (e.g. overviews of organisations operating in the agriculture/natural resources sector) and value chain settings. The question is, should AgriCord take up the cost of maintaining such a data base, or merely provide agri-agencies and FOs with links to other document repositories on the Internet?

### 3.3.2. MEASURING RESULTS AND IMPACT

In 2011, the mid-term review of Finland's support to the Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme observed that "The weakest link in the monitoring system is the farm level. There is a lack of data on the actual impact on the farming families. At present this is measured mainly through "story harvesting". The latter is a relevant method as such, but it should be rather used to supplement the facts and figures – to give a face to hard facts. This is an area requiring improvement." (Porvali & Sumelius 2011, 28).

The 2012-214 phase of Finland's support (Building Capacity of Farmers Organisations in Developing Countries) explicit stated that: "On-going evaluation by agri-agencies takes place at two levels: evaluation of the organizational farmer organisations is based on profiling information. *Impact evaluation at the household level is based on story harvesting*" (AgriCord 2012a, 31).

During 2012-2014, substantive improvements were made to the AgriCord portfolio of M&E tools. As observed above, reporting procedures and output indicators were streamlined (3.1.5.). Did the changes in other M&E tools deliver on the MTE 2011 recommendation?

We made the following observations:

- The AgriCord programme delivered on impact reporting, as planned in the programme proposal. During the 2012-2014 period, farmer impact stories were annually harvested and 20-25 of them presented in the annual Evidence of Impact reports (AgriCord 2012b, 2013, 2014c). Table 5 shows which of the case study projects were featured in the annual Evidence of Impact reports.
- Story harvesting is a good method for learning lessons and sharing good practice. The Evidence of Impact reports are very well written and produced. They deserve to be made good use of, e.g. in the in-depth dialogue between FOs and agri-agencies, in training and capacity-building of M&E personnel; and in the design of impact studies. However, story harvesting alone is not adequate to determine project impact on farmer lives and livelihoods.
- AgriCord recognizes the need to validate individual stories (AgriCord 2012d, 35). The method is to be complemented by external evaluations and specific livelihood studies (see 3.1.5).

Table 5. Prevailing practice in the collection of data for impact assessment – comparison of case study projects

	Project	MFAF Requirements (GoF 2012)		AgriCord Tools (2012d)		
		Baseline assessment	Systematic reporting of outcome and output at activity level against baseline	Story harvesting	Specific evaluations or studies	Proxy indicator of farmer income and food security <sup>13</sup>
Ethiopia	Bahir Dar & Dehansit Dairy Cooperatives	No	No	Evidence of Impact 2014	Internal evaluation	No
	Koga Irrigation Users Marketing Union	No	No	No	Internal evaluation	No
	Zembaba Bee and Forest Product Marketing Union	Not known?	Not known?	Evidence of Impact 2013	Final report	Yes
Tanzania	Mwikatsi Beekeepers – Mwiwata Manyara	No	No	Unpublished success story		Yes
	West Kili Potato Growers - Fert	Yes	Yes	Evidence of Impact 2013	Final report	Yes
	ZAHLIP – TAHA (Zanzibar horticulture)	Yes	No	Evidence of Impact 2014	Internal evaluation	Yes

- Farmer income and food security is considered a cross-cutting concern by AgriCord. The monitoring of cross-cutting concerns is undertaken as information gathering, on the basis of questionnaires, at the beginning and end of every project period (AgriCord 2012d, 30). Proxy indicators were used. From 2012, special attention was given keeping track of information related to yields, production, sales and incomes related to project activities, as indicators of availability of food and changes in living conditions (AgriCord2012d,30, 35).
- A review of six case study projects shows that data relevant for impact assessment is collected in most projects. However, the data obtained is not adequate for a formal assessment of project impact on farmer livelihoods. Externally conducted specific studies were done to support implementation, especially of forestry projects, but none has focused on beneficiary impact.

Based on the above observations, the evaluation team concluded that it was not possible to undertake an impact evaluation of Finland's support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme 2012-2014. Considering the importance Finland assigns the ability to demonstrate impact in development cooperation, a recommendation for how to address the situation was prepared (see below and section 4).

<sup>13</sup> "From 2012 on, Farmer Organizations and agri-agencies keep track, in each project, of yield, production, sales, incomes related to project activities as indicators of availability of food and changes in living conditions" (AgriCord 2012d, 35).



### 3.3.3. POVERTY IMPACT - ANALYSING INCOMES AND LIVELIHOODS OF FARMER HOUSEHOLDS

The current methods of evaluating impact at beneficiary level, story harvesting and the tracking of yields, production, sales and incomes information related to project activities, are indicative of substantive positive impacts on farmer income and household livelihood. However, they do not provide for conclusive evidence. Current M&E practice produces outputs that will assist in determining parameters for improved future impact monitoring and evaluation. Some of the observations that may be useful when designing a poverty impact study are:

- Story harvesting provides insight into the mechanisms that bring about positive change at farmer household level.
- Positive changes come about not merely in income and livelihood, but also in social capital
- Imperative to consider intra-household distribution of benefits (husband and wife income)
- Farmer Organisations need to know their membership
- No heavy quantitative surveys, but assessments that have a clear link to national poverty indicators and internationally recognized poverty indices.
- The capacity of Farmer Organisations and Agri-Agencies to undertake impact monitoring or evaluation is limited. Impact assessment should be outsourced.
- Poverty impact assessments should be undertaken as stand-alone, external studies, preferably in a comparative perspective. The 2014 thematic reviews of crosscutting issues (AgriCord 2014a-f) provide a very good guidance for the design of impact assessments.

### 3.3.4. HUMAN RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

In 2012, Finland adopted a human rights based approach (HRBA) to its development policy, as an instrument to consolidate the three dimensions of sustainable development (the economic, social and environmental), and to strengthen the global governance of sustainable development. The approach draws upon value-based development policy, and includes civil and political rights and freedoms as well as economic, social and cultural rights. All people have an equal right to influence and participate in the definition and implementation of development. The aim of the HRB approach is that that “everyone, including the poorest people, know their rights and are able to act for them. It is equally important that the authorities know their human rights obligations and are capable of implementing them” (GoF 2012, 11). The policy guidelines are put into practice through the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, together with the partner organisations in development programming and planning mechanisms. Furthermore, the approach contains specific measures, i.e. inclusion of the human rights-based approach in all activities.

The planning of the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty 2012-2014 programme largely precedes the introduction of the HRB approach to Finnish development cooperation. The Programme Proposal does not recognize HRBA in its intervention logic and design.

The Evaluation Team briefly examined the HRBA context of the Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme from two perspectives. Firstly, we examined whether the evolution of the FFFP programme during the period 2012-2014 showed signs of an evolving human rights based approach in the future?

The AgriCord FFP programme recognizes rights-related issues as major concerns when addressing poverty through the strengthening of farmer organisations. Over the period 2012-2014, the trend appears to be moving away from explicitly addressing rights issues at local level, towards greater participation in national policy dialogue, lobby and advocacy. Meanwhile, as part of good governance, farmer rights and responsibilities feature centrally in the logical framework (2014).

Secondly, we posed the question whether rights issues were of relevance to the case studies examined?

During the field visits, projects were found to operate within rights-related contexts, affecting the ability of smallholders to develop their business and address poverty. Rights issues included access to, use and control over natural resource (land water and woodlands); differences in rights regimes between men and women; and tenure arrangements (land ownership compared to share-cropper and tenant rights). None of the case study projects explicitly tackled rights issues, and only two projects had a lobby and advocacy component that would provide for such work. Although there currently may be little contestation or conflict over rights currently, many FOs are likely to be confronted with rights-related challenges in the future (e.g. women tenant farmer water rights on Zanzibar), as globalization and population growth continue to increase competition over resources. Finland's focus on human rights based approach provides an untapped opportunity for AgriCord to channel funds to Farmer Organisations to build their capacity to address rights-related issues in their operations, and for the Finnish agri-agency to increase its competence and efficiency.

### 3.3.5. GENDER

Gender is one of four key cross-cutting issues in the evaluation. The ToRs draws the attention to the contribution of Finland's support to the realization of gender objectives under the Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme; the extent to which gender concerns have been integrated into project management; the gender impact of project intervention at farmer organisation and beneficiary level; and the sustainability of possible gender gains (ToRs, p. 7-8, Annex 2).

The Evaluation Team examined gender at programme, organisation and project level (case study projects only). A recent thematic review of gender equality concerns in AgriCord activities provides guidance for the future (Agricord 2014e). The evaluation observations were as follows:

- The national governments have gender policies in place (exemplified by Ethiopia and Tanzania).
- Gender equity is an explicit development objective of some organisations, both agri-agencies (e.g. AgriTerra and WeEffect), and farmer organisations (e.g. Mwiwata in Tanzania).
- AgriCord, as a network of agri-agencies, has defined gender as a cross-cutting concern, but has not developed specific binding implementation modalities.<sup>14</sup> In practice, this means that AgriCord is gender aware, but does not have a system in place for mainstreaming gender into the programme. The network, however, finances projects with a gender focus, promotes exchange between agri-agencies on gender (e.g.

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<sup>14</sup> The information is conflicting. The Programme Proposal makes reference to a gender policy (AgriCord 2012 footnote 8, p. 26). The 2014 Evidence of Impact report on Gender Equality (AgriCord 2014e, p. 4) reports that AgriCord has not set binding requirements regarding gender.

via the 14ALL (one-for-all) programme, and includes questions on gender in the reporting formats (AgriCord2014\_gender)

- FFD as a young agency is still developing organisational policies. FFD has no gender policy.
- The Finnish farmer organisations participating in twinning arrangements have a strong representation of women (60% of Finnish twinning partners in 2014). Women in recipient farmer organisations were often curious of them. Woman-to-woman farmer collaboration appears to still be a largely untapped potential for FFD.

The 2012 programme proposal contained many project ideas featuring a gender approach or recognition (AgriCord 2012a, 10-11). Between one quarter and one third of the project budget was earmarked for support to women's associations. During 2012-2014, four projects specifically targeting a women's association, or aiming at working with women (Table 6) in addition to the gender-sensitive design of most projects. A review of the 'gender-focused projects' showed that

- Projects targeted at women were on average as successful as projects in general. Out of eight country projects studied in greater detail, three had a gender focus. All three gendered projects were found in Tanzania. One project performed well (ZHLIP, Zanzibar vegetable project), while two performed below expectation (Nronga and Kalali dairy cooperatives, and beekeeping in Babati). No correlation was found between a gendered approach and performance.
- In many projects promoting "gender-friendly" technologies (e.g. top-bar hives) or affirmative action (e.g. quota setting), the benefit from a gendered approach was *indirect*. A similar indirect impact was also reported for the fish-farming project in Nepal.

Table 6. Examples of Finland funded project with gender component

Project	Gender-approach
AIN 5759- Beekeeping in Tanzania.	Promoting gender-friendly technology
AIN 5610 and 5788 - Nronga/Kalali Women's Dairy Cooperative	Working with women's organisation
AIN 6077 – Fish farming as economic opportunity to women with positive nutritional side effects.	Participant quota setting
AIN 5947 - Linking improved households' economies management to integration of small scale farmers into the vegetable value chain in Zanzibar.	Participant quota setting

Other means included consideration of gender variables in project cycle management; systematically generates gender-disaggregated data; and undertakes specific gender activities in projects gender issues at farmer organization level; disaggregating data by gender in activity reporting; and providing training for women (AgriCord 2014\_gender, 14-15). Findings from the field demonstrated:

- Significant advances in women's participation has been obtained through quota setting in Tanzania. Organisational gender policies have increased women's participation in leadership and activities, e.g. Mviwata Manyara 40% and 50% targets respectively. The extent to which formal representation results in gender empowerment could not be determined;
- In Ethiopia projects female representation in leadership position and project activities was low. Usually, there is only one woman on most committees/boards. In older, established primary societies membership participation appear more balanced (e.g. Agunta cooperative in

Dangla) while new societies were dominated by males. Anecdotal evidence suggests that female representation in cooperative management is emerging as a role model that gradually may extend gender limits;

- All project design documents and reports feature gendered information and disaggregated data on gendered participation in project activities. In general, however, project documents do *not* capture gender barriers well, e.g. women tenure and resource rights; internal household division of labour, socio-cultural praxis, and female literacy.
- Farmer organization management often recognized that gender considerations may enhance overall performance and bring about additional advantages to farmer organisations. E.g. household food security was enhanced through multiple use of potato in Koga, Ethiopia and greater efficiency in the value chain achieved as a result of gendered training. The position of primary cooperative societies in Ethiopia was strengthened through inviting women to become members, as this not only increased membership but boosted share capital.

In general, the evaluation team concluded that gender variables are well taken into consideration in the on-going projects, but that substantial leverage may be created from adopting a stronger gender focus. This may be achieved by FFD developing a gender policy to guide future engagement and partnership building. This does not only apply to future projects, as current projects would benefit from a gender analysis and review that will add value to and deepen existing collaboration. AgriCord as a network should support the agri-agencies and farmer organisations build stronger gender competences.

### 3.3.6. ENVIRONMENT

Environmental sustainability is one of four key cross-cutting issues in the evaluation. The ToRs draws the attention to the integration of environment in programme activities; the achievements in terms of environmental sustainability, and factors that may enhance or inhibit such achievements (ToRs, p. 7-8, Annex 2).

The programme proposal outlining Finland's support to AgriCord does not contain specific environmental objectives (AgriCord 2012a). The Farmers Fighting Poverty programme document, however, states that "there is a *joint commitment of farmers' organisations and agri-agencies for systematic inclusion of environmental concerns*"; and places the *responsibility for delivering on environmental objectives at the project level*: "The farmer organisation has to apply appropriate practices in environmental sustainability and contribute significantly to sustainable farming practices, better natural resource management and/or efficient energy use through its policies and operations" (AgriCord 2011, 30). How well have Agri-agencies and Farmer Organisations been able to incorporate appropriate environmental practices in their operations?

The general impression of environmental sustainability is quite good. Many projects have an environmental profile or component, all of which are relevant and justified. The forestry projects have an environmental profiling that aims at moderating climate change, sustainable agriculture practices, supporting reforestation and forest conservation, and/or adding value to sustainable forest production (e.g. through certification). Most of the agricultural projects include an

environmental activity or component, e.g. working with smallholder vegetable value chains contains elements of renewable energy and crop rotation for soil fertility management.

Notwithstanding the significant environmental awareness in the case study projects in Ethiopia and Tanzania we found an array of environmental concerns that may pose challenges to the Farmer Organisations in the future. The following examples include both challenges and opportunities:

- Efficiency of water use, pesticides, acidity and environmental flows affecting the Koga Irrigation Scheme, on the Abbay tributary to the Blue Nile in Ethiopia (AIN 6227);
- Concerns about long-term sustainability of water and land management under eucalyptus mono-culture affecting the densely populated Amhara Region in central Ethiopia (AIN 5929);
- Water availability and use affecting smallholder producers along the Zanzibar vegetable chain. Unexploited opportunities for climate-smart agriculture practices (AIN 5947);
- Many FOs expressed concerns about the impact of climate-change derived agro-ecological change on their future operations, but are constrained in taking action.

In general, farmer organisations are weak in terms of environmental know-how and management. The agri-agencies are well placed to assist build the capacity of FOs to address environmental issues, and they may assist in leveraging opportunities for climate smart agriculture practices through building capacity and partnering with relevant third party organisations.

AgriCord as a network should support the agri-agencies and farmer organisations build stronger environmental competence. The findings of the draft 2014 thematic review of environmental sustainability (AgriCord 2014a) are valid and the recommendations for mainstreaming environmental sustainability are worthwhile revisiting in future planning.

### 3.4. RESULTS AND IMPACT –OECD/DAC CRITERIA

The specific questions posed in the Terms of Reference and the answers to these questions at *programme* level are shown in the tables below. The answers to the questions, at *project* level, are shown in Annexes 9 and 10 (case study projects in Ethiopia and Tanzania).

#### 3.4.1. RELEVANCE

Table 7. Relevance – answers to specific questions in the ToRs

Specific question from ToRs:	Evaluation assessment:
Are the objectives and achievements of Programme consistent with the problems and priorities of farmers' organisations and their members (and country policies and strategies)?	Yes. The programme is relevant for farmer organizations and their members in developing countries, their country policies and strategies.
Are the stakeholders and interest groups aware of and satisfied with the activities of their respective project?	Yes, the stakeholders and interest groups are satisfied with their respective projects.
Are the project activities consistent with the rights, needs and priorities of the targeted farmers' organisations and their members?	Yes, project activities are consistent with the needs and priorities of targeted FOs and their members. Rights, however, are not specifically addressed in projects (with the exception of Work Area 3, lobby

	and advocacy).
Are the objectives of Programme consistent with Finland's development policy (incl. regional and country-specific priorities, sectoral and thematic priorities)?	Yes, the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty is consistent with Government of Finland's 2012 development policy, bilateral preferences and current country strategies.

### 3.4.2. DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

Table 8. Development impact– answers to specific questions in the ToRs

Specific question from ToRs:	Evaluation assessment:
Has Finland's support contributed to the progress towards achieving the overall objectives of the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme?	Yes. The Finnish support has had a strong positive impact on achieving the overall objectives of FFP, through (i) providing critical core support to the organization; (ii) providing flexibility in the funding modality contributing to a higher project success rate; and (iii) allowing AgriCord FFP to develop new areas of smallholder engagement that meet a global need (smallholder forestry).
Did Programme contribute to reducing the poverty of the members of farmers' organisations (and/or rural population in general)?	Not known. Sporadic project reporting, qualitative and anecdotal evidence available on impact suggests that FFP through projects has had a very positive impact on FO members income, thereby reducing poverty. However, due to the absence of reliable baseline data and follow-up surveys, the assumption of positive impact cannot be independently validated.
Did Programme have an impact on the lives of the rural poor (women and men)? Through which means (prices, employment, transfers, access, authority, assets, empowerment)?	Yes. The Programme has had an impact on the lives of the rural poor through the projects implemented by FOs and agri-agencies. In most instances, the projects have enabled farmers increase the volumes of marketed produce boosting the income generated from sales from agriculture and forestry products. The projects have also empowered smallholders through trainings and capacity-building. The position of women has been strengthened through quota setting.
What are the overall poverty, inequality and sustainability impacts of Programme, intended and unintended, long term and short term, positive and negative?	Not known. Due to the absence of reliable baseline data and follow-up surveys, long-term trends and patterns have not been possible to ascertain. A recommendation is made for how to address this shortcoming in Chapter 4 below.

### 3.4.3. EFFECTIVENESS

Table 9. Effectiveness– answers to specific questions in the ToRs

Specific question from ToRs:	Evaluation assessment:
Is the quality and quantity of the produced results and outputs in accordance with the plans; how are the results/outputs applied by the farmers' organisations and their members?	Yes and no. The results and outputs are in accordance with the plans. However, many projects have experienced delays in activity implementation for administrative reasons (see 3.1.6., 3.1.7., 3.5.5.) The results/outputs have been applied as stepping stones for continued growth of the FOs as through expansion of services to more members and as adding new services to old members.
To what extent Programme has achieved its purpose of supporting	Yes and not known. The AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme is in the process of achieving its purpose. Planned short-

farmers' organisations or will it do so in the future? Have the planned benefits been delivered and received, as perceived by key stakeholders?	term benefits have been delivered and received during pilot phases. The second phases of funding appear to be delivering on the process of organizational strengthening. The third phases of funding (scaled up) projects are still in implementation, progression is good, but there is need for changed modalities of agri-agency support.
To what extent Programme has achieved its purpose of strengthening AgriCord-network's capacity?	Yes, the purpose of strengthening the network capacity was largely met. Finland's support to the AgriCord central office was critical during the period 2012-2014.
Are the results/outputs and Programme purpose making a contribution towards reducing poverty and inequality, and promoting sustainable development?	Yes. The AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme provides support to local organization during a phase in global development that places increasing importance on beneficiary-driven development and the ability of local communities to stand up for themselves and protect their interests.
What is the likelihood that the achievements in human rights, gender equality, environmental sustainability and strengthening the financial management of the farmers' organisations are sustained after the programme is completed?	Good. Achievements will be sustained provided support is continued for 4-5 years/organisation. The likelihood of sustained achievements increases with each project year. After the first pilot year, the organization is still weak and achievements are at risk. By the time the organization reaches its third/fourth year the likelihood of sustained achievements is quite good.

#### 3.4.4. EFFICIENCY

Table 10. Efficiency – answers to specific questions in the ToRs

Specific question from ToRs:	Evaluation assessment:
How well have the activities transformed the available resources into the intended outputs/results, in terms of quantity, quality and time?	Yes and <b>Not known</b> . Most pilot projects are very small and they have been very efficient in transforming available resources into immediate results. Most scaled-up projects are still in implementan and their efficiency remains to be determined.
Can the costs of Programme be justified by the results?	Yes. The outputs / results have been good in relation to the resources allocated each project. The Programme provides very good returns to donor grants.
Have the resources been used to promote cross-cutting concerns as planned and efficiently?	Yes and no. The Programme did not have specific cross-cutting targets. Where targets were explicit, as in directing 30% of funding towards women projects, this was not achieved. Barriers to achieving target for cross-cutting concerns are discussed in sections 3.3.5.

#### 3.4.5. SUSTAINABILITY

Table 11. Sustainability– answers to specific questions in the ToRs

Specific question from ToRs:	Evaluation assessment:
Will beneficiaries continue to benefit from the project interventions and activities after the planned project period is over?	Yes, projects are continued for a minimum period. Most projects aim at enhancing the FO service function. This process takes 3 years or more, depending on the nature of the intervention. Provided project support continues for the minimum period, there is no reason why members would not continue to benefit from services once the project is over.
Will the benefits produced by Programme be maintained after the	Yes and no. Some benefits will continue after the projects are over, while others will be discontinued. In general, the FOs do not have

termination of external support? Have the projects established exit strategies?	exit strategies for their projects, as this only becomes meaningful when the activity has been scaled up.
What are the possible factors that enhance or inhibit sustainability, including ownership/commitment, economic/financial, institutional, technical, socio-cultural and environmental sustainability aspects?	Factors that enhance sustainability include local ownership, long-term partner commitments, flexible implementation arrangements, and networking. Factors that inhibit sustainability include risk facing farmer organisations derived from operating in difficult economic environments and facing substantial organizational challenges.

### 3.4.6. AID EFFECTIVENESS (PARIS DECLARATION PRINCIPLES, ACCRA, BUSAN AND FOLLOWUP)

Table 12. Aid effectiveness– answers to specific questions in the ToRs

Specific question from ToRs:	Evaluation assessment:
Do the farmers' organizations have ownership, participation and sense of accountability in the implemented projects?	Yes. The Farmer Organisations have a strong sense of ownership and accountability for project activities. Members participate actively.
Does Programme use common and transparent arrangements for planning, budgeting and financial management, monitoring, evaluating and reporting?	Yes and no. Significant variability in the systems between different actors prompted AgriCord to harmonize project implementation tools during the period 2012-2014. The 14ALL process aims at harmonizing agri-agency systems. However, Farmer Organisations are not likely to be able to conform with the PCM requirements and will be relying on their agri-agency partners also in the future.
Does Programme promote coordination and complementarity between agri-agencies, with other actors, with Finnish bilateral cooperation, and with other donor funding?	Yes. AgriCord promotes coordination and complementarity between agri-agencies, with other actors, with Finnish bilateral cooperation and with other back-donors. The extent to which coordination has been successful varies.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS & LESSONS LEARNT

### 4.1. SCENARIOS FOR FINLAND'S SUPPORT TO AGRICORD FARMERS FIGHTING POVERTY

The Government of Finland has supported the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme since 2007. The two first years of collaboration, 2007-2008, were characterized as a 'learning phase'. The years 2009-2011 was a period of intensive expansion and growth with 36 projects in the portfolio at the end of 2011 (Agricord 2012a, p. 7,13). The third phase, 2012-2014, was aimed at reinforcing the Farmers Fighting Poverty results and consolidating the AgriCord coordination role. This evaluation has shown that substantial reinforcement of good results has taken place, but that additional work is needed to consolidate the achievements.

The next implementation phase, 2015-2017, will bring several innovative processes to completion, including the piloting of smallholder forestry, the social gains from twinning partnerships and the testing of the pilot-extension-scaling up model. Through continued, well-targeted support to AgriCord and MTK/FFD, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland may play a crucial role in



consolidating and allowing the Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme to mature, bringing about a new generation of farmer-to-farmer development cooperation initiatives, that may effectively impact on the livelihood and wellbeing of impoverished rural households in developing countries.

Continued support to Component 1, would allow Finnish agri-agency and partner farmer organisations in developing countries take the current crop of projects through the full sequence of pilot-extension-scaling up, which will allow for results to mature and lessons to be learnt. Conducting external evaluations to assess the impact of projects on poverty and cross-cutting issues across farming populations will be imperative. In this review we see much benefit in agri-agencies adopting a strategy that emphasizes long-term partnerships, broadens and deepens the twinning approach and creates stronger local presence. The Finnish Agri-agency, Food and Forest Development ry, would benefit from developing a long-term engagement strategy and accompanying policies (e.g. gender). This may require a restructuring of the geographical spread of activities and focusing on a few long-term partnerships. The focus on forestry development should continue and be strengthened. The work to develop FFD's future engagement strategy should be a participatory process drawing on the substantial experiences generated among Finnish professionals and Finnish farmer organisations participating in AgriCord activities since 2006. It is recommended that FFD will need to look to complementary funding for this undertaking.

The Government of Finland provision of core funding to the AgriCord secretariat has been invaluable for the development of the Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme. Continued support to Component 2, will allow all stakeholders to reap the full benefits from the substantial leverage created by Finnish core funding. The future content of Finnish 'Component 2' support, however, needs to be determined within the context of the ongoing '14all' organizational restructuring exercise. Special consideration may be given provision of external support to the AgriCord M&E function, to produce impact data required by the MFAF (i.e. project impact on poverty and cross-cutting issues across farming populations). The enmeshment of AgriCord and FFD that gradually has been dismantled since 2011, should continue during the next phase, changing from a 'mother-child relation' to full a joint venture between equal partners.

## 4.2. SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides *programme level* recommendations for improvements and changes, action to remedy problems in performance, to learn lessons, build synergies and/or to capitalise on strengths. The presentation follows the structure of the report. Detailed recommendations at *project level* were presented in four debriefing meetings held in Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam, Bahir Dar (Ethiopia) and with twinning partners in Helsinki (see also the matrices in country narrative reports in Annexes 9 and 10).

### **Recommendations arising from Chapter 3.1. Programme Delivery 2012-2104**

- 1) **Policy compliance.** The Finnish Support to AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme is compliant with the policy goals of Finnish development cooperation. The Programme is also compliant with policies and sector strategies in the partner countries, as represented by Ethiopia and Tanzania. However, during a stakeholder meeting, Government representatives in Tanzania queried the status of AgriCord in the country, e.g. whether it is a registered NGO, a UN-body, or accredited with Ministry of Finance as a donor?

Their concern was for accountability - who vouches for and/or represents AgriCord in case of a dispute, grievance or legal matter?

**Recommendation:** AgriCord should review the need for formal status at national level in key recipient countries, e.g. through accreditation with relevant ministries, to remove the current ambiguity surrounding the status of AgriCord prevailing among key national government stakeholders. From this does not follow that AgriCord should establish local structures or have field presence. Formal recognition by national governments of AgriCord's status as a not-for-profit, charitable organization may support local farmer organisations in some countries to achieve tax rebates.

- 2) **The project-based intervention logic** is well suited to AgriCord operating as a multi-donor trust fund. In the collaboration between agri-agencies and farmer organisations, the project-based approach needs to be complemented by strong concerted engagement strategies, participatory approaches and organizational development for long-term partnership building. AgriCord's project cycle approach will be enriched and complemented by diverse and broad-based work approaches of different agri-agencies and farmer organisations.

**Recommendation:** The Finnish Agri-agency, FFD, who is still very young, should consider undertaking a participatory process, involving its Finnish partners and key partners from among farmer organisations in recipient countries, to develop an engagement strategy that is based on long-term relationship building with a few partner FOs and a lesser geographical spread, rather than project-based interventions with many. A greater emphasis on long-term involvement, mutual reciprocity, strong twinning networks and developing protocols and procedures for managing work relationships will provide for strong agri-agency and FO collaboration for the future.

- 3) **Overall performance.** In general, Finland's support to AgriCord, the *Building Capacity of Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries*, Programme performed well against expected results and focal areas in maintaining a sizeable project portfolio; targeting farmer organisations in Finnish bilateral partner countries; giving preference to projects that enhance economic activities; boosting twinning operations; developing collaboration between forest producer organizations; supporting the establishment of a Finnish agri-agency; and overall management of the programme and projects. Challenges were met in the governance of some projects and the promotion of the position of women farmers (see 19 below). Both the Finnish agri-agency, and the AgriCord Secretariat (see 8 below), were strained in terms of human resource to provide effective backstopping to project implementation.

**Recommendations:** For FFD to develop as an agri-agency, additional staff resources and budgets are needed. The current human resource (3 ppm divided over four members of staff) is adequate only to manage the current FFD project portfolio. As more responsibilities are transferred from the AgriCord secretariat, as the project portfolio grows and becomes more complex with pilot projects being extended and scaled-up, and as long-term partnerships develop, more organizational resources will be needed. The FFD Board must begin to look for additional funds to allow the agri-agency to develop as an organisation, put in place work procedures and protocols, develop an engagement strategy and build long-term partnerships in developing countries. If FFD is in for the long haul, the train needs to be equipped accordingly.

- 4) **Maintaining a member-driven focus.** From 2011, AgriCord began implementing a two-pronged programme approach, namely to strengthen the farmers' organisation *and* to improve members' benefits. The Finnish-funded 'Building Capacity of Farmers' Organisations in Developing Countries' programme adhered to this approach. In the course of implementation, however, the use of member satisfaction

driven indicators was reduced: In 2012, the decision was made to remove the FO obligation to undertake member satisfaction surveys. However, even though FOs are not asked to regularly consult their members, they will need to generate continuously updated information about their members in order to be able to provide services and respond to member concerns. This is particularly important when projects are scaled-up and the information needs of FO management changes, or when the interests of different categories of members clash.

**Recommendation:** As member satisfaction surveys are removed as a tool to monitor FO accountability and services towards membership, the agri-agencies are encouraged to negotiate with FOs to build in other activities into projects that provide tools for FO management to gauge member satisfaction, maintain a membership-driven approach, and maintain a membership data base and organizational MIS. Providing for member-to FO-management dialogue through participatory M&E and the adoption of a rights-based approach may provide venues for a sustained membership-driven focus.

- 5) **Work areas.** AgriCord supports farmers organisations in four different work areas – or “themes” in the FFP programme. In 2014, the majority of on-going FFD projects were registered in Agro-Info.net under Work Area # 4 (Farmer-led economic development). In many projects, however, this approach poses a challenge to both the farmer organization and the agri-agency. Whilst doing business brings enthusiasm and motivation, many FOs are very weak and struggle with basic issues of organization management, governance, accountability and transparency.

**Recommendation:** The Farmer Organisations and the Agri-agencies are encouraged to ensure that organisational development precedes or is actively incorporated in projects that focus on farmer-led economic development. Training and capacity-building in organization management, governance, accountability and transparency should continue throughout the project cycle and be strengthened in the form of long-term organizational development. When the local structures are too weak, business projects should be avoided completely, and organizational strengthening and capacity-building offered instead. The Finnish-funded forestry projects explicitly target working with very weak local organisations to develop economic activities. It is recommended that a systematic reviewing of their experiences is undertaken as the pilot-extension-scaling up model comes to first full cycle around 2016-7, to determine the success and learnt good practice from such a dual strategy.

- 6) **Monitoring and evaluation** of the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty programme takes place at four levels: project level (output and outcome of project activities); farmer organisation; farmer household (impact on food and livelihood security) and agri-agency level (quality of support to projects, FOs and members). The review found that the actual practice to be different from the normative standards. The general observation was that project level 1 and 2 reporting rely more on methods and practice developed by the agri-agencies than the Agro-info.net data base. During 2012-2014, AgriCord strived to streamline organizational performance-based monitoring and less information is routinely generated at member level. The AgriCord M&E system, including the use of the Agro-info.net data base, is currently undergoing a major overhaul as part of the Netherland funded ‘14ALL’ organisational review and restructuring.

**Recommendation:** Future support to Component 2 (AgriCord secretariat) should be tailored to match the revised programme structure. AgriCord should set clear protocols and standards for level 3 and 4 data collection and systematize periodic evaluations and specific studies as means to capture the broader programme impact to meet MFAF and other back-donor expectations on impact reporting (see issue # 21).

- 7) **Finances.** Financial reporting by the AgriCord secretariat is of good standard, as exemplified by the Annual Reports to MFAF. Available funds are used efficiently and the return to project expenditure is good. Small

monies have had great impact at FO level. At programme level, the distribution of programme funding over the period 2012-2014 was delayed by late signing of contracts, which appear related to carry-overs of funds from one funding period to the next. At the end of 2014, approximately 1,3 million euro was carried forth to 2015. As the mode of implementation involves a budget roll-over, most of the funds are already committed, and this may not be a major issue at programme level. However, delayed disbursement did cause subsequent delays and inconveniences at project implementation level, which affects project delivery and *vice versa*. Negative effects include increased administrative cost and transaction time; clashes with agricultural seasons; and reduced transparency in fund use.

**Recommendation:** The contracting parties, AgriCord and MFAF, are encouraged to ensure that documents are submitted on time and that contracts are signed expediently. It is important for the future that AgriCord gains a better understanding of what brings about delays and to take appropriate measures to control the situation and increase the efficiency of timely fund management.

Agri-agencies and farmer organisations should invest in continuous training of FO staff and management in financial management to build capacity. This is particularly important as pilot projects are scaled-up and operations become more complex and diversified.

- 8) **AgriCord Secretariat.** A key focal area for Finland's support the period 2012-2014 was support to the development and consolidation of AgriCord's coordinating office in Leuven. The expected results were largely achieved, within the limitations of a very high work load. The provision of a Finnish advisor greatly contributed to the overall success of the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme.

**Recommendation:** Support to Component 2 should be continued to sustain the current positive momentum and bring currently on-going projects and processes to fruition. The detailed allocation of support should be adjusted to match organizational changes arising from the '14ALL' review and to complement funding from the Netherlands. However, it is recommended that Finnish support is directed to ensure that the household-level impact assessments, called for by the MTE 2011, this review and as required by Government of Finland 2012, are produced. AgriCord management should look into means of addressing too high work load at the secretariat as this is counter-productive to programme objectives and achievements.

### **Recommendations arising from Chapter 3.2. Project level strategies and work approaches:**

- 9) **Value chains.** Most projects work with key value chains, as exemplified by the dairy, forest product, honey and vegetable chains in Ethiopia and Tanzania. In general, good overall results have been achieved from structuring interventions along value chains. Anecdotal data shows that improved functioning of the value chains has had a positive impact on farmer income and provided for multiplier effects in the local economy. Increasing members' understanding of value chain operations was seen to build social capital. Value chain work will benefit from more training and capacity-building.

**Recommendation:** The agri-agencies and farmer organisations are encouraged to continue working with value chains, to invest in building the competence of FO staff and members, which will increase social capital. The agri-agencies and FOs are advised to revisit the untapped leverage that was found at the lower (producer) levels of the chain (addressing yield gaps, post-harvest wastage), and in broadening the forestry value chain (to include non-wood forest products and ecosystem services) in the future.

- 10) **Local presence:** Project performance was found to be related to the frequency of agri-agency back-stopping support. Where agri-agencies had a strong local presence, projects performed well. Where FOs

and projects were supported from a distance, problems arose. Local presence is no *panacea* but boosts performance; provides better opportunities for capacity-building and a framework for better dialogue; lowers financial risk and the threshold for FO staff to contact the agri-agency about emerging problems; and contributes towards long-term partnership building. Indirectly, local presence increases overall project sustainability and provides for better overall development impact.

**Recommendation:** As part of a process of preparing an engagement strategy for future partnership work, the Finnish agri-agency is encouraged to review and document its many past efforts in strengthening the agency's local presence, clearly stating the pros and cons. What worked well under different options? Placing young professionals at project sites, employing local coordinators, sharing the work with other agri-agencies? It would be advisable to identify the best medium- and long-term strategies and cost them. Local presence is likely to result in more efficient overall resource utilization, though the initial costs of establishment may be high.

- 11) **Horizontal collaboration.** Enhanced agri-agency local presence may also be augmented through increased collaboration between farmer organizations and their supporting agri-agencies, operating within a country or a region.

**Recommendation.** Agri-agencies and farmer organisations are encouraged to strengthen horizontal collaboration to build long-term partnerships and build capacity. Relationship building between AgriCord funded projects (in-country visits) allow for more frequent interaction; broader, membership participation; farmer-to-farmer learning; and they may address specific developmental needs.

- 12) **Twinning arrangements** are particular to the projects supported by the Finnish agri-agency, FFD. Twinning refers to the active building of networks between farmer organisations in Finland and in partner countries. The number of twinning arrangements in Finland-funded projects has increased during the period 2012-2014. This increase is based on advocacy and hard work on behalf of FFD, as the participation of Finnish professionals in development cooperation is constrained by structural shifts in the Finnish agri-sector and tax policies. The twinning arrangement is capable of producing remarkably strong personalized collaboration that not only greatly enhances project implementation, but also spawns new project ideas and initiatives. The *advisory support* provided by the twinning partners was generally well received. The experience with the *administrative support*, however, was more variable.

**Recommendations:** The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland is encouraged to establish dialogue with other wings of Government (e.g. Ministry of Finance) to determine how mainstream government policy (e.g. taxation and the regulation of civic organisations) may better support the principles for development cooperation. Clarity on the consistent application of VAT would be particularly beneficial. Written guidance, e.g. as an addendum to the Standard terms of Development Cooperation, would be helpful.

The Finnish agri-agency is encouraged to look into ways and means of broadening the twinning base, bringing in Finnish, *and national*, organisations and individuals who have competences in rural development, organizational strengthening, development cooperation, gender, environment and other areas where FOs needs bolstering. The envisaged outcome is competent, well managed farmer organizations drawing upon support from a wide network of rural development support organisations and individuals, in Finland and in their home countries.

- 13) **Exchange visits.** In many instances, the technology gap between poor farmers in developing countries and the high-tech, industrialised agriculture of Finland is too wide. Exchange visits to Finland are much appreciated by individuals, but provide less tangible practical benefit to project implementation. In two

instances (Tz and Eth), exchange visits aggravated leadership wrangles and created envy and jealousy between FO members.

**Recommendation:** Horizontal collaboration (in-country and south-to-south) appear more successful and effective than exchange visits to Finland. Thematic exchange visits abroad, however, were successful – as in the case of professional participation in forest dialogue or international farmer meetings and should continue. Regional visits, e.g. industry and market related, should be timed so that they are undertaken when farmer organisations are able to effectively benefit from business relationship building. An indicator of readiness could be FO ability to participate in preparing for the practical arrangement of such visits.

- 14) **Added value:** Smallholder forestry, twinning partnerships (as a form of farmer-to-farmer collaboration) and flexible funding modalities were characteristics of Finland's support that added value to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme and network.

**Recommendation:** The support to forest organisations provided by FFD and AgriCord is unique and should be continued. Pilot projects started around 2010 are now in their extended or scale-up phase. A systematic review of achievements and challenges is recommended to be undertaken towards the end of the next phase, to learn good practice for the future. AgriCord's collaborative agreement with the FAO Forest Farm Facility (FAO FFF) provides an opportunity to widen and deepen forest interventions. It is important that the AgriCord – FAO FFF collaboration is taken to the national and local level – that agri-agencies and local FOs make use of FFF partners at FAO country offices in the implementation.

- 15) **Financial health.** During the implementation, a few issues relating to governance and financial health and governance were encountered, all of which were addressed expediently by the agri-agencies. However, the cost of querying irregularities is high in terms of time effort. For the Finnish agri-agency, FFD, already strained in human resources, this may become overwhelming as projects evolve from 'simple' pilots to more complex scaled-up interventions, involving larger budgets, better FO financial management skills, and a greater demand for oversight. The AgriCord emphasis on financial health as a cross-cutting issue is worthwhile and should be strengthened.

**Recommendation:** All parties involved, AgriCord, the agri-agencies and Farmer Organisations, should review the need to rebalance resources allocated to financial oversight (more prevention less cure); and consider putting in place stronger preventive measures for the future, e.g. consistent use of common tools to monitor and evaluate the financial health of projects; clear procedures and protocols for how to handle financial irregularities in the field; continuous training and capacity-building of FO management, financial administrative staff and twinning partners; and the adoption of new measures such as empowering 'whistle-blowers' and strengthening member progress monitoring (participatory M&E). Undoubtedly, these are major investments, especially for young agri-agencies such as FFD, but they will pay off in the long run through more efficient use of staff time.

### **Recommendations arising from Chapter 3.3 and 3.4. Beneficiary level results and impact - OECD/DAC criteria**

- 16) **Implementation context.** To assess a project proposal, AgriCord and the agri-agencies need to get to know the recipient farmer organization and the implementation context. The information currently available on Agro-Info.Net provides relevant, but not adequate, basic country information to agri-agencies. To generate the contextual information on farmer organisations and the environments where they operate, agri-agencies commonly gather more data themselves. Some project documents were expertly done, with a

very good situation analysis and very high level of detail, while the others omitted important information. Projects with poor situational background repeatedly missed out on cross-cutting variables.

**Recommendation:** The implementation partners, agri-agencies and farmer organisations, would benefit from undertaking a situational analysis prior to project start up, whose findings should be shared and mutually agreed upon. The Finnish agri-agency could consider outsourcing to (or establishing a twinning arrangement with) organisations and/or individuals to routinely backstop FOs conduct participatory situational analyses. If well executed, such situational surveys at the beginning of project interventions do not take up much time or resources, but will assist FOs understand the project situation and the needs of the membership better, and provide critical information towards the design of pre-project baseline surveys. It is important that FO staff participate in the survey on the ground.

In view of the vast information available on the Internet, AgriCord should revisit the need to upload and maintain contextual information on the Agro-Info.net.

- 17) **Impact reporting.** The AgriCord programme delivered on impact reporting, *as planned in the 2012 programme proposal*, in the form of story harvesting. During the 2012-2014 period, farmer impact stories were systematically harvested, and 20-25 of them presented in the annual Evidence of Impact reports. However, story harvesting alone is not adequate to determine project impact on farmer lives and livelihoods *across* farmer populations.

**Recommendation:** Considering the importance Finland assigns the ability to demonstrate impact in development cooperation the situation needs attention. Having weighed many options, the evaluation team proposes that AgriCord commissions a specific benchmark survey on the impact of the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme on poverty and cross-cutting issues at farmer and household beneficiary level to provide some conclusive data on impact. In view of the absence of baseline data, this will be a costly undertaking, and needs to be designed well. It may be done either for Finnish support only or as a comparative study that meets the requirements of several donors. A few considerations for how this is best done is found in section 3.3.2. From the point of view of Finnish assistance, it is imperative that the Finnish agri-agency projects are included, and that special recognition is given the forestry projects.

- 18) **Human Rights Based Approach.** The planning of the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty 2012-2014 programme largely precedes the introduction of the HRB approach to Finnish development cooperation. The Programme Proposal does not recognize HRBA in its intervention logic and design.

**Recommendation:** The HRB approach is very relevant to AgriCord. Finland's focus on human rights based approach provides an untapped opportunity for AgriCord to channel funds to Farmer Organisations to build their capacity to address rights-related issues in their operations, and for the Finnish agri-agency to increase its competence and efficiency. The HRB approach will also provide a framework for more member-driven approaches. AgriCord should investigate the advantages and disadvantages of adopting a HRB approach at programmatic level, and the Finnish agri-agency in conjunction with developing an engagement strategy for long-term partnership building (as recommended elsewhere).

- 19) **Gender** is one of four key cross-cutting issues in the evaluation. In general, gender concerns are well taken into consideration in the on-going projects. To build on what has been achieved in terms of gender gains leverage may be created from adopting a stronger gender focus.

AgriCord will benefit from reviewing its gender policy and providing more focused support to gendered interventions. The Finnish Agri-agency, FFD, will benefit from developing a gender policy to guide future

engagement and partnership building. This does not only apply to future projects, as current projects would benefit from a gender analysis and review that will add value to and deepen existing collaboration.

**Recommendation:** AgriCord as a network should develop a gender policy and support the agri-agencies and farmer organisations build stronger gender competences, as this will enhance the effectiveness and impact of the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme.

The unique AgriCord network model allows for this activity to be undertaken in a novel way. For example, the Finnish Agri-agency gender policy could be prepared jointly by farmer women drawn from among Finnish twinning partners and from recipient farmer organisations, supported by Finnish gender specialists. To further capitalize on gender gains in the medium-term, FFD could consider establishing a twinning agreement with Finnish gender specialists to backstop project implementation.

- 20) **Environmental sustainability** is one of four key cross-cutting issues in the evaluation. The general impression of Programme environmental sustainability is good. Many projects have an environmental profile or component, all of which are relevant and justified. Notwithstanding the significant achievements, we found an array of environmental concerns that may pose challenges to the Farmer Organisations in the future. In general, farmer organisations are weak in terms of environmental know-how and management.

**Recommendation:** AgriCord as a network should support the agri-agencies and farmer organisations build stronger environmental competence. The agri-agencies are well placed to assist build the capacity of FOs to address environmental issues, and they may assist in leveraging opportunities for climate smart agriculture practices through building capacity and partnering with relevant third party organisations. The Finnish agri-agency may consider developing a twinning arrangement with a Finnish environmental organization.

- 21) **OECD/DAC criteria.** An assessment against the specific evaluation questions posed in the Terms of Reference showed that Finland's support to the AgriCord Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme performed well against the criteria. However, a concern was that the programme is not able to demonstrate conclusive impact on poverty and cross-cutting variables. Qualitative reporting through story harvesting is indicative of a positive impact, but broader impact is not possible to ascertain. Minor issues of effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability were recorded where findings were inconclusive or projects had not yet been concluded.

**Recommendation:** AgriCord would benefit from building capacity to demonstrate a positive impact, based on broad baseline data and follow-up surveys, at regular intervals of between 3 to 5 years. This recommendation complements the recommendation above (17) that AgriCord conducts a specific study on the impact of the Farmers Fighting Poverty programme on poverty and cross-cutting issues at farmer and household beneficiary level that meet Government of Finland evaluation requirements and recommendations from evaluations (2011 and 2015).



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