

## **Enabling Rural Innovation in Africa: Bean as an entry point – The case of Bokosi Village in Kasungu - Malawi.**

Sanginga P, R. M. Chirwa, J. Njuki and T. Magombo

Various organisations have in the past conducted agricultural research activities focusing on bio-physical sciences to generate improved agricultural production technologies, aimed at improving the livelihoods of farmers and other resource poor people in the rural and urban areas. However, most of that research did not fully integrate the beneficiaries in the process. When beneficiaries got involved, it usually was at the tail end of the process. This kind of approach is believed to have contributed to low uptake of research generated technologies, resulting in little change in the livelihoods of the target beneficiaries (rural and urban resource poor people). CIAT advocates the enabling rural innovation (ERI) principles in conducting research, which puts people (beneficiaries) at the centre of the research agenda. The approach is based on mutual and collective learning processes that aim at empowering rural communities by strengthening their social capacity and entrepreneurial skills to be able to conduct research and make decisions that will improve their livelihoods.

In Malawi the ERI approach started a few years back in a number of farming communities (Mnthala and Yazini in Dedza, Ukwe in Lilongwe and Bokosi and Chinseu in Kasungu) on a pilot scale. Various partners were involved in the processes, including the Department of Agricultural Research (DAR), Department of Agricultural Extension Services (DAES), and NGOs like PLAN-Malawi in Kasungu. The procedure starts with the communities identifying their problems, and thinking through the possible solutions by considering their own local resources first and filling in the gaps with external resources. This is all participatory in nature – no top-down procedures.

### ***The case of Bokosi***

Smallholder farmers in Bokosi village were organised into a club known as Gunguluwe club in the year 2003 after CIAT, DAR and Plan Malawi had facilitated a participatory diagnosis in the village. The village is situated 16 km west of Nkhamenya, about at 74 km north of Kasungu Township. One of the crop options farmers considered to be important in contributing to their livelihood was *Phaseolus* bean. Through participatory diagnosis farmers identified a series of problems which needed to be addressed to improve bean productivity in the area. These included lack of improved and high yielding varieties and poor knowledge of controlling pests and diseases and inadequate understanding of the crop production practices.

CIAT DAR and PLAN-Malawi facilitated farmer participatory research, where farmers experimented with 8 improved bean varieties developed by CIAT and DAR. Out of these varieties, farmers chose 7 which proved to be useful based on climatic and soil conditions, of the area, but also due to acceptable time to maturity and fast cooking attributes. In addition farmers also did participatory experimentation with various management options, based on indigenous farmers' knowledge and research generated options of managing bean pest and diseases.

Currently bean production has taken off very well in the area. Many farmers are exited with bean production. It was observed that farmers were willing to allocate

more land for bean production, shifting from tobacco which is predominantly a male dominated cash crop. One woman was quoted as saying “bean production is a woman’s tobacco because it is easier to manage and it brings in a lot of money when sold at the market”. Not only were women intensifying bean production, but some men expanded their bean production in the second season indicating that farmers can see the benefits of bean production.



*Bokosi farmers displaying bean varieties they have been experimenting on and allowed other farmers to taste the cooked beans during the field day.*

#### **Farmer’s comments:**

Mr Steve Nyirenda received 10 kg of Mkhaira bean seed and was able to harvest 460 kg. He repaid the initial seed of 10 kg and kept 30 kg for the next growing season. He sold the rest of the bean to the community grain bank at MK28000 (US\$250) and opened a small grocery. Rosemary Banda also received 10 kg of Kabalabala (UBR (92)25 bean seed and harvested 260 kg. After repaying the credit, she sold the seed to the community grain bank at MK7000. She says; “I have been able to buy a bicycle and I can now send my son to distant markets to buy other household necessities just like my friends who have husbands”. Martin Kaonga produced 380 kg of Mkhaira bean variety and sold 220 kg for MK14000 to which he added MK10000 and bought a bull. The bull he added will be used for ploughing and to expand the land area under beans and other crops.

#### **Lessons learnt**

The knowledge and skills gained in good agronomic practices by farmers in farmer-research groups have benefited other farmers from four surrounding communities of Kanyakatika, Luziwa, Ndindani and Mdekanjiwa village, through spontaneous exchange visits and farmers to farmers’ dissemination.

