

Comments on the High Level Panel of Experts Report  
on Investing in smallholder agriculture for food and nutrition security  
By the Private Sector Mechanism  
January 30, 2013

The private sector mechanism welcomes the report on **investing in smallholder agriculture for food and nutrition security**. An important pathway to achieving food security is to enable smallholder farmers to break the subsistence cycle and become small scale entrepreneurs. The report has many strengths and we encourage the inclusion of some further points to close gaps in the recommendations. As well, we encourage the next draft be edited to encourage a more readable, accessible format.

In **defining smallholders**, it is not about size of the farm or the family structure, which can be highly variable by country, culture and landscape. It is about a farmer or a group of farmers (in a family relationship or not) not being able to provide for their own basic food needs and thus are not able to participate in the primary economic activity which is agriculture. This incapability blocks further improvement in wellbeing and welfare. We encourage the report to consider this fundamental definition.

To further strengthen the report we offer the following suggestions for additional recommendations:

- 1) A **farmer-centered approach** is needed, ensuring they have access to the things they need to produce a crop – such as the best-adapted seed technologies, land, water, knowledge, inputs and credit. Rural infrastructure needs to be in place to allow for market access and farmers to sell their products.
- 2) **Farmer organisations and cooperatives** have a vital contribution to make to the development of agriculture and rural communities. Unless small-scale farmers are organized, they will remain politically powerless and economically disadvantaged.
- 3) **Education is needed** to improve market-oriented education and entrepreneurship opportunities for youth originating from smallholder families that prepares the next generation of workers, farmers, and entrepreneurs across the food and agricultural industry. In the absence of a more developed set of recommendations in this area within the report and the primacy of their importance, the network offers additional details to further the creation of this section:

In many developing countries, especially in Africa, the higher agricultural education system is experiencing serious problems of low quality, irrelevancy, lack of funding, poor infrastructure, low faculty morale, and high graduate unemployment (Maguire and Atchoarena 2003, other related studies on the agricultural education question: M. Maredia May 2011, Michigan State Staff Paper and Wallace, Mulhall and Taylor 1996 cited by Taylor 1998).

Rivera (2006) contends that agricultural higher education institutions do not have a good understanding of the labor market for agriculturally oriented professions. The system has not kept pace with the labor market realities, have not tracked the changing human resource needs in the agricultural sector, to align the profile of human resource outputs with the agricultural development strategy, and to ensure that students are not prepared for jobs that do not exist. (This disconnect between agricultural education system and the changing human resource needs is illustrated by the example of Indian agricultural universities that produce less than 100 graduates in food processing when the country has projected a need for about 200,000 professionals by the end of 2010 (Katyal 2006).

The “global drivers of curriculum change” identified from literature review (Mywish Maredia 2011) must be accommodated and include: 1) The changing profiles of students pursuing agricultural higher education; 2) Rapid scientific progress and technical change in an information-driven global economy, and challenges posed by global issues; 3) The changing labor market; 4) Emergence of information and communication technologies (ICTs); 5) Increased awareness of environmental issues; and 6) Increased awareness of gender issues.

- 4) **Knowledge sharing and extension** allows the agriculture to continually adapt to multiple demands. Whether it is better meeting nutritional needs, improving water use efficiency, reducing land use, or any of the other competing demands on smallholders services, they are best met through improved practices based on knowledge.

Knowledge helps farmers adopt practices that maximise the efficiency of the inputs they use and help protect the natural resources they depend on. Training programmes should specifically involve women farmers in developing countries as essential ‘gatekeepers’ for household nutrition and welfare.

Providing this education to rural communities in a systematic, participatory manner is essential to improving their production, income and quality of life, particularly for smallholders. Extension services disseminate practical information related to agriculture, including correct use of improved seeds, fertilisers, tools, tillage practices, water management, livestock management and welfare, marketing techniques, and basic business skills to address poverty such as literacy and numeracy. Extension is also an essential pillar for rural community progress including support for the organisational capacity of farmers’ groups and the formation of co-operatives.

Five areas to mobilise the potential of rural advisory services are (1) focusing on best-fit approaches, (2) embracing pluralism, (3) using participatory approaches, (4) developing capacity, and (5) ensuring long-term institutional support. (GFRAS,2012)

- 5) Improve smallholder farmers' **access to markets** through investments in transport and storage infrastructure, refrigerated storage as well as information access.
- 6) Recognize the **diversity of private sector actors** in the report. Replace a tone of anxiety about corporations with an acknowledgement of the range of actors in scale, origin, and place in the value chain. Part of that diversity includes that farmers themselves are small enterprises that need to be fostered.
- 7) The clear need for investment in the value chain of agriculture needs to be stated. That investment should foster productivity and diversity of options.
- 8) Any recommendations for regulation should clarify by whom, for what purpose.
- 9) Throughout the discussion of smallholders, the unique needs of women smallholders should be considered, with specific programming to address that fact that rural women remain the most disadvantaged group in the realisation of the MDGs.

## Tone and Structure

The draft requires a fresh editor. There are numerous grammatical and spelling mistakes, sentence construction is often laborious and many words are used for their French meaning instead of their English one. In general, it should be made more readable and less filled with jargon. Many authors are cited but not explained, with the assumption that the reader is familiar with their views or ideas. Sources are totally lacking in several places, and some date back to the 1920s. More modern work is essential. Data is referenced rather than cited. This topic is important and warrants a good investment in its "readability".

Overall the language used is often vague, uses 'cliche' or broad words with no definitions, tends to assume de facto common understanding or agreement on what terms mean or imply. The use of the word 'corporate' or 'corporation' is inconsistent; the meaning assigned to this word is not clearly stated or explained and it seems to clearly derive from the traditional socialist/marxist understanding of private firms but is also at times mixed with other meanings. There are several mentions of 'corporate farming' and of agro-industry farming which do not make sense and are ill-defined. Farming has and will involve a range of farm sizes. The report cannot suggest one size over another but needs to focus on the unique assistance needed to improve the lives of smallholders.

In the framework, it is good to read the recognition that the National Vision and Strategic Frameworks have and will adapt to the targeted area and situation e.g. in Brazil recognition of a bimodal structure. Some of our members question the need of a split between "Institutions and Markets" at national level and "Assets" at territorial level. In general, they note the need to identify roles of the different actors/institutions/market forces, all along the supply chain from farm to market. When these interactions are suboptimal they should be addressed.