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Report of Assessment of Agricultural Mechanization Zonal Networks in Nigeria

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Report of Assessment of Agricultural Mechanization Zonal Networks in Nigeria
For Promoting Pro-Poor Opportunities through Commodity and Service Markets (PrOpCom) Programme

By
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Introduction

PrOpCom engaged the services of New Nigeria Foundation (NNF) to strengthen the capacity of three newly established zonal agricultural mechanisation networks in Kano, Ibadan and Enugu. The Kano-Kaduna zone network is called Forum for Agricultural Mechanisation. The Ogun-Oyo-Lagos zone network is called Organization for Agricultural Mechanisation of Nigeria (OFAM), while the Ebonyi-Enugu-Abia zone network is known as Nkan'uzu Agro Mechanisation Network (NAMN).

The purpose of these networks is to bring together local technology centers, fabricators, dealers, financial organizations and end users related to small scale agricultural mechanization with a view to using the fora to address issues in the small scale agricultural mechanization value chain and to enable the networks to better represent the interest of their members within the market systems and learn key principles useful for their sector market development.

The task of this assignment is to assess the three zonal networks, focusing on their internal dynamics, work-plan, activities, commitment and vision in order to come up with findings and suggestions on the current state of the networks; how useful was the capacity strengthening assignment offered by New Nigeria Foundation (NNF) to the networks and the expectations of the network members of PrOpCom. The overall aim of assessment is to isolate possible intervention areas that would enable the networks get off ground; refocus on their roles in representing members and communicating with stakeholders, informing them on trends, linkages, new ideas, opportunities and other roles that may fulfil their goals and aspirations depending on their needs, capacity and context.

Task was undertaken with the understanding that a network is a “group of individuals or organizations, who on a voluntary basis exchange information or undertake joint activities” (Starkey, 1997).¹ Advocacy and information utilization networking are collaborative processes of information exchange and utilization, around a central theme, carried out by actively interested parties. In a successful value chain network, members are united by a shared purpose or goal and contribute resources to ensure mutual benefits to all stakeholders through value addition derived from well coordinated activities and recognition and consistent focus on the successful attainment of network objectives.

Task was preceded by a desk review of previous reports and other documents on the networks. Meetings were held with executives and members of each of the networks in their respective locations to elicit required information. Some members were reached through telephone and network books were checked where available to verify relevant claims.

Each of the networks were found to be with various features of a group at its formative stage of development but requiring urgent and carefully planned interventions to get them off the ground.

The executives of the Forum for Agricultural Mechanisation, Kano was found to be working together as a team on how to get the network going. They showed readiness to make the network become effective by their readiness to contribute to finance the network. An assessment of their records also shows that they have enough manpower to run the network successfully. They have gone far in the process of registering with the CAC and have enlisted notable personalities in their area to serve on their board of trustees. However, the network, now, appears to be lacking in strategic direction and goals. They have no structure and processes in

¹ Starkey, Paul, 1997, Networking for Development, International Forum for Rural Transport and Development IFRTD

place that could support their effective operations. In addition, the network is yet to focus on what it can do to benefit its members.

The Organization for Agricultural Mechanisation of Nigeria (OFAM), has the finest set of persons on its membership list that can run a good network. It has the largest number of technology centres compared with other networks and it has an active president who has committed his personal resources into getting the network off the ground but without much success. He sounds to be tired of the network at the moment. The network is lacking in focus, strategic direction, processes/procedures, structures, teamwork, Network is actually in some critical condition as it has not had any meeting in the last 12 months. The leadership of the network has thinned down to its president alone. Network is yet to do anything on the 6 months work-plan developed with it by NNF and the President claims he has not seen a copy of the constitution drafted for the organization. It was difficult to get members of the network to interact with. State coordinators of the network claimed that they have never being invited to any meeting of the network. Great effort needs to be expended to revive this network and get it going.

Nkan'uzu Agro Mechanisation Network (NAMN), Enugu share similar features with Ibadan. The pulse of the network is however stronger than that of Ibadan in that the president and the secretary as well as two other members of the network are active and are not tired of the network yet. The lack of activity in the network appears to be the reason most members have been away from the network. There were indications of dissatisfaction with how the executive was constituted and this has kept a key player (representative of Enugu ADP) away in the formation of the network. Network has fewer members than the two others zones. The headquarters of the network is supposed to be in Enugu, but has tactically moved to Abakaliki due to the fact that the president is based there.

This report is in 3 parts: summary of findings, indications of findings and suggestions on the way forward.

Summary of Findings

Findings are presented in three sub-heads namely: current state of the networks, expectations of the networks from PrOpCom and an assessment of the usefulness of NNF intervention on foundational activities of the networks.

a. Current State of the Networks:

Please find on the table below a summary of findings in selected areas of the networks showing the state of the 3 networks as at January 2010.

Area Assessed	Findings
<i>Stage of Networks' Development</i>	All three networks are in the formation stage of development as they exhibit most of the signs that characterizes such group. These characteristics are; inconsistent results, lack of focus and strategic direction, lack of inspiring activities as well as underutilization of personnel among others.
<i>Establishment</i>	i. Name: Each of the 3 networks has a <i>name</i> but they remain unknown and consequently have no <i>recognition</i> beyond their membership at the moment. ii. Membership: Going by those who attended the various

	<p>stakeholders' meetings of each of the network in 2008, Enugu network has 24; Ibadan 42 and Kano 42 members. As at the time of this assessment, Enugu boasts of only 6 active² members, Ibadan, only 7, while Kano has 30 members. Nevertheless, it was also verified that other members backed out due to lack of profitable activity in the network and are willing to return when there are 'serious business' of the network to attend to or when invited to participate. Ibadan and Enugu has no record of membership registration while Kano has a database (hard copy) on 30 of its members. In all the networks, no dues or subscription fees have being collected at the moment. Membership of each of the networks appears to be properly constituted as it brings together in good proportion stakeholders that could really make vibrant Agric Mechanization networks.</p> <p>iii. Registration: None of the 3 networks is registered at the moment. The Kano network has however gone very far in its registration process with CAC, Abuja – just a step away from being registered.</p> <p>iv. Physical Premises: None of the network has physical premises where it can conduct its business. But this is not a problem because in Kano as well as in Ibadan, there are sufficient spaces in several of their members' private offices that can be effectively converted for this purpose. In Enugu, the president is based in Abakaliki and operates from there.</p> <p>v. Constitution: Constitutions were drafted and validated with each of the networks but not being used at the moment. Enugu and Ibadan holds that their constitutions are still drafts and yet to be concluded. Presidents of both network insists that at the end of the validation meetings in 2008, it was agreed that the draft constitution will be given to a lawyer to fine-tune and represented to member for approval before it becomes operational. According to them, this has not been done; therefore, the constitution drafting exercise remains an inconclusive process.</p> <p>vi. Board Development: Kano has gone very far in assembling notable personalities to serve as its board of trustees. Ibadan and Enugu are yet to initiate any move on this. They claimed that PrOpCom or NNF did not encourage them. It appears that earlier interventions gave network members a wrong perception of the role of PrOpCom in the project that makes them to see PrOpCom as a donor rather than a facilitating partner in the project</p>
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² The word active, is used to represent those who are available to be interviewed during the process as well as those who have shown some level of commitment to the network by registration or availability for network activities. The latter part of this description makes the difference in the figure for Kano

<p><i>Administration</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The constitutions, though silently suggests a decentralized administration by making provisions³ for states and stakeholders coordinators. But no proper organizational structure is developed to show how the administrative system could work. No effort has being made by any of the networks to develop one for their respective use. They have not met to actually conduct serious network activity that could compel them to put necessary administrative system in place to support those activities.
<p><i>Activities</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As at the time of this assessment, there are no core network activities going on or planned in all the networks. • The 6 month work-plan developed in 2008 have being completely abandoned and remains unimplemented. However, individual members of the networks are involved in private activities that could have more impacts if coordinated at the network level. For instance, some members of the Kano network participated actively in the development of the Kano State Rice Policy Document now a pending bill at the state assembly. All the networks claimed that their inability to register with CAC limits their recognition for official operations and that this prevented them from implementing the work-plan They insists that PrOpCom (through NNF) promised to assist them in their take-off activities and registration is one of such activities and they expressed disappointment that the promise was not kept. When confronted with the fact that there are some items on the work-plan that could be implemented without much fund or legal documentation/requirement, the general claim was that they were discouraged by the apparent sudden withdrawal of PrOpCom from the network just before it could get its footings.
<p><i>Leadership</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership hold on the network in Ibadan and Enugu are very weak at the moment. Whereas it was easy for us to meet with the executives of Kano network twice as a group, the Presidents of Enugu and Ibadan networks could not get its members together to meet with us.

³ Section 8.7 of the constitution provides for State coordinator who shall assist the executives to coordinate and facilitate activities of the network within the state; and take up duties and assignments as directed by the executives.

	<p>However, there appears to be high level of commitments in all the presidents of each of the networks. Coordination of network activities appears to be more effective in Kano.</p>
<i>Personnel or human resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the moment, interim executive members conduct the affairs of the networks. In Enugu and Ibadan it appears that only the president, secretary and one other member are really on ground for their networks at all times. Kano executive members are intact and available to work with as a group during the exercise. There are no remunerated staff yet.
<i>Internal Operations</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. All meetings held in networks since 2008 are informal. Ibadan and Kano have records of 1 or 2 of such meetings. Ibadan and Enugu have not held any meeting in the last 12 months. No Annual General Meeting held in spite of constitutional prescriptions to that effect. ii. No visible efforts have being made to develop processes for effective internal operation particularly in the area of information gathering, analysis and sharing; identification of critical issues facing respective network; strategic vision mission, goals and strategies; communication; internal planning and external relations; developing strategic alliances to foster the goals of the networks
<i>Knowledge of Agro-Commodity Market</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a good knowledge of the local agro-commodity market among network members in Kano than among the network members in Ibadan and Enugu. Kano could provide statistics on locally cultivated grains market for example and they know major players and their roles.
<i>Finances</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. At the moment, none of the networks have a financial base. The President of Ibadan Network is tired of spending his personal money to run the network. Financing of the Enugu Network is also on the President. Network members in Kano are willing and are set to contribute to the running of the network and they are no longer comfortable with the fact that most past expenses have been on their President. ii. In all the networks, no financial record exists. iii. Kano has a standing plan for revenue generation which includes dues, subscription fees, levies and donation from capable members and non-members of the network. iv. No strategy yet for fiscal management, accountability and transparency. No strategy for financial empowerment of network members. v. Commitment and readiness to make financial contribution to the working of the network is higher in Kano. vi. There are no bank accounts and no evidence of any fund available or belonging to the networks.
<i>Technology</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. All the networks are lacking office equipment and accessories required for smooth conduct of network activities. No office space, no computers and therefore limited access to internet services. ii. All networks have the opportunity to exploit the intellectual

	capacity of some of their members to conduct researches and convert ideas into tangible products that could move networks towards its goal but at the moment, all these are not in existence.
Awareness of Benefits of Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incidentally and surprisingly too, more than half of members of the networks contacted do not know for certain what they stand to benefit from the network. All some of them know was that they were invited to participate in a discussion on agric mechanization in one hotel or the other sometime in 2008

b. Expectations of Network Members of PrOpCom

The Networks expects PrOpCom to fulfill its part of the project as reflected in the implementation strategies worked out with them by NNF

Networks expects follow-up from PrOpCom after NNF intervention. They did not expect PrOpCom to just disengage from them suddenly as it appears to have happened. For instance, Kano network did not feel encouraged when their post intervention correspondences with NNF and PrOpCom on possible follow-up activities were not adequately responded to. I saw two of such letters in their records addressed to NNF calling for follow-up activities in form of training of their executives. Enugu is not even aware that NNF has finished its work with them; many of the network members spoken to in Enugu appears not to know the difference between NNF and PrOpCom

The Networks expected PrOpCom to share information and reports of NNF intervention with them for validation – just for the purpose of being sure that what was reported was what actually happened or transpired. Most people felt they are not carried along.

Members hold that PrOpCom missed an opportunity to strengthen the network through its Mudu Concept – to develop grain threshers for use in Nigeria. For instance, Ibadan holds that if their members who bided had been given the opportunity by PrOpCom, the Mudu Concept would have created activity within the network and assure members of good things that could come through the network.

c. How useful was NNF Input

The task given to Nigeria Foundation (NNF) was “to strengthen the capacity of three newly established zonal agricultural mechanization networks by facilitating the achievement of critical and foundational activities of the networks.”⁴ In pursuance of this task, “NNF supported the executive committees of the three networks to develop the constitutions and 6 month work plan [and] a concise recommendation on the roles that can be facilitated by PrOpCom to support and partner with the networks was also developed.”⁵

It must first be noted that it is too early in the life of the network to measure the effectiveness of foundational activities done for or with it given that the intervention is less than 2 years on ground.

⁴ Excerpted from the Ag Mechanization – 07 SERVICES AGREEMENT TERMS OF REFERENCE for Organization Development of the Agricultural Mechanization Zonal Networks between SAIL Associates LTD/GTE and Matthew Omolade Oso

⁵ Taken from the same source as above

Secondly it appears that NNF did it work half-way – constitutions were drafted, work-plans were developed and recommendations on the roles to be played by principal actors in the project (PrOpCom, networks, consultants, others) were clearly spelt out but the plans were not implemented

However, information gathered during this assessment clearly shows that NNF may have failed to develop ownership of the project deep enough in the network members. This is reflected in their general belief that the network is PrOpCom's or NNF's network rather than their own. This is particularly the case in Ibadan and Enugu where network members expects PrOpCom or NNF to do everything for them. Kano appears to have ownership due to the exposure of its leadership. Though Ibadan and Enugu networks still holds that their constitutions are not conclusive and need to be properly drafted by a lawyer, the fact remains that the draft they hope to present to the lawyer to finalize came through NNF input.

Secondly, it appears that NNF team has no Organizational Development expert to complement its expertise in Agronomy and Agric Engineering. This deficiency makes the intervention to overlook certain foundational activities of the new networks as could be seen in the summary of findings on the state of the network above.

It is my humble opinion therefore that NNF intervention to the limits described above were useful in what it did particularly in assisting the networks to draft their constitution and develop work-plan and strategies containing some foundational activities which if implemented could go a long way in giving the networks their footings.

PrOpCom has taken the right step towards bridging the expertise, ownership and capacity building gaps in the project and this is a good follow-up and scale-up on the project.

Indications

Though it appears that the networks are not living up to expectation, it should be noted that their current state are normal in that inconsistent results, crisis and short term focus; shifting priorities; lack of clear directions, goals, processes, structures; dysfunctional systems, unclear policies and procedures; lack of teamwork; inadequate people and resources are necessary manifestation of any social group in its formation stage as is the case with all the three networks under review.

The life pulse of the networks is good in that the required manpower are on ground, the need is great and the stakeholders are willing to work together to improve the agric mechanization sector in ways that will add value to all of them. There is no doubt that networks will recuperate and wax stronger in its purpose if they are given proper orientation that will enable them own their own network and map out their own strategies on how to make it work for them and their respective and collective interests.

The three networks were initiated through a catalytic medium or agent (PrOpCom) as different from those internally initiated by needs of its members. It is easy for members of catalytic initiated network to expect from the agent more than the agent bargained for. Extra care must be taken, then not to hurriedly abandon the network before they find their footings as all the networks require some nurturing through its formative, normative stages as well as a carefully planned and executed disengagement strategy.

The assessment also reveals that certain conditions that need to be met for effective take off of this type of network were not met; like clearly defined and widely accepted purpose, disengagement strategy, ownership, resources to run the networks,

availability in sufficient quantity of the skills required for running a network, sound knowledge and understanding of the network environment – for instance, What is the capacity of each of the stakeholders in the value chain and what can they contribute to the purpose of the network,

Each of the 3 networks is at different stages of their formation. Ibadan and Enugu are far behind Kano and requires a well facilitated process that will rapidly develop ownership and deliver some immediate benefits of the network to their members.

One of the major gaps revealed during this assessment is that it appears members of the network were not properly mobilized or sensitized as to what they may benefit from the network as well as the role each stakeholder in the network will play for its effectiveness. Few of those interacted with knows how the network will work in their interest and general interest of its members and stakeholders.

There was a communication gap between PrOpCom and the network somewhere between NNF intervention in 2008 and now. A repeat of this should be avoided until well articulated disengagement strategies have being implemented.

Though we could not ascertain whether or not PrOpCom agreed to play the roles allocated to it in the implementation strategies developed with the networks by NNF in 2008, PrOpCom now need to state clearly the length it can go in establishing these networks then OD consultants can pick it up from there.

Expected outcomes of PrOpCom of the agric mechanization network project need to be carefully spelt out and communicated to everyone involved in the project. Measurable indicators must be developed each goal to facilitate effective monitoring and evaluation at all stages of the project.

Suggestion on the Way Forward

For a network to be on the path to successful networking certain conditions need to be met; these include: establishment of clear objectives and direction; dynamic and proactive management or leadership; adequate resources; commitment and willingness of network members to share information; an objectively articulated monitoring and evaluation strategy must be built into the networking mechanism. Above all, the benefits of network participation should be visible to all members as well as establishment of clearly mapped out processes for realizing those benefits. It is therefore recommended that next rounds of effort must focus on ensuring that these conditions are met in the networks.

PrOpCom is a catalytic agent in this project such that the networks may not survive unless they are carefully nurtured to a level where they can be on their own before the partnership can graduate to a higher level where and when disengagement could be implemented. It is therefore recommended that a carefully planned establishment and development and disengagement strategies for the networks be developed and tenaciously implemented.

We were surprised on the field to hear network members referring to their networks as PrOpCom's or NNF's network. This shows that the approaches earlier deployed did not create the required ownership of the project. In view of this, it is recommended that steps must be taken in subsequent interventions that will ensure ownership of the networks by its member. Sufficient internal zest must be generated to fire-up the networks by its members rather than everyone waiting on an all

supporting PrOpCom to build their network for them. Approaches must be participatory, motivating, incentivizing and context-appropriate enough to create the necessary ownership that will profitably sustain each of the networks.

Management of a network is quite more challenging than a mono-character group. It is more of coordination than governing. Necessary steps must be undertaken to ensure that networks are well managed and for enhanced networking participation, both in the focus area of the networks (agric mechanization) as well as in the area of tools used to facilitate successful networking.

Capacity building activities must include sensitization of network members on the benefits of the network and how these benefits can be derived. Work-plan activities must include activities that will ensure that some immediate network benefits gets to members. Accordingly, it is recommended that capacity building phase should start immediately so that the whole process can be concluded by March 2010 when farmers are expected to hit the field for the next planting operations.

Capacity building activities may start from Kano as it appears they could be more easily mobilized for such activity than Ibadan and Enugu.

Methodology for next round of intervention as contained in the contract need to be amended to accommodate the findings of this assessment.

There are other agricultural networks like USAID Market, IITA, GTZ and others operating in areas where the networks under review intends to operate. Therefore, reports on studies of the agro-commodity markets environment as well as donor and government supported agro-activities in the area will go a long way to create unique identity for PrOpCom's Agricultural Mechanization networks and will prevent unnecessary duplication of effort. This becomes very important given the fact that some of the members of PrOpCom's networks are key players in these other networks too.