

Editorial

THE ANSWER IS INCREASED PRODUCTION!

As the costs of food increase to unobtrusive heights - and as the different activists engage in running battles which were hitherto meant to be peaceful protests but now drawing into a crescendo, we ask ourselves what is the problem? As we shall be discussing extensively in this Month's newsletter, the answer is simple: increase production.

Though it would suffice to mention that government needs to reduce taxes on fuel, it is also imperative to note that this would only address the issue in the short run. To address the issues of food prices, all stakeholders must come out strongly to support the farmers to increase production from the current predominately subsistence farming to commercial farming.

It's about time we rejuvenated the long forgotten irrigation systems and also seriously address the issues of mechanization of agriculture.

Fighting running battles on the streets - leaving tens of lives lost in our wake, will not solve our problems. It is time to act - and act we must; NOW

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Paradigm shift, as KRC joins the knowledge network to link small scale producers to Global Markets

*By John Murungi Amooti and Bihunirwa Medius
Mountains of the Moon Hotel, Fort Portal*

The cool morning breeze of Fort Portal town pervaded the entire picturesque and serene Mountains of the Moon Hotel. Both short and long embraces were exchanged -and a little teasing here and there, pleasantries, et al. Drawn together -not unlike brothers and sisters; but more studious and with one cardinal aim: to build knowledge across the globe.

This was the mood and setting when over 20 participants, drawn from all the five continents converged on Mountains of the Moon Hotel's main auditorium to dialogue on issues of increasing production and the viability of global markets for small-scale producers across the world -and much more. The landmark symposium that was

organized under the auspices of the global knowledge building network which draws within its ranks participants from Latin America, India, Europe, Asia and Africa. The conference was the second Global Learning Network meeting -since the inception of the network in 2010. The first meeting had taken place in Geneva; Switzerland in 2010. The April 4th to 8th April meeting was hosted by the Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC), Uganda.

The conference discussed inter alia, the challenges affecting smallholder farmers, in marketing of their produce and also the favourable regional and domestic policy environment that can enhance the agency

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Paradigm shift, as KRC joins the knowledge network to link small scale producers to Global Markets (...continued from page 1)

of smallholder farmers to make informed choices and decisions concerning markets. The delegates at the high billed symposium also realized –during their discussions, that the major problem hindering the progress of the small scale producers in the world was not the lack of money, but rather the lack of appropriate information and knowledge. The conference therefore explored ways of supporting the producers to acquire the necessary information both locally and internationally

For example the representative of Sobre Agricultura Sostenible (SIMAS) - an NGO working with farmers in Nicaragua, Central America, Dr. Falguni Guharay shared their experience on how they had worked with local radio stations to provide timely and relevant information.

KRC has equally strived to provide information and contribute to the generation and evolution of knowledge in the Rwezori region in the last 14 years. This has been achieved through the partnership it has built and galvanized at regional, national and international levels. For example it is through KRC's

partnership with Hivos that many small scale producers in the region have been supported to develop their potentials and increased their production and incomes.

The delegates realized that many developments had taken place since their last meeting in Geneva in April 2010. These developments included; the turbulence in the food and agriculture sector has gained particular attention from global leaders and how the effects had dominated international agendas.

The meeting also generated new momentum and opportunities for fresh insights to reshape the debate around small-scale producers, agriculture and food. The Learning Network has since inception, endeavored to produce, integrate and disseminate knowledge using the lens of small-scale producers' agency — the capacity of small-scale producers to take informed decisions and to act on them.

These interventions require challenging people's own ideas, conventional wisdom, assumptions and actions from both

theoretical and practical perspectives. The network aims at building a collaborative research programme and dialogue with a multitude of actors ranging from, producer organisations, businesses, civil society organisations, public institutions and local networks, across several countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The Global Learning Network has developed a common framework along three themes. These are; policies and operational environment, institutional arrangements for small-holder farmers, informal, indigenous and endogenous means that promote producer agencies that require the evolution of information and knowledge on global markets for small scale producers.

The Mountains of the Moon Hotel Meeting was followed by a highly 'brainy' public debate with academics, Ugandan farmers' organizations, government representatives, agribusiness entrepreneurs and civil society organisations under the theme "*Exploring Effective Mechanisms to make Markets work for smallholder farmers*", at Kagote SDA Hall.

KRC SUPPORTS RWENZORI SMALL-SCALE PRODUCERS, MARKET LINKAGES TAKE CENTRE STAGE

The Farmer Enterprise Development at KRC has been at the forefront of championing community centered initiatives. These have led to the development of community groups from CBOs to big farmer organizations and Micro-Finance Associations. The Department recently hosted a Global Learning Network on Small-Scale Producers, which attracted participants from all the globe's five continents. In an exclusive interview with The KRC Newsletter, MS Bihunirwa Medius, who has been at the helm of the Farmer Enterprise Development for the last 5 Years expounds on the issues. John Murungi Amooti recorded the excerpts



You have been managing this Department for the last 5 years, what can you ably identify as your major achievements?

What we need to understand is that issues of agriculture require collective efforts –from all stakeholders. As KRC, we have managed to bring together the various players in the sector to dialogue on issues of increasing production, marketing and institutional building. This has not only increased access to markets by farmers but it has also greatly contributed to the growth of Civil Society as a whole .

There is this general belief that farmers have not benefited much from their efforts –and yet middlemen mint millions out of the food they buy from them. What are you doing about it?

For a long time development players grappled with issues of maximizing profits for the poor, albeit with less progress. However I am now happy that our recent initiative of encouraging and supporting farmers to market their produce in organized groups is paying off. With support from KRC most of the hitherto small community farming groups

have now grown into big Marketing Associations or Middle-level farmers groups which are leading to increased production and marketing as a group, hence making profits accruing from the collective bargaining force.

KRC has been hailed for supporting women farmers to increase their incomes through saving groups and micro-projects. However there have also been concerns that the women make these profits, only their husbands to show up later and drink the hard earned proceeds. What's your take on that?

What we must acknowledge is that the women in the region are becoming more economically empowered and are now taking charge of family welfare unlike in the past when they only waited for their husbands to fend for the family. As to whether men are squandering family resources on alcohol, I don't think so, because we have increasingly noticed changes in family cohesion since we intensified sensitization and emphasis on collective efforts from all family members. Most men are now working with their wives to generate incomes and improve their livelihoods.

Amidst this 'food crunch', how prepared are the farmers? Won't the increased prices 'entice' them to sell everything and leave their families to starve?

Well, *(heaves a sigh and cuts a wry smile)* one of the cardinal aims of our unit is to support farmers not only to engage in commercial farming but also ensure food security. That is why we have to work together with all the stakeholders to increase production if we are to come out of the current food crisis which has been exacerbated by the expanded regional market (mainly in Southern Sudan) but not marched with production.

Any other policy recommendation

If we are to address the issue of food scarcity, then government must introduce food banks (silos). This will enable government to purchase and store food during plenty or bumper harvests and then release it at reasonable prices when there is scarcity. We could also explore ways of purchasing food from regions where there is abundance, then sell at reasonable prices to areas where there is famine. We could, for instance purchase from western Uganda and sell to the Eastern part of the country. We should also put emphasis on water for irrigation and adaptation of new farming technology. This will greatly increase production.



Sub-County dialogues take centre as parents contribute to UPE Schools: A case of Mahyoro, in Kamwenge district

By Musoki N Sylvia

It began as an initiative of Civil Society. Then it became everyone's concern; though some leaders reluctantly joined. Finally, the wave of dialogue swept through the entire sub county. The Mahyoro Sub County dialogues have since become a household name.

Held on a quarterly basis, the KRC facilitated decentralized interactive dialogues at Sub County level have brought together stakeholders in UPE schools to engage in reflective sessions to discuss issues affecting the academic performance in these primary schools.

The dialogues have been characterized by learning, sharing information and experience from various schools. This has greatly registered interesting testimonies from the stakeholders in terms of what has enabled them to improve as they take action on issues emerging.

One such a success story is Mahyoro. Parents and Heads of schools have testified that there has been a great increase in the number of parents packing lunch for their children, attending meetings and contributing finances to school development programs.

At Katonzi Primary school, Mahyoro Sub County Kamwenge District, parents did not only contribute towards the purchase of desks for the 1897 pupils. The parents supported the construction of a five-stance latrine and paid a teacher who was not on the payroll for a full term. The school also had 95% of their pupils having packed lunch throughout the term.

There is also an increase in the number of meetings held at school level mostly organized by both SMCs and PTAs at a weekly level to review and discuss the welfare and development of the school. The parents have also increased monitoring of schools on a weekly basis to ascertain the performance of their children. This has led to increased transparency and accountability in relation to UPE funds.

In addition to increasing the morale of teachers this support by parents has also led to cohesion among the political leaders, CSOs and the communities.

Conclusively, the meetings have also assisted KRC, in keeping track of community progress and informing future programming.

Public debate held, participants root for Markets for Small Holder farmers

By Maureen Kalisa

The public debate that was organized by Kabarole Research and Resource center in partnership with the global knowledge-building network, early April, was as nerve raking as the affable colloquium it was. It brought together smallholder farmers, agriculture stakeholders and other members of the knowledge-building network from Uganda, Kenya, Nicaragua, Bolivia, England, Netherlands and India to discuss and explore mechanisms to make markets work for the small-holder farmers.

The participants acknowledged that there were many farmers who grew crops or kept farm animals, but nearly all but a few, consumed everything they produced. Most of these farmers are small holder farmers,

with just a small fraction producing for the market.

It was also revealed that that whereas some of the farmers were able to reserve some of the produce for sale, the local traders or middle-men offered them very low prices. As individual farmers they have little bargaining power with traders and must often accept almost any price offered. All these farmers are capable of producing surpluses but find it difficult to find market for their produce.

The public debate therefore expounded on how to share new perspectives, knowledge and experiences on the difficulties involved in getting markets for the farm products. The participants also sought ways of finding opportunities for farmers that existed on the global markets.

Participants also recalled that in the early 80s, farmers were organized in cooperative unions that brought them together and found market for their produce. But this was short lived when the government liberalized trade and the small holder farmers could not compete with the larger scale producers who would easily find market. This has since created a gap between the small scale producer and the market.

Bihunirwa Medius, the Head of Farmer Enterprise development unit at KRC said that in the last 5 years, many groups, farmer committees and forums have formed. These have tried to bring the small scale producers closer to the market. The farmers don't trust these groups because they are sometimes poorly managed, so



SVV'S Mariek (standing with Micro-phone) moderating the debate

they resort to the middle men who in most cases exploit them.

The tough talking Medius said, the high transport costs involved in getting the produce to the markets frustrated the small scale farmers and discouraged them from increasing their production. MS Bihunirwa, also added that the problems of small holder farmers had not been addressed due to language barrier as most information about market prices and production was packaged in English which farmers don't ably understand.

It was also noted that financial service providers were not helping the small scale producers. The credit they offered attracted high interest rates and the requirements were too rigid and unaffordable by the small scale farmers. However, it was observed that if farmers were organized in groups, accessing credit would be made easy.

Mr. Kasibante Edward, a honey harvester from Bunyangabu sub county Kabarole district said that he had a challenge of selling his honey in the local supermarkets because it was not certified by the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS). He said the UNBS charges for certification were so high.

While submitting at the dialogue, Professor Kasenene, the Vice Chancellor Mountains of the Moon University told the participants that the problems of the small holder farmers seemed to be the same world wide and that farmers were still working individually. He urged the small producers to put emphasis on networking and working together in organized groups to easily access markets.

In his closing remarks, Hon Alex Ruhunda, the MP elect Fort Portal Municipality, urged the small scale farmers to have confidence in whatever they did. He assured them that the government was willing to support farmers –but only those in organized groups. Ruhunda who, before joining politics was a leading global CSO activist also emphasized the need for communities to seek their own solutions to development challenges.



The Role of the Drama theatre in Building Citizens' Competence

By Jackie Mpaka

The Art of Music and Drama has existed for centuries in the World's History as an entertaining, informative and communication strategy, and this shaped societal identities, aspirations, unity, co- existence and acknowledgement of cultural diversities among the African Communities. This great art has not gone unnoticed by KRC. For over a decade now; KRC has utilized this strategy to facilitate public education and sensitization. This has been made possible through working closely with organized youth and women groups from the seven districts of Rwenzori Region.

This initiative has been very pivotal, in targeting the multi- ethnic Region with diverse and varying ethnicities and cultures. KRC strongly believes that such a strategy is appropriate in terms of enhancing exiting local knowledge, practices and innovations as means to achieve sustainable transformation within the community.

Also, Music and Drama as one of KRC's communication strategies has facilitated knowledge and information sharing as well as learning at lower communities.

These strategies have registered specific transformation in two folds; growing interest among the citizens to debate and question the socio- political processes and challenges within their local setting. The

drama messages have ignited citizens to demand accountability from their leaders, and to also engage them in issues of development.

For instance, the recently concluded General Elections registered a shift in practice where weak and non-performing incumbents lost to new entrants. The citizens weighed these leaders according to performance and transparency in leadership.

Under the output fold, the strategy has registered emergence of action plans to address community concerns after every session of engagement between the drama group and the audience. The plans have shaped the citizens' desires towards ensuring each stakeholder fulfils his or her obligation in the development process.

At least every week, the communities set major priority actions to a community concern ranging from maintenance of a water point, health centre surrounding, following up absentee pupils and teachers.

In a related development the leaders within the community utilize the drama sessions to engage with the citizens by giving feed- back on issues of , education, Health the electorate roles and mandates of citizens towards This helps to expedite development and political processes within their localities.

The writer works as a Project Manager for the Deepening Democracy Project at KRC

Nurturing Citizens ability to debate: A case of radio talk shows

By Jackie Mpaka

As one wise saying goes 'information is power'. Indeed it is a great tool to mobilize the masses –and KRC has given it the brevity and attention it deserves! The radio talk shows have not only acted as avenues of public education and debate, but have also, over time, groomed intellectual discussions among the citizens in Rwenzori Region and all areas where VOT, Better and Life FM stations reach.

The discussion agenda for the radio talk shows have been influenced by the listeners through live phone calls and SMS –using their hard earned cash. Also Important to note is that, there has been a high registered interest among the political leaders and citizens to voluntarily participate as panelists and discussants on talk shows since 2000.

The discussions have embraced socio-economic and socio-political discourse drawn from the local and international setting. Interesting growing demand for leaders' political accountability focus in the region, the talk shows seem to attract political governance discourse at least in most of the early morning and weekend regular FM station programs outside NGOs funded ones.

This however, indicates a shift in thinking among the populace from mere interest in music and love related shows that were previously enjoyed by both youth and the aged, to governance processes.

KRC has progressively registered maturity among the listeners where, the discussions



Some of the community members that KRC recently supported to learn radio broadcasting techniques. KRC uses radio to reach out to the communities

are shaped with facts drawn from their own context coupled with demands put forward to enhance accountability from the leadership and implementers.

The youth have emerged active in taking part in the live debates too, with few women calling in and sending SMS. At least each 2 hour talk show registers an average of 25 - 30 phone calls with 15 - 20 SMS, as contributions towards the debate.

The peak of the importance of the programs was the recent 2011 Uganda General Election Campaigns. The period witnessed different Political Party Contestants appearing for a joint debate in one talk show about their party manifesto in relation the citizens' needs. This arrangement was spearheaded by KRC in inviting

the discussants to participate with listeners to challenge them on their ability to deliver in relation to their past performance profile and the manifestos.

There was noticeable growth in maturity among the leaders in terms of accepting to debate and withstand counter-attacks from opponents without losing their cool. And on the other hand, the strategy indirectly influenced individual's consciousness to be well equipped, informed and orderly in order to debate successful either live in the studios or by a phone call.

Radio debates will go a long way on addressing the information gap.

MONDAY MEETINGS AT KRC: WHERE MY CAPABILITIES WERE BUILT

By Priscilla Kokugonza



A technical meeting at KRC

As a family tradition, every Monday the KRC organizes interactive planning and reflective meeting sessions from 10:00am- 1:00pm for all the technical team. Personally I have been initiated into a reflective cultural practice that is characterized by exciting - but I brain teasing moment.

I have admirably watched as the staff challenge each others on the socio- economic and political issues around the World. As a student on training, I have been exposed to various information and knowledge on various issues in a short time about what I studied in relation to what is really happening in the community.

More interesting and motivating is the

vibrancy and the confidence among the female staff during the meeting as they flex intellectual muscle with their male counterparts! This has built my inner confidence, and I am sure I will start debating from an informed point of view.

The meeting environment at KRC casts away shyness and builds a brave and courageous person. These meetings have inculcated in me the need to be organized and orderly, before interfacing with people.

Another component of these meetings is the sharing of the good events at personal level. This has continuously enabled me to reflect upon the progress taking place in my life -both positive and negative. I also learn from my colleagues about what sup-

ports them to progress positively. The Meetings are also characterized by progressive reports from the various KRC project. This is done on a quarterly basis, and it has enabled me to learn processes of organized implementation, and having control over results. The meetings have also exposed me to learn to make presentations, confidently to a large group of people

Conclusively, the on- spot actions, that are agreed upon before the meeting closes, remind me of the importance of always having clear action for every -thing discussed and planned so that achievements are celebrated and gaps are addressed.

The writer is an intern student at KRC