



THE NEXT GENERATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT: BOLDLY GOING WHERE NO NGO HAS GONE BEFORE

PRESENTATION TRANSCRIPT

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PRESENTERS

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PRESENTATION TRANSCRIPT

Julie MacCartee: Good morning, afternoon, and evening everyone. On behalf of the Agrilinks team I'd like to welcome you to the October Ag Sector Council Webinar titled The Next Generation of Civil Society Engagement: Bolding Going Where No NGO Has Gone Before. We're excited to have a great lineup of speakers today to discuss the realities of engaging civil society in agricultural development projects. The monthly Ag Sector Council Seminar Series is a product of the USAID Bureau for Food Security and is implemented by the Knowledge-Driven Agricultural Development Project.

My name is Julie MacCartee and I'm a Knowledge Management Specialist with the USAID Bureau for Food Security. I'll be facilitating the webinar today. And so you'll see my name in the chat box and hear my voice during the Q&A session after the presentations. Thank you to everyone so far who has introduced yourself in the chat box and please continue to do so. It's always really fun to see that we've got a global audience for these webinars.

Throughout the webinar we encourage you to use the chat box to network, to share links and resources, and to ask questions about the presentations at any time. And we'll pose those questions to our speakers in the last section of the webinar today after the presentations when we begin addressing Q&A. And we also have a few experts on hand to help answer your questions directly in the chat box.

Before we get started with the content I'd like to quickly announce some exciting news on behalf of Agrilinks. We are upgrading the Agrilinks website in November. And so later next month you will see a new platform when you log onto <http://www.agrilinks.org>. We've listened to feedback from Ag practitioners and professionals to really completely revamp the website for the better. And the new site will still have blogs, resources, and online trainings brought over from the current version of the site.

But we'll also add some all new functionalities to help practitioners connect with each other and learn. The new discussion areas that we're featuring will be the biggest change and one that we hope you're quickly take advantage of. Practitioners can use the discussion page to ask questions, discuss challenges, and share ideas. And the site is also more accessible than ever.

A mobile version and a low bandwidth option means that practitioners can easily access Agrilinks resources from the field. So for more information on this please feel free to contact me or any number of the Agrilinks team using our e-mails or the agrilinks@agrilinks.org e-mail address.

Today we are here to discuss the next generation of civil society engagement. And before we delve into that – our presentation today – I also wanted to briefly call your attention to another Agrilinks event on civil society engagement held last Wednesday as a precursor to today's webinar. We held a one hour online chat on the Agrilinks website featuring a panel of experts from Chemonics Catholic Relief Services and InterAction. And participants asked questions and partook in

a very rich discussion about engaging civil society in project design and implementation.

So I encourage you to visit the link on this slide – and we'll also post this link in the chat box – to view the full discussion. And just to call out three of the key good practices that emerged from that discussion last week, some of the key points. Number one is that definitions for a civil society, just how we define it, vary widely depending on customary and legal standards in a given country or other factors. But just setting these parameters on the definition does help prioritize needs and keeps us from slipping into equating giving grants to local NGOs as truly engaging with civil society on systemic changes.

Second, capacity building is an important component of engaging civil society, particularly in terms of program design and implementation. It's important not to just pay lip service to building capacity but to use assessment and other tools to understand the needs of a local organization and build some restraints. And then thirdly overall engaging civil society needs to be purposeful and thoughtfully built into every phase of a project. So we just wanted to share those three takeaways from last week's online Ask Ag discussion.

All right so now let's turn to thinking about the next generation of civil society engagement with Susan Pologruto who will be giving an introduction. Susan is the senior democracy advisor for USAID's Bureau for Food Security. And that's her photo up there in the left of the screen. And she is leading the effort to implement the Feed the Future Civil Society Action Plan to strengthen Civil Society engagement efforts. I'm going to go ahead and pass the torch over to Susan to take over. So Susan please unmute your microphone.

Susan Pologruto:

Thank you Julie for that introduction. Can you hear me?

Julie MacCartee:

Yes I can hear you.

Susan Pologruto:

Okay great, just checking. Thank you again Julie for the introduction and welcome everybody. And thank you so much for joining us this morning. As many of you may already know Feed the Future has taken some very important steps in recent years to strengthen how we're engaging civil society through the USAID's Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid, civil society organizations provided the Feed the Future and BFS in particular with recommendations that ultimately provided the basis for the Feed the Future Civil Society Action Plan.

That plan was launched in May of 2014. And it outlines some concrete actions that we will take with civil society to continue the fight against hunger and poverty. And some of the things are very, very specific for USAID and our staff. And that includes providing training. It includes providing guidance. It includes providing a best practices handbook that we're currently developing. All of those activities that we're trying to do we're ultimately trying to promote country ownership and the effective engagement and meaningful engagement of civil society actors in country.

As you already know civil society partners often implement our programs. But they're doing so much more than that. They're providing us with valuable feedback and input, following the priorities on how we design the programs that work. And they get the word out locally and globally on the importance of food security and nutrition issues. So these groups that we're working with in country and even our US-based NGOs are really on the frontlines of fighting hunger in their communities. And they're absolutely critical to strengthening food security in sustainable country-driven ways.

So today's discussion and webinar we're highlighting the importance of working with local actors to achieve the Feed the Future objectives as well as how to partner with civil society and agriculture and food security programs and what that looks like. So today you're going to hear some useful approaches and tools for effective engagement as well as some of the challenges and lessons learned. With that said I'd like to introduce our first speaker, Winstone. Winstone Bohela is responsible for planning and coordinating implementation of all institutional capacity strengthening interventions at relevant government institutions and civil society organizations, at both the national and sub-national levels, enhancing the mainland and as well as in Zanzibar.

He is a Tanzanian with professional background in corporate law, engaged in development work specifically on capacity enhancement and service improvement for the poor for over 20 years. And through various training and continuous practice he has amassed skills and experience and participatory management, human resources, organizational development, and he's provided a variety of workshops and seminars and trainings on these issues. So Winstone I will turn it over to you to tell us more about the program in Tanzania and how you're engaging civil society.

So Winstone please take it away.

Winstone Bohela:

Thank you very much. I hope you all can hear me. As the facilitator just said I'm Winstone Bohela working in the Feed the Future program in Tanzania for nutrition. And I will be speaking from Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, and together with me we have Janeth Said who is in Dar es Salaam with me who will speak later on. And in Washington we will have another speaker who will also comment later on and they will participate in text messaging in the chat box. That is Nene Diallo.

So in my presentation I hope you all can see. I will talk through five topics. I will introduce the program briefly – very briefly – and then I'll talk through the engagement of our program at the national level in terms of the civil society at national level. And then I'll go through in how engage with the civil society at district and community levels. And then I'll go on to talk about the skills that are recommended for the next generation. And then I will finish with actionable tips for engaging civil society much more effectively.

So as I said before Mwanzo Bora is an USAID-funded nutrition program on the U.S. Government's Feed the Future initiative. And its main focus there is on the reduction of maternal anemia and childhood stunting. It is this idea to do this by reduction 20 percent. And it does that by implementation of the evidence-based

nutritional and necessary interventions. The program is implemented by a consortium which has four organizations. It is being led by Africa with the lead organization.

And together there is a nutrition organization called Counsenuth. Counsenuth is responsible for nutrition, technical services, and then we have Manoff which is responsible for providing in there necessary communication and programming and Deloitte with main responsibilities in terms of nutritional capacity strengthening. The program covers 33 districts with a population of more than 9.5 million in eight regions of Tanzania mainland and Zanzibar. And its main focus is actually built on the situation in Tanzania as being depicted by the slide which is being displayed right now because that's actually the situation in terms of the childhood stunting and maternal anemia in Tanzania. And that's the justification of the project activities and interventions.

So I go directly to the CSO engagement and I'll start with the national level. At the national level the program engaged with an organization call Counsenuth. Counsenuth is engaged with the program at two fronts. First it is engaged itself as part of the program consortium member. And at the same time it is actually a beneficiary for international capacity strengthening. So the two sides of this CSO are actually meant to help each other indefinitely as Counsenuth is implementing and is acting as a technical partner as a consortium member it is at the same time enjoying and benefiting from the institutional capacity strengthening.

The skills that are being gained actually have a chance to be implemented live in the program in terms of activities that are being backstopped technically. So how did the program build Counsenuth capacity? First of all the program is part of capacity strengthening to Counsenuth there's a nutritional and technical impact assessment that was done. And then the capacity gets established and after that prioritization was done in terms of what are the key areas in terms of the efficacy, technical aspect, the governance, and financial and grant management.

After those get established and prioritized Counsenuth was supported in improving and our developing governance, finance, and grants. And as part of building capacity of this CSO on the side of technical, the CSO will provide an opportunity to lead the technical implementation of the nutritional intervention at all levels. And through this engagement what has Counsenuth benefited actually? And what have we achieved in this time? And through engaging the national CSO Counsenuth actually the program has managed to reach more than 1.7 million women and more than 1.6 [million] children.

And these have been reached by nutritional and behavioral services. Because of making sure that the services are actually sustainable at the end of the day one of the means of the program was to make sure that the system strengthened the structures, and the systems that are provided in these services. And by doing that several people are within the structures were trained and actually 3, 500 people were reached in terms of either training or orientation, or at least in terms of engagement.

Through the intervention and the engagement with Counsenuth Counsenuth itself has benefitted a lot in terms of being part of the consortium because by being a

member of the Mwanzo Bora program consortium its profile has actually been boosted and the boosted portfolio has radiated confidence in organizational competence to handle funds and programs. And as a result of that several donors have entrusted Counsenuth with funds.

Between 2014 and 2018 Counsenuth is going to be receiving and spending more than \$10 million from three different donors that are not USAID. And actually as part of a benefit Counsenuth is also right now using skills, tools, and experience that have been gained through the implementation of the Mwanzo Bora program in other donor-funded programs apart from USAID. And of course it goes without saying that because of getting more fast implementation to other programs Counsenuth has expanded its staff base and it can now manage to open sub-offices in the field in order to be able to effectively manage the subcontractors and their general responsibilities.

So that's the engagement at the national level. As I said before, our engagement with at our national level and district and community level – at the community level our engagement with the local – most of them regional or district level CSO and how did we procure and engage with the CSO? We did that by making sure that actually we are running the existing and the operating CSO. And they are running the whole process based on transparency and competitive process.

That was done by making sure that the institutional assessment was done and the CSO were not based on the technical competence. And the combination of technical capacity, due diligence, and reference of the capacity, the past performance actually were the basis for their selection. And over and above that the experience in implementing and managing grants or programs for Africare or other organizations whether funded by USAID or other entities also increased their competitiveness.

And through this engagement the program actually managed to provide 14 maybe to grant out sub-grants to 14 local CSOs and they are all given contracts to implement evidence-based nutrition interventions. And through these engagements these local CSOs have managed to reach almost 3 million men and women in more than 2,300 villages in the 20 cases of the program area in the first four year. And if you look at the entire process of procurement and awarding actually the process exposed the CSO to transparent competition, quality, accountability, and the delivery, and discipline.

After engaging with them how did you build their capacity? Actually the CSO was oriented on the program content and working tools and they were introduced and our leads to the government institutions and the structure and the mandates to support program interventions. And they were also introduced to the community and the government-built program service providers. And at the end of the day they are also introduced to the final beneficiary of the program services.

Over and above the CSO were supported and were motivated to prepare and plan and budget for the implementation of the community program activity and that administration cost. And they are mentored and awareness is done together with them to make sure that they orient in the local leaders village and hamlet level and they are oriented to the community-built volunteer service providers. And

they are also coached and mentored to form community beneficiaries' peer support groups.

That should promote peer discussion around recommended nutrition behaviors. And after being given their first orientation and their first initial capacities an introduction to the necessary structures they are given sub-grant funds and opportunities to manage, implement, and plan and report and define the funds had been given to them. And they were alongside as part of addition of the program they are coached and mentored to effectively coordinate and facilitate peer-supported groups of behavior changing discussions using provided nutrition as a specific case.

There are also coached and mentored to effectively facilitate farmer- field base and demonstration plots to improve availability and accessibility to diverse _____. In the whole process how did we ensure that there is ownership and sense of belonging for the sustainability of the program-supported services? Actually the sustainability was promoted through mentoring and coaching to position the CSO to involve and work with and within government systems, institutions, and structures at sub-national level.

For instance CSOs were linked and supported to work with relevant technical personal at the district level and the extension workers at ward and village levels. And CSOs are linked and supported to participate in government planned nutrition intervention at district and community levels. In other words we encouraged CSOs to make sure that the deployment budget actually reflected in tandem with what is happening at local government levels so that they can know each other.

And over and above that CSOs were encouraged and supported to be part of the nutrition coordination and decision making bodies and structure at the district, ward and village levels. And CSOs are coached and mentored to request information from and provide feedback to a number of government reporting systems. All the reports that the CSOs are providing to the program are actually the very reports that can also be retrieved from the normal elementary system.

Comparatively through working with the CSO we have noted several improvements. And one of the improvements is in terms of the quality and quantity of the service delivery through the regular monthly and quarterly reports. And we also noted a comparatively improved was implemented performed interaction with the level of support to beneficiaries which was easily seen in the reports and site mentoring and during the support of the region visits.

After working with the CSO's national and subnational level what are the recommendations in terms of the next generation of the CSO on the skills that are needed? Generally we can say we recommend skills around both the organization and the management skills. And we are referring to things that are relevant a number of CSOs in terms of the type of organization, what organization legal status that is proper for a CSO to the best of their ability. And skills that are related to proper planning and in planning that can actually be implemented.

Negotiations in the cause of their working they really need these skills in terms of making sure that they benefit in the normal systems they are operating in, effective supporting supervision skills and things that are related to asset management. And they also need skills around procurement, grants, and financial development because as they grow they are amass more money and they collect money and they receive funds from donors. They need the skills to manage this better so that they can even get more or even manage better the ones that they have.

They also need the skills on resource mobilizations, advocacy, lobbying, and strategic positioning. Sometimes knowing exactly what do they need to say and where do they need to be at what time? It's very important to also for them to have skills on self-assessment, structuring, and managing income-generating activities especially because most of the CSOs want to work with CSOs that do depend on donor money. So sometimes you get a feeling, and actually they admit that if that donor cannot give that money anymore or if a certain program ends up they don't know exactly how are they going to operate their CSO the next time around.

So in terms of what are the tips for effective CSO engagement we in order to make sure that you have a really effective CSO engagement. Make sure you've examined partnership on the existing strengths and will power to deliver. This is very important because you cannot start from a clean slate-- it has to start from things that are needed to be done. And after that you have to appreciate the existence of a systemic and administrative or operational capacities.

And identified because usually there are a lot of systemic and administrative gaps. So identify the critical gaps that you need to address, and then address those based on preference. And sometimes it's good also to mainstream capacity initiative programs, activity plans, and budgets to make sure that the actual theory and practice to come together at the same time because that's the best way for them to become much stronger.

And always make sure you integrate a planned action within the existing structures and systems in order to promote the strength of the continuity; that means to ensure there is sustainability in what is the plan. Thank you and in Tanzania Swahili, Asante Sana!

Susan Pologruto:

Great. Thank you so much Winstone for that presentation. Our next speaker is Adam Keatts. Adam is an agricultural economist with over 12 years' experience designing, managing, and monitoring market development initiatives in 18 countries across Asia, and Africa. On the USDA Rural Business Services Development Project based in Vietnam he facilitated entrepreneurial investments in the coconut and rice sectors.

With ACDI/VOCA he designed an Organizational Assessment Tool for USAID Food for Peace and he later served as a regional director for Southeast Asia based in Loa. As the economic team leader for Conservation International based in Cambodia Adam designed and managed several field projects at the complex nexus of market systems development and ecosystem management including the

USAID New Partners in Value Chain Development Chain Project and the Women's Fish Processing Project.

That last one as a subcontract under USAID HARVEST. Adam is now Fintrac's knowledge manager. And he leads evidence-based learning across a global portfolio of small holder market development programs. Adam, I'm going to turn it over to you.

Adan Keatts: Okay, thank you Susan. Can everybody hear me okay?

Susan Pologruto: I sure can.

Adan Keatts: Okay great. Good morning everyone. As Susan said my name is Adam Keatts. I'm the agriculture knowledge manager for Fintrac based in our home office here. And I was previously based in Cambodia for several years where part of that time I spent on producer group development with Cambodia HARVEST. So I'm going to be talking about how the project – how the Cambodia HARVEST project has been engaging civil society. And I will be specifically focusing on a case study of commercial horticulture producer groups.

Okay I'm not going to spend too much time on this but this is just to give you an overview of the project's objectives and activities. First HARVEST is the: Helping Address Rural Vulnerabilities and Ecosystem Stability program. It's not only a very impressive acronym; it's also a five and one-half year food security program under the U.S. Government's Feed the Future and Global Climate Change initiatives. We have an agribusiness component that focuses on horticulture, primarily fresh vegetables.

We're also working in the rice value chain as well as the aquaculture value chain. With aquaculture we're working both in pond and cave systems. We also have the capacity building and social inclusion component which ensures that we integrate gender, youth, and nutrition sensitivities into everything that we do. We have the natural resource management component which focuses on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

And the enabling environment component which focuses on engaging with our public sector counterparts both directly and through technical working groups to influence policy reform around agriculture, food security, and natural resource management. So as you can see it's a large, multifaceted project with many moving parts. The project is now coming into its final year of implementation. And the impacts that we're seeing in terms of economic, environmental, and nutritional gains are really quite substantial.

So first Susan gave a bit of a primer on this as we started but just to provide a bit of a bigger picture view of what we're talking about when we talk about civil society. I do think that there's a wide perception out there that civil society refers almost exclusively to NGOs and interest groups particularly those engaging in political advocacy. And while those types of organizations are certainly a very important component of the broader sector I think it's important to draw attention to the diverse nature of this sector which is why this is a really valuable discussion we're having today thanks to USAID and Agrilinks.

So some key words that I'd like to draw attention to from USAID's CSO Sustainability Index are: informal, self-governing, free choice. As you'll see on the slides that follow these are a few characteristics that we talk about specific to how we strengthen horticulture producer groups in Cambodia. First I'd like to set the state with a brief discussion about the local context in Cambodia because in so many ways context really does matter, particularly in terms of how local realities influence the design and implementation of activities engaging with and supporting the civil society sector.

First the enabling environment, particularly the legal and regulatory framework under which the civil society sector operates is important. There has been progress as well as challenges. But generally the civil society sector in Cambodia is less established, less mature than in other regions, particularly in Latin America for instance which in many ways does have a relatively vibrant civil society sector. So the public sector in Cambodia and more generally in Southeast Asia does increasingly recognize the role of non-governmental actors.

However there continues to be what I call here a reluctant acceptance and at times a more active restraint of the civil society sector through formal laws and regulations. And that's particularly acute in the political and environmental space. I think it's also important to recognize how history influences the dynamics of the sector. In Cambodia the legacy of the Khmer Rouge continues to influence many informal norms in terms of the way in which citizens interact, cooperate, and compete.

Generally there is still a distrust of those outside the nucleus family. And there continues to be skepticism of collective production activities. Particularly the term "cooperative" is often viewed with concern. And in many ways this extends to Vietnam and Lao as well where they had similar recent histories of forced labor.

So what is clear from the CSO Sustainability Index definition is that civil society encompasses a broad range of local organizations. Similarly HARVEST – the Cambodia HARVEST program – is working across a very diverse group of civil society subtypes we could call them. This engagement ranges from our partnerships with local NGOs who are project implementers. In these arrangements we've strengthened their technical capacity to deliver services to farming communities.

And the program benefits from those local NGOs in terms of their grassroots knowledge and expertise within communities. Our engagement also spans the strengthening of community-based organizations to manage common pool resources like fisheries, water, and forestry, also including building self-help groups like women's savings groups, and of course to more explicit production oriented groups in aquaculture, rice, non-timber forest products, and horticulture that we'll discuss here in more detail.

So across 11 different subtypes of the civil society sector we're working with and through nearly 450 CSOs. But for this presentation we're just going to drill down specifically on how we strengthen those commercial horticulture groups and

some lessons learned from those experiences. Let's get into specifically how the project supports the development of those producer groups. What do they look like on the ground and what do they do?

Well in terms of scope their function is simply the production and marketing of horticulture products. So each of the members share this targeted commercial interest. In terms of form, on average each group has about 12 members. They're organized at the village level with members in close geographic proximity to one another. This allows them to aggregate their harvests as well as to aggregate their demand for inputs. And this aggregation is what attracts buyers and suppliers and effectively reduces the transaction costs of doing business with small farmers.

In terms of leadership of the groups there is limited hierarchy with only a president, vice president, and marketing representative elected by the rest of the members. And finally just to give you a sense of the scale that the project has been working on we have organized 73 of these groups representing 870 farmers to date. And a group horticulture marketing to date has resulted in about \$1.1 million of incremental sales of new sales. And that represents about 3,500 metric tons of horticulture produce.

And now, how do these groups operate? It's important to point out as we'll discuss a bit in the lessons learned slide that not every group operates the same. They're really quite flexible in terms of the activities that they choose to undertake, and how they carry out their work. But generally their activities are centered around input market access, financial market access, and output market access. For input market access on the project facilitates field days with input providers to demonstrate their products, raise awareness, and build loyalty among farmer group members.

For the most part farmers in Cambodia already know their input providers. But these activities solidify those relationships. And so some groups may also pool their resources to bulk buy inputs like plastic covering, seedling trays, et cetera, like we see in this picture here of a group that did that to bring down their unit costs. For financial market access there are some groups – again not all – who may enter into borrowing agreements with local MFIs where the group guarantees a loan for one member and upon repayment the next member is afforded the opportunity to borrow.

Given the shared risk involved in these types of arrangements it's natural to see why not all groups pursue this course. However, when it does work it can be a very effective way for farmers with limited collateral to access working capital loans. And for output market access the marketing representative of the group conveys to members the target crops of local buyers, and the market window for supplying it where peak demand exists.

Also the marketing representative may organize physical logistics with the buyer to minimize crop losses. This may include either the coordination of a central collection point within the village or scheduling buyer pickups at individual plots around harvest times. With those functions in mind it's important to consider what skills these farmer groups need to succeed. First and foremost they need to understand the market. They need to know what those market windows are and

the quality specifications for their target crops and how to program their planting to meet those demands. That's what we call calendarized production.

Next they need to know how to apply good agricultural practices and modern technologies so that they can meet those expectations and those market specifications. The GAPs – the Good Agricultural Practices we teach include things such as land preparation including raised beds, also seedling transplantation, integrated pest management of course, which is inclusive of crop rotation. Soil nutrient management, water resource management, and some technologies that we transfer include things from as simple as plastic mulch and trellis climb to hybrid seeds, inorganic fertilizers, crop protection products, and drip irrigation systems.

And finally in terms of what they need to succeed farm administration or simply record keeping. As important as it is most small holder farmers simply don't do it. It helps them track income and expenses. It allows them to show financial institutions what their past returns are and opportunities are for future returns, which makes them more bankable. And it allows them to make investment decisions to improve the operations of their farm.

Okay now here I'd like to provide an overview of the level of support that the project provides. So specifically as external facilitators what role does the Cambodia HARVEST project and our local partners play in establishing and supporting these groups? The first is target area selection based on several pre-established criteria including horticulture potential which is inclusive obviously of agro-ecological characteristics market access, et cetera.

And we also considered development impact objectives inclusive of health and nutrition status of villages, and other demographics such as women and youth populations engaged or not engaged in agriculture in those areas. We then work through the commune and the village heads to identify farmers that are interested in horticulture group participation. Those who are interested and committed self-select into the group; however within that self-selection process as facilitators we very clearly promote these opportunities to women and youth.

And for the leadership of each group we develop a short list of candidates based on several criteria. This includes who is respected and trusted in the village, their willingness and ability to transfer the knowledge that they gain to other members and other village members who are not in the groups of course. And we consider social inclusion. So this process of short-listing leadership candidates allows us as facilitators to further promote women and youth not only in membership positions but in leadership positions within the groups.

And then the project supports these producer groups for a period of 18 months. And this represents about 4 to 5 production cycles. This is assuming two to three production cycles per year. Just as an aside the number of our product cycles depends on their year round water availability and their ability to harness that water that they do have. So currently about 45 percent of all group members now do have access to irrigation and can product year round. And the specific support that the project provides includes cost shares for inputs initially to jumpstart the

lead farmer demonstration sites on which knowledge transfer, on-farm extension visits take place

The project also provides access to weekly market-driven on-farm extension visits as well as – as I mentioned earlier – monthly field days between input providers and farmers. And we also facilitate initial linkages with key buyers in the area where those relationships do not currently exist. After 18 months of initial support the producer group graduates from project support. And at this point they're equipped with the knowledge to stand on their own.

Out of the 73 horticulture producer groups that we've established we've found that more than 50 are still operating as a group. It's natural and should be expected that not all groups will continue in perpetuity. But for those who are not currently operating as groups those individual farmers now have the technical skills that they need to succeed in the market that they didn't previously have. But for one reason or another they chose to operate as individual farmers. And that's okay.

Nonetheless we see that this 70 percent of groups continuing to operate collectively is a testament to the value that these types of CSOs can provide in terms of access to on-farm knowledge and market access. Some of the factors that we believe contributes to the sustained operations of those groups are listed here: market-driven. These groups are market-driven and organized around a very discreet, shared commercial interest. Self-selection: members choose to join a group or to not join a group. They are not co-opted into this process.

The groups are unburdened. They're unburdened by external operational demands and therefore they have very little to no overhead costs. And they're flexible. As I mentioned before group dynamics vary from group to group. And each one operates a big differently. Some may bulk buy inputs and some may not. Some may organize central collection points for buyers. Some may prefer individual pickups at their farm gate – whatever works for them. And some of these seemingly simple collective activities involve a great deal of trust and logistical skills.

So while some groups are collectively organizing their planting decisions based on buyer demands for instance they may also prefer to transact as individuals. And that's okay. That flexibility may be one factor that keeps the majority of these groups operating on their own without project support. And one more thing that we think contributes to the sustainability of these activities. Once farmers experience the tangible value of collective action they tend to continue it.

But if there are problems of free riders or cheating within the group or just limited added value compared to what farmers can achieve as individuals then the group's ability to be sustained becomes more difficult.

This is my last slide and it is just a few takeaways that we think are relevant in Cambodia and beyond. First the civil society sector is diverse as we've already mentioned. And all forms of CSOs are needed. No single model is a silver bullet for all of the challenges and all of the context that we may see. But it's important

that we recognize informal producer groups as a part of that robust civil society sector that we're all seeking.

Next there is often a lot of focus put on the group or the organization itself. In the case of the informal producer groups the group itself was not the goal for the project. The group is seen as an important vehicle for knowledge transfer and market access. It's the producer capacity to achieve a critical mass of supply and demand that enables them to increase their incomes. That's ultimately the goal.

And a last word on the skills that external facilitators need. In order to gain trust from farmers, to build trust within a producer group, and to foster trust between farmers and market actors we as external facilitators really must bring first and foremost extensive practical, technical market-driven agronomic knowledge to the table. Both farmers and market actors must first trust us and our local partners of course in that facilitator role.

They need to know that we know what we're talking about. And we can do that by working alongside them to demonstrate success initially. And of course we must also have a comprehensive understanding of the local context. And the ability to ensure inclusion and gains among women, youth, and other marginalized individuals within the village. That's it for me. Thank you very much. And I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Susan Pologruto:

Great. Thank you so much Adam for that very thorough presentation. We sincerely appreciate it. *[inaudible]* Janeth. Janeth is a nutrition advisor and public health specialist for USAID with extensive experience of more than ten years in a variety of capacities. Currently she is serving as a champion for Health-Agriculture-Nutrition linkages while coordinating cross-sector nutrition activities in Tanzania.

In addition, she manages Mission's global health and Feed the Future activities in improving nutrition status among women and children under five. Prior to joining USAID, she worked with refugees in camps with hands-on programs that addressed severe and acute undernutrition among women and children in camps.

Janeth I'm going to turn it over to you.

Janeth Said:

Thank you. Hi everyone. I hope you can hear me. So straight to the point! From USAID's standpoint, particularly in relation to nutrition in terms of engaging civil society, it is a work in progress. And this is because there is all that, regarding USAID in Tanzania, to engage civil societies are still varied. There are high levels of undernutrition, particularly stunting, of which is a kind of hidden program from the eyes of the community. So engagement of civil societies here is very, very important to us.

And also we have seen a lot of programs come and go without losing a trace. So USAID Tanzania wanted to try to make these efforts more sustainable by engaging the community. And if you can recall what Winstone has presented for example we're kind of having an ambitious goal. And so in order to achieve that we needed a broad based kind of target group to reach where women and

children are living. And so civil society is actually using the same community we thought was going to be important for us.

The question of “how” has not been moving forward even for us because for example we have just learned that engaging civil societies and implementation, at the same time using their capacity, is not easy. [This is] especially if a donor or implementing partner is pushing for the quick results. And so to get out of that is very, very important that during the designing of a program it's better to build in adequate time that we allow the CSO to deliver on the project but at the same time growing in terms of the capacity.

And also think about building in a transparency that will help the CSOs to understand how to negotiate with the funders [and] how to effectively implement the projects. Again, you need to build a good relationship between the implementers and civil societies. This is because sometimes... and this can be achieved by creating an environment that you attract trust between the implementing partner and the civil societies.

I'm just putting this forward because we have heard the case in which civil societies feel like they are left out of the consortium or they are left out. They're not considered to be the same partner who can deliver on the mandates. So I think it's very, very important to create the environment in which they can feel comfortable and be able to share what they feel and to feel as part of the project. Another important thing is to have a consultative procurement process.

So if I can use an example of USAID Tanzania when we are developing these big programs we have to go out considering different stakeholders in their effective groups: civil societies, private sector, local governments, and so forth. And the question was to ask them how can they benefit from these projects? We knew it wasn't everybody who was going to be part of the consortium, but we wanted to get the input on what they value and what they think can be helpful for them.

And so we got the input and we incorporated those inputs. And really they helped us. When we were offering – issuing the request for proposal for application I think that gave courage to CSOs to try... and we got a lot of applications. And you can see the results through the process that we are implementing right now. From the experience we now know that effective engagement of civil societies have to be accompanied with capacity building.

I know one of the presenters has mentioned this. And this capacity building will depend on the need. It could be focusing on things like resource mobilization, financial management, human resource development, knowledge management, governance, organizational structure, and so forth. This will be unique to civil society and that will come after the assessment is done. So if capacity building can be done in a good faith it can result in a strong, productive relationship between the CSOs and implementing partners.

And they can also build in the confidence that they can do business hopefully. Over to you.

[End of Audio]