P4P DRC: Rebuilding infrastructure to link smallholders to markets

In Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), P4P has explored how infrastructure improvements can catalyse agricultural development. Nearly 200 km of rural farm to market roads have been rehabilitated in partnership with the government, FAO and UNOPS. This project, combined with community-led maintenance on another 300 km of rural roads, has successfully linked previously-isolated farmers to traders and more profitable markets.

The post-conflict environment presents unique challenges for P4P’s work promoting smallholder market access. In DRC, the country’s transportation infrastructure has suffered from destruction and a lack of maintenance due to armed conflict. Lack of road, rail and water transportation in combination with large distances between smallholder farmers and markets often limit smallholders to selling their crops through barter systems close to their farms. In the Kabalo and Bikoro territories, where P4P works, communities have been fractured by years of armed conflict. The country’s agricultural production has also been reduced to a subsistence level despite DRC’s agricultural potential. DRC has more than 80 million hectares of fertile land that could be cultivated year-round, but less than 10 percent is cultivated each year.

Partnerships and community ownership for improved infrastructure

Implementing P4P in DRC meant that WFP not only needed to design a programme that developed the capacities of farmers and their organizations, but also focused on rebuilding infrastructure.

P4P is working in close collaboration with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Through a joint funding mechanism supported by the Belgian Government, the two UN agencies are working hand in hand to support the government to strengthen the capacity of smallholder farmers and rebuild agricultural markets affected by years of disruption and armed conflict. In Bikoro, P4P started thanks to a contribution from France.

Since 2009, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), as a P4P partner, has worked with local companies to reconstruct sections of roads and build culverts. P4P and partners have facilitated community cohesion and ownership by supporting the formation of community-led road maintenance committees and involving local government and local businesses in the work. Communities were encouraged to contribute with materials and labour through

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WFP’s Food for Assets programme, which provides food in exchange for work on the rehabilitation projects.

**Making connections: positive impacts**

Road rehabilitation has been crucial to revitalising markets and connecting farmers to economic opportunities, allowing smallholders to transport their products to larger structured markets with shorter transportation times. With access to these markets, farmers are able to obtain a better price for higher quality grain than at the farm gate. P4P also partners with OXFAM to better facilitate the aggregation of crops and to reduce post-harvest losses by constructing warehouses along the rehabilitated roads midway between communities and markets.

“This project taught us how to farm and how to save in order to increase our production,” says Florent Banza, a P4P-supported farmer who opened a small village pharmacy with profits from increased production and sales.

**Roads open new business opportunities**

One of P4P’s key objectives in DRC is to link smallholder farmers to traders in order to re-establish trader networks and link farmers’ organizations to sustainable markets. Before the road rehabilitation project started, traders were wary of buying from smallholders due to their unreliable and long transportation times. As a result of the new roads and improved transportation, traders started negotiating with smallholder farmers directly, now more confident in receiving their purchased crops on time.

Road rehabilitation efforts have also had other benefits. Links to urban centres have improved, which has increased access to health services for nearby communities. Plus, the warehouses constructed along the rehabilitated roads have provided new employment opportunities to rural individuals and have reduced post-harvest losses, successfully enabling farmers to sell higher quality grain. In the future, links between smallholders and processors along these rehabilitated roads could open up possibilities for the production of value-added foods.

**More efforts needed to support smallholders**

Despite the many successes of the rehabilitation project in Kabalo and Bikoro, challenges remain for smallholder farmers. Due to limited access to vehicles, smallholders still require WFP logistical support to transport commodities to warehouses. Transportation over greater distances, where roads have not yet been rehabilitated, still proves challenging.

Due to the limited production among smallholders, storage facilities were operating at only 20 percent of their total capacity between 2010 and 2013. Further capacity development is needed for smallholders to increase their production and maximize the use of warehouses.

*Article by Daphne Hendsbee, P4P*

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**Read more about P4P in DRC:**

- [P4P in DRC - Fact Sheet](#)
- [In Equateur’s Forests, P4P Helps To Build A Generation Of Model Farmers](#)
- [P4P helps connects farmers to markets](#)
- [Promising signs despite multiple challenges](#)
- [Increase in income enables business diversification](#)
WFP scaling up successful post-harvest programme for smallholder farmers

A recently completed trial reveals how P4P-supported smallholder farmers drastically reduced their post-harvest losses, losing less than two percent of their harvest over three months of storage. WFP is now planning to scale up the successful initiative with a project that aims to reach 41,000 farming households in Burkina Faso and Uganda. By receiving specialized training and investing in subsidised storage equipment, these farmers are expected to substantially reduce their post-harvest losses and thereby also increase their surplus and sales.

The results from WFP’s action research evaluation trial on “Reducing food losses in sub-Saharan Africa” clearly show the benefits for smallholders investing in post-harvest handling techniques and storage technologies. In the trial, 400 smallholder farmers in Burkina Faso and Uganda compared their traditional storage facilities with methods and equipment which have proven effective in developed countries, such as metal and plastic silos as well as different kinds of inexpensive hermetic (airtight and water-proof) storage bags. During the 90-day trial period, sampling and data collection were conducted every month. The results show that participants in the trial retained at least 98 percent of their harvest when using the new storage equipment, regardless of the crop and duration of storage. The key to success was intensive training in proper use of the hermetic storage bags and metal and plastic silos, before using the improved technologies.

Seeing results

According to the project’s manager, Simon Costa, many farmers initially expressed scepticism about changing farming techniques which had been used for generations, and many believed that significant post-harvest losses were inevitable. However, Costa said that at the end of the trial: “It was quite emotional to see the reaction of some of the farmers when they opened their new storage units to check on their grain after a month had passed. After watching the grain in the traditional storage units deteriorate quickly, they expected the same (or worse) to be occurring inside the new units. Their disbelief quickly turned to jubilation when they discovered their harvest was in perfect condition.”

Results from the trial suggest that these improvements could potentially lead to a 64 percent gain in income for a single smallholder in Uganda. The improved storage systems also had a positive impact on women’s lives by reducing their workloads, as the storage units eliminate the time-intensive process of separating spoiled grains and re-cleaning.

Increasing food security, improving lives

Decreasing food waste by reducing the post-harvest losses of smallholder farmers is a vital step towards meeting the world’s growing food needs, and is one of the pillars of the Zero Hunger Challenge. It also plays an important role in P4P’s objective to improve the lives of smallholder farmers, by making food more affordable and consistently available for poor households, leading to an overall increase in food security. The increased preservation of their crops also reduces the need for smallholders to purchase grains to replace the quantities lost during post-harvest storage. This in turn should increase smallholders’ disposable income, allowing them to make investments in better health, nutrition and education for themselves and their families.

Scaling up

Building on the successful results of the trial, WFP has launched a 14-month Special Operation targeting 41,000 P4P-supported farming households in Burkina Faso and Uganda. The operation aims to reduce post-harvest losses by 70% through the provision of specialized training and subsidized storage silos to protect harvested crops from pests, mould and moisture. However, without an assured market, smallholders may not have the confidence to invest their time, energy, and money in new post-harvest handling techniques and equipment. The presence of WFP as a buyer intend to give smallholders assurance that they will be able to sell their increased surplus. P4P will continue working to link smallholder farmers to quality markets beyond WFP in order to ensure sustainability.
Blog: Smallholder-friendly business practices for private sector engagement

In Malawi, a group of private firms belonging to the Farmers World Group illustrate that smallholder-friendly business practices can be both profitable for the private sector and benefit farmers. In this blog post, Dimitri Giannakis, Director of Farmers World, describes the group’s work with P4P and the initiative’s potential to encourage the further development of agricultural markets in Malawi.

Farmers World Holdings Ltd is a group of Malawian agribusiness companies founded in 1995. Throughout the years, we have worked with rural people to enhance food security and development while being mindful of our corporate social responsibility and the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals. Our business ventures enhance the lives of rural smallholder farmers and their communities by providing them with access to farming inputs, agricultural extension, credit programs, ATMs, adequate storage and fair prices for their surplus crops.

Private sector engagement to benefit all
I believe that our work in Malawi is an excellent example of the way in which the private sector can complement and contribute to the work done by P4P. Our experience also shows how smallholder-friendly business models can be beneficial for both parties. Coupled with capacity development efforts by P4P and partners, our work provides smallholder farmers with the tools necessary to produce higher yields and market quality crops. The rural locations of our sales outlets make farming inputs such as fertilizers and improved seeds accessible, and facilitate programs that provide smallholder farmers and their organizations with credit, which allows them to purchase inputs when they are needed most. Through the warehouse receipt system, we offer these smallholders the opportunity to have their grain professionally stored and treated for a small fee. This reduces post-harvest losses and allows farmers to wait to sell their crop when sales will be most profitable.

Farmers’ World also buys crops such as maize, soya and pulses in bulk at over 300 buying points in rural locations as well as at the farm gate. By purchasing crops from P4P-supported smallholders and their organizations, we link them to sustainable markets such as animal feed manufacturers, food processors, breweries and large grain traders, as well as WFP. In order to ensure the transparency of this process, we use calibrated scales, issue purchase receipts clearly marked with price and weight, and display and communicate our buying prices openly. In Malawi, we have also played a leading role in developing a market for staple crops, as a founding member of the Agricultural Commodity Exchange for Africa (ACE), an online public commodity exchange. This platform has benefited many P4P-supported farmers’ organizations by providing them the opportunity to participate in collective sales to a variety of institutional buyers.

Facilitating healthy markets
In the future, we hope to further engage with maize storage and warehouse receipts, moving these points further into rural areas to reach more farmers. In order to facilitate the creation of a rural maize market, we also hope to encourage the development of rural trading platforms for commodity buyers and sellers, linking them through a commodity exchange. These efforts hinge upon our ability to educate farmers and traders regarding timing and quantity of purchases, and upon our capacity to have a positive impact on local and regional prices.

Today, the commercialization of maize and the
liberalization of the maize market has created a tradable surplus in Malawi. In 2013, an estimated 1 million metric tons (mt) of surplus maize was produced, 90% by smallholder farmers. However, policies which disrupt healthy market environments, such as the restrictions on the exportation of maize, or the dumping of free maize, threatens the further development of this sector. Because of this, I believe it is vital that WFP and other relevant partners utilize its potential to promote and develop liberalized commodity markets in Malawi through further collaboration with the government.

This will require the development of food security strategies which allow the government to step away from the market with confidence that the country’s food security will not be compromised. WFP and other development partners must also further promote the development of the private sector, and engage with it to promote practices which lend mutually beneficial support to rural smallholder farmers. With increased private sector engagement and reduced government intervention, I believe it will be possible to reduce the food aid currently relied upon by many rural individuals, by empowering them to become self-sufficient thanks to sustainable food security solutions built into the structure of a healthy liberalized market.

Blog post by Dimitri Giannakis, Director, Farmers World

(Note: These views are the author’s and do not necessarily reflect those of WFP.)
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P4P NEWS

P4P in the Media
WFP’s Executive Director discusses food assistance, local procurement and P4P on the USA National Public Radio. Listen from 00:12:30

WFP implements P4P-like project in Ecuador. Read more

Journalists visit P4P project in Kenya. Read more

Report on the importance of public procurement
Report by Olivier De Schutter as UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food recommends the expansion of smallholder-friendly procurement practices. P4P and PAA are cited as examples of good practice in the report. Read more

Call for entries: African Farmer Organizations Award
The 2014 Africa Farmer Organization of the Year Award recognizes and rewards farmers’ organizations for promoting sustainable agriculture in Africa. African farmers’ organizations are encouraged to enter before 30 June 2014. Read more

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