Introduction

The question central to this brief, which was extensively discussed with different stakeholder from East Africa during a workshop in Nairobi (November 2010), is how to scale developmental initiatives in the context of agri-food chains. The workshop included experiences from Kenya and Uganda. This brief builds on a specific feature of agri-food chains of undifferentiated products, namely the inclusion of large numbers of smallholder farmers into an organisation primarily functional to marketing and production. It summarises five different pathways for upscaling and working with large numbers of smallholder farmers.

Bulking and scale

In all cases a specific business model driven by sustainability or pro-poor development intentions surfaced. Variety in scaling pathways was related to the achieved fit of these developmental interventions with the realities of aggregating large volumes of raw materials produced mainly by smallholder farmer. The need to manage large groups of small holders complicated interventions. This raised the question how the practice of bulking, i.e. the activity of assembling volumes of agricultural products, acts as a process functional for both value chain performance and development. At these nodes, buying firms try to manage this node for ensuring a reliable and consistent flow of volumes of agricultural products. Farmers and farmers' organisations target this node to negotiate terms of trade, for example based on their capability to reliably deliver produce. Volatility in transactions and vulnerability of down-stream chain actors, particularly small-scale farmers, is importantly shaped or confined at this node.

In the example of EPK Tea Factories negotiating ownership and terms of trade was linked to the organisation of aggregating volumes and arranging transport and collection closer to farms. In the case of farmer field schools supported by Lipton Tea and the Kenya Tea Development Authority agricultural practices were the basis for farmer association. Reconfiguring the institutional arrangements between levels in the chain for the purpose of scaling sustainable farm practices only came to the fore after piloting with selected groups of farmers. In the case of the oilseed subsector in Uganda, a policy-oriented platform (OSSUP) assembling different chain and non-chain actors who began to explore different types of bulking. This led to mutual appreciation of the roles of both buying lead firms and farmers groups in making the subsector more stable and predictable. Improved coordination in the sub-sector

Table: **Scaling pathways in five case studies from East Africa**

	Tea Farmer Field Schools	Tea EPK Factories	Coffee Societies	Chillies Contract Growing	Oilseed Subsector Platform
Number of smallholders	Piloted farmer field schools reached 700 tea farmers in 4 factories. Replication induced by certification targets 50,000.	Number of tea out growers increased from 700 to 7500 in 8 years' time	Buying company set minimum number for support program: varying between 10 and 25,000.	Work with 20 groups reaching > 6000 farmers managing a labour intensive crop.	Companies contracting >30,000 farmers. Subsector involved > 200,000 in 4 major regions.
Scaling pathway	Align farmers around practices in vicinity of factory. Field schools platform for certification.	Farmer-owned but not managed tea factories made terms of inclusion attractive for farmers	Improved management and planning capacity of farmer societies; level of autonomy.	Started with lead farmers in linking to groups and to expand network.	National platform linking to regional alliances and farmer groups

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Managing dependencies and scale in value chain interventions

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encouraged more buying firms to work with individual and organised farmers (one firms In the case of chillies, the company Equator offered contracts to all kinds of farmers, also those supplying only 2 kilograms, was key to achieving a higher level of certainty for farmers operating in risky agricultural systems despite uncertainty in the market. For consistent supply the company relied on leading farmers and setting up groups. In the case in the Nyeri Coffee project, farmer societies were central in addressing weakest points in managing supply and production risks and organising a reliable supply. Linking groups, particularly weaker ones, to collection centres and to achieve scale was important for addressing managerial questions.

Connectivity among actors

The previous linked scaling to a functional practice linking actors in the value chain: bulking. In addition, different forms of collective action and partnerships came to the fore. The farmer field schools initiated by Lipton built on and revived the factory-based extension network of the Kenya Tea Development Authority (KTDA). KTDA was also important for achieving a certain level of coordination in the sector. The entrance of a certification scheme, Rainforest Alliance, partly redirected the strategy from localised learning to compliance. The Ugandan Oilseed Subsector Platform aimed for coordination, joint action and synergy in the sector. It started as a national platform, looking through a policy lens, and gradually built linkages with regional platforms where associated farmers were present. The platform included buying firms, sometimes contracting tens of thousands of producers. At regional level, the interaction between farmer groups and companies stimulated banks and government officials to become involved in the sub-sector. In the Nyeri Coffee project, the buying company insisted on a minimum scale for support programmes: at least 10,000 farmer families. Working through the coffee societies made this possible. The NGO-led support strategy aimed to make the selling coffee societies as independent as possible from the buyer (ECOM-Sangana) and to enhance the quality of their planning and management processes. The contracting scheme of chillies started as an independent enterprise, and eventually aligned with government agencies after negotiating the terms of support. The involvement of smallholder farmers was important for attracting support from government and NGO's. The EPK Tea Growers Company centred on the terms of inclusion for farmers within a network of tea factories. Committed farmers attracted investment by private sector and public agencies, e.g. to repair roads.

Managing dependencies

Scaling development entails dependencies between actors and across scales under conditions of vulnerability and unpredictability. This implies skill formation for embedding development interventions and collective action in value chain realities, and for teaming up chain and non-chain actors in ways that risk are shared and capacities linked.

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