

Introduction

In value chains different actors cooperate and depend on each other for individual and overall chain performance. The process of prioritizing critical points for control and (preventive) interventions may provide a basis for joint problem solving and increased coordination. The use of concrete evidence and data in this process may help to objectify and validate priorities. Such a perspective builds on approaches like HACCP or ISO standards that encourage systematization of risk assessment and priority setting. This briefs report on the process of priority setting in five case studies examined during a 2 day workshop in Nairobi (the questions central to the case studies are listed in the text box, next page). The current practices in the case studies did not yet reflect a strong systematic approach. The discussion sheds light on two questions:

- (i) what kind of institutional settings bring different chain actors together in such a way that they identify bottlenecks, problems and intervention priorities and act upon in a coordinated way, and;
- (ii) what kind of risk management tools can they use for a joint search for strategies addressing complex problems, which are beyond the capacity of individual, specialised actors.

Priority setting

The cases illustrated big variety in priority setting (see table). For example, the Lipton/KTDA tea case in Kenya chose for improving incomes by interventions targeting quality and yield improvements. Priorities were largely defined and monitored within smaller farmer groups associated with the extension network built around tea factories. Ownership of problem-solving was close to the ground. This set-up is now linked to compliance to a standard system, reflecting priorities set by actors institutionally remote from farmers. Working towards compliance has become a driving force. The institutional challenge is to

make both processes commensurable. This includes questions on co-ownership and collaboration among different chain actors, and empowerment in knowledge & factory management. A contrasting example is the case of EPK, which started with re-arranging the ownership structure of tea factories: farmers became owners and delegated responsibility for day to day management to others. The involved farmer groups and other stakeholders learned by doing. There was no designed approach or a clear risk analysis (feasibility) carried out when buying the factory. The task of monitoring and documenting this process was not explicitly assigned.

Table: Priority-setting processes in five case studies from East Africa

	Tea Farmer Field Schools Lipton/KTDA	Tea EPK Factories	Coffee Societies	Chillies Contract Growing	Oilseed Subsector Platform
Process of priority-setting	Agenda setting by farmer groups included in factory-based extension network of KTDA and close to production	Embedded in negotiation process between farmer groups, buying company and government focussing on terms of trade, investments	Based in planning processes, agreement on themes in workshops, independent decision-making by societies	Anchored in continuous problem-solving, need assessment and business model encouraging independency of farmers	Initial problem identification by national platform, task forces working with top 3 in preparing policy dialogue, and consultation regional platforms
Intervention priorities	Production practices, e.g. plucking, tipping, pruning, followed by compliance with standard	Leaf collection close to farmers, better tea prices, improved infrastructure, and income diversification.	Training in better agricultural practices and accommodating an inclusive improvement process	Production risks, e.g. quality levels, reliable supply, combined with certainty by contracts and finance	Improved seed, working capital for bulking, credit for procurement infrastructure, and interaction of technology users and research



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For quality of life:

Priority setting in value chains: continuous and inclusive improvement

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Coordination in decision making

Decision making in priority setting did take place at various levels in organisations and value chains. In case of coffee societies in the Nyeri project, the process was initiated by the chairman of one society and created for joint decision making. Other chain actors got involved and Board members participated. A 3-year training project involved multi-stakeholder participation and the process prioritized product quality. Gradually, two complementary intervention areas were added: “the planning process as start of the management cycle” and “the organizational setting of the societies”.

In the case of EPK it was a bottom up process in which farmer leaders discussed problems with management. Priority setting remained implicit in the process. There was willingness to invest in problem solving.. The teaming up of different chain actors did enable a focused lobby for support and public investment.

In the case of the oilseed platform in Uganda (OSSUP), the policy lens of the national platform was implemented by a smaller group of key players from lead firms, producer organisations, NGOs and government. Priorities were validated by regional platforms, which strengthened national policy advocacy. The clear list of priorities set by different stakeholders was convincing support agencies.

Textbox: Lead questions for analysis priority setting in case studies

1. How did you prioritize areas of interventions?
 - a. What was the process used for identifying and weighing of priorities?
 - b. What were the defined priority interventions areas?
 - c. What possible interventions areas were left out, for the time being?

The Equator case, contracting chillies production to a variety of farmers, demonstrated a chain wide inclusive approach. It combined, on the one hand, interventions aiming at guaranteeing a purchase of all farmers’ products. On the other hand, it supported farmers in becoming self-financing and independent. A strong ICT package enabled detailed monitoring and a continuous feedback process. The approach included leadership development and on-farm strengthening of good agricultural practices via farmer field schools.

Inclusive improvement

In reflecting on the five case studies participants recognized the value of working towards a systemized approach of continuous (and inclusive) improvements. The workshop suggests that it is important to test risk-based management tools able to overcome biases in thinking and problem solving and to enhance connectivity of problem-solving strategies at different levels in the value chain. Coordination among chain actors may be a precondition for involving others actors in addressing both complex and day-to-day problems

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