

THE BUSINESS EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME (BEEP)

AN EVALUATION FOR THE ROYAL NORWEGIAN SOCIETY FOR
DEVELOPMENT (SNV)

BY STEIN W. BIE AND SASKIA VAN OOSTERHOUT

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**Department of International Environment and Development
Studies, Noragric
Norwegian University of Life Sciences**

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Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Noragric
Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB)

P.O. Box 5003

N-1432 Aas

Norway

Tel.: +47 64 96 52 00

Fax: +47 64 96 52 01

Internet: <http://www.umb.no/noragric>

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¹ Team Leader. Senior research scientist. Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Noragric. Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, Norway.

² Team member. Independent consultant. Cape Town, South Africa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. The concept design of BEEP: Project design, structure and funding	1
1.2. Background: improved business performance through exchange of experience	3
1.3. History of BEEP	5
1.4. Objectives	5
1.5. Methodology	6
1.6. Summary Terms of Reference of this evaluation	6
2. CONDUCT OF THIS EVALUATION	7
2.1. The evaluators	7
2.2. Travels as part of the evaluation	7
2.3. Circulation of draft for partner commentary	8
2.4. Finalization	8
3. THE BEEP COMPONENTS	8
3.1. The national components	8
3.2. The trans-national component	8
3.3. The (Norwegian Peace Corps) FK component	9
4. RESPONDING TO ITEMS IN THE TERMS OF REFERENCE	9
4.1. Criteria used	9
4.2. Effectiveness	9
4.3. Efficiency	14
4.4. Impact	15
4.5. Relevance	17
5. CONCLUSIONS	26
5.1. The context for measuring relevance	26
5.2. BEEP concept, structure and development	27
5.3. Research <i>vs</i> RPO needs	28
5.4. Sustainability	28
6. APPENDICES	29

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BEEP proved to be a valuable project for most of the actors, and has installed a new sense of business purpose in many cooperative or similar organizations in Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia and Uganda. Academia has become more actively involved, particularly in Tanzania and Uganda, offering teaching and research resources to BEEP's objectives. BEEP has been reasonably well organized from the Norwegian side, but would have benefitted from more continuity. Earlier criticism levelled at BEEP from a broader Nordic Consulting Group study has not been verified in this assessment.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE CONCEPT OF BEEP: PROJECT DESIGN, STRUCTURE AND FUNDING

A conference in Oslo in 2001 reviewing possible future steps for collaboration in cooperative development projects identified a number of possible strategies for collaboration between NV and partners in Eastern and Southern Africa. As a follow-up the BEEP (Business Experience Exchange Programme) concept originated from a meeting between Odd Arnesen (then at the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR), Norway), Professor Chambo (Moshi University College, Tanzania) and Dyborn Chibonga (NASFAM, Malawi) held in Moshi in 2002. The idea was conceived jointly in response to what they perceived as being a dominance in the agricultural organization and marketing sectors of donor-led interventions and North-South technology transfer above consideration of indigenous efforts and possibilities for players in the South to share their experiences among themselves. With trends towards liberalisation of developing country economies favouring greater roles for the private sector, and a marked and growing failure of the state and established (often state controlled) co-operatives to provide the support and honest broker roles expected by the primary producers, the need for new strong and alternative mechanisms was considered. Significantly, national experience gained in this new arena was not widely shared between countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, several of which face the same challenges. National institutions of higher learning and research in the region had previously shown little or no interest in these more local issues, and arguably concentrated on general principles and research topics taught and researched worldwide. They had insufficient research funds to initiate field research of this type. Thus ventures into new theories and practices of organization and administration of the agricultural sector had largely been driven from the North and with donor funding and twinning to research and educational institutions in the North.

We believe it is essential for anyone looking at BEEP to appreciate that BEEP was conceived by the initiators as an alternative venture into a neglected sector, where overseas ideas frequently dominated initiatives and little use was made of local experience, leading to few national initiatives in Eastern and Southern Africa to locally train people and produce knowledge relevant to the new market and political challenges. BEEP was an attempt to counterbalance this and to create and

communicate new knowledge primarily originating in the South. Whilst we may have had difficulties in this evaluation to retrace the intellectual origins of BEEP from documents, the many meetings with participants in BEEP have brought this to the forefront.

The concept of BEEP involved mobilizing national rural producer organizations (RPOs) as well as national research institutions (RIs). Initially identified in three countries (Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia) and later expanded to include Uganda, they included institutions that were all active in the agricultural sector (see Table A, and Appendix D). Uganda and Mozambique had been observers in the first meetings, Uganda later joined. They were significantly different both in form and mode of operation and therefore represent a wide range of approaches both among producers and research establishments. This programme construct does therefore not render itself for comparative studies of BEEP programme successes between the 4 countries, rather it represents a wide variety of approaches to differing challenges in the agricultural sector from which all can learn regardless of national origins. It also follows that what works in one country may not work in another where conditions are different.

A pilot study followed in 2002. In line with overall policies of Norad and NV on poverty alleviation, the target group was rural producers through their organisations in four partner countries from Southern and Central Africa (Table A and Appendix D). The overall objective of the programme was to strengthen RPOs' business performance, through documentation of successes and failures and exchange of business experiences between RPOs in the participating countries. Attention was focussed on a comprehensive set of issues: improved business performance, successful application of formative process research, regional co-operation in business and research networks, and education concerning agri-business education programmes as well as a number of cross-cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender, and environment. It could be argued that this menu was a very long one, an attempt to capture many of the then development trends. It was certainly not reductionist in nature. The necessary research data were gathered by the local research institutions in the partner countries using formative process research (FPR, as advocated by Norad) in co-operation with the respective national RPOs.

Funding was obtained for a 4 year period from 2003 – 2006. The total project cost was NOK 10 mill. spread over 4 years. The financial contribution from Norad was NOK 9 mill. and NOK 1 mill. from NV, in line with the general principles of Norad-financed projects of this type. NV obtained its contribution from its member organizations in Norway. Funding was allocated to NV as the development implementation agency (essentially reflecting on the needs of the PROs), and NIBR, as the Norwegian institution supervising the research component, at a ratio of 1:5, i.e. with a heavy funding bias towards research.

Table A: BEEP cooperating partners, Rural Producer Organisations (RPO), Research Institutions (RI), and Norwegian partners.³

Country	Type of Organisation	Acronym	Organisation name
Malawi	RPO	NASFAM	National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi
	RI	APRU	Agriculture Policy Research Unit, Bunda College of Agriculture
Tanzania	RPO	TFC	Tanzania Federation of Cooperatives
	RI	MUCCoBS	Dept of Research, Moshi University College of Co-operative and Business Studies
Uganda	RPO	UCA	Uganda Co-operative Alliance
	RI	DAGEAB	Dept of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, Makerere University
Zambia	RPO	ABF	Agri Business Forum
	RI	INESOR, UNZA	Institute of Economic and Social Research, University of Zambia
Norway	Implementing Organisation	NV	Norges Vel – Royal Norwegian Society for Development
	RI	NIBR	Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research
	Principal donor agency	Norad	Norwegian Agency for International Development

1.2 BACKGROUND: IMPROVED BUSINESS PERFORMANCE THROUGH EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE

The BEEP partners shared the common view that increased incomes contribute to improved livelihoods in the rural areas. This programme is thus primarily about improving livelihoods through income generation and income distribution, and to a lesser extent addresses other livelihood issues. The partners believed that farmers need to be encouraged and supported to increase production levels, to improve the quality of their produce, to diversify their production, improve the timeliness of production, and to introduce more high-value crops. To this end, member-controlled, well-functioning, well and honestly governed and market-oriented channels were to provide the necessary link between farmers, input suppliers and markets.

All the partner countries experienced government interventions in the 1990s (e.g. price controls, unilateral marketing policies, and corruption in high places). Whilst possibly well intended, they were in part introduced by overseas agencies not always familiar with local conditions, and subsequently caught in the cross-fire between lending policies of international credit institutions (e.g. structural adjustment) and national political ambitions. It led to an almost complete breakdown of farmer-owned marketing organisations and brought their names into discredit. Co-operatives were practically banned in Malawi; in Zambia the government undermined normal trading

³ Organisational acronyms are listed in Appendix A.

practices (incl. those of co-operatives) by the provisions of free inputs to small-scale farmers for maize production, leading to bad credits, high risks and bankruptcies. In Tanzania, the leadership of co-ops had become engulfed in corruption (as apparent in later criminal proceedings) and was not trusted by rural producers; both internal strife and politically motivated destruction of co-ops blighted Ugandan farmers. These countries were subsequently subjected to economic restructuring programmes negotiated by the national governments with The World Bank and other lending institutions. These imposed market reforms and trade liberalisation on the stagnated economies. The rural producers' marketing organisations (co-operative unions) which had previously enjoyed some government protection and privileges through law and practice, proved unable to compete in the newly liberalised market. Their members, the small rural producers (those with least income), were left without proper means to access markets and bargain for prices. This resulted in reduced prices for their produce and increased production costs, arguably due to exploitation by private traders and retailers in non-functioning markets.

More recently government policy changes in all four countries have created more enabling environments towards the agricultural private sector. Various new farmers' initiatives have emerged in the region over the past few years. Some have received support directly from Norad, and indirectly through NV. These include four innovative apex RPOs in Southern and Eastern Africa (Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) that represent very different approaches to member-controlled, market-oriented organisations, aiming at accessing markets and bargaining for better prices on behalf of their members.

Studies identifying the factors of success or failure of initiatives such as these are rare and hence possibilities for learning from or replicating successful approaches within the region are limited. In addition, reliable documentation of on-going national policy formulations, donor policy formulation and reflections within the institutions, is virtually non-existent. This lack of information is limiting internal organisational reflections in RPOs at a time of rapid expansion and changing national and international political and economic environments. This situation led to the arrangement to link RPOs with local research institutions to investigate and document successes and failures in business concepts run by the RPOs, including a number of underlying issues such as gender dynamics.

1.3. HISTORY OF BEEP

The main points in the history of the BEEP are summarised in Table B.

Table B: Historical Timeline of BEEP

Year	Project development and events
2002	No previous exchange of information between the RPOs before the start of the BEEP project. BEEP initiated following a pilot FPR project involving stakeholders from NASFAM, ABF, ZNFU and Moshi Co-op College. Participating organizations exchanged visits in small groups to do a SWOT analysis of each RPO. Summary of findings distributed to all stakeholders. National workshops held in each country: delegation's findings on their own RPOs were discussed, followed by the first annual regional workshop in Arusha, where representatives from all partner countries were present. Derived most relevant research objectives through extensive dialogue. Draft programme document developed and circulated among the partners. Tanzania visited Malawi and Zambia, Malawi visited Zambia. Received funding from Norad. BEEP established.
2003	Uganda became a full member from the onset of BEEP. Annual regional meeting Kampala.
2004	Annual regional meeting, Lusaka.
2005	'House of learning' - exchange visit from ABF to UCA through NV link to FK. Critical external review of NVs International Department, by Nordic Consulting Group (NCG). In this review the existing programme document for BEEP was found to have weaknesses relating mainly to loose terms of reference in the project document, and a perceived relaxed style of project management. Annual regional meeting Lilongwe. Major reorganization followed internally in NV.
2006	Annual regional meeting Arusha. Revised annual plan for the final BEEP year 2006 with direct comments and contributions from the 4 partners. Discussed the NCG review, critical African voices heard on its conduct and conclusions. Proposed the development of ESAANET. NV to continue activities primarily on the producer organization side through ESAANET.

1.4. OBJECTIVES⁴

The overall objective of the BEEP programme was to strengthen the business performance of RPOs, by facilitating exchange of business experience between the different partners. This was expected to have a downstream effect on poverty alleviation at farmers' level. The main objectives and key activities are summarised in Table C below.

⁴ The objectives, outputs, activities, indicators and means of verification from the 2006 amended programme document are presented in Appendix I for reference.

Table C: Main objectives and key activities of the BEEP programme

No	Main immediate objectives	Key activities
1	Improved business performance at RPO level.	Identifying conditions and factors that could improve the RPOs' business performance
2	Exchange of business experience between RPOs.	Documentation of successes and failures in business concepts run by the RPOs
3	Documentation of successes and failures in existing business concepts.	(special focus for 2006)
4	Application of formative process research.	Researching internal and external factors influencing the RPOs' performance
5	International publications of research reports obtained through BEEP.	Further dissemination of research results for the purpose of international publications
6	Support regional business and research networks	Establish regional cooperation for business development, policy dialogue and organisational development; establish common website

1.5. METHODOLOGY

Formative process research (FPR) was adopted by Norad as a norm, and meant to enhance the learning process and performance of development programmes. In the context of BEEP and as implemented there, it was an interactive and iterative research methodology, involving researchers and their institutions, the RPOs, respondents, as well as the donors as active players in the development and evolution of the programme. In this way the structure and culture of the collaborating organisations were to be shaped through dialogue. FPR was considered by Norad and NIBR (the research supervisor) as a well-suited methodology to facilitate the formulation and implementation of a common research programme between the different participating organisations in BEEP. They had had little previous contact with each other. The specific research themes were to be identified and prioritised jointly by the different partners.

1.6. SUMMARY TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THIS EVALUATION⁵

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which the objectives of BEEP have been achieved, and to assess the relevance of BEEP as providing the basis for the continuation of the regional network of RPOs. The objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Assess the roles and interventions of the organisations involved in project organisation and administration
- Assess the impact of BEEP on regional integration and information sharing, exchange activities on business sharing, research on business performance, creation of a collaborative environment between RPOs and research institutions, development of more relevant curricula at research institutions, and the ability of RPOs to commission FPR.

⁵ For the full set of TORs please see Appendix D.

- Assess how effectively BEEP has implemented lessons learned from research
- Assess cost and time efficiency
- Assess relevance of exchange activities, research and methodology
- Assess the short and long term impact, as well as the sustainability of BEEP
- Propose interventions that may ensure sustainable impact of the project, as well as interventions that may take the network, with regards to the RPOs and their benefits from regional integration

Assessing the quality of the research is not within the TOR. However the evaluators have assessed whether the research has met the objectives of the BEEP programme, and the needs of the RPOs.

2. CONDUCT OF THIS EVALUATION

2.1. THE EVALUATORS

Stein W. Bie (Norway) has his background in natural resources management and research management with national and international organizations. Saskia van Oosterhout (South Africa) has a background in ethnobotany and has much experience from non-governmental and grass-root organizations in Southern Africa (for summary CVs please see Appendix E).

2.2. TRAVELS AS PART OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluators were acutely aware of the need to visit most or all major BEEP players. A previous review (by NCG in 2005, including BEEP aspects) had not done so). As part of this evaluation the two evaluators assembled (from Norway and South Africa, respectively) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania where they had initial meetings with the Tanzania RPO. They subsequently flew to Moshi, Tanzania, for meetings with the Tanzanian RI, before returning to Dar es Salaam for further RPO meetings. They then proceeded to Lilongwe, Malawi, for meetings there with the Malawian RPO and RI. Proceeding to Lusaka, Zambia, they met with the Zambian RPO, but were unable to meet the RI, as key researchers were on duty travel. The RI was later approached about a telephone conference which, however, failed to materialize due to renewed international travels on their part. The Zambian RI has therefore been reviewed on the basis of printed material only. From Zambia the evaluators proceeded to Kampala, Uganda, for meetings with the Ugandan PRO and RI. At least 2 days were spent in each country. The evaluators then proceeded to their respective home countries. Subsequent meetings, involving telephone link-ups to the South African evaluator, were held in Norway with NV, NIBR and Norad. The evaluators believe they have met with all key personnel currently involved with BEEP, with the exception of the Zambian RI. Most staff with knowledge of the earlier years of BEEP were included in the interview process. However, changes of personnel, particularly in the Tanzanian RPO which has recently been completely reorganized, have left some historic gaps in the knowledge base. The evaluators do not believe that this has been serious for the evaluation. Finally, the evaluators have studied the Nordic Consulting Group's NV evaluation of 2005, but have approached the issue independently, and 2 years further

on in the BEEP project, and have therefore reached other conclusions. (See also Appendix F for Itinerary)

2.3. CIRCULATION OF DRAFT FOR PARTNER COMMENTARY

A draft copy of this report was circulated soon after the completion of the field work, but response was slow and incomplete. Most comments received have since been incorporated.

2.4. FINALIZATION

A serious delay has occurred in the finalization of this report, for which the Team Leader offers his absolute apology.

3. THE BEEP COMPONENTS

3.1. THE NATIONAL COMPONENTS

The BEEP project had two components at national level: the RPO component and the RI component. In the original BEEP concept it was assumed that the two would be closely linked. The research component (addressed by the RI) would respond to challenges or issues identified by the RPO. By having its own research budget the RI would independently address the issues, and having academic freedom to draw research-based conclusions without being expected to provide blueprints for implementation. Indeed, by suggesting that a quality criterion of the research would be publication of research results in internationally refereed research journals, it is implicit that direct applicability of the research results may not be a prime target. Whether this has always been appreciated at PRO-level is open to discussion. If – as has been the actual case – no internationally refereed publications have been generated by the research component, other criteria may have to be invoked to assess the relevance and quality of the research component.

3.2. THE TRANS-NATIONAL COMPONENT

Through the annual regional meetings of the 4 national PROs with the 4 national RIs, BEEP created a trans-national venue for exchanges between practitioners (and their organizations) and the research scientists (and their institutions). Although many of the RI scientists clearly have international experience and have travelled significantly in the science world, few may have met on regional issues prompted by the national PROs or compared notes with fellow scientists on these more local national issues. This BEEP component is innovative and not found in many other programmes or projects. The networking originating from the assembly of national PROs and RIs has potential if executed carefully. An assumption is, however, that participation in the networking, including the annual meetings, is adequately and efficiently financed.

3.3. THE (NORWEGIAN PEACE CORPS) FK COMPONENT

Towards the latter part of the BEEP project, activities organized under the BEEP umbrella have been supported by professionals and funds made independently available through the Norwegian Peace Corps scheme (FK). FK has supported participants from RIs and RPOs in one BEEP participating country to serve with a RPO in another BEEP country on a prolonged (up to 1 year) secondment. Although experience with the FK component has been limited, and comes in addition to regular BEEP activities, early indications are that FK activities have integrated well with the BEEP framework and provided an avenue for South-South collaboration not normally open to RPO employees. Whilst scientists (e.g. from RIs) may be more familiar with such international exchanges (through international projects, sabbaticals and employment mobility), they are less common in RPOs, several of whom found the FK component innovative.

4. RESPONDING TO ITEMS IN THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

4.1. CRITERIA USED

The evaluators have considered the following criteria:

Effectiveness

Efficiency

Impact

Relevance

Roles

4.2. EFFECTIVENESS

1. Assess effectiveness of the project implementation including an assessment of how outputs are in line with achievement of project objectives.

NV is a development organization with an international department focussing on rural development in developing countries. Its staff has expertise both from national (Norwegian) development projects and from many years of working overseas. Although the conduct of some aspects of its work has been subject to an external evaluation of assessors from the Nordic Consulting Group in 2005 with significant negative comments of the performance of this department, the evaluators have no reason to believe that NV's international department is not now adequately staffed. Indeed, clients in the 4 countries have commented positively on dealings with the current staff. The external review in 2005 also made some marginal comments on NV's handling of BEEP. Seeing BEEP at the end of its project period, and in 2007, the present evaluators find it difficult to identify with NCG comments made when the BEEP project was in its early phases. We note from NV documents that due cognisance has been taken of negative NCG comments related to BEEP, and we assume that adjustments have been made. We note, however, a number of critical comments made both of the conduct of and conclusions of the NCG by African partners in BEEP. These negative comments relate both to the methodology of the NCG review and the

actual conduct of the limited field visits. We have had conveyed by many African partners that the NCG review was basically faulty on BEEP. Without re-opening a debate, and without serious analysis of adjustments made by NV following the NCG review, it suffices to say that the current evaluators have been presented with a very different scenario: that of BEEP in 2006/2007. We do believe that NV has gone to considerable length to ensure effective mechanisms for handling matters relating to the RPOs, and we note satisfaction among African RPOs on this score.

More concern has been expressed by African partners on the subdivision of labour between the RPO-component and the RI-component both at national and trans-national level. Since NV is not a research institution, at least not in the international context, the original concept assumed that a professional research institution, selected to be NIBR, would manage the research component. (Indeed, a central originator of the BEEP project was at the time a staff member of NIBR.). African RI partners note a significant mobility of NIBR staff leading to changing BEEP desk officers at NIBR and challenges in retaining institutional memory on their side. In this process the communication between NV and NIBR may also have become sub-optimal. Whilst the professionalism of NIBR staff has not been challenged, the frequent changes of desk officers in a project that in any case seems to have been marginal in the overall NIBR portfolio, have not been positive.

With the overall 1:5 subdivision of funds between the PRO and RI components there are obvious sources of discontent and misunderstandings, particularly among African partners. The evaluators wish at the onset to note that there are national cost differentials at national African level between producers' organizations (where cost levels reflect national salary and expense levels) and research organizations (who are more closely linked to international research costs and whose staff experience consultancy rates more closely aligned to international rates than national salary levels). I.e. hourly rates are different. In particular it was difficult to understand among some RPOs the high rates charged to the BEEP project by NIBR. This may reflect a lack of understanding of the financing platforms of NIBR and similar Norwegian research institutions, where project work constitutes an important part of their financing, and that such work is not the subject of general Norwegian government subsidy. A "value-for-money" query has therefore been raised by several RPO representatives on the issue of effectiveness of use of funds, both by national RI partners and by NIBR. The evaluators cannot fault the rates charged by either African RIs or NIBR, as they are within normal range of such commissioned research and research administration.

The evaluators note that continuity is an important aspect of research administration, also in that it fosters greater understanding of the needs and expectations of non-research partners. NIBR's handling of the research component of BEEP fell short of optimal effectiveness. Although clearly not deliberate, BEEP fell victim to changing institutional winds at NIBR.

Comments were also received on slow disbursement of funds, particularly from NIBR. Many delays, however, seem to originate in the central administration of

the African research institutions' own parent organization and thus beyond NIBR's control (events at the University of Zambia is quoted as an example, where internal UNZA deliberations on consultancy guidelines delayed decisions). Others reflect the research quality control function entrusted to NIBR and duly adhered to by them. PROs commented favourably on the role played by the Secretariat in Zambia in disbursing funds in a timely manner. As is not uncommon, delegates to BEEP annual meetings did experience difficulties in obtaining travel advances and settling travel claims. Credit was given to the efforts to streamline this in most recent meetings.

The evaluators conclude that the administration of BEEP, whilst suffering from some discontinuity in staffing both at NV and NIBR level, was effective and adequate. Inevitably there will be aspects open to criticism but – importantly – we found no evidence of irregularities and have reviewed auditors' reports giving 'clean audits' at all levels, both at RPO, RI and Norwegian organizations. The evaluators applaud the gradual transfer of financial matters to the office in Zambia, whereby further administrative efficiencies were achieved. The project history of BEEP is one of learning along the way how to achieve efficient administration between trans-national partners that had hardly cooperated before. Many projects have failed here, BEEP did not, and contrary to what the NCG report may have sensed in 2005, our review in 2007 indicated that BEEP 'came good'. It is difficult to see whether this was a result of the NCG review and the steps then taken by NV, or whether the NCG diagnosis of concern was premature. We have noted voices from the African partners that the latter may have been the case.

2. Assess effectiveness in implementation of lessons learned from research at RPO level.

Whilst the above reflect on aspects of the administrative effectiveness of the BEEP project, there are more fundamental concerns relating to the whether money was effectively spent. These relate to the effectiveness in implementation of lessons learned. An underlying assumption in the BEEP project was that little was known on the transition from state controlled co-operatives and similar to business-based producer-owned enterprises. This was the rationale for the high proportion of BEEP funds allocated to research (in addition to its more costly nature). It is therefore essential to consider whether the research, and associated activities, e.g. teaching, dissertations, actually added value to the knowledge pool. A common criticism from the RPOs of the way BEEP was structured was centred on the relationship between the research component and the RPOs. According to the original project design, research themes were agreed upon after discussions between the RPOs and the various researchers during the ARMs (annual regional meetings). The themes concerned issues of relevance to the RPOs. The research themes were then investigated, data was gathered at RPO level and reports were fed back at the ARMs. However, the research output appears to have fallen short of RPO expectations in some countries, notably Malawi and Tanzania. At national level it was felt that inadequate funds were available for close liaison between the PRO and the RI to disseminate the research findings. There appeared to be no adequate budget lines to facilitate close national contacts once the research results

were available. The RPOs frequently failed to claim ownership to the research results and the RIs seemed far from eager to spend their own money in follow-up activities. The evaluators noted that research reports were not often read by central RPO administrators, who themselves often have university background and could have been expected to display interest in the results. RPOs reported that concepts and language was not accessible to end-users. There appears to have been a failure of understanding between the practical, pressing, immediate needs of RPOs compared to the more long term process of research which sought to conceptualise and contextualise in more abstract terms. Good examples are the two research themes for 2003, which analysed Gender and Agricultural policy issues whilst RPOs were looking for advice on market opportunities. Since themes were developed by both RPOs and researchers at ARMs, it must be questioned how this misunderstanding arose. We note comments from the NIBR side that they found it difficult to facilitate and nurture closer liaison between RPOs and RIs.

A more fundamental issue is whether research themes really constituted *research sensu stricto*. RIs in the university sphere are constructed in the tradition of generating knowledge for the ‘long haul’, often with time perspectives of 10-20 years in agriculture. Whilst short-term research is often undertaken in response to specific and urgent requests, RIs will normally see short-term issues as examples in a longer-term research strategy. The opportunity of short-term financing of immediate issues may be tempting to a RI yet may not be covered by a more fundamental definition of research. RIs may themselves not be very efficient organizations for conducting short-term research, but alternative providers (similar to marketing and consultancy institutions often found in industrialized countries) may not be available and were – in any case – not the target group for the BEEP project. BEEP research projects often covered calendar times of 1-2 years or less, and with weeks rather than years of staff time. It is probably not surprising that no report from such research has reached internationally refereed research journals (as was the original intention, and for which NIBR was assigned a mentor role). ‘Internationally refereed research’ is clearly a different definition of research than what RPOs and ARM understood by ‘research’. The very definition of research should have been jointly understood by the RPOs and the RIs from the onset.

The construction and conduct of the Annual Regional Meetings (ARM) may illustrate such dilemmas (table D).

Table D: Analysis of time (hrs) spent on activities at ARMs⁶

ACTIVITY	2004 Lusaka	2005 Lilongwe	2006 Arusha
Introductions etc.	2 hrs	2 hrs	1 ½ hrs
Research & discussions	6 hrs	15 ½ hrs	7 hrs
Exchange visits & FK	4 hrs	2 hrs	4 ½ hrs
Field visits	½ day	½ day	1 day
Reflection & planning	6 hrs	4 hrs	9 hrs
ESAANET planning	-	-	15 hrs

⁶ Data derived and summarised from the available ARM programme documents

The analysis shows how the general perception by the RPOs that the ARM workshop agenda was dominated by the research reports, relates to the time allocated to research findings. Reflections from the 2004 ARM report show that at that stage the objectives as stated in the project document were not compatible with the business interests of the RPOs. Early recognition and change in strategy would have been a productive organisational development intervention. The perception by RPOs that feedback on research findings dominated discussion at the ARMs, was strong, as well as the perception that the results were not presented in a user-friendly, accessible manner. RPOs found that it would have been more useful to have a number of more business-oriented recommendations that they could have built on, based on the guidelines set by them, according to their needs. To be useful, the research results needed to be concrete and practical. RPOs also felt that the ARMs should have been more focused on their immediate needs and less on contextualised research results. A strong sense of ownership of the research and research results by the RPOs was not there. In effect, the ARMs therefore did not present an opportunity or platform that was adequate for presenting and negotiating RPO issues. It appears that good ‘process facilitation’ would have been more beneficial at the ARMs, rather than the structured, formal presentation programme.

But in the case of one partner (Uganda), a strong dialogue was created between the RPO and the RI research team. The fact that this dialogue was mutually satisfying, and that a close match between the RPO and the research team was established, also had an important bearing on the high quality of research produced. The Uganda case, which also involved students, is an example of how it can be done.

10% of the research funds were allocated to researchers to write proposals and a further 60% released after the proposals had been handed in and quality controlled by NIBR. The remaining 30% was released on handing in of draft reports. However, reports were generally handed in late, causing disbursements to be delayed. Bureaucratic delays between NV and NIBR may also have delayed the release of funds. NIBR had its own budget and charged NV for the hours spent. After 2006, NV paid money directly to the local partner research institutions.

A knowledge exchange mechanism was created for BEEP in the form of a website. Originally managed from NIBR in Norway, the website was only operative for a short period and does not seem to have fulfilled original intentions. It was described by African partners as remote and difficult to interact with. This appears to have changed when ABF in Zambia took over. In 2005 the research on accessibility of market information resulted in the development of a website which has allowed RPOs to link to increasingly wider and more sophisticated trading networks. All the partners gave an input and each partner is sending an officer this year to learn the use and management of information at the 3rd training workshop to be held in Lusaka at ABF in June 2007. Through their website trade platform, they have been able to play themselves as a node for COMESA and link to NEPAD through this, opening up opportunities for business and information.⁷

⁷ In Zambia like in Tanzania, dissemination of research findings was done through national workshops and ABF choose the stakeholders to invite, while the RI paid for the same. Apart from the first year and part of the fourth year (when RIs had common research topics), ABF in (consultation with INESOR) actually had the final say on the research topics for the next three years. One such research topic

The introduction and use of FPR and the setting up of a business exchange network involve a number of hidden expectations: the development of trust, the easing of suspicion, the gradual evolution of competition into cooperation, the development of new business links, which all take time. This is especially the case where no relationships existed before, or where historical links were either internal, or external with different, previously colonial links.

At each ARM in November, the research reports were presented in draft form. Although there was generally agreement at those meetings that the research themes were too ambitious and not narrowly focussed enough, this may be related to the choice of the FPR methodology, as well as the fact that the project formulation itself was less directive and specific. NIBR was to act in a mentor role to ensure publication at international level. However, the reports eventually came out in local series, partly facilitated by NIBR. The evaluators have had an opportunity to read nearly all such reports. We agree with NIBR that the general level of the reports is not that of international publications, and we agree that the local series level chosen was the most appropriate. This is not in line with the original project concept, but it is appropriate to ask whether this was a realistic goal in the first place. A better question to ask is whether the publication of research in local series did in fact reach the target group. We have no way in ascertaining whether groups outside BEEP have indeed accessed the BEEP publications, as it has not been part of our remit to conduct a citation analysis or similar. Whilst we do know that RI research reports were not universally read by RPOs (indeed sometimes not at all), we cannot exclude the possibility that some research reports, even when not found helpful by RPOs, could have reached a wider research audience and been appreciated there.

4.3 EFFICIENCY

1. Assess the economic viability of the project with quantification of main benefits and costs, and/or assessment of cost efficiency.

The BEEP project broke new ground in establishing RPO – RI connections that had not previously existed. BEEP has recently (2006/2007) been completed. The main findings of the BEEP projects, and the main networks established, came about in the last 2 years. Business models and business enterprises with roots in the BEEP activities are only now surfacing. None have been active long enough to ascertain their financial profitability or their economic sustainability.

It is not possible at this stage to conduct any formal cost/benefit analysis or similar of the BEEP project. The evaluators are nevertheless of the opinion that BEEP represents a

“Access to Market Information for Increased Market Share On selected High Value Crops Under contract Farming in Zambia” has resulted in the piloting of the “Market Information Hub” at ABF. INESOR paid the ABF consultant for this assignment. Also note that NIBR was against piloting the information hub, but ABF and INESOR recognised that it was important and INESOR accordingly set aside funds to accommodate it. In addition, some activities in ESAANET may be an offshoot of the Zambian Market Information Hub. It is also important to note that in the 4 years of BEEP, all the Researchers from outside INESOR were suggested by ABF. As further evidence of the collaboration between ABF and INESOR, in the fourth year INESOR engaged and paid for a Research Assistant from ABF.

relatively modest investment in a new concept that may be successful in the longer term. In that case it is likely that major economic benefits may accrue. The success of one canning enterprise or one honey agreement may influence the outcome significantly. Whilst we do find it appropriate to have raised the question, we do not apologize for not having a quantitative answer. The 4 year BEEP project time was too short for an analysis to be made at this stage. It may be more appropriate to return to formal cost/benefit analyses in 3-5 years time.

4.4. IMPACT

1. Assess the impact of the project on regional integration and information sharing with special emphasis on business development.

One of the core ideas in setting up BEEP was to initiate a regional agribusiness network where none had existed before. This would also provide an excellent academic opportunity. Our findings showed that the partner countries agreed that BEEP (and especially the exchange visits funded by FK) had paved the way for future possibilities regarding regional integration and information sharing with special emphasis on business development. Partners felt that there had been a surprising degree of openness in sharing of business information and good contacts had been set up, especially at the ARMs. UCA, for example, learned from its Tanzanian and Malawian partners about warehouse certificates, and learned from Zambia how to cover the cost of extension and how to link this with demand for high quality (Text Box A). Contacts between partners were further pursued when members were on other business, in partner countries.

BOX A: A case history of a visit by Ugandan farmers to their counterparts in Zambia

Fertile Ground: a case history of Uganda visiting Zambia, 2006

As a student researcher in the department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, at Makerere University, Innocent Muhereza had been working with Dr. Johnny Mugisha on a BEEP research project. They were looking at exchange of business experience between RPOs using FPR methodology. The work had fired his imagination to the extent that he took up the post of project coordinator at UCA. NV and ABF facilitated a week's visit for Innocent and four Ugandan farmer leaders (including three women farmers) to visit their counterparts in northern Zambia. The visit opened their eyes to contract farming as well as to the demand driven, specialised extension service. CPGA, the leading RPO in northern Zambia, charges farmers an extension levy in return for extension advice according to their needs. The system is self-sustaining for all parties concerned. Farmers benefit from increased productivity, higher quality produce, as well as orderly and fair marketing, resulting in greater profitability. UCA learned about CPGAs grading and quality control systems, and gained information about effective input distribution systems and loan recovery facilitation. Innocent believes that the opportunity afforded by BEEP to make this visit, will reinforce UCAs Business-plan, Demand-driven and Member-funded extension service, and increase the operational and organisational sustainability of all parties involved.

2. Assess impact of exchange activities on business performance at RPO level

Business performance was not directly measured. There is not enough evidence at the present time to conclude. With only a handful of (otherwise promising) visit, the evidence is currently anecdotal.

3. Assess impact of research carried out on business performance at RPO level.

We have previously recorded that the link between the research component and the RPOs has been largely dysfunctional, although there are exceptions (e.g. see the Uganda case above). Whilst not at international standard (as previously expected) the research output has not been poor, and it has addressed topics jointly chosen by the RPOs and the RIs. That little impact so far on business performance can be traced directly back to the research component may partly be due to the relatively short time elapsed, but also to a reluctance of the RPOs to accept the research findings. A likely explanation is, however, the failure to find forms of communicating essential items from the RIs to the RPOs. Noting the old saying that if you want to ensure that your research results will NOT be read in developing countries then you should publish in the best international journals (that are much too expensive for developing country libraries), the publication at lower levels (as in BEEP) may in fact have been more appropriate. In Norway NIBR has a good track record in communicating research findings to a broader audience. Maybe NIBR's expertise in this communication field would have been more usefully employed in the BEEP project than the task of mentoring highest level scientific publications. This may have been a design fault in the BEEP project.

4. Assess impact of the project as enabling RPOs to commission formative process research (FPR)

It appears that for the participants in the BEEP project, both at RPO and RI sides, the concept of FPR needed to be refined through more precise facilitation to bring researchers to a closer understanding of the needs of RPOs. FPR was introduced as a requirement from the Norad side, and the concept – although building on a longer tradition of participatory research methodologies – was probably new – and sometimes alien - to many of the BEEP players. In organisational terms, FPR is used as a start-up methodology as it shapes the organisational culture and structure along the way. In that respect, it proved very useful in bringing the RPOs and research organisations to become acquainted with each other's points of view. However, at the earlier stages (e.g. in the aftermath of the 2004 and 2005ARMs), assumptions of understanding on all sides lead to disappointment and failed expectations. Process facilitation should have been introduced at an early stage to create more dialogue between donors, implementers, RPOs, local researchers and NIBR. We sense that opportunities were missed through the lack of a common perception of the mode of FPR.

5. Assess how the project has contributed to the creation of a collaborative environment between research institutions and operative Producer Organizations.

In Tanzania, dissemination of research findings were done through the national workshops organized every year, where research findings were discussed and developed recommendations before the presentations at the regional forum. Participants to these national workshops were drawn from RPOs involved in the research, research institutions, extension workers, and members of the National Research Advisory Group (NRAG). However TFC was concerned that there were no specific financial resources available for internal meetings between MUCCoBS and TFC to disseminate the research findings. In Zambia, ABF felt that the research was not relevant to its immediate business needs and would have preferred to have commissioned the necessary research on an *ad hoc* basis.

Whilst we do record RPO disappointments of the relevance of the RI research reports, we have also observed significant appreciation of the BEEP platform for meetings between the two sets of groups. BEEP clearly broke new ground in bringing the parties together.

6. Assess how the project has led to improved integration of agribusiness related courses in the curricula at college/university level.

As a result of their involvement with RPOs through BEEP, research curricula in both Tanzania and Uganda have been modernised according to the needs of the users and the market. Students can now get placements with RPOs and the research is applicable and relevant. MUCCoBS have been considering establishing a new department to train extension agents. This response is an adaptation to changing market needs and fills a unique and highly specialised niche. The transformation process at MUCCoBS coincided with BEEP activities as a result of the FPR approach that guided the way to a closer relationship and understanding of the problems facing farmers. Their research information is available by internet (esrf) as well as in the forthcoming Journal of Co-operative and Business Studies. Significant output has also been in Swahili, in this context a user-friendly language. In Malawi, Bunda College of Agriculture introduced an Agribusiness course, after discussions with NASFAM over the need for their graduates to have agribusiness training.

We record significant impact of BEEP on university curricula.

4.5. RELEVANCE

1. Assess the relevance of exchange activities to producer organizations and their members.

Where exchange activities took place, they were regarded by the RPOs as a very successful aspect of the BEEP project (Text Box B), although business performance in relation to exchange activities was not measured directly. In some cases, e.g. Malawi, the RPO felt that a better match was needed between the skills and interests of the exchange person and their destination.

Seeds of Sustainability: Zambia vs Uganda, 2005

The first of its kind exchange visit occurred in 2005, when Brenda Kachapulula (BK), a programme officer at ABF (Zambia), went on a ten month exchange visit to UCA (Uganda). The visit was sponsored by FK. BK found the experience very useful as it opened her eyes to the way farmer groups and associations were organised in Uganda, as well as gaining organisational insights into the management structures of UCA. She found the RPOs very motivated and knowledgeable. Unlike Zambia, the administration of districts is decentralised in Uganda and receive their own funding from government. This means that the RPOs have control at the local level over the delivery of goods and performance of the extension service. At the organisational level, she observed how UCA raises funds and how their different programmes are split up, while maintaining the core operations of UCA. She also became aware that while farmers want to follow market trends by diversifying into new products, this is hampered by directives from government that have designated certain areas for specific crops, according to the natural resource potential of the area. Policy changes are being negotiated by UCA.

In return, BK, a horticultural exporter by training, shared her agronomic skills with a local Ugandan cooperative and trained them in the growing of paprika. However, she feels that the exchange visit would have been well rounded off by a return visit of cooperative members to paprika outgrower projects in Zambia.

BOX B: A case history describing the successful exchange visit of an RPO staff member from Zambia to an RPO in Uganda⁸

2. Assess the relevance of tools, methods and means of communication for experience exchange purposes.

The knowledge gained by staff members sent out on the exchange visits funded by FK, were reported back in the form of quarterly reports to FK. Verbal communication and briefings at RPO level did occur, but to make full use of the programme, structured feedback and planning sessions need to be set up at the RPOs in order to integrate the information and lessons learned by their returning exchange staff. MUCCoBS organized four BEEP National Workshops. Participants came from research institutions, RPOs including TFC, MVIWATA as well as those that had been studied during the research, in order to get their feedback. It is not known whether this information was made available to the RPOs, and whether it was in a user-friendly (at grassroots level) form in each case.

3. Assess the relevance of research topics

Common research themes:

Research themes were discussed and jointly agreed by researchers and partner RPOs from Malawi, Zambia, and Tanzania (after discussions at national fora in 2002) at the regional forum in Moshi in October 2002 where Uganda and Mozambique attended as observers. This agenda guided researches from 2003-2006.

'Cross regional research themes for a continued process were identified' (BEEP project document, 2006). This may have been the case in the early days of BEEP, but

⁸ An additional benefit should also be recognized: The first participant on the FK exchange programme from INESOR to Makerere University , Richard Bwalya, performed so well that Dr. John Mugisha got him connected to a scholarship network and he did his masters degree at Makerere.

this changed as RPOs needed different themes relevant to their own experiences and problems. Perhaps the common issues were not as relevant as individual issues, or perhaps the common issues needed to be more clearly defined and related to the immediate needs and concerns of RPOs.

Research abstraction and disjunction of timescales

The relevance of the research, compared to the problems experienced by the RPOs, was affected by the two main factors. Firstly, the nature of research abstraction which placed the problems within a contextualised framework, and secondly, the disjunction of timescales where longer term, more complete contextualised pictures did not merge well with the need for immediate short term solutions to immediate short term problems. It may thus be questioned whether a set of contextualised research papers are necessary for a rapidly changing business environment.

Polarisation of direction and needs

Due to similar issues and problems facing different sets of partners, natural attraction and therefore, polarisation of direction and needs, occurred between Malawi and Zambia on the one hand, and Uganda and Tanzania on the other. This would have demanded different research programmes that could perhaps have been more relevant to each group. Cross cutting issues, especially gender, which had been a research topic in 2003, did not seem to elicit much interest and was regarded of much less relevance compared to market information.

4. Assess the relevance of the project in relation to the external environment including assessment of external conditions that have influenced project implementation.

There is little doubt that the general political trends in the 4 participating countries have been towards market liberalisation and privatisation of major components of the primary rural industries. This has been a longstanding policy of many of the important donor and lending agencies and a conditionality for receiving support. At the same time producer-owned organizations, including modernised co-operatives, have received support at national level, both from farmers and farmers groups and – sometimes reluctantly – from the governments themselves. BEEP has clearly captured major international and national trends, and at an early stage. It was timely.

4.a Roles

Assess to what extent the institutions have fulfilled their responsibilities and managed their roles efficiently and how the collaboration between the organizations involved has functioned generally. Special emphasis should be given to how Norges Vel has contributed with practical advice and specific input to the RPOs, and how NIBR has contributed with practical advice and specific input to the research institutions.

BEEP became a project as the ideas of a prominent Malawian RPO leader, a leading Tanzanian academic and an experienced Norwegian researcher merged at a critical time. With the possibilities of Norad funding through a construct between Norwegian institutions and institutions in Eastern and Southern Africa, BEEP emerged from the thoughts of three people to a major institutional collaborate effort.

NV and NIBR emerged as the Norwegian partners. NV's strength lies in its organizational experience with RPOs and NIBR as a research institution with a significant track record in rural research in both industrialised and developing countries. NV certainly has a strong agricultural bias whilst NIBR's strength is not directly agricultural or the primary rural industries but rather development issues. Whilst there could have been other Norwegian partners considered, the two selected represented a logical choice.

We believe NV has performed its duties adequately, with a significant improvement in timeliness and structure during the 2nd half of the BEEP project. Weaknesses signalled in the NCG report in 2005 were certainly less visible in 2007. NV's experience in RPOs in this region of Africa was obviously helpful although its previous strong alignment with the now failed co-operative movement in some of the countries may have burdened it at the start of the project. We get a sense that NV was more familiar with past organizational structures and their strengths and weaknesses than with the emerging highly competitive and business-oriented models now part of a privatised, liberalised and globalised economy. In this sense NV may have gained knowledge from BEEP, and has been orderly in its administration of possibly unfamiliar business directions. It has certainly practiced due diligence in its handling of financial matters, even to the extent of possibly being overcautious. Being a development agency it met a challenge in becoming overall responsible for the BEEP project that was dominated by a research component.

NIBR was given a task to perform in essentially carrying out quality control of the scientific work. Among peers this is a difficult task. NIBR's remit was probably not realistic in as far as the aim for international publication of the research results was unrealistic, or possibly even misconceived. Being a minor project in the overall NIBR portfolio, BEEP never became a priority among NIBR staff and fell victim to frequent personnel changes. We do believe NIBR made a genuine effort to fulfil its intended role as a mentor to the African RIs. However, such a role was probably not wanted by these RIs who had had little experience with NIBR and may have felt they had equal and more relevant expertise themselves. NIBR's role may have been a design fault from the onset but NIBR must be credited with its efforts to fulfil its obligations.

The local African research partners saw a different, more complex, longer term and more contextualised picture than the RPOs. Delivery of results took too long both with respect to RPO expectations and as per contracts and was always delayed especially in Malawi and Zambia.⁹ BEEP had difficulties in identifying interested researchers in the academic communities and to ensure continuity once contracts were placed. Uganda and Tanzania were exceptions. Although technically playing leading roles, the RPOs found themselves with only a small share of the budget with perceived inferior influence on the choice and conduct of the research. However, the successes of Uganda in fostering good cooperation indicates that this difficulty may not have been structural in the project but rather reflect inadequate communication at the onset and during critical phases of the project.

Originally the BEEP coordinating functions (the secretariat) were located in Uganda but due to inadequate performance it was moved to ABF who had a proven track record of good performance with the SFAP project, funded by Norad. ABF seems to have had a good hand with its BEEP activities, and has been praised throughout.

4.b Short and long term impact of BEEP

It is much too early to assess the impact of BEEP in the 4 countries (and on NV and NIBR). What is clear is that it has created and fostered remarkable new links between RPOs in the 4 countries, and that the FK add-on component has been particularly valuable to achieve this. In Uganda the direct links between the RPO and the RI has been exemplary, and can provide an example for Tanzania where the RI had a less mature RPO partner. Our impressions from Malawi and Zambia is that the RPOs are

⁹ Since a draft was circulated to interested parties, the following comments have been received: “ As indicated earlier I have problems with the general comments in this paragraph as related to the Zambian case. I equally do not agree with the “difficulties in identifying interested researchers in the academic communities”. The table below gives some insights into delivery of reports.

Year	Research Topic	Comments
2003	How RPOs are affected by economic agricultural policies and how they work to influence these	Delivered on schedule
2004	Gender Dimensions of RPOs	Delivered on Schedule
2004	Governance and Business Enterprise Development of RPOs	Delivered on Schedule
2005	Value Chain Analysis of Selected Crops Under Contract Farming	Delivered on Schedule
FOOTNOTE CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE	Access to Market Information for Increased Market Share for Selected Crops Under Contract Farming and Piloting of the Electronic Market Information Hub	Delivered late Consultant Ignored to complete assignment
2006	Documentation of Success and Failure stories of two case study RPOs	Delivered late
	Piloting of the Electronic Market Information Hub	Not yet delivered by ABF consultant

It is clear from the above that the comment that, research reports in Zambia were **always delayed** is misplaced. In 2005 ABF suggested that we engage a certain consultant to do the “Access to Market Information Study and Pilot the Information Hub”. This consultant submitted a report which did not fulfil the contract TOR and INESOR spent extra time in finalizing the report hence the delay. The consultant even neglected to Pilot the Market Information Hub. ABF and NIBR are formally aware of this. In 2006 “The Documentation of Success and Failure Stories of two Case Study RPOs” was delayed because the Lubulima Agricultural and Commercial Cooperative Union (one of the two case study RPOs) was reluctant to be interviewed because of internal politics between them and ABF. ABF and Norgels Vel are aware of this. Finally ABF and INESOR agreed to pilot the Market Information Hub which was neglected in 2005. ABF identified a consultant based at their premises to pilot the hub. The consultant started working in September 2006 and has to date not delivered. Meanwhile, ABF has indicated that it understands this while INESOR does not understand it. In a nutshell INESOR is not entirely to blame for the delayed reports.

well equipped to handle research findings but that the RIs are not yet well tuned in to RPO needs.

4.c. Sustainability

In BEEP one of the most frequently mentioned obstacles to achievements was the loss of staff that had had previous dealings or experience with the project. This resulted in loss of institutional memory especially at the Norwegian end (due to staff turn-over and policy changes), and affected both the research component (especially at NIBR) as well as the personal and organizational links that had been established between the African partners of BEEP and their Norwegian counterparts at NV and Norad. Loss of institutional memory also occurred when Norad changed the way that aid was administered to its African partners. Other donors stepped in with financial support for a certain period of time, and helped the RPOs to survive (notably USAID at ABF). It must be noted that sustainability needs to be seen with a long lens into the future, because although initiatives like ABF, NASFAM, BEEP are remarkable and noteworthy, they are competing for very scarce resources (qualified and highly committed staff; organizational capacity, management, relationships; enabling policy environments, networks, infrastructure, and funding). Support from a donor has to have stability built into it, so that the resulting organizations, programmes, or projects can develop a reasonable level of resilience. Only then can we speak of, or expect, sustainability after external support has been withdrawn.

Another key success of BEEP is that various organisations that were involved with the project are or have become, ‘Learning Organisations’. ‘Learning Organisations’ are able to adapt positively to changing circumstances (see Text Box C). Good examples are ABF, DAGEAB, MUCCoBS, NASFAM, NV, TFC and UCA. Each of these organisations accepted the challenge of developing differently. In BEEP there was learning from differences, living with differences, and the challenge of how to develop common ground from this, thereby developing a broader vision, a longer lens. During 2005, for example, NV was forced or decided to undergo a re-organisation effort and focus more on its core strengths and interests. Likewise, in Zambia ABF choose to work with the private business sector rather than cooperatives, while in Uganda, UCA chose to work with cooperatives. Thus the reflective environment within the RPOs improved as they became aware of more structural aspects of the project. This will have sustainable, wide-ranging results down the line, long after BEEP has finished.

BOX C: The learning organisation

The self-organiser

Kourdi (2003) quotes Peter Senge (1993) as follows: In a complex and fast-moving business environment, there is an advantage to being a “learning organisation” that adapts to the winds of change. Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, highlighted this in 1993.(footnote 6). Self-organising businesses need to be designed and led by people who can create an organisation where its constituent parts and, above all, its people continually “self-organise” around emerging strategic issues, fluidly developing the organisation. In this way, accepted formulas and perspectives are constantly challenged and revised.

To achieve this, organisations need the ability to develop learning communities (networks of people working together without traditional top-down management to improve effectiveness) to generate innovative solutions for commercial opportunities. Innovation and collaboration are crucial competencies for operating in environments that are difficult to control and rapidly changing.

Although innovative in both concept (research into agribusiness developments among south-south partnerships in post structural-adjustment economic environments) and approach (formative process research), the research directions, themes and methodology were not considered mainstream by either the Norwegian or the African research institutions at the time that BEEP was initiated. This was a first obstacle to

Obstacles and risks faced by BEEP

Although innovative in both concept (research into agribusiness developments among south-south partnerships in post structural-adjustment economic environments) and approach (formative process research), the research directions, themes and methodology were not considered mainstream by either the Norwegian or the African research institutions at the time that BEEP was initiated. This was a first obstacle to BEEP.

The second obstacle was the difficulty in identifying suitable institutions and researchers interested in following the identified lines of research. For practical reasons, mainly to do with the need to get the research initiated as per the proposal, institutions and researchers were co-opted, with perhaps less commitment or understanding of the overall project objective, than would have been desirable.

The third major obstacle has to do with the dynamics inherent in the way funds are solicited from donor agents and their set requirements, which may not have much bearing to the situation found at ground level. Thus while BEEP was based on a cutting-edge concept which courageously charted new territory, it was in essence a small pilot project, with a limited budget, running for a restricted period of time. In effect, on the one hand, it sought to establish relationships and effective dialogue between south-south partners concerned with small-scale agricultural production. At the same time, it sought to document the development of this relationship and to provide market and other information to strengthen the relationships.

Given that this particular set-up had been non-existent before BEEP, neither as a formulated concept, nor as a *de facto* situation, it would have been reasonable to expect many unforeseen circumstances to crop up. If BEEP had been launched as less ambitious in its scope and objectives, with more emphasis on its collaborative dimensions, there would have been more room for adaptive management. This is not to say that timeframes linked to specific outputs, from particular individuals at identified institutions, should not have been put in place and agreed upon by the collaborating partners.

In addition, for projects of this nature (investigative, innovative and cutting edge) and size (small budget, few partners, limited time scale), the need to address a large number of issues in the proposal, according to the requirements set out by the funding agent, is often responsible for creating unrealistic objectives and expected outputs. While it is understood that funding agencies naturally want to follow particular themes and to ensure that there is cost efficiency, it is counter-productive to expect this at the cost of having fewer, less ambitious but more realistic objectives, outputs and expectations. The theme of poverty alleviation may be used as a good example. Any project that seeks to interact with rural producers will touch on issues associated with poverty, since by its very nature, rural life in Africa is at the interface of poverty.

It is unrealistic however, to expect any impact or change in this multiple dimensional situation in the short term.

Although BEEP was criticised in the NCG review about the lack of a log frame, this was unrealistic and not in the spirit in which BEEP was formulated, i.e. as a limited budget, restricted period, pilot project.

4.d. Possible additional interventions to ensure sustainable impact

The ESAANET project document, for which BEEP essentially was a pilot phase, clearly elaborates **good strategies** for the strengthening of a collaborative regional business and market integration network..

Attention should be paid to the likely **political influence** that strongly networked, successful, business-minded organisations would have, and the necessity to lobby for progressive policy changes, so that these can be put in place during stable periods.

The usefulness of research results and the **sense of ownership** of the research by the RPOs needs to be strong. This can only be achieved if the research agenda is set by the farmers/RPOs and efforts are made to approach the issues from their perspective.

Data should be collected and analysed in a **gender-disaggregated** manner.

Research findings must be made available to a much wider audience. This will enhance the credibility of the network and its ‘alleged’ activities. ‘Alleged’, because, if there is no proof at ground level about the findings and their usefulness at this level, there will be no credibility and trust, and therefore no ownership apart from passive opportunism.

Exchange studies must be carefully planned and resources must be set aside for follow-up activities to ensure that knowledge gained is held and distributed within the organisations. The **relevance of topics for study visits** should be discussed within the network, and experiences gained should be shared with the members of the network.

Publication of research findings should be produced in user-friendly form, in **local languages** (in farmer booklets or newsletters). Farmers’ capacity to understand complex research findings should not be underestimated, provided that the information is communicated in ‘farmers language’, i.e. relevant, practical, and useful. Examples may be sourced from The Swedish Cooperative Centre (SCC) which has produced a series of specialized farmer booklets. Also, various CGIAR centres such as ICRISAT, ILRI and CIAT have produced communication materials for farmers, as well as FAO in its PRGA programme.

Communication flows need to be established and improved. Additional media such as radio, videos, and DVD/CDs for use by communities, as well as information about the website, internet resources and email in order to access market information, should be introduced to farmers and RPOs.

Bilateral agreements concerning disbursements against outputs need to be set up at an early stage in the contract

4.e. Sustaining collaborative and sustainable win-win environments

In order to engender a feeling of security, dialogue between the donor and the recipients needs to be initiated about their **long-term relationship**. While failure rates amongst donor projects are known to be quite high, what for example are the consequences of a successful completion of project objectives?

A long-term relationship should in no way be interpreted as a long lasting **dependency** relationship due to the inherent power play between donor and recipient.

Process facilitation should be introduced from the beginning of the project to develop dialogue appropriate to address project objectives as well as the members' aspirations, which evolved as the project proceeded. Power issues and roles need to be made transparent and be negotiated between the players, each of whom brings their own perspective. There is a great need to acquire the services of the most professional, highly trained, qualified and experienced, committed, independent process facilitator (specifically not a social-worker-counselling type person, nor the mechanically-minded, engineer type) that can be contracted locally. The emphasis should be on a local person, (emphasis: not a foreigner) due to the need for an understanding of extremely subtle power issues comprising social, political, historical and cultural dimensions. Both GTZ and OD International hold a register of local OD consultants. Initially this may be considered costly and therefore the costs should ideally be borne by the donor organisation at the initiation stage. However, it is assumed that the consultant will facilitate the development of the network in such a direction that the gains made will have economic benefits for the organisations involved in the development process.

Additionally, the organisations involved need to see the difference such a facilitator makes in relation to a **successful attainment of project objectives**. Although this would add to the financial burden, the organisations could decide to make a financial contribution so that this would become a sustainable intervention after the donor organisation has withdrawn.

4.f. Exit strategy

- Suitable exit procedures would include **putting structures and strategies in place for RPOs to integrate the regional network in their own strategies**. If a close fit/match is made between project objectives with the needs and aspirations of the RPOs, then a high level of project ownership will develop, to the extent that the project exit would have little impact. However there may be financial implications after the exit of the project and certain key activities would no longer be sustainable. Such effects should be identified early on so that suitable survival strategies for the RPOs may be negotiated in time and put in place in a forward thinking, planned manner.
- **Exit strategy related to Norges Vel withdrawal from the programme¹⁰:** Special emphasis was put on a progressive exit strategy for Norges Vel. It was considered a high priority that the network was left with the best possible options to maintain the valuable contact that had been established, and that it could draw the benefits of a continued network beyond 2006.
- ABF has agreed to run the secretariat after 2006.

¹⁰ Extracted from the GLO-01/408-26 Business Experience Exchange Programme document, 2006

- Information exchange will continue through the website (<http://www.beepafrica.com>) which has been established for the purpose of the network.
- ABF will bring up a proposal to the other organisations and institutions for a contribution to the running costs of the secretariat, including the administration of the website. This will make continuous contact and exchange between the parties possible, even if external funding cannot be found.
- A continued exchange through the south-south FK exchange programme will allow the partners to continue their exchange of business experiences and to learn from each other. ABF, as the secretariat, will continue to coordinate the exchange after 2006.
- The secretariat will search for possibilities for external funding for continued running of the network
- RPOs and research institutions within each country express great satisfaction in the new and BEEP-initiated contact that has been established between the two different types of institutions. One low-cost model will be to make use of graduate and as well undergraduate students who need research themes for the finalization of their master's degree. Such a model will give the RPOs a new possibility to order low-cost, but yet quality controlled research on themes of their interest.
- NIBR has expressed interest to continue with their involvement in BEEP beyond 2006, with special focus on the research institutions, and will look into possibilities for external funding after 2006.
- Norges Vel will also be a partner of the network beyond 2006, and give their input when requested. Norges Vel intends to stay in close contact with the RPOs within the network also in the future, for possible inclusion in other future activities Norges Vel may be involved in within the region

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1. THE CONTEXT FOR MEASURING RELEVANCE

Projects may fail in the aspects measured, while small successes often go unnoticed. Rural peoples' lives are extremely complex and have multiple facets that require attention. Projects often make demands that increase the complexity and loads that individual people, groups, organisations and communities are able to carry. It is also extremely difficult, to judge specific needs and particular attitudes, as these can vary greatly within a short timeframe, according to circumstance and events. Project interventions therefore need to be adaptable. Resource-poor people have, by definition, few buffers, and dependency on outside sources of income develops easily. Because the opportunity costs are so high, relevance should thus be measured by very small achievements, in terms of genuine participation and ownership over a longer period of time. Genuine participation and ownership can be measured according to how the affected persons perceive responsibility for the project vision and its activities, i.e. within the context of their own lives, and not that of the project.

Perhaps the most important, all pervading, question that should be addressed at each stage is whether a particular objective would be empowering for the local communities and justification provided how so.

5.2. BEEP CONCEPT, STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

The way the BEEP project proposal was developed was more a result of the organizations and institutions that were available in each country, than a specific choice made of the institutions that became involved in the project.

To its credit, the four year BEEP was in essence an extended pilot project, and clearly delineated the opportunities, as well as constraints, areas either of strength or disempowerment and unrealistic expectation, as well as project structures that need strengthening such as timeframes against disbursement, improved ways of timely disbursement of funds, output based disbursement of funds, need for localizing control over funding and contracting, and local website management

It appears that the FPR needed to be refined through more precise facilitation to bring researchers to a closer understanding of the needs of RPOs. It proved very useful in bringing the RPOs and research organisations to become acquainted with each others' points of view. However, at the earlier stages (e.g. in the aftermath of the 2004 and 2005ARMs), assumptions of understanding on all sides lead to disappointment and failed expectations. Process facilitation should have been introduced at an early stage to create more dialogue between donors, implementers, RPOs, local researchers and the Norwegian research institute.

Early recognition and change in strategy would have been a productive organisational development intervention. It appears that good 'process facilitation' would have been more beneficial at the ARMs, rather than the structured, formal presentation programme.

Where exchange activities took place, they were regarded by the RPOs as a very successful aspect of the BEEP project. The strong link between the BEEP network and the FK is believed to have mutually strengthened the outcome of both networks.

Due to similar issues and problems facing different sets of partners, natural attraction and therefore, polarisation of direction and needs, occurred between Malawi and Zambia on the one hand, and Uganda and Tanzania on other. This would have demanded different research programmes that could perhaps have been more relevant. Cross cutting issues, especially gender which had been a research topic in 2003, did not seem to elicit much interest and was regarded of much less relevance compared to market information.

5.3. RESEARCH VS RPO NEEDS

The research topics were defined independently of exchange visits or of experiences learned from them. As such there was no link between research and exchange activities.

Budgetary allocations highly favoured research at the cost of business exchange activities.

The project design should have had more room for interaction between NIBR and the local researchers.

The vibrant atmosphere that is generated in business discussions is hardly compatible with the complex, detailed, abstract and contextualised reasoning that is the backbone of academic research

Two main problems were identified regarding the relationship between RPOs and research. Firstly, the need for immediate short term solutions to immediate short term problems faced by the RPOs did not merge well with the nature of research abstraction, which placed the problems within a contextualised framework. Secondly, the disjuncture of timescales, with research having longer term, more complete contextualised research pictures, did not satisfy the need for immediate short term solutions to immediate short term problems faced by the RPOs

5.4. SUSTAINABILITY

It must be noted that sustainability needs to be seen with a long lens into the future. Support from a donor to initiatives like BEEP has to have stability built into it, so that the resulting organisations, programmes, or projects can develop a reasonable level of resilience. Only then can we speak of, or expect, sustainability after external support has been withdrawn.

Although research is frequently dependant on external funding sources, its long-term benefits may not always be immediately tangible. The research results produced in the course of the BEEP project is available as a valuable resource on agricultural markets, for the COMESA region.

There is much need and potential for scaling up the feedback to farmers to enhance the sustainability of these achievements. Information and communication channels need to be broadened and developed in terms of published materials specially prepared and made accessible to end users (farmers). This would also include scaling up of radio programmes to disseminate research findings in appropriate form accessible to end-users.

We believe that on balance BEEP was a valuable pilot project and most relevant in the present environment. We are glad that it is followed up by new activities, although we feel that it could have fruitfully continued beyond the initial 4 year period. We sense that institutional change at NV may have discouraged a natural extension of BEEP, but we do commend NV and its partners for the efforts to build on BEEP, benefitting from BEEP's strengths and learning from its weaknesses.

APPENDICES

- A: List of Acronyms
- B: List of Tables
- C: List of Text boxes
- D: Terms of reference
- E: Evaluators abbreviated CVs
- F: List of Persons Interviewed
- G: Documents consulted for this evaluation

APPENDIX A: List of Acronyms

1. General

ADB	African Development Bank
APO	Agricultural Producer Organization
AU	African Union
BEEP	Business Experience Exchange Programme
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme
COMESA	Common market for Eastern and Southern Africa
FK	Norwegian Peace Corps (Norges Fredskorpset)
GTZ	German Technical Assistance
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency syndrome
ICA	International Cooperative Alliance
IM	Institutional memory
NCG	Nordic Consulting Group
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NIBR	Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NORAGRIC	Department for International Environment and Development Studies, Norwegian University of Life Sciences
NV	Royal Norwegian Society for Development
NRM	Natural Resource Management
OD	Organisational Development
RI	Research Institute
RPO	Rural Producer Organization
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis
UMB	Norwegian University of Life Sciences

2. Tanzania

MEMCOOP	Member Empowerment in Cooperatives
MUCCoBS	Moshi University College of Co-operative and Business Studies
NRAG	National Research Advisory Group
SCCULT	Savings and Credit Cooperative Union League of Tanzania
SMEs	Industrial small and medium Enterprises
TICU	Tanzania Industrial Cooperative Union

TFC	Tanzania Federation of Co-operatives
3. Malawi	
APRU	Agriculture Policy Research Unit at Bunda University College of Agriculture
CARD	Centre for Agricultural Research and Development at Bunda University College
NASFAM	National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi
4. Zambia	
ABF	Zambia Agri-Business Forum
CPGA	Central Province Growers Association
INESOR	Institute of Economic and Social Research
UNZA	University of Zambia
ZNFU	Zambia National Farmers Union
5. Uganda	
UCA	Uganda Co-operative Alliance
DAGEAB	Dept of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, Makerere University

Appendix B: List of Tables

Table A: BEEP cooperating partners, Rural Producer Organizations (RPO), Research Institutions (RI), and Norwegian partners. Organisational abbreviations are listed in Appendix A.

Table B: Historical Timeline of BEEP

Table C: Main objectives and key activities of the BEEP programme

Table D: Analysis of time (hrs) spent on activities at ARMs

Appendix C: List of Text Boxes

BOX A: A case history of a visit by Ugandan farmers to their counterparts in Zambia

BOX B: A case history describing the successful exchange visit of an RPO staff member from Zambia to an RPO in Uganda

Appendix D: Terms of reference¹¹ – Evaluation of the project

Business Experience Exchange Programme Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia

Background

Development of the project

The Business Experience Exchange Programme (BEEP) was started in 2002, following a pilot formative process research project carried out in the same year. The pilot project involved stakeholders in Malawi (NASFAM), Zambia (ZNFU/Agribusiness Forum) and Tanzania (Co-op College). During the pilot project, the participating organizations exchanged visits in small groups. The purpose of these visits was to identify particular strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and problems of each organisation. Their findings were summarised in reports and distributed to all stakeholders. A national workshop was then held in each country, where the delegation's findings on their own Rural Producer Organization (RPO) were discussed. The national workshops were followed by a regional workshop, held in Moshi in Tanzania, where representatives from all countries were present. This workshop concluded the relevance of further activities along the same lines, for the purpose of improving business performance by the rural producer organisations in the respective countries. A draft project document was developed and circulated among the partners, and subsequently the Business Experience Exchange Programme was established.

In addition to the above-mentioned partners, representatives from Uganda and Mozambique were invited as observers at the regional workshop, and subsequently resulting in Uganda joining fully from the onset of BEEP. The network of RPOs and research institutions within Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia was thereafter established.

Main objective

The main objective of the programme is to strengthen RPOs' business performance, through exchange of business experience, and thereby indirectly contribute to reduced poverty at farmers' level. This has been supported by the use of the formative process research method. Formative process research had been adopted by NORAD to enhance the learning process as well as performance within development programmes. It was the first time the private sector and community-based organisations have adopted such an approach.

Main immediate objectives

- Improved business performance at RPO level.
- Exchange of business experience between RPOs.
- Documentation of successes and failures in existing business concepts.
- Application of formative process research.

¹¹ Note that the timing of this review was since changed. Evaluators comment.

- International publications of research reports obtained through BEEP.
- Regional business and research networks.

Target group

The target group for the project is rural producers through their organisations (the RPOs).

Presentation of the partners involved in the project, and their respective roles:

Norwegian partners

The Royal Norwegian Society for Development (Norges Vel) is a Norwegian development organisation working with business development and process management using value chain approach. Norges Vel is based in Norway, but has been working with development projects in Africa since the mid seventies. Norges Vel has the overall programme and implementation responsibility, and has supported the programme financially through its cooperation agreement with NORAD.

The Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) is an interdisciplinary social science centre for urban and regional research. The Institute is charged with a national duty to conduct environmental research and works internationally on urban and regional research from an environmental and developmental perspective.

Within an urban and regional research framework NIBR studies and reports on the following sectors: public administration, governance and democracy; welfare, health and living conditions; planning, land use and urban development; regional development, business environments and demography; and environmental and development issues. NIBR holds the responsibility of coordinating the research component of the project.

Malawian partners:

National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM) is a member-owned, democratically governed, and non-political organization providing business services to its smallholder farmer members. Founded on the principles of collective action and self-reliance, NASFAM empowers farmers at the grass-root level as they form cohesive village-based clubs and financially independent business associations in order to improve incomes and contribute to economic development. Its mission statement is that NASFAM exists to improve the lives of smallholder farmers. Through a sustainable network of smallholder-owned business organizations, NASFAM develops the commercial capacity of its members and delivers programmes that enhance their productivity.

In line with the above, NASFAM's major objective is to promote farming as a business. In order to achieve this some of the member services include linkages to local and export markets, credit facilities for clubs and public/private sector service providers and training in crop production, business management, HIV/Aids and Gender mainstreaming, infrastructure development, good governance and leadership.

Agriculture Policy Research Unit (APRU), Bunda College of Agriculture, was established in April 1994 at Bunda College under Centre for Agricultural Research and Development (CARD). The Unit operates within the framework of Bunda College administration with the guidance of an Advisory Committee. APRU was established with a view of enhancing the performance of the agricultural sector through conducting policy oriented and collaborative research. The type of research conducted ranges from short, medium and long term. Other complimentary functions are training, outreach and documentation.

Tanzanian partners:

Moshi University College of Co-operative and Business Studies (MUCCoBS) was established in May 2004 by the government by transforming the former Co-operative College Moshi into a University College. MUCCoBS is a constituent College of the Sokoine University of Agriculture. It is an autonomous institution with own Governing Board accountable to the University Senate and Councils. The University College is organized into two faculties – Co-operative and Community Studies; and Business and Information Sciences. There are two Directorates; and Institute of Continuing Co-operative Education and Training that coordinates the University College regional centres (about 18); and the Bureau of Research and Consultancy Services. The BEEP Research project is coordinated by the Bureau of Research and Consultancy Services, formally the Directorate of Research and Consultancy Services.

The Cooperative College initially played dual roles of being research institute as well as that of the RPOs through the MEMCOOP Project. The Tanzania Federation of Co-operatives and some local RPOs were involved in the BEEP activities through a loose National Research Advisory Group that was constituted in 2003 drawing members from RPOs, government, and Research Institution. In 2004, the University College handed over the role of RPOs to the Tanzania Federation of Co-operatives (TFC).

Tanzania Federation of Co-operatives (TFC) is the National umbrella organization of cooperatives in Tanzania that Promote, Serve and Coordinate the development and prosperity of all Cooperatives. The current membership comprises about two Apexes (which are Tobacco and Cotton Apexes) and Six unions (Due to the current Cooperative law passed in 2003 allows even the Primary societies and Union to be direct member of TFC) responsible for growing and marketing various members produces such as Tobacco, Cotton, Cashew nut, Coffee, Cereal crops and two Specialized unions known as SCCULT (Savings and Credit Cooperative Union League of Tanzania) and TICU (Tanzania Industrial Cooperative Union) that caters for industrial small and medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Ugandan partners:

Uganda Co-operative Alliance Ltd. (UCA) is the apex of the co-operative movement in Uganda, which currently number over 3,000. Its mandate include providing education and training to all levels of co-operatives in the Ugandan co-operative movement, lobbying for good policies to develop the co-operatives, representation and to undertake development programs and projects. Its mission is to provide high quality services to co-operative organisations in the country and their members. Two areas in which UCA is currently undertaking development projects

include agriculture and rural finance in which over 100,000 small-scale producers are involved.

Faculty of Agriculture, Makerere University (Makerere) is one of the pioneer Faculties of the University that has progressively contributed solutions to challenges faced by agriculturalists during the production of food and fibre in an ecologically sustainable manner. It is a public institution mandated to produce qualified specialists and practitioners to meet the agricultural challenges, and to conduct research that is relevant to the development of agriculture in Uganda. Its mission is “to produce professionals and practitioners, generate and disseminate knowledge and technologies for sustainable development of agricultural and agro-industrial sectors”. In undertaking research, partnership engagement has been of paramount importance resulting in strong links with national and international training and research institutions.

Zambian partners:

The Zambia Agri-Business Forum (ABF) is the hub in terms of information regarding outgrower schemes in Zambia. The forum has vast experience in facilitating contract farming, to produce high-value quality agricultural produce as required by markets / processors. The ABF members contract over 150,000 farmers annually.

The Institute of Economic and Social Research, UNZA (INESOR), is the social research wing of the University of Zambia (UNZA). It was established in 1937 by an Act of the then Northern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly as an Independent Grant Aided Social Science Research Institute. INESOR carries out basic (theoretical) research, applied (including formative) research, collaborative research and consultancies. Research is either self-initiated or commissioned by government, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and individuals.

External evaluations and follow up

In 2005 an organisational and strategic assessment of Norges Vel was carried out by the Nordic Consulting Group (NCG). Though not being the main subject for the review, some criticism was raised concerning BEEP (reference is made to Norges Vel's revised application to Norad for 2006 funds, where the main points of criticism is presented and commented on). It is of relevance that due to recommendations given in the NCG review, a revised application for 2006 had to be developed. This led to a delayed process in transfer of money from Norad to Norges Vel in 2006, and thus none of the planned activities within BEEP received project funding until the beginning of April.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which the objectives of BEEP have been achieved, and to assess the relevance of BEEP as providing basis for a continued regional network of producer organisations.

Objectives of the Evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation are:

- Assess the short and long term impact, as well as the sustainability of the project

- Assess the project organisation and administration including the roles and interventions of the organisations involved
- Propose additional interventions that may be considered to ensure sustainable impact of the project.
- Propose additional interventions that may be considered to take the network a step forward, especially emphasizing the producer organisations and their benefits from regional integration.
- Make specific recommendations on actions needed to take the network a step further.

Scope of work

Effectiveness

- Assess effectiveness of the project implementation including an assessment of how outputs are in line with achievement of project objectives.
- Assess effectiveness in implementation of lessons learned from research at RPO level.

Efficiency

- Assess the efficiency of the project: Have outputs been produced at reasonable cost and in an acceptable time frame.
- Assess the economic viability of the project with quantification of main benefits and costs, and/or assessment of cost efficiency.

Impact

- Assess impact of the project on regional integration and information sharing with special emphasis on business development.
- Assess impact of exchange activities on business performance at RPO level
- Assess impact of research carried out on business performance at RPO level
- Assess impact of the project as enabling RPOs to commission formative process research
- Assess how the project has contributed to the creation of a collaborative environment between research institutions and operative Producer Organizations.
- Assess how the project has led to improved integration of agribusiness related courses in the curricula at college/university level.

Relevance

- Assess the relevance of exchange activities to producer organizations and their members.
- Assess the relevance of tools, methods and means of communication for experience exchange purposes.
- Assess the relevance of research topics
- Assess the relevance of the project in relation to the external environment including assessment of external conditions that have influenced project implementation

Roles

- Assess to what extent the institutions have fulfilled their responsibilities and managed their roles efficiently and how the collaboration between the organizations involved has functioned generally. Special emphasis should be given to how Norges Vel has contributed with practical advice and specific input to the RPOs, and how NIBR has contributed with practical advice and specific input to the research institutions.

Based on the above, recommendations should be given on exit strategies for project support and on possible new interventions needed to sustain project impact. In particular, attention should be given to:

- How the current project exit strategy fits with the findings in the evaluation.
- Ways to sustain a collaborative win-win environment between RPOs and research institutions within the respective countries, also considering measures needed to obtain this at a financially sustainable level.
- How to reinforce the business orientation of such a network in order to obtain regional integration and collaboration between business oriented producer organizations with the objective of improved business performance as well as national and regional business and market development. In other words, how the RPO part of the network can develop to become a strong, regional business and market integration network.

Personnel

The Evaluation is to be implemented by a team of two experts, one from Southern or Eastern Africa and one from Norway, the latter with the role of team leader – in order to ensure easy communication opportunities with NORAD about the results of the evaluation.

The team should have the following expertise:

- Agricultural and social economics, well grounded in social research and with knowledge of formative process research
- General knowledge on local business development
- Solid evaluation experience from international development projects
- Previous experience with networks, farmer groups/co-operatives, business/institutional cooperation
- Regional knowledge of Southern and Eastern Africa (especially within rural development)
- Experience in assessment of research projects
- Fluency in spoken and written English

The consultants will carry out the evaluation together in a participative manner. The team members will organise themselves independently.

Timing and reporting

The duration of the evaluation will be 20-24 working days for each of the consultants in February -March.

The draft report shall be delivered to Norges Vel by 1st of March, 2006. The draft must be written in English. Norges Vel will circulate the draft to all partners involved in the project for comments, which will be sent back to Norges Vel within 1 week of receipt of the draft. Norges Vel shall then present comments from all parties within 4 days to the Evaluation team.

The Evaluation team will consider the comments and deliver the final report to Norges Vel within 5 additional days.

Together with the final report the evaluation team will also deliver the completed form for Evaluation Summary, as attached to this terms of reference.

Appendix E: Evaluators abbreviated CVs

Stein W. Bie

Is a Norwegian and has his background initially in the management of natural resources in developing countries, and in farming systems there. Following his university training at Oxford and Cambridge in England, he spent 6 years in The Netherlands in the Dutch government with the mapping of soil and natural resources. He later became Director of Research at the Norwegian Computing Centre and Professor of Physics at University of Tromsø, applying the new computer tools and satellite technologies to resources mapping. In 1988 he became Director of Noragric at the (then) Norwegian Agricultural University, and in 1995 Director of Research in the new Sustainable Development Department of FAO, Rome. In 1997 he became Director General of the CGIAR centre International Service for National Agricultural Research. He returned to Norway in 2003 to partly rejoin Noragric, and partly to develop an organic dairy farm with historic landrace breeds of dairy cows and dairy goats.

Saskia van Oosterhout:

The agricultural diversity and natural resource management of smallholder farmers has fascinated me for a long time and led to my doctoral studies on crop diversity in low potential areas. In 1992 I received my PhD on The Biosystematics and Ethnobotany of *Sorghum bicolor*. Living in Zimbabwe at that time, I saw the need for enhanced dialogue between smallholder farmers and policy makers. I subsequently initiated SALRED (Southern African Trust for Local Resource Development), a not-for-profit organisation (NGO) based in Zimbabwe. It supported and promoted sustainable livelihoods of rural persons through the management and use of natural resources. - My areas of competence include:

- Policy development and analysis regarding people-centred management and use of natural resources; development of organisational policies and procedures; risk management analysis and capacity building of rural communities; development of Participatory Research and Methodology.
- Rural development and plant genetic resources specialist; participatory action researcher. Extensive fieldwork experience in natural resource use and (agro)-biodiversity conservation.
- Adaptive management of biodiversity; research into agro-biodiversity; conservation of crop plant genetic resources, effects of gender dynamics on crop agriculture.
- Extensive fieldwork experience and participatory action research in rural development, risk management, and implementation of adaptive management measures by local communities, developed enabling governing structures through

collaboration between local and national bodies. Specialist in gender dynamics in agriculture and land-use change.

- Analysis, monitoring and evaluation of natural resource management, land-use change and risk management by communities. Systematic planning and development in agricultural and natural resource management with a focus on climatic and economic change.
- Extensive networking among local, national, regional and international partners and collaborators.
- Sourcing of funding from international donors.
- Facilitation of organisational change processes, training for empowerment.
- Freelance consultant in the above areas.

Appendix F: List of Persons Interviewed

Malawi

RPO

NASFAM

Dyborn Chibonga Chief Executive Officer

Betty Chinyamunyamu Director, NASFAM Development

Candida Nakhumwa Manager Communications, Monitoring, Evaluation

Research

CARD

Kenneth Wiyo Director

Stanley Khaila Previous director

Tanzania

RPO

TFC

Gerald Malima Executive secretary

Willigris Mbogoro Director of Cooperative Development

Agnes Namuhisa Education and Publicity Manager

Research

Moshi University College

Prof. Suleman Chambo Principal MUCCoBS

Jones Kaleshu Deputy Principal, Academic

Faustine Bee Director Research and Consultancy Services

Prof. Leo Donge Dean, Faculty of Business and Information Sciences

Justine Bamanyisa Head, Publication and Documentation

Ndyizerwa Manta Director, Institute of Continuing Coop Development and Education

Zambia

RPO

ABF

Felix Chizhuka Chief Executive Officer

Daniel Ball Chairperson of ABF board

Brenda Kachapulula Programme officer and horticultural exporter

Research

Uganda

RPO

UCA

Leonard Msemakweli General secretary
Innocent Muhereza Project coordinator

Research

Johnny Mugisha Senior lecturer, Makerere University

Appendix G: Documents consulted for this evaluation

1. BEEP Evaluation TOR
 2. BEEP programme document, Jan 2006
 3. 2004 Annual Regional Workshop Programme, Lilongwe
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