

Meeting Minutes

Date: 5th November 2021

Location: Online via Microsoft Teams at 11:00–13:00

Meeting Presentation: [link](#)

Agenda

1. Notes and comments on [previous MoM](#)
2. FSLC Partners achievements in September 2021
3. Focus theme: Effective market linkages for rural farmers (Market Linkage Association)
4. Contingency Planning – Presentation and Assessment Teams
5. Mapping of the African Migratory Locusts in Zimbabwe (OXFAM)
6. Partners' Corner
7. AoB

Participants 42 registered, 48 attendees, 29 organisations represented

List of organisations:

ACF, ActionAid International, ADRA Zimbabwe, Amalima Loko CNFA, CARE International, Catholic Relief Services, CIAT – HarvestPlus, CIMMYT, CRS, DanChurchAid, FACT Zimbabwe, FAO, FEWS NET, FNC, FSLC, Help from Germany, IRC, Jairos Jiri Association, LGDA, MapAction, MeDRA, Mercy Corps, NAZ, Oxfam, Save the Children, TdH Italy, Trocaire, USAID, WFP, Zimbabwe Red Cross

Discussion

1. Notes and comments on the previous Minutes of Meeting

No feedback on the previous minutes of the meeting held on 15th October 2021. Minutes approved without any further changes.

2. FSLC Partners achievements in September 2021

During the month of September 2021, FSL Cluster partners reported having reached 336,000 people with either in-kind food distribution, cash, or vouchers modality in both rural and urban areas. Among them, 315, 824 received cash-based support in urban areas, 4,682 in rural areas while the remaining 15,448 beneficiaries received in-kind food assistance in rural areas.

September confirmed the status of the assistance reported in August, with cash assistance taking 95% of the share of food assistance, and in-kind only 5%. Food in-kind also shows a growing trend within its low absolute figures, whereas it has almost doubled compared to August. Under the current circumstances, only 5 agencies have reported being active in food assistance (only 1 national NGO) in the month of September, while the contribution to the HRP remains low due to the pre-lean season period.

Agriculture and livelihood assistance reported a total of 161,000 beneficiaries in September. This includes 53,330 people benefiting from the provision of crop and small livestock inputs, 103,335 extension officers and farmers received training, extension, and advisory services focusing on good agriculture practices with an emphasis on climate-smart agriculture, on and inputs for agro-ecology interventions such as soil conservation practices, soil reclamation techniques, and restoration of degraded landscapes. Lastly 4,813, beneficiaries received assistance in the rehabilitation of critical assets for animal survival and agriculture (dip tanks and animal drinking troughs) through other modalities (e.g., contracting a company).

[September dashboard](#)

[Partner presence dynamic map](#)

3. Focus theme: Effective market linkages for rural farmers (Market Linkage Association)

Background to Market Linkage Association:

In 2007 – 2008, SNV did a study on contract farming, and took the results out for verification at a couple of workshops. One of the outcomes of the workshop was a demand by delegates to 1) Have a forum where there could be a regular meeting between the private sector and the development sector to discuss issues pertinent to smallholder agriculture and 2) Markets Linkages in particular. In August 2008, the Market Linkage Working Group was developed. There was a steering committee of which FAO was a member. As with most working groups, they're normally set up for particular projects, and when the funding runs out, the working group closes. The steering committee decided in 2010 to form a subscription-based association, so it would be independent of general funding and be funded by members. One of the achievements in 2009 was the development of a concept notes of a Zimbabwe Agricultural Development Trust to finance smallholder agriculture. This was successful and received funding and we have the ZADT as an important actor. In 2011 MLA was constituted by organizers and as of August 2021, there were 44 paid up corporate.

[Market Linkage Association Presentation link:](#)

Questions/Responses

FAO: As you mentioned, a lot of work has gone into contract farming and the closed markets with very mixed success. Could give two or three tips on best practice tips to organizations that are thinking about going into contract farming, how to avoid some of the pitfalls experienced in the past and some of the advantages to help organizations that are thinking about starting up a contract farming operation.

ACF: Also examples what development organizations should not do, worst practices.

Response:

Here are a couple of the key ones:

- When designing a market intervention, it's really important to start off with an exit plan, not to get there haphazardly and then decide what to do at the end. It is important to know how the project is going to be sustainable and leave it in the hands of the private sector and the farmers. We're looking for market players and need to have capacity and for the bigger companies, a genuine inclusive ambition, not just an add-on where you're putting already busy staff to look after a program. A smallholder market program is pretty complex, and it needs a great deal of attention. Also, remember that as a facilitator, development partners are external to that system, their work is to facilitate for a temporary period, three or four years, and then they exit to leave something working without them.
- Avoid free handouts: Whenever we do something for free, we're displacing a genuine market player. Somehow, it is not always possible, but it should be avoided as much as possible. Also, cash transfer programs are coming in, they are far better than free input program because they empower farmers to make their own procurement decisions and also involve the markets and then just on contract farming.
- Usually, the geographical area is defined for a development partner moving in, so it's important to understand the context, what works there already. Whether it is livestock area, an irrigation scheme, it is important to understand the context of what is working. There is no need to try and reinvent any wheels, so the first thing to do is speak to the farmers, to understand.
- Bearing in mind the difficulties with the climate, dry land agriculture is always going to be very risky. We've been involved in programs such as in Gokwe South, where we promoted sesame for a number of years. First season with sesame was fine, and then we were hit with La Nina in 2016 2017, and it was heart-breaking to see the devastation that flooding can do. But then that was followed by two seasons where the reverse happened. Sesame is supposed to be a drought tolerant crop, but no crop is drought tolerant if the dry conditions come at the wrong time.
- As development partners, we are always under a lot of pressure to reach many farmers, and by doing this, to cover a lot of farmers, we spread our resources very thinly, which is a disservice to

the farmers themselves, who don't get the support they need, and also makes logistics very challenging. Trying to serve those farmers and the extension officers become very exhausted by trying to cover such a large ground.

- Contract farming on irrigation schemes can be tricky. There's often a difference of opinion on irrigation schemes. While it is great because you don't have such a big area, there you've got very many characters, some of whom are serious farmers, while other ones are not. Productivity is often not fantastic, even on schemes. If you're looking at a scheme, be very sure that this is a good operating scheme where the farmers are serious, where they've got some track record.
- Not all companies are suited to contract farming. Many of them would like to have a development partner to come in, operate contract farming system, put them in inverted commerce for them, then the farmers won't see the company for the entire season. Then at the end they come and pick up the produce. No relationships being developed at the end of that program. Other areas of company default are on the late supply of inputs. This is really bad, every day that the inputs are late, prejudices the yields that farmers could potentially get. This is far more common than we would like to see. Sometimes the business doesn't have the cash flow and it ends up as a real crisis as a facilitator.

OXFAM: How can we make markets work for our small farmers? How can they work for the poor that we work with? From the presentation on the closed market with Nespresso, we had an example of 700 farmers producing around 18 metric tons of coffee exported, which totalled to around \$110,000 per year. I know it's relative, but if you do the direct calculation, you see that every farmer would get around \$146 per farmer per year. If we had to divide it into months, it becomes much lower. So how do we, development partners, practitioners in this sector make the market work for our farmers? The other part is how can we eliminate the middleman?

Response:

On the approach that we've taken with some of the sorghum threshing groups. We've assisted them in developing their own contract farming systems. In Nkayi, for example, we have a threshold that is now contracting 30 farmers. These local communities know the best farmers and they're there on the ground to monitor production and there's social capital there as well and that is working well, and it is increasing the amount of food at that local level.

With the example of TechnoServe with the coffee export scheme, we need to bear in mind that all farmers have multiple income streams. They don't have their entire farms put over to coffee. So, this would just be one line of income coming into the farmers over the years. Farmers in those areas that we mentioned they've invested quite a lot into coffee. Maybe the one thing I didn't say is that the company Nespresso is paying a premium on coffee produced by smallholders. It is above the world price. And this has galvanized more and more of the smallholders to invest in coffee, to rejuvenate the older plantations. So, the money doesn't look that huge, but I think adds up, as you consider the other activities that these farmers are doing.

There are extreme cases where things work. For example, feeder finance program has benefited families by adding value to their livestock and ended up as genuine win-win. We've seen chili programs, which is a fairly high value crop, and in our experience, there's been enough value in the chain for everyone to get a fair piece of the money. So, having experienced many of these problems we sort of also thought, okay, close markets is fairly difficult. But the majority of our farmers, they're in open market systems. They're producing at their own sort of expense. Or maybe they get a bit here and there from government and maybe developing partners, but they are under no obligation to sell to any particular market.

So, it's these sorts of markets that we have in more recent years been supporting by developing these village businesses that then provide services to help the farmers to become more efficient in many of the areas we saw from the first part of today's presentations, many of our districts being food insecure, so many of the districts that net sinks when it comes to food, there's not much export going out. Therefore, whatever crops most of our markets are selling, they're being absorbed and consumed locally. If we can make these more efficient, we can get to a level where there would be surplus for some of the urban markets.

The middlemen are there because they provide a function, they're much aligned. But without them, this critical link between many of our farmers and livestock offtake to the abattoir, it wouldn't be there, and people would suffer. So unfortunately, I think the problem that we all have is that they take too much of the cake and maybe the farmer doesn't get enough. So, this might be an area where we need to focus until such time the systems are put in place where the middleman is no longer needed. But I guess for this to happen, there would be to be a local level of aggregation. In some areas it is possible having farmers coming together and aggregating themselves, coordinating directly with the abattoir who then comes and picks up the cattle. That's a very worthwhile and helpful intervention. As development organizations, we can only cover so much ground. Many farmers fall out the loop side. I don't see middleman sort of disappearing anytime soon.

FAO: What is the role has or is Government played/playing in terms of creating a conducive environment for contract farming to be successful?

Response: The economy needs to be in good shape for any type of business to be done. Many companies are struggling. And we've seen a reduction in interest by the private sector to get involved in inclusive business models because of the economic hardships. Just recently, I was at a horticultural financial investment forum and farmers were bemoaning the enabling environments, which they called not enabling. They were saying that things like the 40% retention on exports is really hurting the bottom line, and it's preventing the growth of that section. If we've got companies that are having difficulties, they're not going to want to invest in an inclusive model. This has also affected one of our programs. We facilitate, as you saw earlier, a flower seed contract

and the company contracts in farmers had such an enormous problem. Trying to explain to farmers about the export retention from governments, farmers just couldn't understand it, didn't believe it and felt that they were being cheated. And it was really tiring relationships to such an extent that the whole program was looking in danger. So, we asked ZIM trade to come in and they came, spoke to farmers and as a completely independent organization, that matter was resolved. There are challenges when you talk about legislation of contract farming, for example, there is legislation in place, but it's unenforceable contract farming, more like a social contract. Very rarely does anyone go to court with farmer defaults. It is more like rules of the game on paper if you like that contract, but it's important to have that contract so that those rules are very well understood.

CRS: Thank you so much for the presentation. It is exciting to see that we have unmet market demand for some commodities, that presents opportunities for small holder farmers. From your experience for how long should one invest in small holder farmers for them to be deemed ready for the markets?

Response: I guess this question would be from someone or an organization that has been assisting farmers on the production side. If it's a high value crop, farmers should be making pretty good money even in first season. If it's lower value, of course, they should make a profit after one season. But it might take a bit longer. But market development programs when we started in an area will take us at least two or three years. As we establish these village businesses, it takes two or three years to really coach, train, develop the capacity of these businesses in order that they can function well.

ActionAid: How is the participation of men and women smallholder farmers in contract farming? Any recommendations on that?

Response: Again, this is value chain specific. Under the LSSP, we found that there were slightly more women being engaged in contract farming than men. But if I just get back to the village businesses, we often use self-help groups as a foundation on which to develop an enterprise. And these groups are often dominated by women membership. So, we find that the establishment of businesses in the rural areas is very empowering for women, and it enables them to also get into value chains that were traditionally men dominated, for example, cattle. We know that most cattle are owned by men. But if a woman group comes in and starts manufacturing stock feeds, it enables women entry into that value chain, and they will profit even more than the men because we know those further out the chain or providing services generally make a bit more money than the actual producers themselves.

Q: Any attempt in regional markets? If yes, any best practices?

Response: We haven't really had much on regional markets because we find markets in the areas where we operate. As I mentioned, productivity is fairly low and the produce that is produced can be sold either locally or into a nearby centre. But obviously we have an exception. Going back to the Chili contract where chilies are exported to South Africa, this is not directly by smallholders but an intermediary company that aggregates and sell their produce to the market. The other example was the flower seeds, which are exported to the Netherlands. Once again through an intermediary. We haven't had any examples of farmers exporting directly generally, that would take a lot more capacity. It's more sophisticated operation for the moment. There is an intermediary company doing that.

Christian Aid: Member of the Market Linkages Association: Wanted to add and share that we have had experience in working down the chain on promoting climate adapted crops like small grains to facilitate demand of these products beyond just the farm gate. For instance, we have worked with companies in developing consumer products that are more appealing to consumers that have found their way to conventional supermarkets. This encourages people to have a more positive look at these products and demand more of them. So, we went around market development as well as product development itself, looking at the specs and qualities that are required to make up specific consumer product and go through various tests, etc. So that you come up with products that are more appealing that also mixed with other ingredients again, to make the by-products of these products more appealing. And so that your sorghum is not only consumed for the reason that is climate adapted, but also because consumers do prefer those products. So that's been some of our experience with them. This we also linked it with 19 buffers products.

There are already products that are selling in Spars, Pick 'n' Pay etc. This demonstrates that it is possible, and we do hope that because these companies are making money out of this, they will continue to demand the raw materials and that the raw materials will continue to come from small produces.

Comment: The interest in traditional grains, is really growing to an extent, even if we look at the harvest data from last season, and also in terms of continuous input that we have in this direction from partners and organization working in the area bringing in the voice also, and the interest of a smallholder farm. So traditional grains are definitely something that organization can have to look at very much interest.

4. Contingency Planning – Presentation and Assessment Teams

[Contingency Assessment presentation link:](#)

[Contingency Assessment team link:](#)

There are two major plans that organization are working on at the moment.

- i) Lean Season Response plan: to make a more comprehensive resilience building and livelihood support and the food assistance plan for the coming season. The second part of this process is being coordinated through the cluster system directly and for which FSLC cluster partners were contacted in August and some of you shared your inputs and has now been consolidated. Some organizations in October have already started implementing.
- ii) Contingency plan, which is a result of an inter-cluster effort with all the clusters present in Zimbabwe trying to identify and move forward in the preparatory action as well as get ready for the real response when something happens or what could happen.
- iii) Contribution to Contingency plan is still open. In terms of tools, questionnaire, early warning systems, mapping, whatever it is, and in this regard we invite partners who wants to highlight anything that is being introduced in the country or in the making or any good experience in terms of early warning systems or the pre-crisis and or methodologies for maximizing efficiency and effectiveness of the post crisis of the response component, we are open for suggestions.

5. Mapping of the African Migratory Locusts in Zimbabwe (OXFAM)

[African Migratory Locus in Zimbabwe Presentation link:](#)

Oxfam is working with MapAction on a locust reporting tool and have been going through a pilot number of phases and would like to present an update on the prototype system and going forward. Oxfam would like to advance work and anticipate reaction across Southern Africa region and in Zimbabwe and is committed to supporting the African migration locust mapping through Piloting, a tool for collating data around locust sites. Would like actors to identify, coordinate, and mitigate the potential negative consequences

FAO: Not sure if you're aware or already participating, but there is an anticipatory action community of practice in Zimbabwe, which is jointly chaired by FAO and the Meteorology Department. If you're not part of that, would suggest you join. It's a very active and quite vibrant platform for sharing experience and trying to align multiple approaches to participate in actions. Can assist you with contacts there if needed. Also strongly encourage you to link up with FAO. FAO has a regional locust response project. I notice that you've been funded by USAID. The FAO one is also funded by USA, so we need, I think, some close collaboration there. So, would be happy to talk to you more about that and see how we can definitely bring in some of the technology that you're using into the locust analysis and response. Also hope you are working with the government and through the DRSS specialty services because the locust issue is a very sensitive issue. If not again, can facilitate that because you must be careful with going into these areas and you need to coordinate closely with government.

MapAction: We will make sure we are working with the government either directly or through our partner organizations. Great to find out more about the anticipation group that you mentioned and also the work more generally on Locust response and see if we can clarify and share technology and ways of working. Although Oxfam/MapAction are creating a system that we can put in the hands of the cluster, we would like someone to take us forward in terms of managing this and creating the monthly outputs that can feed into these sorts of meetings. And whether this is something that we joined up with, the work already been done by FAO, or it's separate as long as it's addressed and there's someone to take it forward.

FAO: What's the institutional set up? Are you a private company that's been subcontracted by Oxfam? And what's the role of the country office in Zimbabwe?

Response: MapAction is an NGO, and has been working in humanitarian sector for 20 years and have a close partnership with Oxfam in dealing with numerous humanitarian crises. But in this case, we've been brought in to help with the locust monitoring because we know that there's a real gap in monitoring of African migratory locusts and red locusts. Much of the attention previously has been on the desert locust we wanted to try and help fill this gap.

FAO: Really encourage you to discuss that offline and I can put you in contact with the right people there.

6. Updates from Partners

No updates shared

7. AOB

Nothing reported

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