



Information System Better-iS

ICRAF/ZALF - Output

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Summary:

ICRAF and ZALF conducted within the Better-iS project two international conferences to bring together researchers, policy makers, business as well as civil society representatives. Furthermore did the events allow an in-depth discussion of the preliminary as well as final project outcomes. The factsheet is also designed as guide to prepare other practitioners as well as researchers for potential stepstones when organising such an event.

Title:

Organisation and realisation of international Better-iS conferences

Problem and Objective:

Due to the international and multi-stakeholder design of the Better-iS consortium as well as the up-to-date policy relevance of the projects output by the time of initialisation, two international conferences were realised to allow the researchers to optimise the projects output on the one hand and to incorporate latest policy developments on the other. Location for both events was Bagamoyo, Tanzania situated approximately 60 km North of Dar es Salam. The conferences did function as platform for the presentation of the projects preliminary findings and additionally allowed the researchers to gather additional data from official and local level, UN staff and practitioners. Furthermore they served as market places and exchange platform for representatives from different spectrums such as businesses, NGOs, ministries, farmers and local scientists.

Method:

The conferences were integral part of the Better-iS project from the early planning steps. A highly politically sensitive research area such as biofuels, which long-term effects were everything but clear by the late noughties, demand more than others research areas for consistent checks and feedback-loops with political decisionmakers and ongoing business developments.

The consortium decided to involve, in addition to high-level speakers, also farmers from Tandai village in Kinole ward as well as Laela in Sumbawanga district, as these locations were chosen as research sites for the first two village surveys. In an initial step, potential participants were identified by all partners. Some, as ICRAF and ZALF, were able to supply contact details of suitable farmer representatives as well as agricultural officers and teachers from the local level who were capable of reflecting the findings and discussions and inform their fellow villagers about the findings of the data gathered in their settlement. Others such as e.g. Wuppertal Institute could successfully identify ministry officials as well as business representatives their research was partly based upon. Additionally did external partners such as e.g. DIE, supply contact details about potentially important key persons the consortium had no contact with before.

There are procedures that should be followed when inviting senior government officials e.g. directors, permanent secretaries etc. Generally invitation only via Email is not recommended as a formal letter of invitation has to be delivered to the ministry in person. The inviting institution will be requested to send another representative after a time period of two or three days to pick up an answering letter informing the institution whether the invited participant will be available or whether a representative is sent. However, receiving such an official letter is not a guarantee of participation as officials in those positions might have critical and sometimes urgent political issues to work with. Generally has the availability of senior government officials always been a challenge due to their responsibilities.

On the ground organisation was realised mainly by ICRAF Tanzania. In general, two to three ICRAF representatives were involved in the organising process. For the second Workshop, they were additionally supported by a ZALF representative.

In general, all participants need to be compensated by paying per-diems which do vary according to the position of the participant. Challenges could arise when the organizing institution is using different guidelines for paying per diems/allowances and not the government guidelines. Government employees would always want to be paid using government rates regardless they are invited in a meeting organized by governmental or nongovernmental organizations. To harmonize the situation, sometimes the organizing institution could decide to pay them using government rates.

Results:

As a matter of fact, the involvement of high ranking officials in conferences at least in Eastern Africa does depend on personal contacts as well as availability and, last but not least, on the up-to-dateness of the conference topic. In this respect, Better-iS was quite successful as the conferences did not only serve as platform to channel Better-iS findings to the experts designing biofuel policies but it also allowed a rare exchange between policy makers, farmers and business representatives. Other road blocks were harder to overcome: Visa questions (research visa vs. tourist visa), transportation issues as well as financial statements from various HQs were sometimes putting immense pressure on the organising team. In total, Better-iS is nevertheless convinced that channels could be established which will allow the consortium to reach beyond the scientific community and approach policy makers in Tanzania and Germany. Furthermore did all partner institutions establish a network on the ground which allows follow up projects in accordance to the projects findings.

Insights about the second conference as well as statements of selected participants can be observed via a youtube movie: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4uA6eRmKus>

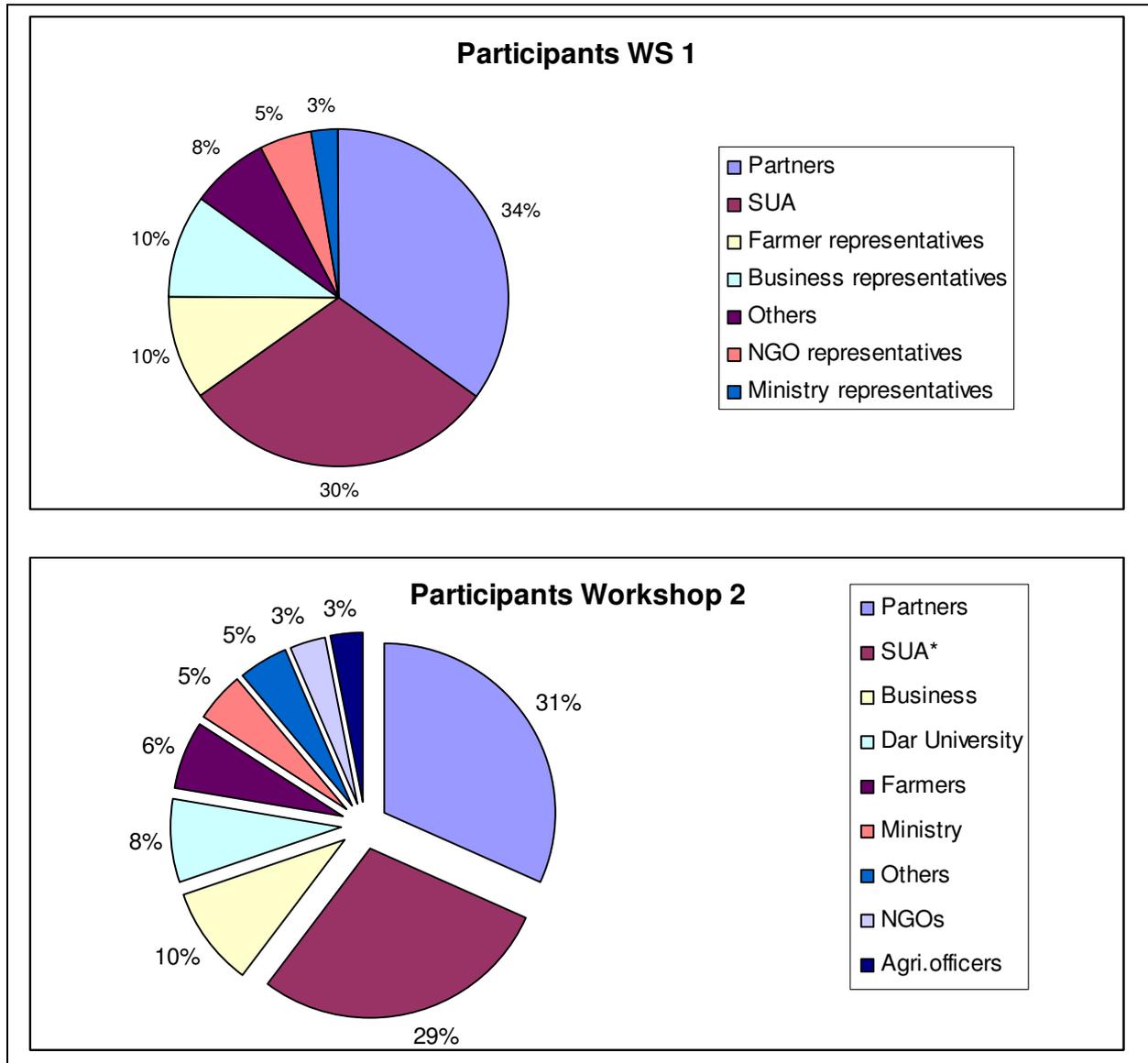
Lessons learnt:

For practitioners / For research:

Conferences, workshops, seminars and other kinds of meetings need good preparation and proper planning to ensure that everything goes well as anticipated. Issues to consider when making arrangements for any kind of meeting, depending on the objective of your meeting/ workshop/ conference etc. identify the relevant participants;

1. The location/venue should be output and cost oriented. Therefore, a place should be selected which would maximize participation (avoid setting meetings close to the offices of the participants as they might only participate for half-days). On the other hand, the selection of the location/venue should consider the aspect of cost in terms of transport, accommodation and other living expenses
2. Think of the size of the group you want to invite in the meeting; in most cases the size of the group is detected by the objective of the meeting, required composition of the participants and the financial aspects
3. Experience suggests that, when dealing with government employees/officials the governmental guidelines should be closely observe for paying allowances/perdiems to government employees. Referring to other than the official payment schemes might cause problems. However: The internal payment structure (and therefore the daily allowances) might be communicated in the forefront to potential governmental officials to avoid misunderstandings
4. Though in some circumstances organizations have been paying participants according to their own policies, experience has shown that the decision could bring challenges particularly when dealing with government employees and sometimes could interfere with the participation and efficiency of the invited participants
5. Getting high ranking officials on board has in most circumstances been a challenge, although one would always be sure of getting a representative of a lower level
6. High ranking officials would most of the time prefer to use their official vehicles, so one should include in the budget the costs for fuel and allowances for their drivers (experience has shown that, they would always come with their vehicles regardless of the transport arrangements made by the organizers such as a transport to pick all the participants together).

Documentation





Article in Guardian 14.12.2010 about the first Better-iS meeting in Bagamoyo

Higher quality downloadable via: http://www.better-is.com/files/Artikel_gross.JPG

Entire reports of second annual workshop 2010 and final conference 2011 in Bagamoyo available:

http://www.better-is.com/files/Proceedings_of_Better-iS_Workshop_II_Bagamoyo_2010.pdf

http://www.better-is.com/files/FS37_Report_of_final_conference_Bagamoyo_Dec_2011.pdf

Participating institutions: International Food and Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Institute for Environmental Economics and World Trade IUW, World Agroforestry Centre ICRAF, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Leibniz-Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF e.V.), Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa. Associated partners: SOKOINE University of Agriculture, Ministry of agriculture, food security and cooperatives Tanzania