Harnessing regional and local food procurement to build resilient smallholder agricultural systems

Sharon Amani*1

1School of Sustainability – 800 S. Cady Mall Tempe, AZ 85281, United States

Abstract

Ninety eight percent of the estimated 870 million people who currently do not have enough food to eat live in developing countries. Global trends toward urbanization, growing incomes, and shifting preferences toward higher trophic-level diets exacerbate the challenge of feeding the earth’s population, projected to reach 9 billion by 2050. Against the backdrop of a globalized market economy, the food price crisis of 2008 highlighted the damaging impact of food insecurity upon political, economic, and social stability. One notable response by governments and development partners to the 2008 crisis has been renewed investment in agriculture-led growth, including crop intensification, value-added processing, and the promotion of linkages between smallholder producers and markets.

Institutional procurement of food commodities from smallholder farmers in developing countries has the potential to shift producers from relatively low value farm-gate sales to markets which offer a premium for large quantities of high quality commodity. The World Food Programme’s Purchase for Progress (WFP P4P) is a five-year pilot project spanning 20 countries across Africa and Latin America with the objective of identifying structured trade and public procurement opportunities that support smallholder agriculture and can be adopted by national governments. The program complements capacity building of farmer organizations in production, post-harvest handling, quality standards, accounting, and leadership with the purchasing power of WFP, the largest food buyer in many of the participating countries. Smallholder farmers engaging in P4P contracts exhibit a shift away from traditionally resilient cropping patterns and practices toward the WFP basket of commodities, prompting investments in selected seed and agrochemical inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. The objective of the study is to identify how smallholder procurement initiatives can be designed to enable sustainable social-ecological systems which are resilient to economic and climatic shocks. Using household-level surveys, farmers’ organization records, and focus groups discussions in Burkina Faso and Rwanda, this study seeks to understand how P4P has impacted agricultural practices, marketing decisions, livelihoods, and local ecosystems. Preliminary findings suggest that while the availability of a high quality marketing channel increases producer income through contract sales and upward pressure on farm-gate prices, dietary diversity scores and food security at the household level does not necessarily improve. In addition, crop intensification programs may diminish adaptive capacity through increased producer debt as well as compromised water and soil quality. Recommendations on how to incentivize the adoption of conservation agriculture techniques and how to modify the procurement process to promote resilient ecosystems are explored.

*Speaker
**Keywords:** Food security, smallholder agriculture, resilience, social ecological systems, sustainability, markets, livelihoods.