



### West African Farmers' Organisations and the Current Climate: Opportunities and Challenges

*The farmers' movement asserted itself strongly in West Africa in a very unique context—that of the 1980s, a time of State withdrawal and structural adjustments, a vital associative dynamic in rural areas, the involvement of charismatic farmer leaders, and the support of committed technical and financial partners. This movement became progressively structured, from village groups to supra-national networks at the turn of the 2000s. Since the advent of these farmers', livestock farmers' and herders' organisations (FOs) and notably over the past ten years, the sub-regional context has changed greatly. In particular, after the 2008 food crisis that was followed by other food and climate crises in the Sahel, we saw new armed conflicts, dropping agricultural ODA, rising land prices and renewed interest in agriculture from the private sector, a springing up of initiatives by the international community to fight food insecurity, and the announcement of ambitious agricultural investment programmes, etc. In response to these major changes, FOs have attempted to adapt and make themselves heard while simultaneously facing recurrent internal difficulties unique to all social movements. After approximately forty years of existence, where is the West African farmers' movement today? How have FOs' strategies and practices changed? How are they adapting to new challenges? This brief attempts to address all of these questions.*

#### I. Contextual Changes for FOs Before and After 2008

**The 1980s: structural adjustment policies.** In the 1980s, the structural adjustment policies driven by the World Bank and the IMF led to the withdrawal of West African States from the agricultural sector and economic liberalisation. In response to this situation, many farmer services previously provided by the State—such as input supply, agricultural produce marketing, or agricultural advice—were entrusted to the private sector, both companies and associations, usually without any guarantee of the existence of an alternative supply for quality services affordable to the largest number. FOs were a response to this gap left by the withdrawal of the State from agricultural services. Simultaneously, the State withdrawal was accompanied by a drastic cut in public agriculture spending, by both States and development partners. The deterioration was such that in 2003 in Maputo the heads of African States pledged to allocate a minimum of 10% of their national budgets to the agricultural sector, but did not give themselves real means to fulfil their pledges.

**The 2000s: regional integration and the promotion of public policies negotiated with FOs.** With economic liberalisation, West African countries entered more clearly into sharp international competition, sometimes much to the disadvantage of local production for certain products, pulling down agricultural prices. From the start of the 2000s, and in the wake of the CAADP (the continental agricultural programme driven by NEPAD), States put the issue of agricultural and trade policies back on the agenda. These policies were notably supervised by

regional institutions (WAEMU, ECOWAS, CILSS, etc.) whose steering role was strongly reaffirmed. Following the WAEMU agricultural policy (APW), adopted in 2001, the ECOWAS common agricultural policy (ECOWAP) became in 2005 the framework of reference for 15 West African countries. On the national level, National Agricultural Investment Programmes (NAIPs) were drawn up at the start of the 2010s and have now been launched in nearly all West African countries—with the exception of Guinea-Bissau. On the regional level in West Africa, the regional policy agenda has ramped up since 2012, primarily around the operationalisation of the ECOWAP regional agricultural investment programme (RAIP). ECOWAS has thus set up many Task Forces bringing together socioprofessional stakeholders—notably networks of FOs—and specialised institutions in the region with the aim of turning the orientations in the RAIP into concrete action. At the end of 2013, the Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF), the technical arm for RAIP implementation, was inaugurated.

**2008: a turning point in the food crisis and the 'return of food production'.** The 2008 crisis and the hunger riots in West African capital cities revealed producers' and consumers' vulnerability to the volatility of food prices on international markets, as well as that of States too widely dependent on imports to ensure their populations' food security. Combined with a climate crisis, this period also revealed the growing fragility of rural households and the phenomenon of progressive impoverishment (decapitalisation) among certain categories of

farmers, driven by the chronic insufficient profitability of their farms. Thus, this period acted as a true electroshock at all levels: the international community re-focused its attention on food value chains that had long been neglected in development policies and programmes. States also reacted in the short term with input subsidy policies and more structurally by forming national

security stocks. Taking advantage among other things of the rising investments by foreign companies in the agricultural sector in West African countries, many States attempted to promote and invest in large-scale production models ('agribusiness') seemingly more efficient than the predominant family farming systems.

### Post-2008: A Profusion of International Community Initiatives to Fight Food Insecurity

In response to the 2008 crisis and the persistent food insecurity that has followed in recent years, the international community—although also in a bad spot because of the financial crisis—overflowed with initiatives, which were sometimes uncoordinated and little connected with regional frameworks and policies.

- Following the G8 Summit in 2009, the World Bank, at the request of development partners, set up a fund—the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP)—destined to channel some of the committed resources to specific 'food security' actions.
- In 2010, the Scaling Up Nutrition movement was created under the auspices of the United Nations with the aim of closer support for the food and nutrition security policies of voluntarily participating countries in the region.
- The following year (2011), under French presidency, and to prevent new price shocks, *the G20* chose West Africa to be a pilot region for the development of a system of reserves to supplement national stocks.
- Among the most recent initiatives to date, the G8 Summit in June 2012 launched the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, seeking in this way to encourage private investment by multinational and local companies in six test countries in sub-Saharan Africa.
- The same year, and faced with the magnitude and succession of food crises in the Sahel, the European Commission promoted the 'Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative – AGIR' along similar lines as the Zero Hunger programme launched simultaneously within ECOWAS. Faced with all these initiatives, regional and local policies have been somewhat unclear and little heard, and FOs have often been scattered.

**Growing interest in livestock.** More recently, regional integration institutions and partners have showed renewed interest in the livestock sector, notably pastoral herding: the growing visibility of regional herders' networks and their development of incisive advocacy strategies led, in 2013, to two declarations (N'djamena in May and Nouakchott in October) that both recognised the mobility of herders and their herds as a *sine qua non* for the resilience and sustainability of pastoral systems

and set the priority outlines of a regional policy to support pastoralism. At the end of 2013, this process was accompanied by the formulation of the Regional Support Programme for Pastoralism in the Sahel (PRAPS, an ambitious regional programme with World Bank support), launched under the auspices of CILSS that also set up a specific Task Force on pastoralism in early 2014.

## II. Changes in the FO Landscape

**The West African farmers' movement took root in a multiplicity of grassroots FOs:** groups of farmers around a crop or territory, women's organisations, young people's organisations. Progressively, these FOs formed federations at higher geographic levels within farmers' unions, federations and umbrella structures, eventually forming national platforms. In the early 2000s, the West African farmers' movement structured itself on the regional level by creating the Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA, the West Africa network of farmers' and producers' organisations) whose primary mandate is to support structuring among farmers and promote policies favourable to West African family farmers. More recently, livestock farmers' and herders' organisations in the sub-region have also asserted themselves.

**A trend of increased structuring by value chain:** In recent years, FOs have faced changes in institutional, economic and policy conditions driven by States, donors or the market, which have had repercussions on how they are structured, in particular by pushing them progressively toward structuring within value chains. Progressively, and notably to meet sub-regional food sovereignty challenges, value chain FOs have been organised in certain countries, and ROPPA instigated the creation of regional consultation frameworks by value chain, notably for food value

chains that are key to food and nutrition security. One sign of this is the regional consultation framework for rice producers (CRCOPR), formed in January 2011 with the aim of influencing rice value chain development policies. More recently, a framework for livestock was formally formed.

**As an extension of this 'value chain' dynamic, inter-branch organisations** have also grown strongly in countries, sometimes carried by FOs themselves or by projects. Here, inter-branch organisations (IBOs) refers to the forms of organisations that consist of a drawing together of groups of stakeholders from several professions within a value chain (producers, processors, traders, transporters, etc.) who wish to dialogue, consult each other, coordinate actions and act together to solve one or more shared problems involving a product or group of products. IBOs are not new in West Africa and this form of organisation already exists in certain value chains in several countries, but the trend is the spread of the model. An emblematic example is the 2013 creation of the Réseau Ouest Africain des Céréaliéristes (ROAC, West African cereal network), which federates national inter-branch organisations from eight countries to address issues such as free circulation of cereals within the region, the harmonisation of quality standards, price information, and the promotion of investment financing in cereal production.

### FOs Position Themselves to Defend Family Farming

Over the past 10 years, West African FOs, their national platforms and their regional networks have played a sure role in guiding policies and intervention frameworks in the sub-region. Utilising both their common concerns and unique qualities, networks of FOs have been able to obtain recognition of the value of family farming and its many advantages over 'industrial' farming (in terms of jobs, resilience in the face of shocks and guarantees against food insecurity, per-hectare productivity, respect for the environment, etc.) notably in a document of reference for all countries in the region—the ECOWAP. They advocate for increased support for the modernisation of these farms and herding operations through appropriately supervised public and private investment. With perhaps less success, they alert the authorities about the greed over land and the risk that certain farmers could be dispossessed of their means for development and survival. They have also, notably since 2008, drawn greater attention to local food value chains among decision-makers (whose attention had traditionally been focused on cash and export crops). They have been less heard regarding trade policy. Opposed to current measures moving towards greater liberalisation of the agricultural product trade between the ECOWAS region and the rest of the world or with its largest trade partner, the European Union (provisions regarding the common external tariff (CET) and the economic partnership agreements (EPAs)), they defend the principle of food sovereignty, local production versus cheap food imports and community preference in international commercial trade. They decry the chronic and ongoing (proportional) under-investment of public funds allocated to the agricultural sector (even since the 2008 crisis), contrary to what many documents now claim.

**Affirmation of livestock networks.** Since the 2000s, two West African livestock farmers' and herders' organisations have progressively asserted themselves on the regional stage. The 'Billital Maroobè' network of livestock farmers' and herders' organisations (RBM) was created in 2003 with the aim of securing the pastoral economy and helping strengthen sub-regional integration. Initially, RBM covered three countries (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger). Progressively, its intervention zone spread to four other countries—Benin, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal; Togo and Chad are also in the process of entering the network. This expansion of the Network has also come with an increase in the number of RBM member organisations within

each of the countries concerned and the progressive institutionalisation of national representative platforms for its members. Created in 1989, the Association pour la Promotion de l'Élevage au Sahel et en Savane (APESS, the association for the promotion of livestock in the Sahel and the savannah) brings together livestock farmers in 12 countries of West and Central Africa. APESS works to renovate traditional livestock farming and improve livestock farmers' involvement in the economic, political and social development of African countries. Following an in-depth assessment of its activity in 2007, APESS began extensive work in 2010 to redefine its 'Horizon 2021' strategy.

## III. Solid Accomplishments...

### A. Farmers Offer Services to Farmers

**Economically, FOs started far behind.** Following the structural adjustments, States withdrew from agricultural service provision (input supply, agriculture advice and extension, management of primary collection and marketing of agricultural produce, access to credit, etc.), leaving it up to the private sector, in particular FOs, to take over, usually without any preparation and above all without public financial support. The challenges regarding the provision of farmer services were and remain considerable in West Africa, and FOs' resources are paltry. Nevertheless, a distinction must be drawn for large cash crop and export value chains—cotton, coffee, cocoa, etc.—that involve major financial interests and have always received special attention and specific oversight from States in the region: access to inputs and credit, technical advice and guaranteed markets. When it comes to other FOs that are 'territorial' in nature or focused on food value chains, it has primarily been through partnerships with technical and financial partners (TFPs)—and progressively other stakeholders in their

surroundings—stakeholders in downstream segments of value chains, financial institutions, etc.—that they have been able to develop their capacity to fulfil these new functions.

**Diverse experiences.** Yet, while the context has never been favourable, many FOs—primarily on the local level or within unions and federations—have attempted—with success—to set up strategies to provide useful economic services to their members. For example, the Faso Jigi FO in Mali has set up a range of services for its members from access to input loans to market guarantees through grouped sales. In the case of the Fédération des Paysans du Fouta Djallon in Guinea, 15 years of support have given this organisation a high degree of maturity allowing it to provide its members with a local advice supply, access to quality seed, and a guaranteed profitable market resulting from the combination of a partnership with traders and incisive advocacy that successfully obtained an import restriction during the local production peak.

### B. Local Farmers Speak Out

**In West African countries, FOs have for many years been involved in participating in the formulation of their policies.** Thus, Senegal's and Mali's agro-sylvo-pastoral framework laws (LOSAPs) are revealing examples because these laws include a large share of FOs' concerns. The same was true for the national agricultural policy (NAIP) elaboration process where the system utilised most often included FOs that made

considerable efforts to influence policy content. This was, for example, the case with the national FO platform in Benin, which was able to obtain the inclusion of family farming in the country's NAIP after a lengthy negotiation process. Regarding ECOWAP implementation, FOs have recently become more active in the consultation arenas set up by ECOWAS to define its implementation instruments. The process initiated in 2012

through ECOWAS Task Force consultation meetings was actively monitored by the three networks—ROPPA, RBM and APSS—and some victories are to be noted.

**We can cite the creation of the Regional Food Security Reserve, and in particular its ‘animal feed’ sub-component.** Indeed, RBM in collaboration with APSS and ROPPA was solicited to propose a ‘animal feed’ component and in this way piloted an in-depth study on the subject. Proposals were formulated with the aim of operationalising this ‘animal feed’ component, notably the need to set up a warning system to anticipate crises and dovetail this specific reserve with a regular livestock feed supply chain for livestock farmers. During this process, RBM and APSS played a major role in the finalisation and adoption of various prior technical documents and in their

adoption process. ECOWAS now recognises the three FO networks in the sub-region as partners in the implementation of the regional agricultural investment program, and they have been included in the institutional system for steering, implementation, financing and monitoring-assessment.

**Threats still weigh on family farming.** While policy battles have been won over the past 15 years, FOs nevertheless continue to struggle to overcome certain threats that weigh on family farming and in particular land tenure issues and the fight against land grabbing, which continues to grow in scope, and monitoring EPA negotiations that, despite ROPPA’s committed mobilisation at the start of the process, has not been extended further. Finally, the recently completed common external tariff (CET) negotiations have not to date had the hoped-for results.

#### ROPPA Exercises its Influence Beyond West Africa

Beyond the West African region, one should also note the driving role ROPPA was able to play both in structuring farmers on the pan-African level and as a spokesperson for small farmers in the highest international bodies:

- ROPPA played a driving role in the formation of the Pan African Farmers Organisation (PAFO) which federates the five regional FO networks on the African continent.
- ROPPA has a seat on the GAFSP Steering Committee (only two seats are reserved for representatives of civil society in developing countries). This allows ROPPA to promote FO participation in the elaboration of GAFSP projects, make proposals regarding intervention lines, and monitor project execution.
- ROPPA participates actively in the FAO’s Committee on World Food Security (CFS), especially within the civil society mechanism. Recent stakes discussed by this Committee include: land tenure guidelines, agrofuels, responsible investment principles, agricultural price volatility, and investing in small-scale farming.
- Following participation in several national platforms, ROPPA attended the meetings of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly where it defended its vision of the agro-sylvo-pastoral model.
- As part of the definition of the 11<sup>th</sup> EDF, ROPPA took part in organising a consultation meeting on FOs’ position on and expectations regarding European Union investments.
- ROPPA was in the past involved in the creation of IFAD’s Farmers’ Forum in 2005, and since then West African FOs have been increasingly included in the elaboration and implementation of IFAD’s projects and strategies. This mechanism also made it possible to channel considerable funding for an innovative programme supporting farmers’ platforms on the African continent (SFOAP).

## IV. ... and Lingering Challenges

### A. Challenges Inherent to All Social Movements

**Representativeness and connection with the grassroots:** within FOs, legitimacy is acquired by national and regional networks’ connection with their grassroots members, and the ability to provide services to members and defend their concerns at the policy level. FO networks’ strong involvement in advocacy aspects and policy fights puts them at risk of lessening their contact with the grassroots. As the head of an NGO says, ‘Recognition of a FO’s legitimacy generally comes from two different sources, one originating within the group and the other from outside it. The first is a form of “social” legitimacy because it is the result of the relations between a group and its leaders. The second is a “legal” legitimacy because it is granted by the public authorities that confer on an organisation the power to negotiate.’

**A major challenge concerns the training and promotion of young people and more generally the renewal of leadership**

**within FOs.** Indeed, if knowledge is not passed down, the organisation runs the risk of depending excessively on a small group of people who hold the knowledge and power. As the head of a Senegalese NGO says, ‘generally speaking, young people do not necessarily look favourably on the family farming model unless it allows them, by modernising decision-making and management modes, to handle new types of needs—communication, leisure, living conditions. FOs generally struggle to mobilise their younger members unless they feel useful to the FO given their training and this usefulness is recognised and materialised by responsibilities entrusted to them (field activities, activity monitoring). However, one can note FOs’ stronger capacity to meet women’s needs: they still make up the majority of FOs members and are crucial stakeholders in optimising local agricultural products. The new context of democracy building in society and the development of communication fosters their participation in the life of FOs.’

## B. FOs' Autonomy and Financing Challenges

Structuring is fragile because sometimes pushed from the top rather than supported by the grassroots. By channelling public support and international aid to the agricultural sector through FOs, States and donors have fostered the creation of a very large number of farmers' organisations for opportunistic reasons and following project-based logics to the detriment of the formation of autonomous and independent organisations coming together to elaborate and implement collective strategies. This unique dynamic has an impact on the solidity of certain organisations that—once funding comes to an end—may disappear because there is no interest in sustaining them and on the democratic operation of many FOs.

There are diverse forms of support but a lack of

harmonisation among TFPs weights on the effectiveness of funding. Since the farming milieu in West African began to become structured, many technical and financial partners have begun supporting FOs from the local level to the sub-regional level. In this way, FOs have received diverse forms of support from many of the historically involved partners. The frequent competition between institutions and support organisations, the diversity in partnership modalities, and the inadequate coordination among partners increases the difficulty FOs have in managing external support. The lack of harmonisation across various donors' strategies and approaches, fads, along with differing levels of requirements and management modalities, reporting and execution speed for activities make it difficult for FOs to be effective and concentrate on technical and operational issues.

### Swiss Overseas Aid, a Historical Partner for West African FOs.

According to a sociologist focusing on FOs, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has been discreet but confident and persistent in its support for the rural world through support for farmers' and pastoral organisations. By getting closely involved, it fostered innovative assemblies of consortia of development partners merging their contributions to finance programmes elaborated by farmers' organisations following their own strategic priorities. These consortia, the most advanced of which was the consortium created in 1992 with FONGS in Senegal and is still operating today, were simultaneously platforms for the exchange of ideas among development partners and farmers' organisations on the underlying issues pertaining to the consolidation of the farmers' movement or the promotion of the rural world. Even well before this, in 1977, with its support for the farming movement through the 'Six S' initiative to 'utilise the dry season in the Sahel and the savannah', the SDC promoted the financing of FOs' activities through a non-specified fund. This flexible fund, the use of which was freely determined each year by the FO members according to very precise consultation and management mechanisms that they had set, stimulated grassroots farmers' initiatives. Above all, it created a crucible that allowed the main FOs in West Africa at the time—through the farmer discussions it initiated—to acquire and develop their capacity for analysis, alliance building and management. Indeed, the Six S member FOs chose to invest a large portion of this fund in training. For nearly 15 years, Six S was an immense 'school workshop' for the oldest West African FOs that then were able to share their experience with the others.

## C. Challenges Linked to a More Demanding Context

**Acting on several fronts.** Most national farmers' umbrella organisations bring together several structures with different statuses and pursuing multiple objectives. This combination of economic and trade-union functions is simultaneously a strength and a weakness for FOs. It allows them to influence the content of agricultural policies on the national level and regional scale. But, at the same time, it fuels governments' fears of the emergence of powerful opponents and amplifies attempts at manipulation. According to the head of an FO support NGO, the creation of FO consultation platforms on the national level and of ROPPA on the sub-regional level is a real institutional innovation that makes it possible to build the adaptations necessary for collective mobilisation in response to changes in where public action is produced. But the diversity of fields of action (economic, social, policy, the environment, etc.), the 'scattering' of arenas for negotiation and decision-making, and the multiplication of stakeholders and agendas muddies understanding of governance at different scales and makes the role of umbrella FOs in influencing public policy difficult.

**Changing scale.** As mentioned above, FOs' economic initiatives are diverse and some have been crowned with success. Yet, with the exception of certain value chains (notably export value

chains), FOs' weight in national economies is still limited today, and States' lack of will to invest in up-scaling these initiatives and improving the policy and regulatory environment necessary for them to flourish further limits their impact.

**Making concrete and experience-based proposals to influence decisions:** in most West African countries and on the regional level, we can consider the policy framework to be in place to promote investment in local family farming. While the legitimacy of FOs and their networks has been recognised, and while they have actually participated in policy elaboration, it nevertheless remains that the application of all these policies (policy instruments) and laws (application decrees) is a huge job that requires FOs to be proactive more than ever, and this requires a high degree of technical skill. Among other things, this raises the question of expertise within FOs and the articulation between technicians and elected officials. According to a head of the RBM network, 'our challenge is to manage to build convincing arguments that advocate for greater support from public authorities for financing pastoral operations. RBM's approach consists of ensuring that the two pillars on which pastoral systems are built—the household and the community—are taken into account.'

## V. Shift in Regional FO Networks' Strategies

### A. Investing in Monitoring and Knowledge

**Tracking and capitalising on FOs' economic initiatives.** Faced with these numerous challenges and given their accomplishments, notably in regard to policy, FOs and their networks now focus their efforts more on identifying and analysing FOs successes and failures in the area of economic services. This economic 'focus shift' is happening in close connection with the advocacy work by regional FO networks. Notably, it is a matter of taking inspiration from effective FO initiatives and contributing actively to defining agricultural policy implementation instruments. Thus, with the aim of being better armed for ECOWAS Task Force meetings, FO networks have undertaken work analysing and documenting experiments in three priority areas: (i) FOs' organisational initiatives to market their produce, (ii) organising for the supply of production factors, and (iii) inter-branch organisations.

**Monitoring and capitalising FF performance.** In addition, the aim is to improve the credibility of advocacy efforts by

emphasising the economic and productive efficiency of family farms themselves and their capacity to respond simultaneously to economic, social and environmental challenges. For this, ROPPA is setting up a 'Regional Family Farm Observatory' based on the successes of platforms such as FONGS in Senegal. It will observe certain 'typical' family farms over several years with the help of a monitoring tool filled out by organisers and advisers within FOs (the 'simplified balance sheet'). In Senegal, this has provided much valuable information on family farms' situations as well as their evolution trajectories from one year to the next. It reveals three major types of farms, which may react very differently to shocks and may follow very different trajectories (see sidebar). The APSS network has also for some time been developing a similar monitoring tool designed to observe family livestock operations. For its part, RBM has begun action-research on the contribution made by transhumance to the economies of West African countries in order to provide economic arguments to bolster future advocacy action.

*'The first category consists of family farms (FFs) that are successful, that is to say that manage to feed themselves and produce excess to feed others. These farms make up 10% of the total. The second category consists of farms that could be successful and help meet national needs if they had a favourable context. Today, they do not produce enough to cover their food needs year-round and make up 70% of all FFs. Finally, the third category consists of farms whose survival is threatened because their agricultural performance is excessively poor, their property is limited, and they have high debt levels. This category makes up 20% of all FFs. Finally, it is important to note that all these family farms market products.'*  
(Nadjirou Sall, FONGS, Grain de Sel, 2013)

**Tracking, analysing and documenting public agricultural policies and budgets.** Following the pledges made by the African Heads of State in Maputo in 2003 to allocate at least 10% of their national budgets to the agricultural sector, FO networks have largely begun monitoring public budgets: budget spending was studied and analysed in several countries for the September 2013 update meeting on these pledges in Monrovia—the verdict of which was rather negative—and FOs have doubled down on their advocacy in favour of increasing such investments. In addition, attention has also been paid to investments in the livestock sub-sector. Networks of livestock farmers and pastoralists are undertaking extensive advocacy efforts: RBM has developed arguments on pastoral legislation based on the analysis and documentation of the pastoral

decree in Niger and its extension to Senegal and Benin. For its part, APSS has studied and tracked public policies on and funding of livestock rearing in several countries in the Sahel.

**Training leaders and building in-house expertise: the farmers' university.** In 2014, ROPPA launched its first course at the Farmers' University in Ouagadougou. The aim is to train young farming leaders on key topics such as entrepreneurial management, seeds and advocacy. The training concept is based on the constraints formulated by FO members and on training tools suited to their realities. Expertise within FOs is also optimised within the network: technicians or elected officials of some FOs have been mobilised within neighbouring countries to train FOs on topics of interest to them.

### B. Consolidating Alliances

**Reversing relations with development partners.** Because of their paltry financial resources, FOs often find themselves in the position of responding to an outside suggestion rather than taking the initiative based on what their grassroots express. Several dynamics show a current tendency to seek greater autonomy from development partners. In the past, some FOs have elaborated and are still elaborating today precise programmes with accompanying budgets that they then submit and negotiate as a whole with all of their partners. FONGS in Senegal was a forerunner in this area: in 1991, it organised the 'Thiès Round Table' that included not only development cooperation partners but also several other farmers' organisations in West Africa that were invited and, for the first time in West Africa, the Senegalese

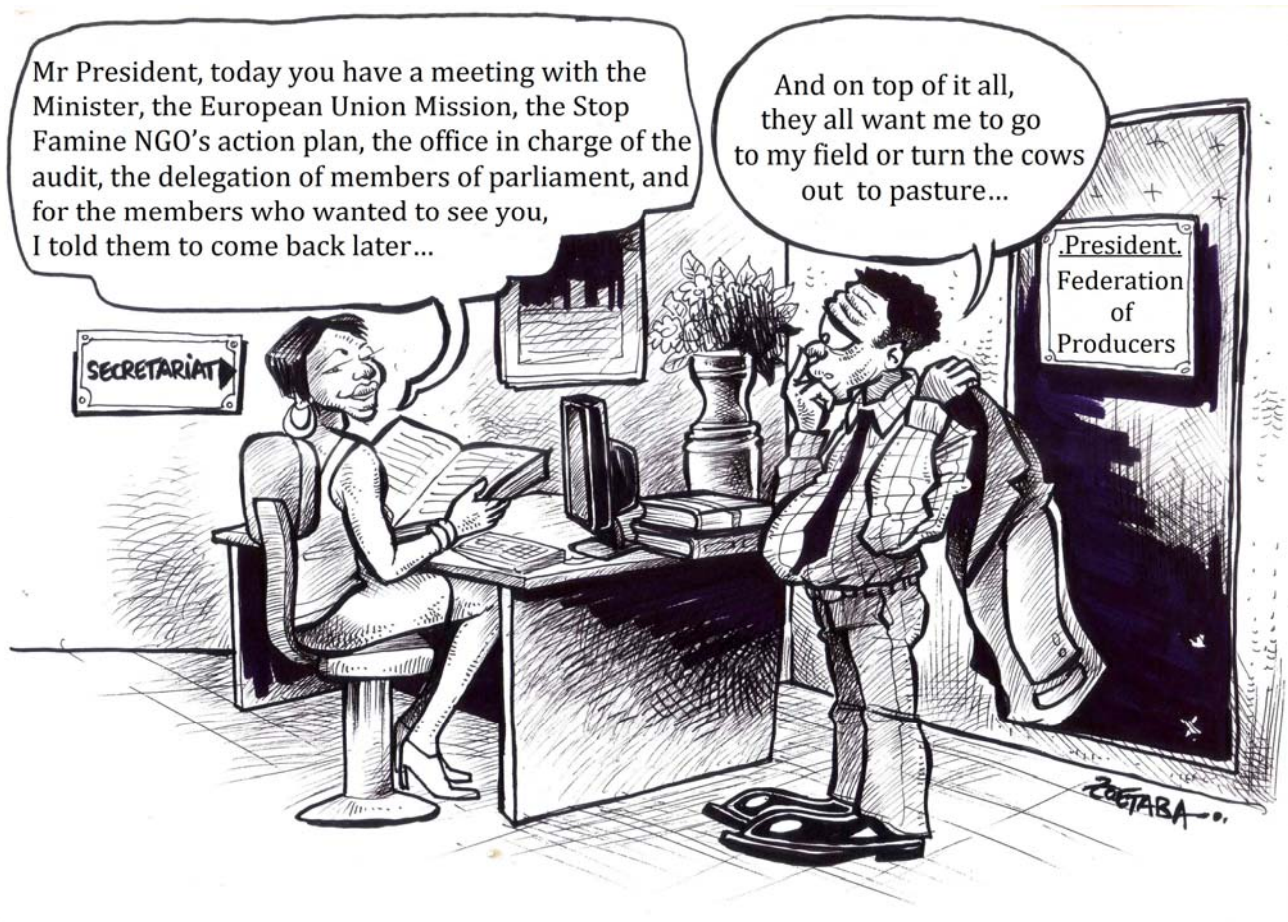
government. Today, many FOs are adopting the same strategy. In so doing, both nationally and regionally, FOs have been in recent years able to retain and bolster their strategic partnerships with a few emblematic technical and financial partners.

**Strengthening relations with regional institutions.** ROPPA and RBM both signed a collaboration agreement with ECOWAS in 2013, a historic event. In RBM's case, this agreement addresses the flagship themes related to pastoral policies: legislation on cross-border transhumance, the regional animal feed reserve, and action-research on transhumance's economic contribution. In order to mobilise the funding available at ECOWAS and WAEMU effectively,

ROPPA is currently conducting a preliminary study on the formation of a regional FO support fund that would be open to all its FO members and the members of two other regional networks, RBM and APSS.

**Strengthening alliances between FO networks.** With the aim of harmonising their advocacy positions, synchronising

their actions to this aim and presenting a united front in the sub-regional policy discussions, ROPPA, RBM and APSS created an 'inter-network' farmers' consultation framework in 2013. The main objective of this framework is to form a united front, reach a shared vision, and speak with one voice in the name of farmers in the sub-region, in particular within policy negotiation bodies.



**Family Farmers for Sustainable Food Systems: A Synthesis of Reports by African Farmers' Regional Networks on Models of Food Production, Consumption and Markets**

*EAFF, ROPPA, PROPAC, May 2013 (43 p.)*

This synthesis is based on studies by regional farmers' networks in West Africa (ROPPA), Central Africa (PROPAC) and East Africa (EAFF) on the role of family farming and on the models of food production, consumption and domestic markets. It aims to improve FOs' understanding of the necessary investments in family farming to improve its development. Its conclusion presents the levers able to allow family farming to act as the foundation for food sovereignty.

<http://www.europafrika.info/en/publications/family-farmers-for-sustainable-food-systems>

**FOs' Participation in Public Policy: Lessons and Recommendations from the 'PAAR Network' Capitalisation Documents**

*Inter-réseaux, 2012*

As part of the project aiming to build the capacities of networks of agricultural organisations when it comes to agricultural, food and rural policy (the PAAR Network), now reaching its conclusion, eight of Inter-Réseaux Développement Rural's partners have produced experience analysis papers on diverse subjects in close partnership with the FOs in the region. Their work is now available on Inter-Réseaux's website. The conclusions drawn from these capitalisation papers are full of lessons for FOs, and for FOs' (technical and financial) partners and African policy makers equally. Among these eight studies, four deal with the topic of FOs' participation in public policy. This summary draws crosscutting lessons from these papers on the subject of FOs' participation in public policy, which acts as the common thread throughout the paper. It offers an overall vision, but does not aim to provide an exhaustive report on all the analyses and proposals contained in the individual works. The idea is to highlight some of the lessons that FOs can learn from these experiences and invite discussion, even if this means slightly overstating certain positions.

[http://www.inter-reseaux.org/IMG/pdf/synthesis\\_OP\\_pol\\_capiPaar.pdf](http://www.inter-reseaux.org/IMG/pdf/synthesis_OP_pol_capiPaar.pdf)

**Cadre de concertation inter-réseaux des producteurs en Afrique de l'Ouest – Banjul (The Gambia) – 20 February 2013**

*APESS, RBM, ROPPA, February 2013*

On 20 February 2013 in Banjul (The Gambia), RBM, APESS and ROPPA created a framework for inter-network consultation for West African farmers. This document presents this consultation framework: its foundation, values, objectives and lines of coordination.

<http://www.inter-reseaux.org/ressources-thematiques/article/un-cadre-de-concertation-inter>

**ROPPA's Five-Year Plan**

The Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et des Producteurs Agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA) has made public its five-year plan for 2012-2016, focusing on modernising family farms. This plan is unveiled in a document that also discusses the West African context and the accomplishments and limits on action undertaken in recent years. The plan itself is divided into four areas: economics, policy, management and staff, each of which subdivided into a set of 'outcomes' targeted by the plan and actions to implement.

Download the Five-Year Plan (PDF, 49 pages, in French):

<http://www.inter-reseaux.org/ressources-thematiques/article/plan-quinquennal-du-roppa-2012>

**For More Information on Regional FO Networks**

ROPPA's new website: [www.roppa-afrique.org](http://www.roppa-afrique.org)

ROPPA's Facebook page, also very active: <https://www.facebook.com/roppawestafrica>

RMB's website: <http://www.marooobe.org>

APESS's website: <http://www.apessafrique.org>

**Appuyer les organisations de producteurs**

*Marie-Jo Dugué, Denis Pesche, Jean-François Le Coq, 2012, a co-publication by Quæ, CTA, Presses Agronomiques de Gembloux Collection Agricultures Tropicales en poche - 144 pages.*

The summary also aims to showcase information provided by FO networks in the framework of an SDC programme.

These *Food Sovereignty Briefs* are a joint initiative by Inter-Réseaux Développement Rural and SOS Faim Belgium. They aim to provide summaries of food sovereignty-related subjects based on a selection of a particularly interesting references. They are published every quarter and distributed digitally.

SOS Faim Belgium ([www.sosfaim.org](http://www.sosfaim.org)) supports farmers' and agricultural producers' organisations in roughly fifteen countries in Africa and Latin America. Inter-Réseaux Développement Rural ([www.inter-reseaux.org](http://www.inter-reseaux.org)) aims to promote networked discussions, exchanges and reflection on the subject of rural development in developing countries.

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