Inter-réseaux Développement rural

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY BRIEF

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Are agricultural advisory services moving towards a revival in Africa ?

The offer of agricultural advisory services has become a lot more diversified in Africa over the past thirty years, but there is still a long way to go in order to meet the needs of all farmers in terms of both quantity and quality. The lack of adequate services affects not only agricultural productivity, but also public health and the environment (poor use of inputs, for instance). Several countries have recently introduced new (and sometimes ambitious) policies to address this issue, such as Morocco, Madagascar, Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger. The new policies are part of an attempt to revitalise advisory services by taking advantage of the wide range of approaches and schemes that are already used in the field, coordinating them, and providing a framework for them. These policies face a number of major hurdles, however, in terms of funding, governance, and advisor qualification. This brief was produced by a working group led by Inter-réseaux Développement Rural and comprising IRAM, CIRAD and Ambre Conseil/CERFRANCE, among others. It is based in particular on: a report submitted to the French Development Agency (AFD), an issue of the Grain de Sel magazine, a Bulletin de Veille newsletter, an experience-sharing event, and contributions from individual members (see "References").

1. Overview of advisory services: the offer is insufficient, but is becoming more diversified

At the moment, the agricultural advisory services offered are far from meeting people's needs. With regard to quantity: Data is unfortunately lacking, but it is agreed that the coverage of advisory services is far below the FAO's standard of one advisor for every 200 to 350 farmers. With regard to quality: There are frequent and therefore worrying discrepancies between the messages provided and farmers' actual needs. In the past, the major extension programmes focused mainly on transferring agricultural research techniques to farmers based on assumptions about their needs. Today, not only are those programmes no longer in operation, but demand for advisory services has expanded into many different areas (agricultural techniques, farm and FO management, sales, advisory services for the management of shared resources, legal advisory services, taking into account the impact of agricultural practices on the environment, etc.).

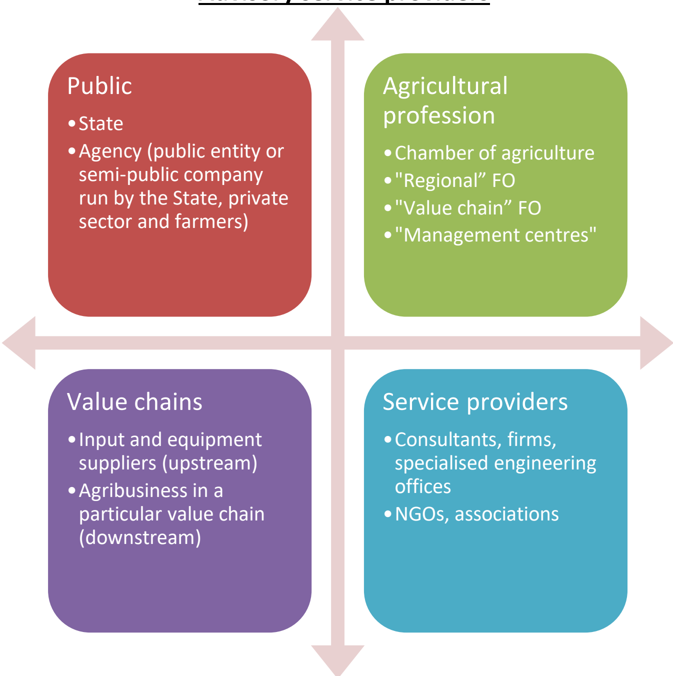
Existing advisory services are struggling to offer a diversified response to that demand in a way that is tailored to: each type of farm (family farm, family farm with some salaried employees, farm business, etc.); each type of value chain (local food production, national food production, export, etc.); how peasant-farmer organisations are structured (few or many FOs, general-purpose FOs or FOs specialising in a particular value chain, etc.); geographical isolation or connection to markets (existence of transport infrastructure, distance to markets, etc.). Lastly, advisory services are struggling to take into account the fact that those needs are changing over time: They become increasingly sophisticated as farmers develop their farms. Aspects such as gender, age, level of schooling, and adherence to a minority group (e.g. transhumant livestock farmers) have also been insufficiently taken into account in advisory services.

And yet, advisory schemes have become more diversified in recent years in West Africa. In the past, the State was more or less the exclusive provider of agricultural advisory services, through its civil servants based in the field. Structural adjustments and the withdrawal of the State have reduced the coverage of advisory services, but have also led to the emergence of new stakeholders capable of offering a wider range of services. Today, in addition to State-run schemes, there are also schemes run by the agricultural profession (FOs, chambers of agriculture, management centres), the private sector (input sellers, downstream companies), and service providers (consultants, NGOs, etc.). Moreover, despite the dominance of "top-down" approaches to advisory services, which are often poorly adapted to the realities and needs of farmers, several approaches have been developed over the past thirty years allowing for greater consideration of the knowledge of farmers, and this has led to the emergence of more participatory approaches where the aim is to assist and empower farmers.

Agricultural advisory services currently offered (non-exhaustive list)

Extension services (or supervision)	Dominant approach until the 1980s. Mass dissemination of technical advice (based on research) through a pyramidal and hierarchical system (formerly public), and through standardised, top-down and relatively simple methods (e.g. the "training and visits" approach). This approach has proven to have many limitations, but is still in use.
Managerial advisory services (or advisory services for family farms)	This approach is based on a technical and financial analysis of the needs of the family farm (or FO). A technician helps farmers record and analyse data about their farm. This type of advisory service involves individual phases and group phases. Farmers have a high opinion of this service, but it has struggled to reach a wide audience.
Advisory services based on the "farmer field school"	This approach was generalised by the FAO and has a growing number of followers. During periodic operations performed with a technician on a test plot, groups of farmers test different crops and livestock-farming techniques, and compare their practices and their financial results.
Farmer-to-farmer advisory services	Peasant-farmer instructors, peasant-farmer testers, peasant-farmer relays—the names are different, but they all refer to the same approach: utilising peasant-farmer knowledge, promoting advisory services based on indigenous practices, and reducing the cost of advisory services. This type of scheme may complement the work of technicians and other types of advisory services. It is often managed by peasant-farmer organisations.
Advisory services provided by stakeholders in value chains	This approach has become increasingly widespread as input consumption has increased. For example, dairy companies may have an interest in developing advisory services for animal nutrition in order to sell livestock feed and buy more milk during the dry season. This private offer of advisory services has the advantage of costing nothing to the State, but is oriented towards the concerns of businesses (upstream and downstream) and rarely takes into account environmental aspects or local specificities.
Innovation platforms (mixed)	This approach is promoted by international researchers, NGOs and donors. A platform brings together stakeholders, often from the same value chain, to solve technical and organisational issues. It aims to ensure that research is tailored to local conditions. This scheme is struggling to become less project-dependent.
Other schemes	There are other less-common approaches too: legal advisory services, marketing and sales advisory services, coaching, resource centres, mobile telephony, environmental advisory services, farm business schools, SME business loop, etc. They do not yet cover a large number of farmers.

Advisory service providers



2. A wide variety of advisory schemes in the field (examples)

Below is an overview of the different types of advisory schemes that currently exist in French-speaking Africa (and Peru), based on case studies by members of Inter-réseaux (see “References” for a list of the reports).

Example of advisory schemes for family farms managed by FOs (Burkina Faso): Advisory schemes for family farms, offered by FOs (FEPAB, FNGN, etc.), involve strengthening farmers’ forecasting and management capacities, disseminating cultivation techniques, and improving the structure of certain services (inputs, group marketing, credit). Volunteer peasant-farmer relays/instructors play a central role in these schemes (data collection, basic training), alongside salaried advisors. The FOs combine group advice and individual advice. The advisory schemes for family farms offered by FOs have proven to be relevant, but also vulnerable: they are expensive and project-dependent; they have relatively low coverage (between 0.1% and 10% of FO members in question); some farmers are illiterate; it is difficult to recruit skilled advisors.

Example of a “management centre” scheme (Senegal): In 2004, FOs in the Senegal River Valley decided to create centres for management and rural economy in the form of organisations where peasant farmers are in charge of governance (based on the model of French management centres). Two main services have been developed: accounting and the monitoring of growing-season loans granted to farmers by the National Agricultural Credit Bank of Senegal (*Caisse Nationale de Crédit Agricole du Sénégal*) through grassroots FOs. The scheme currently includes four associations (one of which is an umbrella organisation) with roughly 20 employees and 480 members (mostly grassroots FOs). Although it has received financial support since its creation from the AFD and the Society for the Development and Exploitation of the Senegal River Delta (also known by its French acronym, “SAED”), the scheme has been steadily becoming more independent by billing for those services (depending on the centre, self-funding has risen from one-third to half).

Example of a community scheme (Madagascar). Cap Malagasy is an association that specialises in agricultural advisory services. It has 18 advisors and is guided by an umbrella FO (FIFATA). Its services combine both group and individual support, and depend on the presence of an advisor based in a municipality (one advisor for roughly 150 farmers, within a 20km area). They focus on technical and financial aspects (with the help of peasant-farmer relays), and on leading groups and helping them develop their services. Cap Malagasy’s services are funded mainly through external resources.

Example of a private scheme (Peru). A valley in the Andes Mountains was surveyed, and the following were found to coexist: an agricultural extension service run by the public authorities (in sharp decline); agribusinesses providing advisory services through “commercial firms” (sale of inputs and advice on how to use them); a network of independent technicians who also sell inputs. The quality of the advisory services is highly variable, but almost all farmers now have access to it. The coverage of those services is linked to the rise of private agricultural supply firms, and to the development of mobile telephony. The partial privatisation of agricultural advisory services has nevertheless strongly redirected those services towards short-term technical issues and the use of inputs.

Example of a scheme involving multiple actors (Niger). There are original schemes run by the local milk value chain focusing on milk-collection centres that offer multiple services (provision of livestock feed, collection of raw milk, sale with industrial firms (contract), advisory services). Agricultural advisory services focusing on collection centres mobilise several different stakeholders (collectors, private veterinarians and livestock assistants, the collection centre (elected representatives and employees), chamber of agriculture, NGOs, an industrial firm, an innovation platform, and the State). The main advantage of this advisory scheme is that it is run by economic and private stakeholders. In just a few years, the effects were visible. But the scheme is highly dependent on industrial firms (on the regularity of their local-milk purchases, and on the prices they offer), and the advisory services at the moment are essentially focused on the downstream part of the value chain (increasing production while reducing seasonality, improving quality).

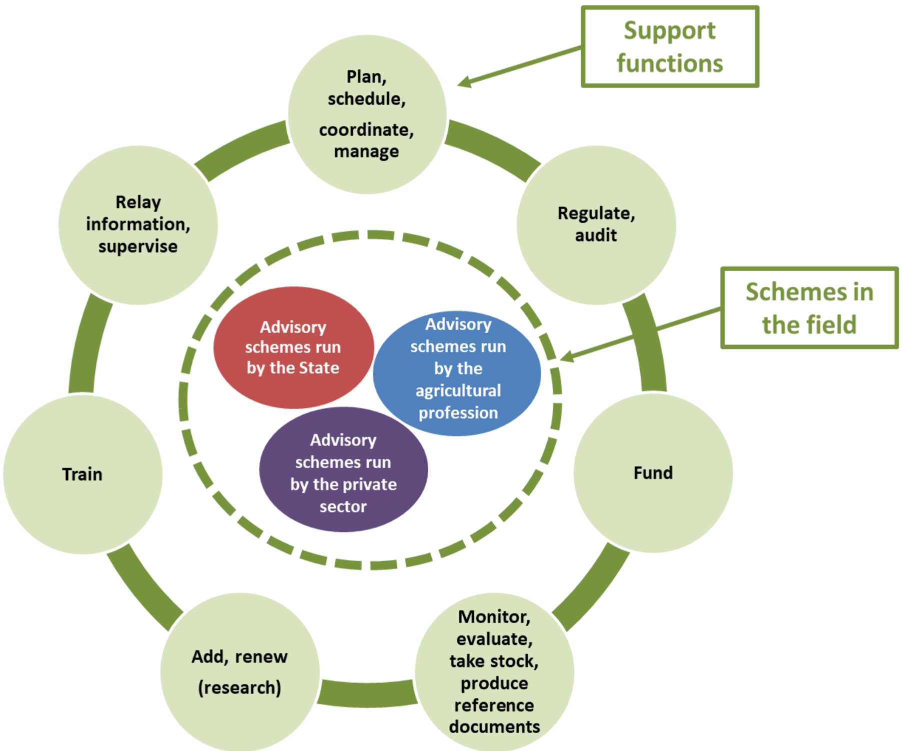
3. States are repositioning in response to the changes

Return and repositioning of States. In response to the many different advisory services needed and offered, several West African countries have been trying for the past decade to revitalise advisory services by repositioning themselves – often assuming coordination and support roles in partnership with the private sector. A good example of this has been the emergence of national and regional advisory-services agencies in Ivory Coast, Senegal, Niger and Benin. Those agencies are sometimes designed as public schemes with civil servants based in the field (Ivory Coast, Senegal), and sometimes as mixed schemes involving service providers (FOs and NGOs, for instance, in Benin and Niger).

Moving towards "integrated systems for agricultural advisory services". Faced with the diversity of advisory providers and approaches, several countries are looking to reposition themselves in a role that involves networking, monitoring and coordination. The concept of an agricultural advisory system is now emerging and can be applied at national and regional level. This concept makes it possible to rethink the sharing of roles between the State, the private sector and the agricultural profession, and to reposition the State so that it can focus on sovereign activities. Niger and its National Agricultural Advisory System (*Système National de Conseil Agricole*) are an emblematic example of this new approach.

Greater consideration for "support functions". States have recently become aware that an integrated agricultural advisory system cannot function in a satisfactory manner unless a number of (sometimes invisible) conditions are met. These "support functions" include: i) coordinating and monitoring the quality of schemes in the field, ii) offering advisors initial and ongoing training, iii) networking with researchers (technical and methodological innovations, experience assessment, etc.), iv) communicating information, and v) ensuring the sustainability of funding for advisory services, etc. Some of those functions are solely the responsibility of the State (e.g. supervision), while others may be shared between public and private stakeholders.

Diagram of the integrated system for agricultural advisory services



4. Overview of current advisory policies

With the wide variety of advisory services offered and demanded, States are having to reposition themselves. They are doing so in very different ways, depending on the context: highly involved (Cameroon), withdrawn (Uganda), mixed (Niger), etc. Below we present examples of current policies that bear witness to this variety and the issues specific to each of those State positions.

Predominantly public systems

In Cameroon, there has been a massive revival of public advisory services with some notable new features which constitute a small "internal revolution": desire to introduce joint management between the State and the agricultural profession, managerial advisory services (for FOs on production-focused projects and for farmers), project for the creation of a national agency and, ultimately, mixed funding (including parafiscal charges). The public scheme (2,100 advisors) is entirely funded by the State (salaries) through the "C2D" debt-reduction and development contract, and is managed by the AFD. There are other advisory schemes too, such as the one linked to the cotton value chain in the northern part of the country.

In Morocco, family farms are taken charge of by a scheme that is essentially public (in terms of its advisors, governance, funding), with the objective being to ultimately privatise advisory services (through private State-approved operators: cooperatives, input suppliers, etc.). The National Agricultural Advisory Office (*Office National de Conseil Agricole*) currently employs roughly 1,500 agents to support small family farms. Advisory services for large farms, on the other hand, are provided by engineering offices and consultants, and a fee is therefore generally charged.

Mixed systems

In Niger, the State-driven reform of advisory services needs to leave plenty of room for the agricultural profession and the private sector, with respect to both the governance and funding of schemes in the field. At national level, the division between public schemes, private schemes and schemes run by the agricultural profession (in terms of agents in the field or grassroots advisors) is 1/3, 1/3, 1/3. Those schemes cover different needs, with a strong focus at the moment on technical advisory services and a growing interest in managerial advisory services (for FOs and farmers). Niger also set up an agency to promote agricultural advisory services (*Agence de Promotion du Conseil Agricole*), but it is only involved in support functions (national and regional: coordination, supervision, monitoring/evaluation, allocation of funding, etc.) and does not employ advisors.

Ivory Coast also has a mixed system (State, agricultural profession, private sector) with well-rooted joint management. That system has a powerful financial tool (FIRCA) that covers all crop and livestock farming value chains, with a particular focus on major export value chains. Public advisory services are provided mainly by the National Agency for the Support of Rural Development (*Agence Nationale d'Appui au Développement Rural*, or "ANADER"), (roughly 1,400 agents), funded in part by the State, with certain actions funded by FIRCA and therefore indirectly by the value chains. There are also various private operators (e.g. cotton companies) and operators from the agricultural profession (e.g. cooperatives in the cocoa value chain) offering advisory services that are funded by FIRCA, by external aid, or directly by the value chains.

Predominantly private systems

In Uganda, advisory services are provided almost exclusively by the private sector, at the request of FOs, but are supervised, monitored, coordinated and funded mainly by the State (75% of funding is from the State, with the rest provided by donors). Advisory services are provided by NGOs, engineering offices or agricultural supply firms. A semi-public agency called the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) ensures coordination in the field and monitors/evaluates advisory service providers. Large upstream and downstream companies, as well as large production and processing companies, are urged to help fund advisory services.

In Benin, the State has clearly repositioned itself and assumed a supervisory and coordination role. There are no longer any public agricultural advisory agents in the field: Advisory services must now be provided entirely by FOs, NGOs and private firms selected through bidding procedures, most often at the instigation of projects. Territorial agricultural development agencies (*agences territoriales de développement agricoles*) are in charge of coordinating the development of value chains and ensuring the quality of advisory services. They are run by representatives of the State, FOs and the private sector. Advisory services are funded by a newly created fund called the "FNDA", which is supported through State grants, value chains and donors.

5. Major challenges when it comes to reviving advisory services

Reconciling the economy, health and the environment

Privatisation of advisory services. In order to reduce public spending and encourage greater productivity, many African countries and donors are turning to an approach where companies positioned upstream and downstream within their respective value chains have an increasingly important role in providing advisory services. Many observers, however, warn that having too strong of a link between the sale of inputs and advisory services creates economic, social and environmental risks. This type of advisory service does not take into account the complexity of a farm, its constraints and its interests, but rather focuses mainly on agricultural production. It also tends to encourage greater use of chemical products (fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides) as well as improved and sometimes imported seeds. The risk is so serious that some industrialised countries are going in the exact opposite direction: In 2019, for instance, France is preparing to enact a statute on separating the sale of phytosanitary products and advisory services (see *Grain de Sel* no. 77).

Content of advisory services: green revolution or agroecology? Advisory services are never neutral. All advisory schemes offer a vision of agricultural development, and that vision may be very different depending on who is providing the service. It is clear that delegating advisory services mainly to input suppliers and to stakeholders in value chains will encourage intensive agriculture, as is the case in the cotton value chain in Mali, and in market gardening in Algeria. But businesses are not the only ones promoting intensive agriculture based on the green-revolution model (inputs, heavy mechanisation, improved varieties): Many public schemes and projects also promote that model. Without denying the importance of developing value chains and making working conditions less harsh, it is important to ensure territorial cooperation for advisory services in order to find a balance between short-term issues (food security, agricultural income) and long-term issues (soil fertility, biodiversity, water preservation, human health, etc.).

Finding permanent resources to fund advisory services

Funding. All countries looking to revive agricultural advisory services have one point in common: It is difficult to mobilise the necessary funding. Advisory services require significant short-term spending if they are to “pay off” over the medium term. First of all, funding must be provided for schemes in the field: advisors’ salaries, logistical resources, etc. Funding must also be provided for support functions (advisor training, research/development, sharing of knowledge and information, monitoring/evaluation and experience assessment, etc.).
The amount of funding currently allocated to advisory services is largely insufficient to ensure the satisfactory coverage and quality of those services. Moreover, funding is not permanent and is often dependent on international aid on a project-by-project basis.

The hope of funding advisory services through funds paid into by various stakeholders. Much hope has been placed in the creation of funds that are paid into over the long term by value chains and the State, and to a lesser extent by donors. The best-known example (and one that has been in existence for a while) is FIRCA in Ivory Coast, which has a number of strong points (real contributions from value chains; joint management) and weak points (domination by export value chains, which contribute the most; mobilisation of FIRCA in project management). Funding mechanisms linked to value chains, however, do not apply in areas with low production potential. Niger and Benin recently acquired a tool for funding the sector (FISAN and FNDA). There are other noteworthy examples too: the Agricultural Development Fund (*Fonds de Développement Agricole*) in Madagascar, the World Bank competitive funds, etc.

In Ivory Coast, FIRCA is a model for funding advisory services. Created in 2002, FIRCA collects parafiscal charges on export products and funds research programmes and programmes that provide agricultural services to peasant farmers (development, extension services, advisory services and training) in crop, forestry and animal production. Since 2017, FIRCA has been coordinating (through international funds) a pilot experiment for managerial advisory services at three sites, because it identified the need to complement technical advisory services with more global advisory services for farms and FOs. In 2017, FIRCA had a budget of over 13.9 billion CFA francs, 99% of which was from the following five value chains. rubber (47%), coffee – cacao (21%), oil palm (16%), cashew (9%) and cotton (6%). It employs 116 agents.

The quantity/quality dilemma. Given the large number of farmers who benefit from advisory services, the major methodological challenge is to be able to articulate standardised approaches for a broad range of farmers, as well as support-focused approaches that are tailored to each situation in order to best meet the farmers' needs. Those two approaches require different skills. For example, a skilled and experienced advisor may develop complex approaches to advisory services (e.g. strategic advisory services for farms, investment advisory services, etc.), but the cost will be higher, and the advisor will work only with a limited number of farmers. Conversely, an advisor with little training or experience will be more inclined to use standardised methods for advisory services, but he or she will probably be able to work with a greater number of farmers. Advisors may also work with peasant-farmer relays or peasant-farmer instructors, which is less expensive.

Focusing as closely as possible on the needs of farmers

Governance. Historically, the State was the sole stakeholder when it came to the governance of agricultural advisory services. Today, FOs are becoming more and more involved. But the degree to which the agricultural profession is involved in the development of national policies for advisory services is highly variable depending on the country: very limited in Burkina Faso; starting to emerge in Niger and Cameroon; significant in Madagascar, Benin and Guinea. Steps are also being made towards more joint management of agricultural advisory services: joint management of FIRCA in Ivory Coast, mixed boards of directors at agricultural advisory agencies such as ANADER (Ivory Coast) and ANCAR (Senegal). The private sector (upstream and downstream stakeholders) is rarely involved in governance except in certain cases, such as FIRCA in Ivory Coast.

Advisors' skills. The effectiveness of advisory services depends largely on the skills, knowledge, savoir-faire and soft skills of the people providing those services (designers and managers of advisory schemes, advisors and trainers, and peasant-farmer instructors). But those skills are currently insufficient because of weaknesses in the level of basic and ongoing training, and in the sharing of practices and the assessment of experiences. In addition, many farmers have poor literacy skills, which makes the advisor's job even more difficult. In most countries, peasant-farmer instructors are growing in number and are not receiving enough recognition, training or support. Lastly, certain skill areas have not been sufficiently covered or mastered: for example, knowledge and savoir-faire in the technical/economic and managerial fields, including FO contributions to the economic management and governance of value chains.

Other challenges. All advisory policies have difficulties responding to certain specific needs and to newly emerging needs: particularly the needs of women and young people, as well as those of transhumant livestock farmers and any needs that arise as a result of unforeseeable events (drought, price crises, etc.). Moreover, many hopes have been ignited by the use of "mass" information and advisory tools based on new information and communication technologies, and on the rapid development of mobile telephony. These innovations are currently being developed and have not yet proven their effectiveness.

Will digital technology revolutionise agricultural advisory services?
Many development stakeholders (including the European Union) are investing in the "digitalisation" of agricultural advisory services. The widespread accessibility of internet service and smartphones has ignited hopes of a major leap forward in terms of "remote" advisory services: information on prices, weather, production techniques, etc.

Unfortunately, several studies currently in progress (see *Grain de Sel* no. 77) appear to show that those types of advisory services still affect few farmers, that they are not generally designed to offer personalised advice, and that they create profitability problems. The prospects are promising, but for the moment these services most often consist in the transfer of standardised knowledge.

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List of the 11 experience-assessment reports completed as part of the process of reflection

1 - Niger: Multi-actor advisory-scheme model, promoted by a local value chain with a focus on one key stakeholder: a peasant-farmer milk-collection centre offering multiple services (experience-assessment report by IRAM)
2 - Burkina Faso: Peasant-farmer schemes offering advisory services for family farms (*conseil à l'exploitation familiale*) in Burkina Faso: evolution, features and challenges (experience-assessment report by Agence CORADE)
3 - Burkina Faso: Boosting sales for agricultural products: when producers get involved in agricultural advisory services via phone (experience-assessment report by APROSSA - Afrique Verte Burkina)
4 - Senegal: Network of centres for management and rural economy in the Senegal River Valley (experience-assessment report by AMBRE Conseil/CERFRANCE)
5 - Ivory Coast: Advisory schemes linked to cocoa certification in Ivory Coast (experience-assessment report by CIRAD)
6 - Cameroon: Advisory-scheme model for overhauling extension services at country level: the ACEFA programme (experience-assessment report by AMBRE Conseil/CERFRANCE)
7 - Madagascar: Agricultural advisory scheme in Madagascar: Cap Malagasy (experience-assessment report by FERT)
8 - Peru: Towards the privatisation of agricultural advisory services: consequences for dairy producers in the Mantaro Valley (experience-assessment report by CIRAD)
9 – Focus on field schools: coaching to encourage joint development of peasant-farmer innovations and agricultural advisory services (experience-assessment report by AVSF)
10 - Cross-disciplinary experience-assessment report: The role of farmers' organisations (FO) in advisory schemes (experience-assessment report by AFDI)
11 - Cross-disciplinary experience-assessment report: How are information and communication technologies transforming advisory schemes? (experience-assessment report by CIRAD)
These 11 reports are available (in French) on the Inter-réseaux Développement rural website:
http://www.inter-reseaux.org/vie-du-reseau/cycles-thematiques/cycle-sur-le-conseil-agricole/article/fiches-de-capitalisation-le?lang=fr

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