

Evaluating advisory services for family farms

Gifty Narh Guiella (gifty.guiella@corade.org)_

WITH THE STATE'S WITHDRAWAL from agricultural advisory services, monitoring and measuring the impact of advisory services for family farms is important. Doing so involves examining the evaluation methods used, their scope and their limits. This article presents an example in Burkina Faso.

► Gifty Narh Guiella is a director and trainer at Agence Corade, a consulting and training company based in Burkina Faso.

► This article is based mainly on the following resources:

- D. Halley des Fontaines, Coulibaly Y. Liagre L. (2006), Etude de définition d'indicateurs de résultats et de mesure d'impacts du Conseil à l'Exploitation Familiale et du Conseil de Gestion aux OP, AFD
- Roppa (2016), Summary and Findings of the First OFF/ROPPA Report.
- Dugué P. Guy Faure (2012), Appui à la mise en place d'un dispositif de suivi - évaluation des effets et de l'impact des démarches de Conseil à l'Exploitation Familiale au Burkina Faso. Cas du CAGEF (Dédougou) et de l'UPPA du Nayala (Toma), F3E.
- Lalba A. (2012). Évaluation de l'impact et effets du conseil à l'exploitation familiale, SNV.
- Narh G. (2018), Les dispositifs paysans de conseil à l'exploitation familiale agricole au Burkina: Principales évolutions, caractéristiques et défis, Inter-réseaux.

AN IMPORTANT CHALLENGE for agricultural advisory services today is to evaluate their impact on farms, families and rural communities. As fewer and fewer resources are being allocated to agriculture, summary qualitative evaluations of managerial advisory services for family farms (*conseil à l'exploitation familiale*, or “CEF”) are no longer sufficient when it comes to justifying the resources invested in those services.

Different schemes were therefore created to monitor and measure the effects of CEF. Performing evaluations to secure funding. Peasant-farmer advisory schemes affect a marginal proportion of farms in the countries where they are implemented. In Burkina Faso, CEF provided by three federations (*Fédération Nationale des Groupements Naam, Fédération des Professionnels Agricoles du Burkina, and Union des Groupements pour la Commercialisation des Produits Agricoles de la Boucle du Mouhoun*) covers only 6,510 farms out of roughly 900,000 members. Insufficient funding is an obstacle to ensuring the longevity of those schemes and scaling them up.

Farmers' organisations (FO) therefore need to help more people understand the effects CEF has on farms and the community. Lending from stakeholders is dependent on the quality of the evaluation methods.

Encouraging dialogue to improve schemes. The “SEMI” scheme for monitoring, evaluating and measuring the impacts of CEF was designed by the agricultural organisation French Farmers and International Development (*Agriculteurs Français et Développement International*, or “AFDI”) and the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD). The scheme's pilot phase was implemented by the engineering office Agence Corade and Réseau Gestion (comprising seven FOs that provide CEF in Burkina Faso).

Measuring impact serves different purposes depending on the types of actors involved. It is also important that the profiling for the scheme and choice of criteria are part of a participatory process in order to ensure that each stakeholder's expectations are taken into account. The SEMI scheme aims to create the right conditions for dialogue between actors. Beneficiaries and advisors can express their views on the scheme and suggest improvements (me-

thods, tools, working conditions, governance). FO leaders can express their difficulties, question the different actors about their responsibilities, and pass on reliable information to umbrella FOs about how peasant-farmer schemes are helping strengthen family farms.

Different types of impacts for agricultural advisory services. The direct impacts of agricultural advisory services are those that affect the beneficiary of the service, the farm, non-agricultural activities, and the family. Indirect impacts affect non-members, the FO, institutions, and value chains connected with the direct beneficiaries.

CEF may have impacts on the farm evaluated by technical performance criteria (planning of production, management and organisation of the family farm, etc.), economic criteria (boosting income, production-related investments) and environmental criteria (management of natural resources). They may also have an impact on farmers and their families. Those impacts are evaluated based on the member's personal development (self-confidence, change of perspective), improvement in the member's technical and managerial capacities, household food and nutrition security, the member's health, and women's participation in managing the farm. CEF also has impacts on the professional environment (adopting innovations or improving FO management), the village community (development of community initiatives, improved social relationships), the local and national economy (emergence of value chains, new areas of activity), and the environment.

Strong focus on qualitative indicators. The impacts of CEF are measured using quantitative indicators (number of farms affected, increase in production) and complementary qualitative indicators (perceptions, attitudes, level of satisfaction).

With CEF, qualitative indicators deserve great attention, as most of the changes are triggered by changes in the farmer's benchmark system, which gives rise to the possibility of new attitudes and sustainable transformations with respect to practices.

Additional data-collection methods. The “before and after” method consists in monitoring how a farm's parameters change over a given number of years af-

“The effects of advisory services on family farms need to be easier for people to see”



Interaction
between a CEF
member and an
advisor

ter establishing a benchmark situation in year zero.

The “with or without CEF” method compares member and non-member farms to see the difference CEF makes between the two types of farm. Data collection also takes into account farms’ cropping schedules. In Burkina Faso, the SEMI scheme was carried out after the crop year in order to assess the production and harvest, and in the middle of the year in order to establish the situation regarding sales and projects.

Given the complexity of the changes to assess, it is recommended that several data-collection methods (information sheets, member files, additional surveys) be combined in order to identify the different impacts. For the AFDI/CIRAD scheme, data is collected by FO advisors, and a firm assigned to provide advisory support for the FOs is in charge of analysing the data. This method may be biased because the evaluators are not independent. That is why some schemes (such as the scheme run by SNV, a Dutch NGO) propose having the evaluation performed by independent entities.

For the most representative sampling possible.

The sampling of farmers evaluated must be representative of all farms reached by CEF in terms of proportion and type. In general, type is established based on technical/economic criteria and on how experienced the farmers are in CEF.

For “with or without CEF” comparisons, samples

of members and non-members must be as close to one another as possible in terms of technical/economic performance.

Farms in the control group must be selected in an environment that is not affected by the CEF scheme. Production conditions must also be the same (rainfall, agro-pedological conditions, etc.).

Positive evaluations despite methodological limitations.

The different evaluations have helped confirm that CEF has a positive impact on farm performance and the personal development of promoters, and helps improve cohesion and conditions among farming families. The AFDI/CIRAD scheme showed that two-thirds of the beneficiary farms increased their revenue and capital, while farms in the control group stagnated or regressed. The SNV evaluation showed that 97% of the farms receiving advisory services adopted new practices for managing natural resources. But the impact of CEF on the local or national economic context has been rather limited.

But these methods do not differentiate between the role of CEF and the role of contextual factors in the changes identified, and do not sufficiently take into account the farmer’s personality. They are also sometimes too complex and too expensive to be replicated by FOs. Lastly, the large amount of data based on statements by farmers or collected by non-independent actors could introduce bias in the results. ■