

The challenges of agricultural advisory services for FOs in Madagascar

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IN MADAGASCAR, farmers' organisations are involved in designing, monitoring and implementing agricultural services policies. This interview explores the new challenges and roles of those organisations, which are both beneficiaries and providers of agricultural advisory services, in a context where the State has withdrawn from its former role.

► Gérard Andriamandimby has been director of the SOA network in Madagascar for the past ten years. He works with elected representatives at regional and national level to strengthen their organisations.

► The SOA network is a union of agricultural organisations that is composed of 25 farmers' organisations (FO) and roughly 30,000 peasant farmers in Madagascar. Its mission is to promote FOs as partners for designing development policies and as economic actors.

GRAIN DE SEL (GDS): Could you tell us about the agricultural services policy in Madagascar? How are advisory services promoted there?

GÉRARD ANDRIAMANDIMBY (GA): The outlines of Madagascar's agricultural policy can be found in the 2009 Farmer Services Strategy (Stratégie de Services aux Agriculteurs, or "SSA"), whose objective is to "support the development of modern, professional and competitive family farms that are able to generate a fair income from their work and investments and ensure food security, while being mindful of future generations." The SSA aims to ensure fair access to agricultural services, and clearly places the farmer at the heart of its efforts. It utilises farmers' organisations (FO) and agricultural service centres (ASC) to help farmers identify and set up services, and is funded by the agricultural development fund (ADF), which was set up in 2009.

That fund now covers 15 of the country's 22 regions and funds six types of services: production support, FO structuring and strengthening, access to production factors, financial services, research, and strengthening of actors in agricultural services.

The ADF funds advisory services (technical advisory services and managerial advisory services for family farms) through its production-support component. Those services may be run by FOs, or by training centres, research centres or service providers whose capacities are being strengthened to improve the quality of their advisory services.

GDS: What role did FOs play in defining and monitoring that policy?

GA: The SOA network is one of the national FOs that engages in advocacy work in support of family farmers in Madagascar, and participates in the development of agricultural policies and strategies, including the SSA. It launched forums for collaboration called Regards Paysans ("Farmers' Views") at regional and national level, where issues relating to agricultural policy are debated. This approach helps farmers prepare proposals before presenting them to decision-makers and to the ASC and ADF steering committees.

The SOA network has defended the principle of complete equality in terms of peasant-farmer participation in advisory funding schemes (ADF) and ASCs, as well as multi-year programme contracts. Multi-year contracts allow them to ensure that their

organisation continues to operate over the long term, pay and strengthen their technical team and network of peasant-farmer relays, and ultimately improve farmers' access to local technical and managerial advisory services that are well-adapted, modern and innovative.

GDS: How have the roles of FOs changed over the past ten years with regard to advisory services in Madagascar?

GA: At first, FOs were simply the beneficiaries of advisory services. Now, they are also providers of those services. They have salaried technicians, networks of peasant-farmer relays, and effective tools (monitoring of benchmark farms, production costs, cultivation area, etc.). They are now able to orient advisory services based on the needs of the beneficiaries (choosing the right varieties and crop-management

techniques for seed production, local agroecology techniques, etc.). Over the past ten years, FOs have trained their peasant-farmer instructors and technicians, and have brought about changes in advisory services in line with their strategy

and resources. They have also developed at the same time many other complementary services (access to inputs, sales, storage).

GDS: What types of advisory services does your network offer? Why?

GA: The FOs of the SOA network develop production-focused technical advisory services and managerial advisory services for farmers belonging to the network. With the help of the SOA network, eleven of them have even developed advisory services tailored to young farmers (a total of 700 young people have set up farms). Five other FOs have specialised in advisory services for seed production, working closely with researchers.

GDS: How do FOs fund advisory services? Are they capable of providing advisory services over the long term?

GA: An agricultural advisor advises 250 to 300 farmers and costs roughly 1.2 million ariary or 300 euros a month (1.5 euros/farmer), for an annual total of about 3,600 euros. Advisory services are essentially funded through grants provided to the FO (by the ADF, projects/programmes), and to a lesser extent using the FO's own funds (particularly for agricultural cooperatives). Within the SOA network, the

"Farmers' organisations are beneficiaries and providers of agricultural advisory services"

Young farmers visit a fruit-processing cooperative in Mahitsy, Antananarivo



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- members who are able to provide advisory services over the short/medium term are those that sell products with high added value (cocoa, milk, seeds).

GDS: *What is the added value of advisory services offered by farmers' organisations?*

GA: FOs are intended to remain within their territory, and it is therefore in their interests to invest in strengthening their human resources. They also know their members and can identify schemes for peasant-farmer relays more effectively than external actors. Those peasant-farmer relay services offer various advantages in terms of costs, proximity and availability at local level (see p. 25). The advisory services offered by FOs therefore provide local relays for the dissemination of information and innovations, and make it possible to be closely attuned to members' needs.

GDS: *Are farmers' organisations capable of providing a response to the State's withdrawal? What do you expect from the government at present?*

GA: FOs are capable of providing a response to the State's withdrawal, provided the State provides grants so that they can operate advisory services and cover the salary and training of technicians and peasant-farmer relays.

The State is actually no longer involved in operating advisory services. That role has been entrusted to chambers of agriculture, FOs, accredited service providers (NGOs, engineering offices, private consultants, etc.) and training centres. But to improve the provision of advisory services, the State needs to encourage the development of FOs over the long term, help collect data and develop infrastructure to facilitate the work of technicians and interaction between farmers. More importantly, the State should provide training for talented technicians and support the chambers of agriculture. Those entities have some connection with most farmers, and they could engage in business advisory services (providing

strategic advisory services to help with decision-making) and specialised advisory services, and provide instructors at territorial level.

GDS: *Would you say that the advisory services policy is headed in the right direction?*

GA: Several factors, such as the recognition of advisory services organisations, lead one to believe that the agricultural advisory policy is fragile. The effective implementation of programme contracts by the ADF remains difficult, and peasant farmers no longer make up the majority in the ADF funding schemes. Schemes run by FOs affect only 10% of peasant farmers, and those FOs still do not have the financial or human resources needed to grow significantly and increase their capacity. So even though the State is working on reference guidelines for different roles and on the content and orientations of advisory services, a lot still needs to be done to implement the services strategy.

GDS: *What are the challenges of agricultural advisory services for farmers' organisations in Madagascar? How can they be overcome?*

GA: As the context changes (development of value chains, creation of standards, pro-agribusiness policies, etc.), advisory services change too. Those services need to diversify and become more and more specialised. There is a need for innovative agricultural practices that are inexpensive and environmentally friendly, which requires technical advisory services that take into account issues relating to the environment, technical/economic management, tax management, etc.

In addition to technical advisory services, it would be a good idea to have advisors in business management responding more to issues regarding the orientation and operations of the farm. FOs therefore need to develop their advisory services in order to provide a response to the demand for increasingly personalised, strategic and effective advisory services. ■