

Advisory scheme with multiple actors focusing on milk-collection centres

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THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES an advisory scheme with multiple actors focusing on milk-collection centres in Niger. It highlights the challenges resulting from the growing participation of advisory actors from the local private sector (milk collectors, private veterinarians and livestock assistants, service centres) in the milk value chain.

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► Karkara is one of Niger's biggest NGOs.

THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL advisory system adopted in Niger in 2017 promotes a wide range of advisory schemes run by the State, the agricultural profession and the private sector, including a unique scheme run by the local milk value chain focusing on collection centres.

Peasant-farmer milk-collection centres offering multiple services: pivotal actors. The collection-centre model is based on four pillars: peasant-farmer governance with a cooperative of livestock farmers who own the centre; an upstream production area; a partnership with an industrial firm downstream or with artisanal processing facilities; and a set of services: milk collection, cooling and quality control, provision of livestock feed, advisory services for livestock farmers. There are currently five centres in Niamey.

Contributing to advisory services according to skill level. A wide range of actors have organised themselves around each collection centre in order to promote local milk and provide advisory services for livestock farmers: veterinarians and livestock assistants provide advisory services for animal health and feeding. Milk collectors, cooperative agents and agribusiness focus on hygiene during the milking and collection phases. The elected representatives of the cooperative raise awareness among livestock farmers about the value of milk and the role of women, and provide mediation when conflicts arise. NGOs are involved in advisory services for the value chain and in securing women within the value chain. A livestock farmers' organisation helps ensure functional literacy, and the collective innovation process is driven by an innovation platform. More recently, two other types of advisory services were introduced: managerial advisory services for livestock farmers provided by

the chamber of agriculture, and managerial advisory services for cooperatives provided by a service centre. While collection centres are fully playing their pivotal role in the value chain, they are struggling to coordinate the different advisory actors around them. Coordination is therefore currently provided by IRAM and Karkara, in conjunction with the milk innovation platform.

A mixed business model linked to the value chain.

This advisory scheme is based on a mixed business model. Functional literacy, advisory services for value chains and support for collective innovation are entirely subsidised through projects. Advisory services focusing on animal health, feeding and hygiene during milking are supported by actors in the value chain. Managerial advisory services for livestock farmers and cooperatives are currently subsidised, but more and more livestock farmers should start to cover some of the costs. Awareness-raising and mediation activities by elected representatives are covered by the cooperative. So the value chain provides an economic foundation for advisory services, and the advisory services have positive impacts on the value chain.

Positive impacts, but advisory services guided by the downstream part of the value chain.

In just a few years, the impacts were considerable in terms of increasing the production and collection of milk (+600% for the Hamdallaye centre in six years), improving the quality of milk (no rejection by the industrial firm), reducing the seasonality of production (flattening the collection curve), generating revenue for livestock farmers (roughly 1,000 livestock farmers per centre are generating higher revenue on a regular basis), creating jobs in rural areas (roughly 30 jobs per collection centre, including about a dozen collectors). The main advantage of this advisory scheme is that it is run by private actors (FOs, collectors, veterinarians) and by the dynamics of the value chain.

Therein also lies its weakness. The advisory services are highly dependent on the value chain. If industrial firms reduce their purchases of local milk, the value chain and advisory scheme are weakened. Another drawback is that the advisory services are for the moment mainly focused on the milk facility and are heavily guided by the downstream part of the value chain (boosting production, improving quality, reducing seasonality). The launch of managerial advisory services for livestock farmers should, however, broaden the scope of advisory services and provide a better response to the needs of livestock farmers. ■

Annual collection of the Hamdallaye centre (in litres).

Source: Nariindu Iram-Karkara.

