

CIRAD, Innovation Joint Research Unit

University of Parakou

AFD

PADYP

Inter-réseaux

**Workshop for improving the sustainability of
advisory services for family farms in Africa**

13 to 15 November 2012 in Benin

1. Context and rationale

Developments in agricultural advisory services in Francophone Africa are mainly taking place in a context of a withdrawal of the State from advisory activities. In this context private actors (agribusiness companies, NGOs, POs, input providers or private service providers) have been able to pick up the slack in advisory functions only partially and with sometimes narrow objectives dictated by their overall mandates. Nevertheless, agricultural advisory services are once again subject of increased attention from some States, particularly following the recent global food crises.

With French cooperation, Cameroon has put in place a significant training and support mechanism for farmers and agricultural advisors. With the support of funding entities like the EU and IFAD, Madagascar too has introduced an innovative mechanism of service and funding centres for agricultural development. In Benin, experiments aimed at revitalizing advisory approaches were among the most successful in Francophone Africa with the establishment of Advisory Services for Family Farms (ASFF) implemented by a NGO and PO network, with funding from different sources (AFD/France, SNV/Netherlands, DDC/Switzerland and DGD/Belgium) and under the umbrella of the Ministry of Agriculture. Other experiments in progress, also relying on international cooperation, are more oriented towards training rather than on advice (farmers' field school, training in agricultural entrepreneurship, etc.) but are also based on the principles of participation, promotion of innovation and improved integration of knowledge and farmer requirements in order to enhance their skills.

The recent revival of interest by certain States for agricultural advice and extension cannot, however, mask the difficulties that most of them have in coming up with innovative mechanisms to meet the diversity of farmer requirements and to progress beyond the pilot stages of new approaches being implemented via projects. In addition, questions remain unanswered on the up-scaling, out-scaling and sustainability of the new advisory mechanisms. They mainly concern the increase in the number of farmers able to access advice; the governance and, hence, the coordination mechanisms involving various actors; the funding and thus the contribution of actors and the State to this funding; and, finally, the training of advisors and, more generally, of technicians of rural development.

The development of public policies to strengthen advisory services by accepting a multiplicity of approaches is a subject of intense debate in several countries (e.g., the White Paper on extension in Benin, the development of national advisory strategy in Burkina Faso, etc.). At the international level, these debates take place within the framework of the Global Forum on Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) which was launched to serve as an exchange and advocacy platform. In Africa, the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) is progressively establishing itself as a continental platform for facilitating agricultural advisory services. AFAAS and GFRAS are supporting the creation of a Network for Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services for Western and Central Africa (RESCAR-AOC) with a mandate to strive towards improving the effectiveness and the sustainability of agricultural advisory services in those regions.

These observations highlight the need to analyze the diversity of current experiments on ASFF and, more generally, on providing support to farms in order to draw lessons and recommendations for improving the sustainability of advisory mechanisms in Francophone Africa. This analysis involves the sharing of experiences with advisory service actors (technical partners, researchers, development agents, producers) and this in conjunction with existing networks and forums.

2. Questions concerning the sustainability, up-scaling and out-scaling of advisory mechanisms

A workshop held in 2001 in Bohicon, Benin, helped in reviewing ASFF approaches and methods in order to create a common platform to define ASFF while recognizing the diversity of situations in each country. Since then, several funding entities, including AFD, and technical cooperation actors such as SNV or NGOs like AFDI have continued to promote ASFF through several projects. The different ASFF approaches are relatively similar and even if their tools differ, the underlying principles of intervention remain common, having already demonstrated their relevance (capacity building for producers so that they are able to take decision more independently, promoting a management rationale to link forecasting, action and evaluation phases, comprehensive farm approach which encompasses all activities and objectives of the farmer, and techno-economical analysis of activities).

The 2012 Bohicon workshop will be an opportunity to address the issue of sustainability and up/out scaling of ASFF mechanisms and also to cover other extension experiences. We can consider that this general question encompasses issues of governance and coordination of actors, of funding of advisory services, of skill mobilization and training, and also those of adapting advisory methods to each local situation.

Questions concerning governance and coordination

- How to insert pilot advisory experiences into national training and advisory mechanisms in view of the change of scale required (reaching more producers, institutionalization of the pilot experience)?
- How to distribute – among private actors, POs and the State – the roles and responsibilities of steering and implementing the various kinds of advisory services?

- What relationships to form between the various services provided to the producer (credit, supplies, training, etc.)? How and under what conditions can the ASFF help develop other services?

Questions concerning the funding of advisory services

- What will be the implications of funding sources and mechanisms on the orientation and quality of advisory services?
- What are the real possibilities of funding of advisory services by the participants, the POs, the supply chains, the State or funding entities?
- Which mechanisms to rely on for mobilizing funding for each category of actor?

Questions concerning skills mobilization and training

- What profile of advisors for what type of advisory activity?
- How to train these advisors in sufficient numbers, beyond those required just for the projects: what curriculum for the initial training of new entrants into the profession and for the continuing professional training for those already in it?
- What role to be accorded to – and support extended to – farmer facilitators who can support more experienced advisors or develop specific functions?

Questions concerning the adaptation of advisory methods

- How to adapt existing methods aimed at reinforcing learning to better meet requirements of producers and their organizations and to take into account the actual skills of the advisors and funding possibilities?

To find answers to these questions and identify solutions, we have to rethink the design of farm advisory systems in order to come up with real methodological and institutional innovations which can vary from country to country. The main idea is to **conceive advisory methods and mechanisms according to the strategies of advisory organizations and not to try to adapt the organizations to the methods being promoted**. More specifically, this involves changing the methods to suit the skills of technicians or farmer-facilitators; to promote acquisition of skills rather than knowledge (for the advisors and the farmers); to develop managerial reasoning abilities rather than mastery of management tools; to review the composition of target groups according to interest groups and/or learning abilities; to greatly increase the involvement of national mechanisms and public training and advisory structures to renew approaches and skills; to design mechanisms where actions of the various stakeholders at a territorial level complement, rather than overlap, each other; to avoid to try and find a mechanism and method acceptable to all; etc.

Results of recent work conducted in Benin, as well as analysis of experiments undertaken in other countries, can enlighten the debates on building ASFF capacity to meet the advisory requirements of African producers. The presentation of these results is an opportunity for all stakeholders to undertake jointly a thorough reflection on the questions mentioned above

and to identify solutions collectively. These discussions should also stimulate reflection conducted with the framework of RESCAR-AOC, AFAAS and GFRAS.

3. Workshop objectives and expected results

The objectives of the discussion and brainstorming workshop on advisory services for family farms in Francophone Africa are to arrive at some answers to the questions posed, based on the analysis of experiments in progress. Specifically, these are:

- Arrive at an assessment of ASFF actions undertaken in various Francophone African countries with a focus on analyzing the sustainability of the advisory mechanisms (integration within an advisory and training system, governance of mechanisms, funding of activities, capacity building of advisors and managers of advisory organizations).
- To debate this assessment in comparison with other farm advisory experiments (farmers' field school, agricultural entrepreneurship, etc.) and to present the findings of research into ASFF in order to draw lessons useful for ASFF.
- Develop courses of action (by project or country) to improve the ability of ASFF mechanisms to meet producer requirements and to ensure their sustainability by identifying methodological and institutional innovations.
- Strengthen links between farm-advice actors in different countries in order to promote exchanges of experiences and skills.
- Foster relationships with the AFAAS forum in Benin, RESCAR-AOC, AFAAS and GFRAS in order to promote synergies and to contribute to a debate at the international level on renewal of advisory methods.

This workshop will provide support to and reinforce African advisory forums and networks in drafting advocacy documents addressed to governments and major funding entities.

Participants

To address the main question of the workshop, several groups of participants have been identified:

- Actors connected with an ASFF development project; these actors include project managers, managers of advisory mechanisms in NGOs or POs, representatives of farmer organizations involved in managing ASFF;
- Actors connected with advisory experiments other than ASFF and having experience with the sustainability of advisory mechanisms;
- PO representatives having a strategic vision of the role of POs in providing advice and services to producers;
- Representative of public institutions in charge of advisory matters (Ministry of Agriculture) and/or participating in formulating national advisory strategies or policies;
- Representatives of funding entities involved in agricultural extension or wishing to discuss their approach to the subject;
- Researchers working on extension and representatives of advisory networks.

To promote a proper work environment, the number of participants will range from 50 to 80 people (depending on the funding available). The participants will be identified through projects connected with the development of ASFF.

4. Organization of the workshop

The workshop will run for 3 days, from 13 to 15 November in Bohicon, Benin.

The workshop will rely on:

- A preliminary analysis work in the countries undertaken by the participants (in particular within the framework of ASFF but not limited to it) so that they can contribute actively during the workshop. Terms of reference will be sent to them to guide them in this analysis. CIRAD and Inter-réseaux could support this preliminary work in the countries.
- A preliminary analysis work on the place extension finds in the national policies of some Western African countries. Inter-réseaux could coordinate this work.
- A presentation and discussion of results of studies conducted by CIRAD and the University of Parakou in Benin on ASFF and by other organizations in other countries.
- Group work and plenary sessions to learn from the presentations and discussions and to define courses of action in relation to the questions posed.
- Exchanges and discussions before the workshop but also a dissemination of results after the workshop via Inter-réseaux and GFRAS/AFAAS/RESCAR-AOC.

The workshop will be organized by an organizing committee consisting of one person each from:

- CIRAD (Guy Faure)
- University of Parakou (Ismail Moumouni)
- PADYP (Pascal Gouton)
- AFD (Anne Legile)
- GFRAS/AFAAS/RESCAR-AOC (Patrice Djamen)
- Inter-réseaux (Fanny Grandval)
- Representative of a producer organization (Marc Gansonré, Burkina Faso)

The workshop will be held under the umbrella of the Ministry of Agriculture, Benin. PADYP will be the liaison with the ministry and will be in charge of the logistics (local invitations, rental of hall, equipment, lodging, catering, etc.). CIRAD, the University of Parakou and Inter-réseaux will be in charge of conducting the workshop (contact with the countries, provide support for the preliminary assessments, organization of presentations, summaries, etc.).

5. Expected products

- Workshop proceedings (results of Benin studies, country assessments, suggestions for plans of action)

- A summary to disseminate widely (to participants, on the web sites of GFRAS, AFAAS, etc.) and meant for managers of extension-related projects and for ministries and funding entities who wish to revise their advisory policies
- An action plan for projects involved in ASFF
- A contribution to the AFAAS forum in Benin and at the continental level