

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

of the report of the Workshop for the formalization of the West and Central Africa Network of Agricultural and Rural Advisory services (RESCAR-AOC), 18th – 20th Feb. 2015, Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)

The West and Central Africa Network of Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services (RESCAR-AOC) emerged since 2010 with the mandate to be one of leading stakeholders for the implementation of sub-regional agricultural policies designed to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development in West and Central Africa (WCA). The workshop for the formalization of RESCAR-AOC held in Abidjan from 18th to 20th February 2015 by CORAF / WECARD in partnership with the RESCAR-AOC, AFAAS, GFRAS and ANADER is part of the process for its setting-up and definition of its scope and modalities of intervention.

The objective was to provide the RESCAR-AOC with appropriate institutional and operational tools necessary to fully bring its specific role in the successful implementation of sub-regional agricultural policies in WCA. Through plenary sessions and group work, the workshop was specifically aimed to: (i) present and validate results of the diagnosis of the state of agricultural and rural advisory services (ARAS) in WCA; (ii) consolidate the strategic orientation of RESCAR-AOC; (iii) validate its operational framework and action plan; (iv) identify opportunities for synergies with other agricultural and rural development institutional actors in WCA.

The workshop was launched by Mr. Minaya Siaka Coulibaly (Director of Cabinet of the Minister of Agriculture of Côte d'Ivoire) acting on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture prevented, it was attended by 70 participants including: (i) representatives of national department / agencies in charge of Agricultural extension and advisory services in WCA countries; (ii) delegates from national fora of ARAS; officials of WAAPP, AFAAS, GFRAS, sub-regional organizations of producers, (iii) officials of CORAF/WECARD, sub-regional Economic and Monetary communities (RECs), (iv) development partners and (v) resource persons.

Diagnosis of ARAS in WCA: a landscape in flux marked by new actors, methodological and institutional innovations, challenges of sustainability and scaling and a gap between supply and demand of ARAS

The state of ARAS in WCA as carried from an analysis of existing literature and results of an electronic conference highlighted the main transformations that occurred during the last two decades, key challenges and trends that are emerging. The results validated by the participants at the workshop reports the predominance of smallholders' family farms and a weak development of agribusiness. New institutional instruments (CAADP, sub-regional agricultural policies, platforms of actors etc.) have emerged, as the ICT development, participatory approaches and plurality of ARAS providers. There are significant organizational dynamics (several networks, existence of national ARAS fora etc.) and the development of ARAS innovative methods and tools whose effectiveness, sustainability and scaling are yet to be proven. It appears that there is a mismatch between supply and demand for ARAS. The demands of producers for ARAS are mainly technical and economic. The demand applications are often more determined by potential services of providers rather than on the real needs of users. The emergence of participatory approaches and increasing structuring of producers organizations can contribute to improve the reliability and relevance of demands.

The producers' access to research results is low, the development of media and ICT provides opportunities for ARAS actors to better connect research with producers. ARAS providers are diversified (public services, producers' organizations, private sector, NGOs) and they often have a more or less predefined offer that they try to adapt to the needs of producers. The presence of different suppliers of ARAS varies according to the value chains, types of services and geographic locations. Despite the diversity of suppliers, the cumulative supply of ARAS is insufficient both quantitatively (number of producers reached) and qualitatively (categories of farmers reached, themes). Women and young people are still insufficiently taken into account. Some strategic and emerging issues (farm management, agroecology, market integration etc.) are not yet adequately addressed in the provision of ARAS. There is a lag between the advisor profile and the expectations of users. The gap is even greater as the demand is diverse and changeable while the process for the renewal of extensionists' profile and skills is slow and insufficiently or poorly insured. The supply gap is attributed to the lack of resources and skills etc.

Major trends identified include: pluralism of the ARAS landscape both in terms of actors, of methods and tools; a need for a better public/private partnership; increased role of ICT; decentralization and wider opening of agricultural innovation systems; the need to develop skills of actors more urgent than the necessity to foster the dissemination

of knowledge and innovations and the increased need to better document and communicate on the effects and impacts of ARAS.

This analysis revealed seven major challenges for a better contribution of ARAS to a Sustainable Development in WCA: (i) improving the geographical and thematic coverage of ARAS; (ii) ensuring the scaling and sustainability of innovative methods and tools; (iii) renewing the profiles of extensionists and ARAS methods and tools; (iv) production and better management of knowledge; (v) ensure quality of service and the accountability of actors; (vi) strengthening dialogue between stakeholders and (vii) improving the volume, quality and sustainability of funding.

Strategic orientation of RESCAR-AOC: facilitating sustainable development in WCA through enhanced exchanges and synergies that contribute to improve the performance and sustainability of ARAS

Analysis of the challenges to the development of ARAS led to the identification of the major strategic orientations for RESCAR-AOC. Based on iterative exchanges that resulted in several reformulations, the vision, the mission, the purpose and the strategic axes were defined with a focus on positioning RESCAR-AOC as a key stakeholder contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in WCA, by specifically ensuring a better mobilization of the potential of ARAS.

Vision	Effective agricultural and rural advisory services mobilized in line with demand to facilitate sustainable development in West and Central Africa
Mission	To provide a space for exchange, awakening, orientation, consultation, capacity building and knowledge sharing for agricultural and rural advisory services actors and stakeholders in West and Central Africa
Objective	To contribute to the improvement of the performance and sustainability of agricultural and rural advisory services
Specific objective	Encourage exchanges between stakeholders in agricultural and rural advisory services at national and regional levels
Strategic axes (A)	A1. : Knowledge management; A2: Capacity building; A3. : Advocacy and policy dialogue; A4: Networking and partnership

The expected results of each of the four strategic axes as well as activities considered as necessary and sufficient to achieve them have been discussed and validated.

Axes	Strategic Result	Activities
Knowledge management	<i>A regional platform facilitating stakeholder access to knowledge, best practices, rural and agricultural innovations is set up</i>	(1.1) running a regional electronic platform for the management of innovations and knowledge; (1.2) facilitating the establishment and consolidation of innovation platforms
Capacity strengthening	<i>The ARAS actors' empowerment skills (individual and institutional) are strengthened</i>	(2.1) developing a regional strategy for capacity strengthening of actors; (2.2) adapting the agricultural advisory systems set-up to contexts and their development and; (2.3) professionalizing the job of agricultural extensionist and guarantee of the quality of services.
Advocacy and policy dialogue	<i>The potential of ARAS is better recognised and taken into account in development initiatives</i>	(3.1) highlighting the effects and impacts of ARAS; (3.2) raising awareness on the role of ARAS and levers to better harness its potential; (3.3) participating in policy frameworks for the elaboration and execution of development operations; (3.4) creating an enabling institutional environment for the development of ARAS.
Networking and partnership	<i>Consultation and partnership between stakeholders are facilitated and consolidated</i>	(4.1) supporting the creation and consolidation of national ARAS actors forums and their integration in RESCAR-AOC and (4.2) facilitating the sharing and synergies between ARAS professionals and other agriculture and rural development actors.

Organization and governance system: an option for a light efficient structure to be deployed gradually

Operational mechanisms adopted for the deployment of RESCAR-AOC activities are based on three principles: the development of synergies with strategic and operational partners, the principle of subsidiarity and the contractualization. The categories of RESCAR-AOC actors include public and private advisory services, agricultural and rural training organizations, POs, NGOs, research, private sector, organizations funding ARAS activities media etc. The typology of RESCAR-AOC members includes three categories: (i) the statutory / founding members (ARAS national fora or national structures with similar functions), (ii) adherent members (sub-regional and international organizations with interest in ARAS, technical, scientific and financial partners); (iii) the partners or affiliates (physical or legal persons interested and willing to participate in the sharing of experiences and information activities without further formal commitments).

The governance system adopted for the efficient functioning of RESCAR-AOC includes: (i) General Assembly (GA); (ii) Steering Committee (SC), (iii) an Executive Secretariat, (iv) the administrative and financial management support unit (CAGAF) and (v) thematic working groups. The functions and composition of the various bodies have been validated but the representativeness and the selection mode of different categories of members for the steering committee are yet to be refined. The establishment of RESCAR AOC-governance system will be gradual. A transitional period of two years (2015 - 2016) was deemed necessary. During this period, the steering of RESCAR-AOC will be ensured by a five-member follow-up committee composed of representatives from the following organizations: (i) CORAF/WECARD, (ii) sub-regional economic (ECOWAS, ECCAS) and monetary (CEMAC, UEMOA) communities; (iii) AFAAS; (iv) ANADER and (v) the Rural Hub. The primary mandate of this committee is to: support the interim Executive Secretariat in the implementation of priority activities identified for the transitional period (2015 - 2016), promote RESCAR-AOC to sub-regional and international development agricultural and rural actors, and to prepare the constitutive GA of RESCAR-AOC. Furthermore, it was agreed that an Interim Executive Secretariat composed of an Executive Secretary, a program officer and a communication and knowledge management officer will be established by June 2015 the latest. This body will be hosted within CORAF/WECARD and ensure the role and functions of the Executive Secretariat, it will work in particular to the implementation of the RESCAR-AOC action plan for 2015 and 2016. It was agreed that Dr Patrice Djamen continue the facilitation of the network as the Acting Executive Secretary of RESCAR- AOC. He will be assisted by a program officer and a communication officer. These two people will be made available by CORAF/WECARD during the transitional period.

Action Plan for 2015 - 2016: priority to quick-wins founding activities, strengthening the integration of RESCAR-AOC in the regional development institutional landscape

The priority activities to be conducted by the interim executive secretariat during the transitional phase (2015 - 2016) have been identified. They will include: (i) support the creation and consolidation of national fora; (ii) create a regional platform for the management of agricultural and rural knowledge, innovation and technologies; (iii) finalize the study on the state of ARAS at national and regional level; (iv) achieve synergies with the WAAPP; (v) conduct advocacy at the national, regional and international levels; (vi) strengthen synergies between ARAS, research and training; (vii) develop sub-regional projects and initiatives on ARAS. The interim Executive Secretariat will refine and implement these activities while trying as much as possible to combine and integrate the sub-activities identified for the operationalization of strategic Axes. A distinction should be made between the tasks to be implemented directly by the Executive secretariat at the regional level and activities to be carried out rather at the country level.

Opportunities for synergies to be achieved

The participants identified opportunities for synergies with: WAAPP (support for the establishment and strengthening of innovations platforms); national fora of ARAS, AFAAS and GFRAS (through joint actions developed and operationalized using the principle of subsidiarity); CAADP (through the involvement in the operationalisation of the Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa-S3A, whose implementation is ensured in WCA by CORAF/WECARD); economic and monetary communities sub-regional (implementation of agricultural policies and investment programs).

The workshop was closed on a note of Mr. Minaya Siaka Coulibaly who, on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, thanked all the participants for their rich contributions and stressed that the results of the meeting are definitely an important step in efforts to better harness the potentials of the agricultural and rural advisory services for the sustainable development of West and Central Africa.

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