

Farmers' Organizations Not Yet Unified in Nigeria

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THERE ARE a great many farmers' organizations in Nigeria, but can we speak of a Nigerian "farmers' movement"? Between the large umbrella organizations that are sometimes manipulated by the government authorities, and a multitude of local initiatives, Nigerian farmers are now beginning to look for a path to unity.

► This article by the *Grain de sel* editorial staff draws upon a study carried out by Agricord, an article in *Défis Sud* (issue No. 95, pp. 20-21), and interviews with Amina Jibrin and Alaseinde Arigbede, leaders in Nigerian farming.

► Amina Jibrin (aminabj@yahoo.com) has been president of the Association of Small Agroproducers in Nigeria (ASAPIN) since 2010. She has been a farmer for fifteen years, growing maize, soy beans and cowpea (niebe) on the roughly two hectares she owns in a village in Bauchi state.

► Olaseinde Arigbede (olaseindearigbede@yahoo.com) chairs the Union of Small and Medium-Scale Farmers of Nigeria (USMEFAN). Trained as a medical doctor, for twenty-three years he has pursued his choice of working to support smallholders in his country.

EVEN IF farmers' organizations (FOs) in Nigeria are not yet well structured, several broad categories can be distinguished: FOs with a general scope and focus on advocacy; FOs set up as cooperatives specialising in one or more agricultural products; FOs that operate locally; and FOs made up of only women.

The number and composition of FOs in Nigeria are hard to ascertain. Locally there are many small FOs, often organised by age group or sex (elders, youths, women, etc.). On the national scale, the large federations that are meant to take charge of advocacy and address politicians have been created only recently, or are very close to the federal government. It is still too early to speak of a genuine "farmers' movement" in Nigeria, but some dynamic currents are becoming established.

CFN and FADU: Economic Organizations Structured at the National Level. There are an estimated 2,000 cooperatives in Nigeria that are grouped in local and/or regional unions. They are specific to a product (mainly groundnuts, cassava, oilseed plants, cotton, maize, wheat and rice) or to a territory. The Cooperative Federation of Nigeria (CFN) was founded in 1945, and numbers thirty-five cooperative federations from around the country, covering roughly 50,000 grassroots cooperatives. In addition to representing its members at the national level, the CFN offers various services: training and capacity building, access to credit. It also plays a role in mediation and coordination between the member cooperatives.

The Farmers' Development Union (FADU) has at least 500,000 members, 65% of whom are women. The federation is active in twenty-nine states in Nigeria. Its activities aim primarily to provide economic services to farmers—management advice, technical training, access to credit, etc.—and defend their interests.

Women's Cooperatives United under COWAN. The Country Women's Association of Nigeria (COWAN) was created in 1982 by Mrs. Bisi Ogunleye, who still presides the federation today. It operates in twenty-eight of the thirty-six states in Nigeria. Its members are exclusively women, rural or urban, who are organised in local groups (cooperatives) of ten to fifteen members. COWAN's activities follow the needs of its members: the federation offers microcredit and training in ways to save money, as well as support for small businesses and agricultural activities.

Organizations with a Trade Union Focus: AFAN, USMEFAN and ASAPIN

AFAN, a special partner of the government. The Apex Farmers' Association of Nigeria (AFAN) was born of the merger of two umbrella organizations, the All-Farmers Association of Nigeria (ALFA) and the National Farmers' Association of Nigeria (NAFAN). This merger was purportedly recommended by the Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo, who wanted to see all Nigerian producers assembled in one organization, so that the government would have a single clearly identified interlocutor for addressing agricultural issues with the farming community. AFAN is considered to be very close to the government and its independence has been questioned. The make-up of its leadership has very often been affected by changes in the government.

AFAN's activity is essentially that of an advocacy group at the federal government level. AFAN seems to play an important role in Nigerian agriculture, and draws its legitimacy from its membership inherited from ALFA and NAFAN. It has often been reproached for not representing small farmers in Nigeria, however. Amina Djibrin, president of ASAPIN, denounces "an agribusiness type of producers' apex organization that does not defend the interests of small farmers." Likewise, Dr. Olaseinde Arigbede, president of USMEFAN, declares that AFAN "is a political instrument in the hands of the government, and has never truly defended the interests of small producers."

USMEFAN, an organization that affirms its independence. Contrary to AFAN, the Union of Small and Medium-Scale Farmers of Nigeria (USMEFAN) is a broad umbrella organization that is highly critical of the federal government. Its leader, Dr. Olaseinde Arigbede, describes the difficulties that USMEFAN founders encountered at the inception of the organization: "The existing apex organization, AFAN, did not want its members to have the option of going over to another organization. When we finally managed to build a coalition of producers and launch USMEFAN in 2004, it didn't please the government, and we had to fight until 2007 to obtain legal recognition and status."

Today, USMEFAN is a national network of producers in twenty-two states across the country. Based in Ibadan, USMEFAN operates with very little outside funding and few employees. As its leader explains: "We cannot depend on funding bodies for our de-

velopment; I believe that NGOs and international aid have corrupted our people. I recognise that we need partners to help us start up certain activities, but later on the organization must be capable of generating income by itself through its activities, and not always wait for outside help.” Dr. Arigbede’s strong personality, which has given the organization its impetus since the beginning, makes some observers sceptical concerning USMEFAN’s social base and its viability.

USMEFAN focuses on food sovereignty and the defence of family farms and smallholder agriculture: “We are convinced that family farms are the best prospect for the future, they are the hope of Africa.” (Dr. Olaseinde Arigbede) The group opposes globalisation and market liberalisation, fighting for greater justice, equity among peoples and gender equality. Its grassroots action addresses the day-to-day problems of small farmers. One of its major current themes is land grabbing. To combat this phenomenon, USMEFAN has waged a broad awareness-raising campaign notably via the media, targeting farmers and also traditional chiefs. USMEFAN is also mobilised against the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Nigeria, working to inform the young generation and raise their awareness.



“Voices for Food Security” and the birth of a new organization, ASAPIN. The Voices for Food Security (VFS) campaign was launched in July 2009 by Nigerian organizations working with NGOs from the North, most notably Oxfam. These include Nigerian smallholders, civil society organizations and various Nigerian networks. The main objective is to mobilise actors and support their efforts to work together on

food security issues in Nigeria.

The VFS campaign is addressed to the federal government, and to international funding bodies. One of its first acts was to ask the government to split the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources into two separate ministries, a plea that was fruitful, as these two ministries now exist. The second issue raised by VFS was the percentage of the national budget devoted to agriculture (see the Maputo commitments), when it was observed that this proportion had fallen between 2009 and 2010.

The presence of a great many organizations representing Nigerian smallholders in this campaign led to the creation of the Association of Small Agro-Producers (ASAPIN) in Nigeria with the mission of representing small producers at the national level. ASAPIN obtained official recognition in March 2010. This organization represents local FOs that are themselves present in all thirty-six states. USMEFAN is a member of ASAPIN. ASAPIN aims to affiliate 100,000 members, and has taken on the mission of defending food sovereignty and smallholder agriculture in Nigeria.

While ASAPIN’s work is still closely tied to the VFS campaign and advocacy, it also pursues action to support farm production, via projects to give farmers access to inputs. The association also supports agricultural trade by helping farmers gain access to markets and developing their negotiating skills.

Nigerian Organizations in the Sub-Regional Structuring Process. Farmers are organised in a number of different ways at the federal level in Nigeria. They may focus on economic activities or advocacy; some have ties to the government, others are independent. These farmers’ organizations are recent and fragile. As of this writing, none had joined the Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs d’Afrique de l’Ouest (ROPPA, the network of farmers’ and agricultural producers’ organizations of West Africa). USMEFAN and ASAPIN, by their vision and their mission to defend family farms and food sovereignty, would seem to be quite close to ROPPA’s positions. Dr. Olaseinde Arigbede, leader of USMEFAN, offers an explanation. “We have been in contact with ROPPA for a long time and we have already collaborated at several levels. But it I think it is not yet time for us to join a sub-regional network because, when one is part of a network, one’s partners and those who work with the network tend to want to put everybody in the same basket. The risk is that if the basket falls, all the eggs are broken at the same time. This seem to me to be risky for us, for the time being. Furthermore we don’t want to dilute ourselves in a sub-regional body. Nigeria is big, we represent over half of West Africa, and therefore if we want to set up a network to be stronger, we should start with our own country!” ■