

# Lessons from the participatory analysis process on local initiatives



*Beyond the comparative analysis carried out by type of action in Chapter 2, other across-the-board lessons can be drawn from the case studies. There are two types: (1) lessons on collective marketing actions; 2) lessons on the process/approach and tools used to analyse and share these concrete experiences.*

*1) Lessons from the collective marketing actions: the initiatives that have been studied show that FOs provide much-needed services. They enable farmers to access markets on better terms (re-establish a balance in power relations, reduce risks and transaction costs, etc.), and/or derive better value for their products. This is especially the case when the farmers have an understanding of their socio-economic environment (supply-demand relation, price determination in different types of markets, the role of the value chain actors and of rural development actors, etc.). It is also true when farmers reinforce relationships among themselves over time, but also with other local actors by making use of their know-how and respective networks.*

*In this regard, it was observed that, even when they have the resources, FOs are not necessarily more successful than processors, transporters, traders, or even individual farmers at carrying out certain marketing related activities.*

*Recurrent factors of success and failure observed in the initiatives of FOs are also illustrated: some are related to marketing activities while others relate to collective actions and to the functioning of FOs in general. These lessons are not new; highlighting them here only serves as a reminder, knowing that the idea here is not to present “best practices” that should simply be replicated in other places.*

*2) Lessons on the process and tools: different tools were used in the process to analyse, capitalise on and discuss concrete cases: carrying out field visits, feedback forms, videos and audio tapes on the experiences and exchange workshops. The usefulness of these tools was above all due to their being employed at different moments as complementary aids during a process that had already been completed. This process not only focussed on the tools (number of tools produced or participants in the workshops), but on a genuine process of communication of the experiences.*

*These tools can be further improved and need to be each time adapted. However, because their production and use took root in a long process in line with the dynamics of local actors, it was possible to share the cases diligently, debate them collectively and in so doing, ensure their use by actors to continue the construction of collective reflections for action. In this sense, they are useful support tools.*

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## **1 – ACROSS-THE-BOARD LESSONS FROM THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FO ACTIONS**

Beyond the lessons (or the questions, to be more precise) highlighted by the different types of actions presented in Chapter 2, recurring failure and success factors were observed in most of the collective actions of FOs that were studied. The lack of membership, commitment, or even discipline by some farmers is frequently mentioned: broken commitments, opportunism and individualistic behaviour (sales of products to ambulant collectors who are less demanding about quality, cash payments when prices increase, etc.) without considering the consequences for the FO and its commitments to traders (quantities, quality, dates, etc.).

If the farmers benefit from the services of the FOs to which they feel more or less attached and committed, the cases studied show that “dissident” behaviour can be minimised. Three types of success factors can be distinguished: those related to the types of actions chosen by the FO (and/or the support organisation); those related to the manner in which the actions are implemented; and those related to the structuring of the FOs.

### **1.1 – Success factors related to the actions chosen and the objectives of the FO**

#### **Implementing actions that meet analysed needs in a reliable manner**

A first trivial point, but which in fact is not always checked, is the suitability of the action chosen for the needs of the members of the FO: collective actions of FOs are “sustainable” and respected by the farmers when they meet their needs and benefit them. Indeed, there is often a gap between the needs of the members and the marketing actions that are put in place. Are grouped sales, transport, purchase-storage or market information systems always the most relevant measures when the immediate credit needs of most of the members have to be met?

FOs that implement actions too hastily (often under the influence of external funding) are often doomed to fail. Inadequate consultation with members results: (i) in demands and unrealistic expectations from the farmers vis-à-vis their FO, (ii) in the system being set up too hastily and (iii) in difficulties carrying out activities collectively in the future (for example: an FO that obtains temporary external working capital purchases its members’ products at prices higher than market prices without taking into consideration the costs of storage).

In the cases that have been studied, the actions that “succeed” are those resulting from the analysis made by the FO – often after the fact, unfortunately – of the failures encountered in previous actions. These failures force the FOs to review or scale down their ambitions or in any case to plan more realistic collective actions: the “problem” of marketing is therefore “broken down”; and is no longer taken in its entirety, and therefore much more targeted solutions are explored to solve specific problems. Each of these solutions may appear “small” but in fact their diversity and complementarity contribute to the success of the FO.

The role of the leaders and staff of the FOs is crucial. Their understanding of the basic mechanisms of market operations and how prices are determined (for farmers and buyers) is a prerequisite. Information on prices, supply, and the demand of buyers and consumers is necessary but not enough. They also need to have the ability to analyse this data.

#### **Anticipating negative effects or predictable constraints**

Farmers are not the only actors at the local level or in the value chains. Whatever collective action they initiate can undermine existing power relationships and well established socio-economic powers.

Resistance may come from traders who try to destabilise the collective actions – in particular by co-opting farmers with financial advances. It may also come from farmers who do not identify with the collective action.

In the cases studied, when the activity put in place by the FO competes with those carried out by other actors of the value chain and the risks of resistance are not fully taken into consideration, failures are often to be expected. Farmers are the ones who bear the consequences: loss of products, time, money, motivation and destabilisation of the collective dynamic...



Farmers dream of their ideal FO (Stew, 33, 2005 GDS)

### Implementing actions where the FO contributes greater added value than other actors

Farmers frequently feel robbed by other actors in the value chain, traders most of all. This is often the result of under erroneous assessments of the activities and risks that other actors in the value chain are taking or over-estimating their expected benefits. Additionally, farmers are tempted to get involved in the activities “in place” of these actors.<sup>38</sup>

The examples studied show however, that FOs cannot always offer better services to their members than other actors that are present in the value chains. This leaves the door open for dissident strategies from members. On the contrary, examples show outstanding results when the roles and complementary competencies of each type of actor are leveraged, with traders, processors and transporters who are not boycotted “in principle”, but considered as useful economic actors.<sup>39</sup>

It is therefore not always in the interest of the farmers – far from it – to have their FOs assume new functions “in place” of traders, processors and/or existing transporters. Farmers have to ascertain the advantages and risks of involving their FO in the implementation of an action: can it do better than other existing actors in offering the same type of service? Is it more relevant for the FO and its members to

<sup>38</sup> Studies show that: (i) volatility in the prices of cereals is much higher in local markets than on the international market, and (ii) if there is great instability in the endogenous markets, price variations at the production stage are closely reflected in consumption prices in many cases (good price transmission). This means that traders fulfil their commercial function without excessive margins to the detriment of farmers or consumers, and therefore, that they are not such tremendous «speculators» (Daviron, Cirad, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> Examples of Mogtédou in Burkina Faso, Nowefor in Cameroon, or the self-managed cattle market in the North of Benin.

engage in new transport, processing and distribution activities, or better still to improve on the existing activities (production of quality products, more reliable and consolidated contracts with other actors, etc.)?

### **Implementing actions where the FO contributes greater added value than individual members**

In the close-knit environments where FOs operate, there are often no other actors who can offer farmers the services they need. Should the FO then nevertheless provide these services?

Examples show that it is sometimes better and more effective to allow the individual farmers to carry out some tasks than to want to organise everything at the level of the FO. For example in Mogtédó, members of the cooperative decided to allow individual farmers to sell the volumes and quantities of rice they wished in the local market. Nevertheless, the FO contributed by “organising” this local market in a manner that enabled the individual farmers to sell more of their rice.

When collective actions are very risky, it is sometimes preferable to allow the farmers to take actions by themselves and not to struggle to “carry out the actions collectively” at all cost. This is often true in particular when the socio-economic environment is very unfavourable or very volatile (pressure from other actors, intervention by the state or donors).<sup>40</sup> It is also true in food crop supply chains where large volumes of products are sold not because the farmers want to sell but because of their immediate need for money.

### **Choosing diversified, complementary actions rather than focusing on “a single miracle action”**

We have seen in the cases studied that collective actions of an organisational nature are often very effective for farmers. These actions generally require very limited material investments. On the other hand, they are very complex and take a long time to put in place because they affect not only the individual and collective management capacities within the FOs but also those of other actors. For example, actions promoted by the FO to improve the transparency and functioning of the market may undermine existing power relations (with respect to the traders, traditional chiefs, finances of the municipal council, etc.). Dialogue, negotiations and lesson-learning over time are necessary.

### **Organisational / economic measures**

In many cases, if the FO is not well organised and fails to work with other actors of the value chain, the economic actions that are financed will crumble at the end of the project due to internal problems in the FO (insufficiently rigorous or transparent management, unrealistic behaviour with respect to the market, etc.) or to the renewed power of actors excluded from the marketing system (traders).

Many FOs studied did not succeed because they only focused their actions on a single type of function or activity, whether economic (provision of inputs, grouped sales) or organisational (information, advice, training, market organisation). FOs that carried out a variety of actions to solve the difficulties and face the risks in the market responded better to the needs of their members over time. The marketing actions put in place were seen more as tools to respond to the needs of the members rather than as ends in themselves or as readymade solutions that could be imposed.

#### **Time-consuming organisational activities given the composition of FOs**

Organisational activities (the type of activity related to improving the circulation of information or work on supply management in the local market) are difficult to put in place within FOs for a number of reasons:

- farmers are not all the same. The same farmer may have different strategies depending on the various

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<sup>40</sup> In the local supply chains in particular, given that they are more easily destabilised than imported product supply chains where the traders are more organised and few in number. Examples: fixing and control of seed prices by governments and control of the prices of basic food commodities, subsidies for consumption, food distribution by the WFP in local markets...

agro-ecological and socio-economic conditions they encounter and the production systems they develop as well as climate forecasts or their family situation;

- farmers do not only have economic needs: they also have social expectations vis-à-vis their FO. This places the FOs in a situation of mediation, which is often not easy between members (in principle, beneficiaries of the services put in place by the FO) and “external” partners (traders, banks, donors...), who are certainly focused on the economic aspects.
- given the diversity of the members in terms of their expectations as well as geographically, dialogue and communication within the FO over time is necessary to define actions that will be accepted and to which all members can adhere. Arbitration is necessary because all the members cannot be equally satisfied (for example in defining specifications on the types of products and qualities expected or in negotiating a price or a date to bring products to the market, etc.).

#### **Economic activities: challenges for sure**

Many support organisations finance economic activities (related to transport, storage, processing or grouped marketing) which present a number of advantages:

- they are more visible and faster to put in place : the purchase of a vehicle or setting up working capital makes it possible to quickly disburse large sums of money;
- they mobilise farmers and have a unifying effect at the FO level: for example it is easier to mobilise farmers (and donors) around a storage facility than to work overtime on the management of supply or on the organisation of multi-actor agricultural fairs;
- they are focused on a single type of actor: Effort is concentrated at the level of the FOs without other actors.

## **1.2 – Success factors related to the manner in which activities are carried out by the FO**

### **The marketing actions put in place are shared by the members**

The collective dimension of the vision and project of the FO is crucial. There is no “innate” collective spirit on the part of farmer members of the FO. Cooperation is built around shared objectives but also around collective actions that have been tried over time. The members are not the same (farmers differ in terms of their production systems, constraints and expectations) and they must learn to work together.

To make all their expectations converge, it is important to ensure internal dialogue, circulation of information, resources to generate awareness, understanding and sharing of the collective marketing actions by the entire group (principles, rules and justifications).

The case studies show that these apprenticeships take time: many years and even decades. The situations appear to be “easier” when production is relatively localised in a given area (an irrigated area, a valley, etc.) and where the farmers have succeeded in working together on various occasions (preparation of the farm plots, water management, etc.). These actions around production are good stepping-stones to get to know each other and work together around the marketing of products.

#### **Words of a farmer**

*“When you tell a farmer “I will market your production”, chances are he will not be happy after you do it. As a result of several unfortunate experiences, we have decided to adopt a marketing approach that involves everyone and is clear to everyone. We have highlighted the benefit for members rather than for the cooperative. This made it possible for them to mobilise and really stick with the process of market reorganisation”.*

### **The actions put in place involve rules and binding control systems**

Is it enough to want to be together and accept the principle of mutual interests and the risks involved in a collective action for it to work?

Collective actions for marketing products are easier to put in place when, in addition to a common vision of the aims of the actions considered, there are also clear rules that are shared and frameworks that make it easy for them to be implemented (e.g. a single sales site in the market). These frameworks help to limit temptations and dissident behaviour by the farmers (when an isolated trader makes a counter-offer for example) and thus facilitates the consolidation of the collective actions. This can be done generally through the use of penalties for failing to comply with the quality standards or commitments on the quantities to be supplied.

Members may adhere to the collective action voluntarily, but it appears more reliable when the members have a “binding” commitment to participate (which may be financial or a condition for access to credit). In many of the case studies, collective action was strengthened by the involvement of other regional actors (local groups, traditional chiefs, and police) or value chains (traders associations, interprofessional organisations, etc.). Nevertheless, a collective action defined in a very rigid manner also increases the risk of failure and dissidence... thus the need for a certain amount of flexibility.

### **Actions put in place that provide for some flexibility and possibilities for renegotiation**

For the collective actions and the rules to “hold”, they have to be realistic with regard to the diversity and differentiation of the farmers themselves. The latter are not only farmers: they have families, they engage in many activities that are not always agricultural (private trading, salaried work, etc.) that may compete with or destabilise the collective action, and they also have different capabilities for coping with risk.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, if disciplinary measures are necessary, the case studies also reveal that the collective actions are more viable when the possibility of appeal and a certain amount of flexibility are provided for. This flexibility is indispensable particularly in very fluctuating contexts when the prices agreed upon beforehand can no longer hold when the contract has to be implemented, whether for the farmers or for the traders. In this sense as well, the diversified strategies of the farmers (diverse marketing options, different buyers, etc.) contribute to their success.

That said, for some collective actions, introducing “rules and systems that are binding and flexible at the same time” would appear to be impossible when the organisation/structuring of the farmers is too weak or the socio-economic environment is volatile. This has quite sensibly induced some FOs to retreat from carrying out certain collective actions, considering it was better for the farmers to act by themselves rather than to try in vain to lead collective actions that could not work (grouped sales for example).

### **The actions implemented involve value chain stakeholders and local actors in the region**

Among the success factors, are the relationships that the FO can develop with other actors of the territory, markets, value chains, public services and local development in general. These links can contribute to better distribution of the risks and/or power monopolies:

- the work done between the FO and other actors of the value chains and markets provides a better understanding of markets and how they work. This can also contribute to concerted definition of standards and trade rules;
- the local authorities and traditional leaders can take part in defining and controlling the decisions made by the farmers for the benefit of a wider public by extending the benefits derived from FO organisation throughout the local economy: larger volumes traded in the market, better prices,

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<sup>41</sup> Leaders selling their own products and those of other farmers.

greater purchasing power for farmers, financing social activities;

- partnerships and alliances with actors involved in training, research, extension work, decentralised state services or civil servants of ministries also strengthen FOs. Farmers who do not have the means to do everything, are often in need of these alliances. Where they exist, they are frequently very effective.

### **1.3 - Certain success factors related to the structuring of the FO**

#### **The FO has the means to implement its actions and make good use of its resources**

By analysing the history of longstanding FOs and their multiple trials and struggles, one sees that by seeking to undertake many activities without a proper assessment of the competition and the risks involved, many FOs have lost out. FOs are not necessarily ready to carry out any new type of activity (transport, processing). To take charge of new activities can only be realistic for the farmers if the FO is quite robust and able to manage and make decisions that are collectively honoured.

Because of lack of competencies, FOs do not often deliver on expectations and many of them have been destabilised to a greater or lesser degree at some time in their existence by actions that were managed poorly. Sometimes with the encouragement of support organisations, FOs set very unrealistic objectives without any knowledge of the difficulties involved. For example, the strategy of the farmers to develop activities in place of intermediaries is not always realistic given their real capacities to take on new functions, finance them and manage them collectively (while faced with attempts by the same intermediaries to destabilise those activities).

#### **The members of the FO benefit from services but also assume responsibilities**

Farmers may view their FO as an opportunity among others (good purchase prices) and try to benefit from its services without feeling they have any corresponding obligations. These individuals are therefore “users” rather than “active” members of the FO, and they do not feel committed to complying with a given quality, quantity or delivery dates, or to participating in the social life of the FO. This can certainly only weaken the collective action and even beyond it, the FO itself.

While the FO provides services to its members, the members also have obligations: among others, to participate in the life of the FO, to build a common vision to defend beyond their individual activities, and to respect the commitments that have been decided collectively. Through lack of understanding or interest in collective action, the relationship between the farmer and the organisation may be seen by members as demanding and the FO perceived merely as a necessary intermediary (especially when there are no other service opportunities in the market).

This brings to light the question of the balance between individual and collective interests, with the good of the whole being greater than the sum of individual interests. Communication between members at the base and the leaders is essential. The role of the technical teams is also essential in the quality of the information and training given to the members to help them and their leaders make decisions in a more realistic, serene way.

#### **Leaders play their roles**

The leaders who are farmers themselves may commit to unrealistic demands. The FO is plays the role of an intermediary between farmer members and rural society (farmers have families and live in connection with other activities and rural actors), on the one hand, and other economic actors in the value chains, rural and local development actors (policy makers, support organisations, etc.) on the other.

However, to legitimate their power positions, the leaders may want (have) to offer better terms than the market can provide and have problems ensuring votes on decisions that “disappoint” members with unrealistic expectations. Their role is not always easy.

### **The staff of the FO are trained and carry out activities for the members' benefit**

The role of the staff of the FO is not simple: their positions depend on the elected representatives and it is not easy to bring the members and leaders to accept disappointing realities or defend positions that *a priori* may be less advantageous for the members in the short term, though more realistic in the medium to long term.

The technical teams at the level of unifying FOs are in a privileged situation in terms of access to information and contacts with trade, technical and financial partners. It is sometimes difficult for the FO to keep their skilled technicians once the latter have acquired a network of relationships and capabilities. How many people in charge of marketing in FOs have left for private organisations or to trade on their own account?

Although this situation is unavoidable (FOs' limited resources do not permit them to pay high salaries), FOs can obtain the resources to better manage their human resources and the relationships between the elected leaders and staff. To put in place quality services for the FO and its members, other than the competent staff, it is also necessary to introduce tools for planning, steering-assessment and continuous feedback on the activities of the salaried teams in the FOs to ensure that they work diligently for the interest of the members, not only to control what the staff are doing but also to keep track of the achievements and the knowledge capital that has been acquired.

### **FOs: are they just like any other organisation? FOs have special functions**

*“The FO is not something alien. Members shouldn't scratch it: it belongs to them, it is part of them. The FO is an organisation that also exists to empower the rural world, something companies won't do. It provides other services that the private sector does not”*

In fact, the FO is not an ordinary organisation that invests like a company depending on market opportunities and returns on the capital invested. It is an organisation at the service of its members, a social group, which may have economic as well as social needs.

This brings up the issue of the balance within the FO between the economic (which can push the FO to work only with the most successful farmers for example) and social functions. It is necessary to highlight the expected results as well as the objectives to which the members are committed: this makes it possible to refer to them and to recall and/or issue reminders about the rules that must be respected.

## **1.4 - And after this, what should be done with these cross-cutting lessons from the case studies?**

These lessons are not new: many were known even before starting this study<sup>42</sup>. To highlight them here is merely to recall them, knowing that the idea is not to present “best practices” that can simply be replicated elsewhere.

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<sup>42</sup> There are innumerable reports on the subject. Amongst others in the French literature:

On the role of FOs: Les organisations paysannes et rurales pour un développement durable en faveur des pauvres : – Thème n°1. Renforcement du pouvoir des agriculteurs et résultats de l'action collective. Note introductive Atelier de Paris / Mercoiret (Cirad), Minla Mfou'ou (Canadel). – World Bank, IFAD, MAE, MAP. – Octobre 2006, 14 p. (pour la préparation de Rapport de la Banque Mondiale 2008 « Agriculture pour le Développement ». Les organisations paysannes et rurales pour un développement durable en faveur des pauvres. – World Bank, 2008.

On FOs and marketing: Many works by Afdi, AVSF, Cirad, Gret, Iram, etc.

On methods of support to FOs: Les programmes d'appui institutionnel aux organisations paysannes en Afrique sub-saharienne : analyse et capitalisation de l'expérience de la Coopération française / Mercoiret, Pesche, Berthomé – MAE, DGCID, DCT, EPS, Cirad-Terra, Ciepac, Octobre 2004. – 53 p.

### Best practices to transfer do not exist!

“Best practices” do not exist. This depends on the context and which viewpoint is adopted. The viewpoint of the FO that is carrying out the action? That of the farmer who benefits from it? That of the donor or support organisation that supports the value chain or specific actions? Or that of the expert who analyses the initiative?

There are only practices that work in specific contexts to solve specific problems for specific FOs. Often it is a combination of “small things”, neither extraordinary nor innovative, that strengthens the services offered by the FO.

### More than just recommendations of “what needs to be done”: questions that need to be asked

This observation raises the question of the point of these general lessons. Rather than suggesting “all you have to do is...” or “there must be...”, these results show the reason why the FOs and the support organisations need to acquire steering and evaluation tools that enable them to verify and ensure that the actions put in place are relevant. The box below gives examples of key questions that can guide the action towards better service for the benefit of the members.

#### Not best marketing practices to copy, but possible questions to ask when putting marketing actions in place

(1) The actions put in place by the FO:

- ⊙ respond to the reliably analysed needs?
- ⊙ take account of the negative effects or predictable constraints?
- ⊙ contribute more added value than those already offered by other actors?
- ⊙ are diverse and complementary without focusing on a “miracle action”?
- ⊙ have been discussed and agreed by members of the FO?
- ⊙ have clear rules and control systems?
- ⊙ leave some room for flexibility and possibility for renegotiation?
- ⊙ are carried out with other stakeholders in the value chain and local development actors?

(2) The Farmers' Organisation:

- ⊙ has the means to implement its actions and makes good use of its resources?
- ⊙ is clear on its mandate?
- ⊙ has active members and leaders who assume their key roles?
- ⊙ has competent leaders and employees for the provision of quality service?
- ⊙ has systems to make the best use of its collective wealth of experience?

*Approach directly inspired by the “quality criteria” reference developed by the URD group for humanitarian actions. In particular see “rose des vents” of Compas Qualité (www.urd.org).*

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## 2 – APPROACHES AND TOOLS FOR SHARING THE CONCRETE CASES

Beyond the results obtained from the analysis of the marketing initiatives (comparative-analysis in Chapter 2 and the across-the-board lessons above), what results do the local actors draw from the study-analyses, exchange tools and forums that require considerable involvement on their part? These participatory approaches are complex and take time to put in place, are time-consuming and clearly expensive (whereas human and financial resources are limited). These questions therefore deserve to be clarified. Lessons learnt from the tools and the communication media produced and used during the process of the *Working Group* are presented below.

### 2.1 - Workshops: spaces for exchange and communication?

Participants in workshops, if they are informed in advance, often arrive with among other information, a program that they have more or less the chance to read.<sup>43</sup> In reality, even if they have read it, regardless of the topic or the audience (FOs, ministries, researchers, NGOs, etc.), the programme is often fixed well in advance and usually follows the same format (see box). What takes place in such workshops? What has to be said? What happens or remains afterwards? Who do they serve at the end of the day?

#### Traditional conduct of a very traditional workshop

- 1) **opening**: official speeches, presentation of objectives, logistics and guidelines.
- 2) **successive plenary presentations** (10-15 minutes by PowerPoint), for half a day; then the question of the rooms to which participants have to be assigned, answers to some of the questions (in half an hour at the most, since the opening session and the presentations have already taken more time than planned).
- 3) **work in subgroups** (or field visits), often with question grids to fill in and then back in plenary sessions where the rapporteurs try to summarise the work in 10 minutes.
- 4) **conclusions** and grand final **declarations**.
- 5) **evaluation**, often with generally polished, respectful satisfactory comments (with perhaps different viewpoints expressed during the coffee breaks, at least).

The result is often as follows: *“presentations were too long, there is too little time for discussion, except during breaks but they were too short”*.<sup>44</sup> In general, very little is remembered from these workshops. Is it because they do not respond to the needs of the participants? Or is it because the format of the workshop does not give adequate room for discussion? Faced with these observations and questions, we tried to build a dynamic where workshops are only components – the visible parts - of a long process with a “before and an after”.

To better exchange “during” workshops and ensure an “after workshop” result, we tried especially to improve the phase “upstream or before” the workshops by setting them within the context of local dynamics. A long process of support, exchange visits and the creation of tools was carried out with farmers. The first part of the work consisted in identifying the actors and local marketing initiatives. Thereafter, different forms of exchange (and in different languages) involving local groups were multiplied. The local groups analyse and discuss the concrete cases and prepare to present them. They then come to the workshops to share and to discuss them (in French).

<sup>43</sup> In general the farmers are designated in the last minute and their availability often takes precedence than whether the theme of the workshop is adequate for them.

<sup>44</sup> It is a pity given the numerous workshops which are organised. More so, this can contribute to disperse the energy of the farmers, encourage them to run after the workshop per diem and even destabilise the FOs by the dispersion of the leaders and their salaried staff.

During these workshops, the choice was made to allow for more room for discussion between participants and to make it the core of the meetings, with few formal speeches (which aid communication) and more time for group discussions. Thus, the shared time was put to better use and laid the groundwork for dynamics beyond the workshops. Field visits, videos and feedback forms produced before the workshops made it possible to share experiences during and after the workshops. Lessons are learnt from the different tools.

## 2.2 – Collective analysis trips to study concrete cases: essential and far-reaching work

The visits and analysis carried out in the field by local actors prior to the workshops are long processes presenting varying organisational problems depending on the availability of farmers, local accommodations and the means of communication and transport deployed.

This time is important and necessary for the work to be focused on the concerns of the local actors as well as on the dynamics of the FOs, so that the feedback analysis carried out by these groups should be a process of collective apprenticeship. Time is needed “before the visit” to identify groups engaged in marketing experiences and/or interested in the *Working Group*’s process. Thereafter, time is needed so that the local groups can:

- do the work according to their calendars: set up the groups, organise, carry out field visits and produce the first analytical notes;
- understand the key items of the experiences studied, fill in missing information with return trips to the field when necessary, exchange with the support structures involved;
- produce the exchange tools on their experiences, which are needed afterwards to carry out comparative-analysis and help gain a sense of perspective with regard to the specificities of each case.

Difficulties therefore exist. They can even discourage organisation and follow-up on the process involving local actors before the forums. It is much easier to limit the work to evaluation studies and analysis of “best practices”, which are done by experts faster and apparently less expensively.<sup>45</sup>

But we have to be clear about the results we wish to achieve. If the objective is to have an evaluation study quickly so as to be informed about what is happening in the field, one might be satisfied with the second option (to use experts). On the contrary, we should be sceptical of the “external synthesis provided during a workshop” formula, if we expect the actors be able to change their practices. Because the process of collective apprenticeship is also an integral part of the results to be obtained and this necessitates specific means in terms of time and human resources.

Within the framework of the *Working Group*, efforts by farmers and support teams (with the associated financing) did not go in vain. The lengthy phase of visits and capitalisation were occasions for multiple exchanges between actors (sometimes in the local languages) and was a very important step in the process of collective apprenticeships.<sup>46</sup>

For the farmers who capitalised on their own experiences and /or other experiences visited, and who took part in designing the exchange tools, the process led to self-reflection (mirror effect) and to improving their ability to represent themselves and present their story and their situation. This is the first result. Though it is difficult to measure according to the classical criteria for project evaluation, it has to be taken into consideration.

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<sup>45</sup> In reality, one can question the usefulness cost of a workshop whose effects are very limited...

<sup>46</sup> In Benin, Cameroon, Guinea and Mali between 2004 and 2006.

## 2.3 - Videos: powerful tools to enhance exchange and support debate

Videos produced to share the practical experiences of actors have shown enormous potential. They contain, in some 10 to 20 minutes, more information than a long report. The power of the image makes it possible to reconcile in a single time and place rich experiences that are sometimes located in very geographically distance places: this allows more people to access it. Since it is often difficult to move many farmers to watch an experience, the video makes it possible to take home the experience, its actors and their voices.

Video has characteristics that make it an undeniable asset to bring life and reality to the experiences of others: we see and hear. *“It is clear, the videos of the marketing experiences (like producing pictures and PowerPoint presentations), bring added value and make wider and better participation possible not only at the level of grassroots farmers but also the leaders of the FOs. The farmers participate more fully since that it is more “visual” and concrete and in seconds it brings a change to the many workshops in which they take part each year”*, according to a facilitator of the forum in Bamako.

In our experiences, when the phase “before” the production of the video involved local actors (farmers and support NGOs) to a considerable degree, the video was later on circulated and used “alone”. This joint construction of videos, following a process of voluntary participation, takes more time than when the video is commissioned to a communication professional who “puts the finishing touches” on the video without any outside input.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, there is need for skills and a specific attitude: it is not easy to find a professional who will take the time to understand the issues with the farmers and jointly construct the scenarios with them the way they want (see box 1). All the same, the videos are not miracle tools: the results depend on the manner in which they are used (see box 2).

### (1) What type of video production initiatives are we talking about? (S. Ouattara)

As the director of a private press agency working for more than 20 years in the production of press articles, photos, video, radio and television programs, and for the past five years in the training of young journalists, I like “doing journalism differently”. When we use the video tool with farmers, we are certainly working on journalistic genres, but the participatory approach we use is different from what a professional reporter would use, who works alone.

We proceed first of all by identifying the innovation in the field. It is the necessary step to understand upstream “what is our subject matter?”. This involves working with individuals and support organisations that are familiar with the experience: FO, NGO, projects or state development organisation. One has to go to the field, meet people, and understand their issues. After that comes the phase of deepening the reflection and determining the explanatory elements. This can be achieved by organising meetings between the FO, consultant, filmmaker and the support NGO. There can also be the examination of the case studies done by the consultant. When this is done, we can then proceed to the actual production phase i.e. the filming and the postproduction, which leads to the production of the video.

This appears obvious, but still! How many videos have been commissioned and finalised without understanding the situation of the local actors? We can then ask whether the result is a “video for development” or “simply a video”. I never forget who I am; I try not to lose sight of values such as a balanced view, honesty (objectivity, on the other hand, I reject). In a world where communication finds itself everywhere, to keeping one’s focus is a constant battle.

*Ref: Initiatives et réflexions d’acteurs autour de la vidéo pour le développement / Diagne et Sall (FONGS), Colin et Petit, Ouattara (Jade productions), Lothoré. – GDS 44, Inter-réseaux, 2008. – 2 p.*

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<sup>47</sup> Inter-réseaux had many exchanges with leaders of FOs, support organisations (Amassa, Saild) and video professionals (Jade productions, Cespa) to jointly construct the scenarios. Feedback, experience sharing and construction of collective reflections: videos, tools inscribed in the processes; Guide to the video “Vidéo pour le développement ou vidéo tout court ?” / Colin, Petit, Diagne, Mbzibain, Ouattara, Sanogo, Lothoré – IR, 2008. – 24 p.

## (2) Strengths and limitations of video to support development (I. Colin, V, Petit)

A current challenge is to put local populations back at the centre of thinking about their development and encourage approaches aimed at promoting “active partners” rather than “passive beneficiaries”.

But for true dialogue and collaboration to be established, there is need for further leeway for each and every one to be comparable. If this ultimately leads to particular forms of political and institutional organisations, then it entails specific work on communication, which has justified the emergence of **communication for development**. This decision relies on the use of approaches, modern and traditional communication methods and tools, to **facilitate discussions and the exchange of views** between the people involved in a development effort. Among other media used, the video as a tool is again in the spotlight.

### Video approaches

Depending on the case, video is used to achieve different objectives: lobbying actions, training, experience sharing and facilitating debate. Participatory video production options also make it possible to support co-expertise approaches, which aim to perform diagnoses, do follow-up studies and evaluations or plan development projects with the local populations.

These video interventions are developed by NGOs (AVSF, Maneno Mengi, Deccan Development Society), donors (filmed evaluation of the Prey NUP project in Cambodia by the AFD), researchers (project Wademed in Morocco) or even farmers’ organisations.

Although the renewed interest in the video is due in part to recent technological advances in this area, what are the real strengths and limits of video to support local development dynamics?

### Benefits offered by the video tool

Videos have a number of advantages, first of all its accessibility: the oral nature of the messages make it possible to reach nearly everyone – particularly illiterate persons - and the images in themselves have a strong descriptive character; discussions take place around “factual reality”, generally (and often very quickly) seen by the spectator as objective proof.

Another major strength is how easily it can be reproduced and, by the same token, its potential for massive distribution. It also serves as a record of events, often leading the actors of a video to attach a strong value to their roles and invest time in their preparation – as if the fact that they are frozen on the tapes meant that their statements were irreversible. More broadly, the dissemination potential of video makes it a strong message-carrier, capable of facilitating vertical communication (see the Fogo Process of D. Snowden where the video put at the service of the local populations was used as a tool to represent and disseminate their development strategies) or horizontal communication for example during exchanges of experiences between farmers’ organisations.

The video also makes it possible to offer local actors, new spaces for expression that can be qualified as “**direct**” and “**secure**”. “Direct” in the sense that, once the interview has been filmed, and by avoiding the anonymity of the information, it reinforces and strengthens the credibility it is given by the spectators: the latter feel they have received first-hand information. “Secure” because the video can guarantee the expression of certain groups, especially the most marginalised, and therefore where the interviews create opportunities for expression: their dissemination during debates helps open up the dialogue to new participants.

Used in a participatory manner, video plays the role of a mirror, and therefore favours work that is based on reflections, appropriate for retrospective assessments for each and everyone with regard to his/ her arguments and behaviour within the local system. Finally the use of video is relatively original and interesting compared to the fascination television brings to the four corners of the world. This was clearly highlighted during a participatory diagnosis that was carried out using video in the Office Zone of Niger with the participation of Malian farmers:

*“The projection of the video helped to encourage people to express themselves during the meeting. We also learned many things from it { } without the video we would never have had this type of information. Many of us attend meetings but do not understand what is actually taking place. This time, when we watched the video, everybody then knew what had to be discussed”.*

*They come to us and we hold meetings. Or they invite us, and then we speak and they write. But if what you say is not what they think, they will not write it. Never. Many people take part in these meetings, but*

*what you say is translated into French. With the video you are seen and heard, nobody can transform what you have said”.*

### **The limitations of video**

It is clear that the production of videos cannot directly solve the problems of poor nutrition, access to water or low incomes. We sometimes observe the frustration of the populations when a camera is introduced; when they would have preferred a well (see the analysis of Braden and Huong on the use of video in Vietnam). The interventions must be able to identify projects that can be effectively supported by video, or honestly acknowledge cases where the media does not have its place.

In the development context, video as a product is hardly an end in itself. It is how the video is used and its incorporation into a more global approach to feedback and dialogue that makes it possible to evaluate its different strengths. It is important to carefully distinguish the real impact of a video intervention (medium-term measure) from the momentary excitement it can generate. “The life of the video” after its production has to be the focus of attention. If not, are the spectators sufficiently prepared to see the biases inherent in the production of the video and to distinguish factual reality in this sense from what is shown in the video? Faced with an uninformed audience, the force of conviction conveyed by audiovisual messages can transform them into propaganda instruments. The video can therefore become a new source of power (depending on the influence that each person has on its content) and thus play a role contrary to its original purpose. It is therefore important to ensure that the spectators are capable of watching the video critically. On this subject, many precautionary measures can be taken including writing an accompanying/support guide that highlights the contexts in which the video was produced, possible leads for debate, possible comparisons with other situations, etc. (see video support guides Inter-réseaux).

### **The role of those making the video**

These limits show the influence of the people involved in producing the video – who may or may not belong to the system of local actors. They should not only be audiovisual technicians but aware of development issues and have the necessary understanding of the subject. Our experience has shown the importance for the audience of having the video participants express themselves on the subject presented or discussed by the video, along with the honesty and humility of presenting their comments as one point of view among others. Objectivity is illusory, and it can even appear useful to voluntarily present issues from a generally specific angle and in a positive manner in order to help advance the debate. If this means a form of manipulation, then it should be conscious, exposed and controlled. The “communicator for development” considers the video process and its impact in terms of development the absolute priority, well ahead of the audiovisual product. No matter how enthusiastic the local actors or how much the time is devoted to its production, the video must remain what it is: a tool.

A final point concerns the Participatory Video process (VP). This can provide excellent results, mainly in terms of accessing how the actors see themselves, building self-esteem, empowerment, and starting dialogue... All the same, it cannot escape the general criticisms made against participatory approaches: socio-political and institutional conditions remain crucial for their implementation; the making of the video may be perceived as a lacking transparency by the participants; the know-how of the filmmaker is essential and they often lack a system of checks to guide the fieldwork. These approaches also raise the very crucial question of copyrights.

### **Video is not a miracle tool, but certainly a tool to be taken advantage of**

The video is therefore not a miracle tool that could revolutionise development practices. However, if we recognise that poor communication penalises bottom-up approaches and is an important barrier to the emergence of an “alternative development” approach, then the use of video has a role to play in various situations. By providing possibilities for expression, video makes it possible to bring the viewpoints of the population to the public arena and even to create a **counter-force** – and perhaps this explains some of the resistance to the use of these approaches. It is a tool for socio-cultural opening up and a tool for exchange. It can facilitate establishing dialogue between different groups and in so doing, remove barriers – even if only temporarily – whether social, geographical or even temporal (time constraints). It can also help establish a form of continuous democracy. Nevertheless, depending on the case, other communication tools may be more appropriate. It is up to the communicators to identify them, taking into account local habits of dialogue and conflict resolution. Today it appears important to have tools that can help stimulate

joint reflection among development actors at every level of intervention. In this respect, feedback in the form of a video on development support activities, whether successful or not, seems quite appropriate.

*Ref: La Vidéo Participative : outil d'accompagnement du développement local ? Étude de trois processus de concertation en Bolivie, en Équateur et au Mali / L. Colin, V. Petit – Thèse, AgroParisTech-Abies-Cirad Green, 2008.*

*Du potentiel réel aux limites de son utilisation pour l'accompagnement du développement : la vidéo, un outil qui fait débat / L. Colin, V. Petit – Contribution à Inter-réseaux Développement rural, 2008 – 4 p.*

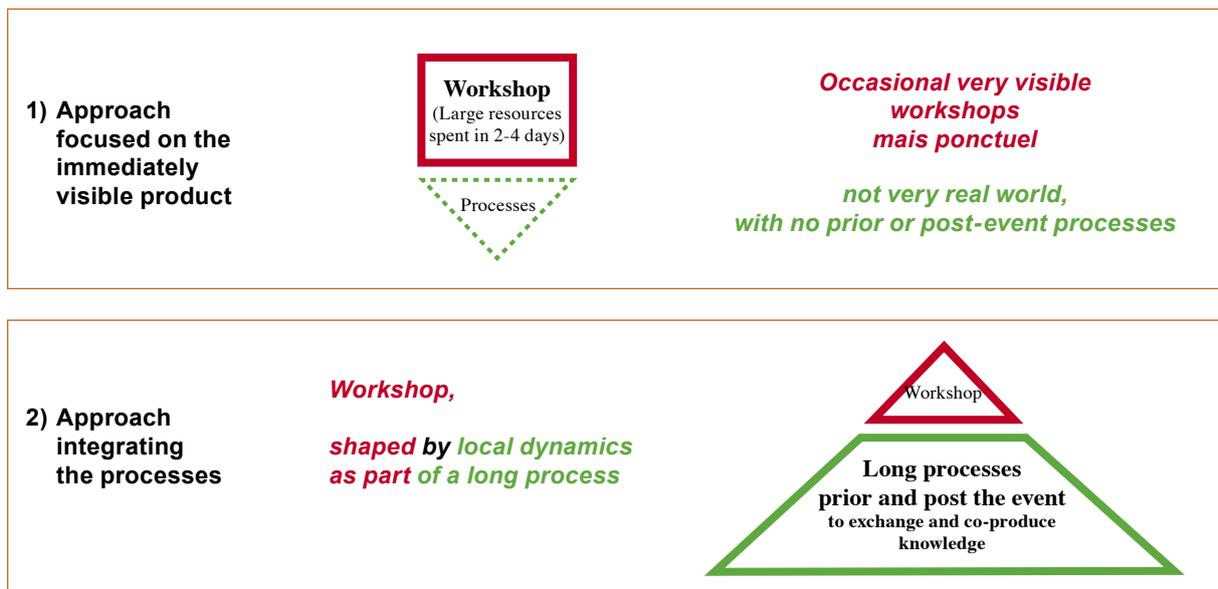
## 2.4 - And after the forums and workshops?

### What happens afterwards depends on what happened beforehand...

Exchange visits and preliminary analyses and tools developed prior to the forums (feedback forms, audio tapes and video) made it possible for the actors, despite the short length of the forums, to clearly present their experiences not only with contextualised, descriptive aspects but also analytical information.

Responding to the questions of participants was an important element during the process of forum deliberations by the farmers presenting their experiences (mirror effect). The presentations also facilitated exchanges and stimulated participant reflection. The concrete cases studied beforehand were effectively shared and discussed: at the end of the forum, most of the participants had a genuine understanding of the experiences and could carry out comparative analyses of the cases presented.

After the forums, participants gave some “traditional” feedback - formal and short - to their “leaders” who had mandated them to take part in the forum. But many other meetings also took place, led by the participants using the aids obtained from the results of the *Working group*: these aids, and especially the relative mastery of their contents by the participants from the outset of the forum, made it possible to continue the discussion and support reflection within their FOs and support organisations beyond the forum and those who took part directly in it.<sup>48</sup> The videos were used as support (the work of the session leaders facilitated by the feedback forms and the video support guides); other aids (CDs, audio tapes) were produced by the FOs based on existing ones for dissemination and were also used in other forms (radio) and in different languages.



Products and processes (Lothoré, 2009)

<sup>48</sup> CDs containing all the aids were given to each participant at the beginning of the forum.

The media can even be downloaded from the Internet and they have been used in university courses.

The participants - those who participated in the preparatory phases of the workshop or in the workshops themselves - do not indicate the types of changes in practices that can be produced or that they can generate. However, there is evidence suggesting that new activities were observed in the field following ideas inspired from the FO initiatives studied and meetings in the field: agreements between farmers and traders, new mechanisms for price setting, changes in collective marketing strategies.

These changes in practices in the field are certainly not credited only to the work of the *Working Group*; other factors come into play. But by opening up the field of opportunities and references for the activities carried out by the farmers, the *Working Group* greatly contributed to these changes.

The example of the Cameroonian FO Nowefor is illustrative of this (see box). It recapitulates how the farmers and leaders of the FO viewed their participation in the *Working Group* and what they were able to gain from it. The FO participated in the feedback on its experience, first of all in a report and then in a summary sheet; these aids served to jointly construct the scenario to produce a video; the video was shown during the Regional Forum organised by the *Working Group* in Bamako; and thereafter, the members of the FO used the video to work within the FO and/or with potential partners.

### Sharing marketing initiatives between FOs: experiences and lessons from the FO Nowefor

#### *Upstream - meetings in large groups (national workshop in Cameroon, international forum in Bamako)*

A team of leaders and staff of the FO Nowefor took part in the production of a video about their own experience in the management of supply at Bafut local market in Cameroon: working on the scenario, choosing the people to interview and seeking the views of Sald (Cameroonian NGO which has supported this FO for a long time). Sald made a contract with professional journalists to produce the video. Ever since, the technical team and the farmers of the FO Nowefor have shown the video of their experience on many occasions.

#### *During the experience exchange forum in Bamako (2007)*

Being able to present their own experience bolstered their capacity to communicate and discuss their experience. This made it possible for other participants in the forum to understand and effectively debate about the experience and consider it in relation to the other experiences presented: the self-managed cattle market in Benin and the market for rice farmers in Mogtédo.

#### *After the forum*

Nowefor farmers used the video within their FO network for internal communication and to make their experience known to a wider public. Indeed, their experience of supply management in Bafut was successful, but the issue regarding the system in place was the need to find more distant markets to sell local surpluses; this forced them to work on producing larger volumes... and thus with more farmers. The video in this case helped the farmers to make their experience known to other farmers in neighbouring zones and was used during support sessions as a means of inducing these farmers to work on the supply management issue as well.

The Nowefor team used the video to show their experience to other partners and aid organisations during forums to which they were invited. This helped make them better known and to strengthen them.

Each time, Nowefor has made many copies of the video using its own funds to disseminate it more widely (more than 300 people had seen and discussed the issues raised by the video a few months after the forum). The video was also shown on television in two provinces. In the example of Nowefor, the fact that local actors were used in the conception of the video allowed for "its appropriation": they "saw themselves in it" and they used it to achieve their ends, and this helped to give the video a life after its production and presentation at the Bamako Forum.

#### *Assessment of the process and the video tool*

According to the then Coordinator of Nowefor, the process of feedback and discussion made it possible to:

- discuss concrete practices with others who also presented their experiences;
- strengthen the capacity of the FO to communicate internally and externally (local authorities, traders, donors), to involve more actors in its initiatives, and to gain recognition from various quarters;
- have a direct impact on the activities of the FO, on the organisation of the market and on the prices of products.

Nevertheless, the video is not a miracle tool. There are limits and constraints to its use:

- the need for projection equipment and electricity;
- the need for a means to produce copies dubbed in local languages;
- the need for other simple written aids such as annotated posters in local languages that can be used in remote regions that do not have their own computers or video projectors.

Video is therefore, only one communication tool among others and has to be used with other complementary aids and discussion tools suited to local conditions and languages.

*Ref.: Expérience de commercialisation du gingembre par Nowefor, organisation paysanne du nord-ouest (Bafut, Cameroun) – CTA, Inter-réseaux, Nowefor, Sald, 2007. – 12 min (vidéo) + Guide d'accompagnement (13 p.).*

*Farmer's organizations sharing Farmer's organizations experiences: Nowefor experience sharing, and learning from a process / Mbzibain (Nowefor), Lothoré (Inter-réseaux Développement rural), Octobre 2008. – 10 p.*

*Valorisation of the video documentary on the ginger commercialization experience of Nowefor / Mbzibain, 2007. – 4 p.*

## 2.5 – A variety of results according to the approach and tools used

### Visible results

At the beginning of the approach, we defined formats for the sheets, videos and audio tapes in such a way as to make their use easier during the facilitation of wider collective reflection. We made changes during the process (mode of production involving the local actors, production of support guides to accompany the videos and facilitate reflections using this tool). In the end we were able to obtain:

- co-production of information and analysis of agricultural product marketing in different forms: descriptive sheets, audio tapes, videos of the experiences, support guides for the videos; comparative-analysis sheets for the marketing activities (chapter 2); across-the-board lessons in marketing and tools (chapter 3);
- co-production of support tools to continue the debate over time, independently of the sporadic process of the *Working Group*: the aids pertaining to the experiences and analyses are still available. These aids do more than merely provide information on the existence of this and that experience (a one- or two-page article or a radio announcement can be effective for that). Complementing each other, the aids provide information “that speaks”, which can be shared relatively easily, and which can help facilitators/technicians or leaders to prepare other collective reflections during various events.

### Necessary diversity of exchange aid formats

For writing, it is important to have different formats, for different approaches and periods of reading, and for different audiences: (i) very short format for a simple “sticker” (a few lines); (ii) short format to provide information about some characteristics of the activity of the FO (a page); (iii) format with more information, to go beyond factual information and to understand more analytical elements. Files of about ten pages, if they can be read by the technicians, staff or leaders (who are used to reading), are not appropriate formats for “grassroots” members. Also necessary are illustrated and/or animated aids, each of which can be used in its “own manner”.

### Less visible results, related to the process

The approach and tools used in the analysis and feedback work had many important results:

- they established a genuine exchange of experiences and communication between actors during many meetings (local workshops, national and international forums);

- they reinforced the capabilities of the actors to present and communicate their respective experiences. This is an essential point, to be able to work more effectively with the members internally, to improve the understanding of each member, but also to be able to work at the external level, in collaboration with other value chain, rural and local development actors;
- to reinforce the capabilities of the stakeholders to share and discuss these studies more widely in order to find suitable solutions in view of their own contexts and specific needs and the specific characteristics of their products, their socio-economic environment and the structure of their FOs, of course. The participants go back with ideas and tools to continue debates collectively. This can lead (and has led) to new actions at their own level;
- reinforce the advisory capabilities of the support organisations with respect to FOs.

At the end of the process, we can say that these tools were aids that facilitated collective reflection. They should be used in a complementary manner by local actors according to their needs and their state of reflections on marketing.

## 2.6 - Recommendations for action

### Is one tool better than another?

There is certainly no best communication-exchange aid. How they are used in a completed initiative (without confusing tools and ends) and the context of their use within the local dynamics is what counts. The idea is not to do feedback for its own sake.

#### Feeding back on experiences?

The idea is not to do feedback just for the sake of it, but to meet and share, because what counts is the relationship with the other, and not partly true-partly false communication that is so common.

The first role of feedback is that, instead of being limited to a point in time, the experience of an individual, an institution or a group of people becomes a source of building know-how for them, and therefore a structuring experience for those who have had them.

The second effect is that by asking them or by obliging them to structure what they have drawn from their experience and to transform the know-how and the fruit of their experience, they become structured by themselves; they are therefore not only more effective in their actions but they build up know-how which can be transmitted to others.

Good feedback is one in which even the production of feedback contributes to setting the structure, the organisation, in motion. For this to happen, the association (the actors) must be involved in the task, [ ... ] so that feedback on an experience will be the product of the actors of the experience, even if its final production is done by somebody from outside (support organisation).

*Source: Analyser et valoriser un capital d'expérience. Repères pour une méthode de capitalisation. Dossier coordonné par A. Ollitrault-Bernard, S. Robert et P. de Zutter, 2001*

“How to do it” and “who does it” matters more than the occasional result of the feedback or communication aid produced (paper, web page video, workshop, etc.): *“Within the framework of communication that targets development, the technical team must also be committed. The relationship between the technician and the person whose experience is being used to teach a lesson is what makes the difference. It is this complicity that can be the foundation for an aid that has a soul”* (J. Kompaoré, Performances, Burkina Faso)

How do feedback and exchanges about initiatives work? How are the tools mobilised and used – or not? These issues are essential because communication is neither spontaneous nor immediate, even among people apparently speaking “the same language”: the approach is not visible, even though it contributes to the interest of the tasks carried out.

## Put the actors directly concerned at the centre of the initiatives and tools

The general lessons are not important: some were already known even before the start of this work. The search for these types of lessons should not be a justification for launching studies (but then it is often what remains to be done). The issue is to start with the actors, farmers and concrete cases, to recognise their existence and enable the local actors not to put into practice the supposed or proposed solutions but to strengthen and reinforce their own possibilities for action.

### “Know-how does not mean knowing how to do, but what to do”.

Skills are often understood as the application of theoretical knowledge or practices or even as a set of abilities and personality traits. They are understood in terms of the situation. This is an analytical approach to skills, which is only defined by the sum of knowledge, know-how, and interpersonal skills. Describing skills here means listing them.

Skills, on the other hand, have to be considered as a process, enabling a farmer to make the connection between the combination of resources (knowledge, know-how, etc.), an action, a contribution to a result (service, expected product): the person (the farmer) has a wide margin of autonomy to organise, make decisions, adapt, react, innovate. This does not mean carrying out a particular activity conceived and prescribed from outside at a particular time. We count on the ingenuity, innovation and entrepreneurial spirit of the farmer – and therefore this must be recognised beforehand. This is what will guarantee the survival of the farm. It also seems just as pointless to try and judge past actions by the present, as it is to look to the past to find recipes for the present. On the contrary, recognising mistakes to avoid repeating them and help advance ideas and modes of intervention for the benefit of the wider rural population appears to be more than desirable.

*Ref: Extract from Boterf Guy, Skills Engineering, Les Éditions d'Organisation, 1998*

## Necessary evaluation of the impact of the studies, of feedback and of workshops

No matter what final declarations the workshop make or how many workshops are organised, WebPages and papers are published and videos are made: if they are not useful or used, they have no *raison d'être*. **It is their impact that matters.** But then, measuring the impact of the activities aimed at improving analytical capabilities and collective decision-making is difficult for a number of reasons (see box).

### Difficulties in measuring the impact of capacity-building

Impacts can only be measured well after the completion of an action (it is impossible to assess the impact of a workshop at the time it ends). This is even truer of capacity-building for collective action. It is not enough to give relevant information to a member of a FO during a workshop or in a file (slip) for the FO to understand it. Beyond the individual understanding of the information, there is also the process of putting it to practice or into action. And when we work at the level of agriculture (annual production cycles which limit the number of times the action can be repeated and therefore mastered), and at the level of the FO (with differentiated farmers), this implies much time for information sharing and communication.

The impact is differed over time and conditioned by many other factors. Yet the impact of training or a workshop is hardly ever assessed many years after it took place.

Should we not evaluate the capitalisation studies and the workshops? This will generally be expensive given the number of studies and workshops that were financed. Furthermore, if the impacts of studies/workshops cannot all be measured, acquiring tools to evaluate them from time to time may perhaps lead to greater impact.

It is possible to think about evaluations that are not based solely on visible results (the number and quality of workshops or capitalisation as such), but also on organisational aspects and the processes that led to these workshops and capitalisation. These “process” aspects (how to capitalise, organise workshops, etc.) are essential but are seldom taken into account in the conception, implementation and evaluation of case studies. One element appears essential in these processes: the actors who directly concerned must be placed at the centre of the approaches and tools used. This is not the same thing as

the simple, mandatory declarations announcing that the approach and processes were “participatory”, which sounds as though it was pre-printed on headed paper.

A number of possible questions can help clarify these aspects:

**1) For workshops in particular:**

- ⊙ are the priorities of people invited to the workshops respected (are dates scheduled according to the agenda of the organisers or participants)?
- ⊙ are the resources used and structured with the local dynamics in mind?
- ⊙ does the workshop take into account the capabilities, the information and knowledge of the participants?
- ⊙ is the structure of the workshop flexible? Does it take the audience into account?
- ⊙ are the participants prepared enough to be able to understand and discuss the information?
- ⊙ ...

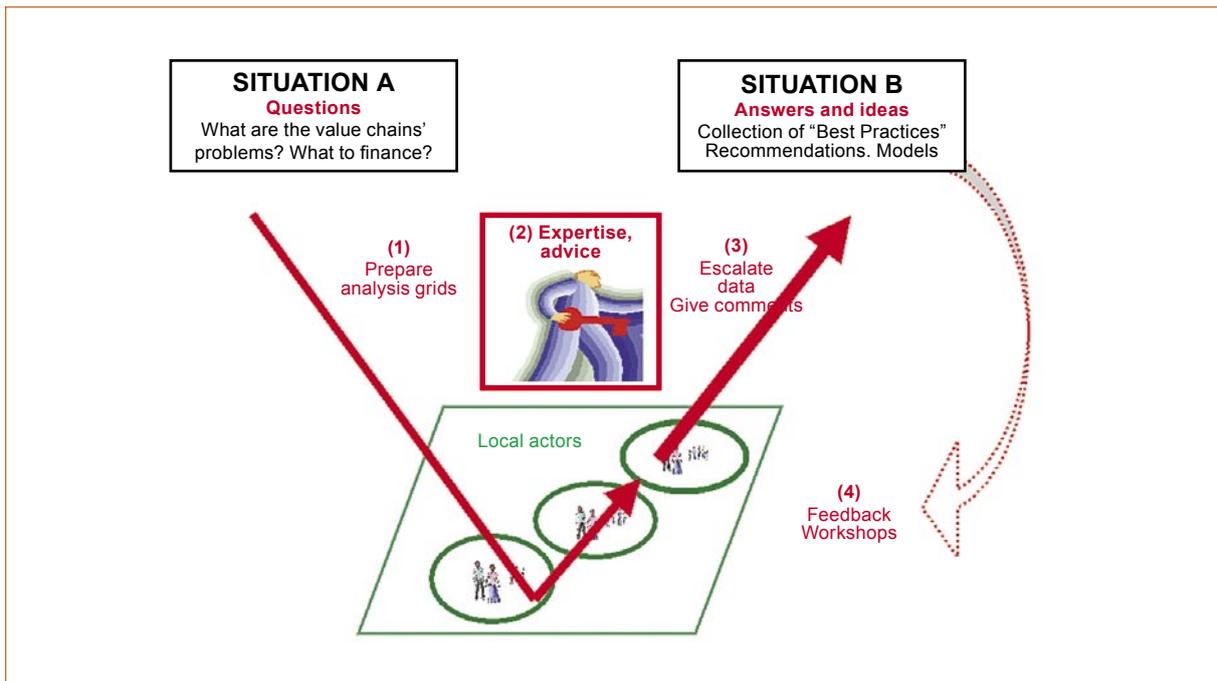
**2) For the feedback sessions in general:**

- ⊙ what objectives are targeted by the feedback sessions?
- ⊙ how are the actors involved in the feedback sessions?
- ⊙ are the types of feedback and the aids varied?
- ⊙ how will the feedback sessions be used after their production?
- ⊙ what means and methods are in place to ensure that they “live on” after their production?
- ⊙ ...

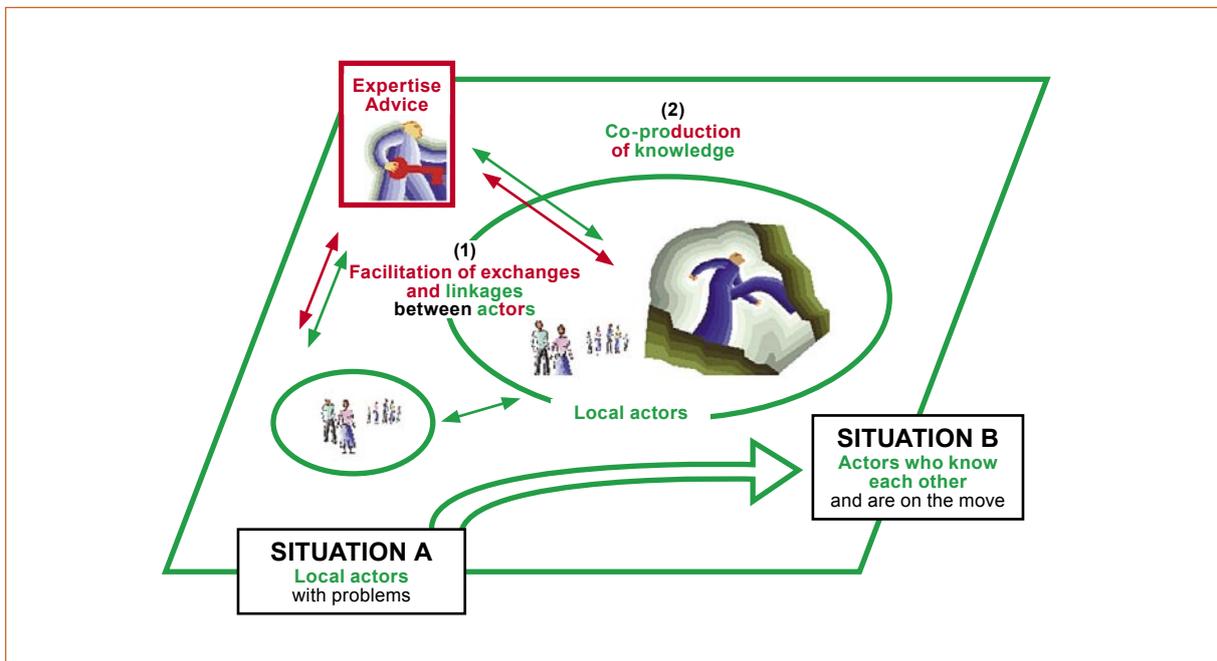
Knowing that the expectations of organisers, participants, facilitators, and donors may be different, or even contradictory, the issue is to build a set of tools that are sufficiently diverse to cater for each and everyone. In this respect, one should give the imagination free reign: the formulas and formats of the workshops, aids or forms of communication have to be thought up anew each time, without forgetting the ties between the different tools.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Example: the roving video-supported workshops. The concept of the roving workshops was borne within the *Agricultures Paysannes et Mondialisation* network. The idea is to bring together a group of key-persons and make them reflect together on a specific theme, around a series of field visits. Video support during these sessions makes it possible to structure collective reflections and to construct documents which facilitate continued reflections after the trip (see images on <http://www.agter.asso.fr>).



Experts who advance ideas and debates (Diagne, Lothoré, 2009)



Every step of the way, actors are on the move (Diagne, Lothoré, 2009)

*Legend: Circles and text in green: local value chain actors  
 Squares and text in red: actors (from the North or from the South) that support the value chain actors  
 Arrows: linkages, exchanges between actors*