



Summary of the discussion workshop for improving the sustainability of approaches for management advice for family farms in Africa

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PADYP

Appui au développement
des dynamiques productives

¹ This summary has been prepared on the basis of summaries of the different working groups and plenary sessions.

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AFD: French Agency for Development

PADYP: Project to Support Development of Production Dynamics

FEPAB: Federation of Agricultural Professionals of Burkina Faso

INTRODUCTION

The discussion workshop for improving the sustainability of approaches for management advice for family farms (MAFF) in Africa had the objectives of (i) taking stock of MAFF approaches in different countries in Francophone Africa through the analysis of the durability of such systems (integration in an advisory and training system, governance of mechanisms, funding of activities, capacity building for advisers and managers of these mechanisms), (ii) determining courses of action to improve the ability of MAFF mechanisms to meet producers' needs and to ensure their sustainability by identifying methodological and institutional innovations.

This workshop allowed us to take stock of the evolution of MAFF mechanisms ten years after the first workshop on MAFF held in 2001, also at Bohicon. This previous workshop concentrated mainly on advisory methods and tools.

On the initiative of CIRAD and AFD, this present workshop was organized in conjunction with Inter-Réseaux, University of Parakou (Benin), PADYP (an AFD project in Benin) and FEPAB (a farmer organization in Burkina Faso). The workshop brought together 70 participants from over 10 African countries with participation by representatives of POs involved in the implementation of MAFF mechanisms, coordinators of advisory programmes (PADYP, PROCOTON, ACEFA, BV Lac, etc.), advisers, farmer extension workers, representatives of ministries of agriculture (Madagascar, Benin, Burkina Faso) and entities providing support for advisory services (AFDI, CER, CA17, Farm, FAO, GIZ). Also represented were national and international research organizations (Universities of Benin, CIRAD, INRA), networks involved in advisory services (GFRAS, AFAAS, RESCAR-AOC) and funding agencies (AFD, FAO and GIZ).

1. The evolution in agricultural advisory services in sub-Saharan Africa and the strengthening of Management Advice for Family Farms (MAFF)

Agricultural advisory services have grown in Francophone Africa following the withdrawal of the State from agricultural extension responsibilities. This has resulted in a plurality of forms of advisory services provided by a variety of actors. However, the taking up of this slack by private actors (agribusiness companies, NGOs, POs, input providers, consultants) is only partial, fulfilling, as it does, objectives specific to their own advisory mandates. A break with the existing and past top-down extension services is also not so easy. Issues of capacity and skill building and distribution of roles between various advisory-service actors and coordination amongst them are seen as key levers to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of advisory systems that are gradually being introduced.

Furthermore, agricultural advisory services are once again the subject of increased attention in some countries (Cameroon, Benin, Burkina Faso, etc.), especially following the recent global food crises. While acknowledging the role played by private actors in providing advisory services, some States are re-investing in their own advisory structures by recruiting advisers. Others prefer to rely on contractual interventions. With few exceptions, however, States are struggling to fund advisory-service actors in view of budgetary constraints. They also struggle to foster the emergence of innovative advisory mechanisms for responding to the plurality of producer needs and for going beyond the pilot phase of new approaches usually implemented by projects.

Experiments in MAFF (Management Advice for Family Farms) conducted with French support for nearly two decades in many Francophone African countries have sought to promote comprehensive advice to farms, one that is based on learning methods. Support from various cooperative efforts (French, Dutch, Swiss, Belgian) also helped to test and adapt MAFF in different contexts.

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1. MAFF is a holistic approach that allows the producer and his family to analyze their situation, plan, take decisions, monitor their activities and evaluate results; it encompasses the technical, economic and social aspects of their activities.
 2. MAFF is a process of strengthening the ability of farmers to master various aspects of their activity (agricultural production and other income-generating activities, organization of work, management of cash flow, etc.) in order to achieve various family objectives. It is a matter of placing rural families at the very centre of the advisory function.
 3. MAFF is based on learning methods (*including training, exchange of experiences, valorisation of indigenous knowledge, etc.*) and support for decision making (*various tools: techno-economic monitoring of production, calculation of gross margin, cash management, etc.*) which are based to a large extent on numeracy and literacy.
 4. MAFF experiments fit into farmers' realities: farmers involved in these approaches are part of networks for the exchange of technical and local knowledge, they are often members – even office holders – of producer organizations.
 5. MAFF experiments aim at building mechanisms for supporting producers with a strong participation of POs and a possible involvement of new actors such as NGOs or consultants. They seek to empower farmers and their organizations in relation to other actors.

MAFF distinguishes itself from extension services which are aimed primarily at transferring knowledge and new practices to farmers, notably in the field of agricultural production. Extension services can rely on intervention methods which are more or less participatory and can reach a wide audience.

Questions now arise on the scaling required to increase the number of producers with access to advisory services (including MAFF) and the institutional and financial sustainability of advisory mechanisms. How to strengthen the dynamics of agricultural advice in the South and the development of public policies to strengthen advisory services by accepting a plurality of approaches is a subject of intense debate. These discussions take place in these countries through more or less structured discussion platforms and the drawing up of strategic documents on the agricultural sector – or on agricultural advisory services and/or training of rural populations. MAFF is thus currently being debated in this context in various countries (Burkina Faso, Benin, etc.). These policy documents are often derived from guidelines adopted at the African level within the framework of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), which includes a research and advisory services section. Discussions are also taking place through international networks such as the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS), through continental networks such as the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS), and through regional networks such as the Network of Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services of West and Central Africa

(RESCAR-AOC).

2. An analysis framework which takes into account the interactions between the governance of MAFF mechanisms, available funding, adviser skills and advisory methods

To advance further the discussions taking place in the networks mentioned above and those between the actors involved in MAFF, this workshop was organized to examine the different existing MAFF mechanisms through four main areas of inquiry: (i) modalities of governance of mechanisms, in order to define the orientations of MAFF, and of the actor-coordination mechanisms so as to create synergies between advisory services actors, (ii) MAFF funding modalities by focusing on the contribution of different entities and the State to this funding, (iii) modalities for capacity and skill building for advisers, farmer extension workers, and all others involved in managing advisory mechanisms, and (iv) modalities of adapting advisory services to regional or national situations depending on available skills and funding but also in terms of the needs of farmers and the sometimes conflicting priorities of guiding or funding organizations. Each of these four areas (governance, funding, expertise and methodology) has an influence on other areas of MAFF, which means that each MAFF mechanism is perforce original.

Internal assessments based on this analysis structure were carried out by various MAFF systems represented at the workshop. They helped draw out lessons which were discussed and further enriched at the workshop. We present here the summary of all these discussions.

3. The main outcomes of the workshop

3.1. Designing governance of MAFF and other forms of advisory services at different scales

The governance determines the manner in which priorities are assigned and how decisions are taken in a context of increased accountability of actors and a multiplication of decision-making centres. The analysis of governance helps determine the relationships that need to be established between the various actors and activities of an advisory mechanism. To begin with, advisory actors need to distinguish between (i) the internal governance of the advisory mechanism in which they are involved and which they seek to (re)orient, (ii) the governance at a territorial scale (small region) involving several actors providing different kinds of advisory services and which can interact with MAFF, and (iii) the overall governance of the advisory system at the national (or supranational) scale involving several different advisory mechanisms which one cannot easily influence, but on which MAFF mechanisms can rely or of which they must form part of.

Internal evaluations of mechanisms have highlighted the diversity of modes of internal governance of MAFF mechanisms. To a large extent, they depend on the nature of the organization or structure providing advice (PO, management centre, project, NGO), on the history of establishment of the advisory service and funding arrangements. Workshop discussions led to two major questions: Which actors are best placed to provide quality advisory services? How to coordinate the various forms of advisory services at the national level?

When POs themselves provide advisory services to farmers

First, what emerged from the workshop was the recognition of the strong role played by POs in the direct implementation of advisory services in many countries (e.g., MAFF experiments in Burkina Faso with the POs of the management network, in Guinea with FPPD, or in Benin with FUPRO). In Burkina Faso, UNPCB enters into contracts with the SOFITEX cotton company. In certain geographic areas with higher agricultural incomes, service centres have been tried out (e.g., CGER in the case of the Senegal River valley), with services primarily directed towards first-level POs but also available to farms. They are controlled by PO representatives. In the latter two cases (Burkina Faso and Senegal), the implementation of the advisory services by the POs then becomes indirect. The direct implementation of advisory services by a PO requires a PO that has the necessary resources. This option allows advisory services to be more in line with farmer requirements and can help strengthen the PO by letting it offer an additional service to its members and with a more detailed knowledge of the constraints and opportunities of its members' farms. However, if MAFF is poorly integrated into the PO's plans, this direct management can actually weaken MAFF due to risks relating to the dispersion of activities, management of salaried advisers or financial equilibriums.

The emergence of POs in advisory services is also revealed in the strategy documents on agricultural advisory services drawn up by the governments in the four countries studied (see policy analyses conducted in Niger, Burkina Faso, Benin, Guinea). Even if States find it difficult to concretely translate this approach into practice, this announcement provides opportunities to defend the rise of POs in rural development through their inclusion into negotiations conducted between the State and other actors of rural development.

Modalities for establishing advisory services generally lead a PO to make MAFF a distinct service within the PO, with insufficient integration with its other services. In fact, MAFF is often tried out and developed with the support of a project that aims to promote it without taking into account the overall strategy of the PO. However, an improved connection between MAFF and other services of the PO would better meet the needs of its members and create synergies between the main activities of the PO (supply of inputs, access to credit, marketing). The case of UGCPA in Burkina Faso illustrates a first effort at better integrating MAFF with all the PO's activities and in making it a transversal service that should lead to an improved planning of credit advanced to its members by the PO, of cereal delivery by members to the PO, or supporting other PO activities on managing soil fertility. This lack of an integrated vision prevents farmer extension workers from defending MAFF internally and externally when project-based support comes to an end. 'How to explain that MAFF is a priority when we have yet to fulfil our members' urgent requirements?' asks a PO representative. MAFF still remains too much within the ambit of technicians and does not yet rely sufficiently on the advocacy of elected representatives, not only to raise awareness about MAFF but also to orient its content and implementation.

The structures providing support to MAFF actors should concentrate more on institutional strengthening

This strong involvement of POs in the implementation of advisory services does not preclude the implementation of MAFF by other operators such as NGOs (in the case of Benin), consulting firms (in the case of Madagascar) or departments of the Ministry of Agriculture (in the case of Benin again, Cameroon, Togo). As highlighted in the workshop, structures providing support to MAFF actors (international NGOs such as AFDI or national NGOs, foreign advisory centres such as the French CERs) can combine both direct implementation of MAFF in some areas (particularly in the experimental phases to gauge how MAFF is received) and support to POs and their advisers in order to strengthen their capacity to implement MAFF through training, assistance in managing MAFF mechanisms and monitoring. However, the analysis of issues of sustainability of advisory services showed that these structures providing technical support should also play an important role in providing support at the institutional level in order to link the national advisory structures (POs in particular) with relevant financial and political interlocutors.

The State still has a role to play even if national governance of advisory services remains difficult

At the national scale, the linking of MAFF mechanisms to national advisory systems is still at a very low level. This governance takes the form of networks or platforms and currently manifests through informal exchanges or exchange workshops (such as at Bohicon). The trend towards a national governance of advisory services incorporating formalized and sustainable mechanisms seems difficult given the highly pluralistic nature of advisory systems that currently exist. Indeed, it is clear that advisory services actors have differing political and financial strategies that lead to various competitions or alliances between actors in pursuit of institutional positioning or access to funding.

It appears, however, that the State still has a role to play in ensuring equity (access by the greatest number to advisory services) and the sustainability of advisory services. For the State, it is not so much a matter of wanting to coordinate or control advisory systems than of (i) mobilizing all advisory services actors, including those involved in MAFF, through local or national platforms to foster synergies, and encouraging actors to clarify their roles and responsibilities, (ii) encouraging the sharing of experiences to draw lessons and ensure capitalization of knowledge in the field of advisory services, (iii) developing an advisory services-friendly regulatory framework that would, for example, accord recognition to the status of advisers or allow access to vocational training for them, and (iv) promoting innovative mechanisms for funding of advisory services and ensuring the sharing of funding whenever possible.

MAFF actors can participate in and improve the coordination of actions at a territorial scale

The relationships between MAFF mechanisms and other actors involved, more or less heavily, in advisory activities in the same territory (small region) were discussed at the workshop (technical advice provided by the Ministry of Agriculture or by agro-industrial companies, credit providers, input supplier providing advice, etc.). We noted some rare cases of competition between MAFF mechanisms supported by different projects (in the case of Benin) and more generally a lack of communication between various advisory mechanisms working in the same territory.

However, initiatives – still too timid and too few as emphasized by participants – were undertaken to establish relationships between MAFF mechanisms with other advisory mechanisms or with actors who devote part of their activities to providing advice. These initiatives take the form of alliances with other stakeholders to develop common actions (e.g., literacy efforts undertaken by other actors and MAFF, credit managed by microfinance institutions and MAFF, etc.), of the creation of local platforms for exchanging experiences that can be used by a municipality to promote synergies (case of Benin), of the management of PO networks that allow innovative experiences to be capitalized (case of network management in Burkina Faso) or of informal networks between advisers working in various systems for coordinating their day-to-day activities.

3.2. Funding advisory services by seeking a diversification of funding sources and through cost savings

The workshop allowed us to take stock of the still critical situation regarding funding available for advisory services in general and for MAFF mechanisms in particular. MAFF mechanisms remain highly dependent on external funding (foreign donors or technical partners), which makes them highly vulnerable and sometimes prevents them from innovating. Compared to the assessment made after Bohicon I, however, we noted some real openings and two main strategies to initiate financial durability of MAFF systems were highlighted: the diversification of funding sources and cost savings in advisory services.

Contributions from farmers and their POs will continue to remain limited

Obtaining direct contribution from farmers remains difficult; some experiences proved inconclusive over the long term. In fact, since MAFF is an intangible service whose effects are not immediate nor easily quantifiable, the farmer is reluctant to pay for it. However, it appears that direct payments for advisory services become possible when it is connected to an economic activity such as the sale of inputs (e.g., breeding assistants paid on the sale of products for livestock in Madagascar). It certainly remains important to conduct research in this field to innovate and come up with a form of payment acceptable to the farmers.

Contributions from POs become more feasible when they undertake commercial activities such as marketing of agricultural products or sale of inputs to members which allow compulsory contributions from them (case of UGCPA in Burkina Faso, of FUPRO in Benin, of FPPD in Guinea). But these contributions by producers and POs currently cover, and will cover in the foreseeable future, only a small part of the costs of advisory services. Nevertheless, such contributions are necessary if the POs want to try to orient advisory services themselves and not to have choices imposed on them by those who control the purse strings.

Rare funding alternatives: banks and territorial authorities

Experiments in alternative funding arrangements are being conducted with the entry of new stakeholders to the cause of rural development in the South. Advisory services appear as a means of securization of bank investments for developing traditional credit, to support microcredit activities or for promoting crop insurance systems. But only a few rare experiments were mentioned at the workshop (case of Benin) and they seem far and few between, both in space and in time.

Policies of decentralization require territorial authorities to become involved in advisory services, as stated in some guiding documents for agricultural policies (see CAADP). In Benin, some municipalities view advisory services as a way of stimulating development in their territory and have offered to fund MAFF. But their thin budgets and priorities oriented towards rural infrastructure have prevented these intentions from turning into reality.

Promising funding possibilities with financial contributions from agricultural production chains and the establishment of development funds

The most promising funding possibilities to be discussed at the workshop were (i) the funding by already organized sectors with compulsory contributions at the marketing stage (case of cotton in Burkina Faso), not in itself a new idea, and (ii) the establishment of regional or national development funds. These funds can either be financed by sectors (as in Ivory Coast with FIRCA) or by the State and funding agencies (e.g., FNDA and FRDA in Madagascar). Services can then be implemented by public or private providers. Under the pursuit of a public good, the State may contribute to the funding of advisory services when they include a dimension of training and capacity building, as is the case with MAFF. In the case of funding by sectors, there arises the difficult question of solidarity between sectors, an option that was not retained in Ivory Coast at the request of actors of the contributing sectors. This type of solidarity between sectors was attempted in France in the 1950s to develop trans-sector advisory services but floundered due to tensions between sectors, thus calling into question this principle of solidarity itself. However, it is still possible to introduce compulsory financial contributions within a sector to develop services that can include advice for topics beyond the strict requirements of the particular sector and destined to all farmers living in the territory of the sector, irrespective of whether they are part of the sector or not.

Other than Ivory Coast and Madagascar, countries have so far not established regional or national funds – though Benin and Burkina Faso have expressed intentions of doing so. Nor have they released specific funding destined for advisory services except when it comes to strengthening their own advisory structures, as is case of the Ministries of Agriculture in Benin and Cameroon. It should be noted that funding agencies continue to play an important role in financing projects directly and, increasingly, by directing their contributions to regional or national development funds.

It is necessary to know how to draft funding requests for MAFF but also to convey the fact that MAFF is an instrument that supports public policies

In order to ensure improved funding of MAFF, it becomes a strategic necessity to make sure that various MAFF mechanisms are truly anchored in the national advisory system. In this way, MAFF attains useful visibility and can draw on global funds for activities in tune with priorities of national policy, even of international issues (climate change, poverty alleviation, etc.). It also seems important to better link MAFF activities to the priorities of national and international programmes that fund or will fund major investments (infrastructure, especially) in order to better justify the financing of advisory services. To do this, it is important to participate in any consultation platform on agricultural advisory services and to raise awareness about MAFF among policy makers and funding agencies by helping farmer extension workers draft effective funding requests.

In this sense, an argument needs to be made to justify the funding of advisory services from various donors including the States. It should not only draw the attention of the States to the utility of MAFF in the development of family farms but should also explain how MAFF can

respond to priorities defined by public policy, both at national or international (e.g., CAADP) levels to meet the major challenges confronting agriculture. To be effective, such an argument would require more data on MAFF's impact (monetary and non-monetary) on rural households within its ambit (direct effects) or those outside it (indirect effects). Data of this type may be elicited from comprehensive statistical surveys – an unrealistic option given the costs involved – or less comprehensive ones but based on rigorous methods. In this latter case, research needs to be involved to innovate in the methodologies of impact studies.

Operators propose cost savings by relying primarily on farmer extension workers

It should be noted that MAFF appears to be still very expensive because the cost of all activities required to implement it are included in the overall cost of the systems: operator providing methodological support to service providers, training of advisers (with frequent turnover) and literacy programmes for producers to enable their full participation in MAFF. Cost savings in advisory services have been attempted through reliance on the growing numbers of farmer extension workers and adviser-farmer extension worker pairs to increase the number of farmers who can access the advisory service and thus reduce wage costs. Another cost saving avenue pursued was through the merging of adviser training programmes with training courses already existing in the concerned countries. The development of PO-implemented MAFF will ultimately reduce costs, particularly those related to coordination of activities, a responsibility that can be taken up by farmer extension workers. But the need to invest in capacity building of POs precludes any hope of a reduction in costs in the short term.

3.3. Building capacity of all advisory actors by mobilizing permanent institutions

The workshop addressed three key areas of building capacity of advisory services actors: (i) the issue of the training of advisers, (ii) the role of farmer extension workers (or contact farmers²) and (iii) the strengthening of the skills of advisory system managers.

It is necessary to have specific training programmes for advisers

Very encouraging initiatives in adviser training by public and private organizations at the national level were discussed (case of the University of Parakou in Benin, FERT training centre in Madagascar). However, they are still far from common. Yet they allow us to anticipate the long term viability of initial and professional training courses in these countries and to ensure a smooth turnover of advisers, given that a significant proportion of advisers can leave for other jobs once well trained. Employers (the State, private firms, POs), however, are little involved in creating the contents of training courses, which may lead to a mismatch between the training provided and the employers' requirements. To ensure an ongoing interest from the public for these courses, it is manifestly necessary to build curricula that enable students to acquire knowledge and skills useful for a wider range of occupations than just of advisers. The establishment of permanent training programmes leads to questions from advisers and technicians on the possibility of obtaining diplomas that may be useful in their career paths.

² A contact farmer is a farmer who acts as point person; he communicates information from top to bottom and vice versa. He may also act as a facilitator and, when necessary, as an extension co-worker.

Even with generalized adviser-training programmes conducted under the ambit of permanent institutions, training within projects and particular MAFF mechanisms remains relevant for advisers to acquire targeted skills. In such a situation, sharing of training resources between projects will be desirable, through capitalization of experiences, training methods and tools. The importance of training all those involved in the management of MAFF mechanisms, not just the advisers, was stressed: salaried technicians, certainly, so that they can implement the planned activities and be capable of monitoring advisers but also elected officials so that they are able to monitor MAFF mechanisms (orientation and evaluation) and develop skills to draft effective funding requests.

Farmer extension worker are the future but only under certain conditions

The workshop was an opportunity to take stock of the activities and the role of farmer extension workers (or contact farmers), recourse to whom is becoming increasingly widespread in all MAFF mechanisms. With the promotion of farmer extension workers, actors managing MAFF mechanisms seek, on the one hand, a change of scale due to the increase in the number of farmers involved in advisory services and, on the other, to facilitate greater sustainability of advisory services through cost savings. In addition, workshop participants also showed that farmers are appreciative of the help the farmer extension workers provide during the transition between two advisers or between two projects funding advisory systems.

A large variation in profiles and activities of those called ‘farmer extension workers’ was noted with respect to MAFF mechanisms: literate or illiterate, volunteer or paid on lump-sum basis, collecting data or acting as trainer, etc. In some MAFF systems (case of mechanisms supported by SNV in Benin and in Burkina Faso), farmer extension workers can even train other farmer extension workers and take on a ‘supervisory’ role over MAFF activities in the field. Strong concerns were then expressed on the real capacity of these farmer extension workers to ‘provide advice’ while working on a voluntary basis and given the large workload normally assigned to them, thus distracting them from their own farming activities. While the question of what the farmer extension worker ‘should’ and ‘can’ do is easily discussed, what he ‘wants’ to is rarely addressed. Farmer extension workers present at the workshop spoke about their interest and motivation in undertaking such a function: easy access to training, particularly through privileged exchanges with the adviser, desire to help friends and neighbours, desire to be useful, opportunity for additional income, and, for some, improved job prospects.

The evolution of the farmer extension worker’s role as he gradually acquires new skills and gains independence was highlighted. Some POs even expressed emphatically their wish to see the most capable farmer extension workers become advisers, considering that they had acquired the necessary skills and abilities. Some participants raised the issue of the need to keep the farmer extension workers in the POs in which they were trained. This position appeared neither relevant to the POs concerned, nor desirable, because farmer extension workers have the right to grow in their activities. The question rises again of the continuing training of the farmer extension workers through formal training programmes or through the creation of exchange networks between farmer extension workers.

The importance of the ‘adviser-farmer extension worker’ pairing was also highlighted. As shown by research conducted in Benin, an adviser’s profile has a strong influence on how the

farmer extension worker develops and implements advisory activities. This pairing needs to be recognized and the functions of each should be better explained and better differentiated.

3.4. Knowing how to customize one's advisory service offer while preserving MAFF's core

The issue of MAFF methods was discussed in terms of their evolution and adaptation in the context of implementation of advisory services. The marked changes observed since the time of the Bohicon I workshop, ten years ago, can be divided into four major themes: (i) diversification of forms of advisory services, ranging from technical advice for illiterate farmers to techno-economic advice based on the traditional MAFF tools, (ii) simplification of documents relating to techno-economic advice, given the difficulty expressed by many farmers participating in MAFF, (iii) diversification of tools to better adapt to the diversity of producer profiles, and (iv) diversification of tools to better adapt to the diversity of skills of advisers and farmer extension workers. Innovations have also been tried out by combining conventional advisory tools with ICTs or methods inspired by coaching systems or professional didactics.

These changes in methods are required if the scale of coverage has to be widened. This will require changes in the skills mobilized (number of farmer extension workers mobilized with respect to number of advisers), available funding (cost savings by participating in a context with a fixed total available budget) and modes of governance (e.g., greater involvement of the POs in order to better adapt the advisory systems to the needs of farmers and involving POs more in mobilizing participants). These changes raise the issue once again, ten years after Bohicon I, of the intensity of advisory services (number and quality of interactions between advisers and farmers) that MAFF mechanisms should aim for to generate a real learning process. Indeed, managers of MAFF mechanisms remain still undecided, and very legitimately too, between quality advisory services but with a small number of producers (*'true MAFF'*), and more standardized advisory services which reach a larger number of producers (*'MAFF light'*).

The core principles of MAFF have to be preserved!

The broad diversity of advisory services (diversity of methods and tools) currently offered to producers for implementing a MAFF approach led to a debate on what is at the heart of MAFF. This diversity of offers for advisory service requires us to clarify what forms the core of a MAFF approach, including its advantages and disadvantages. While the concepts of learning and of farmer empowerment in decision-making processes are at the heart of the approach, they are not the sole preserve of MAFF mechanisms as shown by discussions on Farmer Field Schools (FFS). Promoting a holistic approach to farm management is already a more characteristic aspect. Such an approach is based on the traditional management cycle (analyze, plan, act, monitor and adapt, evaluate the results) and can be used with both literate and illiterate persons, albeit with a lesser degree of accuracy for the latter category. Finally, the inclusion of concepts that allow technical and economic dimensions to be translated to impacts on agricultural production and the farm is a distinguishing aspect of MAFF mechanisms. Such a techno-economic analysis requires data acquisition and processing which can be more or less extensive depending on the requirements and available time and skills.

Advising illiterate farmers is possible

In order to reach a wider audience, experiments in MAFF for illiterate farmers have been conducted in several countries (e.g., PADYP in Benin). In such cases, advisory methods can draw on tools already being used in other advisory service experiments by actors unrelated to MAFF (visual aids, construction of stories, role playing, field trips, etc.). But questions still remain on how to conduct advisory sessions for illiterate farmers to strengthen management skills (analyze, plan, act, monitor, evaluate) for the main productions of the farm without falling into the pitfall of a simple offer of technical advice based on the mere transmission of knowledge from the adviser and exchanges of experiences between participants.

How best to equip farmer extension workers?

To increasingly rely on farmer extension workers, we need to take a hard look at advisory methods and tools that we equip them with, given that their skills differ from those of traditional advisers. Would tools that are simplified versions of those used by advisers be suitable or will new ones have to be designed from scratch? For example, should we build tools, or select some from existing ones, for each different farmer extension worker based on his domains of excellence (avoiding a standardized approach for all farmer extension workers) or do so with an intention of fostering a network with his friends and neighbours (promoting peer-to-peer exchanges). It is also apparent that providing technical advice on crop and herd management is occupying an increasingly prominent place in the activities of advisers and farmer extension workers. For this they tend to rely on a traditional group advisory approach or on new methods, such as those relating to farmer field schools³. Questions have been raised about the ability of advisers or farmer extension workers to provide this technical advice while promoting a real learning process and thus avoiding the simple transfer of knowledge and technology. Finally, there was discussion on the possibility of hybridizing MAFF methods with other methods such as farmer field schools or with the one currently recommended by the GIZ: the ‘farmer business school’⁴.

Adapting the advice for the target audience does not necessarily mean creating homogenous groups

However, in this phase of MAFF expansion, both in terms of diversity of the target groups concerned and of the methods developed, it is clear that discussions have not led to the possible segmentation of the target audience. What advice with what method for what type of farmer? The majority of workshop participants suggested a segmentation by educational proficiency (literate and accustomed to writing, literate but not favouring text-based advice, illiterate but wanting to turn literate to progress, illiterate). It is obvious that advisory tools⁵ will be different for each of these categories.

According to feedback provided at the workshop, experiments of offering advisory services on the basis of farm segmentation (size, type of production, etc.) to provide differentiated

³ In farmer field schools, advisers hold regular meetings with volunteer farmers who acquire new knowledge and new skills, mainly on crop management, through field observations (analyzing to make decisions) and exchanges between themselves and the adviser.

⁴ This method aims to impart the rudiments of techno-economic management to a big audience of farmers through a limited series of meetings between the adviser and farmer groups.

⁵ The term ‘advisory tools’ include a variety of tools: tools for farmers (data recording, results analysis at the plot or farm level, reasoning to better define one’s project, etc.), tools for advisers (modalities of organizing an advisory session or field visit, understanding the diversity of farms in an area, etc.).

advice were not found satisfactory. Through the presentation of the study on learning within the MAFF framework conducted in Benin, discussion also took place on the importance of the farmers' psychological profiles (proactive, responsive, imaginative) to explain the diversity of learning forms in order to find another way of grouping farmers. But the same question pops up: Should one work with homogeneous groups to provide more targeted advice or instead should one take advantage of the diversity within groups to draw lessons for all? In this perspective, it seems necessary that the adviser and the farmer extension worker each have two toolboxes on hand in order to be able to deal with different groups and profiles as well as differing advisory needs.

We need to update knowledge on farms, better characterize the evolution of advisory methods and, finally, be able to characterize MAFF's impact

Taken together, these observations argue for, on the one hand, a closer look at the changing methods and, on the other, at possible improvements. But such thinking cannot separate itself from the need to invest more substantially in the analysis of the impact of various methods (on the performance of farms, families, or even territories) in order to make better choices. If little effort has been expended in this area, it is mainly because the methodological difficulties are formidable. Having up-to-date knowledge of farms will also help guide the advisory services based on the needs of farmers, the diversity of their farms, and the diversity of learning processes.

4. Workshop recommendations

Various discussions held during the workshop helped to identify courses of action or recommendations to improve the functioning of MAFF mechanisms for meeting the challenges of scaling and sustainability, better meeting the needs of producers and POs, improving relationships between MAFF mechanisms and actors who interact with them in their territory of intervention (other forms of advisory services and other services to producers) and, finally, inserting MAFF systems into the national advisory and training systems. These broad courses of action were also broken down into more concrete actions by MAFF mechanism and/or by country.

4.1. How to improve one's MAFF mechanism to meet the challenges of scaling up and sustainability and better meet the needs of producers and the POs?

Improving internal governance

- Adapting the MAFF approach so that it strengthens and supports all services provided by the PO and not letting it be an isolated service; making it a transversal service, and placing it well upstream, before the designing of the PO's other activities.
- Encouraging networking of advisers and farmer extension workers within MAFF mechanisms.
- Strengthening the capacity of elected officials so that they can become more involved in the MAFF governance arrangements (both in the PO which provides the advisory service but also within coordination cells of advisory programmes in which the PO

participates) or in the drafting of funding requests destined for politicians and funding agencies.

Improving funding

- Exploring funding opportunities from royalties from producers or from the PO's commercial activities, knowing that it will always only cover a fraction of the costs.

Boosting skills

- Building a repository of skills needed to implement the MAFF approach.
- Clarifying the role of farmer extension workers (what they want to do, can do, should do) and the functioning of the adviser-farmer extension worker pairing.
- Boosting the skills of farmer extension workers either to provide some particular type of advice or to help the adviser, such as arranging advisory sessions with advisers (identification of groups, literacy levels, problems faced, etc.).
- Always planning literacy programmes for participants, even for farmer extension workers; this is very necessary and regularly requested!

Improving methods

- Laying out the value system to which the advisory process in each territory belongs in order to avoid disconnects between its functioning and that of local societies.
- Identifying the various forms of advisory services (basic training, technical training, general management training, etc.) integrated within the MAFF approach; redefining the value of a holistic approach to the family farm and of the techno-economic advisory services, which form part of MAFF's fundamental principles.
- Identifying possible segmentations of the target public(s).
- Taking stock of existing tools and co-constructing toolboxes for the adviser and the farmer extension worker with the people concerned. Involving elected officials in this work.
- Developing complementary forms of advisory services by relying on ICTs.
- Capitalizing or ensuring the distribution of the capitalization of experiences.

4.2. How to improve the linking of the MAFF mechanism to other advisory mechanisms and to other service providers present in the territories of intervention?

- Identifying and learning more about other advisory mechanisms and building relationships (synergy, complementarity between certain activities such as training, capitalization stages, testing of new tools).
- Developing alliances/relationships with local authorities (municipalities in particular) by offering advisory services as a means of supporting local development plans and thus also gaining access to existing local funding (in the framework of decentralization).
- Participating in or facilitating the emergence of exchange and coordination platforms on agricultural advice, while considering that comprehensive coordination of advisory actors is utopian in a pluralistic system and in a context of weak governance.

- Establishing exchanges networks between advisers in the same territory to reinforce their knowledge of the environment and their skills.

4.3. How to improve the anchoring of mechanisms in the national systems of agricultural advice and training?

Acting on global governance

- Drafting funding requests in order to participate in the development of national policies on agricultural advice and training for rural populations (including strategy papers arising from CAADP); this action requires the strong involvement of umbrella farmer organizations and has to mobilize ROPPA⁶ (Network of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organizations of West Africa).
- Participating in multi-actor discussion platforms for advisory services with the State.

Promoting the establishment of funding mechanisms

- Supporting the creation and/or building of relationships with regional or national development funds that are being established in some countries (Madagascar, Ivory Coast, etc.); finding out the mechanisms to access funds.
- Working towards the emergence of multi-funded advisory-service projects which also form part of advisory systems.

Strengthen training mechanisms

- Strengthening and/or collaborating with development initiatives of adviser training courses (or more broadly, those for rural stakeholders) which are part of national educational structures (universities, etc.) or private ones (consulting firms, NGOs) and responding to employer needs (diploma and non-diploma programmes); but also considering initiatives to introduce elements of training approaches at the school level (mainly technical schools).
- Strengthening capacities of national public and private organizations (research institutions, NGOs, etc.) in order to provide support to actors providing advisory services (POs, NGOs, private companies, consulting firms, etc.); possible complementarity with international-level support structures.

Producing knowledge about the impacts and conducting action research

- Designing and promoting studies in some countries to better qualify and quantify not only the monetary and non-monetary impacts of MAFF but also the mechanisms' cost-effectiveness (cost/benefit) in order to support public decision-making and that of funding agencies.
- Encouraging research, action-research in partnership or studies to derive technical and economic references additional to those already existing, analyzing new themes relating to advisory services (use of ICTs, etc.) and improved advisory methods and tools (especially those destined for the illiterate public).

⁶ In French: Réseau des organisations paysannes et des producteurs agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest.