

## Management advice for family farms in Francophone Africa in 2013: an innovative approach rooted in farmer realities

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### History of Management Advice for Family Farms

In West Africa, the partial withdrawal of the State from agricultural extension functions has led to the rise of a pluralistic form of advisory services being provided by various actors. However, these new actors (non-governmental organizations (NGOs), producer organizations (POs), agro-industrial companies, etc.) have assumed the advisory role only partially. Moreover, their advisory approaches are geared to meet their own specific objectives. Breaking with the old top-down extension practices to promote more participatory approaches is not easy. In addition, States are struggling to finance advisory actors in a context of limited budgetary resources. They also find it difficult to promote the development of innovative advisory mechanisms to help meet the plurality of producer needs or to extend support for new approaches outside of project-based schemes.

It is in this context that MAFF (Management Advice for Family Farms) approaches have been promoted in Francophone Africa with the support of French cooperation entities, most notably the French Development Agency (AFD), for nearly two decades. Support from elsewhere in Europe (Belgian, Dutch, Swiss cooperation entities) and involvement of some States have made it possible to adapt the MAFF approach to different contexts. Today, MAFF programmes exist in more than 10 countries in Francophone Africa, integrated into advisory services provided by NGOs, POs, cotton companies, or State-dependent agencies. They impact approximately 100,000 producers.

### MAFF principles

A workshop held in 2001 at Bohicon, Benin, brought together a variety of actors involved in MAFF. The key principles of MAFF were formulated at the occasion (Table 1).

**Table 1. The key MAFF principles**

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 entire farm by including the technical, economic and social aspects of their activities.

MAFF is a process of building the capacity 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.

MAFF is based on learning methods (including training, exchange of experiences, valorisation of indigenous farmer 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 lesser or greater extent on numeracy and literacy.

MAFF mechanisms form part of networks: farmers involved in these approaches are part of networks for the exchange of technical and local knowledge, they are often members – even leaders – of POs.

MAFF helps build mechanisms for supporting producers with a strong participation of POs and a possible involvement of new actors such as NGOs or consultants. MAFF seeks to empower farmers and their organizations with regard to other actors.

These key principles are then adapted by advisory actors to define advisory methods and develop tools which respond to, on the one hand, the priorities and strategies of local actors and, on the other, the major issues identified by national and continental public policy (CAADP) to fight against poverty, improve food security and agricultural productivity, protect the environment and adapt to climate change.

MAFF differentiates itself from extension, which is aimed primarily at transferring knowledge and new technologies to farmers, especially in the domain of agricultural production. The MAFF approach is similar to that of 'Farmer Field Schools' in that it promotes farmer learning. It does so, however, by focusing on the farmer and his family farm (and not mainly on crop production) through technical and economic analyses.

### MAFF in action: example of Benin

Benin was one of the first countries in West Africa to implement MAFF, starting in 1995 in the framework of pilot projects. MAFF is currently being implemented there with the support of bilaterally funded programmes, such as PADYP (Project to

Support Development of Production Dynamics) funded by the AFD. Advice is provided by nearly a dozen NGOs who have acquired extensive experience in MAFF, by POs such as FUPRO (Federation of Producer Unions of Benin) or by the Ministry of Agriculture which has recruited more than 250 advisers for MAFF. Nearly 20,000 farmers are involved in MAFF in Benin. Based on the experience gained in the field of MAFF, the Ministry of Agriculture drafted a document in 2007 entitled 'White Paper on agricultural advisory services in Benin' in an attempt to extend the approach to the entire country and to identify complementarities with other forms of advisory services. A 'National Strategy for Implementation of Agricultural Advisory Services' (SNCA), also released in 2007, divides advisory services into five categories: 1) Specialized technical advice (this existed already), 2) advice on market access, 3) advice to farmer organizations and local planning, which includes advising producer organizations, 4) farm-management advice and 5) food and applied nutrition advice.

The adviser conducts group advisory sessions and also monitors farmers individually. Work is organized using a multi-phase management cycle (analysis, planning, decision/action, monitoring, and evaluation) with frequent adviser-farmer interactions. MAFF is implemented in a flexible and gradual manner. The adviser uses a farm-diagnosis phase to identify farmer requirements and orient activities. He then organizes collective training on farming techniques (fertilization of maize, cotton pest control, regulation of blooming of pineapple, etc.). He also teaches them management concepts and the use of corresponding tools (harvested crop management, crop-season planning, cash flow planning, revenue-expenditure accounts, etc.). In this way, MAFF encourages farmers to think and reason, helps them incorporate measurements and forecasting in their practices and teaches them to use techno-economic indicators (gross margin, costs/income ratio, etc.). This helps the farmer analyze the results and the performance of his farm. During the crop season, the adviser ensures individual monitoring of farmers in their fields to provide additional training and targeted advice. At the end of the season, a first analysis of the technical and economic results, both at crop production level and entire farm level, is undertaken with farmers in group meetings. Some advisers use computers to perform additional processing on the data of the farmers. These more accurate results are then presented and discussed with each farmer. Based on the results of the previous crop season, the advisers and farmers together plan the following crop season. Under the MAFF approach, exchanges between producers are encouraged through various collective activities (training, group meetings to discuss results, field visits to share experiences, trials in farmers' plots to test innovations, etc.).



**Photo 1. A MAFF participant taking notes**



**Photo 2. On-field interaction between MAFF participants**

To extend the reach of MAFF, NGOs encouraged the initial MAFF participants, often literate in their own language, to form new groups in their villages. This is how farmer extension workers were trained and supported by NGO advisers to be able to deal with the most basic themes with new producers (planning rotations, calculations of gross margins, etc.). Farmer extension workers in Benin now number almost 500 with some of them even being remunerated for their work. The main focus at present of advisory actors is to adapt the method for non-literate farmers, either through conducting literacy programmes while teaching the use management tools or by developing management tools that do not rely on written matter.

#### **MAFF forms part of a pluralistic form of advisory systems**

MAFF is a special form of advice but is linked to other advisory services. Thus, in Cameroon, producers can receive technical advice from the cotton companies for cotton production and also participate in MAFF through other advisers. In Benin, MAFF advisers strive to establish relationships between the farmers participating in MAFF and service providers (inputs, credit, marketing), thus playing an intermediary role. These service providers may also provide specialized advice.

MAFF is therefore part of the wider advisory system with coordination mechanisms between advisory actors. These mechanisms can be local, such as the 'management network' bringing together several POs in Burkina Faso. They can be national through forums such as the meetings regularly held in Benin or even regional as in the form of regional workshops held in 2012 in Bohicon or the one organized in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, by the Network for Agricultural and Rural

Advisory Services for West and Central Africa (RESCAR-AOC) with participation by many MAFF actors from different West and Central African countries, and partners from the North.

### **Strong involvement of POs in MAFF**

MAFF is particularly useful to POs. PO members who participate in MAFF improve the performance of their farms which enables their PO to become more efficient in providing its services (provision of credit, supply of inputs, marketing, etc.). Some MAFF participants then become leaders in their PO and can therefore use the management skills acquired via MAFF for the benefit of the PO.

In many countries, the POs play a special role in the direct implementation of MAFF. Examples include the POs of the management network in Burkina Faso, the Federation of Producers of Fouta Djallon (FPPD) in Guinea, and FUPRO in Benin. The National Union of Cotton Producers of Burkina Faso (UNPCB) manages the MAFF together with SOFITEX (Société Burkinabé des Fibres et Textiles), a cotton company in Burkina Faso. In certain geographic areas where agricultural incomes are higher, service centres have been tried out, such as the Centres for Management and Rural Economy (CGERV) in the Senegal River Valley. While their services are primarily intended for first-level POs, they also serve farms. These centres are managed by PO representatives. Thus, in the latter two cases (Burkina Faso and Senegal), POs implement MAFF only indirectly.

A PO should directly implement advisory services only when it has adequate human and financial resources. Advisory services implemented by POs can be expected to be oriented more in line with farmer requirements. The PO gets strengthened since it offers an additional service to its members and because, in the process, it gains a finer understanding of the constraints and opportunities of its members' farms. However, the PO has to take care to integrate MAFF properly into its activities. If it does not, any attempt of managing MAFF directly can weaken it through the dispersion of its activities, lack of adequate management of its salaried advisers or financial instability.

### **Better consideration of the training needs of advisers, farmer extension workers and managers of MAFF mechanisms**

The quality of the advice provided depends on the skills of the adviser. He should have mastery over the contents of the actual advice (production techniques, farm management), the modalities of delivering advice (participatory methods, learning processes) and ability to build personal relationships (listening, empathizing, availability). Advisers are often trained within the framework of projects. To enlarge the vision on training, MAFF actors participate in interesting initiatives for training advisers – or more broadly rural development agents – within the framework of public and private organizations at the national level (for example, the University of Parakou and the University of Abomey-Calavi in Benin; University of Thies in Senegal; FERT training centre in Madagascar). These initiatives pave the way to provide a permanent curriculum for initial and professional training in these countries and thus ensure that service providers will always have advisers to recruit.

All MAFF mechanisms are now taking recourse to farmer extension workers. Farmer skills and knowledge are thus valorised and there is scaling-out of the number of farmers involved in advisory services. Finally, it helps reduce costs and thus helps ensure durability of the MAFF mechanisms. Farmer extension worker in MAFF mechanisms have a wide variety of profiles (literate or illiterate, volunteer or paid on the basis of the task, etc.) and undertake a diverse range of activities (collecting data, conducting a meeting, etc.). Schemes for vocational training of farmer extension workers are still in their infancy. At the moment, vocational training is provided within the framework of projects, by POs or through the creation of exchange networks for farmer extension workers.

In addition to training advisers, a special effort is made to train the actors involved in the management of MAFF mechanisms: office holders of advisory services so that they can implement the activities and monitor advisers; and elected farmers so that they can effectively monitor MAFF mechanisms (orientation and evaluation) and be able to draft funding requests or to carry out lobbying activities.

Building capacities of advisory service providers requires the establishment of support mechanisms for them. Thus a network of providers has gradually been built to provide this type of support to MAFF actors (international NGOs such as French Farmers and International Development (AFDI), national consultants such as Corade in Burkina Faso or Nyeta Conseil in Mali, the French Centre for Rural Economy, CIRAD in the area of capitalization). These technical-support entities also play an important role at the institutional level by putting national advisory structures (POs especially) in touch with appropriate financial and political contacts.

### **Funding MAFF**

Advisory services have significant costs which mainly fall under one of two heads: salary costs for advisers and MAFF managers; and the cost of training people and for various support activities (support to MAFF providers, R&D, studies and surveys, etc.). Advisory costs run between 20 and 80 USD/year/farmer for most MAFF mechanisms, with the exact amount

mainly depending on the number of farmers per adviser. In MAFF mechanisms that combine ‘technical advice for groups of non-literates’ closely with ‘management advice for literates’ or those that rely heavily on farmer extension workers, the advisory cost is much lower: between 2 and 20 USD/year/farmer.

The funding of advisory services is a topic at the core of debates on MAFF. Funding is obtained mainly via international aid when MAFF is implemented by NGOs and POs. It is difficult to obtain direct contribution from farmers as some unsuccessful long-term experiments have shown. In fact, since MAFF is an intangible service whose impact is not immediately perceived and is difficult to quantify, the farmer feels reluctant to pay. Asking for contributions from POs is more realistic when the latter undertake commercial activities (marketing of agricultural products or sale of inputs to members) and it becomes possible to withhold contributions from farmers through levies. Such is the case with the Union of Groups for the Marketing of Agricultural Products (UGCPA) in Burkina Faso, FUPRO in Benin, and FPF in Guinea. But these contributions by producers and POs currently cover, and will cover in the foreseeable future, only a small part of the cost of advisory services. Nevertheless, such contributions are necessary if the POs want to orient advisory services themselves and not have choices imposed on them by those who control funding.

In a few rare cases, banks and territorial authorities provide the funding. Currently, the most promising funding possibilities are through: (i) contributions from well-established value chains with farmer contributions at the marketing stage (case of cotton in Burkina Faso), and (ii) the establishment of national or regional development funds. These development funds can either be financed by value chains, as in Côte d’Ivoire with the Interprofessional Fund for Agricultural Research and Advice (FIRCA), or by the State and funding agencies, as in Madagascar with the Agricultural Development Fund (FDA) and the Regional Fund for Agricultural Development (FRDA). Services can then be provided 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 indeed the case with MAFF.

### The main benefits of MAFF for farmers

MAFF helps farmers acquire new knowledge (cropping techniques, livestock rearing, monitoring of production in terms of quantity and costs, economic calculations, etc.) and new skills (forecasting, management, etc.). Some farmers use this knowledge and these skills to change their agricultural practices (early sowing, separation of cereal stock for self-consumption and for selling, planning of cropping seasons, etc.). They speak of MAFF thus, ‘This advice helps us in life,’ or, ‘This advice helps us develop our ideas.’ About prediction and measurement, some farmers say, ‘Earlier, we used to draw from the grain store, and when it became empty, we had to manage. This year, I created a stock and today I still have bags.’ The changes made by farmers participating in MAFF have a significant impact not only on their own farms but also on those of non-participants (who exchange ideas and techniques with participants) and on the POs (who improve their management skills). These impacts are, however, difficult to measure and quantify. In 2010, a study in Benin by an independent institute, IERPE (Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy), involving 254 farmers who had participated in MAFF for at least three years between 2000 and 2007, provided significant results (Table 2).

**Table 2. Impact of MAFF on production, income, food security and household expenses in Benin**

Change in variables after MAFF	% of farmers concerned who believe the change is related to MAFF
Improvement in the yield of the main crops	94
Improvement in agricultural income	98
Improvement in the availability of food products during lean periods	85
Reduced spending on household goods and social activities	21
Increased spending on children’s education	68

Source: Arouna and Moutangou, 2011

In 2012, a study conducted by CIRAD in Benin showed that MAFF participants share with non-participants what they learn during MAFF sessions. This has led to significant improvements in agricultural techniques in farms of non-participants and in the management of household expenses by women who also did not participate in MAFF.

### A gradual scaling up and reflections on the sustainability of MAFF mechanisms

In 2012, on the initiative of CIRAD and AFD, a workshop on the sustainability and scaling out and scaling up of MAFF approaches was organized in conjunction with Inter-Réseaux, the University of Parakou (Benin), PADYP (AFD project in Benin) and the Federation of Agricultural Professionals of Burkina Faso (FEPAB). This workshop allowed participants 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 had concentrated mainly on advisory methods and tools.

It became clear at the workshop that the principles of MAFF have been appropriated by many actors and adapted into various advisory mechanisms in different agricultural contexts. Even though advisory methods have undergone many

changes, advisory organizations recognize that the MAFF approach has specific aspects (for example, considering the entire farm, technical and economic analysis, importance of literacy) for capacity building of farmers and helping the decision-making process as compared to other existing approaches.

Discussions on possibilities of scaling up and scaling out led to the conclusion that several avenues must be explored: widening the basic reach of advisory mechanisms, mainly by mobilizing POs and farmer extension workers; the multiplication of mechanisms for better coverage of the territory by asking the State to invest in overall governance of the various advisory mechanisms; and better coordination of the different advisory activities undertaken by various actors in order to promote synergies.

The sustainability of advisory mechanisms depends mainly on continued funding and adequate skills of advisory actors. Business models suitable for intangible services need to be developed in conjunction with all stakeholders involved in providing these services (sectors, producers, POs, the State). Providing and maintaining quality services – those that will be able to make a difference – requires the design and/or strengthening of suitable training mechanisms for advisory actors. These training mechanisms need to be a part more of permanent national institutions than of project-related activities.

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