



**Needs, formats,
and actors**

**Agricultural advisory services
are at a crossroads**

**Promoting sustainable and inclusive
agricultural advisory services**

**Do agricultural advisory services
still have a purpose?**

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Advisory services: a one-way street?

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES such as “training and visit” schemes used to operate —except in rare cases— like a stream flowing from the “wise” (researchers and technicians) to peasant farmers in order to fulfil the priorities of the State and its financial partners. Those days seem far away. Austerity and structural-adjustment measures brought an end to most of the State-run schemes that operated those services.

A number of development actors then began providing advisory services to farmers: professional agricultural organisations, State agencies, investors, input suppliers, NGOs, telephony companies, etc. But how are those services structured? What is their purpose? Whom are they for?

The title of this edition of *Grain de sel* stems from those questions and seeks to explore the different directions agricultural advisory services have taken. Are they more closely aligned with the vertical (top-down) relationships between technicians and peasant farmers, or the horizontal relationships developed through farmer-to-farmer interactions? Whose needs do they serve? Those of the farmers? The investors? The State’s agricultural policy? This edition of the magazine, which builds on the work of Inter-réseaux’s members and partners (such as CER France, Ambre Conseil, IRAM and CIRAD)¹, aims to remind readers that agricultural advisory services are important for the family farms that benefit from them, and for the (still too many) farms that do not. It also illustrates the many different meanings of agricultural advisory services that have developed over the past three decades, and discusses various

agrarian issues, approaches offering different combinations of local knowledge and external support, local histories rooted in particular territories, etc. It is still too early to be able to meaningfully compare all of the different experiences, how they have evolved, and what results they have produced. While some countries appear to be remodelling the State’s role in the governance and funding of a variety of agricultural advisory actors, others see this trend as a withdrawal that opens the door to abuses. The debate over pesticides and the risks associated with coupling advisory services and the supply of farm inputs, for instance, deserves attention. The emergence of an agricultural advisory “system” at regional or national level gives rise to new challenges regarding: consistency and complementarity between different schemes; controlling the quality of advisory services delivered by a range of different providers; advisors training; cooperation; and regulation —not to mention permanent sources of funding.

There is also a risk that only solvent schemes for a small number of profitable commercial agriculture entities will be supported (as a result of “aid fatigue” or a lack of public investment), provided that those entities are sufficiently consolidated outside the countries that strongly support their agriculture. And yet a number of articles bear witness to the importance of supporting many different schemes tailored to farmers and their needs, whether that involves helping drive the transition to agroecology or improving the quality of products in order to promote them on new urban or export markets.

So ultimately, shouldn’t the real question focus on the diversity of models and the direction provided by agricultural policies?

François Doligez, Président
Ninon Avezou, technical team

1. AFD, Technical report n°55. *Reviving agricultural advisory and extension services in sub-Saharan Africa: for new policies in line with the realities in the field*, July 2019 (English version published in April 2022).

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Have agricultural advisory services become more inclusive and diversified since 2010?

Evolution of a complex concept

Sources:

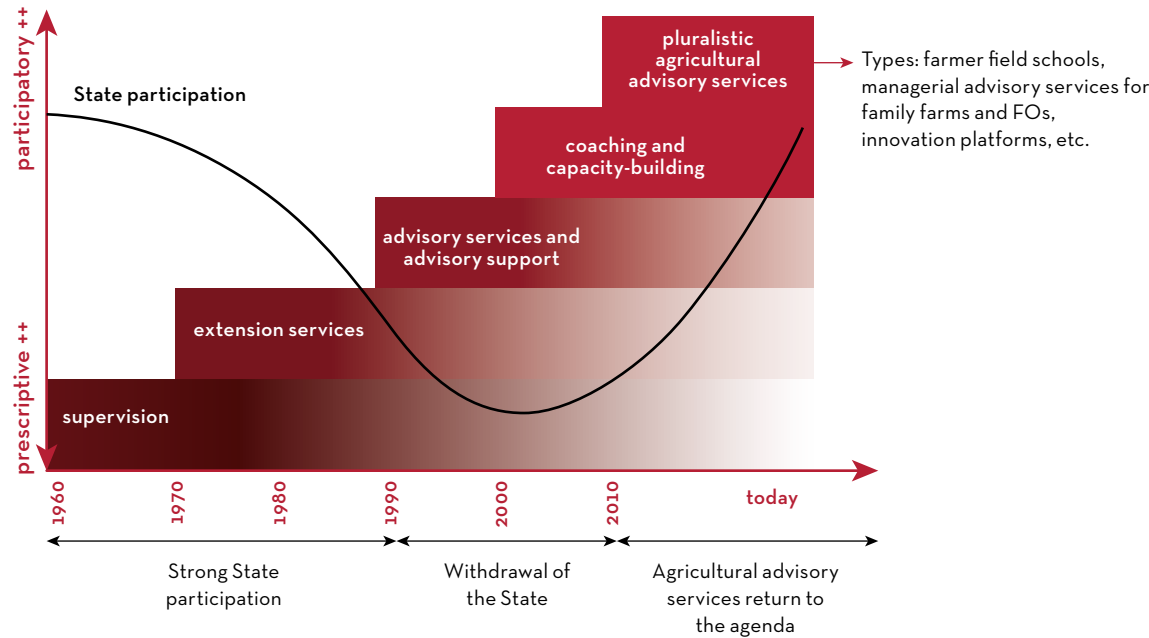
- AFD, *Guidance note – Reviving agricultural advisory and extension services in sub-Saharan Africa: for new policies in line with the realities in the field*, 2019 in French, 2022 in English.
- G. Faure, P. Dugué, G. Fongang, *Diversity of agricultural advisory services in West and Central Africa*, Grain de sel n°77, 2019.

The concept of agricultural advisory services is complex, so this definition attempts to take into account the many different types of agricultural advisory services working in synergy in order to strengthen one another.

“A set of approaches and schemes to support farms (crop, livestock and fish production; processing and marketing of products) and Farmer Organisations (FOs) in areas such as: production management (choice of techniques, organisation of work, etc.), financial management for farms and collective entities (FOs, cooperatives), management of resources within a particular territory (natural resources, financial resources, labour), and acquisition and honing of knowledge and know-how.”

Changes in the dominant approaches to advisory services that bear witness to changes in the vision of agriculture.

Since the 1960s, different terms have been used in Africa to refer to agricultural advisory services in a broad sense. Those terms witness changes in approach, from prescriptive oversight to more participatory approaches that are jointly developed with the beneficiaries. At country level, these types of advisory services generally co-exist.



Types of beneficiaries:
various types of farmers and FOs

Types of providers:
State, FOs, businesses consultants associations, NGOs, etc.

Main types of advisory services

Agricultural extension services: Agricultural extension services consist in sharing the results of research and savoir-faire with farmers, and in helping farmers exploit a larger portion of the value chain (Hailn, 2012). Common synonym: technical advisory services.

Advisory services for family farms (conseil à l'exploitation familiale, or “CEF”): This approach strengthens the capacities of peasant farmers and their families so that they can pursue their activities, analyse their situation, plan ahead and make decisions, and assess their results. It takes into account the technical, economic, social, and (if possible) environmental aspects of their activities (Dugué et al., 2004). Common synonym: managerial advisory services (for farms).

Organisational advisory services: This approach targets collective organisations and may come in several forms (promotion of rural activity, support for community initiatives, support for collective innovation).

Farmers also need *other types of specialised advisory services*: legal advisory services, managerial advisory services for FOs, advisory services for the management of water, value chain advisory services, etc.

Functional literacy training is also an essential component that facilitates agricultural advisory services.

New agricultural advisory actors: the case of Niger

Sources:
 – Synthèse nationale des diagnostics et des planifications régionales du conseil agricole.
 Republic of the Niger, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, April 2019;
 – Christophe Rigourd (IRAM associate consultant).

A new balance between agricultural advisory schemes in the field in Niger

The State is no longer the major provider of agricultural advisory services; it is no more a sovereign function.
 Note: The proportion of NGOs and certain actors (telephony) is probably underestimated.

Two new figures account for most of the human resources for agricultural advisory schemes: the farmer trainer and the peasant-farmer relay.

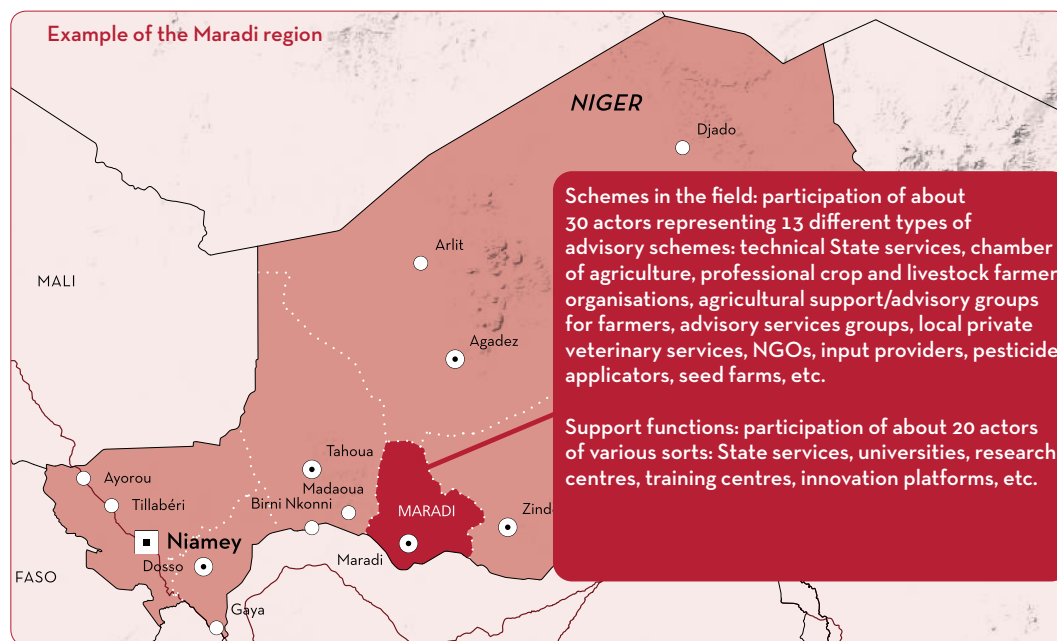
In total, more than 10,000 people are involved in agricultural advisory schemes, which fully justifies the use of new information and communication technologies.
 Note: These figures represent staff who are at least partially involved in agricultural advisory services.



A strong need to coordinate a very diverse range of advisory schemes in the field...

Type of advisory service: functional literacy (cornerstone of advisory services), technical, economic, managerial, organisational, legal, etc.

Approach: technology transfer, technical assistance, support for "learning to learn", etc.



... where only basic advisory needs are sufficiently covered.

Notes:
 – Not all advisory needs are represented (legal advisory services, etc.).
 – A similar trajectory can be established for a farmers' organisation (FO), and for the different types of advisory services for FOs.
 – Territorial coverage of agricultural advisory services may be very unequal depending on the zone (agro-pastoral, pastoral, facing specific environmental issues, etc.)

Diversity of agricultural advisory services in West and Central Africa

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AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES are crucial for strengthening the capacities of farmers and improving the performance of their farms and organisations. The diversity of approaches and types of advisory services is a reflection of the many different visions of agriculture held by actors in agricultural value chains and in different geographic areas.

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COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD, massively invested in advisory services after 1945 in order to modernise agriculture. In Africa, advisory services began to develop in the 1960s with a supervision-based approach. Until the 1990s, the dominant system was the “Training and Visit” system funded by the World Bank, which was based on the transfer of technologies and a standardised approach to advisory services. Implemented by the public authorities, the system aimed to promote intensive agriculture based on the principles of the green revolution. Although strongly criticised by donors, researchers and farmers’ organisations (FO), it is still a source of inspiration for many advisory schemes, particularly those run by upstream and downstream businesses.

After a period of State withdrawal (see pp. 11–12), there has been renewed interest in advisory services since the 2000s, and new approaches are being tested. These approaches are often based on participatory methods in order to ensure that the needs of farmers are taken into account, and to help farmers become more independent.

The farmer field school approach. Farmer field schools are becoming more and more popular (see p. 10). This approach aims to promote cross-learning between farmers, with technicians and sometimes researchers, and is based on analysing situations in order to make decisions; agroecological practices may be encouraged. In Burkina Faso, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) is using this method as it works with the government on programmes for adapting to climate change. But in many projects there is a large discrepancy between theory and practice, with the field school becoming just a field where techniques proposed by the projects are demonstrated.

Managerial advisory services for family farms. This type of service aims to strengthen the capacities of farms so that they can manage their resources based on their objectives and available means through technical, economic and financial analyses. It aims to take into account the entire farm and family, and to promote agriculture that enjoys greater freedom from the choices imposed by value chains. This type of service can also be provided to FOs in

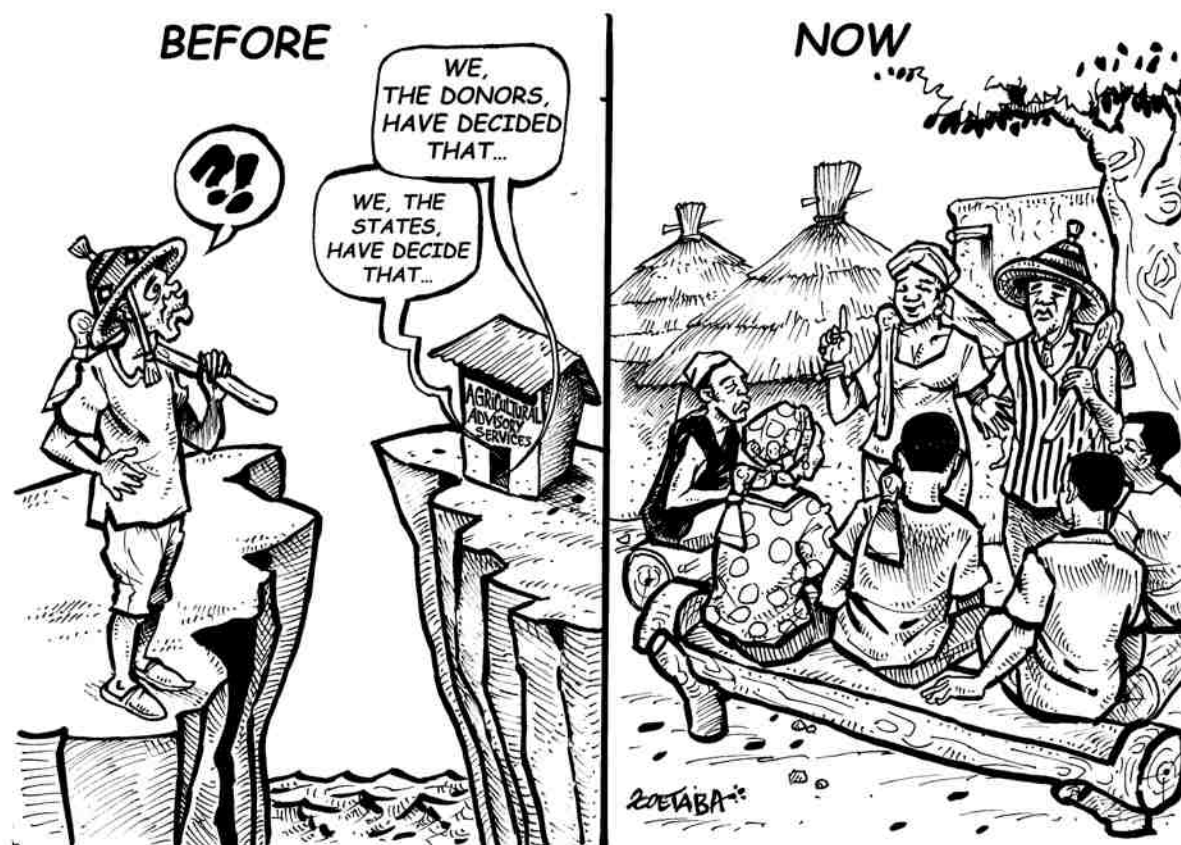
order to help them manage their services. This service is struggling to reach a large audience: Despite great efforts in Benin, it is provided to less than 5% of farms in that country.

Innovation platforms. The innovation platforms promoted by international researchers and NGOs were adopted by several institutions (FARA, CORAF/WECARD, etc.) to help ensure that research is in line with what is needed in the field. The platforms bring together actors from the same value chain to solve technical and organisational issues. But they are struggling to become operational and autonomous, because there is a lack of long-term support and strong partnerships. They are also struggling to free themselves from a projects-based mindset, where they are often used as a way to disseminate a project’s own productivity-focused proposals.

Farmer-to-farmer advisory services. Farmer-to-farmer advisory services are often run by NGOs or projects, and are developed in order to utilise peasant-farmer knowledge, promote an indigenous approach to advisory services, and reduce the cost of those services. Sometimes peasant-farmer instructors are involved in addition to advisors who can provide more thorough advice. The content of the programme depends on the organisation in charge of running the scheme. It may be an effective way to promote agroecology that makes use of peasant-farmer knowledge. But it requires rethinking what peasant-farmer instructors are able to do and what they want to do, as well as the practical conditions of their involvement (see p. 25).

“The right advisory approach depends on the complexity of the problem that needs to be solved, and on the type of solution desired”

Advisory services and ICT. Advisory services via phone platforms, farmer WhatsApp groups, online resource centres, etc. appear to have a promising future (see pp. 8–9). Those services focus on a few different themes: information on prices, weather, production techniques. Their main aim is to circulate information, and —with the exception of WhatsApp groups— exchanges between farmers and advisors are very limited and do not allow for thorough advising. Accessibility to these services is still limited, and the services themselves are not very financially sustainable and are poorly adapted to the actual needs



of farmers (content of the information, joint development of the service). But digital tools may be paired with more conventional types of advisory services.

To a more limited extent, legal advisory services and marketing and sales advisory services have been set up by projects, NGOs and engineering offices. In Cameroon, the European Institute for Cooperation and Development (Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement) assists farmers with new forms of organisation, production standards, and the sale of agricultural products to expat consumers.

Satisfying a wide range of objectives. All the different types of advisory services create a territorial system driven by many different actors who provide advisory services with many different objectives. In theory, such a vast offer should satisfy all needs. In practice, however, the offer of advisory services is not enough to satisfy the growing demands of farmers. Moreover, advisory activities are relatively uncoordinated and poorly funded by the States and value chains, despite the creation—in certain cases—of dedicated funds.

Different advisory approaches for different types of farming. All of these advisory approaches are based on methodological principles that may vary from one situation to another. In the example of the farmer field school approach, certain advisory organisations may favour a “knowledge transfer” approach, while others may favour a “capacity-building” approach to help farmers become more independent in their decision-making. Each approach involves relatively frequent and deep interaction between the advisor and the farmer(s), as well as the mobilisation of different tools. Each approach also affects the cost of the advisory services and the number of beneficiaries.

The choice of approach depends on the complexity of the problem that needs to be solved, and on the type of solution desired or possible (standardised, jointly developed, individual or collective). The

right approach depends in large part on the values and objectives of the organisation running the service, and on the type of farming promoted (intensive farming, agroecology, peasant farming, etc.).

Advisory services incorporated into broader schemes. Agricultural advisory services are not just defined by their advisory approach. They are also defined by other criteria relating to advisory schemes. The first has to do with the capacities of the advisors (training, experience, skills, etc.) and their availability.

The second has to do with: the governance mechanisms of the advisory schemes (see pp. 26–27); the values and objectives of the organisations providing the service; the possibility of farmers and FOs to actually participate in that governance; and the participatory mechanisms for orienting and evaluating advisory schemes (see pp. 32–33).

The third criterion has to do with the objectives of the funding providers (State, donors, private firms, FOs, etc.), the funding mechanisms for the service (tender call, delegation, sale of services, etc.), and the cost of the service for the farmers. In Africa, it is often the donors who, through projects, have dominant influence in guiding advisory services (see pp. 13–14).

Diversity of advisory services: choosing the right one. The funding mechanisms (see pp. 29–30) and governance mechanisms of advisory services have a strong influence on the type of service chosen and on how the schemes are organised in the field. Those mechanisms also reflect the choices of the States and actors from the agricultural sector regarding the farming model or co-existence of models. In particular, advisory services focusing on agroecology and on helping farmers become more independent will be largely run by FOs or NGOs, and will be based on participatory approaches where local knowledge is utilised and where proposals are tailored to the local context.. ■

Are digital technologies transforming agricultural advisory services?

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THIS ARTICLE ANALYSES agricultural advisory services in Burkina Faso that utilise information and communication technologies. Whether they are a niche innovation or just a fad, how are these technologies helping meet agricultural advisory needs?

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► Modeste Florentin Bationo is an agricultural engineer. He has over ten years of experience supporting multi-actor innovation dynamics and processes in rural areas.

► The data cited in this article are mainly from the following studies:

- C. Alexandre, *Émergence du numérique et transformations des services de conseil agricole au Burkina Faso*. Présentation au Symposium AgriNumA, Dakar, 28 April 2019.
- MF. Bationo, *Capitalisation des expériences de TIC appliquées à l'Agriculture au Burkina Faso*, 2018.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION technologies (ICT), and the “D4Ag” (digital for agriculture) initiative are being promoted in developing countries in order to facilitate farmers’ planning, production, processing and sales activities, and to improve agricultural advisory services.

According to the Technical Centre for Agricultural Cooperation (Centre Technique de Coopération Agricole), grants from international donors for D4Ag solutions in sub-Saharan Africa amounted to \$180 million in 2018 (up 67% in 4 years), compared with \$47 million of investment from private companies. But the effectiveness and viability of these solutions have not yet been proven.

Uses of digital technology in agricultural advisory services. The use of ICT in Burkina Faso’s agricultural sector was first promoted through the structural-adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 1990s. Those experiences focused on market information systems (MIS) designed to improve the liaison between production and the market, and to ensure a fair distribution of profits within value chains. Between 2000 and 2010, NGOs, private companies and farmers’ organisations (FO) began focusing more and more on the potential of ICT for agricultural advisory services.

Information on input prices and agricultural products, weather and production techniques are the oldest and most common services. The widespread accessibility of internet access and smartphones has led to the rise of online training services, video-sharing, and decision-making tools in the form of mobile applications. FOs are more interested in solutions that make it easier to monitor members and activities, access weather information and ensure traceability for products destined for more profitable markets (organic, fair trade, etc.).

Variety of media, services offering limited interaction, and limited coverage. Most of the services studied by Bationo are accessible using phones or connected tools allowing access to websites and bulletins. Phones are used mainly for sending text messages, but may also be used to access call centres or interactive voice response (IVR) systems. The advisory service providers who were interviewed are aware that information sent in writing rarely gets through to farmers, who have poor literacy skills.

Oral formats (radio, IVR) are more accessible, but they are also more expensive to develop and are not conducive to providing personalised advice.

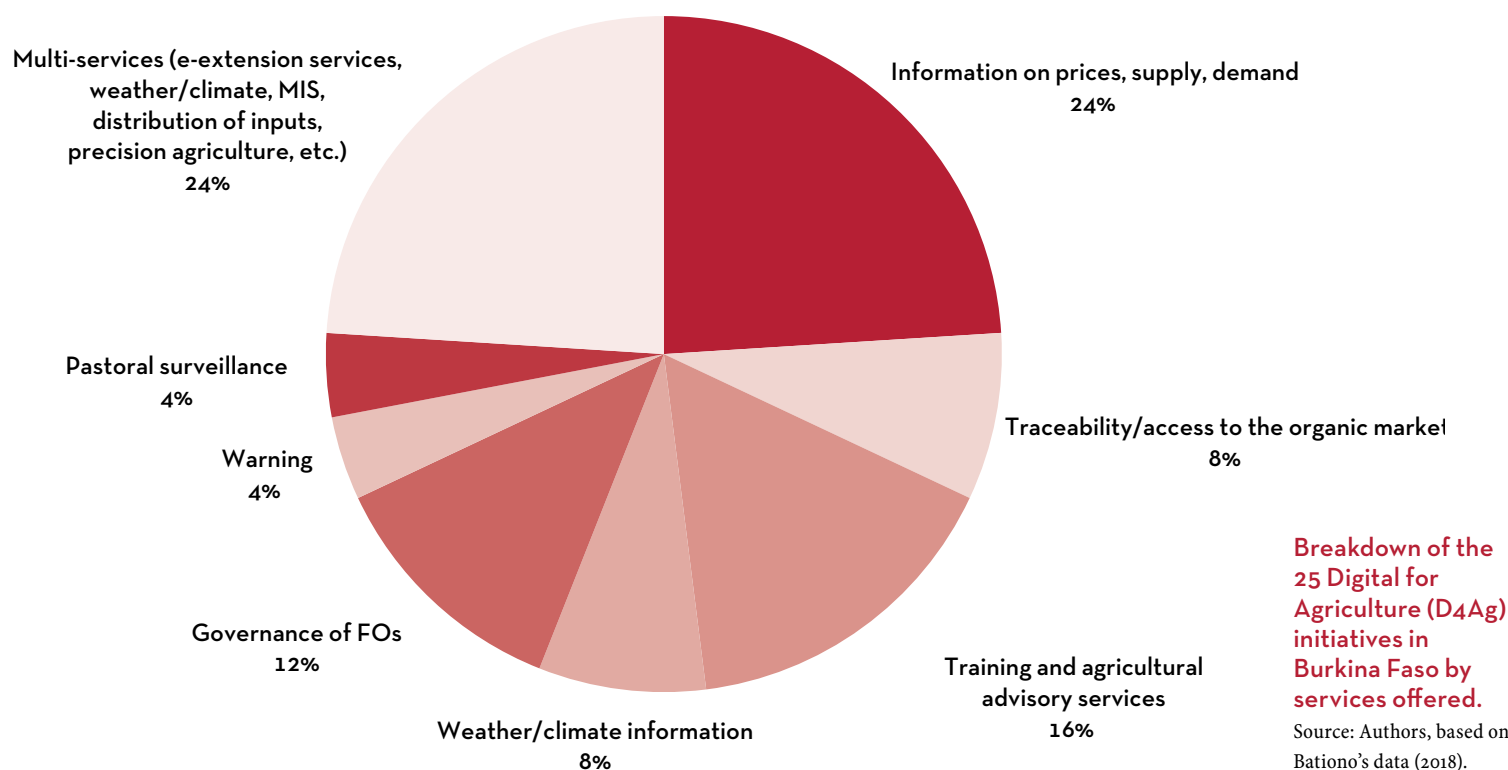
A study conducted in 2019 of 15 digital advisory services showed that only four were designed to allow farmers to ask questions to advisors. The Vacis platform allowed maize and soy farmers to submit their questions to researchers via an advisor’s mobile phone. The Tylaynet platform enabled farmers trained in the Tylay method (based on the skills-assessment approach) to ask their questions to advisors. Those two initiatives did not last, but the following two are still active. The Cocorico call centre gives livestock farmers access to information (produced by satellite imagery) on transhumance corridors, the state of pastures and waterholes, and veterinary care. Cercle des Cuniculteurs has a WhatsApp group where its 250 members (rabbit breeders) can communicate free of charge in order to acquire inputs, diagnose diseases, adjust their feeding and reproduction practices, and sell their animals. This case illustrates farmers’ social network use, which appears to be on the rise. The increase in use, however, is dependent on farmers’ access to those technologies. While 80% of the Burkinabe population had a basic phone in 2016, only 11% were internet users (all sectors combined). What’s more, the administrators of the WhatsApp group say it is hard work monitoring the reliability of the shared data.

Despite their disadvantages, social networks are a promising way to encourage communication between farmers, or between people with “expert” knowledge and those with “peasant farmer” knowledge.

While the current trend is to make better use of farmers’ knowledge, farmers are still rarely involved in the production of information. Most services are used to provide generic information, via phone or internet, developed by researchers or NGOs. Those approaches do not allow for interaction and essentially consist in the transfer of knowledge; they are therefore not well-adapted to solving complex problems.

Moving towards complex inter-organisational networks. The providers of the 25 digital advisory services studied in 2018 were research entities (36%), FOs (28%), private-sector entities (24%), and NGOs (12%). But four new types of organisation are now starting to collaborate with long-standing advisory

“Digital advisory services are not a profitable sector of activity”



actors: phone operators, IT developers, software providers, and data ‘aggregators’ specialised in collecting, formatting and sharing information via digital tools. Complex inter-organisational networks are therefore being developed in order to bring together the financial, human and technological resources needed to develop the service. The 321 service (provided by Orange and Viamo) offers voice messages in local languages, accessible by phone, on best practices for the production of six products. It took several years for an agreement to be reached between Orange, Viamo and the NGO providing the content for dissemination. And it took over a year of work with the Ministry of Agriculture to create the informational content. The contracts between the different parties are renegotiated annually.

Unstable and unprofitable services, but promising prospects. It is expensive to design technological solutions, produce relevant content, and manage services. Most of the services are currently dependent on development aid. In all, 92% of the initiatives are either entirely funded through projects or through partnerships between the private sector and projects/NGOs/donors (Bationo). This raises questions as to the financial sustainability of the initiatives. Some, however, are looking to become more independent by diversifying their activities. FOs (such as those in the cowpea value chain in Kaya using an information system for managerial advisory services for family farms) use the profits generated through the sale of inputs, storage services or warrantage services

to fund advisory services. Some businesses (such as EcoData, which manages the Cocorico call centre) offer services (market studies, surveys, etc.) to FOs and NGOs.

But all providers agree that digital advisory services are not yet a profitable sector of activity. In certain circumstances, however, the use of digital technology for advisory services may be justified. The security conditions in Burkina Faso, for example, have resulted in a lower presence of advisors in the field, rendering traditional support schemes almost inoperative. Remote advisory services would make it possible to continue to support farmers. Those tools could also be used to promote environmentally friendly practices, although the negative ecological impact of high-tech solutions should be taken into account.

Towards a more participatory approach to designing advisory tools. In order to ensure that tools are well-adapted, the way in which they are designed needs to change. Farmers are still rarely involved, but participatory approaches are becoming more and more common. Donors support the joint development of tools and services with FOs. State entities and incubators are promoting “hackathons” to support the development of socially useful applications. All providers are currently trying to develop, by trial and error, suitable solutions that are financially viable. There should be discussion of how to assist those programming enthusiasts in order to ensure that the solutions they develop are truly useful for farmers. ■

Farmer field schools: an innovative approach to agricultural advisory services?

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ONE OF THE LESSONS LEARNED through AVSF's farmer field schools in northern Togo is that this type of agricultural advisory service (which requires human resources and time) allows farmers to look for solutions to their problems on their own and acquire new skills.

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► This article was written based on the following documents:

- Bakker, Teatske. 2017. *Démarches d'accompagnement pour la co-construction d'innovations paysannes. Guide méthodologique des champs-écoles de la région des savanes au Togo*. AVSF;
- Bakker, Teatske. 2019. *Les champs-écoles d'AVSF au Nord Togo : une démarche d'accompagnement pour la co-construction d'innovations paysannes et le conseil agricole*.

Data collection – Field school in the Savanes region

THE FIELD SCHOOL is a method of hands-on group learning: Twenty to thirty peasant farmers (including women) from the same village come together as a group to reflect on local agricultural practices, set up cultivation experiments and discuss their findings. When they assemble periodically to cultivate a plot of land, the farmers (assisted by technicians) compare the results of their practices as well as their financial records.

The plots of land are made available by a member or rented by the group. They are welcoming places where groups of farmers may visit and discuss with one another. Field schools can also set up innovative trials, conducted with the assistance of an advisor or external instructor, in order to develop technical guidelines adapted to local conditions.

Farmer field schools: a method in support of agro-ecology. As part of the “Sustainability and resilience of family farming in the Savanes region” project led by AVSF and the NGO RAFIA between 2014 and 2018, and funded by the French Facility for Global Environment (Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial), 21 field schools for rainfed crops (cereals and legumes) and 18 field schools for off-season market gardening were set up, involving 350 people, and a dozen visits were organised allowing for interaction between groups. The main topics of discussion and experimentation at the market-gardening field schools were: how to determine optimal plant density when transplanting (tomato and onion); use

of organic fertiliser; reduction of doses of mineral fertilisers; and use of natural pesticides (made from onion, chilli, garlic, neem). New crops were also introduced on small plots (cabbage, carrot). Tests helped significantly reduce the use of mineral fertiliser by replacing it with organic fertiliser.

The farmers replicated several lessons from the field schools, such as: cultivating rows of onion (technique also used by women for rice), cultivating onion with compost, and using natural pesticides. Market gardeners are also saving water by using compost, reducing the size of their “pits”, and optimising plant density. After comparing the gross profit margin of the field schools with what they obtained from their own plots, farmers have been reducing their doses of mineral fertilisers and have started focusing more on the production of compost.

A demanding but suitable approach to advisory services. In addition to developing agroecological crop-management techniques, field schools help participants develop an ability to find solutions to their own problems and acquire new experimentation, innovation and communication skills. It appears, therefore, that field schools help family farms become more resilient and more capable of adapting to climate change.

But this experience has shown that the field school is a scheme that requires a lot of human resources (one technician for a group of 20 farmers) and time, while reaching a relatively small number of farmers.

In conclusion, this type of advisory service is the most capable of meeting the following objectives: emergence and validation of innovations tailored to the constraints (particularly socio-economic) of farmers; and creation of technical agroecological guidelines for the local context, and adoption of those guidelines by farmers. Ultimately, one of the impacts of the scheme is to shift agricultural practices and systems towards more ecological alternatives. ■



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Renewed State engagement in agricultural advisory services? The situation in Benin

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AFTER A PERIOD OF WITHDRAWAL from agricultural advisory services, West African States appear to be renewing their engagement through agencies and national funds for agricultural development. In Benin the government is reforming the agricultural sector, and the country offers a prime example of these institutional changes regarding agricultural advisory services.

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THE LIBERALISATION of agricultural advisory services in the early 1990s enabled private entities and farmers' organisations to become involved in funding and providing advisory services in West Africa.

Although the State always maintained a presence in the field alongside them, its role became more focused on coordination and regulation, which suffered from a lack of funding. As a result, the number of advisory schemes increased in a fragmented manner and without synergies. Recent changes may therefore be assessed in light of challenges such as coordinating, regulating and funding (pp. 28–29) agricultural advisory services.

The return of the State. After a 30-year period of withdrawal, States are now making an effort to address deficiencies in their national agricultural advisory systems by building on the achievements of several West African countries. New forums and mechanisms involving all stakeholders in agricultural advisory services (government entities, farmers' organisations, NGOs, private entities, etc.) are gradually being put in place to help regulate, revitalise, coordinate and fund agricultural advisory services. States have a ubiquitous role in that process.

The most remarkable trend has been the creation of national advisory agencies (ANADER in Ivory Coast, ANCAR in Senegal, APCA in Niger) and regional advisory agencies (Benin) with a wide range of mandates, agencies specifically for agricultural advisory services (Senegal, Niger), and agencies for agricultural development in general (Ivory Coast, Benin). In Ivory Coast and Senegal, those agencies have their own advisory schemes in the field. In Benin and Niger, they work with private service providers (NGOs, professional agricultural organisations). States have also developed various agricultural advisory strategies, such as ANCAR's manual of technical procedures in Senegal, the national agricultural advisory system in Niger, and the national agricultural advisory strategy in Benin. Those policy documents offer an assessment of the state of agricultural advisory services as well as the principles of those services, their strategic orientations, and their intervention and monitoring/evaluation mechanisms.

The agencies' boards of directors are composed of

representatives of public organisations, private service providers and professional agricultural organisations. Despite participation by such a diverse group of actors, the predominance of representatives from public entities may result in strong State influence in orienting the advisory services organised by the agencies. Decentralised State entities, for their part, are in charge of controlling the quality of the services.

National funds for agricultural development with a component dedicated to agricultural advisory services (national fund for agricultural development in Benin, investment fund for food and nutrition security in Niger) and funds specifically for agricultural advisory services (interprofessional fund for agricultural research and advisory services in Ivory Coast) are created to fund agricultural advisory schemes. Those funds are funded by levies on agricultural value chains, State grants, and donors.

Agricultural advisory services in Benin: a new beginning. Benin is a typical example of renewed State engagement. The reform of the agricultural sector over the past three years as part of the Government Action Programme is changing the country's institutional landscape for agricultural advisory services. The Strategic Plan for the Development of the Agricultural Sector (2017–2025), which led to the creation of the National Agricultural Advisory Strategy, placed the twelve departmental directorates of agriculture, livestock farming and fishing in charge of imple-

menting agricultural policy, monitoring the agricultural sector, overseeing regulation, and providing technical assistance to agencies. Those directorates are in charge of defining and ensuring compliance with standards, and controlling the quality of agricultural advisory services at departmental level.

Seven territorial agencies for agricultural development (agences territoriales de développement agricole, or «ATDA») are in charge of overseeing agricultural advisory operations.

Each Beninese ATDA is run by a board composed of representatives of the ministries of agriculture, trade, and finance; the departmental directorates of agriculture, livestock farming and fishing within the target zone; interdepartmental chambers of agriculture; professional agricultural organisations; the National Association of Beninese Municipalities; civil society in the agricultural sector; and one de-

“The State is taking back control of agricultural advisory services with the private sector”

legate representing the ATDA’s staff. State services are therefore strongly represented in that governance body. The reform seeks to break down agricultural development by territory and area of specialisation. Each ATDA has specific mandates to promote leading value chains and favours an approach that is strongly oriented towards promoting value chains and based on delegating work. Advisory services are therefore implemented by NGOs, professional agricultural organisations and private firms selected through tender calls and funded in accordance with the National Fund for Agricultural Development mechanism. There are no longer any public agricultural advisory agents in the field.

In short, the State is creating a new framework for the governance and organisation of funding for agricultural advisory services by integrating actors from the private sector. It grants exclusivity for the provision of advisory services in the field to non-State entities, while reserving the right to assist them and to oversee regulation and supervision. Agricultural service centres (which are considered to be a source of technical support for ATDAs) are in charge of transferring savoir-faire and agricultural technologies, and helping strengthen the capacities of farms, service providers and technical training entities for actors in the different value chains by offering demonstrations as examples. Feasibility studies are being carried out in order to define how to set up such centres.

Renewed State engagement for market-oriented agricultural advisory services. Agencies for advisory services and agricultural development are currently in vogue, funded by agricultural development funds. While States have renewed their engagement in the governance of agricultural advisory services, those services have also become more focused on promoting value chains and have moved towards privatisation. In Benin, for instance, there are no more public agricultural advisory agents.

It is important, however, not to forget that agricultural advisory services also play a crucial role in food security, poverty reduction and environmental protection. In order for them to fulfil that role, specific local characteristics and differences between crops (subsistence crops, cash crops, etc.) and between farmers (small farmers, family farms, etc.) must be taken into account when organising agricultural advisory services. Otherwise, those services may remain inaccessible to many farmers. Actors (public entities, farmers’ organisations, inter-professional associations, NGOs, private consultants, etc.) must therefore be well-prepared in order to properly fulfil their new roles in the current political and institutional context.



The Territorial Agency for Agricultural Development (ATDA), Benin

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What are the positions of funding agencies regarding agricultural advisory services?

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TRADITIONALLY, funding agencies have been involved in funding projects and strategies for agricultural advisory services. But over the past few years, their roles and strategies appear to have evolved towards supporting private advisory schemes.

► Mouldi Tarhouni is head of the Agriculture, Water, and Human and Social Development Division of the General Directorate for West Africa at the African Development Bank (ADB).

► Claude Torre is manager of project teams within the Operations Department of the French Development Agency (AFD)

GRAIN DE SEL (GDS): How have the roles of funding agencies changed with regard to agricultural advisory services in Africa?

CLAUDE TORRE (CT) – AFD: Starting in 2005, faced with weak public development aid for the agricultural sector, partners and governments encouraged the private sector to become more involved. That encouragement resulted in the mobilisation of agro-dealers upstream in the value chains, and agro-processors downstream. But advisory services are “guided” by the objectives of those actors (sale of inputs for upstream actors, and specific quality standards for downstream actors), especially since farmers have little negotiating power. And in any case, the farmer always bears the risk!

MOULDI TARHOUNI (MH) – BAD: Since 2010, the African Development Bank (ADB) has been committed to supporting investment in agricultural research and development in order to improve productivity and innovation. Targeted aid for agricultural extension services has helped renovate infrastructure, train human resources, provide logistical services, etc.

GDS: What is your strategy regarding agricultural advisory services? Which types of advisory services do you support?

CT (AFD): The AFD is involved in policy dialogue with governments that decide their own policy orientations. When a government envisions Brazilian-style agriculture or ‘agribusiness’, it is not easy to bring up the subject of family farmers. To get around that, we work with existing professional organisations in West Africa that engage in advocacy initiatives.

MH (BAD): Until the adoption of the ADB’s ten-year strategy (2013–2022) and its flagship programme called “Feeding Africa”, funding for agricultural extension projects was not a priority area. But now we are seeing a paradigm shift, and the ADB is investing more in projects to support agricultural advisory services, particularly through innovative technologies with a project called *Multinational – Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT)*.

CT (AFD): A lot of our involvement is through projects. In this way, the AFD supports a wide range of advisory services: value-chain advisory services, private advisory services, FO advisory services. But it is also necessary to develop public policies with permanent support mechanisms and dedicated budget lines that can provide funding for an array

of advisory services. That is done through incentives and joint-funding mechanisms.

GDS: Besides projects, do you use other mechanisms to fund agricultural advisory services?

MH (BAD): No. As part of its ten-year strategy, the ADB focuses on activities that provide added value and that strengthen ties both upstream and downstream in the agricultural sector. Special attention is directed at funding agricultural research, developing technologies, and disseminating technological innovations to boost agricultural productivity.

CT (AFD): Besides projects, the AFD also has a debt-reduction mechanism (called “C2D”), which allows a country to repay its debt in the form of development programmes. In Cameroon, the ACEFA programme (see pp. 36–38) was launched to provide advisory services to FOs, with headings included in the State budget. We are trying to measure the impact in order to persuade the government to continue to support schemes that offer training and advisory services to farmers. The AFD

also supports FOs – who are the leading providers of advisory services – and banks by offering a credit line or guarantee fund with technical assistance for the bank and the customer. There are also managerial advisory services to help farmers propose “bankable” projects and secure banking institutions.

GDS: In what ways are those mechanisms innovative? And do they make it possible to develop agricultural advisory activities over the long term?

CT (AFD): To ensure the longevity and adoption of advisory activities, we are trying to strengthen institutional aspects, human resources and business models with joint public funding, for example. The AFD has developed an experiment with service cheques in Cameroon, where a fund is made available to farmers in order to mobilise accredited entities. Joint funding is required to access the fund, and particular attention is focused on accountability. In Cameroon, advisory services are increasingly co-funded by the country, but the evaluations currently being carried out will help ensure that they have an impact and that the public funds are being put to good use.

GDS: Do funding agencies work differently now with other long-standing donors supporting advisory services?

MH (BAD): Yes. Lessons have been learned from challenges faced in the past. Funding agencies now

“Investing in people will help get things moving”

A woman performing a graft at the GREL nursery



© AFD, Ghana

☛ focus more on lasting participatory models that will be able to cover their own funding needs over the long term.

CT (AFD): Absolutely. States are now reluctant to invest in anything “soft” (training, advisory services), even though investing in people will help get things moving once farmers become familiar with the subjects!

Just like advisory services, support for FOs must incorporate joint public funding in order to be long-lasting. It is necessary in order for FOs to develop and endure. States are nevertheless reluctant to allow for the emergence of opposing powers that might be capable of challenging their position.

GDS: *How do you incorporate private agricultural advisory actors in your work?*

MH (BAD): The ADB leaves a lot of room for private agricultural advisory actors, because they discourage the predominance of the standard model of publicly funded systems. Cost recovery was insufficient, and longevity a constant source of concern. But in order to ensure the longevity of funding for research and agricultural extension services, it is necessary to encourage both the public and private sectors to participate.

CT (AFD): In most of its funding, the AFD combines an environmental and social framework. This involves a risk-management approach or incentives that are more development-oriented. But it has a cost that is not measured by the market.

The AFD was involved in the production of rubber by a family farm in Ghana, by supporting a public bank and a company called Ghana Rubber Estates Limited (GREL). We negotiated a reduced interest rate

with GREL in exchange for the provision of technical and managerial advisory services on subsistence crops. The rubber farmers also grow for their own consumption and are therefore less dependent on the market and more resilient in terms of food security.

GDS: *What challenges do funding agencies currently face in terms of advisory services? And how can they overcome them?*

CT (AFD): The challenges for advisory services are the same as for other services: longevity of public funding mechanisms; intervention through projects without real viability; scaling up. In any case, public funding mechanisms will need to be used!

MH (BAD): Exactly. It is necessary to adopt an approach that involves multi-year funding with substantial research grants provided to institutions for better forward planning and long-term partnerships to promote regional integration.

The ADB’s assistance in research and development should also be more strategic by addressing cross-disciplinary issues, such as: climate change; socio-economic, institutional and policy research relating to agriculture and the management of natural resources.

CT (AFD): Yes. The current model that is developing upstream and downstream in the value chains is more in line with conventional intensification and improved crop systems without a global vision of the farm. Funding agencies need to have greater consideration for social and environmental aspects (soil protection, best practices for agriculture, management of resources) in agricultural advisory projects for a doubly green revolution. ■

The challenges of agricultural advisory services for FOs in Madagascar

Gérard Andriamandimby (reseausoa@orange.mg)

IN MADAGASCAR, farmers' organisations are involved in designing, monitoring and implementing agricultural services policies. This interview explores the new challenges and roles of those organisations, which are both beneficiaries and providers of agricultural advisory services, in a context where the State has withdrawn from its former role.

► Gérard Andriamandimby has been director of the SOA network in Madagascar for the past ten years. He works with elected representatives at regional and national level to strengthen their organisations.

► The SOA network is a union of agricultural organisations that is composed of 25 farmers' organisations (FO) and roughly 30,000 peasant farmers in Madagascar. Its mission is to promote FOs as partners for designing development policies and as economic actors.

GRAIN DE SEL (GDS): Could you tell us about the agricultural services policy in Madagascar? How are advisory services promoted there?

GÉRARD ANDRIAMANDIMBY (GA): The outlines of Madagascar's agricultural policy can be found in the 2009 Farmer Services Strategy (Stratégie de Services aux Agriculteurs, or "SSA"), whose objective is to "support the development of modern, professional and competitive family farms that are able to generate a fair income from their work and investments and ensure food security, while being mindful of future generations." The SSA aims to ensure fair access to agricultural services, and clearly places the farmer at the heart of its efforts. It utilises farmers' organisations (FO) and agricultural service centres (ASC) to help farmers identify and set up services, and is funded by the agricultural development fund (ADF), which was set up in 2009.

That fund now covers 15 of the country's 22 regions and funds six types of services: production support, FO structuring and strengthening, access to production factors, financial services, research, and strengthening of actors in agricultural services. The ADF funds advisory services (technical advisory services and managerial advisory services for family farms) through its production-support component. Those services may be run by FOs, or by training centres, research centres or service providers whose capacities are being strengthened to improve the quality of their advisory services.

GDS: What role did FOs play in defining and monitoring that policy?

GA: The SOA network is one of the national FOs that engages in advocacy work in support of family farmers in Madagascar, and participates in the development of agricultural policies and strategies, including the SSA. It launched forums for collaboration called Regards Paysans ("Farmers' Views") at regional and national level, where issues relating to agricultural policy are debated. This approach helps farmers prepare proposals before presenting them to decision-makers and to the ASC and ADF steering committees.

The SOA network has defended the principle of complete equality in terms of peasant-farmer participation in advisory funding schemes (ADF) and ASCs, as well as multi-year programme contracts. Multi-year contracts allow them to ensure that their

organisation continues to operate over the long term, pay and strengthen their technical team and network of peasant-farmer relays, and ultimately improve farmers' access to local technical and managerial advisory services that are well-adapted, modern and innovative.

GDS: How have the roles of FOs changed over the past ten years with regard to advisory services in Madagascar?

GA: At first, FOs were simply the beneficiaries of advisory services. Now, they are also providers of those services. They have salaried technicians, networks of peasant-farmer relays, and effective tools (monitoring of benchmark farms, production costs, cultivation area, etc.). They are now able to orient advisory services based on the needs of the beneficiaries (choosing the right varieties and crop-management techniques for seed production, local agroecology techniques, etc.). Over the past ten years, FOs have trained their peasant-farmer instructors and technicians, and have brought about changes in advisory services in line with their strategy and resources. They have also developed at the same time many other complementary services (access to inputs, sales, storage).

GDS: What types of advisory services does your network offer? Why?

GA: The FOs of the SOA network develop production-focused technical advisory services and managerial advisory services for farmers belonging to the network. With the help of the SOA network, eleven of them have even developed advisory services tailored to young farmers (a total of 700 young people have set up farms). Five other FOs have specialised in advisory services for seed production, working closely with researchers.

GDS: How do FOs fund advisory services? Are they capable of providing advisory services over the long term?

GA: An agricultural advisor advises 250 to 300 farmers and costs roughly 1.2 million ariary or 300 euros a month (1.5 euros/farmer), for an annual total of about 3,600 euros. Advisory services are essentially funded through grants provided to the FO (by the ADF, projects/programmes), and to a lesser extent using the FO's own funds (particularly for agricultural cooperatives). Within the SOA network, the

"Farmers' organisations are beneficiaries and providers of agricultural advisory services"

Young farmers visit a fruit-processing cooperative in Mahitsy, Antananarivo

© SOA network



- members who are able to provide advisory services over the short/medium term are those that sell products with high added value (cocoa, milk, seeds).

GDS: *What is the added value of advisory services offered by farmers' organisations?*

GA: FOs are intended to remain within their territory, and it is therefore in their interests to invest in strengthening their human resources. They also know their members and can identify schemes for peasant-farmer relays more effectively than external actors. Those peasant-farmer relay services offer various advantages in terms of costs, proximity and availability at local level (see p. 25). The advisory services offered by FOs therefore provide local relays for the dissemination of information and innovations, and make it possible to be closely attuned to members' needs.

GDS: *Are farmers' organisations capable of providing a response to the State's withdrawal? What do you expect from the government at present?*

GA: FOs are capable of providing a response to the State's withdrawal, provided the State provides grants so that they can operate advisory services and cover the salary and training of technicians and peasant-farmer relays.

The State is actually no longer involved in operating advisory services. That role has been entrusted to chambers of agriculture, FOs, accredited service providers (NGOs, engineering offices, private consultants, etc.) and training centres. But to improve the provision of advisory services, the State needs to encourage the development of FOs over the long term, help collect data and develop infrastructure to facilitate the work of technicians and interaction between farmers. More importantly, the State should provide training for talented technicians and support the chambers of agriculture. Those entities have some connection with most farmers, and they could engage in business advisory services (providing

strategic advisory services to help with decision-making) and specialised advisory services, and provide instructors at territorial level.

GDS: *Would you say that the advisory services policy is headed in the right direction?*

GA: Several factors, such as the recognition of advisory services organisations, lead one to believe that the agricultural advisory policy is fragile. The effective implementation of programme contracts by the ADF remains difficult, and peasant farmers no longer make up the majority in the ADF funding schemes. Schemes run by FOs affect only 10% of peasant farmers, and those FOs still do not have the financial or human resources needed to grow significantly and increase their capacity. So even though the State is working on reference guidelines for different roles and on the content and orientations of advisory services, a lot still needs to be done to implement the services strategy.

GDS: *What are the challenges of agricultural advisory services for farmers' organisations in Madagascar? How can they be overcome?*

GA: As the context changes (development of value chains, creation of standards, pro-agribusiness policies, etc.), advisory services change too. Those services need to diversify and become more and more specialised. There is a need for innovative agricultural practices that are inexpensive and environmentally friendly, which requires technical advisory services that take into account issues relating to the environment, technical/economic management, tax management, etc.

In addition to technical advisory services, it would be a good idea to have advisors in business management responding more to issues regarding the orientation and operations of the farm. FOs therefore need to develop their advisory services in order to provide a response to the demand for increasingly personalised, strategic and effective advisory services. ■

New agricultural advisory actors in West Africa: interests, limits and strategic implications

Patrice Djamen (p.djamen759@gmail.com)

THE DIVERSITY of agricultural advisory service providers in West Africa over the past 20 years was the result of several factors and presents an opportunity to improve the offer of advisory services. But challenges are arising, and strategic orientations need to be (re)defined in order to enable agricultural advisory services to help transform agriculture.

► Patrice Djamen is a researcher at the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD). He leads research, expertise and capacity development activities on the renewing of agricultural advisory services for the facilitation of agroecological transitions in family farms.

IN WEST AFRICA, demand from farmers for agricultural advisory services has become more and more diversified over the past 20 years. That diversification has given rise to a wide range of agricultural advisory service providers, which has had an impact on the services offered, funding, advisor profiles, and advisory methods and tools. The emergence of new actors is a major change that needs to be understood and encouraged in order to offer farmers inclusive and easy access to high-quality agricultural advisory services.

Strong recomposition over the past two decades.

Historically, agricultural advisory functions (provision of relevant knowledge and information, facilitation of interactions with actors, decision-making assistance and ongoing capacity-building) were overseen mainly by the ministries in charge of rural development. But public agricultural advisory services ran into difficulties, which culminated in the late 1990s (see pp. 11–12).

At the same time, new agricultural advisory service providers began to emerge, playing an increasingly important role. Many were from the private sector (agribusinesses, input distributors (see pp. 19–20), engineering offices), NGOs, and the agricultural profession (FOs, chambers of agriculture, etc.). Private entities also began to emerge that were initially non-agricultural but that developed activities in connection with one or more functions relating to agricultural advisory services (e.g. telephony companies, see pp. 8–9).

This diversity of actors at both national and regional levels means that the analysis and development tables for advisory services need to shift from a single scheme to an integrated system comprising several different schemes.

A wide array of actors supported by the State?

While shortcomings in public schemes played a big role in the emergence of new actors, other factors also contributed. The development of multilateral cooperation facilitated suppliers' access to several sources of funding. By focusing on its coordination functions, the State encouraged the private sector to take over the activities it was withdrawing from, sometimes suddenly. The desire of FOs to boost their performance drove them to set up internal advisory schemes offering their members access to local agri-

cultural advisory services, and to ensure that loans for inputs are used efficiently.

Governments more or less directly supported the emergence of new actors by passing legislation creating the legal statuses now used by several private agricultural advisory service providers (economic interest groups, associations, NGOs, cooperatives). In Benin, the decision to allow for contractual relationships in agricultural advisory services, with the authorisation of private service providers, has encouraged a rise in the number of new actors (see pp. 11–12). In Guinea, the public authorities in charge of agricultural advisory services helped create —through training programmes and the provision of agents— the agricultural advisory scheme for the Fédération des Paysans du Fouta-Djallon (FPPD), which was an example of successful internalisation of an agricultural advisory scheme.

Diversification of actors: improving the offer of agricultural advisory services.

The diversification of actors makes it possible for agricultural advisory services to cover more themes and geographical areas, as suppliers tend to focus on specific requests. Farmers' organisation schemes target their members first and foremost —sometimes even exclusively— by offering them technical/economic advisory services, and sometimes managerial advisory services for family farms (conseil à l'exploitation familiale). That is the case with the Union des Groupements pour la Commercialisation des Produits Agricoles de la Boucle du Mouhoun (UGCPA/BM) in Burkina Faso. Engineering offices offer

mainly entrepreneurial advisory services and capacity-building, monitoring/evaluation and support activities. NGOs and public services target primarily vulnerable farmers. Agro-dealers offer advice mainly on how to choose and use the inputs (seeds, fertilisers, pesticides) they sell.

The challenges of diversity. The advantages of the emergence of these new actors have not yet been fully exploited, and farmers' access to high-quality agricultural advisory services is still problematic. Strategic choices adapted to the new context are lacking. Consequently, there is a lack of coordination and synergies between the different initiatives.

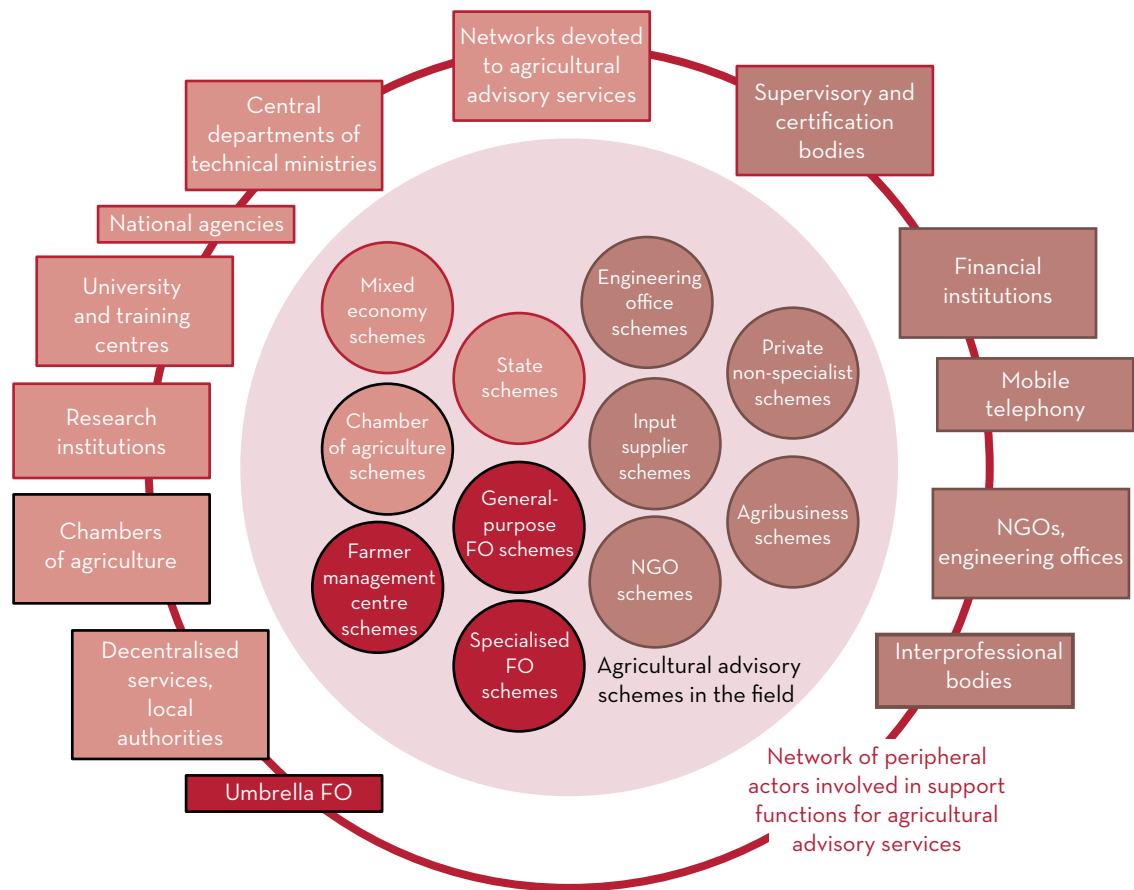
The offer of advisory services may be overabundant in certain areas, and completely lacking in others. ➔

“The diversification of actors may improve the offer of advisory services”

and sometimes managerial advisory services for family farms (conseil à l'exploitation familiale). That is the case with the Union des Groupements pour la Commercialisation des Produits Agricoles de la Boucle du Mouhoun (UGCPA/BM) in Burkina Faso. Engineering offices offer

Diversity of schemes in the field and network of actors for support functions.

Source: AFD. Technical report n°55, *Reviving agricultural advisory and extension services in sub-Saharan Africa: for new policies in line with the realities in the field*, July 2019.



Several emerging topics (nutrition, entrepreneurship, climate change), addressed mainly through projects with limited lifespan and scope, are not yet sufficiently taken into account. Best practices have not yet been fully implemented or scaled up, owing to a lack of synergies and insufficient assessment and sharing of experiences.

Several entities (engineering offices, local NGO service providers) were created through opportunism and were not able to develop a sustainable and dynamic business model that could operate on the entity’s own funding. Those entities disappear or are put on stand-by once the development project that provided them with farmer-assistance contracts comes to an end.

Because many farmers are unable or unwilling to pay for the agricultural advisory services they need, supply is not yet fully driven by demand (see pp. 28–29). The large number of suppliers has not given rise to competing offers of services. Several suppliers are above all focused on their accountability vis-à-vis donors, and rarely put in place mechanisms to ensure their accountability vis-à-vis the users of their services.

The need to (re)define strategic orientations.

Because of the problems caused by the large number of actors, strategic orientations and institutional arrangements need to be (re)defined in order to take advantage of the full potential of agricultural advisory services when it comes to achieving national objectives for agricultural, economic and social development. That’s why countries such as Cameroon, Nigeria and Guinea recently defined national agricultural advisory policies.

Better coordination with up-to-date mapping of supply and demand is essential when it comes to en-

suring that initiatives are consistent and in line with national strategic objectives. A mechanism for registering and certifying suppliers should be organised in order to improve actors’ professional skills. The idea is also to promote learning and experience-sharing, and to develop ties with agricultural advisory support services (input sellers, finance, etc.).

Reinventing public agricultural advisory services?

The appearance of new agricultural advisory actors also presents the challenge of reinventing agricultural advisory services. The challenge for public services is not so much to find lasting solutions to recurring issues relating to the strengthening of human and financial resources; rather, the challenge involves rethinking the offer of services and modernising methods and tools. This involves a strategic repositioning that would offer added value compared with other actors and generate a better return on public investment in agricultural advisory services.

Through recent reforms, Guinea and Niger have decided to gradually shift public services to target the most vulnerable farmers, while private service providers target farmers who are able to cover some of the costs. Moreover, within the strategic framework for agricultural advisory services adopted in Guinea, the role of the National Agency for Rural Advancement and Agricultural Advisory Services (*Agence Nationale de Promotion Rurale et de Conseil Agricole*) —the public body in charge of agricultural advisory services— is to focus more on supporting and facilitating other service providers (agricultural profession, private service providers). The strategy is to ensure that the large number of suppliers results in a greater overall offer of high-quality services, and to provide better coverage to satisfy demand for advisory services. ■

Private agricultural advisory actors: Algeria's market gardening sector

Nadhir Laouar (nadir.laouar@yahoo.fr),
Patrick Dugué

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES have responded to State withdrawal by allowing the private sector to play a greater role. This article explores how that change has affected the market gardening sector in Biskra, Algeria, where suppliers and input retailers are the main advisory operators.

► Nadhir Laouar is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Khenchela (Algeria).

► Patrick Dugué is an agronomist at CIRAD, Montpellier (France).

IN A CONTEXT where the State has withdrawn from agricultural services, advisory schemes in Algeria — particularly in the province of Biskra — are dominated by input suppliers with no specific State oversight. The State has continued to support public agricultural research and the system for controlling the import of inputs in order to ensure their quality.

Biskra is located roughly 400 km south of Algiers. Over the past 30 years, the region has had a remarkably dynamic agricultural sector characterised by strong growth in the amount of irrigated land (date palm, market gardening, potato) and a rapid increase in market gardening production in greenhouses (referred to as “plasticulture”). Biskra has become a major vegetable supplier for the national market and a very attractive region for private agricultural input suppliers. Market gardening farms are highly intensive and are on average 1 hectare (ha). They coexist with larger date palm farms (between 5 and 15 ha) that also sometimes engage in market gardening in greenhouses.

Agricultural advisory services: a virtual monopoly for agricultural input suppliers and retailers.

Starting in the 1990s, it was revealed that Algerian public systems for research and agricultural advisory services were having difficulties disseminating technical innovations. Those institutions rarely collaborate with one another and have weak ties with private actors, which reduces their impact in the field.

During the 2000s, as the public system for innovation was declining, the number of agricultural supply firms and input retailers (called “seed sellers”) steadily increased. Those private actors developed activities for the transfer of knowledge and innovations and for agricultural extension services in the province of Biskra, which now has 24 agricultural input suppliers and 50 seed sellers. Selling inputs is the basic function of those private actors, but strong competition has driven them to adopt several strategies to expand their clientele, including the free provision of agricultural advisory services.

No other private advisory actor has been created in the region, because there are no farmers’ organisations (FO) in the region and because buyers have little interest in improving vegetable quality. Moreover, Algeria does not have a fund dedicated to advisory services allowing for the purchase of advisory

services from a specialised engineering office.

Agricultural input suppliers offering a variety of agricultural advisory services.

Agricultural input suppliers provide several different types of agricultural advisory services. Seed sellers provide plasticulture farmers with technical information on the use of agricultural inputs at the time of purchase. Events dedicated to technical information on market gardening crops and new inputs are also organised, mainly by firms for farmers and retailers. Individual advisory services based on monitoring in the field are sometimes provided by engineers from firms and technicians from large seed sellers, but few farmers avail of them.

New inputs for greater profits? Input importers are represented by technical/commercial delegates whose first objective is to boost their revenue. Those firms are continuously introducing new inputs on the market. These new inputs are presented as being more “modern” and effective, and they are generally more expensive for farmers because the agricultural supply firms add a higher profit margin to them. Retailers and delegates therefore have an incentive to recommend their use in their advisory services.

The technical/commercial delegates organise demonstration events for farmers and seed sellers, and visit them once before the growing season to choose pesticides, seeds and fertilisers, and then two or three times during the growing season. It is possible to call on them in urgent cases. Advisory services may go beyond and

involve innovations practised in other regions relating to irrigation, planting density, and the testing of new products. The delegates monitor the process on a regular basis.

The delegates have created a network of market gardeners who are ready to test or buy new inputs and with whom they discuss directly. Several different means of communication are used: phone, meet-ups in the field, and (for certain farmers) social networks (see pp. 8–9).

Three types of advisory services provided by retailers. Seed sellers are the interface between the agricultural input suppliers and the farmers, as they are in constant contact with them. In Biskra, three types of seed sellers have different positions vis-à-vis

“A strictly private agricultural advisory system presents major risks”

◀ advisory services.

Some with training in agricultural engineering offer local advisory services. They regularly visit the market gardening farms of their best customers (in terms of quantity of inputs purchased and willingness to use new inputs). During those visits, they assess the state of the crops and how the market gardening season is progressing, and they provide continuous technical assistance. They provide mainly solutions that involve using the inputs they sell and, less often, recommending cultivation techniques or equipment.

Others provide information for farmers. They explain how to use the inputs they sell and orient farmers towards certain cultivation practices, while advising against others. They provide the delegates of firms with a lot of information and help them build up their networks.

Lastly, some are “simple traders” who just sell agricultural inputs while limiting the amount of time they spend providing information to market gardeners. They answer farmers only if the farmers ask them specific questions. They do not participate in networking or in the supervision of farmers.

Advisory services: main activity or secondary service of private actors? Firms and retailers organise advisory services in order to develop customer loyalty and gain clientele. They also provide inputs needed for production on credit. That credit is short term and without interest, and it is for loyal farmers known to be good payers (often the biggest farmers). The vast majority of actors involved in supplying agricultural inputs have adopted this strategy, and in the future the quality of the advisory services

will perhaps be decisive when it comes to maintaining clientele.

The risks of a strictly private advisory system. The system of private agricultural advisory services for market gardening in the province of Biskra presents major risks. First, it is not very diverse in substance or in form, and it offers only partial answers to farmers’ questions. It does not address the economic and financial management of the farm, or strategic advisory services. Those private actors also do not take into consideration the environmental and social challenges of regional agriculture. Inputs are used in large doses, because the advisory services orient farmers towards the “chemicalisation” of agriculture, and towards greater and greater use of imported seeds. This may lead to health and environmental problems. Because they lack information and local alternatives, farmers are demanding products that are increasingly effective but that are often more dangerous and cause crop diseases to become more resistant. The consumption of agricultural pesticides in Algeria has increased by a factor of 3.5 since the early 2000s.

The need for intervention by public authorities. Such risks require State intervention, the first step of which is to take control again of the management of agricultural advisory services. Doing so will require mobilising and revitalising public technical institutes. But the State should also encourage the emergence of functional FOs in order to help farmers become less dependent on agricultural input suppliers. ■



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Plasticulture
(eggplant), Biskra,
March 2019.

Advisory scheme with multiple actors focusing on milk-collection centres

Christophe Rigourd (christophe.rigourd@hotmail.com), Abdelmajid Ali Dandakoye

THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES an advisory scheme with multiple actors focusing on milk-collection centres in Niger. It highlights the challenges resulting from the growing participation of advisory actors from the local private sector (milk collectors, private veterinarians and livestock assistants, service centres) in the milk value chain.

► Christophe Rigourd is an agricultural economist and an associate consultant at IRAM. He has been involved in reforming agricultural advisory services in Niger since 2016, and the local milk value chain in Niger since 2015.

► Abdelmajid Ali Dandakoye is an agronomist. He is head of the Nariindu 2 project at Karkara, which is helping develop the local milk value chain.

► Karkara is one of Niger's biggest NGOs.

THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL advisory system adopted in Niger in 2017 promotes a wide range of advisory schemes run by the State, the agricultural profession and the private sector, including a unique scheme run by the local milk value chain focusing on collection centres.

Peasant-farmer milk-collection centres offering multiple services: pivotal actors. The collection-centre model is based on four pillars: peasant-farmer governance with a cooperative of livestock farmers who own the centre; an upstream production area; a partnership with an industrial firm downstream or with artisanal processing facilities; and a set of services: milk collection, cooling and quality control, provision of livestock feed, advisory services for livestock farmers. There are currently five centres in Niamey.

Contributing to advisory services according to skill level. A wide range of actors have organised themselves around each collection centre in order to promote local milk and provide advisory services for livestock farmers: veterinarians and livestock assistants provide advisory services for animal health and feeding. Milk collectors, cooperative agents and agribusiness focus on hygiene during the milking and collection phases. The elected representatives of the cooperative raise awareness among livestock farmers about the value of milk and the role of women, and provide mediation when conflicts arise. NGOs are involved in advisory services for the value chain and in securing women within the value chain. A livestock farmers' organisation helps ensure functional literacy, and the collective innovation process is driven by an innovation platform. More recently, two other types of advisory services were introduced: managerial advisory services for livestock farmers provided by

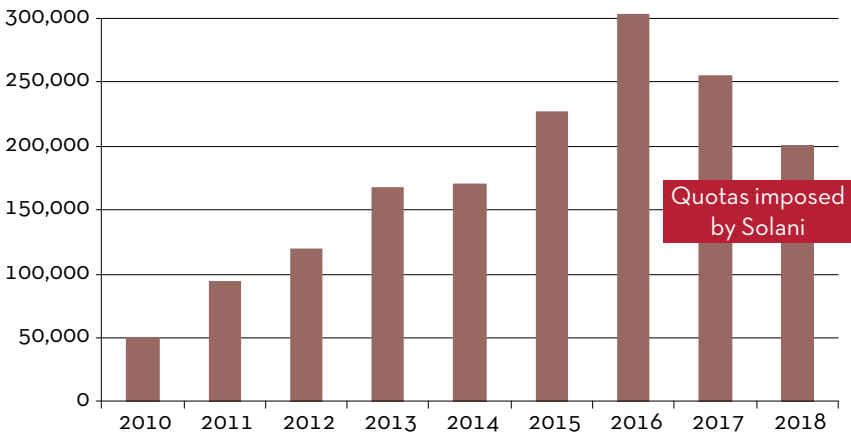
the chamber of agriculture, and managerial advisory services for cooperatives provided by a service centre. While collection centres are fully playing their pivotal role in the value chain, they are struggling to coordinate the different advisory actors around them. Coordination is therefore currently provided by IRAM and Karkara, in conjunction with the milk innovation platform.

A mixed business model linked to the value chain. This advisory scheme is based on a mixed business model. Functional literacy, advisory services for value chains and support for collective innovation are entirely subsidised through projects. Advisory services focusing on animal health, feeding and hygiene during milking are supported by actors in the value chain. Managerial advisory services for livestock farmers and cooperatives are currently subsidised, but more and more livestock farmers should start to cover some of the costs. Awareness-raising and mediation activities by elected representatives are covered by the cooperative. So the value chain provides an economic foundation for advisory services, and the advisory services have positive impacts on the value chain.

Positive impacts, but advisory services guided by the downstream part of the value chain. In just a few years, the impacts were considerable in terms of increasing the production and collection of milk (+600% for the Hamdallaye centre in six years), improving the quality of milk (no rejection by the industrial firm), reducing the seasonality of production (flattening the collection curve), generating revenue for livestock farmers (roughly 1,000 livestock farmers per centre are generating higher revenue on a regular basis), creating jobs in rural areas (roughly 30 jobs per collection centre, including about a dozen collectors). The main advantage of this advisory scheme is that it is run by private actors (FOs, collectors, veterinarians) and by the dynamics of the value chain.

Therein also lies its weakness. The advisory services are highly dependent on the value chain. If industrial firms reduce their purchases of local milk, the value chain and advisory scheme are weakened. Another drawback is that the advisory services are for the moment mainly focused on the milk facility and are heavily guided by the downstream part of the value chain (boosting production, improving quality, reducing seasonality). The launch of managerial advisory services for livestock farmers should, however, broaden the scope of advisory services and provide a better response to the needs of livestock farmers. ■

Annual collection of the Hamdallaye centre (in litres).
Source: Nariindu Iram-Karkara.



Competition or complementarity of institutional agricultural advisory networks?

Nicole Apling Kouassi (nicaphing1@yahoo.fr),
Max Olupot (molupot@afaas-africa.org), Rasheed
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SINCE 2010, agricultural advisory networks are being set up at global, continental and sub-regional level. These differences in scale could raise questions about the consistency of the networks' activities. We questioned representatives of those networks to find out more about the situation.

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► Max Olupot is head of partnerships, planning and learning at the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS). Learn more about AFAAS at www.afaas-africa.org

► Rasheed Sulaiman V is chair of the steering committee for the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS). Learn more about GFRAS at www.g-fras.org

GRAIN DE SEL (GDS): Could you briefly introduce your institution and tell us why it was created?

RASHEED SULAIMAN V (RSV) – GFRAS: The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) was created through consultations with many actors (professionals in agricultural extension services, experts, donors, etc.). Before the GFRAS was created, actors in rural and agricultural advisory services did not have an instrument that could speak on their behalf, strengthen their capacities, share best practices, and facilitate networking.

There was a platform of donor representatives who were interested in agricultural extension services, called the “Neuchâtel Initiative”. The platform was composed mainly of European donors. Starting in 2005, those actors began working more closely with partners in the South, such as the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) and regional farmers' organisations (FO) in Africa. In 2010, the Global Forum was created to make advisory services more effective, to better serve farming families and farmers, and to help improve living conditions in rural areas.

MAX OLUPOT (MO) – AFAAS: At continental level, there was a need to develop entities like the GFRAS to provide direct support for advisory actors. The African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) was created in response to that need, and it established a partnership with the GFRAS in Africa. The AFAAS aims to encourage dialogue, influence policy, and strengthen the capacities of actors with regard to agricultural advisory services for the African continent.

NICOLE APHING KOUASSI (NAK) – RESCAR-AOC: The Rural and Agricultural Advisory Services Network in West and Central Africa (RESCAR-AOC) was founded in 2010. It is a network of actors and stakeholders in agricultural advisory services who are active in the West and Central Africa sub-region. The roll-out of its activities highlights the need for a formal status. Preparations for its legalisation are in progress to give it a legal personality.

The RESCAR-AOC has three types of members: founders (national forums; national entities), subscribers (sub-regional or international organisations that are stakeholders in agricultural advisory services; technical, scientific and financial partners), and associates or affiliates (natural persons or legal entities that are interested and willing to participate in ac-

tivities that involve sharing experiences and information without any other formal commitments). The RESCAR-AOC's purpose is to support national forums by carrying out activities that involve leading, coordinating, strengthening capacities, assessing and sharing experiences, and facilitating initiatives at regional level. So far, eleven countries in West and Central Africa have a national agricultural advisory forum (Burkina Faso, Benin, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, DRC, Sierra Leone, Togo). The functionality of those platforms varies, and the countries that do not yet have national forums are in the process of creating them.

All of those institutions — GFRAS, AFAAS and RESCAR-AOC — emerged in the 2010s, but French-speaking West Africa became aware of the need to strengthen exchanges between rural and agricultural advisory services later than English-speaking Africa.

RSV (GFRAS): The three institutions are funded by different donors (Swiss Development and Cooperation, USAID, European Union, International Fund for Agricultural Development, etc.). But funding is one of the main problems when it comes to providing high-quality rural and agricultural advisory services that are long-lasting and well-adapted.

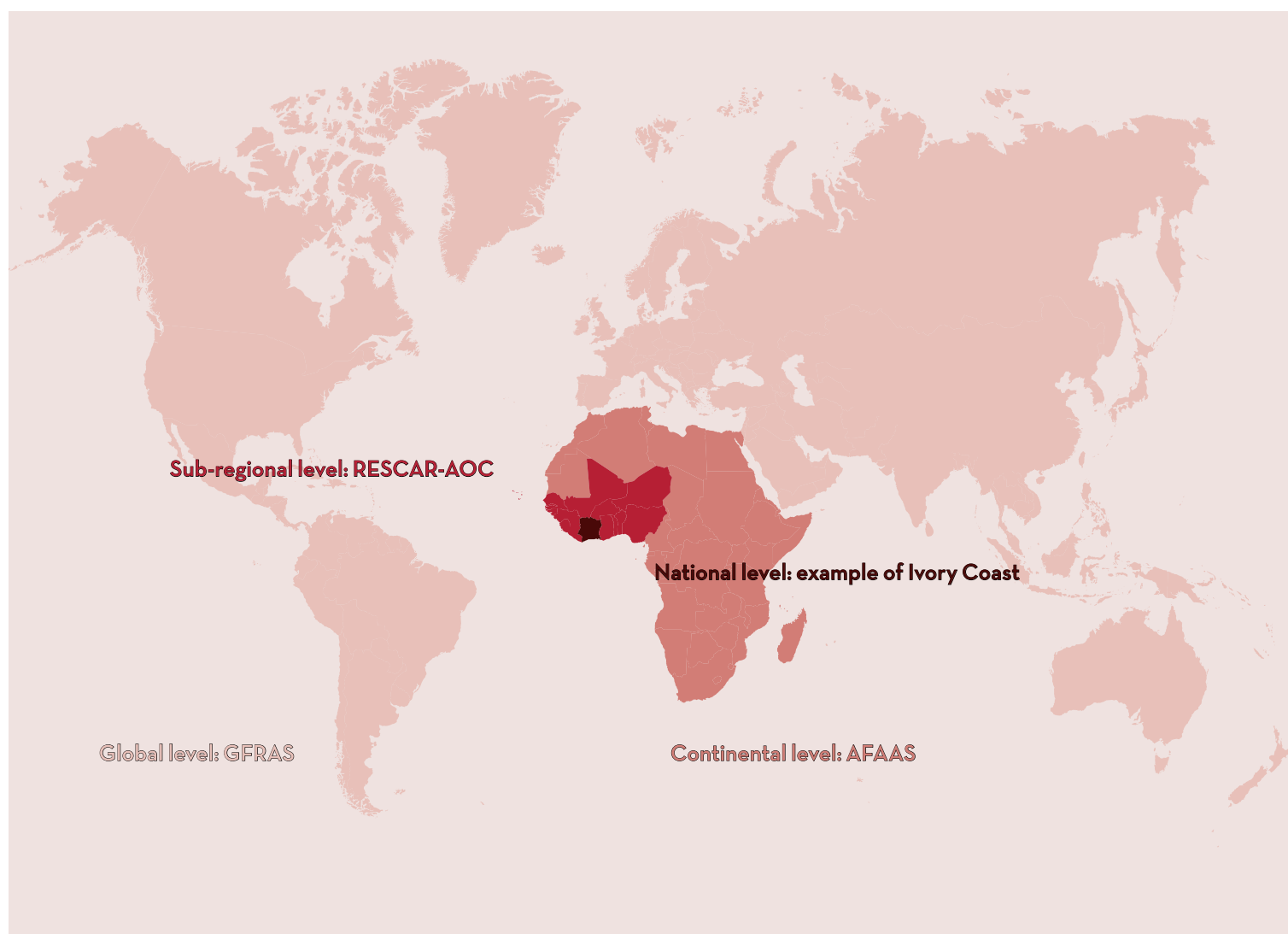
GDS: What are your network's roles and missions, and how does your network operate in terms of rural and agricultural advisory services?

RSV (GFRAS): The Global Forum carries out advocacy work for pluralistic advisory services that are focused on demand with a view to sustainable development. It also oversees governance for those services. The GFRAS' activities are carried out at all levels. But some activities are carried out at global level, such as policy advocacy for worldwide best practices. The GFRAS works directly with its member networks, but collaborates with a large number of (non-member) organisations to achieve its objectives.

The GFRAS advocates for a favourable policy environment and appropriate investments for advisory services in rural areas. It also oversees the professionalisation of rural and agricultural advisory services, and promotes effective and continuous management of knowledge.

MO (AFAAS): The main role of the AFAAS is political: It advocates for agricultural policies that have greater consideration for agricultural advisory services. To do so, we share information with beneficiaries.

“Each level of action is relevant, so long as it addresses a need!”



Every other year, AFAAS organises an event called “Africa Wide Agriculture Extension Week”, which brings together all actors in rural and agricultural advisory services (researchers, development partners, and actors from the private sector) to measure the role of rural and agricultural advisory services in key areas of rural and agricultural development. Lastly, partnerships are important when it comes to implementing rural and agricultural advisory services. The AFAAS is partnered with the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (*Forum pour la Recherche Agricole en Afrique*) and sub-regional research organisations such as the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (*Conseil Ouest et Centre Africain pour la Recherche et le Développement Agricoles*).

NAK (RESCAR-AOC): The RESCAR-AOC’s mission is to offer a forum for exchange, monitoring, orientation, dialogue, capacity-building, and the sharing of information with actors in rural and agricultural advisory services at sub-regional level in West Africa. In 2018, the network organised a workshop in Abidjan with the AFAAS to explore and strengthen synergies between national platforms and private companies. In June 2019, a regional meeting was also organised

in Abidjan on the future of rural and agricultural advisory services in West and Central Africa to share the results of those services and make recommendations in order to improve the sub-region’s practices in that regard.

The RESCAR-AOC helps boost the performance of services in the region through knowledge management (including the creation of a dedicated website) and capacity-building through the creation of theme-based working groups bringing together all member-country representatives, or by conducting studies, engaging in advocacy work and strategic dialogue, networking, and forming partnerships. We work, for instance, with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) to assess whether capacity-building is needed to incorporate nutrition in advisory services. The network also works to ensure that climate-smart agriculture, digital technologies and entrepreneurship are taken into account in public agricultural advisory services.

At national level, each forum or national platform associated with the RESCAR-AOC brings together actors from all agricultural advisory sectors and features activities similar to those of the RESCAR-AOC (knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, synergies ➔

A multitude of regional networks.

Source: <http://www.g-fras.org/fr/se-connecter/membres.html>

between actors, and advocacy) at local level.

GDS: *What types of advisory services does your network support in Africa? Why?*

MO (AFAAS): What matters most is that the approach is well-adapted to local needs and to each context. In West Africa, the AFAAS supports mainly agricultural advisory services run by the public sector, but there are other types of advisory services and other approaches run by different actors (see pp. 17–18): innovation platforms, farmer field schools (see p. 10), peasant-farmer relays (see p. 25), etc.

NAK (RESCAR-AOC): Exactly. There are many different contexts in the region, and there is even a term for “pluralistic advisory services”. There are a wide range of actors: State services, FOs, private entities, NGOs, etc. Instead of imposing a vision, the RESCAR-AOC does not support one particular type of advisory service, but rather makes existing services more effective and sustainable by promoting innovative approaches, such as the use of information and communication technologies (see pp. 8–9).

RSV (GFRAS): For the GFRAS, it is important to strengthen the supply of pluralistic advisory and extension services, and that is why we work with public actors as well as actors from the private sector and civil society (NGOs), including FOs.

GDS: *How does your network influence the creation of advisory policies? What are the limits, and how can they be circumvented?*

RSV (GFRAS): An external evaluation was performed by the AFAAS (and the RESCAR-AOC) in 2017 to assess the different activities that were launched. The evaluation revealed several problems that needed to be resolved in order to strengthen rural and agricultural advisory services in the sub-region. One of the main obstacles to strengthening agricultural advisory activities is funding. We are trying to mobilise more funding, but it is a long and complex process.

The GFRAS has also played a key role, along with the AFAAS, in creating and strengthening the West and Central Africa network (RESCAR-AOC). And it is the GFRAS that is advocating for greater investment and new capacities for rural and agricultural advisory services!

MO (AFAAS): At continental level, the AFAAS brings together decision-makers from each country to share their points of view, which are sometimes different. In terms of advocacy and dialogue, those peer discussions are essential in order to move forward!

The AFAAS has very political functions. We have close relations, for instance, with the African Union.

We also proactively support the development of

policies that have greater consideration for agricultural advisory services.

In Nigeria, these aspects were managed by the states. Each state defined their policy without necessarily taking into account rural and agricultural advisory services. Our role was to create ties between all parts of the country.

But, of course, each country has its own way of doing business and its own political will. Our ability to influence depends on the country’s authorities and their priorities. If they are not very interested in development, then it is a challenge. Each country also has its own priorities in terms of funding...

NAK (RESCAR-AOC): The RESCAR-AOC and affiliated national platforms are apolitical, neutral platforms for discussion. The RESCAR-AOC cannot engage directly in agricultural policies, but we are advocating for greater consideration of agricultural advisory services in agricultural policies and investments.

In Ivory Coast, the national agricultural advisory platform was recently created with support from the RESCAR-AOC and all agricultural advisory actors (national agency for support and rural development, private operators, universities, research institutes, NGOs, FOs). We did not run into any particular difficulties, as the platform addressed real needs.

GDS: *How do you work with other networks on advisory services in West Africa? How do you make sure your actions complement one another?*

RSV (GFRAS): The three institutions (GFRAS, AFAAS, RESCAR-AOC) complement one another; there is no competition. Together, we try to improve the governance mechanisms and rural and agricultural advisory services at each level. The AFAAS and the RESCAR-AOC are members of the GFRAS’ management committee, which ensures harmonious coordination of activities. For instance, the GFRAS and the AFAAS (along with the RESCAR-AOC) jointly organised the 2016 GFRAS Annual Meeting in Cameroon. The AFAAS and the RESCAR-AOC mobilised financial resources in Africa, but the GFRAS sponsored participants from around the world, which allowed for a lot of knowledge-sharing on extension services throughout the world. Both enjoyed greater visibility and greater interactions.

NAK (RESCAR-AOC): Exactly. There is no competition or overlap between our actions because the geographical areas and interventions of each institution are well defined, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. Each level of action is relevant, so long as it addresses a need! ■

Peasant-farmer relays: feedback from experiences

Amandine Schlur (a.schlur@fert.fr),
Augustin Douillet, Ando Ravoninahitra,
Ibrahim Sana

PILOT FARMERS, peasant-farmer instructors, animal-health assistants, peasant-farmer relays—for nearly ten years, farmers belonging to FOs have been providing advisory services to their peers. Feedback from experiences in Burkina Faso, Kenya and Madagascar.

► Amandine Schlur is in charge of projects at FERT and leads a working group on agricultural advisory services with FERT technicians and partner FOs in sub-Saharan Africa.

► Ibrahim Sana is in charge of supporting cowpea FOs in Burkina Faso for FERT.

► Ando Ravoninahitra is coordinator of Cap Malagasy, an agricultural advisory organisation that belongs to the Fifata group in Madagascar.

► Augustin Douillet is a FERT technical advisor to the Cereal Growers Association in Kenya and to the Fifata group in Madagascar.

A peasant-farmer instructor leads a training session on cash flow in Narok County, Kenya

BELIEVING IN THE IMPORTANCE of agricultural advisory services guided by demand, farmers' organisations (FO) developed schemes in the 1990s that utilised salaried technicians. At a time when many local services were needed and funding had decreased, the emergence of peasant-farmer relays provided an interface between the umbrella FO and the grassroots groups they belong to.

Peasant-farmer relays combine indigenous knowledge and an understanding of techniques tested on their own farms. They are very persuasive and highly credible, as they cultivate close relationships with the grassroots groups. Unlike technicians, who come and go as available funding waxes and wanes, peasant-farmer relays are more resilient and provide a minimum level of service in all circumstances. They stand out because of their charisma, their level of technical expertise and their people skills. Chosen by their peers, they receive training in technical aspects and leadership.

Each organisation has its own way of operating.

Mandated by their groups, peasant-farmer relays take on a variety of missions. One peasant farmer in Madagascar says: "I work within a limited area. Everyone knows me. I perform the duties assigned to me by my group, even if it is not contractual, just verbal." In Burkina Faso, indigenous instructors provide training in agroecology. In Madagascar, peasant-farmer relays specialise in and provide services for which they are paid (vaccination of animals, sale of seeds, etc.). In Kenya, farmer trainers lead meetings to analyse technical and economic results.

They are motivated by opportunities in terms of access to innovations and capacity-building. They also have a desire to share their knowledge with their peers, which allows them to gain social recognition. For some, this status presents an opportunity to generate additional income, acquire small equipment and take on more responsibilities.

Some even spend more time outside their farm and are courted by others. "In Kenya, farmer trainers are approached by input companies... They are sometimes more interested in selling products than training their peers!" observes the Cereal Growers Association. This raises the question of conflicts of interest and motivation, between personal ambition and engagement with the community.

An additional link in the chain. At regional level, FOs must provide technical assistance, which is in high demand from peasant-farmer relays, to help them upgrade their skills. Peasant-farmer relays do not replace the FO's salaried advisors, but strengthen their action by increasing the number of farms monitored. But there is a great temptation to abandon paid advisors and use volunteer peasant-farmer relays instead. "There is a risk that the peasant-farmer relay will transform into a technician who no longer has time to look after his or her own field," says a manager at Fifata in Madagascar. But it's the duo of salaried advisor/peasant-farmer relay that produces high-quality advisory services and that allows for dissemination on a larger scale.

An inexpensive scheme. The peasant-farmer relay scheme is inexpensive. No remuneration is paid. Only an allowance for travel or to compensate for the farmer's absence from his or her farm is sometimes provided. What makes this type of advisory service original is that travel and meal costs are covered by the peasant-farmer relay or by his or her grassroots group, on a case-by-case basis outlined in those groups' rules of procedure. Depending on the case, those costs may be partially covered by the umbrella FO. The president of the Dablo cooperative in Burkina Faso says: "At our cooperative, each member makes a contribution in kind by giving two containers of cowpeas each year to the indigenous instructors." Another peasant farmer in Kenya says: "Yes, there are costs. But I am paid indirectly by the margins on the sale of products, for example."

Conscious of the challenges involved in sustaining those services, farmers and FOs appear to have found in the peasant-farmer relay an encouraging alternative that can be adapted to a wide range of contexts. It will be interesting in the future to assess the impact of these new advisory actors in greater detail. ■



New agricultural advisory services governance models in West Africa

Kristin Davis (k.davis@cgiar.org), Amadou Ndiaye, Modibo G Coulibaly

THE GOVERNANCE MODEL for agricultural advisory services that is still dominant in West Africa is the one where the service is run by the public sector. But over the past ten years, the emergence of new actors has been affecting governance models, which are becoming more complex with multiple actors.

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► Prof. Amadou Ndiaye is an agricultural extension faculty member at Gaston Berger University (Senegal).

► Mr Modibo G Coulibaly specialises in impact communication with a focus on radio.

► Gary Alex, Steven Franzel and Patrice Djamen contributed their expertise to this article.

► Learn more about the Feed the Future Developing Local Extension Capacity project on the website.

TRADITIONALLY, rules or regulations for agricultural advisory services are set up by the government. However, advisory services are increasingly provided by a variety of different actors with differing objectives and varied levels of interaction. The main actors have included the public sector (national and sub national governments or parastatals), private-sector companies, civil society including non-governmental organisations (mainly donor-financed) and farmer-based organisations. Major governance models are multiple and respond to different objectives (see table below). Governance is defined as the rule, management, or organisation of institutions, and includes policies, processes and structures.

General trends in governance models. An assessment in West African countries between 2016-2019 shows that agricultural advisory services are mainly the responsibility of ministries of agriculture but pluralistic in terms of providers, with an increasing number of influential nongovernmental actors such as private-sector individuals, producer organisations (PO), and companies such as mobile phone operators. There is a shift from bureaucratic governance focused on national objectives to a multi-actor model, with greater emphasis on local accountability, relevance, and performance. This is linked to the decentralisation trend where local needs are given consideration and the focus is on being relevant to local actors. Decentralisation policies are increasingly common, with agricultural advisory services typically decentralised to sub-national offices. This—along with the rise of PO—accentuates demand-driven services and resultant funding, but dramatically changes issues of governance. Since producers are supposed to have more

influence in local fora (see pp. 22–24), decentralisation is seen as complementary to the shift towards more participatory approaches. However, there remain issues for governance and coordination at the national level that influence subnational governance institutions and decision-making. In Nigeria, for instance, advisory services are a priority of the federal government, but each state decides on funding and programs. And in Senegal, regional directorates were given considerable autonomy in designing advisory systems appropriate for their areas and farmers. Many producers are organised in groups, and PO’ capacity and influence are growing slowly and variably. Apex producer organisations (national-level or network secretariats of similar organisations that bring all the groups together) play an important role in advisory services in francophone West Africa (e.g. cotton producer organisations in Burkina Faso; federation of potato producers in Guinea; Mali’s Farmers’ Professional Organisation Association). In general, the organisations lack capacity to adequately provide advisory services to their members. Investments are needed to strengthen their capacity to facilitate service delivery to members, finance advisory services, and undertake group purchasing, marketing and other collective activities. Another constraint is lack of financial sustainability and donor reliance. Models that have multiple sources of funding and include co-funding, no matter how little, by clientele, will assist in greater sustainability (see pp. 28–29).

Heavy donor reliance - Funding and governance. While agricultural advisory services are back on the agenda of some national governments (e.g. Guinea, Niger, and Nigeria), there is still heavy donor reliance (almost the entire budget

“We are moving towards a complex new multi-actors system”

Type of organisations	Model of governance	Main objectives
Government agencies	Bureaucratic	To align with public policy and political objectives
Projects	Technocratic	To further donor development strategies and objectives
Research and development projects	Technocratic	To promote uptake of research
Producer organisations	Local	To meet local needs
Private-sector companies	Vertical	Source goods and markets
Coordination platforms (see example of Naatal Mbay)	Integrated	To achieve defined objectives

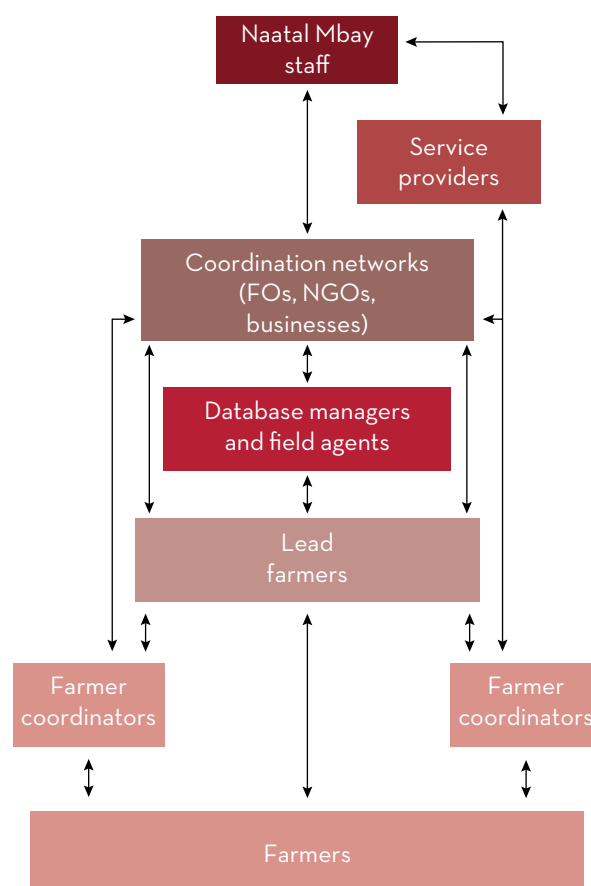
of Ghana's extension services come from Canada (125 million Canadian dollars)). Donor reliance leads to the multiplication of NGOs and projects where many different methods, sometimes conflicting, are used with little coordination or assessment (see pp. 32–33). Moreover, most of the actors provide other farm inputs (equipment, seed, fertiliser, finance, etc.) and advisory services appear as a secondary (and neglected) component of the input supply and agricultural subsidies programs.

In light of the limited government resources and growing population, one important trend is the use of *farmer advisors* at the local level to supplement official services (see p. 25). Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal use farmer advisors, in donor-funded projects, cooperatives, and apex producer organisation advisory services. This implies governance at the community level, as communities are often involved with selection of the agents and presumably the content that they work on.

A complex new multi-actors system. For better coordination, national system platforms are emerging in Senegal, Niger, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Togo (see Afaas, pp. 22–24). Senegal, through the financing of the National Agro-Sylvo-Pastoral Development Fund, tried to resolve coordination issues by assigning the coordinating role to its national advisory system but the system is not yet fully operationalised. In Niger, the Agency for the Promotion of Agricultural Advisory Services aims for coordination between different advisory service schemes, mobilisation of skills to ensure cross-cutting functions, and connecting teams from public and private advisory providers. As a result of new actors in advisory services, governance has evolved.

Senegal: an integrated and complex model of relationships. In Senegal, there is an integrated and complex model of relationships supporting an effective cereal production and marketing system, in which an advisory services system and producer organisation structure have evolved as an important foundation for the Naatal Mbay program.

In the program, some 123 PO track production and loan repayment and monitor rainfall for 60,000 farmers. Each Network forms a team of Lead Farmers, Field Agents, and a Database Manager to manage the data collection and analysis. An important component of the project's strategy is developing *farmer-owned data systems* which provide farmers with information about their farms, both physical measures, such as GPS field surveying for estimating areas and yields, and management data such as costs and returns. A project-supported system enables the Ministry of Agriculture to access key information from producer networks. Local ICT providers are refining applications to integrate information across the value chains and link producer networks, banks, insurance providers, and input suppliers. The project



Organigram of Naatal Mbay's extension approach.

The arrows indicate main reporting pathways.
Source: Franzel, Steven; Ndiaye, Amadou et Tata, Joyous S. (2018). *Senegal: In-depth Assessment of Extension and Advisory Services. Developing Local Extension Capacity Project.* USAID, Washington DC.

strives to empower women as advisory services providers and to promote women's access to services, to recruit more women in leadership positions, and to increase the proportion of female trainees (see p. 35).

There are also *federations* of producer organisations providing advisory services to members, managing development projects and lobbying the government on behalf of members, for instance, the Federation of Nongovernmental Organisations in Senegal which comprises 31 associations of farmer groups.

Toward more effective agricultural advisory services in West Africa. Activities should promote more effective agricultural advisory services in West Africa. Firstly, there is a need to build capacity of PO, strengthening management systems and commercial operations and providing incentives for service provision. A second recommendation is to strengthen coordination between pluralistic advisory service providers through national platforms such as the AFAAS country forums, but also other existing platforms. Thirdly, these platforms should be strengthened to be more inclusive and sustainable, able to collect, analyse, and use data for advocacy. Relatedly, advisory services actors should advocate with ECOWAS for West Africa's agriculture development strategy review to integrate agricultural advisory services as a focus. There is also need for evidence on which types of ICTs provide effective and sustainable services, reach women and other marginalised groups.

On the issues of sustainability and coordination, funding calls by donors should require organisations to submit joint proposals with the private sector and other relevant actors. At the same time, governments should set up mechanisms to ensure accountability to funders and users of services, assessment and improvement of performance. ■

Funding agricultural advisory schemes to ensure their longevity

Cheikh Oumar Ba, Ninon Avezou (ninin.avezou@inter-reseaux.org), Mélanie Moussours

ON THE WHOLE, funding for agricultural advisory services is insufficient, non-sustainable and non-virtuous. But in order to ensure the longevity of the service, those three conditions must be met. “Innovative” funding mechanisms have been developed, some of which are demand-driven and depend on contributions from farmers and value chains.

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► Ninon Avezou and Mélanie Moussours are members of the Inter-réseaux technical team.

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► This article is based mainly on the following resources:

– BA, C.O., Faye, A., Diagne, D. Les mécanismes financiers relatifs aux services de conseil agricole pilotés par la demande – De la vulgarisation à l'appui-conseil au Sénégal. Rome, FAO. pp. 60, 2018.
– AFD, Technical report n°55. *Reviving agricultural advisory and extension services in sub-Saharan Africa: for new policies in line with the realities in the field*, July 2019 (English version published in April 2022).

ADVISORY SERVICES ARE EXPENSIVE. Funding is needed to cover schemes in the field, salaries, logistics, investments, and support functions at national and regional level (applied research, advisor training, teaching materials, governance bodies, knowledge-sharing networks, monitoring/evaluation, etc.). But funding agricultural advisory services is a major challenge in a context where public spending is rationalised – especially as the nature and content of those services (and therefore how effectively they meet farmers' needs) are heavily dependent on the funding method.

Free advisory services are prevalent, but ineffective. In sub-Saharan Africa, the dominant business model for advisory services consists in free services funded by the State and international donors. With the exception of Morocco and Cameroon, this model is rather feeble and ineffective owing to a lack of resources and to the fact that advisors do not feel sufficiently accountable vis-à-vis farmers, which leads to advisory services of unsatisfactory quality.

Rare cases of paid advisory services. A few farmers' organisations (FO) and service centres (CGER in Senegal, Fédération Faranfasiso in Mali, Tillabéri service centre in Niger) have developed specific, targeted advisory services, with significant financial contributions from farmers and grassroots FOs (covering up to 70% of the cost of the service) and the rest subsidised. In these cases, accountability and quality of service are values that are integrated by advisors and farmers. But these cases are still few and far between. Few private entities or associations offering advisory services have developed sustainable business models or reliable management tools, and the payment of even modest financial contributions is often difficult. Other FOs, often supported by projects, mobilise peasant-farmer instructors who are either volunteers or simply reimbursed for expenses by the FO, which is one way of getting farmers to cover the cost of advisory services.

Private advisory schemes offered by operators with broader functions (input suppliers (see pp. 19–20), FOs in structured value chains, engineering offices, mobile telephony companies, etc.) have gotten around the issue by incorporating the cost of advisory services in the price of the agricultural products they sell or in the price of the services they offer, such as the sale of inputs, veterinary care, the creation of

applications to request funding, and subscriptions for mobile telephony services purchased by farmers (text messaging, weather forecasting, etc.). But only farmers who are already sufficiently integrated in value chains have access to those services. Moreover, advisory services are guided more by the specific objectives of those operators and less by the farmer's needs or by issues of global concern, such as the environment. The business model is also not always viable. For instance, the model of mobile telephony companies is not profitable and relies heavily on subsidies (see pp. 8–9).

Advisory services funded by value chains. There are also institutionalised mechanisms funded by value chains. Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement du Textile (CMDT) is a company that is 99.5% publicly owned and that provides advisory services for cotton farmers. When they are run by the agricultural profession (FOs and management centres), these advisory services are funded through a mechanism where a certain amount is deduced from each tonne of cotton sold. In Ivory Coast, advisory services for the production of certified “sustainable cocoa” are based on contracts between exclusively private actors.

Mixed funds: State/donors/value chains. To date, innovative funding has involved setting up funds that are paid into by value chains, the State and donors. They generally encourage FOs to define their advisory needs, identify a service provider, and supervise and evaluate the services provided through the advisory schemes.

The most popular example is FIRCA in Ivory Coast, where value chains provide a real contribution and the fund is jointly managed. But the supremacy of the export value chains that make the biggest contributions and the partial withdrawal of the State—even for the funding of support functions (training, research, etc.)—should be noted.

The current challenge is to ensure that those funds are regularly paid into, particularly through para-fiscal charges at markets and during export and transport. Also, in order to be viable, they must be subject to transparent, rigorous, fair and inclusive management, which requires true joint management involving not only the value chains but also the State and the agricultural profession.

“Whoever pays is in charge”

FOs at the heart of advisory schemes in Senegal.

When it comes to agricultural and rural actors, Senegal is a special case. The creation of the country's two main farmers' organisations – Fédération des ONG du Sénégal (FONGS) in 1976, and Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux (CNCR) in 1993 – revealed the strengthening of an autonomous peasant-farmer movement. Those organisations positioned themselves as actors and partners of the State and donors. In Senegal, the transition from extension services to agricultural advisory services was part of that movement and resulted from an identity-based combat that flatly rejected supervisory approaches.

The 1998 Policy Letter for the Institutional Development of the Agricultural Sector is based on the principle according to which “the development of agricultural and rural advisory services should address the priorities of the farmers who receive those services; decisions relating to agricultural and rural advisory programmes must be made by FOs, who would be responsible for covering a substantial percentage of the cost of the services.”

The “demand-driven” approach to advisory support is therefore supposed to shift the focus of development actors back to the farmer. This occurred through the creation in 2000 of a National Agency for Rural and Agricultural Advisory Services (*Agence Nationale du Conseil Agricole et Rural*, or “ANCAR”), which is jointly managed by the government (which owns 51% of the capital), FOs (28%), the private sector (14%) and local authorities (7%). That capital structure was supposed to shift so that FOs would hold a majority share and enjoy greater influence in decision-making. But the State is still the majority shareholder with 42% of the shares, and appoints the managing director. The ANCAR helps fund advisory services, as do the FOs requesting those services. The services are based on a joint diagnostic assessment by the ANCAR, the FO, and researchers, which gives rise to a targeted advisory programme whose funding is subject to a contract between the FO and the ANCAR. The amount of the FO's financial contribution is stipulated in the contract.

The ANCAR's record, however, has been mixed. According to a survey, the objective (defined at the outset) of at least one agent per rural community is far from being achieved, or has even regressed, and a vast majority of FOs say they are not satisfied with the ANCAR's services. Moreover, the FOs have four representatives on the board of directors, but are not able to significantly influence the management of the ANCAR. The shareholder structure should therefore shift towards having an absolute majority of FOs in



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order to ensure that it is effective. The ANCAR is also dependent on the State budget and has financial constraints that prevent it from performing all the activities deemed relevant by the FOs and the competent ministry.

Long-term funding for advisory services: the pivotal role of FOs. Long-term funding for advisory services requires mixed funding mechanisms involving different agricultural development actors. Demand-driven mechanisms, for instance, have led to the emergence of private advisory services. The private agribusiness sector could be encouraged to contribute more in exchange for tax benefits.

The demand-driven approach also shows the importance of setting up a local advisory system that promotes accountability. That sense of accountability stems in large part from the farmers' financial contribution. There is a risk, however, that small farmers who are able to make only a very modest contribution might be left by the wayside. That risk calls into question the State's role in funding advisory schemes in the field as well as coordination, oversight and other support functions that are necessary for a diversified, high-quality advisory system.

But in order for advisory services to shift their focus to farmers and address their needs, FO participation in the organisation and funding of those services is a big challenge that must be overcome. ■

Should advisory services be separated from the sale of inputs? Viewpoints

Valentin Beauval (valentin.beauval@orange.fr), Alain Herbinet (alain.herbinet@yahoo.fr), Émilie Duclos

IN 2019, France is preparing to enact a statute to separate the sale of phytosanitary products from agricultural advisory services. The measure aims to make advisory services less dependent on sales objectives and raises the question of longevity with respect to cooperative business models. This article takes a closer look at the situation.

An effective way to transition to agroecology

► Valentin Beauval is an agronomist, retired farmer, and member of the Peasant Farmer Confederation's Pesticides Commission. He works closely with Agronomes et Vétérinaire Sans Frontière on the topic of pesticides in Africa.

FRANCE IS THE NUMBER-ONE USER of pesticides in Europe. But the measures decided under the first “Ecophyto Plan” in 2008 failed: Instead of cutting its pesticide consumption by half, France increased its consumption of pesticides by more than 12% between 2008 and 2018.

Intensive lobbying by firms and value chains. Lobbying by phytosanitary firms and the most intensive agricultural value chains managed by economic entities such as cooperatives and businesses played a big role in that trend. Those entities provide advisory services and sell pesticides. Their 8,000 technical/commercial agents therefore have a strong influence on the choices of French farmers.

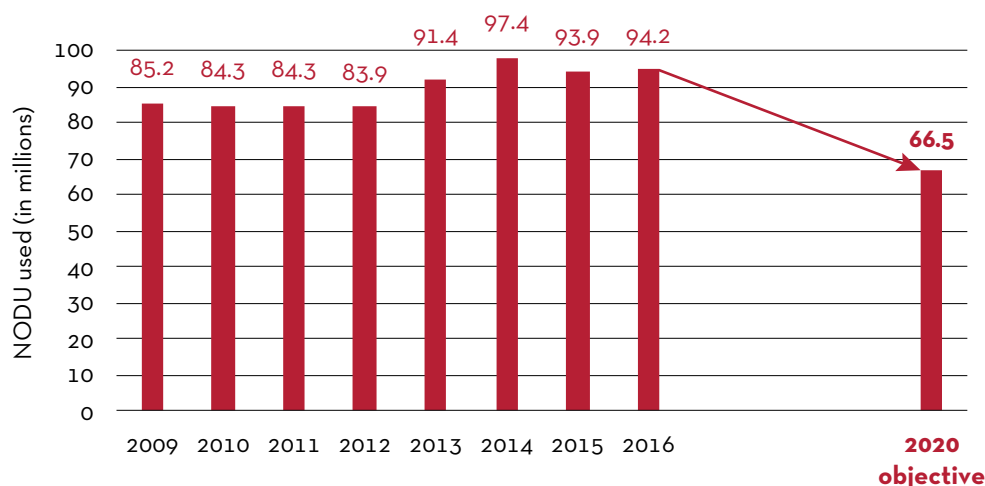
The French government is aware of this problem and wants to require companies distributing pesticides to separate advisory services from sales. In other words, the government wants them to create two separate entities where no shareholder holds more than 10% of the capital of both entities. To support the transition to agroecology, the statute distinguishes between strategic advisory services (which should be performed on every French farm twice every five years by advisors who have no connection with sales) and specific advisory services (performed annually) concerning the actual use of specific products.

Necessary assistance for strategic advisors and farmers. Strategic advisory services may utilise several holistic methods to perform diagnostic assessments of farms, designed by agricultural research institutes since the implementation of “land management contracts” in 1999. Examples include the “farm sustainability indicators method” and the “farm diagnostic method” of the Federation of Associations for the Development of Agricultural and Rural Employment (*Fédération des Associations de Développement de l'Emploi Agricole et Rural*). “Strategic” advisors should be trained in the use of one of those methods. The cost of the diagnostic assessments should also be partially covered by the State, at least for farms that do not have an agribusiness component.

Capacity-building in agroecology should be provided to peasant farmers by advisors who do not have ties with sales entities, such as advisors at chambers of agriculture or centres promoting initiatives in support of agriculture and rural areas (*Centres d'initiatives pour valoriser l'agriculture et le milieu rural*), or by groups of organic farmers. There are many alternatives to using pesticides: diversifying and extending rotations, mixing varieties, mechanical weeding, physical protection, introducing crop auxiliaries, “natural preparations of little concern” (*préparations naturelles peu préoccupantes*), etc. There are relatively few technical hurdles, but the alternatives are often more expensive for peasant farmers because they require investments, labour and biological control products, which are more expensive. Targeted government support is therefore necessary.

Two conditions for success. Two points, however, must be clarified with respect to the scheme separating pesticide sales from advisory services. The reform will need to be gradual, as some French regions do not have enough advisors with the skills needed to provide strategic advisory services, despite the fact that several higher training institutions have created high-quality master's programmes in agroecology in recent years.

Also, in its October 2018 report, the General Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development (*Conseil Général de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable*, or “CGEDD”, an advisory entity under the authority of the French Ministry of Ecological and Solidarity Transition) warned that this reform could increase online pesticide sales and “lead to selling without advisory services, at least for certain farmers.” The CGEDD believes that one suitable safeguard to prevent that from happening would be to require a prescription for the purchase of pesticides through an independent advisor. The risk highlighted by the CGEDD is real. To mitigate that risk, strategic and specific advisory services should be provided by the same person, and farmers should be required to have a formal prescription in order to purchase pesticides online.



Changes in pesticide use in France (2009–2016)

The number of unit doses (nombre de doses unités, or “NODU”) is the official indicator for monitoring the use of plant protection products. Since products are becoming more and more concentrated, it is a better indicator than “tonnes of pesticides consumed”.

Source: Ministry of Sustainable Development, 2019 Budget Bill.

Reinvigorating global advisory services

► Alain Herbinet (alain.herbinet@yahoo.fr) is a farmer in France’s Aube department, and president of the Scara agricultural cooperative for cereals. He is also a member of the Champenois Association for Interregional Cooperation (Association Champenoise de Coopération Interrégionale), which promotes agricultural development in several West African countries.

► This interview was prepared with Émilie Duclos, who is in charge of communications at Scara.

GRAIN DE SEL (GDS): Can you tell us about the legislation? Why was this measure taken?

ALAIN HERBINET (AH): In France, the desire to control the use of phytosanitary products goes back to the 2008 Grenelle de l’Environnement debate. Since then, two “Ecophyto” plans dedicated to achieving that objective have been implemented without success, because they demanded results without any suitable plans for how to actually bring about those changes.

In 2017, the *États Généraux de l’Alimentation* convention led to a bill on the separation of sales activities from advisory services for phytosanitary products. That bill brought about real change. The law first states that distributors of phytosanitary products are no longer allowed to sell products and directly advise farmers at the same time. Moreover, farmers not committed to environmental sustainability must purchase strategic advisory services from organisations that do not engage in sales activities. The terms of the advisory services —content, cost, how much of the cost will be subsidised— will be defined in a decree.

The legislation does not really address a need with respect to our cooperative, as phytosanitary products are used as a last resort. The agricultural profession has trouble understanding this suspicion surrounding advisors and their supposed tendency to get the people they advise to consume products.

GDS: What advisory services do your members need? How does Scara combine agricultural advisory services and the sale of phytosanitary products?

AH: Our advisory services in the cereals value chain aim to satisfy market demand, or in other words demand from processors (millers, brewers) who themselves satisfy the needs of consumers. Within Scara, there is no separation between sales activities and advisory services. Our sector managers simultaneously perform the functions of agricultural technicians who carry out diagnostic assessments, advisors who recommend solutions, and experimenters who participate in tests. They provide a wide range of technical advisory services: agricultural, phytosanitary, etc.

GDS: What consequences does the legislation have on your business model?

AH: Merchants and cooperatives will have to decide whether they will continue to offer prescriptive ad-

visory services on the use of phytosanitary products or shift their focus to the distribution of those products. That decision will be made in accordance with customers’ expectations.

But the vision of the business model for cooperatives is often distorted. Scara generates annual revenue of €70 million, roughly €20 million of which is through the sale of inputs. Of that €20 million, €7 million (or 10%) is generated through the sale of phytosanitary products. Yes, the sales activity generates a profit, but that profit is not essential to Scara’s survival! We could stop providing prescriptive advisory services and continue to offer global value-chain advisory services. The legislation will consider covering costs for beneficiaries that, until now, were associated with the sale of inputs (logistics, technical advisory services, testing).

GDS: Could the legislation present an opportunity?

AH: Yes, it may be an opportunity both for our cooperative and for farmers. The legislation makes advisory services more transparent and helps reinvigorate global advisory services. Moreover, we must achieve the Ecophyto objective collectively. But doing so raises questions regarding what resources to use and the purpose of the farmer’s profession and practices. It will be a source of agricultural and technological innovation, and will encourage the development of precision agriculture based on decision-making tools and robotics.

GDS: In West Africa, how are debates on the separation of sales activities and advisory services playing out?

AH: In our cowpea project with FERT in Burkina Faso, it is difficult to get people to pay for intangible advisory services for farmers. Here and elsewhere, advisory services are linked with sales activities. There now needs to be greater transparency regarding the cost of sales and the cost of advisory services. What is the most strategic activity for farmers? I believe that in complex pedoclimatic environments, the priority is to offer advisory services that are sustainable and that take into account agricultural, technical, and genetic solutions. ■

Evaluating advisory services for family farms

Gifty Narh Guiella (gifty.guiella@corade.org)_

WITH THE STATE'S WITHDRAWAL from agricultural advisory services, monitoring and measuring the impact of advisory services for family farms is important. Doing so involves examining the evaluation methods used, their scope and their limits. This article presents an example in Burkina Faso.

► Gifty Narh Guiella is a director and trainer at Agence Corade, a consulting and training company based in Burkina Faso.

► This article is based mainly on the following resources:

- D. Halley des Fontaines, Coulibaly Y. Liagre L. (2006), Etude de définition d'indicateurs de résultats et de mesure d'impacts du Conseil à l'Exploitation Familiale et du Conseil de Gestion aux OP, AFD
- Roppa (2016), Summary and Findings of the First OFF/ROPPA Report.
- Dugué P. Guy Faure (2012), Appui à la mise en place d'un dispositif de suivi - évaluation des effets et de l'impact des démarches de Conseil à l'Exploitation Familiale au Burkina Faso. Cas du CAGEF (Dédougou) et de l'UPPA du Nayala (Toma), F3E.
- Lalba A. (2012). Évaluation de l'impact et effets du conseil à l'exploitation familiale, SNV.
- Narh G. (2018), Les dispositifs paysans de conseil à l'exploitation familiale agricole au Burkina: Principales évolutions, caractéristiques et défis, Inter-réseaux.

AN IMPORTANT CHALLENGE for agricultural advisory services today is to evaluate their impact on farms, families and rural communities. As fewer and fewer resources are being allocated to agriculture, summary qualitative evaluations of managerial advisory services for family farms (*conseil à l'exploitation familiale*, or “CEF”) are no longer sufficient when it comes to justifying the resources invested in those services.

Different schemes were therefore created to monitor and measure the effects of CEF. Performing evaluations to secure funding. Peasant-farmer advisory schemes affect a marginal proportion of farms in the countries where they are implemented. In Burkina Faso, CEF provided by three federations (*Fédération Nationale des Groupements Naam, Fédération des Professionnels Agricoles du Burkina, and Union des Groupements pour la Commercialisation des Produits Agricoles de la Boucle du Mouhoun*) covers only 6,510 farms out of roughly 900,000 members. Insufficient funding is an obstacle to ensuring the longevity of those schemes and scaling them up.

Farmers' organisations (FO) therefore need to help more people understand the effects CEF has on farms and the community. Lending from stakeholders is dependent on the quality of the evaluation methods.

Encouraging dialogue to improve schemes. The “SEMI” scheme for monitoring, evaluating and measuring the impacts of CEF was designed by the agricultural organisation French Farmers and International Development (*Agriculteurs Français et Développement International*, or “AFDI”) and the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD). The scheme's pilot phase was implemented by the engineering office Agence Corade and Réseau Gestion (comprising seven FOs that provide CEF in Burkina Faso).

Measuring impact serves different purposes depending on the types of actors involved. It is also important that the profiling for the scheme and choice of criteria are part of a participatory process in order to ensure that each stakeholder's expectations are taken into account. The SEMI scheme aims to create the right conditions for dialogue between actors. Beneficiaries and advisors can express their views on the scheme and suggest improvements (me-

thods, tools, working conditions, governance). FO leaders can express their difficulties, question the different actors about their responsibilities, and pass on reliable information to umbrella FOs about how peasant-farmer schemes are helping strengthen family farms.

Different types of impacts for agricultural advisory services. The direct impacts of agricultural advisory services are those that affect the beneficiary of the service, the farm, non-agricultural activities, and the family. Indirect impacts affect non-members, the FO, institutions, and value chains connected with the direct beneficiaries.

CEF may have impacts on the farm evaluated by technical performance criteria (planning of production, management and organisation of the family farm, etc.), economic criteria (boosting income, production-related investments) and environmental criteria (management of natural resources). They may also have an impact on farmers and their families. Those impacts are evaluated based on the member's personal development (self-confidence, change of perspective), improvement in the member's technical and managerial capacities, household food and nutrition security, the member's health, and women's participation in managing the farm. CEF also has impacts on the professional environment (adopting innovations or improving FO management), the village community (development of community initiatives, improved social relationships), the local and national economy (emergence of value chains, new areas of activity), and the environment.

Strong focus on qualitative indicators. The impacts of CEF are measured using quantitative indicators (number of farms affected, increase in production) and complementary qualitative indicators (perceptions, attitudes, level of satisfaction).

With CEF, qualitative indicators deserve great attention, as most of the changes are triggered by changes in the farmer's benchmark system, which gives rise to the possibility of new attitudes and sustainable transformations with respect to practices.

Additional data-collection methods. The “before and after” method consists in monitoring how a farm's parameters change over a given number of years af-

“The effects of advisory services on family farms need to be easier for people to see”



Interaction
between a CEF
member and an
advisor

ter establishing a benchmark situation in year zero.

The “with or without CEF” method compares member and non-member farms to see the difference CEF makes between the two types of farm. Data collection also takes into account farms’ cropping schedules. In Burkina Faso, the SEMI scheme was carried out after the crop year in order to assess the production and harvest, and in the middle of the year in order to establish the situation regarding sales and projects.

Given the complexity of the changes to assess, it is recommended that several data-collection methods (information sheets, member files, additional surveys) be combined in order to identify the different impacts. For the AFDI/CIRAD scheme, data is collected by FO advisors, and a firm assigned to provide advisory support for the FOs is in charge of analysing the data. This method may be biased because the evaluators are not independent. That is why some schemes (such as the scheme run by SNV, a Dutch NGO) propose having the evaluation performed by independent entities.

For the most representative sampling possible.

The sampling of farmers evaluated must be representative of all farms reached by CEF in terms of proportion and type. In general, type is established based on technical/economic criteria and on how experienced the farmers are in CEF.

For “with or without CEF” comparisons, samples

of members and non-members must be as close to one another as possible in terms of technical/economic performance.

Farms in the control group must be selected in an environment that is not affected by the CEF scheme. Production conditions must also be the same (rainfall, agro-pedological conditions, etc.).

Positive evaluations despite methodological limitations.

The different evaluations have helped confirm that CEF has a positive impact on farm performance and the personal development of promoters, and helps improve cohesion and conditions among farming families. The AFDI/CIRAD scheme showed that two-thirds of the beneficiary farms increased their revenue and capital, while farms in the control group stagnated or regressed. The SNV evaluation showed that 97% of the farms receiving advisory services adopted new practices for managing natural resources. But the impact of CEF on the local or national economic context has been rather limited.

But these methods do not differentiate between the role of CEF and the role of contextual factors in the changes identified, and do not sufficiently take into account the farmer’s personality. They are also sometimes too complex and too expensive to be replicated by FOs. Lastly, the large amount of data based on statements by farmers or collected by non-independent actors could introduce bias in the results. ■

Renovating agricultural training schemes

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AGRICULTURAL TRAINING —like advisory services— aims to assist farmers and help them become more independent in the management of their farms. It also addresses practical and technical needs. And yet, the few existing training programmes reach few people and are often not well adapted. This article proposes a number of ideas for discussion.

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AGRICULTURAL TRAINING and advisory services aim to overcome the same challenges for the agricultural sector: to produce, to adapt to market developments and climate change, to feed families, etc. They also both still reach too few actors in West and Central Africa, particularly young people, women, and farmers. That is why improving access to services that are tailored to family farming and to developments in the world of production requires renovating training schemes and schemes supporting agricultural advisory services. Such renovation involves thinking about how to assist instructors and advisors, and about the learning process for actors receiving training.

Strengthening farmers' decision-making autonomy. Agricultural training is still underdeveloped and too often implemented with a prescriptive approach that is not in line with farmers' needs. One of the functions of training for young people and advisory support for farmers is to strengthen their capacities for greater decision-making autonomy when managing the farm, whether it involves making choices with regard to production, crop-management techniques, equipment, or funding options (see pp. 29–30).

Training also aims to help farmers become better able to adapt to the changes that are currently in progress. The training needs of young rural entrepreneurs, farmers, professional agricultural organisations, and advisory scheme managers persist and evolve depending on the situation, even though everyone

is looking for new technical and managerial knowledge and savoir-faire.

Tailoring assistance to the target audience. Training and advisory services differ from one another mainly in the way that assistance is apprehended. Initial agricultural training targets a “younger” demographic of aspiring farmers. The pedagogical objective is to help “young people” develop their integration projects, with a focus on improving professional skills. Agricultural advisory services, on the other hand, target adults who are professionals and who need to adapt their decision-making tools through further training.

It is also important to remember that the beneficiaries of agricultural training and advisory services are often illiterate, and that young people in rural areas often do not complete primary or secondary school, which means they are more limited in their learning capacities.

In this context where professional learning —often informal— is not considered at its fair value, the combined study and internship programme is a pedagogical method that allows young apprentices to engage in a beneficial learning experience, while simultaneously helping the farmers whom they work with improve their practices.

The study and internship programme and territorialisation in Cameroon. Moreover, to be effective and well-adapted to all different operations, agricultural training and advisory services need to be broken down by territory and engage with partners. That is the ambition of the Programme to Support the Renovation and Development of Professional Training (*Programme d'Appui à la Rénovation et au Développement de la Formation Professionnelle*) in Cameroon (see pp. 36–38), a national scheme in charge of training and professional integration for young people in agriculture. The programme's approach focuses on territorial integration with a national network of training centres, and on a partner-based approach combining local private and public actors who are invited to join the scheme. Farmers and their families are also encouraged to participate in order to facilitate changes in posture with respect to life projects.

In Cameroon, after young people become established in agriculture, we are seeing new ways of passing on knowledge and savoir-faire: from young people to other young people without training, and from young people to active farmers looking for technical or managerial assistance for their farm. ■

Young people enrolled in professional training at the Gagnoa training centre in Ivory Coast (2018)



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Inclusive agricultural advisory services: vectors of change

Cécile Broutin (broutin@gret.org), Mame Coumba Faye, Marc Petitdan

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES when it comes to agricultural advisory services is ensuring that gender is taken into account. This article looks back at an experience where gender was taken into account when providing advisory services for family farms in Senegal with regard to the joint management of dairy production, and highlights the challenges that were encountered.

► Cécile Broutin is an agricultural economist and programme head at GRET in charge of monitoring the Asstel project, which facilitates access to services and helps structure family livestock farms.

► Mame Coumba Faye is a land-use and environmental engineer, and has been an Asstel project manager since July 2018.

► Marc Petitdan is an agronomist and an independent expert who was an Asstel project manager from January 2016 to July 2018.

SINCE 2014, as part of the Asstel project, GRET and the Southwest Association for International Agricultural Development (Association Sud-Ouest pour le Développement International Agricole) have been testing managerial advisory services for family farms (conseil à l'exploitation familiale, or "CEF") specially designed for dairy farming in the Dagana and Podor departments of northern Senegal. The goal is to help family livestock farms boost their milk production and their income.

This CEF initiative—which includes technical/economic advisory support, a teaching/training programme, and experiments—has provided support for a network of 22 pilot livestock farms (PLF). In four of them (only in the Jeeri zone), women are in charge of dairy production.

Specific roles assigned to everyone. Women in the Jeeri zone are highly involved in milk production, a role they were assigned by tradition. They are in charge of milking and feeding the cows. Some of the women are responsible for testing the milk, monitoring the collection of the milk, selling to the Laiterie du Berger dairy (LdB)—which collects between 1,500 and 2,000 litres of milk a day locally from 600 to 800 livestock farming families in northern Senegal—or selling some or all of the milk (whether processed or unprocessed) at local markets. Women who are registered with LdB as "milk container supervisors" also collect payment for the milk each month and manage orders for concentrated feeds and fodder.

In the Waalo zone near the Senegal River, milk is sold exclusively at local markets, and seven PLFs are monitored there. On those farms, it is mainly the men who are in charge of dairy production. The men milk the cows, feed the herd, etc. But on certain PLFs, women are still involved and are in charge of processing and selling the milk at the local market.

The "family advisory services" approach: achievements and challenges. CEF is implemented in accordance with the "family advisory services" approach developed by FONGS and APESS. All members involved in dairy production (contact person for the PLF, person in charge of the herd, people in charge of milking and feeding, herdsman, etc.) are invited to take part in work sessions. Both men and women

participate in the annual review of the milk year, which involves: a global presentation of the technical and financial results for the dairy activity, analysis of strong and weak points from the period under review, and identification of adjustments that should be made in order to boost production in future years.

Thanks to this inclusive approach, women are involved in the decision-making process for dairy: quantifying concentrated feed and fodder needs; measuring a cow's milk potential; managing reproduction within the dairy herd and selecting offspring, etc. One pilot livestock farmer in Boffel says: *"LdB called yesterday to find out how much feed to order. My husband handed me the phone and said that I'm the one who knows how to handle that and who is passing that knowledge down to my children."*

It is important to note, however, that even with this approach, some decisions—such as leaving for transhumance and selling animals—are not always open for discussion. Often the man decides without discussing with his wife, or without taking her opinion into consideration. A female livestock farmer in Souyéléne says: *"Last year, I left for transhumance against my will. I wanted to stay and manage the farm. But if your husband refuses, you follow him. I sold nine animals, and since then the level of milk production has fallen. I'll never go again, and my husband understands now."* A male livestock farmer in Fourarat says: *"I'm the one who decides when to sell members of the herd, and I just inform my wife."* Those statements reveal the challenges faced when it comes to taking gender into account in advisory services for family farms where roles are firmly rooted.

Male and female advisors. The scheme mobilised a male advisor and a female advisor to advise on livestock farming techniques. It was shown that the advisor's gender does not affect how advisory services are perceived or adopted. It's the advisor's skills and abilities that matter most. Gender diversity also creates a positive image highlighting professional possibilities for girls in the community, who receive very little education.

In order to renew family farms, advisory services must therefore cover the entire family farm and take into account the contributions and needs of everyone—men, women, and young people. ■

Cross perspective: Do agricultural advisory services still have a purpose?

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GIVING PURPOSE to agricultural advisory services in West Africa today requires examining the different types of services offered, the needs they address, and the visions of agriculture they support. Given the future challenges advisory services will face, the actors interviewed in this article are urging for participatory holistic approaches.

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► Salifou Sare is a programme officer at Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Burkina Faso.

► Sow Yaye Mbayang Touré provides technical support for the Federation of Senegalese NGOs (Fédération des Organisations Non Gouvernementales du Sénégal, or “FONGS”).

GRAIN DE SEL (GDS): Agricultural advisory services are currently being reconfigured in West Africa. What are the impacts?

SALIFOU SARE – SS (DDC): Since the structural adjustment plans of the 1980s and 1990s, the State has withdrawn from agricultural advisory services (see pp. 11–12), which has had a negative impact on agricultural production and yields. Food crises are still a reality, and the value chains that were starting to develop have run out of steam.

Meanwhile, new actors —such as farmers’ organisations (FO, see pp. 15–16)— have moved in to fill the void, and have assumed responsibility for assisting their members and providing services for them.

SOW YAYE MBAYANG TOURÉ – SYM (FONGS): Yes. For example, FONGS assists family farms (FF) and supports endogenous dynamics. But monitoring and advisory services require too much in the way of funding and training to be led by FOs alone. We need to pool our experiences and get all actors to participate (State services, NGOs, etc.).

SS (DDC): And knowing how all those actors are going to coordinate with one another is another question! Plus, FOs need to be able to mobilise their own financial resources in order to fund advisory services over the long term (see pp. 28–29).

GDS: What needs should advisory services address?

BOUBA MOUMINI – BM (ACEFA): Agricultural advisory services are primarily geared towards family farming, which is the foundation of West African society and the only type of farming capable of ensuring food security. Advisory services need to support the development of FFs by taking into account their technical, economic, financial and organisational needs.

SYM (FONGS): Exactly. Advisory services must address all FF needs, not just production. The peasant-farmer movement calls for holistic advisory services based on simplified balance sheets that include both agricultural aspects and non-agricultural aspects, such as family spending.

SS (DDC): Yes, FFs certainly need information on management, production techniques, marketing, and bringing their products to market. But advisory services should also focus on issues other than those relating to the market. That’s the difference with extension services. But it’s not really the case yet. The fact that advisory services for farms are too

focused on technical aspects, or that the different actors do not coordinate enough with one another, makes it difficult to obtain conclusive results in terms of food security.

GDS: What type(s) of agricultural advisory service would you recommend? What vision of agriculture does it embody?

BM (ACEFA): Our advisory scheme has learned from the mixed results of the National Programme for Extension Services and Agricultural Research (Programme National de Vulgarisation et de Recherche Agricoles), which is based on the “Training and Visit” method. It now aims to assist farmers in their activities and help them make decisions. In this vision of agriculture, farmers are trusted to make their own decisions, and their capacities are strengthened. Since

the peasant farmers assume all market risks, models can no longer be imposed on them.

SYM (FONGS): Yes. There needs to be a shift towards approaches based on assisting and supporting FFs. The FONGS approach is participatory and involves family meetings and holistic

support for indigenous instructors (see p. 25).

SS (DDC): Agricultural advisory services should help manage the FF like a company. With respect to their technical, administrative and risk-management approaches, the different types of advisory services currently offered are very different. They are no longer top-down approaches, but rather approaches that are based on participatory joint development of expertise. Knowledge is generated through university research, and by peasant farmers.

In Burkina Faso, the SDC directly supports several FOs to help them structure themselves and improve their skills. We also support many advisory schemes relating to the sale of agricultural products. The Cooperative for the Provision of Agricultural Services (Coopérative de Prestation de Services Agricoles) developed a scheme offering warrantage and training/awareness-raising services for farmers.

GDS: How do you create an advisory system that takes into account the family farm in its entirety while also integrating the family farm into value chains?

SYM (FONGS): In value chains, advisory services are purely agricultural. Those services cover production, sales, management systems, markets, and income. They focus on agricultural productivity and finan-

“Agricultural advisory services are an important tool for transitioning to agroecology”

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES



cial profitability, but they should be more holistic! Advisory services should take into account the FF's entire range of activities.

BM (ACEFA): The extension system where agents were responsible for disseminating standardised crop-management techniques developed by researchers did not lead them to have a holistic way of thinking. The holistic approach is complex. It requires studying how each proposed technical and economic change will affect the entire farm. It is time-consuming and requires being thoroughly familiar with each farm and acquiring specific skills.

The integration of FFs into value chains is necessarily performed by farmers' groups (cooperatives, joint initiative groups, etc.) who play an essential role carrying out one or more economic functions.

SS (DDC): Farms may specialise in subsistence crops (cereals) or cash crops (sesame, market gardening crops, cotton), but there is always a 'backbone' value chain that makes it possible to develop the other value chains. By supporting the development of the organic cotton value chain, Switzerland also contributed to the development of the organic sesame and hibiscus value chains in Burkina Faso thanks to crop rotations. The important thing is to disseminate the innovations in order to influence all of the links in the product's value chains and to have an impact on the

other value chains. The FF must be seen as an economic entity if advisory services are to have a purpose.

GDS: *How and to what extent do agricultural advisory services take into account vulnerable groups?*

SYM (Fongs): The advisory approach based on family meetings brings together all members of the family (see p. 35). Profits are shared and are not attributed solely to the man. During the meetings, the older family members acknowledge that it is time to give young people and women more responsibilities.

SS (DDC): By developing advisory services, you bring together different agricultural actors to share and discuss ideas. Often women are not able to travel without their husband's consent, but information and communication technologies (ICT) allow them to access the information without needing to travel (see pp. 8–9). In eastern Burkina Faso, ICT provide agricultural/weather information to roughly 50,000 people, 55–60% of whom are women. Technological innovations allow agricultural advisory services to take into account the needs of vulnerable people.

Women also have difficulty gaining access to land. Agricultural advisory services can help them produce more on small parcels of land, find the right produce with high added value depending on the available space, etc.



GDS: *Do advisory services help reduce the negative impacts of certain agricultural practices on the health of consumers and farmers?*

SYM (Fongs): FFs make up the biggest group of farmers and consumers. The advisory approach therefore needs to incorporate nutrition and health problems while promoting local consumption. Families in Senegal produce and sell their produce, while consuming imported products.

BM (ACEFA): Yes. Agricultural advisory services should train farmers in best phytosanitary practices. But strengthening the capacities of advisors is still a challenge. Despite their technical skills, we have noticed learning gaps among advisors, partly because of their relatively low level of education (56% of advisors have not pursued studies beyond the baccalaureate).

GDS: *How can advisory services help drive the transition to agroecology?*

BM (ACEFA): The transition to agroecology is a real social issue in the North. But here, it is unknown territory... So much needs to be done in terms of research, training and dissemination. Agronomists have been trained based on a model that emphasises chemically based farming and the use of heavy machinery. In Cameroon, the tractor has become the symbol of modernity, even though ploughing can be harmful to tropical soils. It is therefore a vast programme that goes beyond the individual level and that calls into question an entire segment of the economy. This transition is not advantageous for agribusiness, which is now turning to Africa...

SYM (Fongs): One of the functions of the FF is to help sustainably manage natural resources, but the simplified balance sheets do not explicitly take agroecology into account. Indigenous instructors now offer assistance for each terroir, because advisory services can play a very important role in the transition to agroecology!

SS (DDC): The local knowledge of West African farmers (zai, half-moons, etc.) is a source of many agroecology techniques. But the agricultural practices of some farmers who are uninformed or in too much of a hurry are dangerous for their own health and for the health of consumers.

BM (ACEFA): Researchers in northern Cameroon are working on sowing under plant cover, and there is a lot to learn. But research in agroecology is, on the whole, largely absent. It is therefore not easy to set out in this direction, when farmers want fast results and know that chemical inputs are effective. This does not mean they are not sensitive to environmental or health issues —on the contrary. But what concrete, effective recommendations can advisors make? Who will fund the research and testing?

GDS: *In your opinion, do agricultural advisory services still have a purpose? What are the major challenges facing sustainable agricultural advisory services in West Africa?*

SYM (Fongs): Yes, agricultural advisory services have a purpose. They support the transformation of FFs and help them boost their productivity and feed the world. But those services should be run more by State bodies than by FOs, and they should be sustainable with national agricultural advisory systems based on partnerships between FOs, States, researchers, and the private sector. The broadening of our peasant-farming approach should also offer better support for the transformation of FFs, by utilising their knowledge and experience.

BM (ACEFA): Agricultural advisory services are needed more than ever! No country has been able to develop its agriculture without them. And despite the level farmers have attained, issues continue to evolve. But even the best agricultural advisory schemes and methods cannot solve all of the problems farmers face, starting with the funding of farms.

SS (DDC): With the withdrawal of the State, the major challenge for advisory services is funding, which is the key to ensuring the longevity of those services. FOs are starting to play this role, but they have financial and institutional difficulties. The State needs to help define and standardise a form of advisory services in order to ensure quality, in conjunction with agricultural actors. The State also needs to coordinate everyone in order to ensure that actors' actions complement one another in relation to local knowledge. ■

Inter-réseaux members

Several organisations belonging to Inter-réseaux regularly publish resources on agricultural advisory services. Those resources are available on their websites.



Agronomes et vétérinaires sans frontières (AVSF) is an association that promotes international solidarity and that supports farmers through various projects relating to agricultural advisory services, in particular projects for farmer field schools and projects that promote agroecology: www.avsf.org



Agriculteurs français et développement international (Afdi) is a long-standing actor in agricultural advisory services, working with farmers' organisations to help them set up advisory schemes for family farms and participate in the development and implementation of agricultural advisory policies: www.afdi-opa.org



L'Association pour la promotion de l'élevage au Sahel et en savane (Apeps) carries out projects relating to agricultural advisory services, particularly through innovation platforms in West and Central Africa: www.apeps.org



Afrique verte internationale (AVI) and its members offer a diverse range of advisory-support and training services for farmers' organisations and actors in agricultural value chains in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger: www.afriqueverte.org



L'Agence Corade, in addition to its work in connection with agricultural advisory services in West Africa, has developed personalised advisory services for farmers in Burkina Faso (Tylay scheme): <http://www.corade.org>



Fert leads discussions and assesses experiences relating to agricultural advisory services. It also supports the development of agricultural advisory schemes relating to the agricultural profession in the countries in question (Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Kenya, and Madagascar, as well as countries in North Africa and Central Europe): www.fert.fr



Iles de Paix is a Belgian NGO that supports farming families to help them improve their quality of life and become more resilient. Agricultural advisory services—particularly advisory services for family farms and integrated planning for peasant farming—are at the heart of its work to support the transition to agroecology: www.ilesdepaix.org



L'Institut africain pour le développement économique et social Centre africain de formation (Inades-Formation Togo) is an association that provides support and coaching for rural communities. Since 1972, it has been running a remote agricultural training scheme based on agricultural



advisory services in the fields of agricultural learning and rural self-promotion: www.inadesformation.net

L'Institut de recherches et d'applications des méthodes de développement (Iram) is a long-standing actor in agricultural advisory services for family farms, and recently spearheaded initiatives on the subject (evaluations, implementation of projects, support for the formulation of public policies): www.iram-fr.org



Le Réseau Billital Maroobé (RBM) provides agricultural advisory services for pastoralists through its members in sub-Saharan Africa: www.marooobe.com



Le Réseau des organisations paysannes et de producteurs d'Afrique de l'Ouest (Roppa) promotes the development of agricultural advisory services, particularly through several of its members, and is a stakeholder in advisory systems in West Africa: www.roppa-afrique.org



Les Services d'appui aux initiatives locales de développement (Saild) has been supporting farmers for many years through agricultural advisory services, particularly with their remote advisory service called "Allô, Ingénieur": www.saild.org



La SNV works to reduce poverty and promote good governance, and has supported several advisory initiatives with different types of actors (livestock farmers, etc.) in West and Central Africa, and in other regions around the world: www.snv.org



SOS Faim Belgique promotes initiatives implemented by peasant-farming organisations in Senegal (FONGS) and Mali (Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes, Plate-forme Nationale des Producteurs de Riz) to advise and support family farms: www.sosfaim.be

SOS Faim Luxembourg assists several of its partners in their agricultural advisory initiatives, particularly in Benin, Niger and the Democratic Republic of the Congo: www.sosfaim.org

In addition to these highly involved actors, other Inter-réseaux members have also been involved in agricultural advisory services in Africa and elsewhere.

About Inter-réseaux

INTER-RÉSEAUX DÉVELOPPEMENT RURAL WAS FOUNDED IN 1996, on the initiative of a group of people committed to rural development and with support from the French public authorities. Inter-réseaux has evolved over the years and now defines itself as a European/African multi-actor network.

Inter-réseaux aims to create the right conditions so that actors committed to agricultural and rural development can take action to support rural communities and develop sustainable agriculture that is based on family farming and that can overcome the following challenges: (i)

feeding Africa's fast-growing population; (ii) creating jobs and income in order to combat poverty.

To do so, IR works with its members and partners in three main areas: i) strengthening the capacities of actors with regard to producing knowledge, assessing experiences, and utilising and disseminating their knowledge; ii) developing projects and ideas on issues relating to rural and agricultural development in order to help improve policies and practices; iii) ensuring that the development community has access to relevant information on agricultural and rural development.

Grain de sel magazine

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