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**THEMATIC EVALUATION**

**AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND SUPPORT FOR FARMER INNOVATION IN  
WESTERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA:  
ASSESSMENT AND OUTLOOK FOR IFAD**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



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**ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AOPP	<i>Association des organisations professionnelles paysannes (Mali)</i>
AKIS	Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems
ECP	Extended Cooperation Programme
ENDA	Environmental Development Action in the Third World
FIL	<i>Fonds d'investissement local</i>
FODESA	Sahelian Areas Development Fund Programme (IFAD/Mali)
ILEIA	Centre for Information on Low External Input Sustainable Agriculture
ISWC	Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation Action-Research Programme
LACOSREP	Upper-East Region Land Conservation and Smallholder Rehabilitation Project (IFAD/Ghana)
LADEP	Lowlands Agricultural Development Programme (IFAD/The Gambia)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRTCIP	National Roots and Tuber Crop Improvement Programme (IFAD/Ghana)
ONDR	National Office for Rural Development
PACDM	Maghama Improved Flood Recession Farming Project (IFAD/Mauritania)
PAGF	Agroforestry Project to Combat Desertification (IFAD/Senegal)
PDPEF	Smallholder Development Project in the Forest Region (IFAD/Guinea)
PDRA	Aguié Rural Development Project (IFAD/Niger)
PDRNE	Rural Development Project in the North East (IFAD/Côte d'Ivoire)
PFDV	Village Development Fund Project (IFAD/Mali)
PNASA	National Agricultural Services Support Project (IFAD/Togo)
PNAPAF	National Smallholders Support Programme (IFAD/Sao Tome and Principe)
PNVRA	National Agricultural Research and Extension Programmes Support Project (IFAD/Cameroon)
PRAFD	Fouta Djallon Agricultural Rehabilitation Project (IFAD/Guinea)
PRODAP	Community-Based Agricultural and Livestock Development Project (IFAD/Cape Verde)
PSANG	Food Security Project in the Northern Guéra Region (IFAD/Chad)
CES/AGF	Special Programme for Soil and Water Conservation and Agroforestry in the Central Plateau (IFAD/Burkina Faso)
PSN	Special Country Programme (IFAD/Niger)
RTIP	Roots and Tuber Improvement Programme (IFAD/Ghana)
SACDP	Sokoto State Agricultural and Community Development Project (IFAD/Nigeria)
SCIMP	Smallholder Credit, Input Supply and Marketing Project (IFAD/Ghana)
SOGVERS	<i>Soutien aux groupements villageois dans l'est de la région des savanes</i>
SPA	Special Programme for Sub-Saharan African Countries Affected by Drought and Desertification (Special Programme)
SSWC	Small-Scale Water Control Project (IFAD/The Gambia)
T&V	Training and Visit
VIPAF	<i>Programme de valorisation des initiatives paysannes en agroforesterie</i>



## FOREWORD

This paper is the summary of a report that has not yet been validated within IFAD or submitted to the Fund's partners in the countries of western and central Africa. It should be noted that some of the operational implications of the recommendations still need to be fully identified.

Following an internal review, the full report will be submitted to the next meeting of the Neuchatel Group in London in November 2001, and a regional validation workshop will be organized in a West African country sometime in 2002. Aside from the Fund's traditional partners – government agencies, research institutes, project managers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and cooperating institutions – producer organizations will also be invited to this regional event and are expected to be strongly represented.

As with the other thematic studies conducted by the Office of Evaluation and Studies, this evaluation will culminate in the 'agreement at completion point' with the respective partners, to become the cornerstone of a sector strategy for IFAD in the target region.

## THEMATIC EVALUATION

### AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND SUPPORT FOR FARMER INNOVATION IN WESTERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA: ASSESSMENT AND OUTLOOK FOR IFAD

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

##### I. INTRODUCTION

###### A. Rationale and Objective of the Thematic Evaluation

1. At the time the 2000 evaluation programme was being prepared, IFAD's Africa I Division asked that a study be conducted of the Fund's experience with extension and support for agricultural innovation in western and central Africa in light of: (i) the disappointing outcomes of several projects that were intended to boost production and agriculture revenue through conventional technology-transfer approaches; and (ii) the need to capitalize on the Fund's experience in this sector and to compare it with emerging opportunities and innovative approaches under way in the region.

2. According to the approach paper, the study's stated purpose was to draw useful lessons in order to frame a regional policy to support agricultural innovation that could provide guidance for designing future operations and orient policy dialogue with IFAD's partners in the countries and internationally. Specifically, the study's findings were expected to help IFAD position itself vis-à-vis the recommendations of the Neuchatel Initiative, an informal group of representatives of various bilateral and international cooperation agencies in the development field.

3. IFAD has not conducted a thematic evaluation in the area of agricultural extension since 1989<sup>1</sup>, and the most recent efforts at strategic reflection on this issue for sub-Saharan Africa date from the Special Programme for Sub-Saharan African Countries Affected by Drought and Desertification (SPA) in the late 1980s. Since then, the regional situation has changed significantly in the wake of programmes for sector adjustment and support for agricultural services, the general trend towards liberalization and decentralization, and the strengthening of a broad-based movement towards professional organization of the rural milieu, especially in the countries of western Africa.

4. As the benchmark models that characterized the 1980s and 1990s have come under renewed scrutiny (especially the extension model known as 'training and visit'), debate on the future of agricultural services in western and central Africa has been both expanded and enriched, especially at the institutional and social levels. This debate has been pursued at various fora, including the Subregional Consultation on the Partnership of Research, Extension and Farmers' Organizations, the Neuchatel Group, and the World Bank/FAO-sponsored AKIS<sup>2</sup> thematic group. Thus far, IFAD has not been a core participant in these discussions, despite its experience and position as a source of international aid for agricultural development in western and central Africa.

5. Accordingly, the study is intended to furnish information and proposals to serve as input for an operational strategy for IFAD and its partners in the target region. However, the study's conclusions

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<sup>1</sup> Agricultural Research and Extension for Smallholder Farmers: A Review of IFAD's Experience, 1978-1988, EC 89/2/W.P.8.

<sup>2</sup> Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems.



and recommendations are not meant to apply across the board. They are drawn directly from the **specific situations in which IFAD works** in western and central Africa and from its specific mandate to eradicate rural poverty. In this region, especially since the Special Programme for Africa, the Fund's mandate has been interpreted mainly in terms of **geographic targeting** of multi-component rural development projects. Activities have targeted agricultural contexts marked by high levels of risk and isolation. The Fund has little or no involvement in farming regions that are relatively better off, such as cotton, coffee and cacao-growing areas, the large expanses of irrigated rice cultivation, or peri-urban 'green belts'. These hubs of agricultural development already enjoy smoothly operating private and public agricultural services, so the issue of support for innovation there takes on a very different dimension. To the extent that international debate and national policies have traditionally focused on national agricultural extension systems, they are sometimes ill equipped to identify the specific characteristics and needs of underprivileged areas.

### **B. Constraints of the Study and Problems Encountered**

6. The study is based almost exclusively on a review of existing documentation – e.g. evaluation reports of IFAD and other agencies – without any additional field research. As with other thematic evaluations conducted by the Fund, the study examines experiences that were recently completed or are currently under way but were designed several years ago (most of the projects studied here were approved between 1989 and 1996). In a sector where discourse, policies and project design have clearly evolved over the past few years, it is no easy task to distinguish between passing trends and deep-seated change in behaviours and institutions. It is also hard to draw useful lessons for the future from experiences that reflect past history. Moreover, the sweeping diversity of a region that extends from the Sahara Desert to the equatorial rain forest does not make it easy to draw broadly applicable conclusions. In this regard, the study will likely have a geographic bias reflecting the shortage of project evaluations available for the central African subregion.

7. A second difficulty encountered in the course of the study was that it examined projects in which extension was basically one component among several. In most of the projects, extension accounts for between 10% and 30% of the financial resources. It is hard to isolate the specific contribution of this activity to project results. However, this problem is not specific to the integrated-type projects preferred by IFAD, since the effectiveness of extension is always dependent on other services, such as research, markets for inputs and outputs, investment and maintenance of rural infrastructure, etc. The activity itself of 'extension services' is often multi-faceted.

### **C. Agricultural Extension: A Working Definition**

8. In a study such as this, the first step is to define what is meant exactly by the term 'agricultural extension', and here it is necessary to distinguish the function of extension – as a service provided to farmers – from the institutions that perform this function. The abundant literature on agricultural services in Africa tends to group a number of very heterogeneous functions under this term. In western and central Africa at least, this confusion can be traced historically to the multi-purpose support and supervisory services that were typical of the 1970s and 1980s.

9. As used herein, 'agricultural extension' refers to the set of activities of communication, information, demonstration and technical training geared towards 'transferring' and disseminating to farmers new or improved technologies vis-à-vis current production, processing and management practices. These technical 'messages' or 'packages' are usually formulated and proposed by research institutes (mainly national agricultural research centres, although sometimes universities, projects or non-governmental organizations (NGOs)). Extension is thus a simple function that utilizes tools such as technical briefs and demonstration plots. To achieve mass dissemination of new, standardized technologies in a preponderantly illiterate milieu, extension services rely on an immense corps of field agents who work directly with farmers in their villages (radio broadcasting is also used, but to a very limited extent). It is an on-site activity that is staff-intensive. Although extension agents possess a



relatively low level of training and limited capacity for agronomic and economic analysis, they are supervised by technical staff and agricultural engineers who provide them with training and convey to them the messages developed by the research centres. At the same time, extension agents are supposed to inform their supervisors, and – through them – the researchers, of any technical problems expressed by farmers and their reactions to proposed technologies (feedback). The idea is that extension and research should be articulated upstream in such a way as to ensure that research efforts respond to farmers’ constraints and potential.

10. To the proponents of new approaches to agricultural services,<sup>3</sup> this definition of extension may appear outdated. However, it holds three basic merits for the present study: (i) **it reflects the reality of activities conducted under extension components** in most of the IFAD projects analysed; (ii) **it reflects the prevailing function** – and thus the organization, human resources and corporate culture – **in place at the field-level services of agricultural ministries** in the target region; and (iii) **it helps to distinguish clearly between extension and other functions that are sometimes performed by the same institutions**, such as action-research and trials, agricultural advisory services, rural animation and training, and the supply of inputs.

11. Several conditions must be met in order for extension to be effective in terms of agricultural development. First, technologies must be innovative, they must be adapted to the farmers’ agro-ecological, social and economic contexts, and they must be unknown to farmers and be clearly superior to their current practices. Extension cannot be useful if it is not underpinned by active, applied research to produce innovations that can be disseminated. All other things being equal, the flow of suitable technical innovations generated by research will be more stable and significant to the extent that the agro-ecological, social and economic (especially pricing) parameters are better known, more stable and better controlled in the target area.

12. A crucial secondary condition is that farm inputs and implements, plant stock and, in some cases, the labor force which are the necessary ingredients of the innovations to be disseminated should be physically and financially accessible to farmers.

13. The second condition for effectiveness is at the same time a condition for efficiency: technologies need to be more or less standardized and suited to a large number of farmers (and, in fact, most research already focuses on this type of product). In other words, innovations must lend themselves to mass dissemination by extension agents across vast, homogeneous areas. The denser and more homogeneous the farming population is, the more effective and efficient extension services will be. However, for an extension effort to be meaningful, the innovation should not lend itself to self-dissemination by the market or spontaneous contacts among farmers. At the very least, the extension function should contribute significantly to speed up the dissemination process.

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<sup>3</sup> “*Extension is too often merely seen as a vehicle for spreading scientific and technological progress and technology transfer. But this is a narrow and highly unsatisfactory definition (...) Alongside the functions of information and training, agricultural extension should perform the indissociable function of **facilitation**.*” (Common Framework for Agricultural Extension. Neuchatel Group, 1999). The viewpoint and terminology used here are different: extension is not defined as “what it should be” ideally but rather as what it is and what it does specifically in the projects and institutions reviewed. To ensure consistency, the other front-line services will be used here with their exact names **facilitation, advisory services, support for innovation and action-research**, which are quite distinct from extension and require different skills and organizations.



#### **D. Historical Overview of Agricultural Extension in Western and Central Africa**

14. Historically, agricultural extension in western and central Africa has been provided by government or parastatal ‘agricultural support and supervisory’ agencies that traditionally have associated it with such other services as supply of inputs and equipment, credit intermediation, development-research, support for organization of cooperatives and, occasionally, marketing of output.

15. In the wake of the structural adjustment and sector programmes of the 1980s and the widespread adoption of the ‘training and visit’ (T&V) extension model in the early 1990s, government extension services were restructured to sharpen their focus on their core mission. This engendered a series of national agricultural extension programmes that have left agriculture ministries with extension services that are focused, organized, trained and properly equipped, thanks mainly to financing from the World Bank at the national level (although IFAD has cofinanced a small number of these country programmes), but they are also supported locally by several projects including several that are supported by IFAD. In western and central Africa, these massive T&V country programmes were carried out during the first half of the 1990s with noteworthy institutional outcomes but slim prospects for sustainability, and the impact on agricultural development fell short of expectations, especially in marginal areas. Currently, most extension services are organized according to this model but they no longer receive the external funding that could keep them operational.

16. Starting in 1995 and especially since the World Bank’s adoption of a new strategy in 1997 (*From Vision to Action*), a new wave of country projects and restructurings has been launched adopting a whole new tack – on paper at least – from the previous thrusts: diversity of approaches, responsiveness to demand, plurality of actors, decentralization, central role of producer organizations.

#### **E. Farmer Innovation**

17. The prevalent model of agricultural development aid today continues to be technology transfer from scientific research to farmers through extension. The model rests on two assumptions: (i) researchers’ familiarity with (and foresight of) farmers’ strategies and the complex conditions in which the strategies are implemented; and (ii) the technological ‘paralysis’ of African farming systems. The latter assumption has been disproven by many historians of agricultural development and observers of farming systems who have documented the presence of both a wide diversity and the strong dynamics of technological change, as manifested in the widespread use of varietal selection techniques and the exchange and experimentation of practices, tools and plant stock by the farmers themselves. This ongoing effort of experimentation and adaptation has been critically underestimated and overlooked not only by international development agencies but also by the technical services and research institutes of western and central African countries.

18. During the 1990s, NGOs such as World Neighbors, the Centre for Information on Low External Input Sustainable Agriculture (ILEIA) and the Environmental Development Action in the Third World (ENDA), and more recently pilot projects such as IFAD’s *Programme de valorisation des initiatives paysannes en agroforesterie* (VIPAF) and The Netherlands Cooperation-supported second phase of the Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation Action-Research Programme (ISWC 2) began to explore approaches to support or facilitate such processes of farmer innovation.





## II. TRENDS IN IFAD'S PORTFOLIO IN WESTERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA AND SAMPLE STUDIED

### A. Trends in IFAD's Portfolio in Western and Central Africa from 1989 to 2000

19. Over the period 1989-2000, IFAD approved 74 projects in western and central Africa for a total lending commitment of USD 775 million. Three fourths of these projects (55) included agricultural-services components (e.g. extension, applied research, supply of inputs and marketing support, and land development such as irrigation or soil and water conservation) that were not insignificant in terms of size and were directly targeted at boosting production and/or farm-based income.

20. The period saw a gradual but very clear move away from support for agricultural services. In the last four years, less than one half of the amount of loans approved went to projects having an agricultural development component. Recent approvals have focused on microcredit projects, support for decentralization (or 'local development') and support for rural microenterprise. This trend reflects the emergence of new strategic priorities in the region but it is also certainly an expression of the dismay created by the disappointing outcomes of a number of local or regional agricultural/rural development projects, which accounted for the great majority of IFAD interventions during the first half of the 1990s.

**Table 1: IFAD's Portfolio in Western and Central Africa<sup>4</sup>**

Project Approval Period	1989-1990	1991-1992	1993-1994	1995-1996	1997-1998	1999-2000
Projects approved in the Africa 1 region	14	14	10	13	9	14
Approved projects having a large agricultural-services component	14	13	9	9	5	5
Percentage of approved projects having a large agricultural-services component	100%	93%	90%	69%	56%	36%
Percentage of total amount approved for projects having a large agricultural-services component	100%	99%	93%	72%	49%	43%

21. The 55 projects having an agricultural development component present a diverse array of activities and institutional arrangements. However, the great majority of agricultural extension or applied research components has been entrusted to the government's line agencies (beginning with the original design stage or during implementation), most often through arrangements between the autonomous project management units and the national or regional agricultural authorities. A few projects have been carried out directly by a government line agency, and a very small number have been carried out under contracts or agreements with NGOs.

<sup>4</sup> The projects in the gray area are the ones that are far enough along in their implementation as to be examined as part of this thematic evaluation, conducted in 2000-2001.



## B. Sample of Experiences Analysed

22. The sample selected for this study comprises 23 projects financed under IFAD loans: 19 were designed between 1989 and 1996, three before 1989 and one in 1997. Also, four experiences financed by IFAD under grants (technical-assistance grants or from the NGO Extended Cooperation Programme (ECP)) have been included because of their innovative features (*Échange Oasis-Oasis* in Mauritania, VIPAF in Niger, *Champs-École* in San and Fayda Ton/Ségou in Mali). The study also examined nine experiences supported by other agencies, NGOs or bilateral cooperation arrangements.

23. The experiences were analysed under a two-stage process:

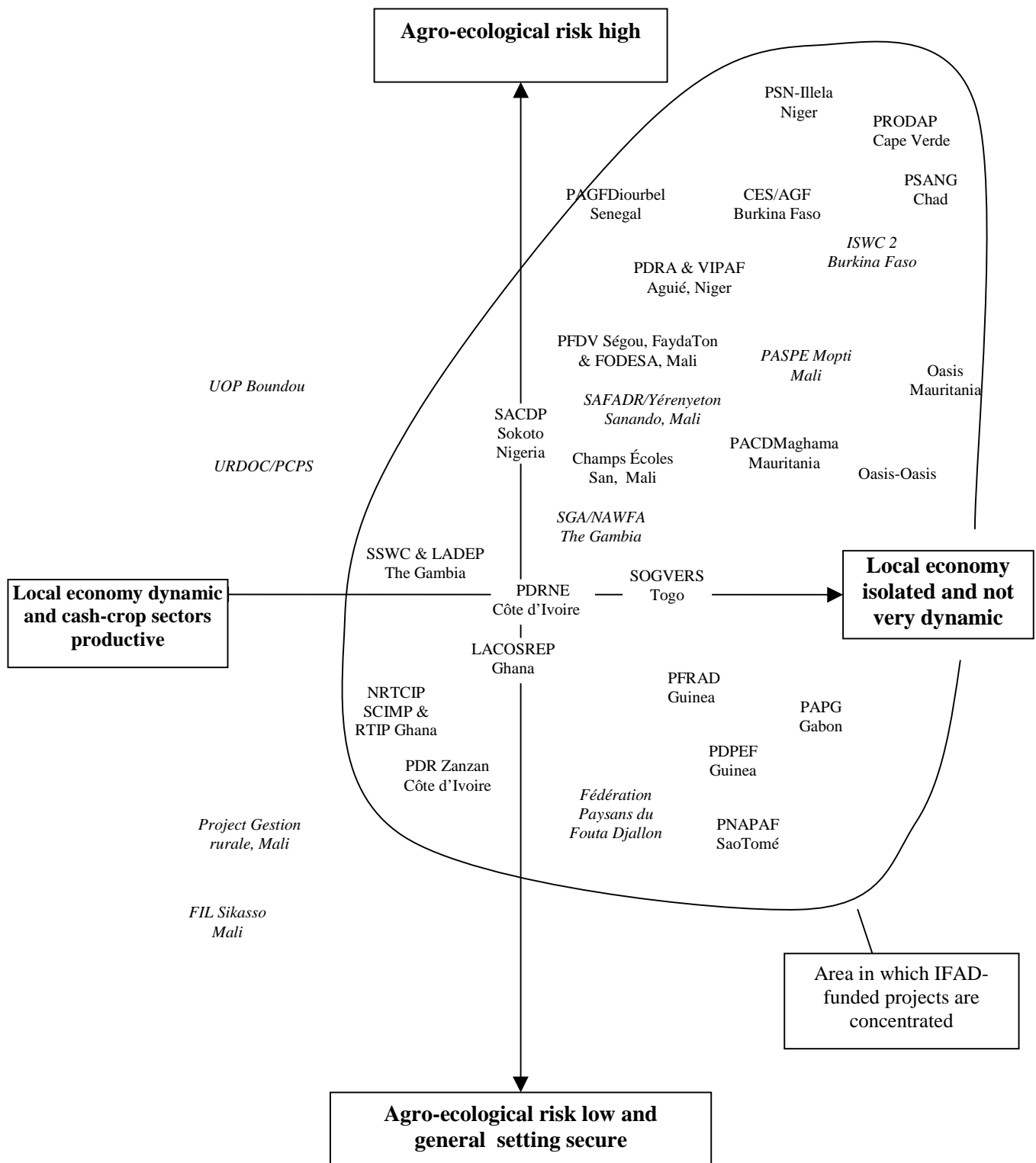
- (i) A review of available documentation on each project revealed the specificities of each experience and a summary brief was drafted. These case studies were conducted on the basis of available documents, mainly evaluation reports and/or completion or supervision reports.
- (ii) Upon completion of the first stage, the next step was to compile and synthesize the full set of experiences. The summary is prefaced by a comparative analysis of the following items: (a) general setting of the intervention; (b) type of intervention; (c) nature of the services offered to farmers in association with agricultural extension; and (d) nature of the innovations disseminated through these experiences.

24. The main defining features of the interventions are shown in Figures 1 and 2 and provide a more detailed description of the sample. Subsequently, the study addresses the impact of the different types of intervention by seeking to identify the problems encountered and potential avenues to be explored by new interventions in this sphere.

25. The great majority of IFAD-supported projects are situated in areas that are isolated and/or have weak economic dynamics and/or are at high agro-ecological and economic risk. Although this focus, which is in line with the strategy of geographic targeting of rural poverty, can be viewed as a legacy of the Special Programme for Africa at the regional level, it is present more clearly and systematically at the country level. The project areas examined share a number of key features in terms of innovation, technology transfer and extension: (i) very diverse and relatively untechnified settings (notably, little irrigation); (ii) crop and livestock conditions that are highly exposed to climatic vagaries (rainfall, parasites and pests, forage resources, etc.); (iii) weak market integration, especially isolation from input markets; (iv) marked seasonal and year-on-year fluctuations in prices for outputs; and (v) variable population densities that are often sparse and/or experiencing rapid increases. Coupled with the macroeconomic and political instability of several countries, these factors contribute to the diversity and unpredictability of the conditions in which farmers operate. It is not a setting that fosters the adoption of innovation through the usual processes of technology transfer (see paragraphs 11 through 13).

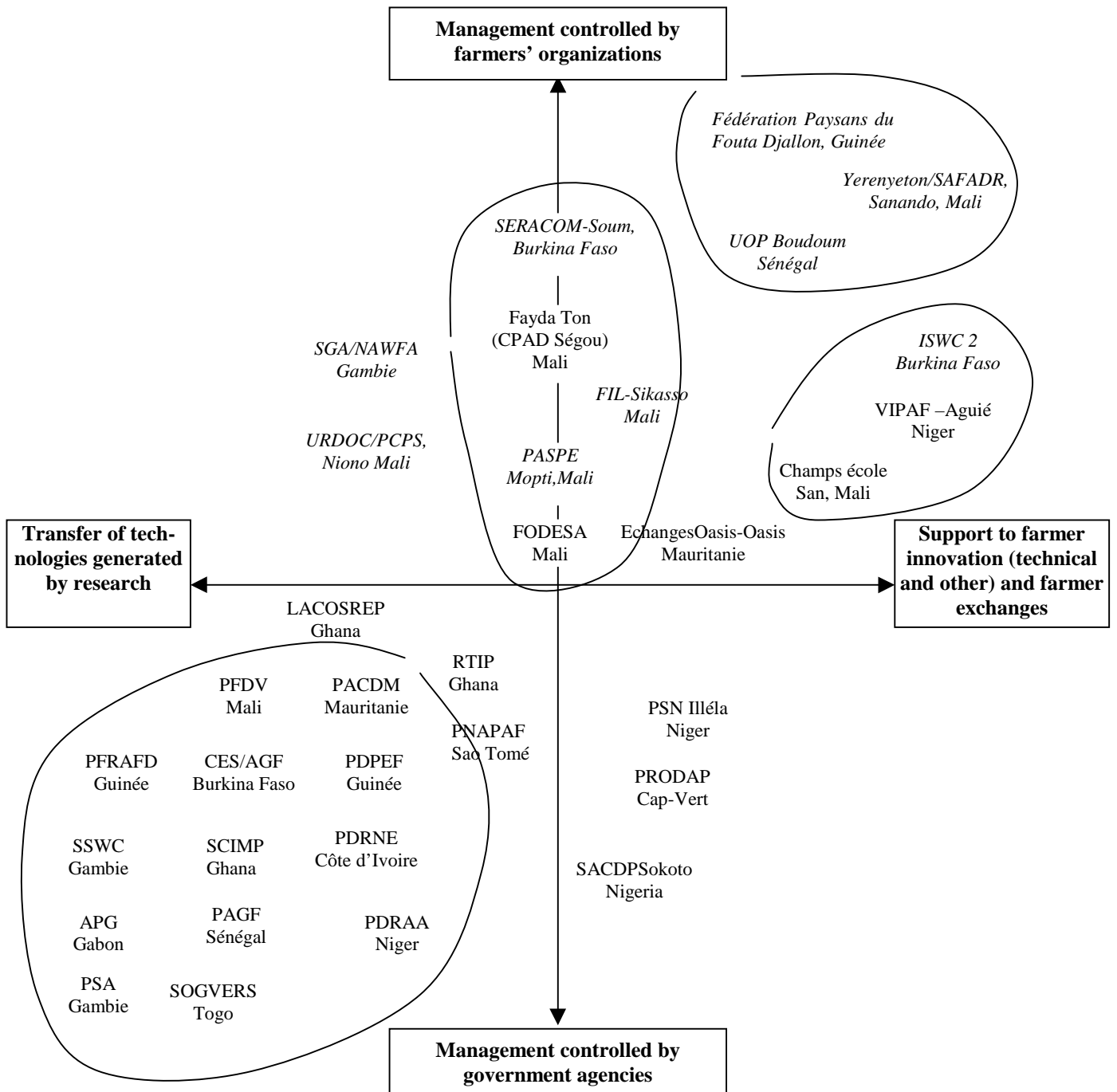
26. The great majority of the agricultural development approaches adopted by these projects are based on technology transfer administered by a government agency. It should be noted, however, that almost all the projects also have components to support producer organization at the village level or capacity-building for local communities. These components are usually quite separate from the agricultural development activities and are implemented by different operators.

**Figure 1: Main Types of Rural Settings Encountered in the Experiences Studied**



NB: The nine experiences in italics were neither designed nor funded by IFAD.

**Figure 2: Interventions by Main Function and by Type of Institutional Arrangement**



NB: The midpoint area of the vertical axis corresponds to management controlled by NGOs or relatively autonomous projects (regardless of whether managed/controlled by farmers' organizations or government agencies). The midpoint area of the horizontal axis corresponds to mixed experiences (extension + support for farmer innovation, participatory experimentation) or 'advisory services', or situations where innovation is mainly of an organizational nature (e.g. marketing, supply, management of investment funds). IFAD was not involved in the experiences indicated in italics.



### III. EVALUATION OF EXTENSION APPROACHES USED

27. The criteria used in the comparative analysis of project impact point up the critical role of the approach that is adopted for agricultural services. A review of the 36 experiences in terms of these criteria shows very contrasting results depending on the approach used. Two major situation types can be discerned among the experiences studied:

- (i) **approaches implemented under conventional extension arrangements** that are used in IFAD-funded projects;
- (ii) **'innovative' experiences**, some of which show IFAD's progress towards new approaches, others of which are built on radically different bases.

#### A. Analysis of Experience with Conventional Extension

28. The approaches implemented under conventional extension arrangements have for the most part been relatively ineffective in terms of attaining the expected results. Either the project did not achieve its expected agricultural development impact, or the specific contribution of the extension activity was secondary or even marginal. Table 2 summarizes these points for a sample of 23 projects.

#### Technical proposals were often unsuited and innovation processes were weak

29. **Lack of appropriate and viable innovations.** Extension faces a difficult situation in IFAD's project areas. Technology packages are rarely viable on a large scale nor are they able to enhance performance and reduce risks in existing production systems. **Technical enhancements, which have in fact emerged and have been disseminated spontaneously – and to a significant degree – in the field, were often developed outside the framework.**<sup>5</sup> In Mali, an analysis of the Village Development Fund Project (PFDV) points to the shortcomings of the technologies disseminated vis-à-vis the diversity of situations, farmers' expectations, and the problems posed by soil fertility and climatic risk. According to the farmer representatives invited to the evaluation workshop, neither the themes nor the solutions were appropriate.

**Chad, Food Security Project in the Northern Guéra Region**  
*Agricultural development: results fell far short of expectations, especially in terms of protecting cereal crops. Overall, the phytosanitary and pest (locusts and birds) risks are under no better control than before the project. Soil protection and restoration: very poor results posted. Dissemination of improved seed: the National Office for Rural development (ONDR) each year held several demonstrations of varieties. Farmers welcomed the fast-maturing sorghum and sesame seed but dissemination was hindered owing to losses caused by grain-eating birds and to low oil content (...) Services from the government counterpart agencies, ONDR and DPVC, were generally weak in terms both of expected results from the agricultural development component and the number of agreements formalized. ...The solutions proposed by the project were not able to respond to the challenges faced by the farmers (...) today, there is no significant difference in average per-hectare yields between project and non-project families.*  
 Interim Evaluation Report, March 2000

<sup>5</sup> In the Sahel, for instance, soil and water conservation techniques often were the result of action-research work by NGOs (stone bunding and filter-type dikes in Burkina Faso), teams of technical experts working outside the framework of extension and research services (*tassa* in Niger), or innovative farmers (*zai* in Yatenga, Burkina Faso).



**Table 2: Summary Table of Outcomes of 23 IFAD Projects in Terms of Agricultural Development and Estimated Relative Contribution of Various Activities/Components**

	Outcome	Land development (soil and water conservation, irrigation, agroforestry)	Improved access (roads, tracks)	Research, Research and Development (R&D), support for innovation	Extension	Supply of inputs (including on credit)	Other: advisory services, training, exchanges, strengthening of producer organizations, marketing
Niger PSN Illéla	A	+++	NA	+++	+	++	++
Ghana NRTCIP	A	NA	NA	+++	NA	+	NA
The Gambia LADEP	( A )	+++	+++	NA	+	NA	+++
Burkina Faso CES/AGF	A/B	+++	NA	+	+	+	+
Ghana LACOSREP	A/B	+++	NA	+	++	++	+++
Sao Tome and Principe PNAPAF	B	++	+	+	++	++	++
Cape Verde PRODAP	B	+++	NA	+++	+	+	+
Mali PFDV Ségou	B	+	++	+	+	++	+++
Mauritania OASIS 2	B	+++	NA	+	+	+	+++
Mauritania MAGHAMA	B	+++	+	NA	+	NA	++
Nigeria SACDP Sokoto	B	++	++	+	++	++	++
Guinea PDPEF	B/C	+++	++	+	+	+	++
Gabon APG	B/C	NA	NA	+	++	+++	+
Niger PDRA	B/C	++	+	+	+	++	+
Ghana SCIMP	B/C	+	NA	+	+	+++	++
Chad PSANG	C	+	++	++	+	++	+++
Guinea PRAFD	C	+	++	+	+	++	++
Senegal PAGF	C	++	NA	+	+	++	+
Togo SOGVERS	( C )	+	++	+	+	+	++
Côte d'Ivoire PDRNE	C	NA	++	+	++	++	+
Côte d'Ivoire PNASA/IFAD	C	NA	NA	NA	++	+	++
Togo PNASA	( D )	NA	NA	+	+	NA	+
Gambia, The PSA	D	NA	NA	+	+	NA	+

- A:** Outcome in line with expectations for majority of agricultural development activities. Sustainability probable.
- B:** Outcome satisfactory in several spheres but fell short of expectations overall in terms of agricultural development. Sustainability questionable.
- C:** Outcome clearly short of expectations and/or unsustainable for majority of agricultural development activities.
- D:** Outcome very weak or not present.
- +++ : Main contribution to outcome; ++ : Secondary but significant contribution to outcome ; + : Minor or marginal contribution to outcome; NA: Activity not performed under the project
- Parentheses in the "Outcome" column indicate the project was not evaluated or is still at an early stage of implementation.



30. **Inability to move from on-station research to applied research with farmers.** This assertion raises the issue of the **role of research**, which has not been able to adapt its modus operandi to farmers' needs. In many cases, extension mechanisms have not been able to create conditions for constructive collaboration with research, e.g. in Niger (Aguié Rural Development Project (PDRA)) and in Guinea (Fouta Djallon Agricultural Rehabilitation Project (PRAFD) and Smallholder Development Project in the Forest Region (PDPEF)). In Mali, the PFDV also highlights the absence of linkage between extension and research. Experiments conducted there can be described more as rural 'multi-site demonstration tests' than development-research trials based on local analysis and attempts to devise appropriate responses by comparing farmers' know-how and practices with researchers' knowledge.

**Guinea, Smallholder Development Project in the Forest Region**

*The implementation strategy, which consisted initially of transferring information and technology by way of village auxiliaries and subsequently, starting in 1998, the almost total delegation of the 'agriculture and environment' components to the respective national structures (...), was not successful in attaining the stated objectives.(...) The project was linked to government technical offices on the basis of a borrower relationship rather than as a partner. The inability, especially of agricultural research services, to produce meaningful technical and economic guideposts that were adapted to the realities of forest Guinea's hillsides and farmers had a serious negative impact on the attainment of PDPEF's objectives. The private sector and various representatives of farmers' organizations (agricultural affairs office, coffee-growers federation, CAOPA) were not involved in any specific relationship.(...) The expected impact in terms of development of agricultural production has been weak overall because the bulk of local production comes from the hillsides, where virtually no significant action was undertaken in terms of food crops, cash crops or environment-enhancing crops,. The 'valley-bottom development' approach did contribute, however, to local improvement of rice production and supply to villages during difficult times.*

Interim Evaluation Report, July 2001

31. **Failure to observe local practices and innovations.** Most of the actions implemented under this approach stood out in particular because of their inability to observe conditions and developments in their respective rural settings. Since there was no ongoing, in-depth analysis of how well the proposed innovation responded to farmers' constraints, several projects disseminated themes for six or seven successive years without ever questioning the message's technical validity (PDRA-Aguié, PFDV-Ségou). Having locked their sights on the quantitative results programmed in the evaluation reports, these projects were even less able to observe farmers' many innovative practices, let alone attempt to analyse them with the farmers.

**Niger, Aguié Rural Development Project**

*The extension arrangements focused on setting up demonstration units for the purpose of providing villages with information on the technological themes and packages proposed by the project. (...) There is no tool for measuring with any reliability the impact of the PDRA's extension actions during its seven-year period. All indications are that the arrangements were ineffective as a result of the approach adopted: demonstration efforts that did not include dialogue with producers, and indifference towards their innovation strategies. The same concerns were raised by subsequent missions during the PDRA, but no one ever questioned the top-down extension structure adopted from the beginning. (...)*

*Too many projects continue to operate as if their objective is to spur passive rural populations into action, as they wait for solutions from the outside. However, experience has shown that, in Aguié as elsewhere, not only are farmers not remaining passive in the face of their problems but the most successful development interventions are the ones that have been able to tap into existing dynamics. What is needed, then, is an overhaul of approach strategies: discard the top-down approach to extension, tap into existing innovations and willingness to change, and engage in dialogue built on a dynamic of experimentation between farmers, researchers, and technical experts.*

Interim Evaluation Report, November 2000



## Inherent constraints of the extension methodology

32. **The top-down approach.** Many of the problems encountered by these programmes have to do with the underlying philosophy of the training and visit system used by extension services for so many years. Such an across-the-board approach in the framework of national extension programmes seems to have yielded a number of outcomes in the major cash crop sectors. All the necessary ingredients for agricultural development are there: credit, availability of inputs, marketing, relatively stable prices. The actual achievements, however, have been significantly less convincing in the areas targeted by IFAD's action. The development of semi-arid or isolated regions faces agricultural risks and economic outlooks that call for a broad diversification of activities. Extension based on the transfer of research-generated technical themes holds little interest for farmers unless those themes can be folded into the complexity of their production systems.

33. **Extension agents have weak technical and economic analysis skills.** Although subjected to regular training in the messages they are to convey, local extension agents are rarely in a position to conduct this kind of analysis and engage in reflection exercises together with farmers. At Maghama in Mauritania, the evaluation underscored that extension agents were not sufficiently equipped to analyse

**Mali, Village Development Fund Programme – Phase II**

*The recommended extension themes were not adopted by farmers. They are aware of them and can recite them during visits, but they have not implemented them. They have developed their own technical solutions that owe little to the proposed technological packages, except for the use of Apron+ to treat seeds.*

*The villages targeted during phase II saw no noticeable increase in yields or in per-person land surface. It appears that, after a period of outfitting and expansion in the late 1980s, a ceiling was reached and, lacking technological innovations, farm yields will stabilize to the extent that soil fertility remains stable.*

Completion Evaluation Report, February 1998

with farmers the technical, economic and organizational constraints of the production system in general or the flood-recession cultivation of sorghum and maize in particular. At the end of this phase, many farmers interviewed by the support mission reached the bitter conclusion that they had not in fact received any true support in terms of technical production advice. In Mali (PFDV), the technical skills of the DRAMR's extension agents, which were transferred under the project's agricultural development component, are viewed as weak and basically involve the application of cookie-cutter solutions. Generally speaking, there has been no attempt to establish a closer linkage between the technical recommendations and the farmers' knowledge under an approach that could be made sustainable through joint experimentation.

34. Several projects fell into the trap of **excessive compartmentalization of actions and services.** *“The proliferation of components and services not only did not make the project any more ‘integrated’ or ‘systemic’, but it had the exact opposite effect by exacerbating the risk of overcompartmentalization, atomization and, ultimately, inconsistency and ineffectiveness of the interventions, leading to a confusing mixture of ineffective messages and actions that were, on occasion, inappropriate or lacked any lasting impact on the milieu.”* (Guinea, PRAFD, Interim Evaluation.)

35. Other problems, too, have resulted from the way extension services are organized. Since these services are usually structured at the national level, it is hard for partner projects to pursue their specific objectives and adapt the ‘extension’ methodology to the local setting. In Chad, for instance, the Food Security Project in the Northern Guéra Region (PSANG) saw virtually all its extension agents reassigned to other districts precisely at the time they were becoming operational in terms of training delivered under the project.





36. **Difficulty of extension services in updating their technical messages.** The PFDV evaluation mission to Mali revealed that only four of the 13 themes disseminated through extension were adopted to a significant degree by farmers: treatment of seeds, conservation of seeds, internal and external deparasitization of livestock, and vaccination of poultry. Each of these instances involved innovations that were effective from a technical standpoint, easy to implement, did not generate significant extra work and had low associated costs. As for the other themes, it is surprising to note that, after nearly ten years of dissemination, some of them have not yielded any results. This raises doubts as to the innovative nature of the technologies that farmers are supposed to adopt, as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of the extension system. The conclusion to be drawn is that there was neither any deepening nor renewal of the technical themes disseminated for years, which raises the question of capacity to analyse the impact of extension arrangements and their flexibility. It also raises the question of the capacity of the project teams to engage in critical reflection on their work.

**Jean Coulibaly, President of AOPP\* Mali**

*"In Mali, we are farmers from birth. As early as age 8, we begin to acquire knowledge from our parents. By the time they reach adulthood, farmers have virtually the same experience as the development agents. But these agents care little about the farmers' knowledge and simply impose their theoretical approach to extension. The farmers – who are the sole masters and workers of their fields – listen patiently to these experts, wait for them to leave and then continue to work with their own cropping system.*

*New technologies are continuously brought in without the previous ones ever having been implemented."*

Address at the Ségou workshop of the Neuchatel Initiative, November 1998

\* Association des organisations professionnelles paysannes

37. **Unsustainability of extension arrangements.** Government extension services are often referred to as 'permanent structures' in contrast to the temporary arrangements set up under projects. In practice, however, government services are extremely dependent on external financing to cover needs in terms of motorcycles, vehicles, fuel and travel expenses of agents.<sup>6</sup> The long-term sustainability of such centralized systems is far from guaranteed, especially in the underprivileged areas targeted by IFAD.

### Efforts to adapt the extension system

38. Aware of the inadequacy of these approaches, several projects have attempted to improve them or have sometimes been able to develop a different relationship with farmers outside the conventional system, e.g. the Special Country Programme (PSN) in Illéla in Niger, the Sokoto State Agricultural and Community Development Project in Nigeria (SACDP), or the Community-Based Agricultural and Livestock Development Project (PRODAP) in Cape Verde.

39. For years, the officials that oversee national extension programmes have been working to overhaul the system's basic design by introducing more participatory stages. Even so, there is no denying that the relationship with farmers has remained essentially unchanged. The terminology used by the most recent generation of projects is especially enlightening in this regard. Some very recent supervision documents of the National Agricultural Research and Extension Programmes Support Project (PNVRA), Cameroon, mention *contact groups* and *interest in seeing the technology 'repeat rate' by contact groups go from 3 repeats per group to 8*. Interest has also been expressed in *identifying the many successful innovations and technologies in the rural world that thus far have been underfunded and underappreciated by the system*. To this end, there are plans to introduce a new programme geared towards fostering farmer innovation in Africa, building on the ISWC 2 approach. However, it has also been observed (and this is not new) that *a change in attitude of all agents throughout the extension structure is needed in order for local extension agents, technical experts and researchers to view farmers as equal partners from all standpoints and to view agricultural extension*

<sup>6</sup> The 1 160 motorcycles purchased for the National Agricultural Services Support Project (PNASA), Togo, and the 1 296 extension agents active in the project area of PNVRA, Cameroon, give an idea of the size of these extension structures at the national level.



*as a two-way street ...* This says quite a bit about the **inertia and resistance to change that characterizes most government extension structures.**

40. Some IFAD-supported projects have sought to develop, at the local level, other types of relationships with farmers, by working outside the extension structure to achieve better integration of farmers. Their efforts represent attempts to break free from the conventional approach to extension. Some projects have thus tried to improve local uptake of services by building alliances with ‘farmer-animators’. This new type of field agent has helped to simplify and streamline village extension networks in Nigeria and Ghana. At the same time, though, this practice will not have any noticeable impact on the dynamics of message adoption if it continues to be top-down. A disappointing development came when these ‘relay animators’ quickly identified with their colleagues in the government<sup>7</sup> and asked, legitimately so, for the same wage benefits.

41. These programmes have also often promoted farmer-to-farmer exchanges in such a way as to create direct contacts between producers from different regions or villages. An extreme example of this can be seen in the *Échanges Oasis-Oasis* in Mauritania, where the approach was built around the direct transfer of knowledge from farmers in Morocco for use by oasis farmers in Mauritania.

### **Conclusions with regard to conventional extension**

42. Generally speaking, these experiences highlight the difficulty of government extension services in adopting an approach of **advising** farmers and responding to their specific demands in accordance with their agricultural and economic constraints. The absence of an effective analysis of farmers’ strategies and practices (and of capacity and willingness to conduct such an analysis) all but prevent these approaches from operating in any other direction than top-down.

43. The extension activities were generally ineffective in terms of disseminating innovation. Exact data are unavailable on the amounts invested by the various financial partners who supported these arrangements for several decades, but there is general agreement that they were relatively ineffective.

44. In the few instances where simple, inexpensive, and truly effective innovations were fine-tuned by varietal research (cassava), experimentation/action-research (*tassa* in Niger, stone bunding in Burkina Faso) or by agrochemical firms (Apron+), the matter of dissemination was not addressed in terms of extension: either there was a problem with access to inputs (production of cassava shoots for improved varieties, supply of imported inputs) or the innovation required investment support (transport of rubble stone for stone bunding in Burkina Faso, *Euphorbia* in Senegal, lowlands development in The Gambia and Guinea), or dissemination occurred almost spontaneously (*tassa* in Niger).

#### **Niger, Special Country Programme /Illéla**

*The mechanisms used to disseminate technical innovations (the tassa) operate on their own, since there is no official extension system. They rely on direct exchanges between farmers and on the principle of lending specialized labour to interested farmers. It is thus necessary to design systems (...) that can dovetail with self-dissemination efforts rather than inhibit them under the widespread top-down approaches.*

SPA Evaluation Report, case study, 1997

45. Lastly, beyond these strictly economic criteria, the unsustainability of conventional extension arrangements and their incompatibility with the processes of decentralization and rural organization currently under way in western and central Africa point to the need to **rethink entirely the issue of support for agricultural services.**

<sup>7</sup> As was underscored in the evaluation of PRODAP (Cape Verde).



## B. Innovative Experiences

46. These experiences are presented as examples of initiatives built on radically different bases that seek to overcome the constraints of existing extension arrangements. They provide a picture, on the one hand, of **different institutional arrangements** – generally more decentralized to NGOs and farmers’ organizations – but also of **different approaches** that assign an important role to strengthening autonomous management by local actors and tapping farmers’ capacity for innovation and self-dissemination. This framework is found in four of the 13 innovative IFAD experiences that were analysed.

47. These innovative approaches can be arranged into four groups, each one focusing on a specific concern to be borne in mind when implementing arrangements to support agricultural development:

- Involvement of beneficiaries in decisions on financing for agricultural support.
- Focus on enhancing production changes (upstream-production-marketing).
- Research and support for farmers’ innovations.
- Capacity-building for stronger autonomous management by farmers’ organizations.

A fifth kind of experience would be the benchmark situations in which farmers’ organizations have acquired and exercise autonomous management of their activities.

48. **Involvement of farmers’ organizations in defining thrusts and managing development actions.** Two experiences from Mali come to mind: the Sahelian Areas Development Fund Programme (FODESA), which is an IFAD intervention, and the *Fonds d’investissement local* (FIL) Sikasso, which is an older experience involving decentralized management of a local development fund. Based on the latter, the Sahelian Areas Development Fund Programme (FODESA) displays some new features of IFAD intervention and shows the kind of significant progress that is possible. First, implementation is handled entirely by the National Association for Economic Development of the Sahel Region in Mali and the regional associations, which are made up primarily of farmers’ organization representatives. The programme sought to implement flexible, demand-driven financing mechanisms, and to assign full responsibility to the target groups for designing and implementing their microprojects. What remains to be seen is how the agricultural advisory services and support for innovation will be handled, i.e. how will these services be organized and delivered if farmers express a demand (knowing that, under the FIL project, this function was performed by an associated project for local land and resource management [*gestion des terroirs*]).

49. **Identification of improved local technologies** and support for farmer innovation processes that play a key role in securitizing rainfed production and disseminating this innovation among local farmers. Four experiences (VIPAF-Aguié in Niger, Yerenyeton/SAFADR and *Champs Écoles* in San in Mali, ISWC 2 in Burkina Faso and Cameroon) – two of them financed by IFAD technical-assistance grants – were able to draw lessons from large-scale extension programmes. They took as their starting point the observation that the successful innovations were the ones built on dynamics already in place among the population. Since farmer innovations are commonplace in most rural areas, it is just a matter of bringing technical experts, farmers and researchers together in order to deepen technical dialogue and thus enhance or design innovations suited to local circumstances. These experiences also show that true innovations are disseminated virtually spontaneously from farmer to farmer. Other dissemination mechanisms are thus possible, provided they are based on arrangements that are appropriate, high-performing, less costly, and easier to sustain than the classic extension apparatus.



50. **Sector-specific initiatives.** IFAD has recently developed a number of approaches targeted at specific food-crop sectors with an eye to eliminating constraints on supply, processing and marketing, namely in the roots and tubers projects of Benin, Ghana and Nigeria. The originality of these experiences, which are still in their initial stages, lies in intervening simultaneously at different points of the production cycle for commodity items that are crucial to agricultural development in the project area. One of the main benefits of these programmes is that they have brought true technical innovations, such as varietals and biological control strategies, thanks to a major investment in research that IFAD has supported for the past 15 years.

51. **Support for autonomous management by farmers' organizations.** Four experiences illustrate the interventions pursued in this sphere: SERACOM-Soum in Burkina Faso and PGR-Koutiala, PASPE and URDOC-PCPS in Mali. These are not IFAD projects but rather are supported by bilateral cooperation and, thus, seek to support an array of functions shared by different types of farmer organizations: village associations, cooperatives and agricultural affairs offices. The programmes have light support structures that bring technical skills to these organizations in such areas of expertise as bookkeeping, supplies, water management and agricultural advisory services, and training and health advice for livestock farmers.

52. **Ownership by farmers' organizations and building direct partnerships with research institutes.** In many countries of western and central Africa, experiences of this type have spread significantly over the past years. Two of them in particular illustrate this type of intervention, where farmers' organizations have built capacity for guidance, management and financing: the Boundoum Union of Farmers' Organizations in Senegal and the Fouta Djallon Federation in Guinea. The latter experience is interesting in that it was initiated by an agricultural development project in an isolated rural area. The project has been able to develop new production chains and grow itself into a farmers' organization that today provides support and advice for its members, acting as a service cooperative (supply of inputs, farm credit, marketing), negotiating for storage structures, advocating farmers' interests, and providing training and technical support for producers in different subsectors. These two experiences show that farmers' organizations can acquire genuine capacity for autonomous management of an area's agricultural development and can provide support and advice to their members.

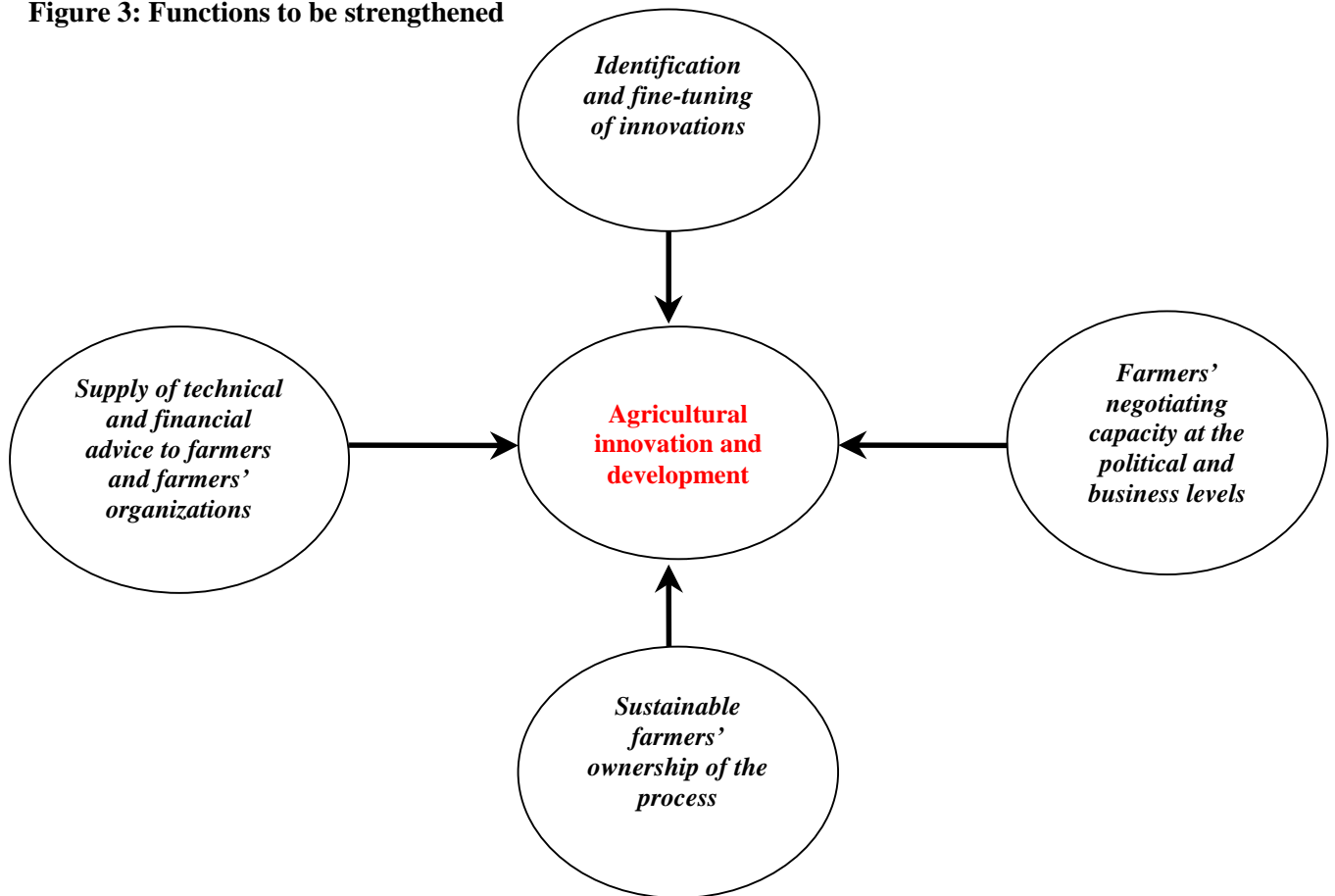
53. All these approaches can be viewed as alternatives to the classic technology-transfer structure. Programmes of this type hold promise for IFAD, but they are still conducted on a pilot scale or often they are still too recent to yield meaningful lessons. They explore new approaches that seek to give farmers a central role in identifying priorities and innovations by placing them in direct contact with technical experts and researchers who are likely to support them and their initiatives.

54. From this review, it can be seen that there are **four fundamental, priority and complementary axes** of intervention that should be strengthened in efforts targeted at supporting local innovations and advisory services for farmers:

- the identification and fine-tuning of innovations suited to local agricultural conditions. This action-research should be conducted locally on the basis of farmers' own innovations, which should first be observed and understood, and it should tap farmers' endogenous capacity for experimentation. Facilitation should be the operative methodology. Scientific research should be driven by farmers' initiatives and demand.
- technical and financial advisory services for farmers.
- sustainable farmers' ownership of the process.
- negotiation among all stakeholders.



**Figure 3: Functions to be strengthened**



55. The first three elements are core functions that should be performed by the service providers and institutions under the supervision of the farmers' organizations. The last point focuses on the ongoing process of negotiation that must be undertaken among the various actors in the agricultural development sphere.

56. One question remains: how to implement effectively a series of concepts and approaches that have often been developed and tested in very localized settings, most of the time by NGOs or action-research programmes. This is the crucial challenge facing future interventions. Given the size of most of its interventions, which are generally at the local or regional level, IFAD is uniquely placed to scale up successful innovative experiences.

57. In light of these promising prospects, IFAD needs to redefine its intervention strategy and procedures while bearing in mind the specificities of its loans but also adapting its intervention procedures to these new objectives (especially in terms of partnerships, monitoring, methodological tracking, scale, adaptation during implementation, etc.).



## IV. SOME INITIAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Identification of Appropriate Innovations and Support for Processes of Innovation

58. **Close the gap in appropriate technical innovations:**

- The top-down technology-transfer approach is unable to meet the innovation needs of settings that are as diversified, complex and high-risk as those in which IFAD works in western and central Africa.
- Project inertia needs to be overcome in order to keep pace with the changes under way in the rural milieu.
- Farmer innovation is a complex process that is often the result of a few innovative individuals who should be identified early on.

59. **Launch a true debate on the innovations to be disseminated:**

- There is a lack of dialogue between the programmes that are responsible for disseminating technical themes and the rural communities that are supposed to adopt them.
- Discussion among farmers, technical experts and researchers is essential in order to make innovation efforts more effective and to fine-tune the conditions for applying outcomes. For this to happen, the stakeholders need to change their attitude, both as individuals and through institutional contexts and cultures. If behaviours are to change, institutions have to change, as does the relationship between service providers and farmers.

60. **Construct technical benchmarks that are appropriate for each intervention:**

- Project teams do not conduct follow-up analyses with other stakeholders vis-à-vis intervention contexts and farmer practices and strategies. **Significant shortfall in terms of observation and diagnostic analysis.**
- Projects should begin by constructing technical benchmarks for intervention, based on an analysis of existing forces and opportunities.

61. **Establish linkages between research, projects and farmers' organizations:**

- On-station trials and surveys are usually not discussed in advance with the actors concerned and outcomes are rarely discussed with them.
- Research should be included at the design stage of projects, and contractual relationships should be established between farmers' organizations and research institutes. Action-research arrangements should be monitored and overseen by farmers' organizations.
- Socio-economic research should be conducted in order to benefit from locally generated innovations.
- An attempt should be made to understand why farmers adopt or reject the technologies.

62. **Invest in the development of subsectors:** special attention should be given to identifying subsectors that could become points of entry for technical or organizational innovations.



63. **Associate research on technical innovation with a process of social and organizational innovation.** Dismantle the artificial, meaningless distinctions between ‘agricultural’ components and components to ‘strengthen farmers’ organizations’.

## **B. Technical and Financial Advice for Farmers and Farmers’ Organizations**

### **64. Impasse reached by conventional extension approaches and structures**

- In the areas where IFAD normally works, extension is generally ill adapted, ineffective and inefficient. The emergence of standard technologies that lend themselves to mass dissemination is a rarity. In some instances, extension can be a useful and justifiable function of a ‘campaign’ type approach but, generally speaking, it does not justify the existence of a permanent institutional structure.
- Other approaches should be explored for providing advice to farmers (e.g. innovative approaches to support autonomous management of advisory services by farmers’ organizations) so as to ensure a supply of services that are more versatile, better targeted, better quality and less costly. In poor regions that are isolated from markets, these services should be subsidized. This does not mean, however, that they should be provided by the government.
- The starting point should be a situation analysis – conducted with stakeholders – of the outcomes and impacts of previous extension experiences.

### **65. Technical legitimacy and profile of advisers**

- The function of agricultural adviser requires a high level of multidisciplinary skills. ‘Advice’ cannot be limited to technical aspects but should take full account of economic, social and organizational considerations as well. The adviser should also be able to analyse farming systems. This is a full-time job.
- In the field, there is a marked lack of human resources with this profile. Governmental and private service providers should give priority to the quality rather than quantity of these advisers. A training effort (support for public or private supply) is needed but must be accompanied by better allocation of existing resources. Too many engineers and high-level technicians are assigned to administrative management functions or to on-station research.
- The concept of ‘coverage rate’ of villages and farms in terms of mass dissemination does not apply to advisory services, which must respond to demand issuing from and relayed by farmers’ organizations and local communities.
- A veritable cultural revolution is needed if we are to move from ‘extension/technology transfer’ to ‘support for innovation/advice’. To be turned to full advantage, advisers’ skills must also be guided and managed by the farmers’ organizations.

### **66. Role and function of advisers**

- Facilitate the work of elected officials and professionals within development structures.
- Compile, enrich and continuously update criteria for technical, economic and social benchmarks that are useful for development in the respective areas.
- Mobilize, relaunch and track the contributions of research in order to benefit from them and recentre them on the operational expectations of producer organizations.



**67. Exchanges between farmers and between farmers' organizations are an effective and efficient means of disseminating innovations**

- Be familiar with and draw fully on informal mechanisms of farmer dissemination.
- There is considerable potential in this sphere: exchange visits, agricultural fairs and competitions, regional fora, rural radio stations.

68. In order to enhance the function of technical and economic advice for producers, it will be necessary to stop investing in top-down systems of mass extension. **As a prerequisite, a process of consensus-building and negotiation must be launched that genuinely involves producers and their organizations in the designing of advisory services, monitoring of their execution and evaluation of their outcomes and impacts.**

**C. Sustainable Farmers' Ownership of the Process**

69. **Symbolic participation in the partnership with farmers' organizations.** The great majority of IFAD-financed projects in western and central Africa have sought to 'build capacity' among rural residents and strengthen grass-roots groups. This virtually systematic thrust stands in sharp contrast to the very weak partnerships, dialogue or even awareness of the existence of several professional agricultural organizations at the local, regional or national level in the target region. Most projects pursue relationships that are strictly bilateral and often paternalistic with grass-roots groups and associations, without promoting or encouraging their restructuring into unions or federations.

**Jean Coulibaly, President of AOPP, Mali**

*"Rather than have a service that tries to take care of everything, farmers would like to work with different development agents and for their organizations to have authority to assign tasks among these services (...) Farmers in Mali want to be involved in decision-making and paying for extension services. For extension to meet a farmer's needs, he needs to be there during decision-making and during management of finances. Technical experts have to understand that the farmers are in charge.*

Address at the Ségou workshop of the Neuchatel Initiative, November 1998

**70. Projects are excessively interventionist and they marginalize villagers' contribution and initiative:**

- A deep-seated change of attitude is needed vis-à-vis the target population.
- A true partnership should be set up between the various stakeholders in these programmes: farmers' organizations, NGO service providers, project management units, cooperating institutions, financiers.

**71. Invest in training for farm-community leaders to exercise their responsibilities**

- An effort must be made far beyond functional literacy and basic bookkeeping.
- **Training of farm-community leaders** is a key challenge facing policies to decentralize the advisory function to farmers' organizations.
- Projects should include a training policy and work with specialized training agencies, outside the project's internal training activities so as to ensure long-term sustainability of the function.





72. **Equip teams with the means and confidence to update approaches**

- Some projects have been unable to adjust to constraints encountered on the ground. Means should be made available to pursue alternative avenues, to completely overhaul the structure and approach to take account of realities in the field: the monitoring and evaluation function is often ineffective in such projects, and there is no true dialogue with stakeholders. Annual meetings should be organized to discuss outcomes and impacts with farmer representatives, development agents, researchers and local politicians.
- Arrangements should be designed and instituted to provide technical and methodological follow-up of projects.

73. The matter of **the sustainability of advisory services** was not addressed in any of the projects studied. The present study has neither the intent nor the means to propose solutions to this institutional/financial problem, however two conclusions can be drawn:

- Government funding should be maintained so that small producers in poor or marginal regions can enjoy access to quality services. This financing and related subsidies should however find new channels.
- **Farmers should contribute directly to financing these services**, even if in many cases these will only be token contributions.

74. **IFAD should engage in reflection and policy dialogue** on the basis of interventions under way to support farmers' organizations. It should also participate in debate on these topics with farmers' organizations, governments and financiers. Regional consultations under the Research-Extension-Farmers' Organization Partnership and the Neuchatel Group are useful frameworks in this regard.

75. IFAD should assist the State in redefining its functions to support autonomous management by farmers' organizations, given the institutional resistance to policies on decentralization and the professionalization of farmers' organizations:

- Problems with implementing the State's 'new functions'. IFAD should plan actions to support government services in such areas as regional development thrust, coordination of interventions, enforcement and monitoring of agricultural policy (markets and pricing, health regulations, trade issues, etc.).

76. **Control and financing of advisory services by farmers' organizations is a core objective:**

- Make adjustments for specific situations in order to help mobilize ineffective local organizations.
- Avoid undermining their autonomy through support that is too systematic or exhaustive when they are already active and dynamic.
- Support the formulation of viable development strategies for these organizations, especially in terms of financial authority over advisory services.

77. **New policies and structures are needed in the area of supply of inputs**, which faces critical situations in most of IFAD's project areas in western and central Africa.



#### D. Negotiation and Partnership

78. Given the complexity and variety of development issues to be addressed, consultation is indispensable. In point of fact, each given objective represents a different set of challengers for different actors. In the following cases, consultation would seem particularly essential:

- Between the State and financiers: who wants to take action, where, using what means, offering or acting on what advice?
- Among farmers' organizations, the State (central and local governments) and financiers (or those with financial management authority): in whose interest are the advisory services provided? What are the financial commitments of the various parties?
- Among farmers' organizations (demand for service) and service providers (supply): on what conditions and terms will the advisory services be delivered?

79. Negotiation is crucial to the success of the process of agricultural advisory services that will be launched and monitored. If farmers' organizations are to take charge of these three key functions, their **negotiating capacity** will need to be strengthened considerably vis-à-vis:

- the State, to implement agricultural policy,
- actors in product subsectors, to secure better marketing and supply arrangements,
- researchers, to define and track research being conducted,
- technical experts, tasked with the advisory services by the farmers' organizations,
- financiers, to negotiate additional financing,
- local governments and among the farmers' organizations themselves.

#### V. COMPARISON WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE NEUCHATEL INITIATIVE

80. Since 1995, the Neuchatel Initiative has brought together, on an informal basis, cooperation agencies, bilateral and multilateral institutions, and international lenders to discuss the issue of agricultural extension services in sub-Saharan Africa. The group has published a number of brochures proposing a **common framework for intervention** and is currently examining the financing of agricultural advisory services and extension services for poverty alleviation.

81. Table 3, below, compares IFAD's convergence with the so-called "Neuchatel principles" in its past practice as reviewed herein and what could be its future practice, according to the recommendations of this report.

82. The main **gap** between IFAD's observed practices and the Neuchatel principles lies probably in the **level of confidence in the ability of farmers' organizations to be full partners with official development aid and those responsible for action in the field**. Many bilateral and international agencies are now seeing in the field that producers are defining advisory services and deciding on their content, and managing human and financial resources, with support from NGOs but also from cooperative officials. **Governments' stated policies are also now increasingly favorable to this redefinition of roles and responsibilities.**

83. IFAD will be able to adopt these principles if it creates the means to observe and acknowledge experiences that hold the most potential for the future. Once convinced itself, IFAD will be better positioned to convince its partners through policy dialogue based on these specific experiences. These thrusts pose however a **number of challenges for IFAD in terms of operating procedures and especially its weak presence in the field**. The strategic reflections currently under way and the subsequent stages of this thematic evaluation should enrich the conditions for implementation of the general principles as set forth here.



**Table 3: Comparison with the Neuchatel Principles**

General principles of the Neuchatel Initiative	Convergence/divergence with IFAD practice in the 1990s	Convergence/divergence with proposals for future IFAD action
<p><i>A sound agricultural policy is indispensable.</i> <i>The impact of the broader setting has rarely been taken into account when evaluating the effectiveness of reforms to extension systems.</i></p>	<p>In most of the cases studied, IFAD's interventions were "subjected to" government policies, such as the agricultural sector adjustment programmes and country programmes for agricultural services, with little capacity to influence them. More attention is now given to 'policy dialogue'.</p>	<p>The principles of partnership and 'negotiation' should make it possible to contribute to policy formulation. IFAD has a slight advantage given its specific mandate and its status as an international financing institution, but also because of its contacts on the ground through projects and, thus, its mediation capacity. Possible support for participation by farmers' organizations in defining national policies. The Fund's largest handicap is its weak presence in the countries.</p>
<p><i>Extension consists of 'facilitation' as much if not more than 'technology transfer'</i></p>	<p>On paper, IFAD seems to be in accord with this principle, especially through its efforts to 'build local capacity' and its interest in 'indigenous technologies'. In practice, however, there are very few applications in terms of support for innovation, except for pilot experiences funded out of grant resources (e.g. VIPAF).</p>	<p>There is a misunderstanding of the term 'extension', which is functionally opposed to 'facilitation' and not suited to IFAD's areas of intervention. To resolve this ambiguity and assume a commitment to facilitation, advisory services and support for farmer innovation, IFAD should acknowledge the principle of 'ownership by farmers' and adjust projects' institutional and financial arrangements accordingly.</p>
<p><i>Producers are clients, sponsors and stakeholders, rather than beneficiaries of agricultural extension.</i></p>	<p>Aside from general discourse on 'participation', these principles have not yet been incorporated into projects under way. The recent trend, however, is in this direction as witnessed by the increased presence of 'development funds'.</p>	<p>Acknowledging producers as clients and sponsors of advisory services, support for innovation and research means having components that are not managed by the government and funds that are administered by the farmers' organizations. Services financed by 'development funds' and managed/controlled by farmers' organizations should be expanded to the sphere of agricultural innovation.</p>
<p><i>Pluralism and decentralized activities require coordination and dialogue between actors.</i> <i>The diversity of the context, services and forms of advice call for a variety of financing mechanisms.</i></p>	<p>Agreement on these general principles has long existed. Practical interpretation, however, has been limited to initial project design, especially in terms of the search for cofinancing with a limited number of major financiers. In the field, there is little dialogue/coordination between actors and projects.</p>	<p>In full accordance with the proposed strategy: complexity, diversity of situations =&gt; principles of partnership, negotiation and understanding by actors. Cofinancing should be developed especially with the economic actors in the countries: subsector production chains and farmers' organizations.</p>
<p><i>To define a financing mechanism, it is necessary to first establish "who benefits from rural and agricultural advisory services?", through dialogue with all stakeholders =&gt; analysis of public vs. private services.</i></p>	<p>IFAD has not had to define any such mechanism because it has followed the public-sector extension arrangements. Negotiations have been of little use and financing was always channeled through the central government (line ministry).</p>	<p>Concept that is new but should lead in the medium term to an approach built on support for the capacity of farmers' organizations to negotiate and assume responsibilities in taking charge of agricultural and rural advice in poor and marginal regions. Negotiation for a government support policy.</p>
<p><i>Financing mechanisms should allow producers to position themselves vis-à-vis the different advisory service arrangements (plurality of supply).</i></p>	<p>Producers are most often viewed as passive consumers of technical supply. Financing has always supported this sole supply rather than demand.</p>	<p>Steps should be taken in advance to ensure that line ministries accept the principles of financing demand and negotiated participation of farmers.</p>
<p><i>It is not enough to provide financing for rural and agricultural advisory services: other functions must also be performed in order to ensure the services' quality and sustainability.</i></p>	<p>There have been some recent projects concerned with the relationship between producers and research. But few operations have included arrangements for training, support for the private sector, or demand-driven technical assistance.</p>	<p>There is much work to be done to create conditions for institutional and financial sustainability of agricultural advisory arrangements. Conditions to support the supply of public and private training services. Impact on sustainability unlikely to be felt sooner than 20 years hence in poor regions.</p>