

For more information

Optimising the impact of development projects: Why and how to promote transversal capitalization?

Operational insights from the DISSEM-INN project experience

KEY MESSAGES

Faced with the global challenges of climate change and food security, research and development projects are multiplying, but without provision for transversal capitalization to produce an overview of their practices and draw lessons from them.

✓ However, transversal capitalization can help to identify ways of increasing the impact of current initiatives and improving the design and implementation of future ones.

✓ Decision-makers therefore have every interest in promoting this type of initiative, especially as they have the necessary financial capacity, decision-making power and influence to do so.

✓ This promotion requires making transversal capitalization a criterion for project funding, with follow-up provided by institutional entities responsible for driving these dynamics within the bodies managing portfolios of projects (donors, States, regional organizations, research and development institutes, etc.).

Transversal capitalization consists in **transforming the experiences of a number of initiatives** taking place in localized contexts into **knowledge that is useful and beneficial for a wider body of stakeholders**. This is the mission pursued by the DISSEM-INN project on a set of eight agricultural action-research projects launched by the European DeSIRA initiative in the Sahel. The process implemented by DISSEM-INN (see **methodological note**) and the results obtained (see **publications**) have brought out an advocacy in favour of other initiatives of the same type.

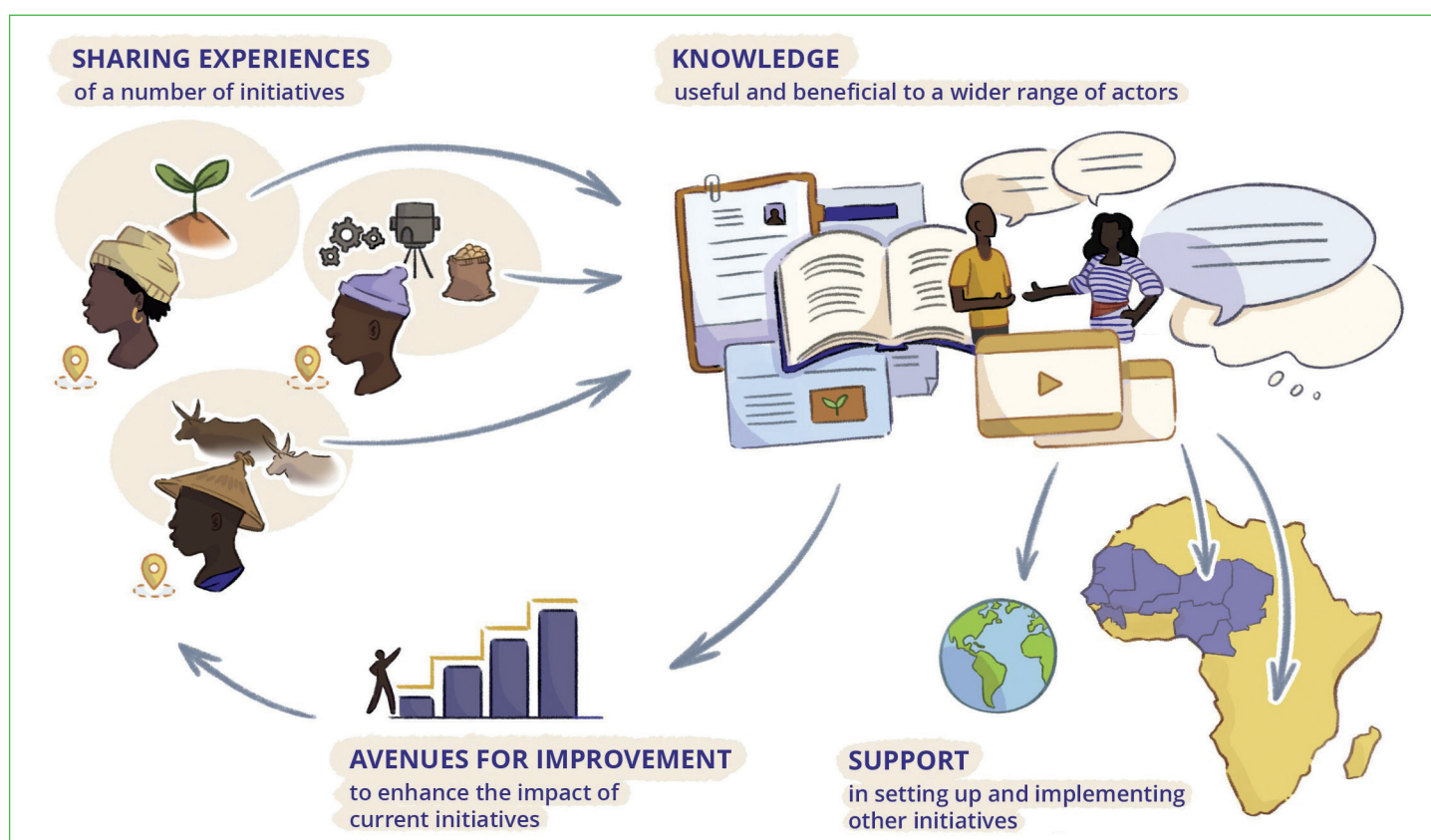
WHY PROMOTE TRANSVERSAL CAPITALIZATION?

DISSEM-INN has established a relationship of mutual trust with the projects, which has given rise to a community of practice. The activities carried out within the framework of this community have generated **collective learning that brings added value that individual projects would not have been able to provide:**

- on the impact factors of their research approach (co-construction; multi-actor approach; multidimensionality of innovations);

- on solutions that can be mobilized to meet the challenges encountered in relation to their approach and context of intervention;
- on actions to be taken to ensure the long-term viability of their interventions and to change their scale.

Transversal capitalization helps to **identify ways of increasing the impact of initiatives**, both in the present, to serve those directly concerned by the process, and in the future, to support the development of forthcoming initiatives. On the one hand, this involves **strengthening the capacities of the initiatives** concerned. Through their participation in this process, the DeSIRA projects have developed a reflexivity both in terms of their innovative approach, which has enabled them to consolidate their research approach through better formalization and coherence of the activities they were carrying out, and in terms of the sustainability and scaling-up of their innovations. The analytical framework developed by DISSEM-INN on these issues helped them to better grasp the different aspects that their innovations could take on, facilitating their storytelling and thus better promoting their achievements, as well as identifying points on which to focus efforts and avenues for following up the results obtained.



• By transforming this transversal knowledge into operational insights, DISSEM-INN is demonstrating that transversal capitalization can also be used to guide decision-making, particularly with regard to the design and planning of future interventions (see Policy briefs n°1 and n°3).

HOW TO PROMOTE TRANSVERSAL CAPITALIZATION?

Transversal capitalization requires, first and foremost, **dedicated resources** to collect, analyse, synthesize and disseminate project learnings. In fact, DISSEM-INN was mainly able to implement all these activities because of the budget and human resources available to the project.

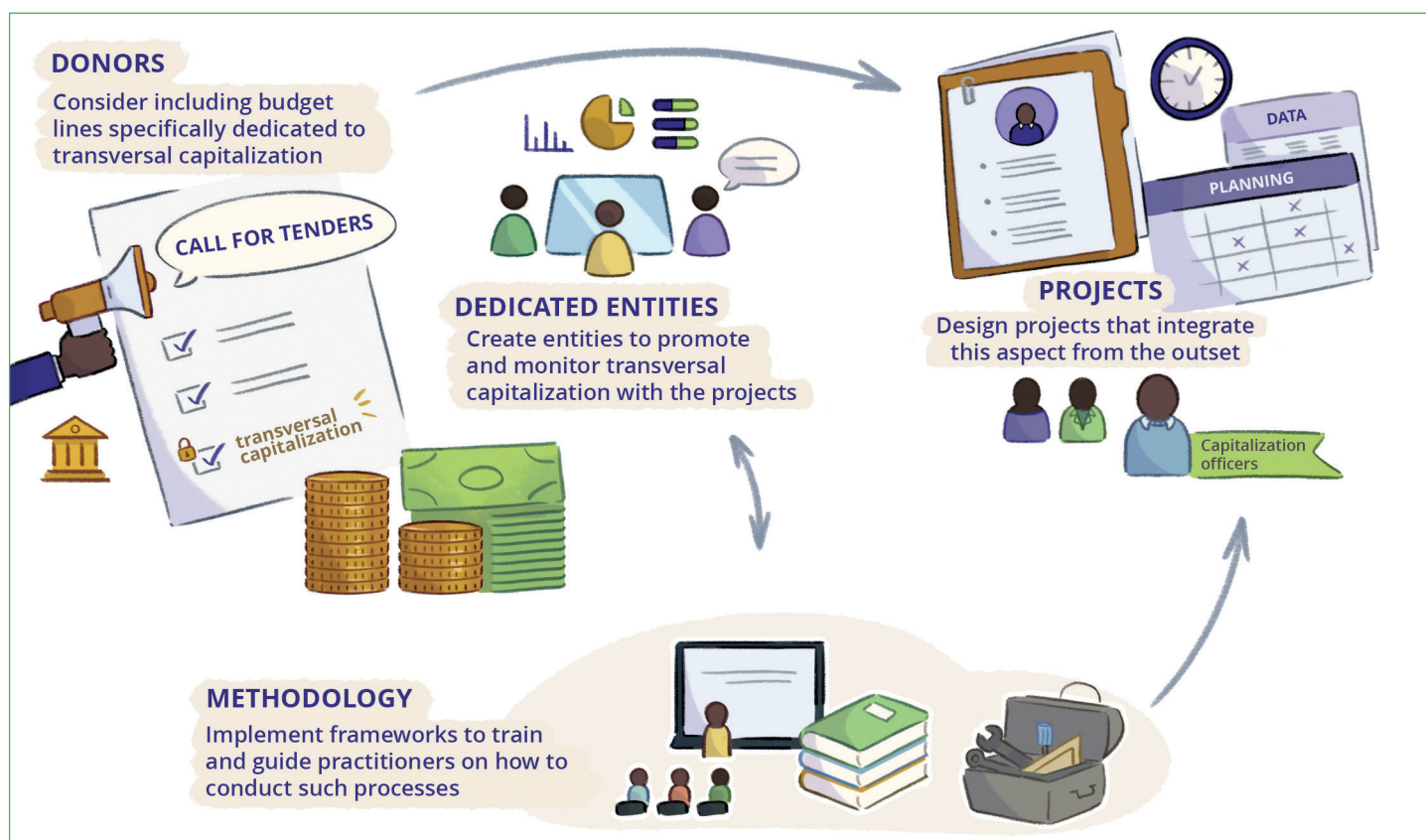
Thus, the inclusion by donors of budget lines specifically dedicated to transversal capitalization as part of their funding would enable it to be integrated right from the design stage of projects and monitored throughout their implementation. In this way, **transversal capitalization could also become a criterion for project funding within the framework of calls for tender, in the form of conditionality**. This system could be applied to any bodies in charge of projects, so that they would have a strong incentive to set up this type of process, by applying it to sets of projects with sufficiently common characteristics to guarantee its usefulness.

To ensure this inclusion of transversal capitalization **in project budgets**, the entities in charge of sets of projects could **establish dedicated bodies** or control

units, positioned at a central level, for example within ministerial research departments or sub-regional structures such as ECOWAS, CILSS or CORAF. These institutionalized structures would also be tasked with **organizing projects according to coherent criteria** (themes, budgets, countries), in order to **create relevant exchange frameworks for transversal capitalization**, financed by the dedicated budget share available to their participants. They could also set up digital platforms to centralize the knowledge produced and make it accessible as and when knowledge develops.

However, transversal capitalization cannot be deployed in practice without **the development of methodological frameworks and approaches** to guide those involved in carrying out such processes. Promoting transversal capitalization therefore requires **systematizing reflexivity on one's own practices**.

DISSEM-INN undertook this reflexive effort, which revealed, on the one hand, that the process it had carried out had given rise to **a new frame of reference** among all the DeSIRA project representatives who had participated in its activities, both in terms of **how to achieve transversal capitalization** and in terms of its conceptual results. On the other hand, DISSEM-INN's methodological approach, characterized by co-design and adjustment "as we go", was flexible enough to be adapted and replicated in other contexts. The result was **the production of pedagogical tools**, such as the methodological note drafted for this purpose, in anticipation that it could give rise to a manual and/or online resource.



WHO SHOULD PROMOTE TRANSVERSAL CAPITALIZATION?

Since “guiding decision-making” is one of the main functions of the results obtained through transversal capitalization, it is in the interest of all decision-makers responsible for deciding on the direction of future initiatives to promote this type of process. This would enable them to improve their interventions on a regular basis, by drawing systematically on the experience acquired. These decision-makers are found in all agencies with responsibility for managing project packages: donors, governments, research and development organizations, regional bodies, and so on.

The involvement of decision-makers is essential, as they are the ones who have primarily control over available funding, or at least the capacity to mobilize it, and therefore the decision-making power to allocate part of it to transversal capitalization initiatives. By virtue of this same power, they also have the room for manoeuvre to create an institutional environment conducive to transversal capitalization, by establishing the latter as a criterion for project funding and setting up supervisory bodies to ensure its implementation. Lastly, their stature gives them the ability to influence project constituents, which they can use to raise awareness about the benefits of transversal capitalization, and equip them to put it into practice.

ABOUT

Funded by AFD and coordinated by Cirad, the “Dissemination of innovations in the Sahel region” project (DISSEM-INN) capitalizes on a set of eight projects launched as part of the European DeSIRA initiative and taking place in the Sahel. These projects help develop innovations to make agri-food systems sustainable and resilient to climate change.

As part of its final synthesis workshop (September 2024), DISSEM-INN shared the main findings of its work on sustainability, scaling and transversal capitalisation with a broader set of stakeholders in agricultural research and development in West Africa. This policy brief is based on the results of that workshop.

This Policy brief is based on the results of this workshop.

Policy Brief n° 1

Presents ways to meet the challenges of agricultural action-research in the Sahel



VERSION EN



VERSION FR



Policy Brief n° 2

Presents ways to meet the challenges of the national agricultural innovation system in Senegal



VERSION EN



VERSION FR



Policy Brief n° 3

Presents pathways for the sustainability and scaling of agricultural innovations in the Sahel



VERSION EN



VERSION FR



Policy Brief n° 5

Presents ways of optimising the impact of development projects by anticipating sustainability and scaling



VERSION EN



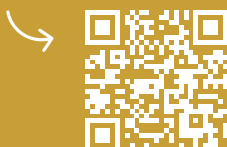
VERSION FR



Source

Synthesis workshop Report, *Bilan d'une capitalisation au Sahel pour développer des innovations de façon pérenne et penser leur changement d'échelle*, DISSEM-INN project 2024.

To be accessed through this QR code.



AUTHORS

Robin BOURGEOIS, DISSEM-INN Project Leader
robin.bourgeois@cirad.fr
Chloé LESENFANS, Consultant for the DISSEM-INN project
ext-chloe.lesenfans@cirad.fr



Photo credit : see the Report of the regional exchange workshop, p. 125

