



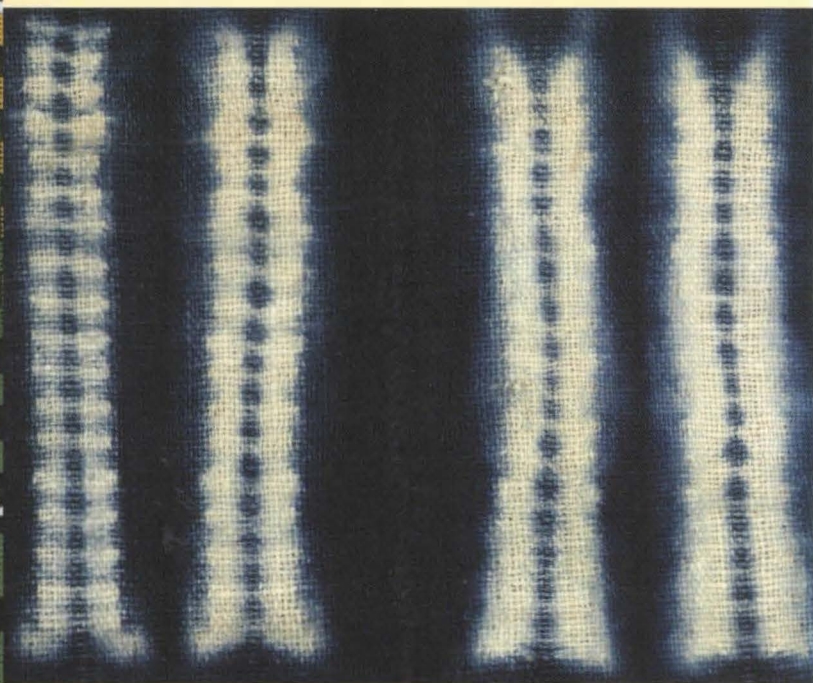
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DÉVELOPPEMENT RURAL

Franco-British-West African research and policy initiatives in West Africa



Relevance to rural development policies

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need to be actively involved, an enlarged and active steering committee needs to be established to provide strategic advice to the network, and there needs to be a sustained financial commitment.

In a globalised economy, it is important that actors are aware of what other countries are doing in a sub-sector, as isolation undermines the competitive position of producers. However, the extent to which this is a regional rather than a national policy issue is debatable: cocoa producers compete within the region and may have difficulty in agreeing common objectives.

Other important issues include:

- European development agencies have a poor record on funding capacity building for management systems and research networks; and
- it is important to establish stronger links between research and policy discourse. Research programmes with less ambitious aims and tighter deadlines can provide more manageable, relevant and timely inputs into decision-making processes, and that have greater influence on policy.

Establishing policy networks is a complex task which requires a flexible, iterative approach.

Remaining questions include:

- how best can producers be involved?
- what added-value is there in taking a regional approach?
- What type and degree of donor funding is required to support the establishment of an effective network? Is it affordable?

Success ultimately depends on donor commitment to support lengthy processes of negotiation and on the fundamental commitment of West African countries themselves.

Establishing policy networks is a complex task which requires a flexible, iterative approach. The challenge of institutional complexity often overshadows core research objectives. Success ultimately depends on donor commitment to support lengthy processes of negotiation between various stakeholders, and on the fundamental commitment of West African countries themselves: without national ownership, there can not be any long term sustainability.

Study 3: Research-extension-farmers' organisation linkages¹⁰

(Pierre-Marie Bosc, CIRAD-Tera, Karim Hussein, ODI and Jean Zoundi, INERA, Burkina Faso)

Overview

This study in West and Central Africa was carried out within the framework of the CORAF Initiative, with support from MAE,

¹⁰ Copies of the full research summary distributed at the workshop are available from ODI and further publications from the organisations referenced in Appendix 1 (p. 73).

DFID and the EU. Field studies were carried out in Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, The Gambia and Burkina Faso by the ODI/CIRAD/CORAF team. A sixth study was carried out in Nigeria by a consultant commissioned by DFID, using the same analytical framework.

Farmers' organisations can play an important role in supporting their members' livelihoods where they are: representative; federated at a level higher than the village; legally and formally accepted by government; and members have in common a profitable economic activity or the production of a key commodity.

Farmers' organisations can play an important role in defending their members' interests where they are: representative; federated at a level higher than the village; legally and formally accepted by government; and members have in common a profitable economic activity or the production of a key commodity. However, it is also important for there to be a favourable political, legislative, institutional and macro-economic context if strong linkages between farmers' organisations, agricultural research and extension organisations are to develop. In addition, there is a need for:

- a continued policy of decentralising national agricultural research institutes;
- material incentives for researchers to engage in participatory research and dialogue with farmers' organisations; and
- establishing consultative frameworks that are more representative of farmers' organisations (not solely involving private farmers).

Lastly, it is crucial for farmers' organisations' technical capacities and resources to be strengthened if they are to be able to articulate their needs and demands to agricultural service providers more effectively.

Aims and objectives

The programme aimed to address a number of well-established research issues in the light of the following social, political and economic developments in West Africa:

- technological innovation and its appropriation by producers;
- the crisis of research and extension systems and their financing; and
- the emergence of new development actors and the quest to identify their roles.

The programme merged the research interests of ODI (farmers' participation in agricultural research, NGOs and the role of the state) and CIRAD-Tera (farmers' organisations, agricultural research and innovation). The study examined the role of agricultural research in technology generation and dissemination processes and, more specifically, the role that farmers' organisations and other civil society actors play in these. The main objective of the study was to highlight the technical, economic and institutional conditions that influence the development of effective collaborative linkages between research systems, farmers and farmers organisations.

The research was conducted at the regional and national level, actively engaging with national research institutes in each country. The distribution of activities was balanced between francophone and anglophone countries (The Gambia, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea, and Nigeria). While there was considerable convergence on priority research issues and analytical framework, there were some differences in the methodological approach applied by the different country teams. Nonetheless, this collaborative initiative established strong and lasting professional and institutional relations between French, British, and anglophone and francophone West and Central African partners.

Activities and outputs

A common analytical approach and conceptual framework was first developed by the research team, drawing on a literature review. Sixteen previously undocumented case studies were examined in the field, permitting comparative analysis of diverse organisations and types of linkages. Case study results were analysed at a workshop in Montpellier, France, at the end of 1998 and preliminary project findings were presented and discussed with senior CORAF representatives in Dakar, Senegal, in January 1999. An extended list of outputs can be found in Section C, Appendix 1, page 73 which includes a number of resources available on the internet.

Problems encountered

Three main problems were encountered. Firstly, the involvement of local farmers' organisations was fairly limited in comparison with the involvement of the donors, research institutions and CORAF. The research process was characterised by lengthy negotiations between the latter, generating high transaction costs. Secondly, the collaborating donors operated different funding mechanisms that made it difficult to mobilise funds for the study quickly. Thirdly, promotion and dissemination of programme outputs could have been more extensive, particularly at the grassroots level. This could have made a real contribution to future development of effective linkages between actors.

Lessons learned

The following lessons were identified:

- the political, economic, legislative and institutional context is critically important in creating an enabling environment for agricultural research, extension agencies and farmers' organisations to form partnerships with other actors;
- there is a high degree of diversity amongst farmers' organisations, in particular in terms of organisational structure (e.g. federal or not), representativity, scale of activities and place in the national legislative framework;

An enabling political, economic, legislative and institutional context is critically important for agricultural research, extension agencies and farmers' organisations to form effective partnerships.

Successful collaboration between agricultural research and farmers' organisations depends on research policies oriented towards development needs; participatory approaches to research; the existence of effective means by which research can capitalise on and learn from experience; and strengthened regional collaborative networks.

- the capacity of organisations to undertake economic coordination varies significantly across country contexts;
- collaboration between agricultural research and farmers' organisations depends on a minimum number of conditions: research policies oriented towards development needs; participatory approaches to research; means by which research can capitalise and learn from experience; and strengthened regional collaborative networks;
- building linkages between research and farmers' organisations implies a reciprocal recognition of the value of the roles of each and a clear division of responsibilities;
- partners must also be ready to accept that partnership involves significant transaction costs; and
- the strength of social capital and varying institutional density in each context are key issues defining the potential for successful linkages.

Policy recommendations and themes for future work

In order to realise the full potential of collaboration with farmers' organisations, especially in making agricultural services more demand led, this study highlighted the need to:

- support the emergence of farmers' organisations, and strengthen their economic, management and technical capacities, with a particular emphasis on supporting the development of their technical and economic objectives;
- assist extension services and research organisations to take into account the requests, or demands, of farmers' organisations and formulate them into research issues through a discussion process with farmers' organisations (alongside training in participatory methods);
- assist farmers' organisations and civil society actors in formulating requests for research and in participating in research processes, especially through the creation of 'catalytic' research and extension funds;
- strengthen the capacities of research, extension and farmers' organisations to work together;
- further investigate the effectiveness of various organisations in terms of support for producers; and
- develop methodologies to strengthen the capacities of farmers' organisations to play an active role in policy formulation.

Summary of discussion

- **Comparative advantages of regional approaches to rural development compared to national approaches.** Regional approaches to research rooted in successful local-level collaboration between research systems and rural stakeholders benefit from closer relationships between actors and a deeper

understanding of the importance of context. Questions and issues that can be addressed by research can thus be better targeted to the real problems faced by farmers in each context. However, where regionalisation is limited to the sum of individual country priorities, rather than understood as truly regional, transnational comparative approaches that takes precedence over national ones, it tends not to produce the same results.

- **Identifying priorities.** Technical research and extension priorities in West and Central Africa can be more accurately defined when both upstream and downstream economic problems are being handled carefully by a producer organisation that has a role in co-ordinating the whole process.
- **Roles of different actors.** The roles of research and the process of interaction between different actors involved in the technology generation and dissemination process are difficult to assess in the following areas: resource management involving complex decision-making processes; and where there is unequal control over rules governing access to resources.
- **Making research and extension services more downwardly accountable to end-users.** Making agricultural services more downwardly accountable is essential, but implies serious reorganisation. Initiatives to resolve lack of accountability often originate from the grassroots, particularly where producers are organised at a regional, transnational level. In this context, research and extension services not only need to be strengthened, but researchers need to become more aware of producer needs. Those needs cannot emerge without both sides making a significant investment in processes of dialogue. This, in turn, should lead to a better mutual understanding and to a process of building 'the demand' together (although, the demand for research per se is rarely overt or self-evident).
- **Not all producer organisations are good partners for research and extension.** Some producer organisations are poorly funded and cannot take part in the process of building demand for agricultural services. Others are often operating from a restricted geographical base that does not provide the necessary scale to develop successful collaboration with agricultural research institutions. On the other hand, certain farmers' organisations can become very effective partners. Although research organisations are not always receptive to the demands of farmers' organisations, there is a need to build the capacities of both the producer organisations and research systems to enable them to better co-ordinate their activities.

Making agricultural services more downwardly accountable to end-users is vital. Partnerships with producer organisations are a key avenue to achieving downward accountability.

One problem is whether the poorest and marginalised producers are able to voice their concerns adequately.

A significant problem is the degree to which the poorest and marginalised producers – those least likely to benefit from top down extension – are able to voice their concerns. Organisations representing the poorest groups often have to struggle to demonstrate legitimacy. They are also often male dominated whilst in some places the majority of producers are women. However, many farmers' organisations recognise the concern for legitimacy and some restructuring is taking place to refocus attention on the grassroots.

Key issues arising include the following:

- it is important to consider research-extension-farmers' organisation linkages in the wider context of bilateral and multilateral NGO activities;
- the relationship between research systems and farmers' organisations within commodity chains in different socio-economic and institutional contexts is still unclear;
- the priorities of farmers' organisations vary and they represent different interest groups which may have conflicting objectives: How, then, can they fit into decentralised development processes and in national policy consultations? For which constituencies do they speak and whose interests are not represented? What sort of dialogue should they seek to establish with governments and international donors?
- to what degree are the objectives of poverty alleviation and increased production compatible? Can farmers' organisations achieve both, or should donors work with different actors in pursuit of each objective?