



Bourgou Limani, beneficiary of the LIF in Koulfo,
photo by Mano Tissa

Towards a mechanism of innovative financing for the promotion of farmer innovation

*Implementation of the Local Innovation Support Fund in the area
of the project FaReNe in Burkina Faso*

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Introduction

The Local Innovation Support Fund (LISF) led in Burkina Faso, took its example from pilot projects led by PROLINNOVA (an international program of partnership that promotes local innovation and Participatory Innovation Development - PID). It is an alternative mechanism of financing that permits innovative farmers to have access to resources allowing them to pursue their own research in collaboration with other professionals.

In the framework of the project Strengthening Farmer-led Research Networks for agroecological intensification in Burkina Faso (FaReNe), the LISF was implemented in three areas situated in two regions (Eastern region and Northern Region), in a context in which the weakness of financial support-advice to peasant world is significant. The fund is based on the applications for farming researches related to concerns linked to the production which the producers are confronted with. It is particularly a question of technical and material support to improve the innovative practices.

Setting up of the organizational operation of the LISF

The organizational operation includes committees at the local and national levels. For each of the three areas of intervention of the project FaReNe, a local committee including representatives of the innovative farmers' network has been set up. This operation has permitted to inform and sensitize the farmers and communities, to shortlist and convey the applications to the national committee and contribute to the follow up/evaluation/documentation of the LISF processes.

The national committee includes five representatives of partners from FaReNe in Burkina Faso: the three NGO World Neighbors, Réseau MARP Burkina and Diobass Burkina Faso. It has been set up to (i) define the methodology, the applications models and the selection criteria (ii) launch the call for proposals (iii) centralize and examine the financing applications proposed by the three concerned areas; (iv) select the applications; (v) ensure the availability of funds for the recipient farmers; (vi) support LISF processes of support/evaluation documentations.

The main researcher provides a support/advice in the management of the joint experimentation process and follow up of the farmers' innovations financed by LISF. His specific mission was (i) assessing the experimental protocols implemented by the recipient innovative farmers with the assistance of technical agents; (ii) reinforcing the farmers' capacities through proximity follow-up tests and the support/advice of experimenter producers; (iii) organizing the gathering and treatment of data

related to experimental protocols (cf. experimental protocols); (iv) analyzing the efficiency of the technologies tested by the innovative farmers through a joint evaluation; (v) supporting the specific reports elaboration of innovations financed by LISF.

Tools used

In order to facilitate the operation of the LISF, the national committee has elaborated tools that have been used in the process. The application form of the LISF: a form in French that contains the required information particularly brief information on the applicant farmer and his/her innovation, the content of the applicant's proposal (statement of the problem to be solved and strategy to solve it), indications concerning the cost of the applicant's proposal (total cost; value of personal contribution and total amount solicited).

The applications selection criteria and the choice of farmers' innovations: the six criteria adopted by the national committee to evaluate the research applications are:

1 - Originality of the innovation; 2 - Relevance of the innovation; 3 - Adaptability/reproducibility of the innovation; 4 - Contribution of the innovation to agroecological intensification; 5 - Technical and economic viability of the innovation; 6 - Amount requested by the innovative farmer (see details in box below).

Box 1 | Farmers' innovations selection criteria

Six (6) criteria have been adopted by the national committee to evaluate the research applications.

1 - Originality of the innovation

Where did the idea of the innovation come from? Is it the farmer's idea? An idea copied and strictly applied by the farmer in his/her living environment? An exogenous practice adopted and adapted by the farmer who has brought improvements or some modification? What is the added value of the innovation? Which improvements or modifications has it brought?

2- The relevance of the innovation

What problem is the innovation seeking to solve? Is this problem relevant? Which main reasons have pushed to the innovation? Which effects/changes does the innovation seek to bring in the solving of the problem (s) at the local level?

3- Adaptability/reproducibility

Can the idea be adapted to a similar situation? Is it easy to use or modify? Can the innovation be reproduced

everywhere and by every farmer? Are the required materials locally available? Are they accessible to small producers?

4- Contribution of the innovation to agroecological intensification, in terms of:

- Limitation of nutrients loss by recycling organic residues and reducing run-off and soil erosion.
- Capture and management of nutrients by nitrogen fixation by the micro-organisms, use of animals to produce and/or bring manure, production of green manures etc.
- Harvesting and rational management of run-off waters.
- Management of ground moisture through an increase of ground cover.
- Improvement of agricultural returns/performances.
- Weak pressure on ecological resources (soil, vegetation, waters, etc.).
- Protection of cultures by using bio-pesticides.
- Use of improved seeds/ adapted to the rainfall.

- Preservation of biodiversity (promotion of genetic diversification and agro-ecological species in time and space).

5- Technical and economic viability:

Does the innovation rest on a simple technology, adapted to the technological context of the community and permitting to solve a technical problem efficiently? Does the innovation permit to generate more returns? Does it have a quality price advantage? Can it be sold? Does the implementation cost of the innovation go beyond the expected profits or does it increase them by financial pressure? Is the cost weak, in terms of accessibility? Is the cost efficient, in terms of time and resources?

6- Amount solicited

Is the value of the solicited fund in adequation with the nature and the demands of the applicant's project? Is the farmer's innovation economically sustainable? Is the requested amount below the available fund limits of the LISF?

The selection and scoring grid of farmers' innovations for the obtention of LISF is very simple and permits to assess the innovations in a transparent and equitable manner.

Title of farmer's innovation:

Identity of the innovative farmer:

Residency of the innovative farmer:.....

N°	Criteria	Mark on 5 points					Justification of score
		Very weak	Weak	Average	Strong	Very strong	
	TOTAL						



Bourgou Limani, recipient of the LISF in Koulfo, photo by MANO Tissa

Information and sensitization of the community about the LISF

Three information sessions about the LISF, facilitated by the local committees, themselves supported by the national committee, happened in the three networks areas of the innovative farmers. The information sessions were conducted in the form of meetings gathering village representatives together. The three sessions gathered together 155 participants in all, with 48 at the first session, 56 at the second session and 51 at the third session. The discussions were focused on: content of the LISF; presentation and explanation of the fund application form, criteria for selecting the best proposals, setting a calendar for the files receiving.

Call for proposals and selection

The call for proposals has been launched by the national committee and transmitted by the local committees in the concerned areas thanks to meetings of networks, local radios (radio "Diawampo" in the Eastern Region and radio "la voix du paysan" in the Northern Region), and town criers with loud speakers in the public places.

Applications for farmer research have been elaborated by farmers on the basis of the form with the assistance of local resourceful persons who have acted as exchange facilitators to give information on the so-called form (translation and transcription). At the local level, each of the three local committees has received 15 research applications in all. Each committee has made a preselecting to identify the 5 best proposals at the local level (area) to transmit to the national committee, giving a total of 15 preselected applications out of 45 received applications on total. The 15 applications have been examined by the national committee which has finally retained 3 for financing.

This drastic selection can be explained by the fact that the national committee has wished to put a particular emphasis on the relation of the proposed innovation with the agroecological intensification.

Attribution of funds to recipients

The funds have been allocated to the three retained innovative farmers. The amount of this financment is a total of 582,500 CFA (888 Euros), for the subvention (60%) and 390,000 CFA (594 Euros) for the contribution of farmers (40%). The plan of financing of each retained project includes the subvention of the LISF for the acquisition of equipment/seeds, the technical monitoring process and the innovative farmer's contribution. The chart below shows the financial repartition.

Applicant	Region	Project total amount	Farmers contribution (CFA)	LISF financing granted CFA		
				Equipment	Technical support	Total
Bourgou Limani	East Burkina	350,000	150,000	150,000	50,000	200,000
Research group	North Burkina	272,500	90,000	132,500	50,000	182,500
Savadoogo Boré	North Burkina	350,000	150,000	150,000	50,000	200,000
TOTAL		972,500	390,000	432,500	150,000	582,500

Monitoring/evaluation and documentation process of LISF

In each zone, the monitoring/evaluation has been jointly carried out by the national committee, the agricultural technicians, the persons in charge for extra technical assistance to the three innovative farmers recipients at the level of the project intervention zones, a researcher, a main actor of the experimentations process monitoring and local resourceful persons.

The participatory monitoring-evaluation of the process of LISF was conducted as follows;

- Exchanges with innovative farmers recipients of LISF have permitted to define the arrangements and protocols of joint experimentation (1 day per innovative farmer).

- Support-advice visits have been made to the innovative farmers (on average 3 visits per experimentation site: at the beginning, at mid-term and at end of process). Each visit lasts a day.
- Final participatory evaluation of the process results has been realized by the recipient innovative farmers and shared with their peers (1 day per beneficiary zone of LISF).
- The innovations results have been restituted during community workshops (1 day per zone).

The documentation of the process and results at the level of each village has been realized by the innovative farmers with the technicians and researcher's assistance. A specific report has been produced for each innovation.

Results of the process

The LISF, realized in Burkina Faso, has facilitated the process implementation thanks to the financment brought (working equipment, seeds, base materials) and permitted to complement the producers' individual and collective contributions with a view to improve farmers' innovations. Innovations financed by LISF and activities realized with the support of LISF are:

- 1 The combination of technologies aiming at improving grounds fertility and agricultural returns. This innovation has been carried out by Bourgou Limani from the village of Koulfo in the rural commune of Manni (Eastern Region of Burkina Faso). The financment has been used to facilitate equipment acquisition in order to develop technologies (zaï, manure pits, enhanced seeds, phosphate for compost enrichment).
- 2 The bio-pesticides products (Piszanga) permitting to fight against gardening and cowpeas raiding incidents and while respecting the environment (replacing trees roots and barks by trees leaves) used by women organized in a group of research action in the rural commune of Gomponsom (Northern Region Burkina Faso). The financing has been used to facilitate the acquisition of equipment for making bio-pesticides (inputs).
- 3 Planning of half-moons combined with management technologies of grounds fertility and assisted natural regeneration (ANR), conducted by SAWADOGO Boré Soumaila in the village of Rasko



Dry bio-pesticide packaged in Gomponsom, photo by SIGUE Hamade 2018

from the rural commune of Tougo (Northern Region Burkina Faso). The allocated fund has been used to facilitate the acquisition of equipment to develop technologies (half-moons).

The support from LISF comes to reinforce the innovative farmers' commitment in the promotion of their innovations. It has contributed to stimulating networks and strengthening the process management capacity at the local level and permitted the monitoring of activities.

However, LISF being only one year old, it is still difficult at this stage to appreciate its positive effect. The practice of preselecting farmers innovations (5 innovations per zone) has had a positive impact on the implication of the actors who entered a healthy competition. The innovative farmers receive a certain social recognition and the valuation of their innovative practices, which reinforce their self-confidence and their confidence in their work.

Challenges and solutions proposed

The main challenge is to succeed in being emancipated from external financing consecrated to farmer innovation. To ensure the continuity of LISF after the closure of the project FaReNe, the networks can be incited to valorize their competences in raising resources (for example territorial communities) and their organizational capacities for advocacy. Besides, if LISF finances activities that generate income, this one could also be renewed to finance new innovations.

Insufficient local competences in French or in national languages constitute another important challenge concerning research applications in LISF framework. In order to solve this problem, in addition to translation in local language and simplification of forms, we can

consider training in applications formulation for local volunteers. For example, farmers who can read and write and teach in local languages (Gourmantché, Mooré), persons who have attended school in French (high school students, teachers, and community animators/facilitators) could also take care of accompanying and assisting.

At last, priority must also be given to identification and potential innovations characterization in villages, in order to have a pretty concise and diversified repertoire at their disposal. Peer identification by network members would then allow the technical team to conduct a characterization before selection.

Lessons learned

The majority of applications examined didn't clearly put in evidence the link of the innovations with agroecological intensification, an important criteria with the evaluation chart (see box 1). The elaboration capacities for the research applications in link with agroecological intensification should then be reinforced.

The support of LISF has permitted innovative farmers to acquire the necessary complementary equipment and inputs to reach a level of adequate equipping permitting them to conduct the process in a suitable way.

The success of joint experimentation is strongly conditioned by technical and financial support. So, the action of carrying on of LISF or any other alternative financing mechanism could play a role in the promotion of farmer innovation.

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