



Network meeting as part of the joint experimentation in Manni, photo by Sigué Hamadé

Networks of innovator farmers and agro-ecological intensification

From reinforcing networks to promoting agro-ecological intensification in Burkina Faso

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Introduction

The Eastern and Northern regions of Burkina Faso are characterized by a degradation of natural resources, not without inconsiderable socio-economic consequences for the populations. In an effort to cope with these difficult environmental conditions, the producers innovate a lot of strategies to restore the soil fertility and secure a sufficient production to cover their needs, particularly those related to family foods.

For this reason, the producers are seeking for adaptable solutions both individually and collectively because of the new climate and environment conditions. They have realized the necessity to unite their strengths and be credible partners for the different supervision structures (technical services, local authorities, NGO, Associations).

The historical background of the agricultural popularization in Burkina Faso has shown that the stress had been put on the transfer of technologies, privileging the organizations of the producers in associations or groups depending on the different production industries. But with the evolution of the system, the public structures of support have started to give a particular importance to the endogenous knowledge and know-how.

Within the framework of the project Strengthening Farmer-led Research Networks for Agro-ecological Intensification in Burkina Faso and Mali (FaReNe), whose important subject is agro-ecological intensification, the reinforcement has thus concerned three networks of innovative farmers in the communes of Manni, Gourcy and Gamponsom. In Manni where

there was no specific organization for the promotion of local innovations, particularly in the domain of the technologies of preservation of water and soil/defense and restoration of soil (Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation), a network of innovative farmers has been created. In Gomponsom, an organization called "Association Koumbi Naam of Gomponsom for the Sahel" (AKNGS) has been put on scene for about 20 years and is carrying out plans to protect and restore the environment in order to provide eco systemic products and services. In Gourcy, a network of innovative farmers has also already been put on scene since 11 years to lead local innovations in the objective of ameliorating foods and nutritional security of households. (See box 1). For these two networks, the objective was to reinforce the existing links by creating the executive organs as recommended by the new regulation in the domain, in order to acquire a better functioning autonomy.

Among the objectives of the three networks we can mention (i) contribution to food and nutritional security, in the process of sustainable development and agro-ecological intensification; (ii) creation of a framework of consultation and a favorable environment for the development and valorization of the local knowledge and farmers' innovations. (iii) promotion of knowledge and farmers' role in the domain of research-development and valorization of technological innovations in the rural area. Networking allows a certain number of actors to work in consultation in order to represent their interests at the national level and be formally recognized.

Box 1 | Short historical background of the process of promoting farmers' innovations

The process started in 1993 with the projects "Agro-Forestry Oxfam" and "CES II» which have initiated trainings on Technologies Participatory Development (TPD) and on the Soil Technologies of Defense and Restoration / Water and Soil Preservation (Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation) in the Northern Region of Burkina Faso.

In 2007, the PROFEIS (Promoting Farmer Experimentation and Innovation in the Sahel) was created in Burkina Faso under the aegis of Prolinnova International with the main founder members Réseau MARP Burkina, World Neighbors and Diobass Burkina Faso. In 2009, the project "Initiative Reverdir le Sahel" was launched and contributed to the identification, the training and the accompaniment of innovative farmers and their organization in networks.

Actors of the implementation

The NGO partners World Neighbors, Réseau MARP-Burkina and Diobass Burkina Faso bring their support to the target populations in their area, and supervise the innovative farmers. The NGOs have called up a resourceful person, specialist in networking, to provide sessions of sensibilisation, to give trainings and draw up the statutes and regularizations of networks.

The agricultural supervisors- agriculture, environment and breeding agents- offer the support/advice on groups organization and specific technical trainings, the popularization of good agricultural practices and preservation of natural resources. The public admini-

nistration (high commissionership and commune) is also implied in the process of networks formalization to ensure the management of the organization, the handing over of the official title deeds (recognition receipts) and many other various supports.

The networks main actors are the innovative farmers (men and women) members of networks who share their knowledge and know-how. They sensitize the other farmers, take part to training of pairs and to the local innovation process. These farmers have become aware that climate changes and anthropic action affect natural resources.

Network formalization process

The project FaReNe has chosen three areas of intervention, Gnagna, Passoré and Zandoma with the main objective of reinforcing the research networks led by the agriculturists in relation to the agro-ecologic intensification. An inventory of fixtures of the farmers organizations in the areas of intervention of the project was drawn up by a resourceful person, specialist of organizations, with the objective of bringing out the strengths and assets but also the constraints of the existing organizations of producers.

Concerning the specific activities of the networks formalization, we should mention that many steps have been put in place:

- The framework meeting with the partners of the project (World Neighbors, RMARP, Diobass and the associations) in order to start the process of support and of formalization of the networks.
- The meetings with the actors in the field (Innovative Farmers, representatives in the field of the project partners, the services of support to the producers etc.) on networking and the setting up of the LISF in the Northern and Eastern Regions. The different places of activity of the project have thus been visited.
- The analysis of the collected secondary and primary data and the writing of the preliminary versions for the networking of innovative farmers and of the operational management of LISF.
- The restitution of temporary documents to the partners and actors in the field.
- The finalization of the management documents of LISF and the networks setting up.

- The elaboration of the statutes and regulations of the networks for a good functioning and good governance.
- The restitution and amendment of the statutes and regulation. The finalization of the documents of management of LISF and of setting up of networking.
- The holding of general meetings for the setting up of executive boards.
- The elaboration of the minutes and the sending of the file for recognition to the public administration in order to get the receipt.
- The publication in the official newspaper.

For the setting up of the network in Manni, a particular support had to be provided. Following the missions of support/advice conducted by World Neighbors in Manni and the work of the resourceful person, a constituent general assembly of the network has been organized for the setting up of an Executive Board formed of nine members, including two (02) women. In Manni, the texts of statutes and regulations have been validated in a general assembly by the farmers members of the network. After that, the file has been introduced to the administration for the official recognition (receipt n° 2007-012/MATD/REST/PNGG/HC). This recognition allows the network to act on legal ground as a moral person and assume its responsibilities in all circumstances. This recognition can be considered the birth certificate of the structure and also allows to protect the interests and rights on the innovations and access multiple supports for more autonomy.

Meetings of sensitization/training on the texts that rule the organizations of producers have been held in the three areas: Manni, 20 participants, Gomponsom, 21 participants, Gourcy, 13 participants and animated by the resourceful specialist with the accompaniment of the NGO partners and agricultural supervisors. The statutes and regulations have also been elaborated by the resourceful person supporting the networks. Concerning the case of Gomponsom and Gourcy, it was an obligation to adopt the statutes and regulations to the new law (064-CNT) for the setting up of the new organs of governance and a better functioning of the

networks. Concerning Gomponsom, after the general assembly, the minutes, the statutes and regulations have been submitted to the administration for an official recognition. In Gourcy, the process is running its course.

Besides, the networks have benefited from the other actions of capacity building: training in associative governance and advocacy in Manni and Gourcy, an exchange of experiences by traveling to Mali for the innovative farmers of Burkina Faso, meetings of the network members and setting up of trainings by the pairs.

Results

Concerning the results, it is good to underline first the existence and the functioning of the networks of innovative farmers in the three areas: Manni (26 men, 4 women) Gomponsom (920 men, 1300 women), Gourcy (40 men, 20 women).

Certain members of the networks have become expert farmers in the agro-sylvo-pastoral domain.

They provide the trainings, the support-advice to the other producers in and out of their area. The president of the network of Zandoma has given a training in Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation to 24 farmers of six (06) villages in the commune of Kiembara (the Region of Boucle du Mouhoun), 20 male and female farmers in Arbollé (North), farmers in the regions of Centre-North, 16 farmers of Sahel; etc. In Gomponsom, an expert farmer has given a training to 300 women who benefited from the "integrated program of fight against child labor in the mines" in the Region of Centre-North on techniques of gardening during the rainy seasons, and on restoration of degraded soil. The president of the network of Manni is recognized by his peers as a trainer in Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation. His neighbors have imitated him and have reproduced his innovations in their fields and he is solicited by the farmers of the other villages to help them to establish the combinations of technologies of Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation. All this contributes to the valorization of endogenous know-how in the recovering of the degraded soil in four (04) villages in the commune of Manni.

The network of Zandoma has been reinforced to such an extent that it works as a provider of a service through partnership contracts signed with the NGO and the projects and the institutions of development and research like Africare, PDRD/FIDA and INERA.

Certain members have seen their contributions to the development recognized at the national level through distinctions conferred by the authorities, like for example the successive decoration of two (02) presidents of the network of Zandoma during the Farmer National Day and the National Celebration.

Members of the three networks hold positions of responsibilities in the organizations of producers in the provincial and regional levels, particularly the one of president of the provincial union of cowpeas producers/seeders of Zandoma, the one of president of the regional union of the northern seeders and the one of vice-president of the northern regional chamber of agriculture.

The networks themselves organized innovations fairs and competitions of best innovators. They have for an example organized the cowpea Day (May 28, 2018 in Gourcy), the fairs of innovations (in 2009, 2015 and 2018 in Gourcy) and the fair of tomato of Yako.

The networks of innovative farmers have acquired the leadership in the process of Participatory Innovation Development (PID), of spreading of the innovations and of the management of the Local Innovation Support Fund (LISF). The networks have got a positive impact on the spreading of the innovations and the co-creation.

The actions of restoration undertaken by the networks have permitted the transformation of the environment (recovering of the degraded soil, the restoration of soil fertility) the development of the vegetal covering (grasses and trees), the amelioration of soil productivity and the setting up of private forests. It is the formalization of the networks that really allows taking such an important role in the society because this brings recognition of the networks, of their members and of their capacities.

Challenges met

In terms of difficulties, it is good to underline at the level of the network functioning, the weak commitment of young people who prefer working in gold mines to get more money. Another option would be to increase the inter-network exchanges and start actions of visibility and advocacy and also ensure that agriculture and networks offer interesting possibilities to young people.

Concerning the underlying conditions to the networks and their members, we notice a certain number of constraints. First of all, soil and natural resources management are the most important challenges for the producers who are members of the networks. Certain members, who are not lands owners, have sometimes been subjected to the withdrawal of lands, after they had already invested in management. Altercations linked to the management /ownership of the safeguarded trees from the assisted natural regeneration (ANR) happen. These trees are generally considered natural resources belonging to all. It is necessary to set in place concertized local mechanisms of land management.

On the other hand, the way of doing ANR under the forest law (forest code) remains another challenge. Certain members of the networks are charged (financial bills) by the water and forests services for breaches of the law because they proceed to the pruning of trees, and this is seen as a mutilation. It would be advisable to improve communication and advocacy for better collaboration between networks and forest services.

Besides, the adoption of technologies/techniques is done according to the resources and the capacities of the farmers. Because of that, these people are seeking the best compromise for an adoption that is adapted to their context.

Testimony of the President of the network of the innovator farmers in the East: BOURGOU Limani

Before we used to work in an isolated and disorganized way but today, with the support of the project, we have understood the necessity to be organized in a network of innovative farmers whose president I am. This network allowed us to know each other better and to get closer, to reinforce solidarity and share our knowledge. This network has also permitted us to identify a group of experimented farmers, split up in four neighboring villages to accompany us in the research of combinations of the most adapted technologies to improve the agricultural productions and our living conditions.

The bad practices in the exploitation of the natural resources (acts of vandalism, excessive cuts of green woods, disordered clearing of the bush, pruning of trees) and the animal pressure on the natural resources also cause problems. The sensitizing on the good practices in the exploitation of natural resources may represent a solution.

The setting up of organs of management and good governance is essential for the good functioning of the networks. In order for the network to be attractive, it is necessary to offer a value added to the members, otherwise the network will not be able to perpetuate or renewed.

Lessons learned

The network is on the one hand an appropriate environment of sharing and mutual learning and on the other hand a way of reinforcing the links between the producers, the agricultural supervisors, and the researchers.

There are important prerequisites which allow the good functioning of the networks including: good governance, good leadership of the first persons in charge, non-interference of certain local authorities and non-pluralism of responsibilities in many organizations of peasants in order to avoid conflicts of competences and inefficiency.

The participative approach takes times and needs patience and a certain flexibility in order to meet the results with the majority, what is sometimes incompatible with the planning of the projects where the actions have a time limit, following a precise calendar.

The integrated agriculture-breeding is a deciding factor of the balance in the system of agricultural production because the sub-products of one are useful to the other and vice-versa.

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