

Findings



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Agricultural Extension in Madagascar: Broadening services, leveraging partnerships

Introduction

The extension system referred to as Training and Visitation (T&V), which is currently widely used in Africa, emerged from and was launched from the initiatives of the 1980s to support agricultural extension. Since its introduction, this system has gone through several permutations, informed by the experiences on the ground in each country. In the case of Madagascar, these permutations led to supporting farmers' organizations and diversification of the implementing agencies, which include, outside of the government and its units, NGOs and private operators.

Capacity Building

Capacity building and organizational training constitute one of the 10 major actions decided as a result of a joint mission of donors in April 1996 to study collaboration with farmers' organizations in Madagascar. The Agricultural Extension Program Support project participates regularly in consultations between the Ministry, farmers' organizations, and donors (the World Bank, French and German development agencies) with a view to creating a co-managed mechanism for the training of farmers and technicians. The results of the study "The Evaluation Of The Demand For Training For The Leaders Of Professional Farmers' organizations," serves as a reference to adjust the training program and the strategy of the project.

Focal points of the current strategy

- Decentralization with the regional branches accountable for the definition of programs and the technical and financial management of the activities and resources;

- Opening up the project through contracting for services with organizations other than the administration in the case of the NGOs and private operators, and the development of communications and consultations with the Madagascar donor community;
- Including decentralized municipal governments in the implementation of project activities to evaluate impact and results on the ground;
- Technical assistance and capacity building for farmers' organizations, matching demand with the training offerings and the development of locality-specific training strategies; and
- Responding to the market in the promotion of export crops (horticultural crops in peri-urban zones, coffee, vanilla, cloves, pepper in the eastern and northeastern regions of the country).

The project also offers assistance to improve the management of community activities and to facilitate the participant reaching his/her decisions through (i) mastering the technical tools of management, (ii) optimizing the utilization of the factors of production; (iii) evaluating the costs of production and profit margins; (iv) understanding the market ;(v) comparing costs and advantages between several scenarios and technical agendas; and (vi) measuring the risks associated with each of these options.

The objective is to contribute to the development of economic rationality in farmers. This in turn drives production and increases revenues deriving from quantitative and qualitative adjustments in product offerings and to the needs and exigencies of the market, notably those which concern the promotion of export crops.

The Provisioning Of Farmers With Seeds And Quality Plants

The project supported the better availability of seeds and quality plants and their accessibility to farmers. During the off-season of 1997, the project worked with no less than 35 groups of croppers, bringing together almost 300 members for (i) the multiplication and diffusion of insect and RYMV virus resistant varieties of rice in the Northwest and Northeast (ii) the reconstitution of the seed capital in Morondava (Southwest) and in the Southeast in the wake of the cyclones Cynthia and Gretel, (iii) the increase and promotion of new varieties developed for the highlands, and (iv) improvement in the quality of the private seed reserves of the farmers. Improved techniques in cropping systems and in the management of soil fertility (promotion of Azolla, compost, fertilizer) have led to improved capacity in collecting seeds. These seeds were redistributed at the beginning of the subsequent planting season by 2,300 groups and permitted approximately 120,000 member farmers to cover 12,000 ha in high-quality seed.

Similar activities with 11 farmers' organizations, totaling 132 farmers were undertaken in collaboration with the Project Southwest (PSW) for the production of pea pods exempt from "menamaso" and of bean seeds in the Mid-west region (Miarinarivo). Some 500 farming members in 45 producers' organizations will benefit from these operations.

Partnerships With The Private Sector, Local Communities and NGOs

Partnerships with the private sector and NGOs have increased confidence in the extension service for four important reasons:

(i) more rigorous evaluation of the competencies and performance of personnel on the ground, including the deployment of almost 20 percent of the personnel to tasks other than extension;

(ii) the institutional reorganization of agricultural services;

(iii) the promotion of a decentralized structure at the local and central levels, thus facilitating greater integration with the community, private sector, and NGOs; and

(iv) more autonomy of management and decision making for regional leaders through the involvement of local actors in the development and execution of annual work programs and the establishment of advance funds, to facilitate the balancing of current operating expenses.

The relations between operations on the ground are very encouraging on the whole, including those between different projects under the oversight of the Ministries of Agriculture, Livestock, and Applied Development Research. In several regions, the project has outsourced a number of initiatives and these relationships are tightly regulated by contracts with the different institutions concerned. The project is paying increasing attention to the private sector, given the role that the sector plays in improving agricultural productivity and the promotion of exports.

During this overall agricultural campaign, up to 20 agents from the private sector have participated in the implementation of project activities. These efforts between private operators, farmers' organizations and the project are being pursued and coordinated, in order to promote export crops, particularly in peri-urban zones (horticulture) and in the East and Northeast of the country (vanilla, coffee, cloves, pepper).

Besides the private sector, the project maintains very close partnerships with 66 NGOs, divided as follows, according to their areas of competence and comparative advantage with respect to the project: technical consultations - 39; support to farmers' organizations - 5; and training - 22. The baseline capabilities of the project in the area of consultations to participants includes 110 agents from 39 NGOs, 27 other NGOs participate directly in providing resource-persons for the training of extension agents and consultants to farmers' organizations.

Developing A Sense Of Ownership

The commitment of the local communities constitutes one of the most important features of the project. With respect to the project, 32 communities, in 8 agricultural regions, recruited out of their own resources and made available for extension services 87 agricultural counselors to mitigate the deficit of agents in their respective localities.

Unlike government staff, these recruits are hired on a two-year renewable term. This approach, which puts the two extension systems into competition, "private" versus "public" (in these two cases, these agents have approximately identical resources at their disposal) offers the possibility of testing and accessing an alternative source for extension which could eventually be

encouraged in order to supplement areas of the administration's inadequacy in certain areas or in certain localities. The validation of such an approach should help remedy the deficit in personnel caused by the redeployment of non-essential public personnel to activities other than extension.

Conclusion

Extension through the dissemination of simple technologies at the grassroots without financial risks certainly constitutes an important stage in the process of apprenticeship and the training of farmers. The linkages between farmers, extension agents and researchers in the definition of technical programs, their implementation and the evaluation of their impact on the ground have been improved. The work program of extensionists has become more structured and better targeted to the constraints and exigencies of farmers of both sexes. This has helped to develop more effective operations (i.e. extension, desertification, management of hydro-agricultural resources, agricultural credit).

Regular and systematic training has contributed to the improvement of the skills of the agents and to restore their credibility vis-à-vis the users of the system. Thanks to the substitution of the group for the individual approach, a larger number of farmers now benefit from the services delivered and participate in the diffusion and adoption of the recommended technologies. As a result, the yields of the majority of the crops have been increased and the revenues of the producers have improved.

These lessons learned have encouraged the extension service to explore new venues for cooperation with farmers' organizations, private operators, NGOs and local communities. Mechanisms have been established in several regions (Toliara, Miarinarivo, Antsirabe, Fianarantsoa), to enhance the competencies and resources of each institution through the implementation of coordinated strategies, adapted to each location..

The ownership of the project by its beneficiaries has been accentuated through the setting-up of regular channels of communication and consultation with all the actors involved in the extension process: farmers' organizations, NGOs, private sector organizations, local decentralized community governments, and donors.

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