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PASOAP - PROGRAM OF SUPPORT TO AGRICULTURAL SERVICES AND FARMERS' ORGANIZATIONS IN MALI

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Introduction, Background and Context

The Program of Support to Agricultural Services and Farmers' Organizations (PASOAP) is one of the nine programs included in the Master Plan of the Rural Development of Mali. It began in 2005.

PASAOP is built upon the National Agricultural Extension Program (PNVA), which was implemented in Mali from 2000 to 2004. This program was preceded by the two-year Agricultural Extension Test Program (PTVA) (1988-2000). These programs were all inspired by the Bénor Method (Formation et Visites / Training and Visits). The aims of PASAOP are a qualitative development of decentralized rural development services; the search for better performance of these agricultural services; the increased empowerment of rural development actors; the financial participation of beneficiaries – making them responsible for some of the costs of agricultural extension services; and an experimentation on agricultural extension service management transfer to beneficiaries and private service providers.

At the end of the National Agricultural Extension Program, the National Agricultural Research and Extension System in Mali was characterized, among others, by:

- The existence of a national joint program taking care of the issues related to research and extension funded by the World Bank (IDA) with a share from the government of Mali to reinforce their reciprocal connections and exchanges.
- A culture of inter-institutional dialogue and planning, achieved by the effectiveness of instances in annual planning and assessment of the research and dissemination coordination and supervision of activities implemented on local, regional, and national levels.
- The sound integration of agricultural, stock breeding, environmental and literacy issues.

- The provision of agricultural research and extension services with equipment and logistics (vehicles and motor bikes) to ensure the mobility of the various teams.
- The regular organization of hands-on training sessions for producers as well as qualifying training for researchers and extension agents, such as the degree training program of Sasakawa Funds for Education in Agricultural Extension (SAFE) of the Nippon Foundation under Sasakawa Global 2000.
- The provision of field extension agents with tools -- work schedule, map of the intervention area, daily journal book, visit book, training copybook, monograph, selected seeds demonstration and dissemination books, etc.
- A dramatic lack of extension agents at the base, especially after the implementation of the voluntary retirement program.
- The financing of agricultural extension from state resources only without any specified contribution from the beneficiaries.
- The low level of beneficiaries' accountability (producers, farmers' organizations) in the management and governance of the research and extension services.
- The organization of research findings' users in the national and regional commissions.

Program Description, Objectives and Components

The aim of PASAOP was to assist the government of Mali in reducing poverty in the rural areas through increasing productivity of agricultural and nonagricultural activities, reinforcing institutional, organizational and technical activities of the services of the Ministry of Rural Development, improving the effectiveness of the agricultural producers' organizations and experimenting agricultural extension service management transfer to beneficiaries and private service providers and farmers' organization.

PASAOP was structured in four components, each of which has specific objectives:

Support to the rationalization and modernization of rural development services -- refocus the Ministry of Rural Development on its sovereign work of regulation, policy and strategy formulation, monitoring and evaluation and oversight; improving autonomy, efficiency and accountability of public services.

Support to the national agricultural research system -- improve the effectiveness, relevance and sustainability of its services, through strengthening and operationalizing the research steering by the National Agricultural Research Committee, improving the scientific and managerial capacities of national research institutions and structures, strengthening research/extension/agricultural operation ties, developing the response capacity of research structures to meet the users' specific concerns or expectations, and making the partnership with relevant subregional and international agricultural research more operational and fruitful.

Support to the national system for agricultural extension -- improve the effectiveness and relevance of structures providing support and advice by strengthening the intervention capacities and decentralization of state extension services, and experimenting extension services transfer to private service providers.

Support to agricultural chambers and farmers' organizations -- improve the capacity of farmers' organizations to enable them to effectively play their roles/responsibilities in representing, managing and facilitating; to improve their access to inputs, agricultural credit, markets and innovative technologies; and to enable them to participate effectively in governing bodies of research and to monitor the implementation of policies as well as agricultural projects and programs.

Major Experiences or Achievements in PASAOP

A central and cross-cutting element in the implementation of all PASAOP components is capacity building -- institutional, technical, scientific, organizational, and managerial. Achievements include:

The development and validation of a strategy with an action plan for rural training and for communication in rural areas.

- A policy and a national strategy for agricultural and rural training with a training plan were developed and are in the circuit for adoption. The development process of these instruments created dialogue between the structures as part of training.
- A comprehensive and decentralized rural communication strategy was developed and validated in April 2003. As part of the implementation of this strategy, regional senior executives for communication developed

communication plans. The communication activities focused on building public officials' awareness of the methodology of an early warning system, the creation and inventory management of community food security stocks and prevention of bird flu.

The main results and changes achieved by the National Agricultural Research System (PASAOP, 2009) are:

Scientific and management capacity building for the National Agricultural Research Commission (CNRA) and research institutions

- CNRA was equipped with human resources and materials and all expected statutory instruments. This capacity building for CNRA increased the accountability of the beneficiaries, program evaluation, and the management of research contracts. The creation of Regional Councils for Research and Agricultural Extension (CRRVA) in the regions helped to make projects and research results more relevant and consistent with the needs of beneficiaries and with the regional development objectives.
- The organization of the Agricultural Research Week in Mali (SRAMA) in June 2006 and in March 2009 contributed to the dissemination of research products for the public and partners.
- The establishment of a scientific committee at each IPR/IFRA improved the quality of scientific papers. This contributed to reducing the rejection rate of papers submitted to the scientific commission from 15 percent in 2003 to 2 percent to 3 percent in 2008.

Capacity building among human resources in research structures

Training sessions for extension officers, researchers and producers:

- Long-term training: 46 researchers from the Institut d'Economie Rurale (IER), Comité National de la Recherche Agronomique (CNRA) and Laboratoire Central Vétérinaire (LCV)
- Short-term training for the research staff: 74 employees from the IER, the CNRA and LCV.
- Training for supervisory officers: 147 officers trained.
- Training for producers: 164 trained, including 74 women.

These training sessions enabled relevant structures to better fulfill their missions and gain a certain level of performance through the improved quality of reports and proposals for research topics. This reduced the number of projects rejected by the Scientific Research Committee...

Capacity Building Among Support and Consulting Agents and Producers

In this context, capacity building involved:

- 1174 technical agents – 117.4 percent of the anticipated 1000.
- 7675 villages – 767 percent of the anticipated 1000.

The training improved the capacity of agents and the participation of producers to identify and define constraints through the Village Participatory Needs Assessment

Capacity building of agricultural chambers ensured the proper conduct of their responsibilities of representation, negotiation, advocacy, and formulation of projects and policies.

The organization of statutory activities allowed the consular institution to properly fulfill its institutional obligations, improve its working methods, increase the capacity of elected officials and make important decisions that improved the livelihood of agricultural producers.

A new strategic vision was printed in the management of the consular institution through the development of a five year orientation plan and the establishment of operational working committees.

The training and exchange visits improved the capacities of analysis, negotiation, advocacy and the formulation of projects and policies. Three hundred fifty elected officials were trained on their roles and responsibilities, which led to their greater accountability in the management of the institution on the major issues of the agricultural profession. The Assemblée Permanente des Chambres d'Agriculture du Mali (APCAM is currently represented on the steering committees and board of 54 national and sub-regional institutions.)

Thirty senior executives and 70 facilitators were trained on the needs assessment, development of micro projects, budgeting tools and database management, allowing the presence of an Organisation Paysanne Agricole (OPA) in all regions.

Strengthening the participation of agricultural chambers and OPAs in decision-making bodies of research and extension

The APCAM participated with extension and research services in the choice of technologies that were transferred, beneficiary selection and establishment of agreements, and in monitoring the implementation of the field activities under "Supplemental." This helped improve the consideration of producers' real needs in the choice of technologies.

Challenges and Proposed Solutions

- The low level of understanding of the World Bank procedure manual on the part of the Malian participants was the first problem reported with negative consequences on the rate of resource mobilization and the level of achievement of program activities. The

solution recommended was the training of managers on the procedures and the introduction of Trompro software for management. It was also clear that the procedure manual needed to be adapted to the changing institutional framework of the Ministry of Rural Development (MDR).

- Difficulties in the timely mobilization of the share of project costs paid by the government of Mali: The solution recommended was the payment of bills and pre-financing of activities up to 85 percent until the disbursement of the Malian share.
- Lack of advanced preparation – i.e., private providers signing contracts to provide support and advice services.
- Difficulty of mobilizing the contribution of farmers' organizations receiving support and advice services (20 percent of total costs) under the test agricultural extension transfer: Often the beneficiaries' shares or contributions were given by their associations or by other support services.
- Institutional instability of MDR services, which made it difficult to strictly implement the procedures manual: The recommended solution is rereading and adapting the procedures manual to the institutional development of MDR services.
- Lack of functional literacy, which is a cornerstone in the process of building technical, organizational and management capacities of farmers' organizations in general, but particularly those involved in the management of service contracts.
- The lack of separation of funding for strategic research and demand-driven research on the competitive funds: This explains the imbalance between the two types of research. The recommended solution would be to separate the two funding areas. Lack of an effective strategy to disseminate technologies (funding or credit mechanism, demonstration and dissemination plots of improved varieties of seeds, shop windows, etc.), which had a negative impact on the level of adoption and application of innovative technologies and, therefore, the significant improvement of agricultural productivity and the socioeconomic impact of PASAOP. These corrections will be needed in future extension programs, because "farmers believe only what they see," as the saying goes.

Lessons Learned

- With regard to the high level of illiteracy in Mali (80 percent of rural population), it was highly important to strategically **anticipate** the withdrawal of projects and partners' support before the projects' closure. Therefore, the capitalization of achievements and capacity building of beneficiaries through the promotion of sustainable functional literacy is crucial for sustainability.

- Improving or amplifying the socioeconomic impact of the projects and programs requires the establishment of a financial mechanism that fits agricultural financing needs. This will effectively stimulate the dissemination and adoption of economically viable techniques and technologies and also build the competitiveness of emerging agricultural industries. All in all, this is an important guarantee for improving agricultural productivity, nutritional status and incomes of producers, and reducing poverty in rural areas. Likewise, the establishment of demonstration plots, plots for the dissemination of new varieties and show-cases (demonstration plots) is also an important aspect of the technology dissemination strategy. To promote sustainability and inter-institutional cooperation, the search for synergy and also the culture of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teamwork, the experience of the Regional Committees for Research and Agricultural Extension (CRRVA) should be capitalized on, perpetuated and replicated in other similar cases.
- Because long-term strategic research projects are very expensive compared with on-request research projects and part of improving the efficiency of agricultural research, the separation of funding for long-term strategic research from that of on-request research becomes a highly desired improvement in a global research funding mechanism. Also the sustainability and capitalization of a competitive funding mechanism and the approach of supplemental funding, which focused on the extension of some highly targeted and remunerative technologies (e.g., goat "Guera," microtubers of potato, the breed "kokochè," etc.) must be given special attention.
- Moreover, it is entirely appropriate and strategic to proceed with rereading the economic and social development plan (PDSEC) of local authorities for consideration of agricultural, stock breeding and fishing activities' concerns.
- Contracting advisory support to private providers is worth pursuing and experimenting with elsewhere to ensure that training and necessary capacity building for private providers are current to meet the needs of their future roles and responsibilities.
- Beneficiaries should participate in the management of the funds for research and extension programs. In the contracting and transfer of extension management to farmers' organizations and to private providers in Mali, the level of beneficiary participation in financing the overall cost of services was set at 20 percent, with 80 percent borne by PASAOP.
- The beneficiaries' contribution reflects and symbolizes their empowerment and real involvement in the service provision contract management. The same is true for the introduction of performance contracts, which allow

beneficiaries to evaluate the contractor's performance and decide whether to continue the contract.

- This innovation was introduced certainly because of the limitations or shortcomings reported in the state management of many projects and outreach programs around the world. These shortcomings include the poor management of extension workers under the civil service system in the absence of contract performance, recovery and untimely the use of human resources and moving machinery through requisitions either for political or for operating needs of the state apparatus (elections, administrative tours, etc.). But it must be clear that the mobilization of beneficiaries' organizations' contribution is easy mostly when financial resources are raised internally by farmers' based-organizations (FBOs) through members fees or taxes on products (cereals, livestock, etc.). The availability of human and financial resources coupled with the capacity building for private providers are required prior to contract signature to deliver appropriate extension services and ensure the success of this unique and great initiative

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Annex – Additional Information

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The main objective of the so-called "Window-screen" plots is to help producers make a choice among several varieties (5 to 20) of a given crop (e.g., sorghum, rice, millet). This choice is based on what producers have seen or learnt from crop varieties in terms of yield and morphological stands characteristics etc. the window screen plots themselves are small plots established alongside a road or a public place with easy access for any visitors. In order to facilitate the adoption of the different varieties by producers, the extension and research services organize guided visits around the window-screen plots during the vegetative or harvesting period.