

Documentation on the Method of Agricultural Training Centres



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Introductory Note

This fact sheet has been produced as part of a study to map innovative methods and tools in agricultural advisory services in West and Central Africa. This study was commissioned by CORAF/WECARD (the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development) and carried out by RESCAR-AOC (the West and Central Network for Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services) across 13 West and Central African countries.

The overall objective of the study was to compile a descriptive directory of innovative agricultural advisory methods and tools for scaling up agricultural technologies and innovations in West and Central Africa.

Several individuals within CORAF, RESCAR-AOC, and beyond, across the 13 countries covered by the study, contributed to the success of this initiative. We extend our gratitude to everyone involved for their contribution.

1. Overview of the Agricultural Training Centre Method

The method of the agricultural training centre primarily focuses on strengthening the capacities of farmers (learners). However, the training centre is essentially a method for disseminating agricultural technologies and innovations. Several methods and tools can be integrated into training centres, including field schools, demonstration plots, printed materials, digital platforms, etc.

2. Brief Description of the Types of Beneficiaries Supported by the Method

The farmers being supported through the training centres are generally smallholder farmers who are literate in English. They are typically young (under 35 years old) and aspire to engage in agriculture as an economic activity (agribusiness).

3. Necessity and Objective of the Method

Agricultural training centres are established to address the social inequalities encountered in the dissemination of agricultural technologies and innovations (taking into account women, youth, and people with disabilities) and strengthen the skills of learners in solving agro-sylvo-pastoral production challenges faced by local communities. The objectives of

this tool include: (i) inspiring and training young people for agricultural occupations, (ii) adapting training programmes to the needs of economic markets, (iii) training agricultural entrepreneurs, and (iv) enhancing the entrepreneurial capacities of existing workers, among others.

4. Methodology for Implementing the Method

For the creation and effective operation of training centres, certain changes and innovations are necessary, including: (i) developing communication, linguistic, and socio-anthropological skills among learners, (ii) fostering a vocation for agricultural careers, and (iii) supporting the change in farmers' practices through the application of good agricultural practices.

The recruitment and training of learners follow these steps:

- Programming the training session: updating training modules according to objectives and needs, mobilising trainer teams and resources, etc.
- Planning and meeting with local authorities: organising a meeting with local authorities.
- Radio announcement: preparing and broadcasting a radio announcement to launch the call for applications.
- Application processing: receiving and processing the applications.
- Result selection: posting the results of the selected learners.
- Discussion meeting: holding a meeting with the selected learners.
- Choosing the demonstration site: selecting the site for demonstration.
- Site preparation: dividing and allocating the site according to the practice objectives.
- Conducting activities: carrying out experimental and/or demonstration activities.
- Monitoring and evaluation: monitoring and evaluating the activities at the demonstration site.
- Comparing results: comparing the results at the end of the experiment.

- Assessing technology adoption: evaluating the degree to which learners have adopted the technologies and innovations.
- Recommendations: formulating recommendations for further adoption and dissemination of the technologies among learners.

5. Impacts of the Method

It is difficult to specify the exact number of the people trained through agricultural training centres. For example, in Burkina Faso, several agricultural training centres have over the years contributed to the training of numerous agents and farmers, with training flows estimated at 12,000 learners per year, of which 37% are women (reseau-far.com).

Training centres have achieved the following: (i) breaking down linguistic, gender, religious, and physical barriers; (ii) providing a solution for the production and multiplication of healthy seeds; (iii) improving yields and the organoleptic quality of cultivated products, and gradually scaling up new production methods through farmer-to-farmer exchanges; (iv) demonstrating to farmers the importance of identifying a market for their products before commencing production.

According to farmers, the training they received has led to increased yields thanks to better farm management and higher incomes through the processing of harvested products. Modules on market research and marketing have facilitated access to new markets. For young people, access to new markets is evidenced by online sales and networking among young agricultural entrepreneurs as well as cooperatives.

6. Technologies and Innovations Promoted Through the Method

Professional agricultural training centres play a key role in disseminating and promoting agricultural technologies. They serve as a bridge between research and farmers while training farmers in innovations that enhance productivity, climate resilience, and the sustainability of farms. The technologies promoted and adopted in these centres include, among others:

- Agroecology and conservation agriculture (Altieri, 2018)
- Agricultural mechanisation (Pingali, 2007)
- Irrigation and water management (FAO, 2011)
- The use of biotechnologies (Qaim, 2020)

- Digital agriculture and smart agriculture (Wolfert et al., 2017)
- Sustainable fertilisation techniques (Vanlauwe et al., 2015)
- Integrated pest and disease management (Pretty and Bharucha, 2015)
- Sustainable livestock farming and optimised animal feeding (Thornton and Herrero, 2015)
- Technical guidelines for specific crops
- The use of improved seed varieties
- Production and use of organic manure
- Line sowing
- Various soil management practices tailored to different crops
- Phytosanitary protection of crops
- Use of technical datasheets for specific crops and seed varieties, etc.

7. Average implementation costs of the agricultural training centre method

Establishing an Agricultural and Rural Training Centre (CFAR) is a significant and costly project (Fert, n.d.). Although the pedagogical farms of CFARs can generate their own resources, the pursuit of internal profitability may sometimes conflict with the quality of training (Fert, n.d.). Investment costs for CFARs can range from 363,500 euros (Fekama Agricultural College) to 451,600 euros (CFAR of the Savannahs) (Fert, n.d.).

Costs include the installation of the centre (buildings and equipment) as well as specific operating expenses such as: training fees for farmers; costs for adapting training modules related to new innovations or technologies; acquisition costs of agricultural inputs (seeds, farming equipment) for practical exercises; travel expenses (fuel, food and beverage, accommodation) for consultants and other people such as workers and agents; site development expenses (clearing, preparing planting beds, etc.)

8. Strengths and limitations of the method

Strengths:

The main strengths of the agricultural training centres as identified in the literature and during the national discussion and evaluation workshops and during the interviews for the documentation of methods and tools are as follows:

- Availability of qualified staff to supervise learners.
- High enthusiasm among young people for training in agricultural professions.

- A favourable political context for establishing agricultural training centres.
- Improved skills and professionalisation of learners.
- Access to innovations and new technologies.
- Promotion of entrepreneurship and rural development.
- Support for the agroecological transition.
- Adaptation to local needs and a diversity of training programs.

The main limitations of agricultural training centres are:

- Very high costs for establishing a centre (buildings and equipment) and its operation (mobilising supervisory staff and learners, consumables, etc.).
- Insufficient financial resources allocated to centres for enhancing trainer expertise and updating training modules, as well as for adapting training materials for different social groups.
- Limited infrastructure and equipment.
- Challenges in professional insertion and slow adaptation to climatic and economic challenges.

9. Prerequisites for success and the role of various stakeholders in the success of the method

The success of agricultural training centres is influenced by: (i) the development of consistent training programs tailored to farmers and local markets, (ii) clear coordination and collaboration among stakeholders, effective and better management of the centre's human and financial resources. For the success of a training centre, it is important to consider: (i) availability of agricultural land for the centre's activities, (ii) diversification of training topics to cover all aspects of farming, (iii) a higher proportion of practical training compared to theoretical instruction, (iv) provision of starter kits to learners at the end of their training cycle to enable self-employment, turning them into model farmers who facilitate peer-to-peer dissemination of agricultural technologies and innovations.

The experience of setting up agricultural training centres shows that: (i) agricultural advisory services alone can improve farmers' yields and living conditions by 30%; (ii) agricultural advisory services must be a fully-fledged profession; (iii) achieving food sovereignty requires the implementation of a well-reasoned, planned, properly financed and sustainable national agricultural advisory and extension strategy.

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