

Documentation on the Agricultural Fair



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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 Fair Method

Holding agricultural fairs is a method for disseminating research technologies and may also be arranged for other purposes. For example, there are fairs for improved or local seeds, which serve as exhibition platforms for the different varieties of various crops; innovation fairs, which showcase the various innovations developed around specific themes; knowledge fairs; etc. Fairs therefore help to raise awareness about food security, promote agricultural products within the national economy, highlight producers' skills, and disseminate both local and improved seed varieties. Other types of fairs are described by some authors depending on their areas of interest. In this regard, there is the agricultural technology fair, which is generally organised by the Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) Programme and CORAF. The objective of this fair is to present the agricultural technologies from the TAAT programme and those of CORAF's National Centres of Specialisation or Excellence, in order to promote their brokerage, adoption and integration into agricultural transformation and the socio-economic development of West and Central African countries.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS), for its part, describes four (4) main types of agricultural fairs, noting that all successful ones share the fact that they are well-timed and have clearly defined objectives (CRS, 2017). These four (4) main types of fairs are:

- The CRS Seed Voucher and Fair. This fair originates in East Africa and aims to enable farmers affected by disasters to obtain the seeds of their choice; it is generally geared towards local sellers/farmers, although it may also include the private sector and public authorities.
- The DiNER Fair (Diversity for Nutrition and Enhanced Resilience). This fair originates in Southern Africa. Its aim is to improve access to a variety of agricultural products and seeds to enhance household nutrition, increase food security and resilience. It includes education on nutrition, household decision-making processes, private sector input suppliers, community-based multipliers and individual sellers.
- The Livelihood Fair, which originates in South Asia. The aim of this fair is to protect and restore livelihoods. It often includes seeds, livestock and other non-agricultural goods.
- The Livestock Fair. This fair originates in East and Central Africa. Its aim is to improve access to livestock and the resources required for their upkeep.

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

Agricultural fairs are suitable for all categories of producers. Men, young people, women and people with certain disabilities can all take part in agricultural fairs. Depending on the objectives of the fair, the appropriate profile of participants should be targeted. Thus, the method of organising the fair must take into account the participants' level of education and their languages.

3. Objective of the Agricultural Fair Method

The objective of holding fairs is manifold, including:

- Enabling participants to discover and appreciate the agricultural products on display;
- Fostering exchanges and/or the sale of agricultural products and technologies;
- Establishing business relationships among actors in the agrosylvopastoral value chains;
- Creating and strengthening partnership relations between producers, researchers, technical services and projects.

4. Methodology for Implementing the Agricultural Fair Method

The organisation of an agricultural fair can follow these steps:

- Framing the activity by the initiator: defining objectives, dates, venues, etc.;
- Identifying and communicating the conditions and criteria for participation;
- Identifying the participants;
- Identifying and selecting the thematic areas, products and technologies to be presented;
- Defining the specifications for the samples to be displayed and the available quantities;
- Defining the accompanying information that should be provided with the samples;
- Arranging the layout of the fairgrounds;
- Preparing the communications for the event;
- The actual conduct of the fair;
- Monitoring and evaluating the fair's activities and formulating recommendations for improvement.

5. Impacts of the Agricultural Fair Method

Holding a fair creates a forum for exchanges among producers and various actors in the value chains, which facilitates the uptake and adoption of the displayed technologies and the distribution of certain products, such as improved seeds (CRA-Maradi, 2015).

For the knowledge fair, which is a vibrant, interactive and collaborative workspace featuring lively discussions and practical demonstrations, the facilitated sessions allow participants to learn how others have improved the efficiency and quality of their work. Fairs, like other types of events, are networking opportunities that allow contacts to be established, ideas to be linked and viewpoints to be exchanged naturally in a relaxed setting (FAO, 2014).

6. Technologies and Innovations Promoted Through the Agricultural Fair Method

Several technologies and innovations are promoted through the agricultural fair method. These include:

- Agricultural inputs, including improved seeds;
- Improved breeds of animal species;
- Agricultural equipment and machinery;
- Technical fact sheets on the production, conservation and processing of agrosylvopastoral products; etc.

7. Average Costs for Implementing the Agricultural Fair Method

The organisation of fairs is time-consuming; it presents logistical challenges and is costly (David and Cofini, 2019). It takes into account the rental of the venue and equipment, advertising and the transport of farmers. Consequently, the cost of organising fairs, exhibitions and agricultural events can vary considerably.

8. Strengths and Limitations of the Agricultural Fair Method

The main strengths and limitations of the agricultural fair method, as identified during national discussion and evaluation workshops and through documentation interviews on methods and tools, are as follows:

Strengths of the Agricultural Fair Method

- Wide reach, which promotes connectivity and the sharing of experiences and knowledge among different actors;
- Networking, establishing contacts and highlighting local know-how;
- Showcasing innovations;
- The possibility of holding fairs in local languages, making them more accessible to beneficiaries.

Limitations of the Agricultural Fair Method

- Participation requirements that can make access difficult for producers (e.g. travel, stand rental, etc.);
- High costs associated with the organisation of a fair;
- Often limited to regional or national levels, which can hinder access for the maximum number of farmers.

9. Prerequisites for Success and the Role of Various Stakeholders in the Success of the Agricultural Fair Method

For the organisation of an agricultural fair to be successful, certain prerequisites must be primarily met:

- The establishment of an inclusive team dedicated to organising the fair;
- Clearly defined objectives and expected outcomes;
- Logistic issues (communication, transport, catering) must be planned and budgeted;
- The interests of the participants must align with the fair's objectives;
- Communications and displays must be prepared and evaluated in advance with the fair's coordination team;
- Participants must receive invitations and all the necessary information in a timely manner, allowing them to decide to participate, prepare for their participation and arrange travel.

Bibliography

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