



Documentation on the Relay Farmer or Farmer-to-Farmer
Advisory Method



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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 Farmer-to-Farmer Advisory Method

The farmer-to-farmer extension approach (F2F) involves farmers themselves acting as agricultural advisors, working with public, private, or NGO-based extension organisations. These advisors, depending on their role and whether they receive allowances, are also referred to as contact farmers, rural facilitators, lead farmers, community knowledge agents, or volunteer farmer trainers. Generally, they are not formally employed but may receive allowances to cover their expenses. These advisors are often motivated by access to new knowledge and information, social recognition, and altruism.

The activities undertaken by farmer trainers include training, advisory services, follow-ups, and organising meetings, demonstrations, and field days. They are locally recruited and selected by an extension organisation in collaboration with local authorities and communities based on their knowledge, agricultural expertise, communication skills, reliability, and availability. They are typically trained in technical subjects, extension methods and approaches, facilitation, and communication skills, with ongoing training and periodic support from extension personnel. The farmer-to-farmer method (F2F) is often used in combination with other approaches such as farmer field schools, ICT-based approaches, and demonstration plots to enhance its reach.

2. Brief description of Beneficiaries Supported by the Farmer-to-Farmer Advisory Method

The farmer-to-farmer advisory method is primarily used to support family farms with an average size of about 1.5 hectares. Beneficiaries include rural producers (farmers and livestock farmers), young people engaged in agricultural production, and women who lead farms. These households' production systems are mixed, with a variety of plants and animal species. The main livestock species include cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry. Key crops grown include cereals, legumes, tubers, and root crops.

Several factors motivate certain producers to become relay farmers or endogenous trainers. These primarily include (i) Access to technical innovations and the opportunity to enhance their own skills through training and exchange with other leaders, (ii) their desire to share knowledge and support fellow farmers, (iii) the potential to earn additional income through services provided alongside advisory and training activities, (iv) social recognition associated with the status of a relay.

3. Necessity and Objectives of the Farmer-to-Farmer Advisory Method

This advisory method was introduced to improve the ratio of advisors to the number of farmers supported, ensuring closer monitoring of farmers. The objectives of this method include: increasing agro-sylvo-pastoral production, empowering farmers to manage their farms by enhancing their skills (learning and knowledge acquisition).

4. Implementation Methodology of the Farmer-to-Farmer Advisory Method

The implementation of the farmer-to-farmer advisory method follows several steps:

- (i) Relay farmers are initially members of a grassroots farmers' group.
- (ii) They are identified and selected by their peers within these grassroots groups.
- (iii) Once selected, they receive training on technical aspects, facilitation, pedagogy, and the use of appropriate tools for their role.
- (iv) They are equipped with basic materials, such as vaccination kits or sprayers, to facilitate their interventions.
- (v) They provide services to their fellow farmers.

5. Impact of the Farmer-to-Farmer Advisory Method

Farmer-to-farmer extension programmes have been in use in the Philippines since the 1950s and in Central America since the 1970s (Selener et al., 1997). In Africa, these programmes have expanded significantly (Simpson et al., 2015) and are relatively common.

This model of extension by farmers has proven successful in Peru in Latin America (Hellin et al., 2002), in Indonesia in Far East and several African countries including Cameroon, Malawi, Ghana and Kenya (Franzel et al., 2015). According to Masangano and Mthinda (2012), nearly 78% of development organisations in Malawi use this approach. In Cameroon, however, only one-third of the organisations use this approach in seven regions (Tsafack et al., 2014). However, even though these programmes are widespread, educational resources on the use of the approach as well as analyses and comparisons of F2F programmes are scarce (Franzel et al., 2015).

The farmer-to-farmer (F2F) extension method fosters technology adoption, improve productivity, and enhance main farmers' profitability (Yuko et al., 2018). These authors demonstrated in their study of rice production in Tanzania that the F2F method allowed producers to improve their paddy rice yield from 3.1 tonnes per hectare to 5.3 tonnes.

Financially, relay farmers offer advisory services at a low cost: local proximity reduces travel expenses, and no salaries are paid. They may receive allowances for travel or compensation for time away from their own farms. The allowances are limited to avoid that the relay farmers favour interventions in other farmers at the expense of their own farms. In addition to the allowances, costs include materials provided to relay farmers and training and support expenses, which may be partially covered by farmers' organisations. The originality of this advisory service is the fact that it is taken over by the relay farmer or their basic group (travel expenses and meals are covered as defined in each case in the internal regulations of local groups). A cost-effective service that allows for a low cost of the service.

Relay producers are used in the implementation of other agricultural advisory methods including farm advice, farmer field school, demonstrations, etc. For this purpose, the results of the study by Tchegnnon et al. (2022), in Benin on the effectiveness of the use of relay producers in the implementation of family farm advisory service (FFA), showed that

members have experienced a significant improvement in their capacity to plan their activities (85%), cash management (87%), production stock management (89%), manpower management (70%) and in the definition of a project for the development of their operation (95%). The results also showed a reduction in the technical constraints of the main crops (68%), an increase in yields (76%). In addition, an increase in income (91%) and an improvement in food security (73%).

6. Technologies and Innovations Promoted through the Farmer-to-Farmer Advisory Method

Several technologies and innovations have been promoted through the farmer-to-farmer advisory method, including composting, micro-dosing, bio-pesticide production and use, assisted natural regeneration, zaï techniques, densified multi-nutritional feed blocks, mineral licks, and technical farming itineraries, etc.

7. Average Implementation Costs of the Farmer-to-Farmer Advisory Method

Implementation costs may include training costs, equipment of agricultural advisors (motorcycle/bicycle or transportation costs, clothing, stationery, mobile phones and airtime) and supervision and support costs (Franzel et al. 2015; David and Cofini 2019). Also, farmers training often have high expectations in terms of financial and non-financial compensation (David and Cofini, 2019). Kiptot et al. (2012) showed through their study in Kenya for a dairy project that the cost invested for training and support of agricultural advisors was about USD 160/year. Wellard et al. (2013) estimated F2F implementation costs at US\$400 per farmer trainer over four years.

8. Strengths and Limitations of the Farmer-to-Farmer Advisory Method

In case study documentation, advisory organisations and producers highlighted some strengths and limitations of the farmer-to-farmer method.

Strengths

It is observed that the farmer-to-farmer method: (i) builds trust among participants, facilitating technology adoption; (ii) encourages continuous learning and experience-sharing in the absence of extension advisers; (iii) strengthens community engagement and connectivity; (iv) it is a low-cost system (no direct salaries paid); etc.

Fert (2019) notes that relay farmers in Burkina Faso, Kenya, and Madagascar have a shared advantage: they combine endogenous knowledge with new techniques tested on their own farm. Thus, The F2F method has a quick persuasion ability towards farmers. Its credibility is all the greater as it maintains close relations, even complicity, with those whose reality and daily life it shares. Finally, unlike the technicians who come and go according to available funding, relay farmers are more resilient and provide a minimum service in all circumstances.

Limitations:

For the limitations, it is noted that: (i) the results and impacts of the method are poorly documented, (ii) there is a low consideration of the gender dimension in the choice of relay farmers, (iii) the method requires a lot of time for monitoring and capacity building of the relay so that he/she becomes more or less empowered, (iv) there is the challenge of sustainable support of the relay farmer (farmers pay the services by themselves).

9. Pre-requisites for success and the role of different stakeholders in the success of the farmer-to-farmer method.

Fert (2019) indicates that implementing a relay farmer system requires:

- compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, and therefore the affiliation of relay farmers to their Farmers' organisation or base group, in particular as regards support or carry conditions;
- not to remunerate the relay farmers as employees, but to compensate for the service rendered (in particular through margins on the sale of products, seeds...);
- support the relay farmers in their function, whether by advisers, the Government or other actors (training, access to information...);
- promote exchanges between relay farmers on specific themes, to avoid isolation and open it to other contexts.

Key Lessons and Policy Implications

The key lessons and messages that can be drawn from the experience of the farmer-to-farmer method to guide public policies and agricultural advisory bodies in the judicious use of the method are that the method allows for appropriate solutions to the needs of the operation and requires the deployment of significant human resources.

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