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Cameroon: the National Agricultural Extension and Research Program Support Project

As a follow-on intervention to the National Project for Agricultural Extension (PNVA), this project undertook to finance – jointly with the government, IFAD, and AfDB – implementation (2001-2004) of the national agricultural extension policy and agricultural research in Cameroon as follows: competitive research grants (IDA); linkages between agricultural research and extension (IFAD); and on-station agricultural research (AfDB). While providing services to all farmers, the project sought to prioritize «resource-poor» farmers, and women farmers.

Impact on the ground

- An estimated 80% of the farming population was reached: the 58,699 contact groups created represented at least 50% of farm families; after midterm, 13,277 were formed as micro projects, representing about 488,000 families (39% of the farm families), of them 46% women.
- While average crop, livestock and fisheries yield increases of 10% had been projected in the SAR, the increases by and large exceeded this figure – some of the yield increases per year were as follows: maize – 17.5%; cassava – 23.2%; potatoes – 30%; plantains – 21.3%; milk – 10.1%; cattle – 9.1%; poultry – 7%.
- The adoption rates reached during the second half of the project commonly exceeded the target of 62%. Out of 36 new technologies reviewed in the Impact Study, the adoption rates were over the target in 28.
- Fifty-six SOAPs were in place providing the necessary support to farmer organizations and links with the private sector; 3 contracts were entered into with NGOs for agricultural extension covering 31 zones; 474 production contracts were made between farmer groups, microfinance institutions, and input suppliers or produce marketers; 79 professional associations and 12 produce-specific federations to support local farmers groups were established, involving 23,123 farmers.
- The pilot operation relating to the Village-based Community Development component helped educate 184 trainers who covered 320 villages which prepared diagnostic analyses and activity plans. The plans implemented included improvements in getting potable water (40%), rehabilitation of schools and their equipment (25%), rehabilitation or construction of sanitary infrastructure (10%) and others (25%).
- Three hundred and twenty villages were covered under the community development pilot component, each having a comprehensive diagnostic plan – this exceeded the target of 70-100 villages.
- Compared to the target of 700 subprojects to be satisfactorily implemented, 1,250 subprojects were satisfactorily implemented, of which 520 were by women.

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Lessons learned

- Substantial increases in yields and livestock productivity can be achieved with an effective extension management system if linked with adaptive agricultural research and modified to the conditions in a particular country. However, whatever system is used to support producers, adequate mobility for the extension and research staff is a precondition for obtaining results that will largely derive from the rural population.

- Adding a provision for funds for productive equipment and infrastructure can improve the motivation to
produce more, make produce more marketable, and also incentivize the willingness to form associations.

- In order to benefit more from producer organizations, more activities such as marketing, rural finance, feeder roads, education and other capacity building activities need to be supported.

- Reorientation of farmer support from a mass extension system such as the T&V system to a more targeted and comprehensive approach of advisory assistance to registered producer groups initially reduces the number of benefiting families, because the producer groups, with their multitude of needs, require more time from support agents. This could be offset by a phased approach whereby the first groups graduate, thus freeing up funds for the next set of groups.

- NGOS and consulting groups capable of carrying out extension work tend to be few, and seldom have the skills acquitted by the civil servants over the years. Consequently, when involving NGOs in such tasks, project planners should set aside sufficient funds for capacity building in these organizations before they are allowed to take over tasks from the public sector. Also, a financing system for the pre-payment of services is necessary as NGOs do not normally have funds to start new activities or enter new areas.

- Using POs as a basis for village investments provides economic incentives to village populations, but also offers benefits beyond the purely economic – the approach provides a forum to fight against HIV/AIDS, promotes the position of women, and improves the villagers’ understanding of the changing environment they live in and measures to maintain or improve it.

This Infobrief has been excerpted from Implementation Completion Report No. 30950. For more information, e-mail Ousmane Seck at: oseck@worldbank.org.