Pioneering direct farmer support in Guinea

In Guinea, farmers’ organizations have proved themselves so strong and well organized that IFAD has decided to pioneer a radically new approach in its delivery of assistance. For the first time ever, IFAD funding is being channelled by a government directly to the farmers, to spend on development activities they have prioritized. The programme is still in the early stages, but its innovative methodology and results so far indicate that it may well provide an important blueprint for future interventions of this kind.

Farmers drive their own development

With good soils, plentiful rain and water available for dry season cultivation, Guinea’s productive potential is enormous. Maize, oil palm, onions, potatoes, rice and rubber are just a few of the agricultural products that can be grown in abundance. But farmers are held back on many fronts. They lack credit to buy quality seeds, fertilizer and other inputs, while limited basic infrastructure makes storage, transport and processing costly and difficult.

The past decades have shown that traditional development approaches in Guinea have yielded little in terms of permanent support to agriculture. Now IFAD is putting development funds in the hands of the farmers themselves, allowing them to choose how and where they spend them.

“No more parachuting assistance from above,” says Moussa Para Diallo, President of the National Confederation of Farmers’ Organizations of Guinea (CNOP-G). “What we want with this programme is development by the farmers, for the farmers.”

The National Programme to Support Agricultural Value Chain Actors (Programme national d’appui aux acteurs des filières agricoles [PNAAFA]) opened in May 2011. It offers funding, capacity-building, technical support and a partnership platform to farmers through the CNOP-G, to enable them to implement their own development and build up selected value chains.
A viable partner

This innovation is made possible because Guinea has an exceptionally strong and dynamic national farmers’ organization, recognized as something of a model in sub-Saharan Africa.

Since the early 1990s, farmers’ organizations in Guinea have been growing and structuring themselves around the highly successful Fouta Djallon Farmers’ Federation (FPFD). In 2000, four federations – one for each region – came together as a national confederation. Today the confederation numbers 14 federations, more than 200 federalized and 6 non-federalized unions, and unites nearly 600,000 members across the country.

Moussa Para Diallo was one of the founders of the first farmers’ groups and the structure that became the CNOP-G. “We owe our success to our government, which allowed us to grow and become a legal structure,” he says, “and to donors who have helped us evolve and mature over the years. But we were also motivated to organize ourselves and introduce a democratic system that fosters responsibility and ownership. We have rules and impose sanctions on those who do not respect them. We believe that good governance, transparency and rigour make us credible and durable as an institution.”

Working in partnership

“With the CNOP-G the programme has a ready framework through which to channel its investments,” says Sara Kouakou, IFAD Country Programme Manager for Guinea. “But the framework needs to be consolidated in order to take on the implementation of a large-scale development programme.”

PNAAFA currently operates in two regions; through the FPFD and the Union in Middle Guinea, and the Federation of Rice Growers and the Federation of Rubber and Palm Producers in Forest Guinea. A third regional office will open in Upper Guinea by the end of 2012, and the fourth geographical region of Guinea, Lower Guinea, will be covered in 2013.

“What we are doing with this programme is building capacity within the CNOP-G as we
support the implementation of development activities,” says Kouakou.

PNAFA invests in enabling farmers’ organizations to structure themselves more efficiently from base to summit, and improve services to their members. It provides training programmes in monitoring and evaluation, communication, marketing, accounting and budgeting, as well as providing equipment such as vehicles and computers.

The programme’s funds have allowed the CNOP-G to expand the number of salaried technical support staff who work with the farmers’ groups, identifying needs and designing training requirements, advising on management and governance issues and ensuring strong linkages within the general structure.

PNAFA also plays a central role in facilitating close linkages between farmers’ organizations and state technical services and NGOs. “We collaborate with the relevant state agencies to ensure that once farmers’ organizations have identified their needs, they have the technical support they need to develop their projects,” says Mouctar Diallo, PNAFA Regional Coordinator for Middle Guinea.

These agencies include the National Rural Development and Agricultural Council (ANPROCA), which provides technical support in agronomy; the regional research centres, which provide the farmers with improved seeds; the Rural Engineering Technical Bureau, which helps select sites, carry out the necessary technical research and supervise the construction or installation of warehouses and irrigation systems; and the Regional Rural Roads Bureau.

Information flow
PNAFA ensures that communication, evaluation and sharing of information are embedded in the system of collaboration between the programme, farmers’ organizations and state agencies. Regular meetings are scheduled between the federations and unions and their technical advisers, the regional coordination units of the programme and with strategic partners. Three-monthly action plans guide activities.

“There’s a flow of information coming up from field level, from the farmers themselves, and the implications are huge,” says Ibrahim Barry, technical adviser to the CNOP-G in Labé.

“These are real issues that the technicians are trying to resolve. We are pulling up that information and converting it into action. In essence we are turning problems into activities.”

“Communication is very important to us,” says Prosper Mahomy, President of the Federation of Rubber and Palm Producers.

“Everything we do must be shared with our partners. We want to be known for our transparency and credibility. We want to be visible through what we do so that our partners can evaluate us fairly. And so that our experiences can be profitably shared with others.”

Value chains as entry point
The new programme applies a value chain approach to keep the focus on enhancing the competitiveness of specific products. It organizes preliminary workshops that bring
together all the players along a value chain – producers, technical service providers, traders, even restaurants – to understand what is required to increase productivity and reach lucrative markets. The results of these workshops are then taken up to the regional level where activities necessary for the development of each value chain are identified.

“The idea is that we work together to lubricate the whole mechanism, from farmer to market,” says Mouctar Diallo.

“By meeting regularly and bringing all the players together, we are able to identify opportunities and tackle problems that arise.”

One of the areas identified for future intervention in Middle Guinea is maize. “At the moment the maize value chain is poorly structured and we are working to correct that,” says Mouctar Diallo.

“Maize is important for food security, and there is considerable demand for maize from poultry farmers. The country currently imports more than 300,000 tonnes of maize per year. We would like to see that demand being met by our own farmers. By bringing together players along the value chain, we hope to identify what is required to make them stronger. We work with ANPROCA to identify areas where farmers are cultivating good varieties that are pest-resistant and high-yielding.”

Bringing farmers on board
PNAAFA’s investment allows the confederation to expand its outreach to producers, forming new groups and providing all the inputs they need to farm more profitably. The programme hopes to enable the CNOP-G to expand its members to 1 million by 2014.

Angèle Thea belongs to a group from Bouncouma in Forest Guinea that came together three years ago and joined the Federation of Rice Growers in 2012.

“We feel there is a structure there to help and support us,” she says.

“When we joined the federation we asked for inputs and got them. We’ve had seeds and training and support. Before it was each for himself, now we work together and help each other. And when we work together things happen faster. We can achieve much more.”
Literacy training is one of the most urgent requests made by farmers’ organizations. They know that both literacy and numeracy are fundamental to achieving strong, functional and enterprise-oriented farmers’ groups.

Thanks to PNAAFA funds, the CNOP-G has been able to introduce a system of training trainers that allows rapid dissemination of learning. “We train individuals in functional literacy, basic accounting and improved farming techniques,” says Ibrahim Barry.

“They will then go on to train others in their group. We spend 30 days training the trainers. We are active in monitoring the training activities and meet at the end of each month to address any problems that arise.”

In Sonké Togueta near Timbi Madina, Taibou Bah teaches a class of 20 adults in the new literacy centre built with PNAAFA funds. “I teach each class for 6 months, 3 days a week and more often in the dry season,” she says.

“We begin by teaching those most in need – only 2 people in my class have had any schooling.”

Taibou Bah had a little primary education as a child. She elected to be trained as a trainer and receives a monthly payment from the federation. “But the greatest benefit is sharing with my fellow farmers and learning something myself,” she says. “Being a trainer has given me status, I have become a counsellor for the community.”

The functional literacy classes are taught in the local language and based around five themes: environment, production, organization, health and hygiene, and group management and credit.

“This is truly functional literacy,” Taibou Bah says. “When we have time we hold practical classes; for example we learn about the importance of planting trees, then we go out and plant them.”

Mamadou Yero Bah is a technical trainer in the same village. Six years ago the federation asked him to train his fellow farmers. “I’ve trained many groups,” he says.

“At the moment I support 2 groups of 20 people each. I spend a lot of time in the fields helping farmers resolve problems. I teach
them new techniques: planting, composting, how to use fertilizers; and I use my land to test out new techniques. I give advice when there are problems with the plants or refer them on to the technicians.”

“There’s money to be made in agriculture”

Funds from PNAAFA have allowed the confederation to launch a large-scale push for higher yields. In the first year alone, 20 tonnes of chemical fertilizers, 20 tonnes of improved seeds and 100 litres of phytosanitary products have been distributed to farmers, which has resulted in a significant increase in productivity.

“With this system we have been able to reach a much larger number of farmers with the necessary inputs,” says Mouctar Diallo.

Oumar Diallo is the Vice-President of the L’union des groupements agricoles de Scoumbalako (UGAS), based in Mamou in Middle Guinea. “I came from Nzérékoré to Middle Guinea as an ‘adventurer’, looking for employment wherever I could find it,” he says.

“Now I’ve seen that there is money to be made in agriculture.”

With improved seeds obtained through PNAAFA, the members of UGAS have raised potato yields from 10 to 22 tonnes per hectare in just one year. The improved seeds have a shorter growing period so that they can be sown several times a year.

“Many of us have made money,” says Oumar Diallo.

“With the extra income I’ve been able to go to Mecca, and build a better home for my family. Success has improved social cohesion; we work together and this gives us more strength, more leverage.”

For Oumar Diallo, the technical training provided was essential. “The most important thing we’ve had from the programme is the training in improved farming techniques – this is what will have an enduring impact,” he says.

“Our success has attracted others and the groups are growing. We want to expand and we need tractors to do that. We don’t yet sell as a group and not all of us are able to negotiate a good price. But with larger volumes of produce and a warehouse with a cold room, we’ll explore the possibility of linking with bigger buyers, perhaps even the international market.”

In both regions, the CNOP-G/PNAAFA partnership has introduced inexpensive irrigation of lowland areas to expand dry season cultivation. New nurseries are being established so that high-yield premium and certified planting materials can be made more widely available. The Federation of Rice Producers in Nzérékoré has ordered 35 tonnes of rice for seed production to specialize in the multiplication of quality seeds – varieties that have a high yield and short growing cycle.

In Bangoueta village in Forest Guinea, a support centre for plant production has been established through PNAAFA and the Federation of Palm and Rubber Growers. At the training centre, 25 farmers’ group representatives can be trained at a time in grafting techniques and nursery management. Those trained go back to their groups and share with the others. This is also a centre for the distribution of certified oil palm seedlings.
imported from Côte d’Ivoire. Five nurseries for oil palm and rubber have been established in Forest Guinea.

Infrastructure is another important requirement that is being addressed in the early stages of the programme. A warehouse for storage is under construction for UGAS in Mamou, and another two have recently been completed in Nzérékoré for the rice federation and the palm and rubber growers. A third warehouse is planned for the rice producers in Kissidougou. Warehousing allows producers to take the next step towards selling together in bulk, and to operate a warehouse receipt system, offering credit for inputs that can be paid back at harvest.

In most of the country, banks are not linked to producers, and lending to farmers is still deemed too great a risk. PNAFA and the CNOP-G are working towards a solution to encourage banks to offer credit to producers. The programme is setting up rural financial services associations (FSAs) to provide credit to farmers’ organizations. The credit they offer is still limited, but it is sufficient to allow smallholder farmers to cover basic costs.

In the meantime, farmers’ organizations are piloting self-financing mechanisms. UGAS has been able to set up a revolving fund for seeds and other inputs where a total of FG 344,250 million (about US$4,960) has been invested to date. Eventually the programme would like to see the FSAs linked to commercial banks to provide full financing to farmers’ organizations at favourable rates.

Following Fouta
The Federation of Potato Producers of Fouta Djallon in Middle Guinea serves as an inspiration and example to other federations and unions. It has progressed far enough to be able to meet with buyers and agree prices, and negotiate wholesale purchase and move towards obtaining banking credit. The federation has reached a level of maturity that enables it to decide its own development process. Other federations and unions still need to be accompanied in this process.

Although IFAD has made an effort to streamline and simplify the disbursement process, there have been some delays in releasing funds. The programme is working
closely with farmers’ organizations to enable them to meet the administrative requirements and speed up the system.

“There are considerable challenges involved in working in Forest Guinea. The federations and farmers’ groups are less advanced and have many needs,” says André Lama, PNAAFA Regional Coordinator for Forest Guinea.

“We need more capacity-building, more investment for long-term strengthening of farmers’ organizations, and to ensure they reflect the same values as the national structure. We are working to gradually give them the autonomy to make their own purchases, and this is a new concept for them. They have always been recipients. Working through the value chain allows us to focus our support and evaluate progress.”

Aiming for critical mass

“The role of the state in agricultural development is to ensure the right policies are in place and help attract public and private investment to the sector,” says Sékou Sangaré, Secretary General of the Ministry of Agriculture in Guinea.

“The PNAAFA approach ensures that public investment generates sustainable results by helping farmers help themselves out of poverty, and benefiting the country as a whole with economic growth, increased exports and decreased agricultural imports.”

With systems being set in place in the early stages of the programme, the partnership should gain momentum in coming years. “When the programme ends in 2017, we hope to have consolidated what we are in the process of creating: a well structured and functioning organization, extended to all four regions,” says Ibrahima Bah, National Coordinator of the CNOP-G.

“What we intend is that by focusing on value chain development, we will help generate economic growth, and eventually be able to envisage the CNOP-G becoming an autonomous institution.”

“We are not running after results,” says Moussa Para Diallo. “We work together to create a system that endures. All of this takes time and steady continuous effort. We accompany these changes – we don’t impose them.”

In the meantime all eyes are trained on Guinea to observe and learn from this exciting innovation.

“What we are doing here is building a toolkit – creating a paradigm for operating through this kind of national organization – and encouraging others to do the same,” says Steven Schonberger, IFAD Regional Economist for West and Central Africa. “We want to be able to do this more consistently in other projects and other countries.”

Building a poverty-free world

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) works with poor rural people to enable them to grow and sell more food, increase their incomes and determine the direction of their own lives. Since 1978, IFAD has invested about US$14.3 billion in grants and low-interest loans to developing countries through projects empowering over 400 million people to break out of poverty, thereby helping to create vibrant rural communities. IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized UN agency based in Rome – the United Nations’ food and agriculture hub. It is a unique partnership of 168 members from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), other developing countries and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

KEY FACTS
National Programme to Support Agricultural Value Chain Actors (PNAAFA)
Total cost: US$45.7 million
IFAD loan: US$13.3 million
IFAD grants: US$17.8 million
Cofinancing: OPEC Fund for International Development (US$10.0 million)
Duration: 2009 to 2017
Directly benefiting: 66,000 households

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LINKS
National Programme to Support Agricultural Value Chain Actors
http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/project/tags/guinea/1206/project_overview
Rural poverty in Guinea
http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/rural-poverty-portal/country/home/tags/guinea
IFAD operations in Guinea
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