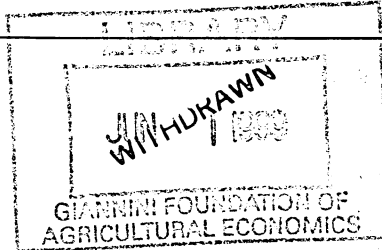




**AGRICULTURAL ADMINISTRATION
(RESEARCH AND EXTENSION) NETWORK**

NETWORK PAPER 50

0952-2468
July 1994



**LINKING FARMERS' ORGANISATIONS
AND RESEARCHERS:
FOUR CASE STUDIES**

- 50a The Sustainable use of Natural Resources by Community Organisations in Central America: The Experience of the Olafo Project by *Tania Ammour*
- 50b Diverse and Linked: Farmers' Organisations in Tanzania by *Amon Z Mattee and Thierry Lassalle*
- 50c Birth of a Small Farmers' Group in Guinea by *Pierre Krebs and Jean Vogel*
- 50d Building a Dialogue between Researchers and Small Farmers: the Tocantins Agro-Ecology Centre (CAT) in Brazil by *Marcia G Muchagata, Vincent de Reynal and Iran P Veiga Jr*

Tania Ammour can be contacted at:

Proyecto OLAFO, CATIE, Turrialba, Costa Rica
Tel: +506 56 6431 Fax: +506 56 1533 Tlx: 8005 CATIE CR

Amon Z Mattee and Thierry Lassalle can be contacted at:

Department of Agricultural Education and Extension
Sokoine University of Agriculture, PO Box 3002, Morogoro, Tanzania
Tel: +255 56 3511/4 Tlx: 55308 UNIVMOG TZ

Pierre Krebs and Jean Vogel can be contacted at:

Chemin du Badimont, 67420 Saales, France
Fax: +33 89 60 31 41

Marchia Muchagata, Vincent de Reynal and Iran P Veiga Jr can be contacted at:

LASAT-CAT, Caixa Postal 203, Maraba - PA
Code Postal: 68 501 - 970, Brazil
Fax: +55 91 324 18 46

Network Personnel:

Coordinator:
Secretary:

John Farrington
Alison Saxby

This Network is sponsored by:

The Overseas Development Administration (ODA)
94 Victoria Street, London SW1E 5JL

The opinions expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of ODA:

We are happy for this material to be reproduced on a not-for-profit basis. Please direct any enquiries to the Network Secretary. The Network Coordinator would appreciate receiving details of any use of this material in training, research or programme design, implementation or evaluation.

CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial Discussion	i

Paper 50a

The Sustainable Use of Natural Resources by Community Organisations in Central America: The Experience of the Olafo Project

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
<i>Objectives</i>	2
<i>Stages of work</i>	4
The Problem	5
Strategies employed and their results	9
<i>Bjisira, Bocas del Toro, Panama</i>	9
<i>San Rafael, Talamanca, Costa Rica</i>	10
<i>San Miguel, El Petén, Guatemala</i>	12
The role of external agents	13
Conclusions: Lessons learnt by the project	15
Table 1: The Olafo Project from the beginning, with three communities in pilot zones	6
Table 2: Characteristics of zones where Olafo is working	8
Figure 1: Location of the Pilot Zones	3

Paper 50b

Diverse and Linked: Farmers' Organisations in Tanzania

Abstract	19
Introduction	19
The Upper Mgeta Horticultural Development Project (UMHODEP)	20
Experiences with farmers' groups as entry points in the rural development process	21
<i>The diversity of farmers' groups</i>	22
<i>The networking process in a given area</i>	24
<i>The independence of each group</i>	26
<i>A mutually trusting and respectful relationship between farmers and professionals</i>	26
Conclusions	28
References	29

	Page
Paper 50c	
Birth of a Small Farmers' Group in Guinea	
Abstract	31
Introduction	31
<i>An historic approach, rich in learning experiences</i>	31
<i>New hope, new disappointment</i>	33
Project initiation	34
<i>The small farmers decide the direction of the project</i>	35
<i>Market forces are not accepted as an inevitability</i>	36
<i>A national meeting arranged for and by the small farmers</i>	38
<i>Encouraging but revealing results</i>	38
Conclusions	39
Box 1: Development Philosophy of Timbi-Madina	35

Paper 50d	
Building a Dialogue between Researchers and Small Farmers: the Tocantins Agro-Ecology Centre (CAT) in Brazil	
Abstract	41
Introduction	41
The framework for dialogue	42
<i>The union leaders' thinking</i>	42
<i>The universities' thinking</i>	43
The framework for collaboration	44
First steps for CAT	44
The dialogue: a scientific question	46
References	49
Table 1: Meeting structure between researchers and farmers	48

EDITORIAL DISCUSSION

John Farrington
Overseas Development Institute

These four papers are to be presented at the International Symposium on Farming Systems Research and Extension to be held in Montpellier, France, from November 21-25 1994.¹ They are reproduced here since they address a number of issues of central concern to the ODI/ISNAR Farmers' Organisations study.

The four papers all have certain elements in common:

- the impetus for working with farmer groups arose from the inadequate performance of conventional "project-led" or top-down approaches;
- all seek closer understanding of farmers' objectives and constraints, of the dynamics of group formation and support, and of current and potential interaction among groups and between them and external agents;
- all are written from the perspective of natural resources researchers, seeking to understand how they best gain the confidence of farmers and increase farmers' influence on the objectives and processes of research and development.

Beyond these basic similarities, the papers clearly differ in important respects:

- **Paper 50a** summarises CATIE's experience in working with local groups in natural resources management at three locations in Central America. It is particularly concerned with the need for projects with a resource conservation perspective to be supportive of (or at minimum, consistent with) farmers' own objectives if they are to succeed. From this arise the

¹ The permission of the Scientific Committee of the Montpellier FSR/E Symposium to publish these papers in the Agricultural Research and Extension Network is gratefully acknowledged.

The assistance of John Nelson and Sue Squire in translating and editing three of the four papers presented here is gratefully acknowledged.

complexities of reconciling short- and long-term resource-management perspectives.

- **Paper 50b** documents the interaction between a university research team and farmers' groups in horticultural production in Tanzania, and the subsequent emergence of a network of farmer groups.
- **Paper 50c** describes how farmers' groups in Guinea were instrumental in obtaining and spreading the new technology necessary for potato production, and in bringing about changes in government policy which had previously favoured potato imports.
- **Paper 50d** traces how new methodologies of interaction between researchers and farmers' groups evolved in new "frontier" settlements in Brazil, in order to move from a situation in which researchers dominated the process of technology development to one in which farmers have a voice.

Taken together, these papers provide a rich empirical background against which some of the preliminary ideas coming out of the ODI/ISNAR study (see Network Paper 47 with this mailing) can be examined. We look forward to continuing interaction with network members and with the authors of these papers on these issues.

Paper 50c

BIRTH OF A SMALL FARMERS' GROUP IN GUINEA

Pierre Krebs and Jean Vogel

ABSTRACT¹

In 1987, there was nothing to differentiate the Timbi-Madina region at the heart of Fouta Djalon from the rest of Guinea. Within six years the district had become home to the largest small farmers' group, and the farmers had taken complete control of potato production and marketing, with a turnover of several million French Francs.

This paper briefly describes the history of development in the region, and summarizes the process by which these farmer groups were formed into a dynamic force for change in Guinea. This process was linked with a project initiated by the French volunteer programme to identify viable technologies and promote agricultural development in the region. The paper outlines the philosophy of this project, and describes how the project workers and the farmers worked together to create a process by which the local economy was transformed and an ethos of partnership evolved.

INTRODUCTION

An historic approach, rich in learning experiences

The Guinean colonial authorities seem to have been concerned very early on about the agricultural development of Fouta Djalon. However, at the beginning of the century, the Commandant of Pita Cercle², located with Fouta Djalon, sounded a note of warning:

¹ Pierre Krebs is Spokesperson in Europe for the Federation of mid-Guinea Small Farmers. Jean Vogel was Head of the Agricultural Development Project in Timbi-Madina from 1988-1993

² *Journal du commandant de cercle Pita*, ARCIN 1904, archives of Guinea.

"unfortunately, our experiments have often been inconclusive, either because we did not take account of climatic and soil conditions, or because we did not fully complete our experiments. We are impatient and not very persevering."

Ten years later little has been achieved. The poor results in the region have been blamed on the agricultural services³. In Fouta agricultural research was often limited to the adaptation and experimentation stages and the main flaw was that the various agricultural researchers "operated behind closed doors, out of sight of the local people". As a result, the agricultural agents were also taken to task. They were judged to be "too busy writing reports, too stay-at-home, too stuck in unproductive theory."

These criticisms applied to an extremely worrying agricultural situation:

"... the population gets (from the high plateaux) only meagre harvests of fonio which are not enough to live on. At this time of the year the people are decimated by terrible famine and live off roots, potatoes and yams (wild)"⁴

On these high plateaus the only crop that grows is *fonio*, a cereal with tiny grains, which produces a meagre 3-4 hundred kilos per hectare ... if the locusts don't pass that way. Even with that low level of yield, it is necessary to follow seven years of cultivation with seven years of lying fallow in order to maintain the soil fertility.

The conscripts of Pita Cercle were the despair of the French colonial army. Almost 80% of them had to be declared unfit for service because of weak constitutions.

Historically agriculture in the region evolved according to the whims of the colonial authorities: arabica coffee, tobacco, potatoes, castor oil were each tried in turn, and just as quickly abandoned.

When in 1944 Richard Mollard⁵ crossed the Timbis – a vast plain situated at an altitude of 1000 metres on the high plains of Fouta Djalou, his judgement was unqualified: "Rice will never grow there... the exhaustion of the soil is

³ *Rapport agricole du deuxieme trimestre 1913*, Thoreau-Levare

⁴ *Cercle de Pita, rapports periodiques, 1906-1911.*

⁵ *Essai sur la vie paysanne au Fouta Djalou*, Richard Mollard, 1944

extreme". He confirmed the view of Vieillard⁶ some years before, who noted "we have arrived at the last stage after which there is nothing left to do but to emigrate elsewhere."

The 1950s marked the end of the spectre of famine in the region thanks firstly to emigration and to the growing sums of money brought by the settlers and seasonal workers, and secondly to the systematic anti-acridity treatments which were becoming more common in Sahelian countries where insects thrive.

At independence the socialist government ended the free market economy. The fixed price regime and taxation policies of this period meant that producers faced difficulties in obtaining vital inputs. The unintended result of the policies was that many farmers aimed only for self-sufficiency. As a result, the hoped for agricultural surplus did not occur.

In later years Sekou Toure, the President, decided to try once again to stimulate the agricultural sector by entrusting agricultural production to local government officers, and by following the production emphases of the administrators. This is why in the Timbis plain industrial cotton production was followed by tobacco production, followed by other attempts to produce potatoes, zebu, and Pakistani buffalo.

The results of all of these initiatives were in inverse proportion to the hopes and financial means invested in them.

New hope, new disappointment

On the death of Sekou Toure, the small farmers began to hope again. Market oriented policies such as free movement of people and goods and liberalised prices were welcomed by farmers with joy. In addition there were many promises of aid, even though on the ground the small farmers saw nothing but missions of experts.

Agriculture underwent two major evolutions. First of all the Fulani, traditional stockbreeders who were settled in the area, began to work the land, a task which until then had been reserved for the traditional 'slave classes'. Then the low-lands⁷ were cleared and cultivated intensively. Two successive seasons of market gardens were planted and harvested there during the dry season.

⁶ *Notes sur les Peuls du Fouta Djallon*, Gilbert Vieillard, 1937

⁷ Land along the side of a river, flooded in the rainy season and benefiting from rising capillaries during a good part of the dry season. These lands had formerly been considered to be "cursed".

These market gardens were not wholly successful. Some growers were able to maintain production while others were not. Effects of extension activities and initial attractive prices led to a surplus of the vegetables which were particularly easy to grow and, as a result, the prices of these fell and production became uneconomic.

PROJECT INITIATION

At the beginning of 1988 a French volunteer programme started a small agricultural development project at Timbi-Madina. Because of unkept promises by previous initiatives of this kind the people greeted this project with indifference, and even mistrust.

It became therefore a challenge to:

- gain the confidence of the small farmers as well as of the local administration;
- avoid the mistakes of the past;
- show that lasting agricultural development was possible;
- help the people concerned to have confidence in themselves.

To gain the confidence of the local population, a census was taken of locally available human resources: people who had the technical knowledge, who knew the history of local development and who were respected socially. This group included entrepreneurial small farmers, dynamic businessmen, wise elders and respected authorities. Through them, the social integration of the project team was achieved and this was vital to allow the identification of common, achievable aims.

Small well-targeted and low cost actions were identified by project staff and put in motion. The physical effects of these actions could soon be seen on the land. A stream was diverted to allow the plain to be irrigated in all seasons, and this facilitated rice-growing and market gardening. A shop selling seeds and agricultural inputs was opened, where almost a thousand small farmers could buy good quality products at reasonable prices.

In the middle of Ramadan many small farmers worked hard at planning, irrigating and levelling in return for being allocated a piece of land measuring 1200m². On this poor land they embarked on the production of rice, which was unfamiliar to them and which had not been tried in the area for many years.

The small farmers decide the direction of the project

Confidence gained after the first rice harvest encouraged farmers to be more open to other possibilities. Some farmers dedicated themselves to improving the growth of the existing crops including *fonio*, sweet potatoes and orange trees. Others tried to introduce new speculative crops like coffee, passion fruit, potatoes.

At the end of 1989, the small farmers evaluated the operations in progress. The conclusion was that only potato cultivating had a realistic future in the Timbis.

At the same time an agreement was reached between the small farmers and the project staff over the philosophy of development. This is summarized in Box 1.

Box 1: Development Philosophy of Timbi-Madina

Only economic development can generate social development. In order for economic development to succeed, three conditions which follow on from one another, must be met.

- First a project must be flexible, must avoid the heavy weight of bureaucracy, and must be able to provide effective support, providing the needed human and technical resources in a timely way.*
- Second, there needs to be small farmers who are interested in and capable of managing the work with the support of the project team.*
- Finally the project needs to identify a crop which is viable and marketable. This is important to ensure a financial return and the success of small farmers' groups.*

As far as potatoes are concerned, the task is enormous, for the following reasons.

- The current yield is so low it barely covers production costs.
- The Timbis are more than 450 kms from the capital, the main market.
- The potato business is in the hands of businessmen who import a large amount of potatoes from Europe and sell them in Guinean markets at half the cost of those produced locally.

The project agreed to embark on this operation on condition that after a period of three years, the whole chain should be under the control of the growers.

The valuable experience of the old growers allowed the project to develop new techniques. For example, composts were augmented with mineral fertilisers and this helped keep down disease and considerably increased potato yields.

As production of potatoes by Timbis grew, the retail price came down but not enough to compete with the cheaper imported potatoes. In June 1991 in Fouta Djallon more than 30 tons of potatoes rotted through lack of outlets and storage facilities.

As a result of this, the farmers formed a union to protect themselves. This union was based on the idea that: *No form of collective organisation develops or keeps going unless at its head are real leaders with at least the following qualities: a sense of the general interest; exemplary personal behaviour; respected authority with the ability to apply and enforce regulations; technical mastery; management, innovation and communication skills; medium and long term vision.*

The project made efforts to locate, highlight and support people with these qualities, who would then organise the small farmers' community as they intended. These people played an increasingly decisive role in the working of the project.

Market forces are not accepted as an inevitability

The union leaders seized their opportunity to expose the growers' difficulties when a Guinean media crew were passing through.

By the following day the news of the farmers' dilemma had reached all parts of the country. This encouraged the small farmers' groups to meet and demand an audience with the Minister of Agriculture which was granted. The subsequent interview was inconclusive and discouraging for many of the farmers.

Disappointed, but not discouraged, Moussa Para Diallo, the charismatic leader of the small farmers from the Timbi Madina district, decided to continue the struggle, and the small farmers' movement fell into place behind him. They threatened the Minister of Agriculture that they would empty their unsold produce in the streets of Conakry. This challenge was broadcast on TV and radio.

As a result of this challenge the Minister of Agriculture was replaced. The Chief of State, General Lansana Conte stood firmly in favour of the small farmers. He asked his government to suspend imports during the first phase of local production, despite opposition from the IMF.

Within three months the farmers delivered almost 500 tons of graded, measured and packaged potatoes to the capital, meeting delivery dates.

For the first time in the country's history a domestic product had stood up against an imported product. And the imports of potatoes, seen by many as an inevitable fact of life, collapsed. Unionised small farmers had proved that they could assert themselves with positive effects.

The small farmers of Timbi-Madina decided to expand their campaign to include other farmers, regions and crops. In order to overcome the suspicion and distrust that had kept the different groups apart in the past, Moussa Diallo arranged a meeting at Timbi-Madina for all the small farmer representatives in the country. The farmers at Timbi-Madina wanted to capitalise on the success of their campaign, rather than just celebrating, so they stipulated that the farmers invited must come prepared to analyse their problems realistically and to propose concrete, realistic activities to overcome them.

The small farmers tried to analyse the history of small farmers' groups and agriculture, especially in France, Mali and the Cameroun, based upon articles in various periodicals including "Courrier de la Planete", "La voix du paysan" (SAID Cameroun), "La lettre du réseau GAO", "Le Monde" and other documents. Other groups considered agricultural policy in Guinea. Armed with preliminary conclusions, delegates were sent to all parts of Fouta Djallon, and to the forested parts of Guinea to discuss the proposals with a wide range of formal and informal small farmers' groups.

A national meeting arranged for and by the small farmers

On 6 and 7 November 1992, 400 small farmers' leaders from all over the country met at Timbi-Madina. After two days of discussions and site visits, clear, precise conclusions were formed.

The decisions reached at the meeting include:

- The farmers should work together to press for the road to Senegal to be repaired, so that growers could respond to the Senegalese demand for Guinea coffee, pineapples, fruit, vegetables and spices.

- Onion production should be a priority area for investment. Historically, Guinea imported almost 90% of its onion consumption, comprising around 15,000 tons.
- Farmers from Fouta created a regional small farmers' federation and a non-ethnic committee was formed. This federation was to help identify and evaluate all projects in the region.

News of the meeting and the Federation's conclusions were widely broadcast. Some resistance to their plans was seen and felt, but governmental support for the Federation helped to prevent widespread intimidation of small farmers by vested interests.

Encouraging but revealing results

In 1993 the Federation obtained funds from the Cooperation Française to hire two permanent officials and the means to launch an operation with onions similar to the one with potatoes that had succeeded in Timbi-Madina.

The Federation negotiated on an equal basis with the rural development structures for establishment of real cooperation contracts, and it developed a privileged relationship with the cabinet of the Minister of Agriculture.

In other regions, existing organisations followed the Federation's evolution closely, even if they didn't feel ready yet to follow in their footsteps.

In order to achieve this success the Federation's committee members had not spent their efforts making long popularity seeking speeches. They had not promised an easy future – *the improved situation of the small farmers was a result of unionisation, and of the farmers' determination to take their demands to the limit and to recognise values such as competence, hard work and integrity.*

The farmers continued to work to lower their production costs and increase their production. In 1993 the price of a kilo produced in Guinea was only 25% more than the imported price, for a quality that was clearly superior. National production in that year reached 2,000 tons.

Many local government officers, people returning from neighbouring countries, and diplomats without posts have decided to take up agriculture.

The advances in circulation of information and people have brought new perspectives to the lives of the small farmers, who were until recently cut off from the outside world.

CONCLUSIONS

The current period offers a favourable atmosphere for the small farmers to take charge of the development agenda for the first time. But without the flexibility of a small economic development project and the emergence of dynamic farmer leaders new initiatives may fail.

Very few systems or states have the necessary ethos, structure or tools to carry out the kind of project summarized above. For example, most rural development specialists are located in towns, rather than near to farmers. In addition, little training exists to foster the development of 'farmer leaders'. This is partly due to the fact that many governments are wary of dynamic grassroots leaders. Some governments therefore encourage NGOs to carry out this work, who often lack the technical capacity to complete this work effectively.

Without investment in training for small farmer associations and their leaders, which is also associated with the identification of new productive possibilities, agricultural projects and a promising small farmers' movement may not reach their full potential.

