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## PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES INSTITUTIONS AND PRODUCERS' ORGANISATIONS: MYTH OR REALITY?

Marie-Hélène Collion and Pierre Rondot

### Abstract

*In Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Guinea, partnerships between research and producers' organisations are emerging. These partnerships take various forms, depending on the context in which they evolve; in some cases the extension services are also involved. Researchers from the four countries met in April 1997 to share their experience and draw lessons from approximately two years of activities to promote such partnerships. This paper presents the findings from the workshop, drawing also on the authors' personal involvement in the four countries. The authors review: (i) the rationale for a partnership; (ii) the approach taken in each of the four countries; and, (iii) the difficulties encountered, either on the side of the producers' organisations or on the side of the research institutes. Although it may be too early to make a final assessment of the extent to which producers' organisations have succeeded in making research institutes more client responsive, valuable lessons for producers' organisations, research institutes as well as donors and external agencies interested in promoting a productive partnership are already beginning to emerge.*

*The experience of these four countries is not unique: in a number of developing countries research and extension institutions have tried to establish partnership mechanisms with producers' organisations. These experiences have been documented and analysed elsewhere and the analysis presented here refers to work conducted by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) and the Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement-Systèmes Agroalimentaires et Ruraux (CIRAD-SAR).*

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### Note

The World Bank, CIRAD and the French Cooperation are currently engaged in a collaborative programme to promote a new approach to World Bank agricultural services support in Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Guinea. The programme aims to:

- (i) introduce producers' organisations as the third party in these projects;
- (ii) provide support to producers' organisations and design partnerships between them and research and extension organisations; and
- (iii) promote and support institutional reforms within the research and extension organisations.

Within this programme, **Pierre Rondot** is working on support to producers' organisations and partnership mechanisms while **Marie-Hélène Collion** is working on the institutional reforms which will allow the partnerships to develop.

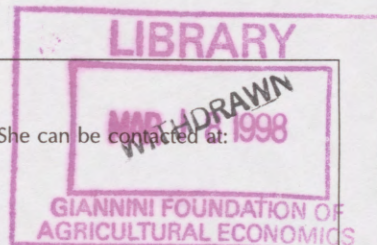
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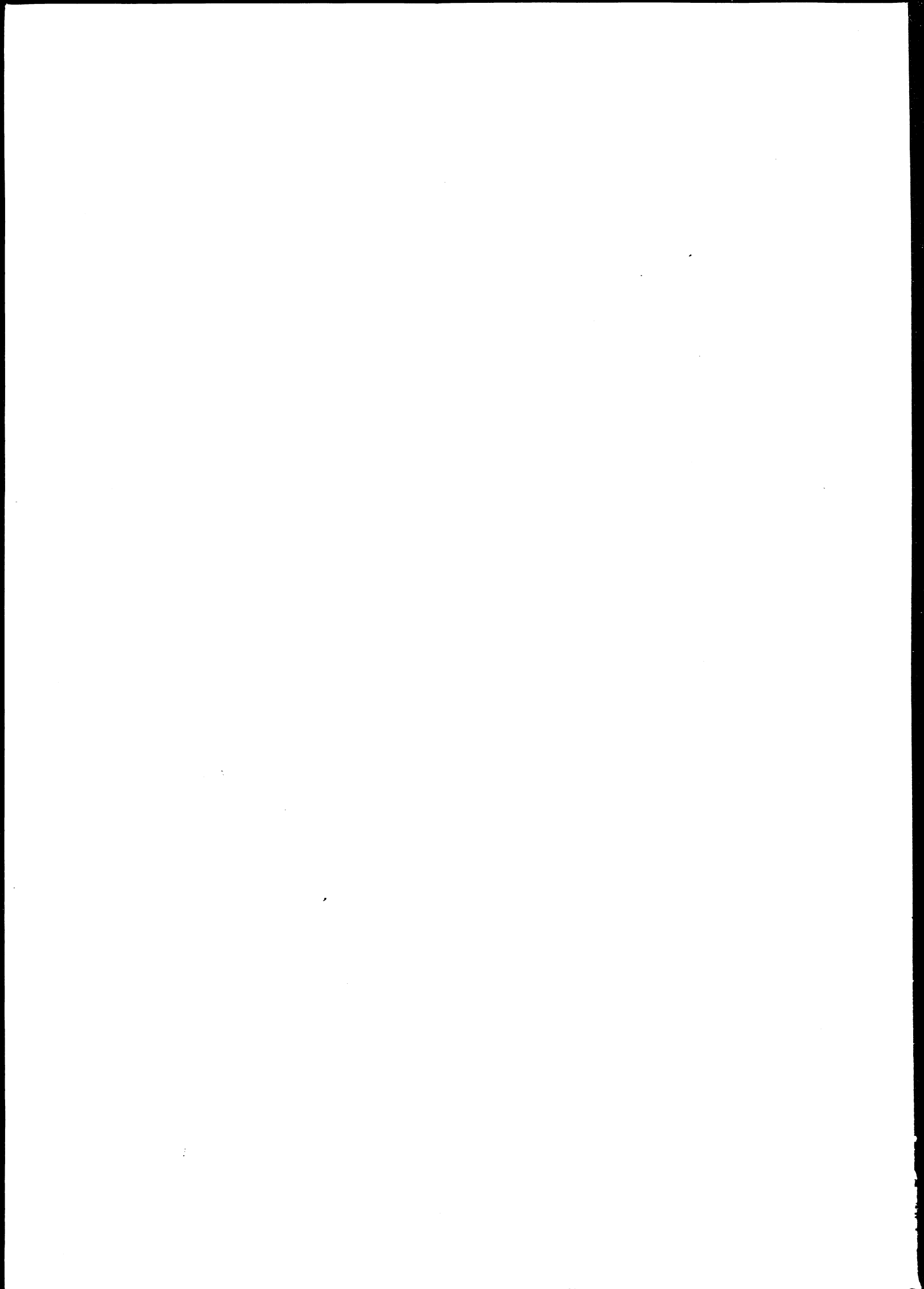
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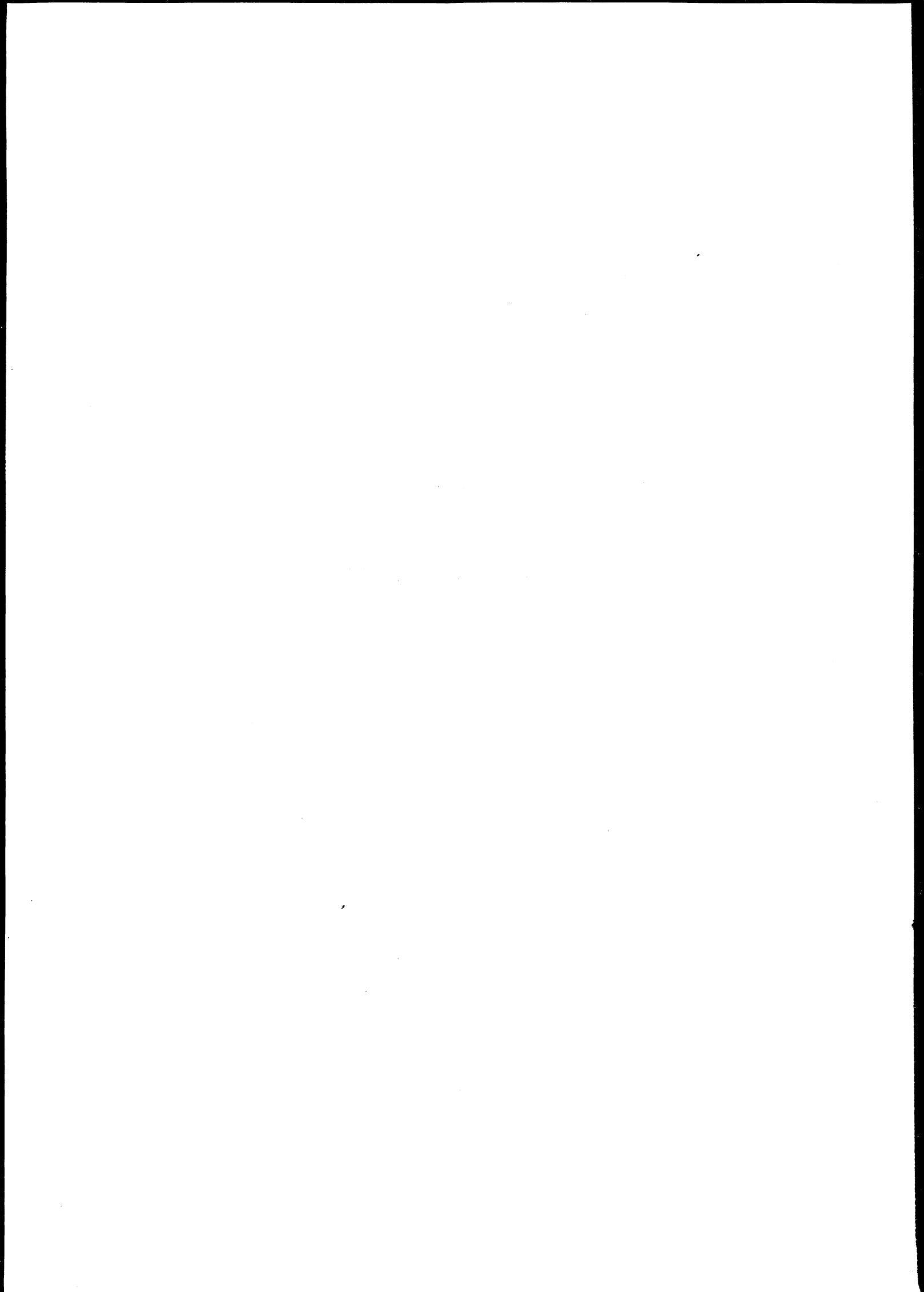
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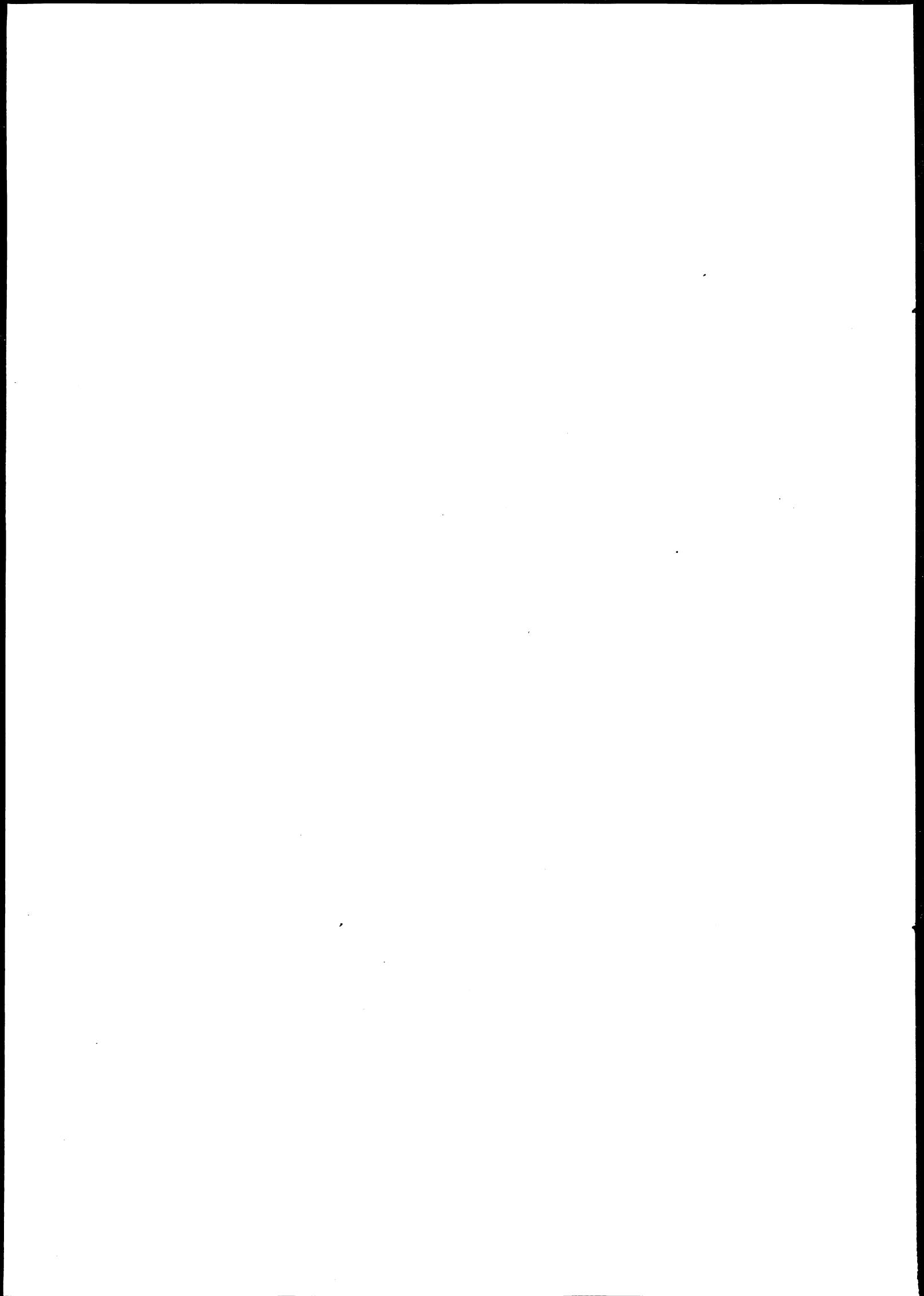
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## Acronyms

ANCAR	Agence nationale de conseil agricole et rural (National Agency for Agricultural and Rural Support)
ARAF	Association des Ruraux et Agriculteurs de Fatick (Fatick Rural and Farmers' Association)
ASESCAW	Association Sportive, Educationnelle et Culturelle des Agriculteurs du Walo (Wallo Farmers' Sporting, Educational and Cultural Association)
CADEF	Comité d'Action pour le Développement du Fogny (Action Committee for the Development of the Fogny Region)
CIRAD-SAR	Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement - systèmes agroalimentaires et ruraux (Centre for International Cooperation in Agricultural Development Research - Farm Produce and Rural Systems)
CAMES	Conseil africain et malgache de l'enseignement supérieur (African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education)
CORAF	Conférence des responsables de recherche agronomique en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre (Conference of Agricultural Research Representatives in West and Central Africa)
CNCR	Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux (National Council for Farmers' Consultation and Cooperation)
FSR	farming systems research
FUGN	Fédération des unions des groupements Naam (Unions of Naam Groups Federation)
IER	Institut d'économie rurale (Institute for Rural Economy)
INERA	Institut national pour l'environnement et la recherche agricole (National Institute for Environmental and Agricultural Research)
IRAG	Institut de Recherche Agronomique de Guinée (Guinean Institute for Agricultural Research)
ISRA	Institut sénégalais de recherches agricoles (Senagalese Institute of Agricultural Research)
ITA	Institut de technologie alimentaire (Institute of Food Technology)
NARC	National Agricultural Research Council
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NRBAR	natural resource-based agricultural research
NUC	national users commission
OFR	on-farm research
PO	producers' organisation
R&D	research and development
RUC	regional users commission
SNPRV	Service national de promotion rurale et de vulgarisation (National Service for Rural Promotion and Extension (Guinea))
SYCOV	Syndicat des producteurs de coton et de vivriers (Malian Union of Cotton and Food Producers)
UCOBAM	Union des coopératives burkinabé agricoles et maraîchères (Union of Agricultural and Horticultural Cooperatives of Burkina-Faso)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WARF	West African Rural Foundation



# PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES INSTITUTIONS AND PRODUCERS' ORGANISATIONS: MYTH OR REALITY?

Marie-Hélène Collion and Pierre Rondot

## 1 WHY A PARTNERSHIP WITH PRODUCERS' ORGANISATIONS?

A number of research and extension organisations throughout developing countries are building partnership mechanisms with producers' organisations (POs)<sup>1</sup>. There are two main reasons why these partnerships are being established:

- (i) to bring about more demand-driven and client-oriented research and extension;
- (ii) to respond to the wave of democratisation and decentralisation and to producers' organisations wanting to have their say in the decision-making process.

Improving the client-orientation of research and extension services

For the past twenty years, tropical agricultural research and extension have been implemented by centralised institutions inherited from the colonial period, without much accountability to farmers. Priority has been given to increasing output by developing and extending technologies that improve plant productivity. Results exist but the extent to which farmers have adopted them is a moot point.

The most significant changes have been achieved when farmers' access to inputs, markets and credit have been highly organised, and technology cost/benefit ratios have been profitable for farmers. This has been the case, for example, with cotton production in all four countries (Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea), and in Mali in particular, with potato production in Guinea, green beans and cowpeas in Burkina Faso and for horticulture more generally in Senegal. In some of these cases, especially for horticulture, farmers have adopted technologies that were generated and transferred by private companies outside the public service system. When the context was not as favorable and inputs were not provided through an organised system – as was the case for subsistence food crops, for example – farmers adopted improved technologies only when these were well-adapted to their production conditions and when additional costs were low (as with short-cycle cereal varieties).

The general feeling, however, is that technology generation and transfer systems have not been sufficiently effective or responsive to clients' needs. They have produced too many technologies that do not take into account farmers' agroecological constraints or socio-economic environments. Such a situation, it has been argued, stems from the fact that users have been insufficiently involved in the technology generation and transfer process. Indeed, it has been amply demonstrated that users' involvement is crucial for the development

of efficient and relevant technologies (Röling, 1989). Private firms in industrialised countries are well aware of the importance of involving users. They have been investing considerable resources to better understand the needs and preferences of the potential users of the products they intend to develop (Souder, 1980).

Research institutes in developing countries began to introduce farming systems research (FSR) or on-farm research (OFR) in the early 1970s, precisely to increase farmers' input into the technology development process. Twenty years later, it is beyond doubt that on-farm researchers have substantially improved their understanding of production systems, so that they are now able to identify particular niches for new technologies. However, on-farm research has not made research institutions as a whole, more client-responsive. Outside the FSR/OFR teams or programmes, researchers and research managers have made little use of the improved understanding of farmers' conditions in the formulation of their research programmes and the design of research methodologies. The culture of research institutions has not changed fundamentally; it remains supply-led rather than demand-driven and client-responsive.<sup>2</sup>

When analysing FSR/OFR successes and limitations, two points emerge. First, in FSR/OFR, farmers tend to be involved only at the end of the process, at the testing and adaptation stage of research. Their input comes too late in what is still conceived of as a linear technology development process (in which feedback from on-farm to on-station research does not function well). Second, it is the on-farm researchers themselves who take the initiative to interact with farmers. Usually farmers are asked to react to technologies proposed by researchers, not to offer their own ideas about potential research themes nor to bring their indigenous knowledge in to shape research methodologies. Finally, individual farmers have little, if any, power to exert pressure and enforce demands on research and extension institutions.

Given these limitations of FSR/OFR, some research institutes have begun to experiment with two new ways of bringing farmers into the definition of the research agenda. They have started: (i) to involve *organised* producers, rather than farmers as individuals, in technology development and (ii) to involve farmers at all phases of the technology generation and transfer process, not just at the ultimate phase of on-farm testing and adaptation. By acting as pressure groups and interacting with research and extension services at all phases of the decision-making process it is assumed that producers' organisations (POs) will be able to make the research and extension agenda more responsive to



their members' needs (Sims & Leonard, 1990). Indeed, this is precisely the way in which research and extension services developed and are operating in industrialised countries.<sup>3</sup> Is there something to be learned from these countries that can be adapted to the specific African context?

Producers' organisations should be well-placed to shape the technology generation and transfer process through:

- providing an organisational base for analysing constraints, pooling knowledge and aggregating demand;
- exerting pressure on the institutions to work within a commonly defined agenda through participation in programme planning, monitoring and evaluation;
- participating in and scaling up adaptive research, testing and evaluation;
- providing feedback on technology adoption impact;
- increasing their members' exposure to new technologies;
- promoting an enabling environment for technology uptake (access to inputs, credit and support for marketing).

(Bebbington *et al*, 1994 and Merrill Sands *et al*, 1995)

### **The impact of democratisation and decentralisation**

Since the beginning of the 1990s there has been a definitive trend towards democratisation, decentralisation and a transfer of responsibilities to civil society. In this favorable environment (such as after the fall of the Moussa Traoré regime in Mali in 1991), various forms of local associations have burgeoned and received recognition<sup>4</sup>. Sometimes, POs have aggregated in unions and federations, acting as advocacy groups with considerable political clout. Such is the case of the Cotton and Food Producers Union (SYCOV) in Mali, the Federation of Fouta Djallon Producers in Guinea or CNCR (National Council for Farmers' Consultation and Cooperation) in Senegal.

CNCR, created in 1993, has been received by the President and the Prime Minister on several occasions. In Mali, SYCOV is the third partner in the '*contrat-plan*' (i.e. negotiations and agreement on the future of the cotton industry in Mali) along with the government and the textile industry (CMDT). The Federation of Fouta Djallon Producers demonstrated its influence by obtaining agreement from the Guinean government to suspend potato imports during the domestic production period.

In all four countries laws to enact decentralisation have been adopted and rural councils have been elected. A transfer of responsibilities to these councils is currently underway. Research and extension institutions must adapt to this new environment. They should take this opportunity to improve their approach to technology generation and transfer by opening up their decision-making processes to these new actors.

## **2 SUMMARY OF APPROACHES AND RESULTS IN THE FOUR COUNTRIES**

### **Senegal**

In the past ten years, research teams at ISRA (the Senegalese Institute for Agricultural Research) have undertaken joint activities with producers' organisations; at various times either side has taken the initiative to instigate partnerships. The joint activity with CADEF (Action Committee for the Development of the Fogny) is certainly the most outstanding. With the support of an NGO and a public training institute, CADEF designed its own local development plan. It then sought the help of ISRA to implement the part of its plan that called for research activities, drawing on a donor grant for this purpose. The joint R&D programme that evolved includes an annual joint programming exercise and review of the past year's results, extensive farmer experimentation through a network of CADEF's own 'animateurs' and joint researcher/farmer evaluation of research result (Mercoiret & Berthomé, 1992).

These activities came about as a result of CADEF negotiating with ISRA to obtain its support. CADEF had the advantage of being able to mobilise funding for ISRA interventions. On the basis of this first initiative, there has been an attempt since 1995 to institutionalise the partnership between research organisations in Senegal (ISRA and the Institute of Food Technology – ITA), the extension services and farmers' organisations, represented by CNCR. A Research and Development (R&D) Unit which brings together managers from each partner organisation is responsible for promoting a common vision for a technology generation and transfer system that will integrate producers' organisations as equal partners. The unit, which has a permanent secretariat and is financed by a World Bank IDA credit, also encourages joint adaptive research activities between researchers, extension agents and POs, upon the request of POs; two regions have begun pilot activities. The R&D unit also organises training in participatory diagnosis for staff from the three types of partner organisation.

At the same time, ISRA managers introduced the principle of partnership with farmers into the institute's policy. The implications of this have been that: (i) the composition of the ISRA Board of Governors has changed to incorporate representatives of farmers' organisations; (ii) joint regional planning committees have been established; (iii) joint R&D activities have got underway.

Changes are also scheduled to take place in the extension services. The new extension services institution in Senegal, ANCAR (National Agency for Agricultural and Rural Support, created by a decision of the Inter-ministerial Council), will be fully decentralised. Contracts based on a jointly defined programme of activities will be signed between the extension services and POs or rural councils. Extension agents will be assigned and evaluated in consultation with the POs and rural communities.

### **Mali**

In Mali, a less encompassing partnership (only between research and POs so far) has been ongoing since 1994. The national research institute (the Institute for Rural Economy - IER) established Regional and National Users' Commissions (RUCs and an NUC), which draw in PO representatives, with the assistance of facilitating NGOs. The POs that participate in the Users' Commissions were selected according to two main criteria: (i) their organisational strength; (ii) their degree of representation of a variety of agroecological and socioeconomic conditions. Regional research programmes work with the RUCs to define research activities, monitor their implementation and evaluate results. IER teamed up with a Senegal-based NGO, the West African Rural Foundation (WARF), to establish a major training programme in participatory technology development and communication techniques, for researchers, PO members and extension agents. The Foundation is also responsible for a training programme to strengthen POs' organisational and technical capabilities. At the same time, the Malian National Agricultural Research Council (NARC) has established a research fund to which POs can apply to contract research of specific interest to them, which is not currently being addressed by IER (Collion, 1995; Mbao *et al*, 1997).

### **Burkina Faso**

In Burkina Faso, POs are active but, with few exceptions, at a provincial rather than a national level. They have, though, expressed their desire actively to participate in planning research activities, and in the selection of extension agents (GREFCO, 1995). Some of the provincial POs – namely the Unions of Naam Groups Federation (FUGN), the Diocèse of Diébougou and Union of Agricultural and Horticultural Cooperatives of Burkina Faso (UCOBAM) – have also called upon research institutes to work with them and have signed contracts for R&D activities (financed with the help of outside agencies, see section 3 below) including contracts to develop and adapt cowpea and green bean technology. In both cases the objective is to develop production for sale, mainly for the export market (Dabiré *et al*, 1995). The contracts cover the operating costs of carrying out research, rather than researchers' salaries.

### **Guinea**

The emergence of POs in Guinea is recent. As in Mali, it is linked with an ongoing process of political democratisation. Nonetheless, some organisations, such as the Federation of Fouta Djallon Producers (who grow potatoes, onions, garlic) and the Federation of Guinean Coffee Producers, are already well structured and, as mentioned earlier, have some political clout.

These groups have also developed contractual relations with research. In 1995, POs actively participated in defining research priorities during a series of regional workshops organised by the national research institute (Guinean Institute for Agricultural Research – IRAG).

Now, during the implementation phase, on-farm experimentation and demonstration is carried out with POs. They actively participate in the identification of constraints through participatory diagnostic exercises and in technology evaluation. In addition, some POs have already started to finance research activities through contracts with IRAG. This is true of the Federation of Guinean Coffee Producers and the Federation of Fouta Djallon Producers, which has been financing potato and onion research at IRAG's Bareng Regional Research Centre. The Federation hired an IRAG researcher to conduct on-farm trials with its members and to help train village technical assistants in potato production technologies. The Federation also exerts considerable influence upon the extension services (National Service for Rural Promotion and Extension – SNPRV): the content of the extension programmes is jointly defined and extension methods have been substantially revised at the request of the Federation. Extension agents working with the Federation are evaluated by it and views on their performance are fed back to SNPRV management.

## **3 DIFFICULTIES IN ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS**

In spite of a positive start, experiences from the four countries show that the extent to which POs can contribute to making agricultural services more client-responsive and therefore more effective should not be overestimated, at least in the short term. It is difficult for POs to influence the research agenda and act as a pressure group for reasons that have to do with both the POs themselves and the institutions with which they are interacting:

### **Issues relating to POs themselves**

Though there are exceptions, few of the POs in these four countries bring together commercial producers<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, the term 'PO' often covers diverse forms of rural people's associations, most of which are all-purpose and community-based. The goal of these groupings is first and foremost a social, political and cultural one, that is to improve the quality of village life. Improving farming practices to make an impact on production comes as a secondary objective. Though some POs (such as farmers' unions or cooperatives) are inspired by non-traditional ways of organising, most are to a large extent still customary-based. Indeed, they face a transition as they attempt to reconcile their traditional values with those of an economically-based industrial society (Dia, 1996). Local traditional rules still underpin the interactions between members, determining, for example, who has authority, how decisions are made, who has access to resources and what the relationships between men and women producers or senior and junior members are.

POs are also very diverse from the point of view of size, geographic coverage, purpose and origin (self-generated or externally induced). Because of their

diversity, it is difficult for them to aggregate into larger, yet still viable, representative units with a national, or at least regional, mandate. By the standards of industrialised societies, they tend to be poorly organised and lack managerial skills. The leaders are often over-extended and focus on external activities, such as interaction with donors, to the detriment of vital internal organisation-building (Bingen *et al*, 1995).

These factors have many implications for the capacity of POs to fulfil their role as partners in the technology generation and transfer process (Bebbington *et al*, 1996; Carney, 1996c).

*(i) POs lack the capability to analyse members' constraints, aggregate and prioritise needs, and articulate them.* As a result, their representation on various programming committees can be a token one. The need to strengthen the technical capability of POs has been clearly identified in Mali. Early on, IER managers decided to recruit a professional NGO, WARF, to provide training and support to POs which were members of Regional User Commissions (RUCs), with the objectives that: the POs on the RUC would be able to identify the needs of their members and articulate them, so as to provide an effective input into the meetings of the research programming committees and other governing bodies; the RUCs would be empowered to make demands on the Institute; and they would know how to feed back information to their members. In Guinea, the Federation of Fouta Djallon Producers has recruited its own technical specialists, as did the FUGN and the Diocèse de Diébougou in Burkina Faso. These technical specialists facilitate interaction with the research institute.

*(ii) POs' priorities remain in the advocacy domain rather than the technology realm.* Partly because they are unaware of technological potential but also because research has not addressed their primary concerns in the past, most POs focus their efforts on marketing, processing, securing access to inputs for their members and issues to do with credit, land tenure and prices. For PO representatives, working on issues related to their immediate economic and institutional environment is often more critical to members' livelihoods, more visible and more immediately rewarding than working on technology issues. For example, Malian village associations formed a union, SYCOV (the Cotton and Food Producers' Union), first and foremost to defend their interests regarding producer prices paid by the Malian Textile Company (Bingen *et al*, 1995). POs tend to appeal to research institutes only in a crisis situation. Such was the case in Southern Mali when in 1994 village associations turned to IER when their cattle began to die.

However, the situation may be evolving. In the four countries some POs are beginning to realise the potential benefit of being involved with research. Again, though, it tends to be more market-oriented POs (the Federation of Fouta Djallon Producers in Guinea, UCOBAM in

Burkina Faso) or those that are focusing on specific market-oriented activities (for example, the production and marketing of cowpeas after the change in CFA parity for FUGN and Diocèse de Diébougou in Burkina Faso) that are moving in this direction. CNCR, the confederation of producer federations of Senegal, may be a special case. CNCR is very active in building a partnership with research institutes and extension services in preparation for the forthcoming Agricultural Services and Producers' Organisations project to be funded by a consortium of donors, led by the World Bank. Despite these POs' increasing awareness of the potential of technological innovations, their interest remains bound by the larger institutional and policy context in which they operate.

*(iii) POs lack political clout and financial leverage.* Most POs still have limited political and economic power. The fact that their representatives sit on governing and planning bodies does not necessarily mean that they wield influence. Examples of token representation abound. It is far more effective for POs to fund research activities – if they have the resources to do this – to ensure that research responds to their needs, rather than to engage in representation. Cases in point are the Federation of Fouta Djallon Producers, FUGN and the Diocèse de Diébougou. Though these POs do not themselves have the resources to fund research, they *can* access external funding that they use in part for research. Thus FUGN contracts INERA (the National Institute for Environmental and Agricultural Research) to work on cowpeas with resources from the Nestle Company of Côte d'Ivoire and the Diocèse de Diébougou is using part of a grant from the Jean-Paul II Foundation to finance research. The Federation of Fouta Djallon Producers uses part of the funding it receives from the Coopération Française (French Aid) to do the same with IRAG.

To substitute for POs' lack of ability to finance research on their own, research funds have been established in Mali and Senegal. In Mali, the RUCs make the decisions about which activities should be funded under the Research Fund of the National Agricultural Research Council (NARC). In Senegal, the collaborative competitive grant fund of the USAID/NRBAR project finances research proposals of good scientific quality, which are jointly presented by a research team and an NGO or a PO.

In summary, experience from the four countries shows that the few POs that have been able to act as pressure groups vis-à-vis research: (i) were market oriented; (ii) had realised the benefit they could gain by investing in technology; (iii) had access to funding that they used in part to contract research; and (iv) had recruited their own technical specialists.

### **Issues relating to the research and extension services**

For a partnership between research and POs to be successful, research institutions themselves must adjust in a number of ways. Changes are not, however, easy to introduce.

(i) *A linear paradigm.* Though there has been a good deal of rhetoric regarding indigenous or farmers' knowledge, research and extension services still operate to a large extent under a linear paradigm whereby research develops technologies, extension services transfer them and farmers are expected to adopt (Eponou, 1996). The potential benefits of integrating farmers' knowledge into the process of technology development are far from being fully captured. Researchers have not sufficiently mastered the participatory research methods that would enable them to build upon farmers' indigenous knowledge to design their experiments. These methods are complex and require not only a high degree of technical expertise but also flexibility, a listening attitude and a good deal of humility that not all researchers can be expected to have. Here again, IER management realised that if its partnership with producers' organisations was to be successful, its scientists should acquire these skills. Thus IER introduced training in this domain.

(ii) *Partnership is not adopted as an official policy of the research institute.* In some cases, the development of partnerships has been adopted as the official policy of research institutions. This is so in Mali where the RUCs are formally part of the planning and programming process and in Senegal, where the collaborative R&D unit has been established. In Burkina Faso and Guinea, the notion of working with POs as partners has not yet been institutionalised, though some progressive and entrepreneurial researchers have begun to develop collaborative research programmes (for testing and evaluation) with POs. As with FSR/OFR, these programmes have, so far, tended to remain marginal and have not yet influenced the working methods of the Institute as a whole. Producers are not empowered to make demands on the system. However, these individual experiences, when documented, can provide a basis for institutionalising more far-reaching partnerships. This is what happened in Senegal; the creation of the R&D unit was based on lessons learned from individual researchers' experiences with POs (notably CADEF, ARAF and ASESACAW).

(iii) *Inadequate research programming and review processes.* Except in Mali, processes for research programming and review are not yet formalised or still do not include an entry point for the input of POs. POs find it hard to intervene in a decision-making process which is diffuse and in which the roles of the various actors are not clearly defined. IER became aware of this potential weakness early on. Its programming process is described in its internal organisation manual, a

published and widely available document. The entry point for the input of RUCs (and thus of POs) is clearly identified.

Even when POs are involved in the programming process, as is the case in Mali, it is not clear what influence they have been able to exert on the research agenda. Many programming committees play only a consultative role (Eponou, 1996). In the absence of mechanisms that make research institutes accountable for results vis-à-vis the producers, the institutes are not compelled to implement the committees' recommendations. This is the reason why IER decided that the RUCs should be represented in the Malian National Agricultural Research Council (NARC). This two-level representation (regional and national) was deemed necessary to ensure that NARC would take into account the RUCs' recommendations when making resource allocation decisions.

The capacity of research institutes to adjust is another problem. In Mali, in a number of instances, RUC members complained that their recommendations for amending research activities were not followed up by researchers, who instead stuck to their existing research programmes. This brings into question the flexibility of research institutes to adjust the content of their activities. Scientists' skills may not correspond to producer demands. Researchers themselves may have difficulties accepting that their work is under question. The research themes proposed by producers may not be of much help to scientists attempting to gain recognition in international academic circles. Therefore researchers may be reluctant to attend to producers' requests.

(iv) *Unconducive incentive systems in research institutes.* In none of the four countries is there a performance review system for researchers which rewards those working with users and makes research staff accountable to their clients. Institute staff are employed either as civil servants (in Mali and Guinea) whose promotion is based on number of years in service or are under an academic system which rewards diplomas and publications in scientific journals (for example in CAMES, the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education headquartered in Burkina Faso). While there is a performance review system in place in Senegal, this exists on paper only and is not operationalised.

Fortunately, though, this has been recognised as a problem which must be remedied. Burkina Faso introduced a request to amend the CAMES system and a new system may become effective in 1999. IER has drawn up a performance review system which will be implemented if and when the government agrees to second staff away from the civil service and grants the institute financial and administrative autonomy.

(v) *Research regionalisation is on the way but still far from being complete.* Results from the four countries show that it is at the local/regional level that farmers' input can be the most effective and meaningful. In all four countries, regional research centres exist, or are

being established (Burkina Faso). However, research is still organised in national commodity programmes or sub-sectoral national departments; decisions regarding programme content are still made at the national level. It is difficult to build regional research teams to address constraints within a regional context if researchers belong to these vertical and centrally run programmes. Some research institutes are addressing this problem: in Mali, the revision of the IER Strategic Plan may recommend the creation of regional programmes; in Senegal, Regional Research Units have been created and sub-sectoral national departments dismantled. In Burkina Faso, it is not yet clear where the present attempt to establish regional teams will lead since it remains the intention that national commodity programmes will still exist. In Guinea, a scientific coordinator who has authority over all the centre's scientists has been appointed at each regional centre, in an attempt to promote regional research teams and to integrate regional concerns within national commodity programmes.

*(vi) Researchers lack communication skills.* An evaluation of producer/researcher interactions shows that researchers lack communication skills. They have only a poor mastery of vernacular languages when it comes to scientific matters and they have difficulties in explaining their work in a simple way. They do not tend to have good presentation skills (WARF, 1997). Communication problems turned out to be such a serious obstacle when establishing the RUCs in Mali that IER decided to offer its researchers special training courses in local languages and communication skills (Mbao *et al.*, 1997).

*(vii) Research has yet to take into consideration POs' main concerns: marketing, processing, input supply, credit and land tenure.* Scientists tend quickly to dismiss producers' demands in these domains, on the grounds that these lie beyond their mandate. Yet research can certainly contribute to identifying appropriate solutions to these problems through data collection and analysis and well-documented information targeted to the needs of policy makers and other actors in the agricultural sector. However, agroprocessing, socio-economic and policy research is weak, or almost non-existent, in most research institutes. Production scientists are equally ill-equipped to integrate socio-economic considerations within their research design.

In Mali, IER management understood that, unless it began to address these issues, it would quickly lose the interest of the other partners in the RUCs. It knows that it must strengthen its economics and post-harvest research programmes, though this may take time. In the meantime, it is working on ways to broaden the dialogue with the RUCs to include other public services and NGOs so that these other agencies might be able to address POs' concerns, even if research itself cannot.

In summary, the experience of the four countries brings a useful insight into the various ways in which

partnership building is being approached, and into the limits of partnerships. In Burkina Faso and Guinea POs contacted the research institutes requesting them to develop specific technologies of interest to them. Contracts were signed for the work and payments made. The approach has not, however, been established as formal policy. Working with POs is not yet institutionalised; it is the result of individual researchers responding to the initiative of POs. The question now is: how can change be induced so that partnership with POs becomes a general policy of the research institutes in these countries?

In Mali and Senegal, on the other hand, the initiative to work with POs came from the research institute managers. These people saw that they could promote change by institutionalising work with POs, hence the creation of the RUCs in Mali and of the R&D Unit in Senegal. However, concrete working relationships between teams of researchers and POs are still slow to materialise, except in cases where some prior PO/researcher linkages already exist.

For partnerships to be effective and successful, changes should probably be induced from both the institutional and the individual/research level.

#### **4 LESSONS FOR DONORS AND OTHER EXTERNAL AGENCIES**

Involving POs in the technology generation and transfer system is no panacea or miracle means of making research more client-responsive. However, partnerships between researchers, institutes and POs clearly represent a valuable opportunity that should not be missed. If the potential benefits are to be captured, donors should alter their way of thinking, as follows.

i) Support to technology generation and transfer systems should be conceived as a three-pillar system: research/producers/extension services. This implies that:

- *donor support should not focus solely on research and extension services.* It should also include support to producers' organisations so that they can play an effective role in the technology triangle. Because of the various forms of rural people's associations that exist, it will need to be decided which kind of organisations should receive support. From experience in the four countries discussed here it seems that almost all rural organisations, even community-based ones, are potential partners for research and extension services (as long as they have agriculture as one of their targets). It may be easier to work with commercial producers' organisations than all-purpose community-based organisations, but this simply implies that the type of support provided must be tailored to the specificities of each organisation.

Support should include, in particular, training to strengthen POs' technical and managerial capabilities and the provision of financial and human resources to strengthen POs' communication and negotiation

skills, and their organisational capabilities (Mercoiret, 1994). It is important that this support is provided with a view to *empowering* producers vis-à-vis public institutions, not making them instruments of the research and extension organisations. To empower producers, donor aid should focus on the overall development of PO capabilities, not solely on technological aspects.

- *similarly, there is little advantage to be gained in supporting POs only.* Public institutions must be supported to evolve at the same time. Experiences from the four countries tend to show that unless POs have substantial financial leverage, they have little power to force change within public institutions which naturally tend to resist change. External agencies should also work with publicly funded institutions to foster change in the following domains in particular: (a) scientific management (formal programming, review and evaluation procedures that include producers' input); (b) human resource management (introducing performance review systems that promote work with users and make researchers more accountable); (c) research reorganisation (to respond to producers' needs and decentralise decision-making processes); (d) training of researchers in communication skills and participatory methods; (e) reconstitution of governing bodies to include PO representatives; (f) revising the content of research programmes to introduce or reinforce socio-economic and policy research and agroprocessing work.
- ii) Funding mechanisms should be used to foster participation and demand-driven institutions, for example, funding should:
- support PO participation in various governing and programming bodies of research and extension institutions. The experience of the RUCs in Mali shows that, if provided with the appropriate support (training and means of transport), PO representation is no longer token; POs can own the planning and resource allocation process and become effective partners.
  - enable POs to analyse their constraints and identify their needs, determine their priorities and feed back information to their members after their meetings with research and extension services. Feedback has too often been neglected. In Mali, after two years of operation, funds have finally been earmarked for RUC representatives to travel and meet the members of their organisations, and for NGOs to provide them with support to prepare feedback to their members.
  - empower POs with the financial leverage that they are lacking. Special 'research/extension funds' should be earmarked for POs to draw on to 'purchase' research and extension services or to undertake collaborative R&D activities initiated by POs. Laws on decentralisation, which are in the process of being implemented in many countries, envision fiscal decentralisation. This opens new opportunities for decentralising research and extension funding to the

local and regional levels so that producer communities have more say in research and extension resource allocation.

Establishing an effective partnership between research, extension and producers' organisations requires a strengthening of POs and important institutional changes. To be demand driven, research and extension institutions can no longer be accountable to government only. Their status must change to allow their management to evolve towards a private sector type management, including efficiency and effectiveness as criteria for success and accountability to clients. The staff of these demand-driven institutions can no longer be civil servants, as is the case now. However, our personal experience in the four countries has shown that such major changes may be difficult to achieve in isolated institutions and may call for profound reforms in the entire public system.

#### ENDNOTES

1. See, in particular, the studies carried out in the context of: (i) the ODI/ISNAR project (Bolivia (Bebbington *et al*, 1996), Mali (Bingen *et al*, 1995) and Zimbabwe (Arnaiz *et al*, 1995); (ii) the ODI follow-up project (China (CECAT/RCRE, 1996), South Africa (Carney, 1996a) and India (Baumann & Singh, 1996)); (iii) ISNAR (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya) in Eponou (1996); (iv) CIRAD-SAR studies (Senegal, Brasil). See also the ODI annotated bibliography (Arnaiz, 1995).
2. The impact of on-farm client oriented research has been analysed from a number of perspectives, in particular by ISNAR in nine study cases (Senegal, Zambia, Ecuador, Panama, Nepal, Bangladesh, Guatemala). See the On-Farm Client Oriented Research (OFCOR) series, in particular Biggs (1989), Merrill-Sands *et al* (1991), as well as Merrill-Sands and Collion (1994); Ashby and Sperling (1994).
3. The role of producers' organisations in the technology generation and transfer process has been well documented in the USA, Netherlands, Israel, Japan, Taiwan, etc. In many of these countries, producers' organisations define the research and extension agenda and participate in resource allocation. They even finance up to 50% of the programmes. On this point, see in particular: Röling (1989); Kaimowitz (1992); Sims and Leonard (1990); Esman and Uphoff (1984).
4. On the evolution of the grassroot movement during and after the 1991 uprising in Mali, see in particular Bingen *et al* (1995).
5. The Malian cotton village associations, SYCOV, the Federation of Fouta Djallon Producers and the Federation of Coffee Producers of Guinea, UCOBAM and the Federation of Vegetable Growers' Associations in Senegal are some of the few exceptions.

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