

**Supporting small-scale farmers
and rural organisations:
Learning from experiences
in West Africa**

**A handbook for development operators
and local managers**

Sylvain Perret & Marie-Rose Mercoiret
(editors)



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Scientific editors: Dr Sylvain Perret and Dr Marie-Rose Mercoiret (CIRAD)

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CIRAD

The Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement – CIRAD – is a French organisation specialized in agricultural research for the developing tropical and subtropical areas.

CIRAD has a mandate to contribute to rural development in southern and developing regions of the globe through research, experimentation, training operations in France and abroad, and dissemination of scientific and technical information.

Its fields of competence and operations include agronomy and crop sciences, veterinary and animal sciences, forestry, food processing and technology, environmental sciences, economics and agricultural policy.

CIRAD cooperates with over 90 countries worldwide.

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The French Institute of South Africa (IFAS)

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Under the guidance of its scientific committee, IFAS promotes and supports joint research programs and partnerships between French and French-speaking academic and research institutions and their counterparts in South Africa and, more generally, the sub region. The institute offers bursaries and subsidies to individual researchers and encourages exchange across the North-South division. It offers a library service with internet facilities to visiting researchers.

IFAS publishes a series of occasional papers, *Cahiers de l'IFAS*, of which three issues have yet been released. IFAS also maintains a website.

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Foreword

The translation of this book into English comes at a very appropriate time as the government in South Africa is trying to come to terms with the challenges of rural development and rural poverty in particular. An Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy (ISRDS) was launched early in 2001 to create a broadbased approach to improve the quality of life of the rural population of South Africa. Many of the principles discussed in this book have already assisted the thinking behind the design process of the ISRDS and we argue that the success of the implementation of the strategy will, to a large extent, be assisted by some of the tools and principles discussed in this book. There are also a number of the other initiatives, such as the Kellogg Foundation's Integrated Rural Development Programme, which are also trying to extend

the message of integrated development and decentralised/localised planning to other countries in southern africa. Kellogg's IRDP is a true example of the application of planning and diagnostic processes (some of the aspects discussed in Part One of the book) at local level to assist the implementation of programmes to improve the conditions of communities in specific localities in six countries in Southern Africa.

The translation of this book into English has opened the way for many students in East and Southern Africa to learn from the wealth of experience with rural development, farming systems research and various interventions in rural communities. As such this effort will certainly make a major contribution to capacity building in this part of the world.

*Professor Johann Kirsten
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Introduction:

Local development vs. globalisation: seeking the match for southern Africa's rural areas

In the context of southern African rural areas, key issues face the local people, development operators, as well as decision and policy makers.

Firstly, a number of these issues are inescapable:

- Southern Africa's rural areas face severe backlogs in infrastructure, services, human capacity and self-confidence, access to information, markets, and so on (owing to former dispensations), often along with poor access to natural resources.
- Globalisation is taking place with its national and local implications: the state's withdrawal from its former commitments and controls, the liberalisation of markets, decentralisation, the transfer of competencies to local management and decision structures. Local government structures or emerging private management structures are seldom prepared for this quick handover process.
- Policy makers are struggling to strike a proper balance between a pure rights-based, gap-filling approach, and a productivity oriented approach.

Secondly, the rural environments undoubtedly bear the marks of diversity, complexity and dynamics:

- Activities and livelihood systems are diverse as are land use patterns, people's strategies, farmers' practices and so on. The so-called homogeneity is a myth. Addressing and understanding this diversity is a prerequisite to any step towards the further development of rural settings.

- Human relationships (at household, community and small region levels) are complex, as are local institutional arrangements (laws, rules, socio-cultural norms), and the entanglement of institutions and decision levels acting upon local settings.
- Dynamics exist, as all the systems developed are always adapting to constraints, taking advantage of new opportunities, and then shifting to new strategies or activity systems.

The globalisation process as described above is likely to reinforce these traits. It is crucial to create awareness and to support the stakeholders with proper tools, methodologies, examples and illustrations.

Relying only on notions such as income maximisation, optimum decisions, normative economic theory and the like appears highly illusive and unrealistic. The idea is to avoid further normative, homogenous and ultimately blind initiatives for rural development (failure to extend the Green Revolution to most rural areas was a serious warning).

The authors of this handbook support the idea that the rural environment and circumstances have to be taken into account for development purposes, be they planning at regional level, policy making, targeting research efforts, designing training and advice for capacity building, or promoting technical change, just to mention a few.

Such concern is derived from the following facts:

- Rural people are increasingly likely to become the main participants of their own development.
- However, they do not have the information needed to make proper decisions. Furthermore, they often lack the skills and self-confidence to make change happen.
- Their activities and desires are limited by poor access to most markets (land and resources, product markets, credits, inputs, and so on), and often by the absence of actual local democracy (so-called participation and empowerment are still more often talked about than really implemented).

- Nevertheless, rural households often show great flexibility, and develop a number of objectives and activities.

This handbook was initially based on West African experiences. It has been decided to translate it into English, and to adapt it, as it is likely to prove useful to most development operators and local rural managers throughout sub-Saharan Africa, as it addresses key issues in a very open, simple, comprehensive and convenient way.

Dr Sylvain Perret

CIRAD / University of Pretoria

Presentation

1. Objectives

In the specific area of local rural interventions and support to small-scale farmers, this handbook strives to achieve two objectives:

- It attempts to summarise the basic components (whole or part) of one field of intervention with the aim of providing the most suitable support to the farmers' needs; each chapter corresponds to one of these components (diagnosis, monitoring and evaluation, training, organisation, management, financing, and so on),
- For each component in a chapter, the handbook strives to underline the main issues to be borne in mind (specific objectives, principles, methods, tools) when working with small-scale farmers and rural people.

2. Target market

The handbook has been produced for two types of people:

- Firstly, it targets *development agents, extension officers and the rural area external operators* who, while working with the rural people, wish to adapt and upgrade their working methods and support in order to address the needs expressed by the farmers and other rural people. It also targets the technical staff from the public sector, NGOs, parastatals, research and co-operative organisations who are involved in projects.

- Secondly, it targets *stakeholders in charge of rural and agricultural organisations* who organise and manage the support to their members. Although such organisations are not very common in sub-Saharan Africa, some do, however, already exist, and their leaders have made requests regarding operational methodology. The recent tendency towards the professionalisation of agriculture linked to the emergence of rural organisations and to the local and regional dynamics (decentralisation and the emergence of local governance systems) should result in the proliferation of professional agricultural organisations, which would take charge of diverse mechanisms of support to the farmers (water users' associations, small-scale co-operatives for marketing support or access to inputs, local agribusiness, and so on). The number of this calibre of professional is expected to increase in the years to come.

3. New context leading to specific choices

This handbook has been produced during a period of tremendous change in sub-Saharan Africa. Although these changes are well known (state disengagement, decentralisation, transfer of responsibilities, changes in the development organisations), their operational consequences have not yet been analysed. In fact, while most African governments are dis-

engaging from their previous functions, other role-players are emerging. Rural organisations are being created or reinforced, private economic role-players are now operating publicly, and local public authorities are emerging or are gaining more autonomy in the management of local affairs. Each of these organisations has its objectives, its own strategies and is defining itself as playing, as is right and fair, a role in the development process.

However, this raises some questions regarding the new relationship between these different role-players: What will be the role of each in future? How will this role be defined? How will the tasks be shared and what collaborations may be established?

The authors of this handbook are of the opinion that the answers to these questions cannot be dictated from outside. If they are expected to be appropriate, such answers must arise from consultation between role-players.

Constructive negotiation (which will take into account the expectations and interests of everybody) is necessary. It must allow convergence to a consensual compromise accepted by all the role-players involved.

This will necessitate a review of the role of the extension officer, who might appear as both an advisor and a mediator in

- supporting the establishment of contracts (by analysing and explaining the objectives and the expectations of the farmers during the negotiations), and
- facilitating access to information and to training.

4. Proven tools and methods

This handbook cannot be considered a package of propositions for new types of local interventions in rural environments. While reading it, one may gain, for good reasons, the impression that the contents have been said or heard before. However, two important points

have to be mentioned on this subject:

- The handbook strives to summarise the different aspects of a successful intervention in the field; in this respect, the authors have considered the existing literature and their own experiences. Whenever certain principles, or the proposition of methods and tools are considered as crucial, the risk of repeating them has been taken, especially when they have not yet been translated into common practice.
- The proposals (approaches, methods, tools) herein formulated have already been applied here and there in real situations. Therefore, they are not vague intentions to be tried out but actual operational indications whose reality and efficiency have already been proven. As an illustration, some examples are provided to stimulate the creativity of the field role-players, who are always confronted with specific realities and who must therefore adapt their methods and forge their own tools.

5. Contents

The handbook is divided in three major parts:

• PART ONE: Procedures

This first part comprises four chapters that correspond to four permanent components of support to the farmers:

1. Local planning

Local planning is the means by which the local role-players (smallholders, artisans, rural role-players, etc.) define firstly their priorities regarding the question of development, and secondly the multi-sectorial action plans in the short, medium and long term. The role-players have to discuss these with external partners (technical services, NGOs, financial partners, administration) located on other geographical scales or other levels of decision making.

II. Diagnosis

A sound knowledge of the starting point is a prerequisite to the support being adapted to the expectations of the farmers. While diagnosis is a preamble to action, it continues during action, allowing different role-players to acquire the knowledge necessary for action.

III. On-farm experimentation

In most agricultural African situations, technical changes are necessary. From the results obtained in agronomic research stations, experimentation in rural environments may help to design some adapted techniques.

IV. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring the actual running of scheduled actions, and frequently evaluating the results are two important functions necessary for the permanent adaptation of these actions and for addressing the needs and constraints role-players face.

• PART TWO: Tools

The second part of the handbook comprises three chapters corresponding to three main concerns that should be permanent in all programmes dealing with support to the farmers.

V. Training of farmers

Training farmers makes it possible for them to acquire the necessary skills for the implementation of their increasing responsibilities. This chapter discusses the information, technical training and management training respectively.

VI. The farmers' organisation

For the farmers to take charge of their economic activities (input supply, credit, marketing, processing of products, etc.) and of their increasing role in activities of general interest (advice, management of natural resources, etc.), they very often need to improve the level of their professional organisation. This is crucial to enable them to defend their interests, and to increase their negotiation power.

VII. Contracts between role-players (discussing contracts)

Smallholders cannot do everything, nor is it advisable that they do everything. It is therefore important for them to enter into contracts with other economic role-players (artisans, shopkeepers, tradespersons, industrialists, agribusiness role-players, etc.) and other institutions (technical services, NGOs, local authorities, etc.).

• PART THREE: Fields of intervention

The third part consists of seven chapters that correspond to several key areas of rural development.

VIII. Extension services and farm management advice

How does one communicate innovations? Extension services, which are usually used to propagate simple and uniform themes, do not respond satisfactorily to this question. Is it possible to make some improvement by using new means of information and technical training, or should one encourage extension services to evolve towards a farm management advice system capable of helping farmers to take decisions that are adapted to their particular situations?

IX. Natural resources management

How does one create conditions for a sustainable agriculture that will use valuable resources without destroying them? Is it possible to define, with the farmers, some regulations related to the use of the environment, based on the maintenance and regeneration of natural resources, so that the entire system may remain compatible with both their short-term needs and their constraints?

X. Product management

The modernisation of agriculture increases the number of products to manage and the channels through which they must go. The quality

of product management does impact upon production. Inputs must arrive on time, products must find a good market and they should be sold at the right prices in order to generate a profit, and so on.

XI. Management of collective assets and facilities

Social collective assets and facilities are put in place in the villages. They include water points, sanitary facilities, and so on. Village people also acquire equipment such as motor pumps, mills. How should such facilities be maintained or replaced? This chapter will attempt to answer such questions and provide some general methodological orientations, while also developing a case study.

XII. Financing local development

Local development always requires financial capacity and the sound management of financial resources. There are many discussions around the diverse modality and nature of such management. This chapter is an attempt to present the key issues, and from diverse experiences arrive at some methodological orientations.

XIII. Women and development

Women have always played an important socio-economic role in the rural society. Although in the past many interventions for development considered women as nothing other than mothers and spouses, their economic role has become progressively evident.

Some kind of specific support for women is necessary. However, this does not mean that the approaches leading to segregation based upon sex are valid. The support for women must always be taken in a general context where men and women have specific but interdependent roles to play.

XIV. The non-agricultural sector

Supporting farmers cannot be limited to agricultural and agribusiness sectors. Rural people

are not only involved in agriculture, but also in some other sectors (like small, micro and medium enterprises and industries, local markets, etc.) that exist or may be developed. Specific approaches are necessary, but which ones? How should these activities be connected to the cropping system, animal production, and so on?

6. How to use the handbook

The handbook does not provide answers to all the questions. As already mentioned, it is definitely not a collection of formulas and recipes, which in any case do not exist anywhere.

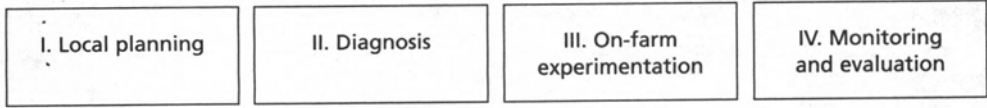
The diversity of situations encountered makes it impossible to develop one single method which might be applied everywhere.

Moreover, the debate has been left open on many issues (extension, saving and credit, collective management of productive equipment or privatisation, etc.) It has been necessary to report on existing controversy here and there. Who is right? Who is wrong? The differences in the reality are so great that no one can ensure that what has succeeded in one place will also succeed elsewhere. It is therefore advisable for the reader (e.g. extension officer, development operator) to reconsider and analyse his or her own practice in order to create his or her own methods of development and come up with some original approaches which will be well adapted to the situations he or she faces.

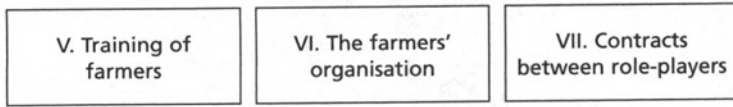
The handbook was not produced for reading from cover to cover. The reader is advised to select the most appropriate chapters, those related to the genuine questions arising from the nature of the work being carried out, its progress and the field of interest.

The following table serves as a reference to the 14 chapters:

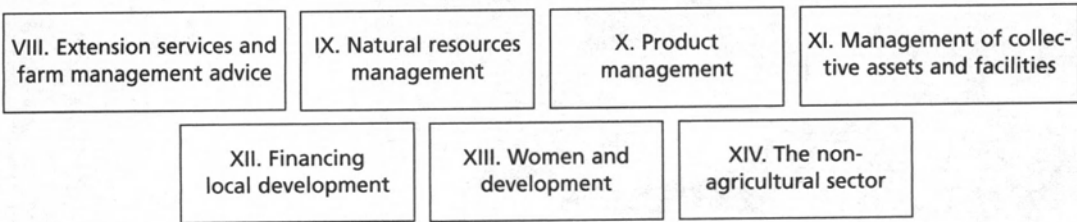
PART ONE: PROCEDURES



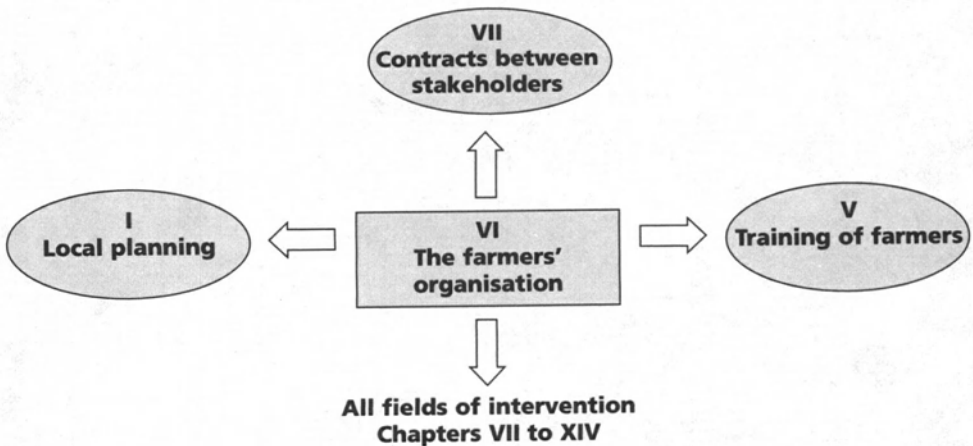
PART TWO: TOOLS



PART THREE: FIELDS OF INTERVENTION



A sketch with comments is given at the beginning of each chapter. It refers the reader to the other chapters related to the issue in question. For example:



PART ONE:

PROCEDURES

- I. Local planning**
- II. Diagnosis**
- III. On-farm experimentation**
- IV. Monitoring and evaluation**

