

GAIN METHODOLOGY:

Diagnosis and design of change
processes within producer
organizations



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processes within producer organizations

by

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"Every action contains a risk, any success contains the seeds of failure. But it does not matter. What matters is how you do things. This is the real challenge."

Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA, 2012



(Source: FAO/Elbehri)

South-South Cooperation facilitated by FAO:

Fatoumata Diallo (l.), president of the Union of cooperatives "Femmes en Action" from Mali with Ela Bhatt (r.), founder of the Self-Employed Women Association (SEWA) of India, during an exchange visit to SEWA at Ahmedabad (India) in March 2012.

Preface and acknowledgements

Constraints faced by smallholders – be they women or men – in accessing markets and improving their revenues are well known and easy to enumerate. Finding workable solutions to these constraints remain a challenge. The situation is very similar in many developing countries, particularly in Africa. A major obstacle to achieving agricultural development and inclusive value chains is the lack of effective and self-reliant producer organizations. In West and Central Africa, most farmer organizations are structurally weak, lack good governance and the endogenous capacity to be self-reliant and sustainably deliver the economic services required by their members. In most cases, these organizations remain too dependent on external support that often lacks safeguards to ensure long term sustainability.

This report describes a new methodology called GAIN (Governance, Autonomy, Integration, Needs based) developed by FAO staff from the Social and Economic Development Department under the direction of Aziz Elbehri, Senior Economist. The main objective of this methodology is to provide an effective assessment tool for initiating endogenous structural changes within a producer organization. Using a participatory and iterative approach, GAIN combines an internal assessment of the organization with an analysis of its immediate environment in order to initiate a gradual process of economic self-empowerment. This takes the OP on the path of more reliably supporting its members' economic needs and playing a more active role in the local economy. The conceptualization of the GAIN methodology is the result of a reflection on the “roots” of the spectacular success of the Indian organization SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association), and the causes behind the weaknesses observed within producer organizations in West Africa and Central Africa.

Once conceptualized, the GAIN methodology needed to be tested in the field and assessed in the African context. As part of the All-ACP project aimed at developing agricultural value chains in West Africa and Central Africa, three producer organizations were selected from three different countries to test the methodology, namely the Ten-Tietaa Union in Burkina Faso, the Noon Departement Producers' Union in Cameroon, and the Cooperative Union of “Women in Action” in Mali.

The GAIN methodology required a full team of facilitators. Aziz Elbehri (FAO-EST) was assisted by Maria Lee (independent consultant) in the case of Mali, and by Carina Hirsch (FAO-ESW) and Marwan Benali (FAO-EST) for Burkina Faso. On the ground, FAO chose local NGOs to co-facilitate the process: in Burkina Faso, the organization SOS Sahel International Burkina, under Salifou Ouedraogo's management; in Cameroon, Agri-SMEs under Norbert Monkam's management; and in Mali the NGO PROEXFAPA in Bamako, under Salif Fulani's responsibility. In addition, Uma Swaminathan, Director of the RUDI cooperative from the Indian organisation SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Organisation) also took part in the Mali workshop and presented the SEWA model.

The authors acknowledge and thank the continued support of David Hallam, Director of Trade and Markets Division and overall responsible officer for the All-ACP project, which funded activities presented in this report. This work has also benefited from the collaboration with Nora Haddad Ourabah from the Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division (ESW). In addition, the authors thank Maria Grazia Rocchigiani (ESW), Sally Berman (OEKC) and Denis Herbel (ESW) for having organized, at FAO headquarters, a Capacity Development workshop under the "Analysis of Development Organizations - Module 4," dedicated to the GAIN methodology, to which a number of FAO colleagues participated and whose helpful comments and suggestions are incorporated into this report.

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Acronyms

EB	Executive Bureau
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme
CTT	Ten-Tiétaa Committees
GA	General Assembly
GAIN	(Governance-Autonomy -Integration-endogenous needs)
CIG	Common Initiative Groups
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PO	Producer organisation
SEWA	Association of Indian women in informal employment
SIC	Commercial Information System
SIM	Market Information System

Introduction

Problems often associated with small farmers' inability to enter the market in developing countries are well known and can be easily enumerated. The challenge however lies in finding effective solutions that not only can fit many different contexts but can also influence both the external environment and the internal factors in producer organisations that so that they may facilitate a better access to market for small producers – both for women and men. In November 2009, during the World Summit on Food Security organized by FAO in response to the food crisis of 2007-08, participants reaffirmed the need to better integrate small farmers – be they women or men – in agricultural markets. This recommendation came out of the bitter fact that, in most cases, despite the soaring food prices in 2007-2008, small farmers in poor countries have not been able to respond by proportionally increasing their production. The famous production response to price did not occur. This showed that agricultural markets do not work – at least not for small farmers.

In the context of West Africa, agricultural policies and investment strategies should be reviewed or rebalanced in favour of basic food production systems as they are the source of the population's food security, including in rural areas. This readjustment process of agricultural policies began with the African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), but the crisis of 2007-2008 has given more immediate impetus to this shift. In order to be effective, these policies and programmes of action must be based on functional small producer organisations that have clear economic objectives and self-empowered and sustainable capacities. These will give them the possibility to interact and negotiate with economic, financial and institutional partners.

However, in West Africa, this is far from being the case for most small farmers and the organisations to which they belong. In developing countries, particularly in Africa, small farmers are confronted with difficult challenges to become an integral part in basic commodity value. They face a number of constraints in terms of access to markets such as the lack of means of production (arable land, water, equipment, financial resources), poor access to education, training and modern technology and a weak bargaining power. Women face additional challenges, including cultural and legal discrimination

giving them or not access to production inputs, financial services, education and technology

Developing markets that include small farmers requires a concerted effort involving government, the private sector and agribusiness, as well as producer organisations (POs), Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), etc. Producer organisations play a key role in ideally helping their members to be less isolated and to increase their social capital and self-confidence (especially for women). In addition, the PO can facilitate producers' access to training, loans and marketing of products on the market, while reducing their transaction costs and increasing their bargaining power. Thus, by organizing themselves, small producers are better able to overcome the constraints they face individually and take advantage of market opportunities.

In West Africa, as elsewhere, during the last 25 years, a wide range of producer organizations, mainly associative institutions and agricultural cooperatives have emerged and come to fill a void created by the gradual decline of public investment, management and support to the agricultural sector.

The performance evaluation of these organizations shows that they are relatively limited. This is due to a number of reasons: the conditions and motivations for which these organizations were set up (often in response to time-limited projects); unsuitable structures and an internal lack of good governance limiting effectiveness; a lack of individual skills and talents necessary to properly manage themselves and to develop partnerships, often combined with a lack of collective vision that would mobilize members around economic goals and clearly define the services that each organisation should offer to its members. In addition, most of these organizations lack autonomy, especially at the financial level, and do not have the capacity to mobilize resources directly from their members. This makes them dependent on external support that comes in sparingly, in a temporary fashion, and is often related to requirements or conditions that have nothing to do with the real and internal needs of these organisations' members.

Establishing producer organizations that are effective, managed efficiently and democratically while taking into account the needs of their members, be they women or men, is a sine qua non condition for coherently developing agricultural value chains and improving small farmers' incomes and living conditions.

Few case studies that shed light on how to specifically support farmers' organizations, comprising recommendations on how to

strengthen their accountability and empowerment process, are seriously evidence-based. Within projects, the efforts of development partners to assist and financially support certain organizations very often end up creating situations of dependency in relation to external assistance. Thus, when the external financial support stops, organizations often tend to fall into a passive phase resulting in the inability to continue to operate independently.

This glaring and, after all, urgent omission calls for a new approach to design a progressive path for producer organisations that leads them to a situation of autonomy and economic efficiency within a framework of institutional sustainability. This approach should be based on an in-depth assessment of the targeted producer organisation, followed by an endogenous evaluation of its capacity to adapt and regenerate. This process can be based on models of existing organisations with an excellent *modus operandi* [e.g. SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association)] that may have a catalytic effect on other organisations' practices and provide an example of a vision for a better way to be organized and managed.

The GAIN methodology described in this report is a direct result of these considerations. More specifically, this methodology has been developed to address three interrelated concerns:

- Finding an effective approach to enable small farmers, be they men or women, to become better integrated in the market and reap the ensuing benefits;
- Formulating within the AII-ACP project in West Africa modalities that can develop staple food value chains through capacity building of inter-professions and member umbrella organizations, including producer organisations ;
- Drawing on lessons learned from the exemplary organization SEWA in India to use them as catalytic agent to induce an effective institutional change in African organisations.

This report describes the GAIN methodology developed by FAO in order to make a institutional and functional assessment of producer organisations in staple food value chains. Its use is linked to the need to change leading to members having greater ownership of the services that the organization can and should give them, taking into account the role of men and women within it. The specific objective of this methodology is to achieve endogenous development of a new strategy and action plan or roadmap implemented by the targeted organization

for a greater economic empowerment of its members and a greater market integration.

The description of the GAIN methodology is followed by three case studies illustrating how the methodology has been tested with three producer organisations in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Mali.

The final section describes the lessons learned from these case studies and assesses how effective the GAIN methodology has been in these different contexts. It concludes with possible ways to adapt the methodology, potential fields for its application and the skills required for its effective use as part of a process of institutional change in broadly defined producer organisations. As a matter of fact, beyond assessing a particular organisation, the GAIN methodology creates an opportunity to reflect on development programme intervention modalities and the capacity of producer organisations to influence these programmes and, more generally, policies that support agricultural organisations.

CHAPTER 1 | DESCRIPTION OF THE GAIN METHODOLOGY

The GAIN methodology is based on three main components:

1. Internal assessment of the organisation and its immediate environment;
2. Development of a strategic action plan by the members of the organization;
3. Monitoring and implementation of the action plan by the PO.

1.1 PRINCIPLES OF AN IDEAL PO ACCORDING TO THE GAIN METHODOLOGY

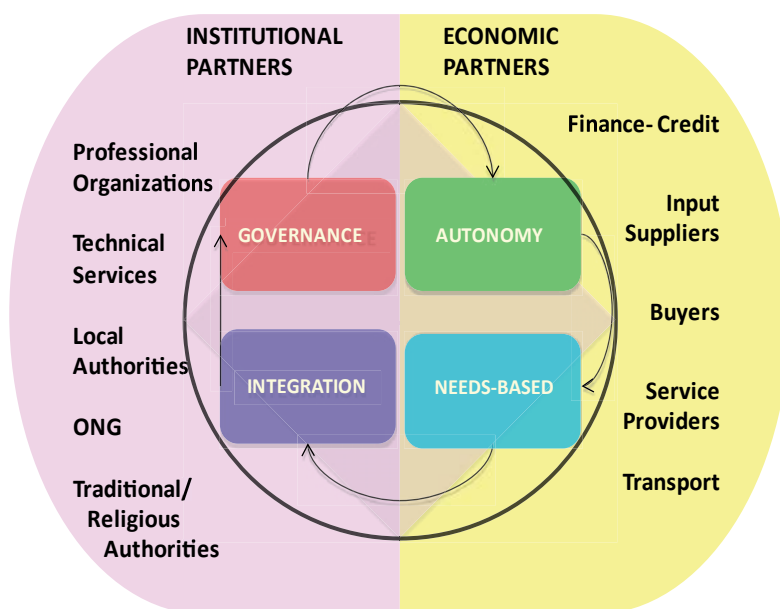
The GAIN methodology enables users to evaluate any producer organisation at the functional and institutional level. With this assessment, PO members will be able to build a new vision and design a structure that allows their institution to become economically efficient and gradually sustainably autonomous and benefit all its members through democratic governance.

The methodology's conceptual framework distinguishes two levels of analysis: (1) an internal assessment of the PO and (2) the analysis of its economic and institutional environment. This conceptual framework is shown in figure 1 below.

This double analysis of the PO follows three main steps:

- STEP 1: Endogenous assessment of the PO;
- STEP 2: Consultations and Validation by economic and institutional partners;
- STEP 3: Reconciliation between the PO's vision and partner requirements for a strengthened partnership.

Figure 1. Representation of the PO and its immediate environment by GAIN



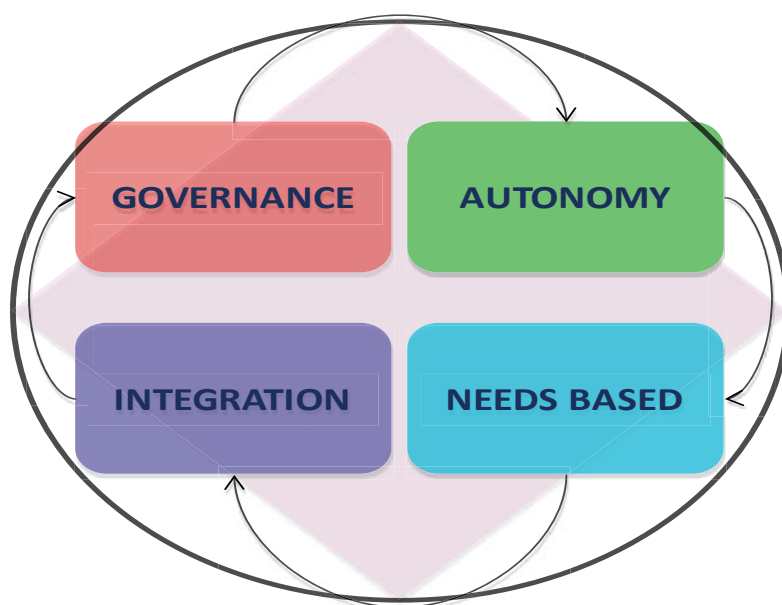
The final product is an action plan or roadmap from and for the PO validated by its major partners.

The GAIN methodology's endogenous assessment of OPs is based on four guiding principles that are considered essential for the sustainable development of an effective organisation: good governance, empowerment, an integrated approach and giving priority to the needs of its members. These four principles are actually successfully applied in thriving OPs, such as the Indian organisation SEWA and consist in:

- **Effective governance** through expanded sharing of responsibilities between the members of the organisation, bringing about an increased commitment of each member to the organisation and flow of information from grassroots to the executive management and vice-versa; in other words, governance that is based on its members' accountability and not just on a centralized decision-making system in the hands of one or two people in the organisation;

- **Increased empowerment** of the organisation and its members. The organisation focuses on gradual empowerment in terms of human and financial resources capacity. Strengthening technical skills and members' decisions are established as a priority, giving members the ability to find solutions for themselves and mobilize resources (capital, financial services provided by the organisation to its members, setting up savings and loan mechanisms);
- An **integrated approach** taking into account the need to improve living conditions (health, education, housing, etc.) and economic opportunities for members. This approach is judiciously combined with programmes and activities that aim to improve access to information, provide targeted training based on needs and facilitate access to means of production. These activities are implemented with a view to empower members and render them more accountable. This principle of integration also implies that the organisation build strategic partnerships with local economic opportunities;
- **Priority given to the needs of members.** Priority needs of members guide the organisation's activities, be it in terms of choice of training programmes, granting of loans or engaging in activities

Figure 2. The 4 principles of the GAIN methodology

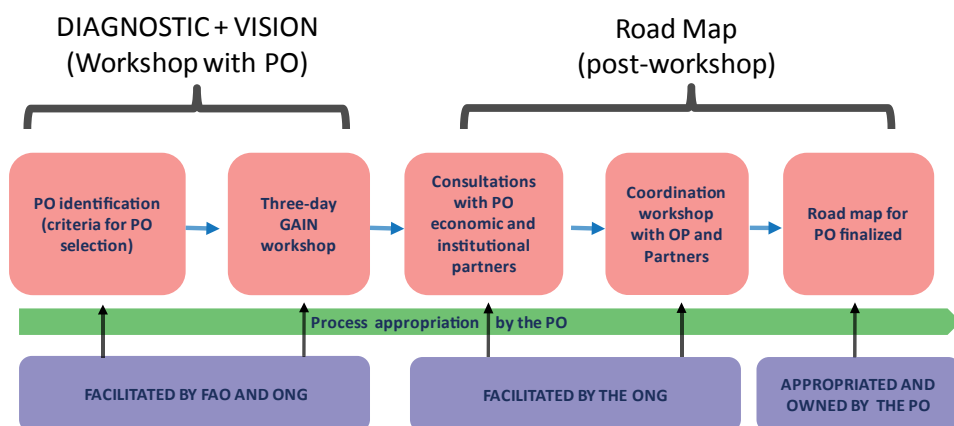


initiated and financed by external institutions. Activities and services are more likely to benefit members in the long term and last over time if they respect the priority needs of members of the organisation.

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE STEPS TO APPLY THE GAIN METHODOLOGY

The different steps of the GAIN methodology are depicted and explained below:

Figure 3. Main steps of the GAIN methodology



1.2.1 Identifying the PO

There are a number of circumstances that allow initiating the GAIN methodology in a given geographic area. Starting this process may follow up on a local initiative, be part of a national development or rural programme, or even in response to economic, political or environmental sudden changes, or simply upstream of an investment programme that requires the active participation of farmers and their organisations in its implementation. Launching the GAIN methodology can also be very useful when producers have access to new market opportunities in the region requiring first and foremost a functional organisation that can facilitate access to loans, information, training, etc. All these circumstances may be a prerequisite to justify the launch of the GAIN methodology for one or more POs. The initiator of GAIN can be the state, an NGO, an umbrella

organization or any third party, as long as they have the required human resources and skills for a successful application of this methodology.

The preliminary criteria for choosing a PO that may benefit from a GAIN assessment are that the status and functionality of the PO should be consistent with the programme objectives, investment or development activity requiring an upstream GAIN assessment. In addition, members should come together around one or more economic functions of the organisation. These economic objectives must also be aligned with the general objectives of the initiating project, programme or activity. Lastly, once the organisation is identified (with the assistance of a local professional organisation, NGO, government agency, etc.), enough members of the chosen organisation need to participate in the GAIN assessment workshop to ensure a collective result. The selection of participants must also meet certain criteria such as a balance between leaders and members (preferably the most active), between men and women, and also between representatives of the different groups within the PO.

Once the PO is identified, a workshop is organised with the assistance of a facilitator (FAO; local NGO) in order to assess the internal situation and the organisation's current relations with economic and institutional partners. In the case of the three test interventions performed and described in the next chapters, the assessment workshop lasted two and a half days and brought together thirty members of the producer organisation and a team of six to eight facilitators, rapporteurs and translators (in local language).

1.2.2 Assessment workshop

A. Internal analysis of the PO

The main component of the GAIN methodology is to organize a three-day assessment workshop to examine the PO's current situation and its relations with its direct economic and institutional partners. The first part of the workshop aims to have all the participants assess the internal governance of the organisation, the capacity for self-management and the ability to mobilize its own resources to respond to the members' economic needs, as well as the organisation's ability to develop a joint approach so that its members may better integrate the market.

For each of the above topics, the facilitators' role is to formulate the questions, take notes, organize, clarify and sort the answers and ensure a wide participation of participating members.

This exercise is followed by a SWOT assessment (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats), inviting participants to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their organisation and its members, for each of the topics covered in the session. The answers are listed on a two-column matrix: the relative strengths and weaknesses of the PO vis-à-vis the main topics discussed.

Table 1: Main components of the internal assessment of the PO (according GAIN)

PO'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES	• Activités génératrices de revenus (en champ) • Non-farm income generating activities (non crop) • Distribution of tasks/responsibilities (men/women, individual / group, family labour /employee)
CAPITAL AND PRODUCTION MEANS	• Capital: land, animals, water, machinery, storage facilities, etc. • Skills: Members' experience/expertise, types of training received (technical, economic, management, leadership), training providers and beneficiaries among members • Social capital: support groups, etc. • Production techniques (inputs, machinery, animals) • Loans (who has access; eligible activities; conditions) • Internal savings (individual and group, etc.)
PO'S STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE	• Formal structure of the PO (governing body, roles and functions) • Forms of governance (decision making terms, information flow, relations between leaders and members) • Level of members' participation (membership, frequency of meetings, etc.)
MARKET INTEGRATION BY PO AND MEMBERS	• Importance of crops' market surplus/agricultural products (crops; consumption/sale ratio) • Products specific for market (farm and non-farm) • Access to market information • Marketing methods (grouped - individual sales, frequency/sale period, sales points, storage possibilities, etc.)

B. Analysing the PO's partnerships

The second part of the assessment workshop analyses relationships between the organisation and its economic and institutional partners. This exercise can be done with all participants (in plenary) or in groups of 10 participants. The first step is to list all the actors with whom the organization is directly or indirectly linked. Afterwards, participants are invited to comment and give their assessment of the successes and difficulties encountered with each partner.

Subsequently, the facilitators help identify the different types of partners following a number of criteria, including:

- PROXIMITY: locally based partners (area, district) or national;

- **TYPE of partnership:** economic or institutional. An economic partnership involves commercial or contractual transactions with banks, suppliers, buyers, etc. Institutional partners include government departments, local authorities, the municipality/city council, local or national professional organizations, NGOs, religious or traditional authorities, etc.;
- **TEMPORALITY:** current or past relationships (ended).

For each of these cases, the PO members accurately describe the nature of the relationship with the partner organization, and rank partners according to their importance and depending on whether relationships are successful or problematic. Finally, they identify the key partners with whom the PO wishes to continue or strengthen relationships in the future.

When this exercise is conducted in small groups, the facilitators then coordinate the restitution in a plenary session for all participating members. During the session the main points of the organisation's internal assessment and the most important economic and institutional partners previously identified are summarized. This restitution and validation for all the PO members is very important as it sets up the discussions for the next and final step of the PO's assessment - namely the development of a shared vision of the organization by the members in a framework defined by the facilitators.

C. Common vision of the PO

The third part of the assessment workshop is dedicated to developing a new vision for the PO based on the core principles of the GAIN methodology: decentralized governance, economic independence, activities geared to benefit the members, an integrated approach and the PO's capacity and functionality. PO participant members are first invited to propose new suggestions for their organization and then rank these in order of priority during a group working session. On this basis, two or three priority proposals are selected for a profound and detailed analysis using the four principles of the GAIN.

Participants are divided into sub-groups of 10 to 15 members joined by one or two facilitators, a translator and a rapporteur, to analyse one of the selected proposal.

The group analysis for each proposal is conducted by imposing each of the four core principles of the GAIN methodology as a benchmark, one by one. As a result, the winning proposal is considered by the

group vis-à-vis the principle through a double lens, namely first the relationship of the proposal with the principle, and then how the principle can modify the proposal's specification. The proposal is submitted to the following specific questions for each of the four principles:

- **GOVERNANCE:** Is the OP's present type of governance suitable to implement the proposal? What changes in terms of governance are necessary to ensure that the proposal can be carried out?
- **PO's AUTONOMY:** What internal resources can the members of the organization mobilize to implement this new vision? At the same time, to what extent can the new vision improve the economic autonomy of the PO's members?
- **INTERNAL NEEDS:** What priority needs of the organization and its members can this new proposal meet?
- **INTEGRATION:** Finally, the principle of integration requires to consider how the PO's members intend to link training needs, strengthening members' capacity, access to means of production, and restructuring their governance to implement their new proposal.

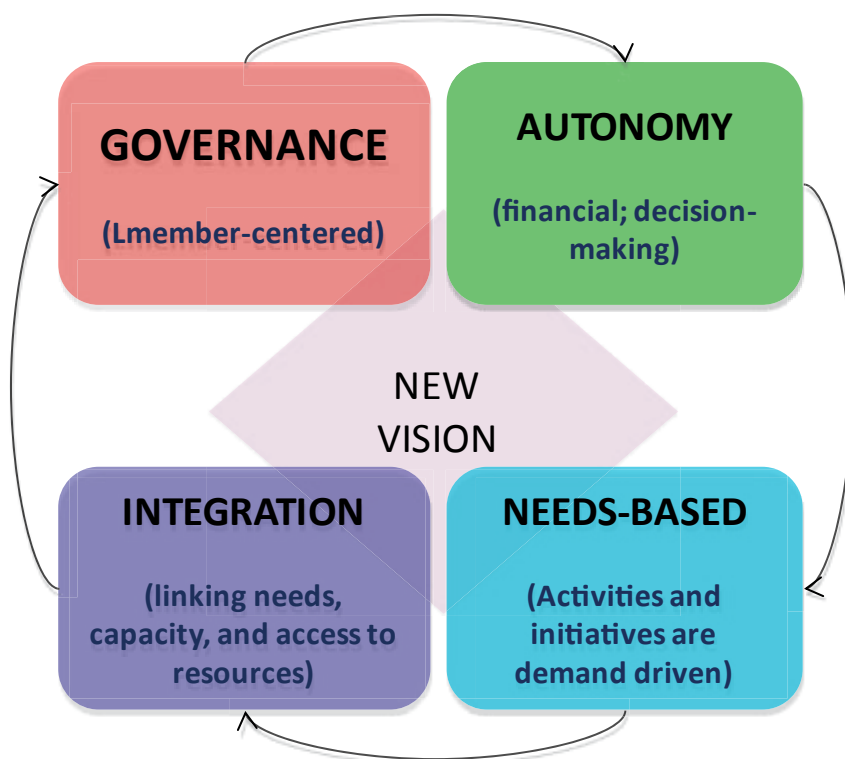
This group exercise ends with the development of an action plan or roadmap in the form of a table with two columns (short and medium term) and two lines (PO's internal activities, and activities to be undertaken with external support). The final part of the assessment workshop consists in the members of the group filling out the table with the help of the facilitator, thus laying down the final development stage of the new vision.

ROAD MAP TO IMPLEMENT THE NEW PROPOSAL	SHORT TERM ACTIVITIES (3 MONTHS)	MEDIUM TERM ACTIVITIES (6 MONTHS)
EXCLUSIVELY BY THE PO		
WITH EXTERNAL SUPPORT		

The results of the group work on the vision are briefly presented and the next steps of the methodology are explained to PO members in a plenary session that closes the assessment workshop.

A first report is prepared following the workshop and is used as the basis for the consultations that follow with both current and potential partners as identified by PO members during the common vision exercise.

Figure 4. The GAIN iterative scheme for the development of the PO's new vision



1.2.3 Consultations with partners

Key stakeholders that may be consulted have been identified during the assessment workshop. These partners may represent a sample of all the current and potential partners. The outcome of the consultations and monitoring with partners is reconciled with the new vision of the PO, while fully taking into account the partners' possibilities, opportunities and expectations, in order to elaborate the final plan of action for the OP. These consultations will assess partners' points of view and relations with the PO while allowing them to outline their own strategies and requirements that may facilitate collaboration or develop new economic, financial or other relations; these should meet the PO's expectations for its future development. In regard to consultations with existing partners with whom more successful and stronger relationships are possible, the objectives of these consultations can:

- Clarify and identify the points of contention between the PO and the partner;
- Identify opportunities for improvement or implementation of more profitable relationships with the partner, while more precisely defining the conditions that the PO must meet to engage in closer partnerships that will enable it to continue existing activities or implement the new action plan.

These post-workshop individual consultations do not follow a rigid framework but should at least consider to:

- Gather the partner's point of view on its relationship with the PO (or with similar POs); identify the partner's conditions and requirements to engage in collaboration or a closer partnership with the PO;
- Understand the overall strategy of the partner vis-à-vis the OP; clarify how the partner's strategy has commonalities with the PO's and what are the points of disagreement; when the PO has previously identified problems or blockages with the partner, gather the partner's own reading of the causes of these difficulties;
- Assess the extent to which the partner may be involved in the implementation of certain elements of the new approach developed by PO members during the assessment workshop and what the PO must do to ensure a commitment from the partner.

The information gathered from these consultations should be analysed in order to identify which of the partners' strategic elements may be entry points for an effective collaboration between the partners and the PO. This requires identifying the prerequisites to developing successful partnerships. When appropriate, causes of conflicting relationships should be identified to reduce misunderstandings or disagreements and build new and stronger partnerships.

The last step of the GAIN methodology is to reconcile the results of the assessment workshop with the outcome of the consultations with partners.

1.2.4 Coordination and development of a roadmap for the OP

The last step of the GAIN methodology process is to organize a coordination workshop between the PO members who participated in

the assessment workshop and the partners that have been consulted. The initiators of the GAIN methodology (e.g., FAO) will facilitate this one-day workshop.

The assessment workshop results and the information from consultations with partners are presented and discussed. This will further clarify each party's position and help the OP to better understand what steps are necessary to implement its action plan developed during the assessment workshop. A final session will be dedicated to a free exchange and sharing between participants (PO and partners) to identify opportunities for collaboration or future partnerships, clarify the preconditions and operational procedures, and establish communication procedures and necessary information exchanges that will ensure success.

Following this coordination workshop, a final report constituting a new strategic plan for the PO is finalized and submitted to the PO who becomes its owner, validates its and implements it at its own pace and according to the new partnerships resulting from this process.

1.3 APPLYING THE GAIN METHODOLOGY: ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS

The GAIN methodology presented in this report has been designed for producer organisations at an intermediate level of organisation that is to say, halfway between village groups (such as common interest groups) and national organizations (platforms, federations, inter-branch organisations). This choice was dictated by our initial goal to develop an effective assessment tool that can help small farmers to better integrate the market and enable higher economic returns for the activities and occupations of these POs' members. These criteria influence the choice of POs and the member participants as well as the role of NGOs that are chosen as facilitators and local organizers of the methodology.

The prerequisites that are required to ensure that the GAIN methodology is successfully applied are listed here below.

Choosing umbrella organizations and selecting participants

Producer organizations targeted by the GAIN methodology must have an economic function and current or potential relationships with the market, and their members must be able to not only produce but also process and market their products.

- The degree of formality of the structure may vary, but some form of association must exist between the members (or grassroots groups) even if it is partial, limited or informal;
- Once the PO is identified, the selection of participants for the GAIN workshop must reflect the various components of the organization, including an adequate representation of women members, a representation of major crops, value chains or income-generating activities, as well as a balanced representation between management and simple PO members.
- This level of representation must bring about a wide contribution to the assessment and ensure that the results of assessment workshop take into account the sensitivities of all the PO members (and not exclusively those of management).

Local support for the implementation of GAIN

- The conduct of the assessment workshop requires an intensive group effort and hence the need to mobilize sufficient resources to succeed. In addition to the main facilitators (minimum 3), the approach requires the same number of translators, rapporteurs and administrative and logistical support. It is often more efficient to team up with a local partner organization (NGO) that has or can mobilize the necessary human resources, knowledge and field experiences with the PO to ensure the proper conduct of the GAIN assessment when it is initiated by an extra national (e.g. FAO);
- Two activities are necessary prerequisites before starting the GAIN assessment, once the local NGO is identified and the list of people to mobilize is established. The first is to provide training for the team of facilitators (initiator and local NGO). This training includes both the philosophy and principles of GAIN in its various steps and procedures. During this training, the emphasis is on the leading role of PO members that will have precedence in the GAIN assessment workshop process. The organizers only play a facilitator role to guide the discussions and deliberations between PO members.
- The second preliminary step is conducted by the local NGO with the PO to:
 - Have a better knowledge of the organisation and understand members activities;
 - Present the objectives and expectations of the assessment

workshop and the active role that PO members are to play in its conduct;

- ▶ Establish a list of participants in the PO on the above listed criteria;
 - ▶ Assess translation needs and the choice of methodological tools based on the selected participants' capabilities and the geographical context of the workshop.
- The logistics of the workshop should be carefully prepared by the local NGO in collaboration with the initiator (FAO), taking into account the requirements for a three-day workshop with 30 participating members and a team of six animators/facilitators, three rapporteurs and three translators (depending on local language requirements).

1.4 POSSIBLE USES OF THE GAIN METHODOLOGY

As described above, the GAIN methodology was originally designed as a diagnostic tool for initiating an endogenous process of transformation for a PO to become autonomous, economically efficient, with more capabilities of integrating the market and enhancing income-generating activities for its members. Given these objectives, the choice of the POs has been midway between small groups at the village level and larger organisations at national or regional level (platforms, federations, inter-branch organisations).

It is obvious that the possible fields of application of the GAIN methodology are much broader. Specifically, the GAIN methodology can be applied to assist farmers to better organize themselves around a promising market opportunity (certification), management of common resources (water, land), management of renewable energy projects, or better coordination to adopt new techniques to better adapt to climate change. In each of these cases, the GAIN methodology can be appropriately adjusted be it for at the level of sub-themes, steps or procedures of the GAIN methodology. This also implies that the main workshop leader/facilitator is an expert in the congruent subject for the application of GAIN.

The GAIN methodology can also be adapted to organisations that are different than the POs targeted in this report. The GAIN methodology can also be applied to umbrella organizations at the level of platforms, federations and inter-branch groups. In this case, even if the overall

conceptual framework of the GAIN methodology remains the same with its different components and stages, some changes would be needed. Particularly, the organisation's internal assessment themes and sub-themes can be adjusted depending on its features and functions and on the final goal. For example, the sub-theme "market access" may not be applicable to an inter-branch group or a national federation. By contrast, other sub-themes can be introduced depending on how the methodology needs to be applied to specific organisations. The coordination phase with partners can focus on institutional partners rather than economic partners. However, the consultation process is broadly the same, including reconciling expectations and goals on either side as per the GAIN methodology.

Finally, the GAIN methodology can also be used as a tool for a sectoral agricultural policy that comprises the component "Strengthening capacities of small producers and their organisations." This process can fit into the framework of a national strategy for agricultural investment that includes a component to strengthen the capacity of farmers and their organisations to better organise and equip themselves. This will allow them to become more active players in a participative way when more coherent and sustainable investment programmes for agricultural and rural development are formulated and implemented. This calls for befittingly adapting the GAIN methodology by developing a generalized training programme that allows a larger number of NGOs and other support organisations to acquire the necessary skills to conduct the GAIN assessment. This will enable them to acquire the skillset to correctly apply it throughout the process, thus allowing a greater number of POs to benefit. Accordingly, a training programme on the GAIN methodology can target NGOs, representatives of professional organisations, state agents, including those responsible for outreach and technical advice and other technical support staff providing support to POs. The final goal of these courses is to generalize the practice of the GAIN assessment as a necessary prerequisite that ensures that POs actively participate in development programmes or investment initiatives within the framework of national development policies and strategies.

CHAPTER 2 | APPLICATION OF THE GAIN METHODOLOGY IN BURKINA FASO WITH THE TIEN-TIEETAA UNION

2.1 CHOOSING THE PRODUCER ORGANIZATION AND AREA OF INTERVENTION

In Burkina Faso, the Ten-Tietaa Union, representing women and men grain producers in the district of Dissin, was chosen to test the GAIN methodology. The choice was made with the help of a local NGO, SOS Sahel of Burkina Faso. This NGO has been chosen as FAO's local partner to co-facilitate the process. The assessment workshop was attended by 30 members of the Ten-Tietaa Union and was held in Dissin from 3 to 5 November 2011. Union members attending the assessment workshop were chosen amongst the leaders and the most active members exemplifying various grassroots groups along with a strong representation of women members. Other significant criteria were experience, the ability to express ideas, and the trust in the group.

Prior to the GAIN assessment workshop, the management of SOS Sahel had preparatory sessions with Union members where they explained the objectives of the GAIN methodology, namely:

1. Assess the organisation at a strategic and institutional level by analysing the current internal situation of the organisation, combining the study of governance tools, the Union's means of production and its ability to meet its members' needs;
2. An analysis of its partners and of the external environment in which the Union operates to determine the causes of the current problems that it encounters in its interactions with these partners and future opportunities for partnership;

3. Having the Union members develop a shared vision;
4. Formulating an appropriate plan of action that can be implemented by the PO members.

The Ten-Tietaa Groupings Union (UGTT) was founded in 1992 as a producers organisation and was officially recognized on 9 February 1999. In the local language, Dagara, Ten-Tiétaa means “mutual support among members.” There are approximately 4 000 members (men and women) organised in 135 farming and forestry-pastoral groups including 61 men and 74 women groups from 22 villages, mostly located in the district of Dissin with a few in Ouessa. The district (or commune) of Dissin is located in the Loba province in southwestern Burkina Faso, a few kilometres from the border with Ghana. The UGTT is an organization of pre-cooperative groups of farming and forestry-pastoral production with the aim to create favourable conditions for better self-management of its members.

The stated objectives of the Union are to promote, provide advisory support to the grassroots groups on how to reach sustainable rural development. One of the major challenges faced by the Union is the fight against poverty and the reduction of food insecurity that affects nearly 80% of members.

Former youth groups, named Naam, originally formed to fight against youth unemployment formed the foundation for the Union. The Union was officially established in 1999 under the leadership of the NGO German Agro-Action, now called Welt Hunger Hilfe. Initially, the Union's creation was kindled with the food security objective. Indeed, the Dissin region had experienced poor harvest seasons and producers did not always meet their food needs. Producers then decided to organize themselves under the slogan - “Strength through unity “ - with the aim to be considered more seriously by public authorities but also to acquire better capacity to overcome the difficulties they faced in terms of food security, access to drinking water and youth unemployment.

Today the main activities of the Union include the implementation of food security, livestock, environment and microcredit for women micro projects, and training on HIV/AIDS.

2.2 CONDUCTING THE ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP

The assessment workshop is the first of the three main components of the GAIN methodology. A comprehensive assessment of the Union



Salifou Ouedraogo of ONG SOS Sahel introducing FAO GAIN methodology to the participants from Ten-Tietaa Union

divided into three segments: (a) internal analysis of the organisation, (b) evaluation of the PO's partners and (c) the PO's vision of the future.

2.2.1 Internal assessment of the PO

A. Economic activities and PO members main occupations

First, the Union members' main activities and occupations were identified. These activities were then divided between the farm and non farm income-generating activities. At the group level, activities are extremely varied even if maize, sorghum and groundnuts prevail; the other cultivated crops are cowpeas, cotton, rice, soybeans and vegetables. Among these activities, peanuts, rice, sorghum, maize and cotton are grown in groups in collective fields, and in individual fields, while groundnuts, rice and maize are only grown individually. Women's groups are very active in these crop activities. The non-crop activities are mainly pork and poultry production, but also a multitude of small businesses such as soap, petrol or basketry. Some male groups

also mentioned vehicle repairing. Most of these non-farm activities are carried out both collectively and individually, except for soap and baskets that are produced and sold as a group. (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. Main income generating activities of the UGTT members

CROP FARMING ACTIVITIES	NON CROP FARMING ACTIVITIES
Individual: • Corn, peanuts, and rice crops Individual and group: • Maize, sorghum and groundnut crops • Cowpea, cotton, rice, soybean and vegetable crops	Individual and group: • Livestock (pigs and poultry) • Small businesses, e.g. soap, oil or basketry • Vehicle repair for some male groups Only done in groups: • Soap, basketry

In the past, Union members participated in projects to restore land and build water conservation structures in the context of development projects funded by European donors. The Union has also set up a receipt system (warehouse receipt) to better manage the internal storage of cereals and facilitate access to loans. (As a formal structure, the Union has created technical committees: a managing well water committee, a storage warehouse warrantage committee, a hygiene committee, and a vegetable crop production committee). In addition, members have received training on hygiene promotion, nutrition and preventing HIV-AIDS. Following these training programmes on HIV-AIDS, the Union has developed the ability to implement a screening programme and give advisory support to groups with a better understanding and consequently, a better fight against HIV-AIDS.

Some Union groups have also received training on erosion control techniques, advisory activities on the use of improved seeds, as well as training on agro-ecology. In the livestock sector, the Union provides support to write applications for obtaining capital loans, as well as technical support



Johanna Some, Union Vice-President, reading her group expectations from the GAIN workshop

to farmers setting up micro-pig farms. The Union also offers microcredit to its members, especially women, for recognized income generating activities. Each year, more than 400 women receive micro loans.

The Tien-Tietaa Union is well organized and has good social cohesion, making it very attractive to donors and projects. Several of its land use and local environment protection programmes receive support as well as reforestation, plant care, water and sanitation activities, integrated food security programmes at the village level, and the Union participates in a project against child trafficking.

B. Capital, means of production, and PO's internal capacity

Capital and Union member's means of production

Access to means of production could be greatly improved. The majority of Union members (nearly 99%) are landowners, but women have too little or no access to land ownership. The only exceptions where women can access land are when the Union intervenes on certain plots or when the state inherits plots following inheritance disputes. Soil quality is also very variable and some plots are too degraded to be cultivated. The lack of water is a recurring problem. Producers cannot adequately maintain many crops and obtain low yields due to the lack of irrigation.

The most preoccupying aspect of crop production is the often-mentioned poor quality of inputs. Seeds are purchased from local merchants and SOFITEX or obtained through personal production or barter between different producers, but quality seed is rare or insufficient or not made available in good time to Union members. Finally, its rather excessive prices make them unaffordable for most producers, given their small budget.

For Union members, another disabling aspect at production level is linked to the tools and materials used. These are unanimously considered obsolete or unsuited for the participants' work. They are *dabas*, knives, wheelbarrows, carts, picks, shovels, machetes or even rickshaws. These obsolete tools are unfortunately not sufficient to ensure a sustainable and efficient production, and the few tractors hired by the Union cannot compensate for them. Most of the labour is family-based (90%) although some of mutual service practices between producer groups have been possible. According to producers, this workforce remains inefficient and unskilled, as it limits itself to manual labour.



Working group in session facilitated by Marwan Benali (FAO)

In summary, water access does not seem to be a major problem (except in some rare cases for water linked to production and agricultural activities); if men have guaranteed access to land, access to land for women is problematic and some members still have difficulty accessing quality inputs (often due to lack of funds) or even sufficient quantity given their needs, particularly because of a

compatibility issue with long cycle inputs. The equipment used was also strongly criticized for their obsolescence.

Access to training

Many courses are offered to Union members, often through NGOs (SOS Sahel), the support of donors and government services. The types of training received include: building stone barriers, the how and why of manure pits and manure management, training in vegetable production, good equipment management, soap making, seed production, literacy, borehole and well management, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, warrantage, hygiene, management of water points, loan management, monitoring and evaluation of activities and/or family farm management. These trainings cover both farm and non-farm activities. Union members are also satisfied with the way trainings are allocated. The village community, the Union, the Ten-Tiétaa communities, women or producers decide who attends these trainings, depending on what is offered. Indeed, a strong tendency towards specialization seems to be emerging within the Union. In other words, when one of the Union producers has been trained, he will be given priority for all other similar training so that he/she may specialize in this area and increase his/her capacity to disseminate knowledge within groups and different villages. These courses are widely passed on, beneficiaries having a “moral obligation” to share the results with other group members through further training or other informal learning processes. However, some training needs expressed by Union members are not met, such as project management, mastering technology, operating account management, food conservation or livestock production. But overall, the Union can boast to have been

the recipient of a wide range of trainings that have benefitted its members.

Access to credit

Union members are quite concerned with accessing loans. Women obtain microcredit with the guarantee of the Union but men have not been able to get access, as the Union will not act as guarantor due to men's reputation for low creditworthiness.



Union members during plenary discussions on the Union internal situation

In addition, the credit lines that the Union and women members can access through the Caisse Populaire are only possible thanks to a protocol with a German NGO that deposited a microcredit guarantee fund for the Tien-Tietaa Union women members. This arrangement allows the Caisse Populaire to disburse loans at a much lower risk. To meet the challenge to access to loans, Union members asked to carry out continuous awareness building on this issue and regular monitoring of the management of loans granted to men. The starting point is to generate greater agricultural yields bringing about a merchant surplus coupled with the necessary guarantees (warrantage) to obtain a loan. The use of funds obtained through credit is quite eclectic, combining both agricultural activities and alternative activities that relate more to household management or other aspects of personal life. Thus, credit is often used toward children's education or refurbishing of homes. Credit also widely supports agricultural activities: for example maize, rice, cotton or livestock activities. Opening a storage warehouse is also eligible for a loan. The credit is mainly obtained from the Caisse Populaire that remains the Union's preferred partner (something we will consider in the next section on the Union's partners). Members face other difficulties linked to loans such as procedure delays, outstanding payments and trust deficiencies in some groups. In general, Union members define poor access to credit - and by the same token dependency on financial institutions - as a major obstacle to the purchase of sufficient production equipment.

Table 3 summarizes the Union's assessment concerning its capitalization, resources and expertise.

Table 3. Strengths and weaknesses of the Tien-Tieetaa Union's capabilities and resources

LAND	
Strengths	The majority of members (men) are landowners
Weaknesses	- Women do not have access to land ownership; with some exceptions - Very degraded soils, lack of water and irrigation systems
Inputs and production means	
Atouts	- Seeds available on the market - Mostly family labour, self-help and support groups
Weaknesses	- Poor quality; difficult access to costly quality seeds in a timely fashion - Obsolete equipment and tools, poorly adapted, low productivity - Lack of skilled labour
Training	
Strengths	- Wide range of training received in the context of development projects - Technical assistance from NGOs (SOS Sahel) and government services - Rational and judicious allocation in members' selection for training
Weaknesses	Several training needs expressed by members have not been met
Credit	
Strengths	- The credit is mainly obtained from the Caisse Populaire, who received financial support from a German NGO - Most beneficiaries are women, with the Union acting as guarantor - Credit is used for farming or other income-generating activities and for basic consumption (children's education)
Weaknesses	- Men do not have access to loans (lack of creditworthiness, no guarantee from the Union) - Difficulties with procedures; trust issues among some groups

C. Structure and governance

The Ten-Tietaa Union is well structured and governed by sound entities. The 135 groups (men and women) are "led" by a board of three members: a president, a secretary and a treasurer. The Executive Bureau (EB), at the top of the Union, is composed of 12 members, including 6 women. The Executive Board includes one member in charge of women's affairs, another responsible for economic activities and another in charge of information. All members are elected for a term of three years renewable once. The EB is the Union's executive body, responsible for planning and implementing actions, reports to the General Assembly while also being responsible for the smooth running of the Union. The EB is in charge of reviewing and selecting loan request applications before they are submitted to the Caisse Populaire of Dissin and also fully monitors the granting of loans. In villages, the Ten-Tiéetaa committees (CTT) assist the EB in building awareness on respecting commitments in relation to maturity dates of the loan as set by each beneficiary. These committees provide a space and transmit

information between the EB and grassroots groups. Each village has a CTT and they total 28. CTT are also involved in mobilizing groups in villages, identifying groups' constraints and needs as well as difficulties, which they communicate to the EB. Committees are elected for a term of two years, renewable once. The CTT are responsible for screening loan files or other project ideas and forwarding them to the EB.

Le BE est l'organe d'exécution de l'Union. Il est chargé de la planification et de l'exécution des actions et rend compte à l'Assemblée Générale tout en étant également en charge de la bonne marche de l'Union. Le BE est en charge de l'examen et de la sélection des dossiers de crédits avant leur acheminement à la Caisse Populaire de Dissin et suit complètement l'octroi du crédit. Il sensibilise les groupements au respect des engagements conformément aux échéances définies par chaque bénéficiaire. Il est assisté en cela par les comités Ten-Tiétaa (CTT) dans les villages. Ces comités servent de lieu et de transmission d'information entre le BE et les groupements de base. Les CTT sont au nombre de 28, un par village. En plus les CTT participent à la mobilisation des groupements au sein des villages, et à l'identification des contraintes et besoins des groupements ainsi que des difficultés rencontrées qu'ils transmettent au BE. Les comités sont élus pour une durée de deux ans renouvelable une fois. Les CTT ont la responsabilité de présélection des dossiers de crédit ou des autres idées de projet et de les transmettre au BE.

The General Assembly (GA) meets annually with 3 delegates per group. The GA defines the yearly main lines of action and mandates the EB to implement actions supported by several specialized committees: 52 water point committees, 7 warrantage warehouse management committees, one hygiene committee, and one vegetable crop committee

Discussions between Union members on internal communication reveal that it works quite well. The internal communication strategy is mainly based on the publication of circulars sent to committees, on town criers, on word-of-mouth, or on church meetings (Union members are predominantly Catholic). A communication structure has also been set up with stocktaking meetings and relay women in the villages. Phones and local radio stations are also used but to a lesser extent, due to the limited access of Union members to these two technologies.

The SWOT analysis on the Union's governance highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. Strengths show that the Union has a sound structure with bodies operating regularly. Thus, GAs occur on a regular basis and the role of various management

committees is respected. The Union generally demonstrates a democratic behaviour. The Union owns a significant amount of land and material goods as well as its headquarters, premises, conference rooms and drying units, perceived by its members as valuable assets to ensure good governance.

In terms of weaknesses, members identified structural and functioning flaws in the organisation. At first, the flow of information was sometimes perceived as insufficient to ensure effective governance. In addition, certain technical committees (e.g. water point management) show poorer performance. It was also noted that the EB is not always operational, with challenges in bringing its members together or in contacting them. Some participants also criticized the Union's finance management. It appears, however, that members are very pleased with the Union's institutions and perceive them as solid, especially in terms of internal communication, deemed quite satisfactory. This seems to be the cornerstone of the organisation's success with the two monthly meetings of the EB. The CTT also meet regularly and allow regular exchanges of information at group level.

D. PO's level and modalities of market integration

The lack of market integration is one of the Union's major weaknesses. The main reason is the fact that most members produce to meet their consumption needs with a variable surplus, which is therefore not always sold. This situation has not allowed members to develop assertive and regular business relationships. When members do sell the excess on the market, they do individually and in small quantities without the ability to weigh on prices or without the benefit of group sales.

Warrantage represents a real opportunity for the Ten-Tiétaa Union in terms of marketing procedures and production sales, as it may really profit from better selling prices on the market, given that it is one of the few organizations in Burkina Faso to carry out this practice. Drying vegetable crops is also a process that can be developed to improve its sales force. However, the Union has low storage capacity, which obviously limits warrantage, whose management remains inadequate. Members came back to the lack of reliable price information in the marketing discussion because it greatly hinders the Union from being in a position to sell products at an optimal price. The Union does not know the market situation well and, therefore, cannot seize existing commercial opportunities, wasting the small surplus it produces.

Information on prices and markets is not available to producers. There is no adequate sales information system (SIC) or market information system (SIM) that would be sustainable enough to provide continuous and timely information to producers. The information is not spread fast enough compared to the volatility of market prices or marketing opportunities (e.g. sales and other outlets). This is largely due to the lack of use and access to means of communication and modern media such as radio, Internet or mobile phones. A few survey operations on market prices have been mandated by the Union or by the Ministry of Agriculture's local branches but overall, word-of-mouth is what prevails in these particular situations, despite its limitations (slow, low reliability etc.).

The Union seems better organized and holds extraordinary GAs or specific meetings when looking at input prices. Phone and word-of-mouth are also used in this case. However, the necessary information to bring about good marketing remains insufficiently disseminated within the Union and does not allow it to seize existing business opportunities.

Finally, market integration is hampered by a number of constraints upstream and downstream of production: upstream, lack of access to quality inputs at the right time, access to land especially for women, access to loans especially for men, and access to appropriate equipment; downstream, the absence of bundling that would enable to sell at the best price and lowest cost in the surrounding markets.

2.2.2 Analysing the PO's partnerships

During the second stage of the GAIN assessment workshop, participating members of the Union were invited to list all the partners with whom they have relationships. These partners along with the services they provide or the kinds of relations they have with the Union are summarized in the tables 4 and 5; Table 4 for local partners and Table 5 for partners at national level.

The Union members identified a large number of partners at both local (district) level and beyond. They are: local representatives of Ministries, the city council and the municipality of Dissin, the European Union, NGOs (Association AGC organization Fayenteren, Welt Hunger Hilfe, Wayel Association, CIDI association, Dreyer Foundation). There is also the Caisse Populaire and Crédit Sud King Agro and Agro Tropic, the Catholic Mission and the National Federation of Naam Groups, which acts as the Union's connector with other institutional or economic actors.

Table 4: Local partners of the Tien-Tietaa Union and services provided

PARTNERS		SERVICES	
Type of partner	Partners	Services	Types of services
Institutional partners	Municipality	- Land tenure security - Assignment of developed areas - Improved seeds	Production support
	Ministry of the environment	Reforestation	
	Ministry of livestock	Veterinary Services	
	Technical Support Zone	Technical support, access to inputs	
	Wayel Association	Mutual service	Access to financing and loans
	CIDI Association (coordination of Total Development Initiatives)	Trainings in livestock production	Capacity building
	Ministry of education	Literacy courses in villages	
	Plan Burkina	Training and other educational aspects	
	FAYENTORAN	Strengthening capacities	
	AJC Association (Conscious Youth Association)	Family planning support	Social Services
	Dissin Health and Social Promotion Centre (CSPS)	Hygiene services	
	Catholic Mission	Information dissemination Centre	Communication and information
	SOS SAHEL International	Overall support	Overall support
Economic Partners	Caisse populaire crédit	Credit	Access to financing and loans
	Crédit Sud Crédit	Crédit	
	King Agro	Group purchase of inputs	Upstream of production services
	Tropic Agro (Group purchase of inputs)	Supply of inputs	
	Private processors	Processing	Downstream of production services
	Local and traders from Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso or Ghana	Sale of production	

Table 5: National partners of the Tien-Tietaa Union and services provided

PARTNERS		SERVICES	
Type of partner	Partners	Services	Types of services
Institutional Partners	Agro-Action	Overall and financial support	Overall and financial support
	National Federation of NAAM Groups	Connects the Union With other institutional and economic actors	
	European Union	Funding	
	ANPE	Youth training	Capacity building
	Diobass	Support to resource conservation	Aide à la production
	Dreyer Foundation	Protecting moringa cultivation	
	PAFER	Lowland reclaiming	
	PIGPE	Irrigation and water point management	Marketing support
	Afrique Verte	Market research Group sales	
Economic Partners	INERA	Fourniture d'intrants améliorés	Upstream of production services
	SOFITEX	Supply of inputs	

Two observations can be drawn from these lists. Firstly, “local” actors are dominant, reflecting the low projection of the Union beyond the district of Dissin, especially as most of the players considered as “external” to the area have tended to come into the municipality in order to deliver their services. Secondly, institutional partners predominate denoting economic, financial and development support relations aimed primarily at strengthening the capacities of Union members. In addition, the relatively limited number of business partners reflects that the Union is not truly able to project itself commercially. Moreover, except for those involving traders, relations with economic partners are often related to upstream production, namely the purchase of seeds (INERA), pesticides (King and Agro Tropic Agro) and loan requests (Caisse Populaire and Crédit South).

The pre-dominance of institutional partners who provide services and support to Union members reflects that the Union is heavily dependent on external actors for its running, if not for its actual existence. This shows that the Union appears to be strongly assisted and supported by institutions and organisations in the vicinity. The strong institutional structure is an attractive factor but could also be



Recitations by members following small groups discussions

the consequence of repeated external requests that require beforehand a formal and functional organization that can fulfil the requirements enabling it to benefit from development project offerings. However, the limited list of business partners reflects the Union's lack of significant economic and financial autonomy.

Following the participants' enumeration of the various economic and institutional partners, be they local or national, a detailed analysis of the Union's main partners was conducted.

Institutional partners

Relations with the Ministries, the city council and the municipality of Dissin are considered positive because they lead to real results for the Union. The Ministry of Agriculture supports Union producers through its departmental service both upstream and downstream of production. Thus, the Ministry provides producers with subsidized fertilizer and seeds as well as training in agricultural techniques. Downstream of the production, department officials provide technical support such as crop monitoring and production and also in terms of pest management. However, the Ministry's human resources and capacities are too scarce

at times to ensure optimal support and monitoring of Union members. This causes occasional delays in the delivery of improved seeds and fertilizer, or a lack of mobility for Ministry staff that should provide continuous technical monitoring on the ground.



Maria Poda, a Ten-Tietaa Union facilitator leading a group discussion on the Union economic and institutional partners

The municipality of Dissin has been also strongly involved in the development of the township, in the Union's life and daily efforts for the past five years. The city council intervenes heavily in the area of tenure security or in assigning developed areas (especially important for women), on the basis of ad hoc interventions and upon requests. The municipality also provides improved seeds to Union producers.

Among non-governmental organizations, a German NGO called Welt Hunger Hilfe (ex-AgroAction) has provided a lot of support to the Union, including by creating a guarantee fund for members to directly obtain loans from the Caisse Populaire. This NGO has continually backed the Union for 12 years, through the following initiatives: soil restoration and the provision of more efficient production equipment. In addition, it provides training and literacy sessions for Union members. The Union's relationship with this organisation is extremely positive and has contributed to improving the lives of women and increasing yields through training and provision of equipment.

Economic partners

In regard to economic relations, La Caisse Populaire remains one of the most important partners of the Union insofar as it has provided loans to groups for 11 years. Groups must be members of the Union to obtain a loan from the Caisse Populaire. Applications are in fact difficult to fill out despite the Union's intermediation efforts for its members. Indeed, members highlighted several issues and emphasized that delays in the granting of loans are often related to the cumbersome loan administrative procedures and difficult access to information.

Participants also complained about interest rates being too high, making repayments difficult operations and undermining a bit more the solvency of Union members. These interest rates are non-negotiable, darkening prospects of improving relationships with the Caisse Populaire.

Union cotton farmers have a strained relationship with the Société Burkinabe Fibres Textiles (SOFITEX). This company grants access to inputs (especially seeds and insecticides) on credit in return of getting paid back in cotton. According to producers, the problem, is that upstream good quality input prices remain much too high especially as the selling price of cotton is very low and this generates losses for producers. SOFITEX (which has a monopoly on cotton purchase at national level) imposes fixed prices precluding flexibility and producers have little means to discuss or negotiate. SOFITEX applies the same rigidity when imposing certain deadlines which determines sales periods that do not correspond exactly to producers expectations and cause delays in the receipt of payment. However, in some cases, they have the opportunity to engage in early sales, that is to say, sell a small part of their production in advance and receive payment immediately.

There is a large range of traders [with a variety of scale (local, regional, national, international) and products] with which Union members constantly interact. However, during the assessment workshop, overall relationships between producers and traders appear to be rather difficult. In fact, traders are in a position of strength and use many tools to enhance their status and maximize their profits vis-à-vis producers. Traders impose very low sale prices that rarely reflect the actual production value and thus contribute to creating a loss of earnings for producers and unpleasantness during transactions. Relationships are also too rigid with merchants with whom the terms of price negotiations are not to the benefit of producers. These difficulties as a whole show weak marketing capabilities of the Union.

This analysis substantiates that, in general, relations with business partners mirror the Union's low economic and market power. On the contrary, relationships with institutional partners are generally positive. Union members value these relationships despite a few difficulties inherent to the sometimes limited capacity of these institutional partners. Similarly, the Union's solid structure facilitates the stability of its relationships with institutional partners.

2.2.3 Common vision for the PO

The third and final phase of the assessment workshop began with a session in which participant members were invited to propose and develop a new vision through concrete and feasible proposals, subject to a rigorous analysis of the GAIN principles. First in plenary session, each member was invited to write out one or two proposals they wish to see the Union achieve. Then the proposals were listed and catalogued and subject to analysis and classification so as to extract a few flagship proposals approved by a majority of members. At the end of the meeting, four new proposals were selected for more detailed analysis in subgroups. These were:

1. Establishing a federation;
2. Creating an internal mutual for the Union;
3. Establishing seed production within the Union;
4. Better marketing of agricultural products.

Subsequently, participants were divided into three groups (10 members each with a facilitator, a translator and a rapporteur), each group dealing with one of the four proposals. The first group (which considered Creating an internal mutual for the Union) briefly discussed the fourth proposal (Establishing a federation). During the sub-groups meetings, the new proposals were scrutinized according to the GAIN scheme and its four principles, namely: decentralized governance, economic independence, activities geared to benefit the members, an integrated approach and the PO's capacity and functionality. The analysis was completed by identifying implementation stages for these proposals and separating what actions are to be developed in the short term (less than three months) and medium term (between three months and one year), depending on the Union's internal capacity and/or the need to use external support. The results of this exercise for each of the four proposals are presented below.

A. Establishing a federation

The sub-group explored how to transform the Union into a Federation in order to expand their base beyond the township of Dissin and join or partner with other unions. In addition, it is important that the Union comply with the rule of law, in particular Law 14 that regulates cooperative societies and groups in Burkina Faso. The Union would also like to grow by incorporating existing federations or by organising

itself around value chains and incorporating new sectors such as fishing.

The Union already has substantial resources to undertake this transformation, such as its strong organizational structure. Similarly, its effective internal communication channels can be useful to support and convey awareness operations that will persuade Union members of the need to mobilize resources or increase group contributions.

This desired governance transformation has important implications for the Union, as it will have to reorganise itself in various value chains and create technical committees by industry and municipality.

B. Creating an internal mutual for the Union

During the assessment workshop, Union members shared that they faced great difficulties to access credit and therefore proposed the creation of an internal savings and loans mutual.

This need was evident because of their strained relationship with the Caisse Populaire. By setting up a mutual and an internal loans system, the Union would take a big step towards greater economic independence.

At first, creating an internal mutual requires to mobilize enough money to constitute a large enough fund. In the medium term, it will



Start of a group discussion on a new vision for the union



Carina Hirsch (FAO) facilitate the group discussion on envisioning a change from union to a federation

be essential to mobilize larger annual contributions, without relying on external funds in order to maintain a degree of autonomy.

In terms of activities, the first step is to educate Union members about how to start the mutual, its added value and the importance of developing it with the Union's own funds, that is to say through increased contributions. In the medium term, the Union plans to establish savings and loan accounts that it would self manage. To do this, it will set up specific training to develop the members' capacity to draw up and manage accounts. A study trip with an organisation that already has its own mutual could also be organized, for example with an organization like

SEWA, which has its own bank controlled by women members, who play the role of custodians and loan beneficiaries.

This course will obviously involve changes in the Union's governance. Participants proposed to set up a management committee of the mutual or a mutual savings and loan committee. This committee, under the control of the EB will be organized into several branches, each branch corresponding to a village. A manager will be recruited for each branch while the committee will receive specific financial management training. A monitoring committee could also be set up and would consist of an accountant and a storekeeper (for warrantage).

This proposal is laid out into a plan (or roadmap in the following table with timelines). It also identifies internal resources to mobilize:

C. Establishing seed production within the Union

Establish seed production within the Union addresses the need to increase yields and reduce costs related to the purchase of inputs. Seeds available for Union producers are sometimes insufficient and often of poor quality. Union members will gain more autonomy and be able to produce better if they develop the capacity to produce their own seeds. Members identified maize, rice, cowpea, sorghum and soybeans as priority products for marketing, putting these at the forefront of their own seed production. Participants also identified

	SHORT-TERM (three months)	MEDIUM TERM (6 months and more)
Own resources	• Sensitize members on creating the mutual and why • Mobilize village committees (communication channel) • Create a savings and loans committee • Organize an Extraordinary General Assembly (to set the amount of individual contributions)	• Mobilize contributions • File the request for approval with competent authorities
External support	• Hire an expert to conduct a feasibility study	• Mobilize external support and seek specialized training for the staff of the Management Committee • Organize a study tour to visit an organisation that already has a mutual • Seek external help to apply for accreditation (legalization) • Contract an expert to audit the accounts

their own specific needs to implement this. Thus, to produce quality seeds, the Union must equip itself with adequate production equipment (including fertilizer and seed base), processing equipment as well as premises to stock seeds. Training in composting would be most beneficial. Finally, important standards regarding the land are to be observed, as it must be sufficiently far from other agricultural land by being separated by a minimum of five contiguous hectares of land. The Union must therefore find this land before starting any activity.

Some of the resources needed to achieve such an objective may be mobilized internally. Indeed, the Union can use part of its estate for the land and the compost pits. The Union also already has the human capacity and knowledge required to perform the necessary reforestation. However, external resources must be mobilized for technical support such as mentoring by the Ministry of Agriculture's staff (for advice, monitoring, training) or seed certification, which is done by the same Ministry. As illustrated in the results of the stakeholder analysis, good relations with the Ministry of Agriculture should facilitate obtaining these resources.

Once all the resources will have been mobilized, Union members will need to implement activities: firstly, the Union should identify potential seed producers within its members and launch the trainings in composting. Secondly, efforts should focus on which agricultural production should be chosen, that is which products should be prioritized in terms of seeds, as well as necessary resources for each (what soil? What inputs? Any storage premises?). Once all of this is done, it will be very important to obtain the seed certification from



Small group discussion on a new vision for the Union

the Ministry of Agriculture and finally to prepare the marketing of these seeds, in particular by applying the Union logo that will allow seed producers to develop a brand and stand out on the market. In most cases, these activities can be performed with the Union's internal resources, while external resources are within its range (training and certification).

In short, establishing seed production within the Union can be done autonomously even if it entails some governance implications, such as the need to create a management committee for monitoring seed production activities. It will be set up according to procedures already established by the Union and will not only be responsible for monitoring operations but also for marketing any seed production surplus. All the different seed crops should be represented on the management committee, with one member responsible for each crop. The options available to achieve autonomous seed production quality are well within the scope of the Union.

	SHORT TERM (THREE MOIS)	MEDIUM TERM (SIX MONTHS AND MORE)
Own resources	• Identify potential seed producers among members • Identify target crops for seed production • The choice of seed varieties	• Identify quality land, meeting criteria for seed production
External support	• Learn about the techniques of seed production with the National Union of Seed Producers of Burkina Faso • Solicit support from agricultural services agencies (training and technical support)	• Develop basic seed (sign necessary agreements with the National Seed Union) • Seek INERA's technical support (seed certification) • Set up specifications for the production and marketing of seeds with the help of an expert

The action plan for this proposal is as follows:

D. Better marketing of agricultural products

The Union could address one of the main weaknesses identified during the assessment workshop by improving the marketing of its agricultural products. Union members show little marketing capacity characterized by highly variable individual sales, often at farm gate and without sufficient knowledge about markets. In particular, participants explained that the Union should focus its efforts on peanuts, rice, soybeans and corn, as their commercialization is still marginal. They also discussed the needs they must meet in order to fully develop this marketing potential that is mainly focused on finding opportunities and securing transportation. Participants also noted that processing units such as drying units are important in this process, as are the related transformation strategies. Finally, Union members need to have sufficient information on applicable prices and those applied in markets and also need to receive additional training in marketing.

The Union identified the crops that can provide production surpluses. In addition, warrantage (which allows producers to preserve and store their production to then sell it at the best price) is an important tool to establish better marketing. However the Union needs to further develop its negotiation capacity vis-à-vis traders.

Union members also identified the main activities they need to develop that will ensure effective and especially sustainable marketing, by starting with finding consumption niches and then sensitizing members of the concerned crops to ensure quality production surpluses. The Union must also reorganize some of its activities by setting up bundled sales and promoting warrantage operations. Finally, in order to better manage resources obtained through these sales, Union members would like to receive training in operating account management. This activity requires mobilizing external support and resources.

Some changes in the Union's governance are essential to support these group marketing activities. Thus, the Union should revitalize its price committee to become the main entity responsible for marketing operations within the Union. In this context, it would be in charge of identifying the products and the quantity to stock and sell, with the notion that only products that are to be sold would be warranted, while the rest is kept for consumption. This price committee would thus become an umbrella marketing committee for all operations and activities related to the sale of products.

The group marketing action plan developed by the Union is as follows:

	SHORT TERM (THREE MONTHS)	MEDIUM TERM (SIX MONTHS AND PLUS)
Own resources	• Conduct a census of its marketable products, including promising crops • Strengthen processing and marketing capacities of women • Identify products that will generate the best possible returns	• Revitalize the existing price committee (governance) and turn it into a marketing committee (managing stock surplus inventory) • Create sales outlets with bundling of products
External support	• Commission an expert for a feasibility study and measure the actual capacity of the Union	• Seek technical support from experienced organisations such as Afrique Verte (specializing in “cereal banks”)

2.3 CONSULTATIONS WITH PARTNERS, RESTITUTION WORKSHOP AND ROADMAP

Following the assessment workshop with the Union, SOS Sahel interviewed the main partners on their relationships and perceptions vis-à-vis the Union and their perspectives on the new vision and proposals developed by the Union. The partners' responses are summarized in the following table:

Following bilateral consultations with key current and potential partners, SOS Sahel organized a feedback workshop gathering together members of the Tien-Tieetaa Union and its partners in order to finalize the action plan. The results of the assessment workshop including the Union's proposals were submitted for validation to partners who expressed their perspectives, expectations and requirements to foster win-win collaboration. The results of the workshop with partners and the Union's finalized Action Plan are presented in the appendix to this chapter.

Regarding the setting up of a savings and loans mutual, it was decided to first reorganize and train Union members. The mutual would be financed by members' individual and collective contributions and also by potential financial partners. The mutual would also be set up in its own premises.

As for setting up seed production, the Union will first seek to identify varieties to then find producers able to invest in the strategy and thirdly to implement the necessary technical training. Acquiring all necessary certificates and certifications to obtain legal recognition

Table 6. Partners' perspectives vis-à-vis the Tien-Tieetaa Union (bilateral consultations)

Union visibility, strengths and weaknesses with partners
• Good image of the union • Good audience with projects and NGOs • Well structured organisation, unique in the Southwest region
Union strengths: • Good governance with bodies that work well • Strong presence of women with loans supported by the Caisse populaire • 100% repayment of loans by women • Participates in the development of the Municipal Development Program (MDP) • Develop capacity in warrantage, reforestation, nutritional education
Weaknesses of Union: • The Union has reached a level of stagnation in its capabilities • Low level of education of members and leaders • Little monitoring with development partners • Men's loan needs are not satisfied • Union strongly dependent on external support (very low economic autonomy)
Possible changes to achieve the new vision and partners' contributions
• Promote new memberships • Encourage turnover of leaders within bodies, including grassroots groups • Increase the volume of the amount of loans granted to members by increasing the Guarantee Fund at the Caisse Populaire • A mutual is possible, but must take into account competition from the Caisse Populaire • Expect to overcome very stringent conditions from the Ministry of Economy and Finance to obtain legal status; need to develop appropriate statutes, have skilled personnel, appropriate premises and equipment, promote savings and cumulatively provide loans • The amount of annual loans granted to all Union members • Improve the skills of members of the Executive Board with experts in finance and credit • Search for partners to contribute funds in addition to membership fees
Other possible partnerships:
• The town of Dissin is ready to provide support to the Union with a campaign to raise public awareness for new memberships • District technical services can assist the Union in production techniques (e. g. veterinary services and bio-digester for methane gas, electricity and compost) • Afrique Verte may accompany and support the Union in restructuring its marketing and setting up cereal banks • The Dreyer Foundation offers to cooperate with the Union to let it have use of its rice huller • The Caisse Populaire de Dissin could assist the Union in loan management through a "win-win" Memorandum of Understanding

is also important. Seed distribution should also be planned and establishing or strengthening relationships with such key institutions as the National Union of Seeds should not be overlooked.

To better market local products, the Union will focus its re-organization on finding and/or strengthening partnerships to improve access to markets, for example Afrique Verte for grain markets but also with processors and other influential actors on market linkages. Certain financial aspects will also be dealt with in accordance with the goal of having a mutual (opening a bank account, guarantee fund, etc.). Efforts will also be made to give the Union better visibility, in particular on the market.

Finally, in relation to transforming the Union into a Federation, it was agreed to start reorganizing the Union and the groups by value chain and to up efforts to meet legislation requirements, which would then allow legal recognition of the future federation. Awareness building and appropriate training will also be implemented while necessary affiliations will be established.

2.4 CONCLUSIONS AND ACTIVITIES SET UP BY THE PO FOLLOWING THE GAIN ASSESSMENT

The assessment workshop, the consultations and the feedback workshop helped develop a vision and goals for the Union. It also clarified the type of collaborations needed with institutional and economic partners



Thirty members from the Ten_Tietaa Union participated in a three-day intensive GAIN workshop facilitated by FAO and ONG SOS Sahel Internationa of Burkina Faso

to achieve these objectives and to establish a roadmap with specific timelines.

To ensure that the Union has the internal capacity to implement the action plan, five Union women leaders had the opportunity to make a training trip to SEWA, in India. This NGO offered a programme of visits and training provided by local trainers and leaders during several field trips during which the Tien-Tieetaa Union women leaders learned how the SEWA savings and loans system is operated from the village all the way up to the SEWA Bank in Ahmedabad. The visitors of Burkina Faso were very impressed with several of SEWA's operating elements. The first concerns the specialization by value chain, thus rendering the structure more efficient as common needs and problems are shared. The second regards the important role of savings, which is one of the cornerstones to empower the organization and its members (including conditionality links forged with credit). The five Union leaders were able to understand better the practices of SEWA in regard to governance, savings and loans, the fundamental role of appropriate and continuous training for rural women who are often illiterate, and especially to their democratic and decentralized governance with a flawless information flow between all members. Based on this training trip, Tien-Tieetaa women leaders have resolved to initiate the following changes in their Union:

1. Reorganize the Union in value chain, drawing on the SEWA model, so that members involved in the same value chains, and thus having the same needs and constraints, may interact more efficiently;
2. Systematize the relationship between loans and savings. Information sessions are planned to educate members about it;
3. Provide training for grassroots leaders starting with the three leaders in each village, and focusing specifically on their roles and responsibilities;
4. Consult with experts in order to receive advice and technical assistance to transform the Union into a federation.

The new vitality within the Union generated by the GAIN assessment and the wealth of knowledge and broadening of the Union leaders' outlook after the trip to SEWA has given a real boost to the Union. The durability of the momentum created will have to be monitored and it will be useful, in the medium term, to take stock of the objectives and timelines laid out in the Union's roadmap to assess if the changes stimulated by using the GAIN methodology had an impact on improving farmers' access to markets and food security.



Following the GAIN diagnostic workshop, five women leaders from Union Ten-Tietaa participated in a training program organized by FAO and SEWA on good governance, leadership, cooperative management, and market integration (Ahmedabad, India, March 2012). (Source: FAO/Elbehri)

Table A.1 (Annex): Tien-Tieetaa Union's Action Plan of Action after consulting with partners

PROPOSED ACTIVITIES (DUE DATE)	PARTNERS/ACTORS
CREATING A SAVINGS AND LOANS MUTUAL	
Internal discussions and reflections at grassroots, GA and EX levels on the identity of a savings and loan mutual (January - March 2012)	EB; Women and men facilitators (Union)
Member training, organization, and operation of a mutual (March-June 2012)	Micro-finance structure
Women and men facilitator training on savings and loans (July-December 2012)	Women and men loan facilitators (Union)
Feasibility study (2012)	Union EB and SOS SAHEL
Encourage savings and loan groups (2013)	Union
Seek approval from the Ministry of Finance for savings and loan groups (2013)	Bureau, Women and men loan facilitators, resource people
Generating equity capital (5000 F CFA shares, savings, etc.). (2013)	Members, Union Bureau, facilitators
Seek support from financial partners to launch the savings and loans (2013)	Union bureau, identify a member who will be in charge of partnerships
Have management technicians and security staff (2013)	Union; technical and financial partners
Equip adequate premises (2012-13)	Union bureau
Logistics for the mutual (equipment, motorcycles, vehicle) (2012-13)	Union bureau
SEED PRODUCTION BY THE UNION	
Sensitizing seed producers (January 2012)	Union, technical services
Identify varieties and producers able to produce seeds (January - February 2012)	Union, technical services
Training on seed production techniques (March - April 2012)	INERA, Contrôleurs
Certification for seed production, purchase of basic seeds from INERA (April -May 2012)	Producers, technical services
Organize and recognize seed producers by seed variety (May - June 2012)	Union, technical services
Technical monitoring of seed producers (May - November 2012)	Controllers, INERA, agricultural services
Define a distribution system for seeds produced for Union members (November 2012)	Union
Contact the National Seed Union (March - April 2012)	Union
Affiliation of seed producers to the National Seed Union (May - June 2012)	Union

Table A.1 (Annex): Tien-Tieetaa Union's Action Plan of Action after consulting with partners (Cont'd)

PROPOSED ACTIVITIES (DUE DATE)	PARTNERS/ACTORS
BUNDLED SALES	
Technical management mentoring, developing working tools and training (2012-13)	Union, Caisse Populaire
Negotiate a partnership to access cereal markets (2012-13)	Afrique verte ; SOS Sahel
Training of resource persons to develop projects, and identify partners (2012-2013)	SOS Sahel
Support to the creation of the guaranty fund (mutual) (2012)	Crédit Sud ; Caisse Populaire
Define the types of loans (production, food security, IGA) (2012)	Bureau de l'Union, Caisse populaire
Set up an account in the name of the mutual with the Caisse Populaire (2012)	Bureau de l'Union, Caisse populaire
TRANSFORMATION EN FEDERATION (DES UNIONS)	
Sensitize/Inform on the transforming the Union into a federation (January - February 2012)	Union, municipality, district technical services
Literacy training for group members (January - April 2012)	Union, Provincial Directorate
Training members in PO management (March - April 2012)	Union, Agricultural services
Create new warrantage groups (January - December 2012)	Union, technical services
Reorganize groups by crop sector (June - October 2012)	Union, technical services
Drawing up of legal statutes for the federation (October - December 2012)	Union, technical services
Convene federation constituting assembly (November - December 2012)	Groups and members of Unions
Undertake administrative action to obtain legal recognition of the federation (November - December 2012)	Union
Affiliation to the Confédération paysanne du Faso CPF (janvier 2013)	Union

CHAPTER 3 | APPLICATION OF THE GAIN METHODOLOGY IN CAMEROON WITH THE NOUN DEPARTEMENT PRODUCERS UNION²

3.1 CHOOSING THE PRODUCER ORGANIZATION AND AREA OF INTERVENTION

Between 21, 22 and 23 September 2011, FAO, in collaboration with BAGRO-PME, organized the “ GAIN Assessment Workshop to support restructuring and capacity building of producer organizations to enable better integrating the market” in Koutaba, Cameroon. Thirty people representing fifteen POs operating in six value chains - cassava, maize, rice, vegetable crops, livestock and coffee - in the Noun department attended the workshop. .

The criteria for selecting these 15 organizations were: (i) the PO's dynamism: actual functioning with activities visible on the ground, (ii) the seniority and experience in the targeted value chain: required to have specialized in the value chain with three years minimum experience, (iii) the number of members: mobilization of a large number of members, (iv) gender balance: male/female parity, and (v) the level of savings by members mobilized by the PO.

² This chapter is written based on the report on the application of the GAIN assessment prepared by Agri-SMEs under the leadership of Mr Norbert Monkam.

The main objective of this workshop was to conduct a socio-institutional assessment with the producer organizations of the departement of Noun, in order to identify restructuring terms following the principles of the GAIN methodology modelled on SEWA. Specifically, the workshop had three objectives: (i) analyse governance practices, organizations' resources and ability to meet the needs of their members, (ii) develop a shared vision and a common strategy to strengthen organizations' capacity to meet their members' needs in the context of their economic activities, (iii) identify opportunities to strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones (market stakeholders, support organizations and public and private services).

In the specific case of Cameroon, the GAIN methodology was used to assess a group of POs that have no previous collaboration experience but operate on the same territory. Although there is no formal collaboration, several managers know each other individually. It also appears that the POs have several common challenges that they have not been able to previously express due to a lack of dialogue opportunities. This workshop created the occasion for dialogue.

The assessment workshop was followed by individual consultations with current and potential partners, identified during the workshop. During these visits and interviews, a summary of the results of GAIN assessment workshop was presented to partners along with an outline of an action plan based on their collective vision. In all, fifteen structures were identified as potential partners for the implementation and completion of an action plan that would meet the expectations of all concerned (POs and partners). A restitution workshop day was held, bringing together members of the POs and partners. This workshop aimed to enhance the action plan to make it more operational and to encourage ownership by stakeholders, to foster cooperation with partners on new and more realistic bases ("win-win" cooperation).

The area chosen to test the GAIN approach is the Noun departement, located in the West Region in Cameroon. This area is regularly called the "Breadbasket of Cameroon" and by extension, even of Central Africa, with its economic potential based on its abundant and varied agricultural production (horticultural products, corn, soy, smoked fish, cattle, plantain, fruit and coffee). Favourable natural factors (soil, climate, topography) and the people's dynamism reinforce this potential.

The Noun departement has nearly 150 small POs operating at the village level and are mainly CIGs (Common Initiative Groups); 113 of these are affiliated to the government platform of peasant

organizations. This government-created structure suffers from a lack of ownership by farmers who say they do not recognize themselves in the priorities of the platform.

Some POs have also started isolated initiatives that, through informal gatherings, help each other to develop their activities (sales and bulk purchases, non-financial services, unconventional financial services...) under the energetic dynamism of a farmer (president of the departement's platform) who does this with no sound strategy and opportunistically relying on public aid, which does not always guarantee sustainability.

3.2 CONDUCTING THE ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP

The assessment workshop facilitation team had 11 members, including an FAO expert, three main facilitators from Agro-PME, 4 translators, two rapporteurs and two administrative assistants.

The assessment workshop began with a plenary presentation by FAO on the SEWA model, its structure, its governance, its activities and the reasons for its success and sustainability. This introduction was followed by an "icebreaker" session where each participant was invited to write out his/her their best capabilities among their main activities as a farmer. The exercise was designed to give, from the outset, a positive tone to the workshop and build expectations that both positive aspects and problems and difficulties of group members would be



Agro-PME team supported FAO in conducting GAIN diagnostic in Cameroun with the producers union of Noon district

discussed. The objective was to identify from the start participant members' capacity and potential and to give a strong signal for all to participate and contribute their ideas in an open environment without taking into account hierarchy or formal responsibilities within the group. The results of this

first exercise are presented in the table below.

Table: Summary of reasons for which activities work well

- ✓ Revenues contribute to improving our living conditions;
- ✓ They allow you to have income to ensure children's schooling;
- ✓ Agro-climatic conditions are favourable;
- ✓ We have technical mastery of production;
- ✓ We have good quality seeds;
- ✓ The products sell well in the market;
- ✓ Products sold bring in good returns (relatively large monetary gain);
- ✓ Sales revenues allow to solve the family's great problems;
- ✓ We have a good coaching;
- ✓ Harvesting helps our food consumption (food security);
- ✓ We easily mobilize partners for support;
- ✓ Bundled sale and purchase of products.

3.2.1 Internal assessment of the PO

A. Economic activities and potential in the subregion

PO Participant members mainly derive their revenues from agriculture located in an area with great productive potential. The Noun département is located in the West Region of Cameroon. Foumban, capital of Noun, is located 400 km north of Yaoundé, and 338 km north-east of Douala. These two cities are easily accessible by paved roads. People and agricultural products are exclusively transported by bus and truck. The climate in Noun is tropical Sudano-Guinean. Altitude and the ocean's proximity accentuate rainfall and lower temperatures. Its rich traditional culture, vast fertile land areas suitable for agriculture and its strategic position on the transition line between northern and southern Cameroon characterize the Noun département.



Translation into local dialect of groups propositions



Recitation by members on the expectations from the GAIN workshop following small group discussions

Given their volcanic origin, especially in the area of Foubot, Noun lands are fertile and suitable for agricultural development. Climate, along with heavy rains, is also favourable, as long as one knows how to use it to their advantage and adapt appropriate cultivation techniques. However, the rugged terrain, with its steep slopes, promotes erosion and leaching of nutrients, making it production a challenge. The soil is also heterogeneous.

The Noun departement is characterized by its abundant and varied agricultural production. The largest transaction flows include: vegetable crops, corn, soybeans, smoked fish, cattle, plantain, fruit and coffee (declining).

The area “exports” excess production outside of the departement and is also a large supply market. All the villages have periodic markets and the most important ones are Foubot, Kouoptamo and Magba. The Foubot and Kouoptamo townships are areas where agro-industrial farms are highly concentrated (corn, green beans). Several municipalities offer off-season crop opportunities due to low-lying marshlands (Foubot, Kouoptamo, Bangourain, Massagam).

B. Capital and means of production

Capital and members' own resources (origin and use);

The analysis of the capital and resources (family, support network, financial resources, experience, etc.) that POs have to produce,



Plenary session on the internal situation for the Union facilitated by Olivier Ndam from Agro-PME.

process and sell their products enabled participants to take inventory of their resources, according to whether they attained these with their own means, through the group or through external assistance.

Producers often mobilize their own resources to acquire land (land capital for farms), small farming tools (hoes, machetes,

etc.), agricultural inputs, hired labour, and maintenance of their plot (revolving fund).

Producers mainly obtain three means through their OPs' resources:

- ✓ Tontine (support group, sharing of field work and savings);
- ✓ Manpower (labour support through community work in the members' fields),
- ✓ Mentoring (training support).

Support obtained outside their POs include:

- ✓ Information on sources of funding and support;
- ✓ Information in relation to the market price;
- ✓ Opportunities for the marketing of products;

- ✓ Storage warehouse;
- ✓ Training;
- ✓ Efficient agricultural equipment (heavy equipment like \ pumps, shellers, etc.).

Analysing how appropriate activities of the PO are with members' needs/resources and market opportunities;

Based on the above information (members' capital and resources of), an analysis on the POs' services identified which ones were relevant, the members' level of satisfaction and the group's ability to render such services.

Concrete achievements outlined below apply only to services obtained through " the POs' Noun platform " and the POs themselves:

- ✓ Technical support - training;
- ✓ Trade in relation to the group's main activity;
- ✓ Training members on veterinary and zootechnical techniques;
- ✓ Facilitate access to loans to meet certain needs;
- ✓ Collective work on members' farms;
- ✓ Contract negotiations to bundle production;
- ✓ Pooled procurement of agricultural inputs;
- ✓ Collective use of heavy equipment (facilitate crop irrigation with electrical pump...).

Most of these services are certainly relevant, but are not delivered in a timely and precise fashion given the group's weak capacity. Three categories of services should really improve: (1) facilitating loans to meet certain needs, (2) collective use of agricultural equipment, (3) collective work on members' farms.



Union members in small group discussions assisted by facilitators and translators

C. Structure and governance

Decision making within the organization

The assessment helped identify the decisions that are usually taken, the actors, the challenges posed by this situation and areas for improvement. By consensus, participants agreed that decisions within their organizations are more focused on production and marketing concerns. Issues relating to the internal governance of the PO are generally ignored or attract little interest, and are not systematically included in the agenda of the meetings.

Three players are at the heart of power in POs

The involvement of the delegate (the one who holds the presidency of the PO) is prominent in all cases. He/she generally receives support from a member recognized by the group for his/her extensive technical experience and an external person who has a mediator role (often a religious leader from the village). In addition to these three people, the treasurer also enjoys a certain degree of influence as he/she is the custodian of the funds contributed by the group (these resources are often not secured in a bank account). The Secretary should also be mentioned although his importance seems come mainly from the fact that he holds the PO's main documents.

The group's stability is generally linked to a few achievements that need to be strengthened: (1) mutual trust among members, (2) a spirit of mutual aid and solidarity, (3) consensus on pooling services that promote sustainable access to markets.

Much effort also needs to be given to: (1) the internal governance of all the POs, (2) value the work done by leaders (e.g. moving from volunteer to staff remuneration at the right amount), and (3) participatory monitoring - evaluation of PO activities by members.

The flow of information within the organization

The questions “How information flows in the organization? What kind of information? Through whom? How? How often? “ led to take stock of the current situation on the flow of information within the group and between the group and the outside world, and to identify areas for improvement.

The main findings are expressed as follows:

1. In terms of achievements:

- ✓ Information flows better on activities related to agricultural production and marketing with two main interests (support in setting up projects and information on sources of support and funding);
- ✓ There is a high frequency of PO staff (weekly) meetings (village groups or CIG);
- ✓ Traditional social networks are the channels most used for communication between members and between the PO and its members: word of mouth, meetings on market places, places of worship, tontines, through the children that one commissions, etc.

2. In terms of weaknesses:

- ✓ Poor infrastructure development (electricity, roads, telephone) remains an obstacle to the flow of information;
- ✓ The retention of received information by members is very limited;
- ✓ Reports, statements, minutes of meetings are not used to pass on information to members (e.g. activity reports or meeting minutes are not distributed);
- ✓ Little information circulating on the internal governance of PO;
- ✓ The opportunities to exchange information between groups based on the same territory are rare;

- ✓ Relationships between CIGs are often informal and ad hoc (meetings during fairs or seminars);
- ✓ Many opportunities are lost because of the lack of interaction between the POs (information on innovations, funding opportunities, partners, potential customers etc.);
- ✓ Opportunities for exchange between the platform and the CIGs are limited and some groups are not aware of the platform.

D. PO's level and modalities of market integration

PO members produce a wide range of agricultural products and generate a surplus sold on the market. PO members are thus very active in the market and in marketing - the primary reason for their union membership. The varied range of crops grown and marketed is divided into four categories.

The varied range of crops grown and marketed is divided into four categories:

- *Cash crops*, including Arabica coffee, Robusta coffee and cocoa.
- *Food crops* are grown throughout the departement. This category includes corn, peanuts, rice, etc. Tubers such as yams, taro, cocoyam and cassava also fall in the same category. In most cases, farmers first cultivate food crop to support their families and only sell the surplus when produced. This major food production is achieved with simple means (hoe, machete) and the important quantity produced is due to the large number of farmers.
- *Fruit trees* are also abundant in the department, which is very favourable to the development of many species (avocado, mango, guava, butter fruit, papaya...). Although fruit production is abundant, specialized orchards are rare. Trees are scattered around the village plantations and homes.
- *Vegetable crops* are market oriented just as fruit crops. Vegetable production can be spread throughout the year thanks to the development of lowlands that facilitate irrigation in the dry season. The production is very varied (tomato, watermelon, cabbage, okra, chilli peppers, black nightshade...). The Mont BAPIT project, funded by the African Development Bank, has brought about an increase in rice cultivation in the lowlands in recent years.

The first three crops marketed in the Noun are maize, which comes first, followed by cassava and rice.

3.2.2 Analysing the PO's partnerships

In order to assess the organization's projection power, institutional partners will be distinguished from economic partners and so will local partners from larger scale partners in this section.

This enumerated list (Table 7), shows that institutional partners are more numerous and important. Each of these partners fulfils a very specific function vis-à-vis the producer organization, either upstream or downstream of the production. Thus, the Union producers mainly purchase inputs from Agro-Chem, EM-Cameroon (organic fertilizer) and AFER (granulated fertilizer) or the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) through its national programme for this value chain. PO members also receive a large number of training through these partners, which are mainly NGOs and extension institutes: the SAMAN NGO provides training in agro-pastoral plants, the NGO Int. provides training for maize seed producers while the Cameroonian

Table 7. Listing of the POs' local and national partners

LOCAL PARTNERS (WITHIN THE NOUN DEPARTEMENT)	EXTERNAL PARTNERS
INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS	
• Research outpost • CIIA NGO (set up and monitoring of projects) • UC • Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) -MINEPIA Programme • Religious chieftaincy • INADES (NGO: training for maize seed farmers) • National Extension and Agricultural Research Programme (PNVRA) • Improving Agricultural Competiveness Project in Cameroun (PACA-World Bank) (advisory support)	• Int. NGO (training for maize seed farmers) • NGO - SAMAN project (training in fodder plants) • Support Project for Competiveness of agro pastoral family farms (ACEFA ; advisory support and small equipment) • GTZ (German cooperation; training in pesticides) • Agricultural Research and Development Institute (IRAD)
ECONOMIC PARTNERS	
• Traders - Poultry Producers • Crédit Communautaire d'Afrique (CCA); set up and monitoring of projects; financing of activities • Coffee Cooperative • EM-Cameroon (organic fertilizer purchases)	• Agro-Chem (input purchases) • INAGRO-SA (input purchases) • AFER (granulated fertilizer)

NGO Inades-Training also provides training to farmers. The German cooperation (GTZ) provides training in pesticides while the Project to Support the competitiveness of family-run farms (ACEFA) offers quality advisory support.

The Pos also receive support from the CIIA NGO and from CCA when setting up and monitoring and evaluating projects.

Among these partners, some appear to be more reliable than others. PO members seem to really appreciate the ACEFA programme because of the quality of advisory support and small equipment supplied. The NGO CIG CIIA is also a trusted partner of the organization it supports in setting up and monitoring and evaluating projects. The Crédit Communautaire of Africa also enables producers to finance some of their activities, making it an important partner. Two other important quality partners for the organization and its producers are the MINADER through its multifaceted support and the NGO INADES through its trainings for maize seed producers.

On the contrary, some of these partners are deemed undesirable for the Union; for instance, the fact that, according to members, the Cameroonians responsible for managing the Project to Improve Agricultural Competitiveness in Cameroon “do not respect the philosophy of the World Bank” hampers the quality of partnership. Similarly, mismanagement and lack of transparency of the National Agricultural Research and Extension Programme (PNVRA) strongly disadvantage producers and creates frustration among PO members of the PO who would wish to benefit. The production of Union members is affected by the embezzlement of quality seed by IRAD. Finally, the



Working groups deliberating about the Union members relationships with all economic and institutional partners

relationship with the coffee cooperative is severely handicapped by the low purchase prices offered to cooperatives.

In summary, PO members seem to have achieved different relationships with a variety of both institutional and economic partners. Members still manage to benefit significantly from several public, quasi-public or NGO facilitated programmes. However, significant impediments such as cumbersome bureaucracy, mismanagement by managers and member's own lack of capacity prevents Pos from really benefitting from a number of programmes and initiatives. The many different business partners, including input suppliers, reflect the diversity of practices in agricultural production and of access to inputs and equipment. However, access to loans remains limited given members' current production possibilities. Moreover, difficulties with institutional buyers (coffee cooperative) reveal PO members' lack of negotiation power in terms of prices and little transparency in the cash crop market.

3.2.3 Common vision for the PO

After completing the PO's internal analysis and assessing its relationships with economic and institutional partners, facilitators launched the third and final stage of the assessment workshop, where members were invited to discuss a new vision for the PO and a priority action plan to be implemented for the rebuilding of their movement. During this exercise, the participants were divided into two groups of 15 members each working separately and assisted by a facilitator, translator and rapporteur.

Most PO members unanimously expressed a common vision to create a cooperative where the base PO would be the main recruitment pool for founding members of the new organization.

According to participants, the option of a cooperative as an umbrella organization reflects the desire to adopt a more demanding organizational model in terms of internal governance and more credible to partners than the CIGs.

One of the major challenges is the improvement of the governance model for the CIGs (members):

- ✓ Strengthen monitoring of the Executive Bureau;
- ✓ Strengthen the capacity of the Executive Bureau members;

- ✓ Adopt and implement regulations;
- ✓ Choose leaders based on their skills and experience;
- ✓ Clearly define the eligibility criteria;
- ✓ Provide a bonus for members of the Executive Bureau (management committee);
- ✓ Make management documents accessible to all members;
- ✓ Include the sharing of information in meeting agendas.



Proposals from all members on the union's new vision were first posted, discussed, then prioritized before in depth analyses of consensual ones.

The expected immediate performance challenges for the internal governance of the new cooperative are:

- ✓ The cooperative must ensure better governance (CIGs represented on the Board of Directors);
- ✓ The director of the cooperative has more responsibilities than a CIG delegate;
- ✓ Written reports of meetings will be regularly distributed to members;
- ✓ Members will be less pressured for contributions to ensure the survival of the organization (member contributions).

Activities/priority services to be rendered by the Cooperative:

- ✓ Grouped purchases and sales;
- ✓ Strengthening “tontines” for an effective mobilization of savings;
- ✓ Introducing new more promising agricultural value chains (diversification of members’ economic activities);
- ✓ Strengthening the information delivery system;
- ✓ Strengthening technical capacity (production, management, marketing, best practices);
- ✓ Development of a win-win partnership between groups.



Group discussion continued during breaks

What are the resources that need to be mobilized in the short and medium term (strategic levers):

To ensure the success of this new vision, PO members have identified a set of resources needed in the short or medium term, including:

- ✓ Capacity building;
- ✓ Partnership with the municipality to develop infrastructure (roads, electricity, etc.);
- ✓ Establishing an operational set-up for the cooperative (staff, offices, equipment);
- ✓ Particular emphasis was placed on what needs to be accomplished prior to creating the cooperative: (a) establish a commission to study the practical modalities of setting up the new cooperative, (b) conduct a good awareness campaign with potential members (grassroots Pos), (c) identify eligible CIGs (potential members of the cooperative), and (d) organize the constitutive GA of the cooperative.

Achieving this vision also requires mobilizing current partners or identifying new ones to implement some of the activities. These partners will only take part in this project if they have some common interest; therefore it is necessary to develop a win-win thought process between the future cooperative and partners. Table 8 below what the cooperative and current partners may gain from this:

Table 8. Benefits for the Union and its partners linked to the creation of the cooperative

CURRENT PARTNERS	COOP/CIG EXPECTED GAINS	PARTNER EXPECTED GAINS
Projets		
ACEFA (European Union Project)	- Advisory support - Material support and specific equipment	Compliance with specifications
PACA (World Bank Project)	Wish to simplify banking processes (bring banking services closer to the PO's activity area)	
PNVRA	Information on PNVRA's activities	
Private partners		
CIGS – CIIA	- Technical support - Set up and monitoring of projects	Paid services
GRENIER	Support to the development and organization of the cooperative	
NGO		
INADES – FORMATION	Strengthening capacities of maize seed farmers	Compliance with specifications
Financial partners		
CCA (EMF)	- More credibility - Training in loan management - Granting loans - Lighter conditions for opening an account	Compliance with commitments 3/10 of participants have a banking account
FIFFA/CANADEL (EMF)	Support to identify new market opportunities	Bring new clients

Table 9. Potential partners and expected gains with the new cooperative

PARTENAIRES POTENTIELS	GAIN ATTENDU COOP/GIC	GAIN POUR LE PARTENAIRE
PADMIR (Support Program for the Development of Rural Microfinance)	Management and funding	Priority activities
ACEP –CAMEROUN (EMF)	Financial partners	New customers and compliance with commitments
C.E.P.D. (EMF)		
BATOUCCUL (EMF)		
Philippe AWUNKEP Yaoundé	Trading partners (develop trade relations)	Formalization of trade relations
WFP (World Food Programme)		
PROJET PADFAR		
ETABLISSEMENT MELI FOUMBOT		
CIG DEMK FOUMBOT		
S.P.C. (société des provenderies du Cameroun)		

In addition to current partners, the new vision for the creation of a new cooperative implies the need to explore and find new partnerships in order to ensure sustainability. The workshop identified the following partners as potential allies for the implementation of this vision:

3.2.4 General conclusion of the assessment workshop

The assessment workshop provided a detailed analysis of the POs' internal organization. It also offered the opportunity to the 15 groups present (CIGs) to develop a new vision embodied in a plan of action to transform the PO into a cooperative, operating according to the rules of the market and the stringent requirements of an agricultural enterprise. The critical examination of the organization's current situation with an authentic assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, as well as a similar assessment of the types of relationships maintained with the current economic and institutional partners greatly facilitated this new vision. In addition, the prospects for forging new relationships with other potential partners have been carefully considered. This dual analysis of the PO was essential to better understand which opportunities are real and effective to successfully implement the new vision of a cooperative.

The main elements of the action plan of the new cooperative developed during the GAIN assessment workshop are summarized in Table 10 below.

Table 10. Action plan for the new cooperative developed during the GAIN assessment workshop

PLANNED ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED RESULTS	IMPLEMENTING PERIOD
ACTION: Setting up the cooperative		
- Building awareness for potential POs - Establish an ad hoc committee to drive the process - Writing a draft project; validated by the ad hoc committee Convene the CGA to: - Adopt basic texts, establish statutory bodies, elect officers and appoint a CEO	- More than 800 POs are aware - At least 200 PO join the cooperative and subscribe shares - The basic texts are written and approved by the CGA - Statutory bodies exist and function - A CEO is appointed	25/09/2011 to 25/11/2011
ACTION: Continued advocacy for the subscription of shares		

PLANNED ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED RESULTS	IMPLEMENTING PERIOD
- Implement effective and operational mechanism to build awareness with at least 3 people - Tour the villages of the departement to talk about the cooperative to producers	- An effective and operational awareness building mechanism is established - At least 200 POs are members and have subscribed for shares	25/11/2011 to 25/12/2012
ACTION: Implement an effective and operational mechanism		
Establish an effective and operational mechanism in order to: - Promote mobilizing and securing members' savings - Follow the effective implementation of projects that have received external financial support - Facilitate the recovery of debts owed to financial institutions by member POs	- Implement the mechanism - Members' savings are mobilized and placed in microfinance institutions 95% of externally financed projects implemented according to specifications - Members pay 98% of loans on time	25/11/2011 to 25/12/2012
ACTION: Organize PO members in around value chains and appoint sector managers		
- Identify all promising value chains - Identify member POs involved in each value chain - Organize the value chains - Designate value chain managers	At least 6 promising value chains are identified, organized and managers for each sector have been designated	25/11/2011 to 25/12/2012
ACTION: Implement a group purchasing of inputs mechanism for the benefit of members		
- Identify potential leaders in the field - Designate those responsible for the commission	A group purchasing of inputs mechanism is established and functional.	25/11/2011 to 25/12/2011
ACTION: Organize bulk purchases of inputs campaigns		
- Identify and quantify the input needs of members - Identify potential suppliers - Negotiation and procurement - Mobilize the necessary financial resources from members - Signing of contracts	80% of member producers have bought their inputs through the cooperative's system of group purchasing	25/11/2011 to 25/12/2012
ACTION: Organize and implement bundled sales of members' products		
- Implement a bundling mechanism - Identify and quantify the crops concerned - Identify the different collection points - Implement necessary logistics to collect and transport products - Search for potential buyers - Execution of orders from buyers	- Mechanism bundling is implemented - At least 8 000 tonnes of products are sold through bundling system and at least 70% of members sell their grouped products through the cooperative	25/11/2011 to 25/11/2012



Thirty members from 15 farmers groups belonging to the Union participated in the 3-day GAIN diagnostic workshop

3.3 CONSULTATIONS WITH PARTNERS AND RESTITUTION WORKSHOP

Bilateral consultations with partners that were identified and chosen by the PO took place immediately after the assessment workshop. These consultations were facilitated by Agro-PME who presented the GAIN assessment of the PO and the new action plan on transforming the PO into a cooperative to partners. Partners were very interested in the process, but expressed the wish to see the cooperative become a formal entity and become operational as soon as possible to seal the implementation of partnerships with formal agreements. In addition, the priorities of collaboration were identified during bilateral consultations with partners and focus on three main themes: (a) access to financing and loans, (b) access to non-financial services and (c) access to markets. The prospects for each of the three principles were discussed with partners and the results are summarized in the following tables.

3.3.1 Access to financing and loans:

PARTNERSHIP THEMES	BLOCKING FACTORS	OPERATIONAL SOLUTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED	RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION
Bulk purchases financing	Poor governance	Capacity building in governance (managerial)	CCA, CIG CIIA, MINADER
Funding of collaborative projects	Diversion of the financing purpose	Successive financing	Financial partner (CCA)
Social projects financing	Breaking of commitments	- Lawsuits and exclusion from the cooperative - Encourage members to save in a financial institution	Cooperative, CCA
Secure financial transactions during bundle sales	Members' dishonesty		

3.3.2 Access to non-financial services:

PARTNERSHIP THEMES	BLOCKING FACTORS	OPERATIONAL SOLUTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED	RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION
Technical support and mentoring	Inadequate supervisory staff	- Form relays within the PO - Tap internal skills/ collaboration	Cooperative with the support of CIG CIIA and DD/MINADER
Strengthening management capacities	Extent of the area covered by the cooperative	Implementation of demonstration mechanisms accessible to all members	Cooperative with the support of CIG CIIA and MINADER
Strengthening organizational capacities	Insufficient resources	Budget the training	Cooperative with the support of CIG CIIA and DD/MINADER
	Excessive accumulation of activities	Writing a good procedures manual, Good definition of tasks	Cooperative with the support of CIG CIIA and DD/MINADER
	Managers' dishonesty	- Open an mutual guarantee account - Establish a monitoring committee	Cooperative with the support of CIG CIIA and DD/MINADER
Project review	Insufficient resources	Plan in budget of cooperative	Cooperative with the support of CIG CIIA and DD/MINADER
	Insufficient resources to fund services	Budget services; Tap internal skills	Cooperative with the support of CIG CIIA and DD/MINADER
	Challenge to design a unifying project	Take into account the gains of all actors in the project	Cooperative with the support of CIG CIIA and DD/MINADER
Legal support	Ignorance of the need for legal assistance	Sensitize the GA and ensure there is a good understanding and helpful acceptance	Cooperative with the support of CIG CIIA and DD/MINADER

3.3.3 Access to markets: Purchase of inputs and bundled sales:

PARTNERSHIP THEMES	BLOCKING FACTORS	CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS	PARTNERS TO INVOLVE AND SPECIFIC ROLE
Supply of inputs	- Lack of resources - Lack of guarantees	- Members' contribution - Support from financial institutions (CCA)	- Cooperative AGRO-Qualité, CCA (financing and securing of financial transactions) - CECI (Organic fertilizer supplier) - Jaco deals with transport and input delivery
Storage warehouses	Lack of resources	Feasibility study (development of business plan)	CCA, ACEFA, PACA, AGRO-QUALITE, MINADER MINEPIA, GIZ, CIIA
Bundled sales/ transport of products	Poor state of roads; lack of means of transportation	- Acquire means of transport - Involve municipalities and other actors	- Strong involvement of buyers - CCA (financing and securing financial transactions)

The concrete results that came out of the GAIN assessment workshop and the consultations with partners led to the following action programme for the new structure (cooperative):

- ✓ An ad hoc committee was set up to drive the process;
- ✓ The awareness campaign has so far registered 30 PO who have already joined the SOCOPACAM (Cooperative Society of Cameroon's Agro-pastoral Producers), by registering and subscribing to at least 3 shares in the cooperative's capital;
- ✓ The basic draft texts has been amended and has been finalized;
- ✓ The general assembly was held on 15 December 2011 to validate the texts and put in place the managing bodies of the Cooperative;
- ✓ The schedule of activities was adopted by the ad hoc steering committee of the project (see table 11);

Table 11: Schedule of activities for the start-up of SOCOPACAM
(Cooperative Society of Cameroon's Agro-pastoral Producers)

ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED RESULTS	DEADLINE	RESPONSIBLE BODIES	PARTNERS
Adoption of the conditions of accession	Formal list of subscribers	30/11/2011	Constituting General Assembly	ONG CIG CIIA
Formalizing the cooperative	Statutes, Records (Administrative committee, availability of legal certificates, etc.)	31/12/2011	AD HOC Commission	COOP/CIG Section
Development of the cooperative's business plan	Business plan with all options of development	30/01/2012	Cooperative	ONG CIG CIIA, DD/MINADER
Drafting of management procedures manual	Management procedures manual available	15/02/2012	Board of Directors	DD MINADER; DD Livestock
Physical headquarters	Availability of buildings and storage warehouses	15/02/2012	Board of Directors	Subscribers (financial contributions)

3.4 CONCLUSION: ACTIVITIES SET UP BY THE PO FOLLOWING THE GAIN ASSESSMENT

The application of the GAIN analysis methodology with the ICG Union of Noun helped bring out the need to formalize relationships between groups and create a new and stronger cooperative structure, that is better organized and better able to meet producers needs.

Indeed, currently the groups are struggling to identify with the Union as it remains a fuzzy entity. Relations between groups are often informal and ad hoc. Groups are focused on marketing their products through bundling systems. But many opportunities are lost because of the lack of interaction between groups (information on innovations, funding opportunities, partners, potential customers, etc.).

A solid plan of action and concrete steps have been formulated and validated by all participants who show a willingness to engage in a process of change. Similarly, consulted partners are ready to support the new structure because they see good prospects for better organization and commercial potential. Professional advisory support would be necessary over a period of 2 to 3 years to strengthen the process and make it autonomous.

Advisory support actions should focus primarily on:

- ✓ Support for internal governance;
- ✓ Support for setting up and implementing projects that enhance the capacity of services for members and self-financing;
- ✓ Strengthening relationships with institutional and commercial partners;
- ✓ Linking the new cooperative with a local structure that could take over with close support.

With the technical support of FAO and the local NGO Agro-SME, the Union of CIGs has been transformed into a duly established cooperative only three months after the GAIN assessment. This is concrete evidence of how effective the GAIN methodology is. In addition to the 15 CIGs (founding groups of the new cooperative) present at the GAIN assessment workshop, 75 other groups from Noun have joined the new cooperative after the awareness raising campaign. The new cooperative plans to specialize in bulk purchasing of inputs and bundling of a few products, such as corn, rice and livestock products.

In conclusion, the GAIN assessment workshop with The Noun Departement Producers Union came at a propitious time for this organization, presenting it with a unique strategic opportunity to endogenously develop and forge a new strategy, thus guaranteeing it a sustainable basis. The new GAIN tool is very useful for a large number of producer organizations that are in a similar situation to that of the Union of Noun before the GAIN assessment.

CHAPTER 4 | APPLICATION OF THE GAIN METHODOLOGY IN MALI WITH THE COOPERATIVE UNION “WOMEN IN ACTION”

4.1 CHOOSING THE PRODUCER ORGANIZATION AND AREA OF INTERVENTION

In Mali, the Cooperative Union “Women in Action” was chosen to apply the GAIN methodology. This Union includes 39 women’s groups (“cooperatives”), representing approximately 3 000 members located along the Niger River with livelihoods based around agriculture (dry cereals, millet, sorghum, rice, vegetables and livestock) and purchasing, processing selling fish. In addition, the Union’s founding president, Fatimatou Sireballa Diallo, participated in the training trip to India in November 2010. There she discovered the SEWA model and returned determined to apply some of the SEWA good practices within the Union.

The Cooperative Union “Women in Action” is very young, having been created in November 2011. Although it has been formally established, it still needs to define its strategic direction and action plan, its general objectives “Protecting the interests and promoting socio-economic growth of women through their member organizations.” need to be refined. Members generally seek to improve production practices, conservation and processing of agricultural products and marketing. They wish to gain real access to equipment and training, and business management capacity building.

Two major characteristics defined this Union prior to holding the GAIN assessment workshop. The first was the strong personality of the

President of the Union, whose dynamism, charisma, and good relations with government and semi-public officials bring a major asset to the Union. The second characteristic was the great disparity in resources, capabilities and diversity of activities between the different grassroots groups (or cooperatives). These are dominated by the cooperative “Women in Action” (which gave its name to the Union) based in Bamako and chaired by the President of the Union. The other groups or cooperatives are much less developed and are characterized by very small businesses with a low capacity to transform and develop their agricultural production, thus being forced to sell excess production as raw products.

The assessment workshop allowed Union members to initiate a process of reflection and transformation. To facilitate applying the GAIN methodology with this Union, FAO hired the services of a local NGO, PROEXFAPA, thus ensuring the support of a team of resource persons with a long experience of working with producer organizations in Mali. With the help of PROEXFAP and the commitment of the President of the Union, 30 members of 15 groups were identified to participate in the GAIN workshop. There were 27 women and three men. These 15 groups are geographically dispersed along the Niger River in Mali, including in the northern areas. As participants spoke three different local languages (Fulani, Banbara and Songhai), a team of translators was essential to ensure better participation. The literacy level of participants was generally relatively low, with a few exceptions.

4.2 CONDUCTING THE ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP

The workshop began with a presentation on the Indian SEWA model given by Umadevi Swaminathan, Director of the agri-food cooperative RUDI, member of SEWA in India. The “Women in Action” Union members were most interested in the SEWA model and asked questions regarding several good practices that SEWA women members benefit from: how did they access land, what level of education and technical training do they have, what are SEWA's institutional linkages with the government and how are women vendors in the RUDI company supported by SEWA?

4.2.1 Internal assessment of the PO

After the presentation on SEWA, the first step of the GAIN workshop began with an internal analysis of the PO.



Plenary session at the start of the GAIN workshop in Niamana near Bamako



Umadevi Swaminathan, from SEWA India presented the SEWA model to the GAIN workshop participants

A. Economic activities

The main agricultural and non-agricultural activities practiced by Union and cooperatives members are summarized in Table 12 below:

Table 12. Main economic activities of the Cooperative Union “Women in Action”

AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES	NON-FARM ACTIVITIES
• Millet and sorghum, vegetables crops, including onion and tomato, production • Depending on the region and the season, members grow rice, maize, potato, chilli pepper, eggplant, okra, squash, cowpea, cucumber, carrot, ginger, sesame, peanut, banana and mango	• Cereal processing (flour, granules, couscous) • Dyeing fabrics and sewing • Certain members fish in the areas near the river

The larger part of production is carried out individually. In addition to individual plots, each group has a field where members collectively grow in cooperatives millet, rice, jatropha and vegetable crops. Low yields limit the possibility of significant surpluses. In addition, initiatives to process agricultural products are still limited (except for the Bamako cooperative) due to lack of training, resources and adequate equipment.

B. Capital and means of production

Access to land is either provided by the village authority (customary allocation) or attributed by local authorities. In some cases,



Members of the Union of Cooperatives "femmes en action" during plenary discussions

collective fields are assigned to a cooperative. Thus, land holdings are not guaranteed because few producers actually own land. The costs associated with cultivating collective land are covered by the cooperative account. Members buy little fertilizer and instead use organic manures (creating manure pits with excrements from small ruminants). The cereal seeds used are generally from massal selection (traditional), while the vegetable crop seeds are purchased from the market. The work is done by hand using traditional techniques with simple tools and small equipment such as hoes, pick and mattocks. Cooperative members share the rental cost of the tractor to plough the fields or use a plough. Low yields can largely be explained by the uncertain access to quality seeds and pesticides and the lack of equipment (including mechanized).

Members, mostly women, have a low literacy level, with a few exceptions. Members are aware that agricultural technical expertise is useful (cultivation techniques, organic fertilizer enrichment, etc.) and most cooperatives or grassroots groups have received some training provided by different partners (CMDT; technical state services, projects/programmes, NGOs). Trainings include processing techniques for soap, shea butter, fabric dyeing, vegetable crop techniques (Spanish NGO MCAPAZ) and fish smoking techniques training with a technician hired by the Union. However, all cooperatives do not access training at the same level. Literacy training are considered too short and lack monitoring.

Know-how and training

One training was considered successful: 60 women received technical training in micro-gardening with the installation of 800 kits (tables, seeds and small equipment) funded by the Ministry of Agriculture. The training was provided by Bamako's "flagship" cooperative "Women in Action", which has a micro-gardening centre for the benefit of women members of other cooperatives in the Union.

Training seems to be conducted sporadically, when external opportunities present themselves. Sometimes cooperatives receive training that are not based on their priority needs because technical partners propose a package of existing ready-to-go trainings they wish to provide to groups they identified as a target group. There is no shared strategy for capacity building in the Union and often the same people participate in training sessions, whatever their subject may be. Finally, cooperatives lack the capacity to identify and build collaboration relationships with local partners who could meet these training needs.



Aziz Elbehri (FAO) leading a group discussion on strengths and weaknesses of the Union

Credit

Access to credit remains sporadic, variable and generally inadequate despite the existence of local Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) that offer credit to cooperatives. Conditions that members can only meet with great difficulties, required guarantees, the complexity of applications and a rate deemed too high by members mean that access to credit is most times beyond their reach. Some cooperatives are able to benefit from loans (e.g. the BAMA Fana Cooperative has received a loan from the MFI Kafo) most often with the support of a partner (NGO) that facilitates the processing of the application and/or acts as a guarantor. Cooperatives also have an internal mechanism of small loans. The funds come either from membership dues or, more rarely, from a loan from a micro-finance institution. In this case, loans are distributed among the members according to expressed needs and availability. These loans are usually used for food (grain purchase), and small business activities. Borrowers repay the cooperative with interest, thus allowing too maintain this fund.

Some banks (BNDA, BMS) seem to want to evolve towards new credit offers that would be more suited to the needs of rural areas. However

there still is a lack in understanding and adopting concepts and notions linked to credit solidarity (lack of trust among members due to bad experiences with either internal or MFI loans). Credit terms are not adapted to the needs and possibilities of cooperatives (excessively high interest rates - failure to meet warranty conditions often linked to property or land not available to cooperatives). Finally, a lack of knowledge about loan regulations and basic texts of cooperatives themselves are also constraints.

From its inception, the Union demanded a daily contribution of 5 FCFA per member, in addition to the annual membership of cooperatives to generate sufficient internal resources. The funds generated are saved within the groups/cooperatives. After two years of operation, the Union funds have been collected and deposited in a new bank account, awaiting a collective decision on the use of these funds.

C. Structure and governance

There are two levels of governance within the Union: The Cooperative Union itself on the one hand and cooperatives/grassroots groups on the other. Cooperatives are entities with formalized mandatory bodies according to national law: general assembly, board of directors, supervisory committee and bureau. It should be noted that despite being called cooperatives, most still function as interest groups to whom this status has been “imposed”; they did not receive any guidance in operation and management as how to transition into cooperatives. The bureau is elected for five years but there have been few changes and the same people have been in place for more than 10 or 15 years. Thus, in most places, cooperatives leaders are often the most active members, and when they have a good reputation, they stay in place longer. The criteria put forward for choosing leaders include: honesty, availability and ability to listen; for the president: openness, competence, helpfulness (“renders services to others”); for the Secretary, skills required (even poor) in reading and writing and good relations with the administration; and for the treasurer, unselfishness and trust prevail. Members of the Supervisory Board are elected by the general assembly and are responsible for checking the good functioning of the bureau.

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Fatoumata Diallo, founder and president of the Union during plenary discussion on governance

Participants indicated that each cooperative organizes a GA one to three times a year, according to needs, and a board of directors’ meeting once a quarter. It should be noted that everyone does not always understand the role and responsibilities of the various bodies. The Bureau’s meetings mainly focus on the sale price of products to retailers and bundling on the local market. Members also discuss opportunities to diversify their production and start processing activities. Most cooperatives have never filed a balance sheet or an activity report with the administration

At Union level, the three statutory bodies are the GA, with two women per cooperative, the Board of Directors with 21 elected members and an oversight committee of 5 elected members. The GA meets once a year and the office once a quarter. Cooperatives pay membership dues to the Union and recognize the value of regrouping and creating links between themselves according to the slogan “Unity is strength”. However, apart from ad hoc training activities, members have difficulty explaining services rendered by the Union and its activities. At present, the general impression is that the Union has not developed a business plan nor is it shared between members. Indeed, in its current operation mode, most of the Union’s activities are implemented at the initiative

of the president, thanks to her dynamism and personal network. Members fully trust the president who enjoys a good reputation among rural development actors and development organizations. One of the president's goals is to implement a strategy of financial autonomy (self-reliance first). Members agree with this approach.

The main feature of this new Union is the diversity of its members - geographical diversity, diversity of activities, mixed genders and ages. However, the territory covered by the Union is very large, which leads to additional costs for meetings. Information flow can be difficult, especially given weak mobile networks in some areas, and this creates a certain lack of connection between grassroots groups and the decision-making bodies of the Union.

In short, the Union's governance remains very fragile and it cannot yet boast to have a solid or very durable base given the lack of a strategic plan or specific economic objectives that members understand and accept. The excessive dependence vis-à-vis the president and her preponderant role are both a strength and a weakness for the Union.

D. Level and modalities of market integration

Marketing of products is either individual or grouped, depending on whether the products come from an individual or collective plot. For the latter, the cooperative usually delegates a few women to take responsibility to sell harvested products on the local market once a week. Transportation from the area of production to the market is done either on foot or using a cart according to the amount of products (distances can range from 7 to 12 km). Cooperative members have easy access to local markets (village, township, regional) but their bargaining power is weak and it may happen that members of a same cooperative sell their individual production based on an informally collected price that may be different from the sale price for cooperative's collective production. Traders take advantage of this lack of coordination.

National or even international (outside the country) markets for cooperative products could be an opportunity for business



Maria Lee (FAO) summarizing the group discussions and proposals on a new governance for the Union

growth and making their products better known (e.g. through fairs and exhibitions), but most of them neither have the means nor the information to participate in these events. Some cooperatives rent storage places, buy commodities such as cereals and cowpea and stock them to sell to their members during the lean season or a bad harvest. They thus establish a “food security stock.”

Nevertheless, members’ level of vulnerability remains high. Some members are forced to sell off their products (selling directly after harvest to pay back loans and to meet the family’s financial needs). Cooperatives do not have a well-defined marketing strategy: at present they do not have any loyal customers or product promotion practices. The small quantity of products sold on the market puts the seller, member of any cooperative, at the mercy of traders. The lack of access to quality packaging products reduces visibility for cooperatives that have processing activities.

Following a trip to India to visit SEWA, the president of the Union has developed a system to bundle micro-gardening (soilless gardening) products and to sell processed products in her cooperative. Women members of other Union cooperatives based in different villages outside Bamako sell the products.

The information that flows between cooperative members mainly deals with product selling prices. In some cooperatives, members are elected with the specific responsibility to collect information (this often is the person in charge of marketing). This information is obtained informally by word of mouth, when someone goes to the market or by phone when a relative calls from Bamako. Radio, according to participants, is a source of random information giving average prices that cannot always be relied upon. There is no mechanism to disseminate information between the Union and cooperatives outside of the GA. Communication and information sharing are quite challenging given distances between cooperatives and the lack of means of communication for some of these.

There is a national system for disseminating information on market trends, mainly for cereals. State or private structures are specialized in market information products (OMA Afrique Verte), but this information is not available or is not distributed to Union members. In addition, members lack the capacity to collect and analyse additional information that can influence markets (cross-border disputes, economic crisis, etc.).

4.2.2 Analysing the PO's partnerships

After the internal analysis of the organization (Union, cooperatives/ groups), the second stage of the GAIN workshop dealt with analysing the PO's partners. The main partners of Union members at the local level are:

- *Financial Partners.* Gnèta finance, Kafo jiginew, CANEF (Centre for Economic and Nutritional Support to Women). The relationship is based primarily on the provision of loans for planning the agricultural year and individual loans (Greta finance), savings and loans cooperatives acquire to allow some of their members to access loans (Kafo jiginew), loans for the financing of specific productive activities such as fattening livestock (CANEF).
- *Business Partners.* Mainly traders in local markets. Relationships with retailers are difficult because producers have little bargaining power and are often forced to sell their produce at asking price to avoid risking having unsold products and losses.
- *Institutional Partners.* Regional Chamber and Local and Regional Directorate of Agriculture (CRA, DRA, DLCA). They provide advisoral support to producers. As part of the Rice Initiative, these partners have supplied the producers with rice seed and fertilizer. It should be noted that the price of these inputs is paid in cash at a subsidized price. To benefit from this support, cooperatives must apply in advance with the detailed orders.
- *Local authorities (municipality, local administrative council).* Through this relationship, cooperatives contribute to developing the socioeconomic and cultural development programme (PDSEC) for five years for the circle. Communities are also responsible to connect producers and development programmes as well as to disseminate information to organizations on the activities of supporting partners.
- *Village authorities.* They facilitate the acquisition of agricultural land by cooperatives and can facilitate the setting up of a market for women's cooperatives (e.g. obtaining permission to create an agricultural market for the Fana cooperative).

A GIE and Mobiom (Organic Movement) are some of the economic partners at the local level and they produce compost. These partners supply cooperatives with organic inputs (cotton seeds, sesame, phytosanitary products, fertilizers). These may also set up commercial

contracts (contracting on prices, quantities of agricultural products) or technical support with producer organizations, as is the case with Organic Malian Movement (Mobiom).

Every Thursday on the local radios, there is an information dissemination programme. Cooperatives can disseminate information for 1 000 FCFA/communication. This information may deal with social events or the area of activities of cooperatives.

Partnerships identified at national level are:

- NGOs: Born Fonden (Yanfolila) Kilabo (National NGO), MCAPAZ (Spanish NGO), TEMED (National NGO), ACORD (Regional NGO) BINGA, AFDI (French Farmers and International Development). These relationships are positive and allow cooperatives to receive support including training (literacy, production and processing techniques).
- Public institutional partners: Ministries (Industry, Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries), research institutes (Institute of Rural Economy) ORTM, ANSA (National Security Agency), APCAM (Permanent Assembly of Chambers of Agriculture), Food (public service). Relationships materialize at the local level through the decentralized bodies of these partners as mentioned in the local partners section here above.
- Among the private partners: input distributors and supermarkets. In general, grassroots cooperative rarely have relationships with private partners at the national level.

In addition to current partners, member participants identified a number of potential partners that may be important for the future of the Union. The following were cited during the workshop: IICEM, IFDC, PAPAM, ICRISAT, AMASSA/Afrique Verte, PDCA, Sasakawa Global 2000, UN Women.

4.2.3 Common vision for the PO

During a brainstorming plenary session, a complete list of expectations and the direction that the Union should take were defined. Using the keywords most frequently cited by members, three strategic priorities were identified for a new vision of the Union:

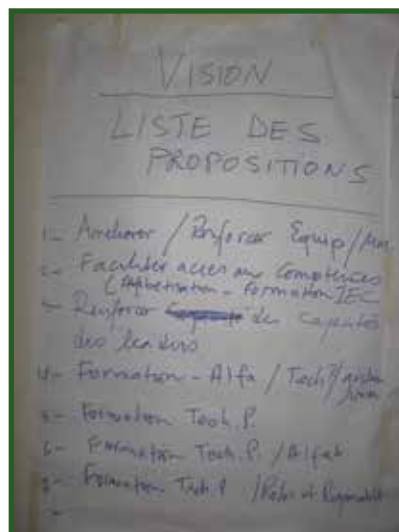
1. Focus on training and capacity building of its members, including:
 - Literacy;
 - Production, processing and marketing techniques, and
 - Members and leaders' roles and responsibilities.
2. A reinforced Union in its structure and governance model:
 - Leadership with shared and decentralized responsibilities;
 - Members' role and responsibilities are clear, understood, and practiced.
3. Focus on members' priority services according to their needs, including facilitating access to:
 - Materials and production equipment
 - Skills in advisory support
 - Financial resources (loans)
 - Strategic information

Working groups then examined the first two priorities, according to the GAIN methodology. The main results of this analysis are presented below.

Capacity development: The primacy of training

Participating members decided that training should be one of the main foci of the Union's strategy. Firstly, the training must meet the priority needs of members, namely:

- Functional literacy (reading, writing, counting, self-management of one's business, plan activities).
- Technical training.
- Technical training:
 - a) production techniques (in this case, we must take into account the specificity of cooperatives across regions and the specific crops they focus their activities on);
 - b) processing techniques (millet and sorghum, vegetables and shea butter);



Member proposals for a new vision listed, discussed, and prioritized into few key consensual proposals for in-depth analysis

c) marketing techniques (operating account).

- Training related to the operation and management of cooperatives: train bureau staff and all cooperative members in their respective roles and responsibilities.

The following resources and means that need to be mobilized were identified:

- Training premises;
- Cover costs for teachers' accommodation for literacy activities (e.g. fund children's education with women's daily contributions of 50 CFA/woman);
- For other needs, the Union must develop a training programme to be funded at least in part through training participants' contributions to the cooperative through their membership dues (proposal to increase contributions by at least 5 to 10 F CFA to finance training).

In terms of governance, this implies:

- The Union needs to engage members so that they contribute more to decisions and resources;
- Training topics and participants to these trainings as well as modalities of participation of members in decision-making must be identified at the level of cooperatives (e.g. payment of fees, etc.). It is proposed to have an intermediary per cooperative who will take an inventory of training needs and communicate them to the Union that will consider their feasibility;
- Establish a mechanism for monitoring training activities that will ensure the training's smooth running and quality, and assess if the training was useful. Participants proposed to establish a training



Salif Foulani of ONG Proexfapa summarizing the members proposals on the required Union services to members

committee (5-6 people) that would receive compensation to cover their costs.

Finally, in terms of implementation, the following necessary steps were agreed upon:

- Short term: Make an inventory of training topics to develop budgets that will ease decision making on operability and feasibility and identify competent partners that can provide these trainings;
- Medium term: The theme of literacy was the only one discussed. The Union will ensure, with the cooperatives, that not only that training facilities are provided, but also that accommodation costs of trainers and auditors are managed.

Redefine the Union's governance:

The second priority of the new vision analysed in subgroups according to the GAIN methodology focused on restructuring the Union's governance. Participants indicated the importance of strengthening the Union in its structure and governance model, given the challenges linked to the cooperatives' diversity and geographical spread. The discussions focused on the need to strengthen local links between cooperatives and the links between cooperatives and the Union's decision-making. These include thinking about how to make grassroots cooperatives more responsible within the Union.

The Union, created very recently, seems to face difficulties in developing an appropriate structure and governance. This is largely explained by the lack of a common vision with goals but also the lack of relay leaders capable of supporting the President. Groups and individual cooperatives continue to operate quasi-independently, and their feeling that they are members of the Union is mainly linked to the magnetism of the president. Therefore, priority needs to redefine the Union's governance should be based on the cooperatives' own means. To achieve this, the following steps are necessary:

- a) Set up a working group with motivated members to launch a reflection on the modalities of how to establish consultative or coordinating regional committees; organize consultations in different regions with cooperatives;
- b) Ensure compliance that the new set up complies with the cooperative law (Article 29 of the cooperative law seems to be favourable);

- c) Include specific modules to empower grassroots leaders in the Union’s training programme;
- d) Create an intermediate structure grouping cooperatives from a certain area and serving both the groups and the Union. For example, establish consultative or coordination committees within a region made up of one member per cooperative, hold regular meetings to discuss needs, exchange ideas, identify synergies and communicate the outcome of discussions to the Union managers;
- e) Meetings could be held each time in a different cooperative within the region to mitigate and share the costs of travel (shorter distances and rotation system);
- f) The need to strengthen the capacity of the cooperative managers by raising their awareness about the importance of their roles and responsibilities and providing them with training on and cooperative functioning and management issues;
- g) The need to improve information sharing and dissemination between cooperatives in the same region and between cooperatives and the Union and vice versa to enable regional synergies. This will facilitate bringing closer cooperatives and the Union as needs will be better understood and met.

Participants appreciated this unique opportunity to conduct an endogenous analysis on the future governance of their organization. This was a first for the Union as a whole. This reflection also clearly showed the importance of strengthening members’ sense of belonging to the Union and the prerequisite to have a better understanding of the activities and needs of each cooperative in order to improve members’ ability to take advantage of market opportunities. It was not possible to go into detail about all the steps required to implement the new vision, but participants expressed the need to have more time for reflection.

As expressed by the participants, the GAIN workshop has unveiled a genuine desire and new energy to move forward. The need to better organize, train and inform oneself has been strengthened.

4.2.4 General conclusion of the assessment workshop

Applying the GAIN methodology resulted in assessing the “Women in Action” Cooperative Union and developing a proposal for an institutional direction. Participants have better defined the actual content of their motivations to join the Union; the priorities defined

during the workshop are among other things, to facilitate their access to training and market information and projects, means of production and bundling of their production.

The assessment workshop highlighted that this young Union is still quite fragile as it has been set up by its leader, thanks to her charisma and her will to create a network of women's cooperatives across the Malian territory. But the Union lacks human resources and an efficient organizational structure. The workshop showed that it is necessary to decentralize the organization through the implementation of local and/or regional coordination to bring cooperatives closer to each other on the one hand, and the grassroots groups and the Union's decision-making bodies on the other hand. This would facilitate developing specialization by area and by crop and would enable better targeting of potential partners that could provide support to the Union. Moreover, this decentralization would make it easier to adopt the SEWA model, much appreciated by cooperatives members. However, this model is based on a highly decentralized decision-making system and this is not the case with the "Women in Action" Union. To achieve this, a group of adequately trained and empowered relay leaders must be set up so that they are able to support this process of strengthening local connections.

Willingness to act and change is very much present, but individual capacities must be strengthened. Two or three participants were identified as potential leaders who could form a group of leaders around the president to lead the process of restructuring and strengthening the Union. To reduce the Union's current fragility, the president must transfer her driving force to a group of motivated

*Thirty members
(mostly women)
from the Union
of cooperatives
"Femmes en Action"
participated in a
three-day intensive
GAIN workshop
facilitated by FAO
and ONG Proexfapa*



leaders. The Union relies on the support of its institutional partners to develop a more detailed operational plan of action and a series of strategic partnerships to take advantage of the various technical and financial support based on identified priorities.

4.3 CONSULTATIONS WITH PARTNERS, RESTITUTION WORKSHOP AND ROADMAP

The results of consultations after the workshop were discussed during a restitution workshop to allow the Cooperative Union both to validate the results and to begin negotiating with partners on collaborative opportunities to implement the action plan (or roadmap) that emerged from the GAIN assessment workshop. Possible synergies and opportunities for partnerships with specific potential Union partners are presented in the table 13.

4.4 CONCLUSION: ACTIVITIES SET UP BY THE PO FOLLOWING THE GAIN ASSESSMENT

A number of steps and activities in direct link with the conclusions brought about by the GAIN methodology were enacted immediately after the assessment workshop organized by FAO and the consultation with partners led by PROEXFAPA.

After the workshop, the Union has collected all membership fees (5 F CFA per member per day) saved by the cooperatives in the two years since the establishment of the Union. This amount was deposited in a new bank account until a collective decision of how to use the funds.

The president of the Union with some of the most active members initiated discussions with different economic and institutional partners to receive support to implement the recommendations of the GAIN assessment workshop.

In March 2012, the president and four other leaders of the Union member cooperatives benefited from a training trip to India organized by FAO and SEWA. During this three-week period, participants received multi-dimensional training in leadership, cooperative management, on decentralized structuring and governance, the savings and loans system, training members and adding value to production by controlling marketing, processing, and distribution of higher value products by members of the RUDI cooperative.

Table 13. List of current or potential partners for the Union and possible synergies

PARTNERS (REGIONAL COVERAGE)	POSSIBLE SYNERGY
BNDA – National Bank for Agricultural Development (national)	• Availability of the bank to provide support the Union and its member cooperatives provided that they open accounts in its branches
BMS – Malian Solidarity Bank (national)	• Mentoring cooperatives to manage banking services • Support for the construction of cereal banks, vegetable crop activities • Re-financing of decentralized financial system (SFD)
(63 savings and loan banks spread between the first 5 regions of Mali and the District of Bamako) KONDO JIGIMA	• Support for artisanal processing activities • Support for technical training activities to ensure repayments
Projet DEBPEA/IFDC (Koulikoro, Sikasso, Ségou and Mopti Regions)	• Grassroots economic Development that can support member cooperatives to set up PEA (Agricultural Enterprise Centres) around a given economic activity
PAPAM – Agricultural Producers Support Project in Mali (World Bank) (National)	• 100% training subsidy • 80% line financing for productive investments business plans
PAFA (Kayes (west), Koulikoro (centre), Sikasso (South, East and West), Ségou and Bamako district for shea butter; Koulikoro (Baguineda) and Ségou (Office du Niger areas, Office riz de Ségou, San et Tominian) for scallions-onions-garlic	• Support the development of bankable business plans for local financial institutions (banks and MFIs)
IICEM – Integrated Initiatives for Economic Growth in Mali (Sikasso, Mopti, Tombouctou)	• Ability to support member cooperatives in Mopti, Sikasso and Tombouctou on the basis of a well-developed business plan
AMASSA/Afrique Verte (De Kayes à Gao)	• Support to processing cooperatives • Financial intermediation in the form of warranty • Technical support • Sponsoring
Integrated Framework Project/Ministry of Commerce (Bamako and vicinity, Sikasso, Kolondiéba, Bougouni, Yanfolila)	• Apply for urgent support to integrate the Action Plan 2012
Marketing and Agricultural Competitiveness Program (Bamako, Koulikoro, Ségou, Sikasso and Mopti)	• Several support opportunities
National Democratic Institute (NDI) (national)	• Possible integration of Union concerns in line with ongoing project interventions
SASSAKAWA GLOBA 2000 (national)	• Support to production through input subsidies
PEOPLE TV (national)	• Support for institutional visibility and communication

Unfortunately this process was abruptly stopped after the military coup in Mali and the period of political instability that has come about in the country.



Following the GAIN diagnostic workshop, five women leaders from the Union of cooperatives “femmes en action” from Mali (and five from Ten-Tietaa in Burkina faso participated in a training program in India organized by FAO and SEWA (Ahmedabad, India, March 2012). (Source: FAO/Elbehri)

CHAPTER 5 | GENERAL CONCLUSION

5.1 RECALL OF THE GAIN METHODOLOGY

This report has presented the new GAIN (Self-Governance needs-Integration-endogenous) assessment methodology developed to diagnose and induce endogenous transformation of producer organizations. The aim is to facilitate economic transition for POs by enabling economic development services to members autonomously, efficiently and sustainably. The main original motivation was to facilitate a better market integration for small farmers through organizations such as unions of cooperatives and POs.

The basis of the GAIN methodology comes from time and again observing malfunctioning POs in West and Central Africa during the All-ACP project for the promotion of staple food value chains. In contrast to these failures, the highly successful Indian women's organization SEWA is considered an exemplary model of sustainable and effective integration for small farmers and rural women in the rural economy.

Once conceptualized, the GAIN methodology needed to be tested and validated in the field. The testing was done on three OPs in three different countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Mali, in the framework of the All-ACP project for the promotion of food value chains. For each of these, facilitator teams from FAO and local NGOs were mobilized to organize a three-day assessment workshop with 30 participants following an agenda defined by the GAIN methodology.

During the workshop, participating members were invited to first discuss the PO's internal situation in group working sessions, starting with the main income generating activities, the members' capabilities and their internal resources, the type of governance and decision making procedures and ending by evaluating how integrated they were to the market and the modalities of market transactions between members and the market.

As a second step, workshop participants reviewed economic and institutional partners in detail and evaluated the possibilities of

mutually beneficial partnerships for the PO and its partners. Finally, a group exercise was facilitated that allowed participants to elaborate together a new direction for their organizations and to discuss in detail how to get there, using the GAIN core values.

5.2 BRIEF COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE THREE ORGANIZATIONS STUDIED

Important lessons can be drawn from quickly comparing the results of the three GAIN assessment workshops held in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Mali regarding the reliability of the methodology and accuracy of the approach. There are also several options on how to extend its scope, its replication on a larger scale, and its application as a tool for policy development related to capacity building of POs.

5.2.1 Scope of Interventions

The three cases examined by the GAIN methodology (Tien-Tieetaa Union in Burkina Faso, the Noun Departement Producers Union in Cameroon, and the “Women in Action” Cooperative Union in Mali) present three very contrasting situations, when considering the agricultural potential, the main agricultural activities practiced by the members as well as non farm income generating activities. The table below provides a summary.

5.2.2 Comparing governance and decision-making modalities

The three workshops highlighted the importance of individual members commitment to ensure that their organization’s operations be

Table 14 Main economic activities of the three producers organizations analysed

UMBRELLA ORGANIZATIONS	NOUN CIG GROUPS	NATIONAL UNION “WOMEN IN ACTION”	TEN-TIÉTAA UNION
Country	Cameroon	Mali	Burkina Faso
Main agricultural products	Maize, cassava, rice, vegetables and coffee	Millet, sorghum, cowpeas, rice, vegetables (tomato, onions)	Maize, sorghum, groundnuts, millet, rice and cowpea, cotton, vegetables
Agricultural potential	High, good agro-climatic conditions	High along the river, lower in the North	Land degradation, water scarcity
Main non-field products	Livestock	Grain processing, cloth dyeing, fishing	Livestock (pork, etc.), small scale trading

effective. If all workshop participants claim that “unity is strength”, it remains true that responsibilities are often in the hands of a few individuals. Structuring organizations effectively requires building awareness for all members regarding their individual and collective roles and responsibilities and training in leadership and team spirit building.

The Ten-Tiétaa Union of Burkina Faso was the most structured and has the strongest governance of the three organizations that were analysed. It is structured around different levels of decision-making and information sharing to facilitate implementing services tailored to the needs of its members, particularly in terms of training and access to credit, especially for women. In contrast, the Noun Departement Producers Union in Cameroon has no strong formal structure and is almost informal. Leadership is centralized and the relationships between different groups are not very clear. This is why member participants took advantage of the GAIN assessment workshop to develop a more formal structure, namely a formal cooperative. In Mali, although “Women in Action” Cooperative Union is formally and legally registered, it does not seem to truly function, apart from the president and founder's initiatives and dynamism; members seem to complete trust and admire her for her ability and strong personality. During the GAIN assessment workshop, this waiting to have an organization that has existed for two years really work gave participants additional motivation to address its future governance and make it a major focus of the new vision.

Beyond the type of structure, the effectiveness of an organization lies in its ability to put its members, men and women, at the centre of its concerns by giving them the means to claim ownership of the organization to which they belong and empower themselves. The three organizations highlighted the existence of local know-how but how this knowledge may be better used within organizations and between members remains to be defined. The Ten Tiétaa Union has focused on strengthening the technical capacity of its members by strategically having some trainers become specialized to then disseminate knowledge. Nevertheless, this strategy takes little account of marketing skills. In contrast, in the case of Cameroon, the choice of the CIG structure has given greater attention to developing business activities, negotiation skills and bundled sales. In Mali, trainings are organized on an ad hoc basis on technical issues (micro-gardening) depending on financial opportunities or technical partnership offers.

In all three cases, the GAIN methodology helped highlight how important it is to strengthen technical, financial and “management” capabilities of members of an organization. Combining these aspects

Table 15 Comparing the three producers organizations:
Governance and members internal capacity

UMBRELLA ORGANIZATIONS	NOUN CIG GROUPS	NATIONAL UNION “WOMEN IN ACTION”	UNION TEN-TIÉTAA
Governance	Unstructured group with CIG loosely interrelated	New formal union, but not yet functional. Union with cooperatives scattered over different regions	Very well structured Union with specialized village committees and functioning executive bureau
State of internal flow of information	Smooth flow of information on sales but little on governance (group meetings, informal meetings between groups, word of mouth)	Informal and individual flow of information among members	Good flow (meetings, word of mouth, flyers, low use of radios and telephones) Weakness of commercial information
Training	Negotiation of labor for plowing activities; Trading market negotiation for the sale of maize; Purchasing and sales bundling	Ad hoc training depending opportunities (e.g. micro-gardening, literacy)	Strengthening of technical, human and financial management capabilities. Training of trainers. Lack of training in the field of marketing

is essential to strengthen the empowerment of individual members and to ensure that the organization may fully play its role as a service provider.

5.2.3 Level of autonomy of the organizations

The analysis of the three PO's partners revealed a common thread among them: they have a strong dependence vis-à-vis a variety of public or semi-public partners. As for the partners, the differences between the three organizations are largely due to the degree of market integration, more developed for the Noun Département Producers Union in Cameroon while it is almost non-existent for the Tien Tieetaa Union of Burkina Faso.

In addition, the three organizations need to establish new partnerships with institutional actors (e.g. access to training, information, land, participation in the development of policies and programmes) and even more so with economic actors (e.g. training, inputs, commercial contracts) to develop. The effectiveness of these partnerships depends on several factors, including the objectives and interests of selected partners and the organizations' ability to influence

the content and modalities of such partnerships based on their needs and vision. In the case of Burkina Faso and Mali, organizations have closer relationships with institutional partners than with the economic ones. By contrast, in the case of Cameroon, economic partners are favoured while institutional ones are perceived with mistrust. However, in all cases, weak bargaining power results most often in open trade transactions occurring on a case-by-case basis (less ability to build regular relationships with commercial buyers).

The development of a new vision accompanied by an action plan (or roadmap) as those developed during the GAIN assessment workshop is a first step towards a greater ability to negotiate with partners and possibly choose which one(s) to appeal to for technical or financial assistance. Specific situations will entail developing, strengthening or renegotiating partnerships that allow members to develop marketing strategies, diversify their income-generating activities beyond farming or strengthen their organizational or leadership capacity. This process should take into account existing financial and human capabilities within organizations. This new vision must be carried out in parallel to the establishment of mechanisms that will improve organizations' governance and strengthen their autonomy, especially at the financial level. These mechanisms may include a greater pooling of member resources (strengthening "tontine" in Cameroon, creating a fund from individual members' contributions in Mali), the establishment of decentralized coordination committees (Mali) or mutual savings and loans institutions (Burkina Faso).

5.2.4 Level and modalities of market integration

In all three organizations, members deal with similar agricultural value chains. However, agro-climatic and land conditions are more

Table 16 Key economic and institutional partners for the three producers organizations

UMBRELLA ORGANIZATIONS	NOUN CIG GROUPS	NATIONAL UNION WOMEN IN ACTION"	TEN-TIÉTAA UNION
Institutional	Rather weak and poorly perceived relationships with institutional partners	Particularly good relations with the Ministry of Agriculture and municipality	Good relationships and significant financial and technical support from NGOs, Ministry of Agriculture, municipality
Economic Relations	Good bargaining power including maize sales bundling	Low bargaining power with traders	Few: Private Companies for the purchase of seeds and fertilizers and Caisse Populaire. Low bargaining power with traders and Caisse Populaire

or less favourable and have an impact on the level of vulnerability of producers and the types of risks they may be willing to take. For instance, in Cameroon, Noun producers have fertile land and generally good quality seeds, which gives them surplus production and allows them to focus their attention on marketing.

In contrast, the Tien-Tieetaa Union and the “Women in Action” Union are characterized by low market integration (except for the cooperative “Women in Action” Bamako). The low level of productivity, the lack of adding value to products, poor quality, surplus variability in terms of marketing, as well as the organization’s inability to access information on the market are all causative factors.

Cameroon’s experience shows that developing strong relationships with business partners can increase the bargaining power of producers to access certain means of production such as labour and inputs; establishing grouped sales of products seems to facilitate negotiating better prices with traders. However, the opportunity to develop some markets is limited by the lack of structure between groups, collective commitment and rigorous management services provided by the umbrella organization. Setting up information sharing systems along with greater transparency to increase the level of trust and cooperation on these commercial transactions were discussed by the three organizations during the GAIN workshops.

Table 17 Modalities for market access by the three producers organizations examined

NOUN CIG GROUPS	NATIONAL UNION “WOMEN IN ACTION”	TEN-TIÉTAA UNION
Bundled sales and diversified clients	• Small quantities sold on local markets • Weak bargaining power	• Remains subsistence agriculture with small surplus for sale • Individual sales • Warrantage practice

5.3

LESSONS ON THE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS OF THE GAIN METHODOLOGY, LIMITATIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS

Policies and development programmes need effective producer organizations that can ensure good governance, capacity building and empowerment of their members if they want to have an effective impact and sustainability. Similarly, organizations need an environment that enables them to grow. From this observation, the GAIN

methodology is an innovative tool that empowers members of these organizations to find their own answers.

The GAIN methodology experience with three producer organizations in three different countries has allowed to properly assess the relevance of the methodology and draw a few lessons for other potential applications.

5.3.1 Capacity of the GAIN methodology to initiate PO's transformation

The GAIN methodology was developed explicitly to help members of producer organizations find sustainable solutions to improve their market integration and strengthen their empowerment. Applying it in three different countries and with organizations with different histories and structures has shown that it can be used to effectively establish a shared and global assessment of an organization along with strategic priorities for the future. It also has the potential to be used with organizations at different levels, be they more or less formal or structured, by tailoring questions to the specific context and the ability of participants.

For most of the participants in these GAIN workshops, this was the first time they were faced with an assessment exercise where they were given the right to speak and the time to express themselves. This makes this workshop a training experience. The merit of this methodology is that it is built on making organization members more responsible and on encouraging them to develop their own solutions. There are no funding or finalized projects at the end of the workshop; participants and their organizations need to take control of the collectively discussed proposals and organize themselves to implement them. This is the first step in a long process of change that requires building long term relations with local partners. Presenting SEWA's successful experience in this area is a very strong argument that inspired participants as it shows that the ability to change and to complete this process is in each and everyone's hands.

5.3.2 Limitations and improvements of the methodology

The GAIN methodology was presented to FAO colleagues during a demonstration workshop in Rome in May 2012 and they evaluated it as very relevant and useful. Several proposals were made to broaden its scope and improve its usefulness. The methodology could indeed be applied to better understand the barriers to change that can be linked to power relations, roles of men and women, conflicts of interest and personal motivation within an organization. It is important to understand the informal aspects, often "invisible" to then be able to

better support organizations in their democratic development and their ability to represent their members.

Analysing in more detail favourable or restricting elements of the environment in which an organization operates (climate, political situation, infrastructure, etc.) as well as legislation and national and local policies issues would enrich the methodology. This would enable it to better facilitate linking producers demands with national and local authorities and strengthen the participation of organizations in the process of developing policies that affect them (these aspects were briefly discussed in the three workshops).

The GAIN methodology, beyond its initial objective, namely a more effective integration of small farmers into market mechanisms, can be applied to other uses or purposes such as:

- a) Participatory evaluation of producers' organizations capabilities and capacity building needs;
- b) Informing policies and development programmes whose aim is to create an enabling environment to strengthen organizations;
- c) Strengthening the governance of organizations, not only to facilitate better access to the market for their members but also for other purposes such as access to local basic services (health, education, training, etc.), climate change adaptation and responsible natural resources management.
- d) Using the GAIN methodology for other types of organizations, such as professional organizations, federations, inter-branch groups.

Whichever way the GAIN methodology is used, it is important to remember that the first precondition is that the organization and its members have to truly want change and, secondly, that local environment offers opportunities for growth. The impact of this methodology on institutional change processes and ultimately small farmers' livelihoods depends on the energy and resources that they can mobilize within their organizations and then with partners.

Although the environment plays an important role, change can only come from within and from grassroots members through a process of experimentation and adjustment, over time. This process is driven by the belief that when producers, men and women, put their energies and skills to set common goals and benefits, they are able to find sustainable solutions.



Achieving efficient, sustainable, and smallholder-inclusive staple food systems often require strong, credible, and economically effective producer organizations. In much of Africa, and particularly in West and Central region, this objective remains a great challenge for the majority of small farmers, as existing producer organizations often suffer from weak structures, inadequate governance, and limited internal capacity to provide economic services for their members, engage credibly with economic and institutional partners, or influence policies for effective smallholder market integration.

This report describes a new methodology called GAIN (Governance - Autonomy-Integration-Needs based) developed by FAO to provide an effective diagnostic tool for designing and inducing an endogenous change within farmers organizations, and placing them on a path of economic autonomy, self-reliance, and enhanced market insertion. GAIN follows a participatory and iterative approach, combining an internal diagnosis of the organization with an analysis of the immediate economic and institutional environment in order to identify and leverage new options for economic partnerships, capacity development, and market and business opportunities. One of the outcomes of GAIN is a roadmap for the organization towards a gradual economic empowerment, enhanced ability to provide economic services for its members, and play a more active role in the local rural economy.

The report describes the GAIN methodology and presents a detailed account of its application in three case studies involving actual producer organizations from Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Mali.

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