

Niger and Burkina Faso | Four years of experience with capitalization

As the “Capitalization of good practices in support of agricultural production and food security” project drew to a close in May 2013, it takes stock of its achievements and activities. For more than four years, the project team has tested and adapted methodologies for experience capitalization and to identify good practices.

These capitalization methodologies are based on a participatory learning process which was implemented with a number of partners. The theme of agricultural input management was re-examined from all angles, firstly from a gender perspective, subsequently from the angle of capitalizing on experiences. As a result, the project has designed a range of thematic products on agricultural input management and participatory methodologies which can be used by organizations and projects, so as to help them capitalize on their experiences.

In the beginning

The project team started out by identifying the innovative practices in agricultural input management that had emerged from the experiences of the FAO Agricultural Inputs Project (1999-2008), and which were partly adopted by the IARBIC project (Intensifying Agriculture by Strengthening Cooperative Input Shops 2009-2013). In so doing, it compiled useful information and relevant knowledge on the theme of agricultural input management in Niger and Burkina Faso.

As part of the Capitalization project, action research helped to identify key success factors and constraints linked to the practice of inventory credit (also known as “warrantage”).

The lessons learned led to approaches for improving practices. Documents in the form of experience fact sheets and case studies were developed.

From the outset, gender was integrated into the action research and documentation. To achieve this, the team and its partners participated in awareness-raising and training sessions on gender issues, particularly using the methodology developed by the Dimitra project in its publication “Communicating Gender for Rural Development. Integrating gender in communication for development” (FAO, 2011).

The participatory action research sought to better understand the gender component of various agricultural practices, so as to increase access to these practices for the most disadvantaged people, both men and women. The studies revealed factors favourable and unfavourable to equitable practice. The project has documented good practices so as to ensure more equitable management of agricultural inputs.

The project has also documented existing methodologies for experience capitalization, in order to choose one that is best suited to the needs of FAO and the nature of the project.

Key moment: the first Knowledge Share Fair

Project partners presented their methodologies for experience capitalization during a Knowledge Share Fair held in June 2010 in Niamey. The team decided to adapt the methodology presented by the Centre for Information on Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture (ILEIA) in its publication “Learning from experience: A manual for organising, analysing and documenting field based information” (2007) and updated it. A concept note on the process of experience capitalization is the result of this work, which was tested and validated with partners in Niger and Burkina Faso.

Like all knowledge share fairs, the one in Niamey was not an end in itself, but formed part of a process. Unlike a conference or workshop, a fair is a place for meeting and moving around, where all participants have a chance to share their experience and their knowledge. It is an occasion for social networking and participation. Planned sessions alternate with informal exchanges. Rather than presentations which follow one another and which focus on content, knowledge share fair sessions are participatory and highlight the approach taken: how was the work carried out and why? What lessons have been learned from the successes and failures? The knowledge share fair in Niamey enabled participants to exchange experiences on methodologies for capitalization, but also on content, exploring technical themes such as agricultural input management. The encounters and contacts established have also led to new lasting partnerships.

Working in partnership

The partnerships have led to a process of experience capitalization, notably in the areas of inventory credit, group orders and the management of input shops. Exchange visits aimed at promoting knowledge sharing have been organized between different national partners, as well as between Niger and Burkina Faso. The partnerships have been created both within and outside FAO. The latter category includes partnerships with the Swiss Agency

Exchange visit on inventory credit in Burkina Faso.





for Development and Cooperation, the Italian NGO CISV and COPSA-C, a cooperative based in southwest Burkina Faso, for the creation of an information and training centre on inventory credit in the country. Another partnership is that formed with the Amelie Fund, in order to strengthen the capacities of the Cigaba Union of Konkorindo in Niger concerning the rural credit system (inventory credit), integrating income generating activities, gender equality and literacy.

The art of writing

Writing workshops are another concrete stage in the capitalization process. They give an indication of levels of knowledge, but also of elements that may be missing in the documentation approach.

The aim of these workshops is to set down on paper all the information relative to a practice, in a way that is readily understandable. During the workshops, the information has been presented in new forms, such as experience fact sheets, information fact sheets, good practice fact sheets, posters, radio broadcasts, plays and videos.

Action-Training

In December 2011, the project moved to the action-training phase for partners, so that everyone – men and women – would be in a position to use the methodology for experience capitalization. For one year, the partners put into practice what they had learned during training. After the first training session, the participants left with an action plan and the promise of meeting up again to share their good practice fact sheets. Each month, the project opened its doors to its partners so that they could present their products, ask questions and talk to the team. Gradually, the products have taken shape...

How to communicate? And how to share?

The good practices and the experiences documented took many different forms. First and foremost, the goal of capitalization is to improve the quality of work, share experiences, adopt new practices and scale them up. The information documented has been adapted to different target audiences and has used various communication channels. As well as written documents, such as case studies,



The knowledge share fair in Niamey.

experience fact sheets, information fact sheets, good practice fact sheets and methodology fact sheets, the project has also produced posters with more graphic displays of information. In an effort to reach out to rural communities, radio dramas were written and performed by a local theatre group, with the aim of informing listeners about good practices in an entertaining way. The programmes, made in local languages, were broadcast by a number of rural and community radio stations. The project has also produced videos, which use images to convey ideas that the written word cannot always express. This is an excellent tool for relaying information to farmers' associations.

To close the project, mini knowledge share fairs were organized in Niger and Burkina Faso as a way of sharing the results of the project with all the partners and stakeholders. Since December 2012, the project partners have continued the work of dissemination and appropriation. The manner in which they have taken up new good practices will be part of the next phase.

For more information on partners' experiences in the fields of inventory credit, group orders, input shops and Farmer Field Schools, visit: www.fao.org/knowledge/km-gender/capitalization-gp/theme-agricultural-input-management/en

For more information on methodologies for experience capitalization and documenting good practices, visit: www.fao.org/knowledge/km-gender/capitalization-gp/theme-experience-capitalization/en

For more information on methodologies to integrate gender in inventory credit, visit: www.fao.org/knowledge/km-gender/capitalization-gp/theme-gender/en

For more information:

- FAO Knowledge Management and Gender Programme website: www.fao.org/knowledge/km-gender/resources/en/
- Capitalization of good practices project: www.fao.org/knowledge/km-gender/capitalisation-bp/thematique-gestiondesintrants-agricoles/en/
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