



Investing in rural people

Strengthening country-level agricultural advisory services in Burkina Faso, Malawi, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Uganda

GRANT RESULTS SHEET



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Part of a multi-donor initiative that envisions agricultural advisory services that contribute to sustained productivity, profitability and growth of African agriculture for poverty reduction

Goals and objectives

The goal of the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) was to increase the use of improved knowledge and technologies by agricultural value chain actors through solid partnerships between agricultural extension and advisory services (AEAS) of member. These partnerships were expected to deliver to smallholder farmers enhanced services related to innovative practices and technologies that increase productivity, add value and reduce loss.

The project operated within the framework of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the New Partnership for Agricultural Development (NEPAD) of the African Union Commission.

The project had two main objectives: (i) to strengthen the capacity of country-level advisory service stakeholders to determine their own priorities and improve advisory service systems; and (ii) to improve the availability and accessibility of appropriate and up-to-date knowledge on advisory services from a range of sources in Africa and worldwide.

The project was conceived as part of a phased multi-donor-funded initiative rooted in the AFAAS Strategic Plan, which envisions “agricultural advisory services that effectively and efficiently contribute to sustained productivity, profitability and growth of African agriculture for poverty reduction”.



Facts at a glance

Grant implementing agency

African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS)

Theme

Strengthening country-level agricultural advisory services

Benefiting countries

Burkina, Malawi, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Uganda

Total programme cost

US\$ 3 022 609

IFAD contribution: US\$ 1,000,000

IWMI cofinancing: US\$2,022,609,000

Partners

European Union, partnership projects with Helvetas, Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)

Effectiveness and duration

December 2012 – December 2014

Linkages to IFAD investment projects

The grant has been designed to benefit all IFAD projects in the target countries.

Beneficiaries

The main direct target group consisted of the AEAS providers, including farmer/producer organizations and private-sector entities providing AEAS in the target countries. These were selected using the following criteria: demand to establish country forums (CFs); not receiving financial support from other donors; regional representation (West, East and Southern Africa); and a balance between countries where sensitization had already started and countries with greater need. In Burkina Faso, Malawi and Sierra Leone, the CFs managed to include 178 AEAS providers in their membership, with a potential of reaching out to over 5,700 users of different kinds (private, public and non-for-profit sectors). The indirect target groups were ultimately the poor rural farmers and producers, as well as other actors in the agricultural innovation system who would benefit from gaining access to knowledge through the CF members.

Main results

The grant has been designed to benefit all IFAD projects in the target countries. The linkage between the Country Forum and IFAD operations has been particularly fruitful in Uganda, where the IFAD country office has made an important contribution towards a lobby and advocacy platform for rectifying the situation of the extension services and bringing the development of demand-driven pluralistic services back on track. It also provides a platform for technically advising the IFAD programmes in Uganda on alternative actions/measures to provide agricultural advisory services to farmers.

The grant priorities were articulated around improving poor rural people's access to services and enabling the creation of institutional and policy environments to support agricultural production and non-farm activities. The main achievements were:

- **Establishment of AEAS country forums.** In order to improve the enabling institutional and policy environment, the project helped to set up AEAS CFs and enhance their capacity to manage the information and knowledge that AEAS providers need from national, regional and international sources in order to respond to farmers' demands and develop innovative ways of interacting with them. **In Uganda**, the CF supported the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries in developing the extension and advisory services component of the new Agriculture Sector Strategic Plan, as a predecessor of the Development Strategy Investment Plan. Through the dialogues and partnership activities, policymakers, researchers and the private sector benefited indirectly by having the opportunity to engage with a multistakeholder platform. Training institutions were actively involved in the CF's activities, which helped inform curriculum reviews. AFAAS and the Uganda CF continue to participate in the review of university curricula at Makerere University and other universities. **In Malawi**, the Malawi Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (MaFAAS) Secretariat has access to parliamentary leaders to discuss AEAS issues. **In Sierra Leone**, the Sierra Leone Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (SleFAAS) is being integrated into the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security, with direct access to government initiatives related to AEAS. In all countries, the CFs have been instrumental in the national CAADP processes, especially in discussions around the Country Investment Plans. In addition, the CFs have enhanced the capacity of country-level AEASs to determine the priorities and strategies for improving delivery of demand-driven agricultural advisory services.

- **Generation and dissemination of knowledge.** The project catalysed dissemination and sharing of lessons learned and good practices across regions, establishing an AEAS knowledge management system in Africa through the development websites, Virtual Social Networking Platforms and a knowledge management strategy. It also generated information on agricultural advisory service innovations that can be scaled out and up across Malawi, Sierra Leone and Uganda.
- **Engagement with the private sector.** In Malawi, improved access to market- and value chain-based extension services was created through better engagement with the private-sector service providers, which received guidance in the MaFAAS.

Lessons learned

- If a short-term project needs to support the establishment of an AEAS CF, it has to be implemented where a clear champion has been identified and sensitization on the role and objectives of AFAAS has been undertaken. The AFAAS Secretariat should use its core support to undertake sensitization and identification of champions in its member countries to prepare the ground for project support.
- The guidelines to establish a CF should be conceived as a reference to help users to identify the starting point and determine the emphasis of each step based on the situation on the ground. The CF provides a neutral platform to conduct the assessment of AEAS providers, with the sole objective of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of AEAS, although further support is needed to sustain such an intense process.
- The CF can help to mobilize resources to strengthen and diversify the AEAS in farming communities, in particular their knowledge of new challenges in agriculture productivity and concepts on AEAS innovations. CFs need to be established fully before they can identify the areas where they can support IFAD country programmes. A dedicated process of strengthening the understanding and capacities of AEAS actors regarding innovation is vital if change is to be achieved in the AEAS across the country. Such capacity-strengthening support is required for decision makers as well as field agents.
- AEAS innovation support and knowledge management need to be managed separately and the critical link between them created gradually. Both aspects greatly depend on the presence of dedicated facilitators with different competencies. Dedicated support is needed to improve the capacities of AEAS actors in the use of virtual social networks, as well as continuous improvement of the systems to adapt to the requirements of the users.
- There is a need for better reporting of outcomes and impact emerging on the ground in order to make the linkage between strengthening AEAS providers and better livelihoods for poor farmers more explicit.

The concept of the country forum (CF) is key to AFAAS and its member countries. The CF concept has already been adapted and replicated.



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Way forward

The concept of the CF is key to AFAAS and its constituency, and the CF model/concept has already been adapted and replicated, which shows the demand to scale up and out. Furthermore, the project supported the stocktaking of innovative AEAS approaches and development of a systematic process and tools to identify AEAS areas that need innovation. The tools developed, the experiences gained and the lessons learned in supporting innovation provide a foundation for AFAAS to develop and institutionalize formal guidelines to support AEAS innovation activities. An initial inventory of the AEAS approaches in all the supported countries except Mozambique (due to the absence of a champion) is now in place. It is expected that as the CFs become more established, more approaches and methods will be identified and the inventory expanded. The MaFAAS, SleFAAS and UFAAS have evaluated the identified AEAS approaches. MaFAAS and UFAAS produced a synthesis paper of the approaches. These papers provide a comprehensive assessment of how well the approaches are aligned with the assessment criteria and give MaFAAS and UFAAS a good starting point for identifying areas for innovation for specific approaches or generically among all the approaches.

Knowledge generated

The following knowledge products were developed:

- Innovation and Knowledge Management Strategy
- CF websites linked to the AFAAS website
- Facebook account for the AFAAS Secretariat
- Virtual Social Networking Platform (VSNP)
- Flyers, brochures and handbooks used as exhibition materials
- Reports including workshop and General Assembly reports by MaFAAS, SleFAAS and UFAAS (available at www.afaas-africa.org)
- MaFAAS articles in the Daily Times Newspaper, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation television and radio, Malawi News Agency website and Zodiak Broadcasting Station website
- Three newspaper articles on AEAS reforms by UFAAS, published in Ugandan newspapers