

Projet régional APRAO

« Amélioration de la production de riz en Afrique de l'Ouest »



Project description

Since 2010, the Government of Spain has supported the regional project APRAO [Improvement of Rice Production in West Africa] with total funding of USD 5.8 million primarily for responding to soaring food prices in the region. To achieve this, the project's immediate objective is increasing rice production by enhancing the capacity of small-scale seed enterprises and farmers with a particular focus on the active involvement of women. The project targets countries among those most affected by the soaring food prices that are Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal.

Justification

The bill for importing rice in West Africa is huge and is rising year by year. In order to reduce this dependency and ensure better allocation of scarce resources, domestic production of rice must be improved to meet national needs. In this regard, the APRAO project is assisting the target countries in efficient utilization of the basic agricultural input, quality seed of locally adapted varieties, to increase production and attain sustainable sub-regional food security.

General principle

The implementation of project activities is according to national development strategies in the agricultural sector and based on a "holistic" and participatory approach involving all stakeholders in the rice value chain.

Actors

This initiative represents a concrete intervention derived from FAO's response to the soaring food prices of 2007-2008 and the impact on vulnerable populations. Although this is a regional project, it comprises national components and is implemented at the local level in the participating countries. This is done in close collaboration with the Integrated Production and Pest Management (IPPM) and Farmer Field School (FFS) programmes and the FAO's Regional Office for Africa and Sub-regional Office for West Africa, under the technical supervision of the AGPMG unit at FAO Headquarters in Rome.

Overview of rice production

The increase in global rice trade over the past 20 years is primarily a consequence of rising demand in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly West Africa. In 2010, the sub-region is a major import hub led by Nigeria, which imports 5.2 million tonnes of rice annually.

Demand for white rice among West African consumers is growing. Despite an annual production of around 13 million tonnes in 2011, the region still imports 40 percent of its rice needs.

Although the potential in West Africa is enormous including favourable production costs of local rice over those of the major rice producing countries, the rice sector in the sub-region suffers from inefficiencies related to low productivity and the high cost of processing and marketing.

The APRAO project is well placed in this context, given its focus on building capacities in the entire rice value chain, and covering the three major rice ecologies of the sub-region namely rain-fed, lowland and irrigated rice.

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Seed policies and regulations

In order to boost agricultural production, farmers must have easy access to quality seeds of high yielding varieties appropriate to the local farming environment. This requires an improvement in the seed production and marketing systems.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the public sector has gradually withdrawn from the production and distribution of seeds in recent decades, making way for the private sector which, unfortunately, has yet to fully take up this role. More recently, however, several small seed companies are emerging and beginning to supply the market with quality seeds, but these nascent production and marketing systems must be supported and strengthened in order for them to become sustainable and better equipped for meeting the difficult challenging situations.

Harmonization of national seed regulations and policies can play an important role in promoting farmers' access to quality seed by facilitating cross-border seed trade. In West Africa, seed regulations and policies fall into three categories:

First, is the most general level which is governed by the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. This stresses the importance of creating strong links between conservation and sustainable use of resources.

Second, is the sub-regional level which was consolidated in 2008 with the joint adoption of the Regional Agreement by ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS. This Agreement is a standardized framework enabling the production and marketing in all member countries of certified seed varieties approved by any member country.

Finally, at national level, countries are required to develop and apply the guidelines in force at regional and international levels, and can be supported in this effort by FAO and other regional and international fora.

Based on the needs expressed by the countries concerned, the APRAO project supports the development and implementation of national seed policies and regulations in the following areas:

- Quality assurance of seeds
- Quality control
- Establishment of small seed companies
- Production of national catalogues of registered varieties
- Strengthening the capacity of national agricultural research institutes and seed companies in the production of first-generation seeds

Project approach

The approach adopted by the APRAO project is a holistic view of the rice value chain based on an Integrated and Sustainable Production System (ISPS) concept, which considers the optimization and overall performance of the value chain as the basis for achieving sustainable agricultural production and effective contribution to food security.

The ISPS concept can be applied to all crops, while taking into account the specificities of each. However, the ISPS approach is particularly appropriate for food crops, especially when the production system is directed, at least in part, towards the market.

For the APRAO project, the ISPS approach was adopted in the design of all its activities. Implementation of the project is based on an understanding that different stages of production represent distinct links in the value chain (seed, paddy production, processing and marketing of paddy) with each link has its own specificities. The key merit of the ISPS concept is its focus on the weakest links which have high potential impact on the overall performance of the chain.

The alignment of the seed sector with the paddy value chain facilitates the management of two subsectors in the same chain, such that the various problems can be addressed from a more holistic perspective.

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The application of the ISPS concept is based on the following criteria:

- Capitalizing on knowledge
- Leveraging synergies
- Optimizing resources
- Integrated management of production factors
- The quest for sustainability of interventions and impacts
- A participatory approach to capacity building

The application of ISPS entails the following potential impacts, amongst others:

- The obligation to form partnerships
- The pooling of resources
- The efficient use of resources
- Visibility of actions
- Sustainability of interventions and impacts

Capacity building

In addition to the harsh climatic conditions that have always characterized West Africa, the sub-region's farming systems face technical constraints that undermine the performance of its agricultural sector. These technical constraints are mainly related to inappropriate technology and the lack of training and information for farmers. To help overcome these constraints, the APRAO project adopts the IPPM approach, which promotes techniques that help to conserve soil and ecosystem services. Through the APRAO project, specific curricula have been integrated in the [IPPM programme of West Africa](#) in order to strengthen the capacities of farmers in the production and use of quality seeds and general paddy production.

To promote synergies with IPPM, the National Coordination of the APRAO project is managed, where possible, by the National IPPM Coordinators.

The IPPM approach uses the Farmer Field School (FFS) training method. This entails a learning environment in which several field visits are conducted by technicians and farmers, who together observe the progress in crop cultivation and note the problems encountered for analyzing the situation and making joint technical choices. This method has many advantages, including the identification of context-specific solutions, improved ownership of good practices on the part of farmers and the wider dissemination of enhanced technology through training of trainers.

State of progress (last updated in May 2012)

At regional level, coordination is provided by the Regional Technical Coordinator (RTC), under the supervision of the Coordinator of the FAO Sub-regional Office for West Africa, acting as Lead Technical Officer (LTO) of the project. The LTO and RTC are both based at the Sub-regional Office for West Africa in Accra. Quality control is provided by the AGPMG unit at FAO Headquarters in Rome, acting as Lead Technical Unit (LTU). Mid-term monitoring and evaluation are provided by a consultant expert in monitoring and evaluation. The first results were presented during the mid-term review meeting on 31 May-1 June 2012. Regional coordination produces six-monthly project progress reports that are published after approval by the LTO and LTU. The reports are available in the right-hand column in PDF format.

The first regional workshop was held in Bamako from 12-16 December 2011, which brought together all stakeholders in the APRAO project and the regional project Water and Food Security Initiative for Africa (IESA). The workshop report presents the results of both projects and the recommendations made.

A second workshop, this time mid-way through the APRAO project, was held on 31 May and 1 June 2012 in Grand-Bassam (Ivory Coast) and it brought together all key players in the project. This workshop provided an opportunity to take stock of successes and difficulties and evaluate the authenticity of the approach involved in implementing the project. It was also an opportunity to present the findings of the capitalization study on the mid-term results

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and make recommendations for further projects. A summary report of the workshop was drafted and shared with the participants.

The presentations made during the workshop focused on the following issues: the state of progress of the project at regional level and in-country (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal); the findings of the capitalization study on the mid-term results; the proposal for a seed information system; the communication strategy; the proposal for a regional programme; and partnership and synergies in the FAO approach.