

In Burkina Faso, it's the farmers who lead the way

The experience of ADELE, an unconventional rural development programme

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In 1998, SDC challenged the farmers – men and women – in the Eastern region of Burkina Faso: We have money, you have ideas. Let's build together a support system that is adapted to the specifics of your region. This proposition did not fall on deaf ears. Today, it's the farmers of the Easter region who control the destiny of ADELE, a development support programme which they built with their own forces.



ADELE : a capacity building programme who support economic initiatives in Burkina Faso.

Mamadou is a farmer. He knows development cooperation. Experts are coming regularly to see him at his small farm, and then design projects in the capital of the country, Ouagadougou. These projects are then implemented, and aid is distributed based on the momentary state of mind of the donor. And so, support is pouring down, like rain, at times in his area, at times in other places, according to a logic that is totally unknown to him. Mamadou is not at all upset about this; in the Sahel life is hard and every drop of water is welcome, even if it does not fall at the right moment or the right place.

In 1998, when he was asked whether he would like to participate in the establishment of the ADELE programme, Mamadou did not have many illusions. He engaged in this new way, as others buy a lottery ticket. But for once, he was asked to be the expert and design, together with his colleagues, their own development instruments.

The building of ADELE required a lot of efforts. Mamadou turned from a recipient into an actor. He had to think and debate with his colleagues a lot to reach a common understanding on what was to do to get the programme right. They also had tough negoti-

ations with a development agency that has its own values (good governance, gender equality, sustainable development, support adapted to the needs of the poorest, etc.). But finally they managed to put up the programme and they are proud of this. ADELE is not "rain" but "controlled irrigation". Mamadou can finally rely on a support system that is adapted to his needs and develop his small farm on a solid foundation.

Although ADELE is a cooperation programme, it functions like a foundation. The programme has an annual budget, a steering council, committees that select the most promising initiatives, and a small accompanying unit that coordinates the whole set-up.

Support by ADELE focuses mainly on initiatives of individuals or groups – men and women – in two domains: economic activities and environmental protection activities. For the majority of those who take such initiatives, the support by ADELE is essential, because it allows them to seize opportunities and to develop new ideas without risking to break up the precarious balance of their livelihoods.

Innovation is another key avenue supported by the programme. This means not only innovation coming from elsewhere, but also local innovations. To promote such indigenous innovation, a competition was established. Various laureates now get specific support to pursue the development or the commercialisation of the result of their innovations.

This wealth of initiatives and ideas allows the farmers in the East of Burkina Faso to find back to the path of growth little by little. But ADELE also does not forget the most destitute people, who are struggling so much with their daily problems that they can hardly cope, and carries out specific activities to help them to get back the energy they need to get out of their precarious state.

Is ADELE a model for cooperation programmes? After six years of experience, Mamadou is convinced of this. But he also knows that the programme has its limits and that development comes also through other entry gates, such as health and the strengthening of local bodies (communal institutions, producer organisations etc.). He is aware that the development of his areas will progress through reinvesting the competences acquired within the frame of ADELE into other projects, hoping that there will be more occasions to be, together with his colleagues, the expert and to pave the way forward.

ADELE is not only an unconventional development programme; it is also one of the rather few programmes which systematically reflects on what works and what works not so well. The resulting experience capitalisation documents are available at www.sdc-ruraldevelopment.ch and at www.groupe-ae.ch.

What is ADELE?

ADELE is a capacity building programme. It supports on the one hand initiatives of rural producers for economic improvement and for environmental protection, and on the other hand vulnerable groups, in three provinces of the Eastern Region of Burkina Faso (Gourma, Tapoa et Gnagna). Based on the first experiences the programme decided to specialise on:

- livestock raising (animal nutrition), vegetable cultivation, bee keeping and other income generating activities in the economic domain
- soil fertility management and protection of areas with rich animal or plant biodiversity.

These priorities were set together with the main partners of the programme – the producer groups of the region with whom the programme was conceptualised and designed.

ADELE operates with two funds: a fund for initiatives of producers and an action research fund to support innovation.

ADELE is implemented by the consortium ARCHEA (ARC Burkina Faso and ACADE Switzerland) and its coordination unit with six professional staff located in Fada N’Gourma and a branch office in Diapaga. Once a year there is a meeting that brings together four concerned parties – SDC, the Government of Burkina Faso, the producer organisations and ARCHEA, to review progress and to discuss strategic and operational options for the next year. This co-steering is one of the strong points of the project.