The SAFE Training programme in Francophone Africa: A partnership approach to training in Agricultural Extension at IPR/IFRA, University of Mali

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Introduction: With little or no prior training in agricultural extension and research, the agricultural extension officers in Mali learn extension work through practice over the years. The SAFE training programme aimed at mid-level career extension personnel has been the only option aimed at changing the scenario in recent time.

Purpose of study: Despite the differences between the SAFE type programme and the regular University programme, the programme was adopted in Mali with the first set of students admitted in the year 2001 to pursue a four year first degree programme at the Institute of Rural Polytechnic, University of Mali. This study aims at:

1) Analysing the reasons for the choice of SAFE programme in Mali
2) Identifying and analysing the various aspects of the SAFE programme in Mali
3) Identify the major partners in the SAFE programme, their contributions and their perception of the programme
4) Analyse the socio-economic characteristics of the SAFE students and their expectations of the SAFE programme
5) Analyse the strong points and the weakness of the SAFE programme
6) Make recommendations for the improvement of SAFE programme in Mali

Results: Various meetings, missions to other SAFE programme in Africa, workshops and need evaluation were among the various stages that preceded the adoption of SAFE programme in Mali. The authorities of the Ministry of agriculture expressed the need for a training programme in agricultural extension at the various levels because the extension personnel lacked training in extension methods and the SAFE type programme was adopted because of its practical approach to training. They also indicated their readiness to support this type of training programme and job guarantee for the graduates at the end of training.

The farmers agreed that the SAFE programme will improve the competency of the extension staff working with them and subsequently improve their agricultural productivity in the country.

A partnership approach to training programme was adopted for sustainability of the SAFE programme between SAFE, DNAMR/MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, IPR/UNIVERSITY and the FARMERS/ GROUPS concerning the conception, planning, training, supervision, evaluation and the financing of the programme.

The training programme consisted of the four year or three year B.Sc professional programme and the diploma programme for the technicians while the other aspects of the SAFE programme include the Supervised Enterprise project and the Technology Village. Sustainability (SD.01), supervised enterprise project(SD.015), partnership(SD.04), field visits(SD.001), financial(SD.02) and material support from partners(SD.001), availability of experts from various sectors(SD.01), training the trainer programmes(SD.002) and professional exchanges(SD.012) were among the strong points of the SAFE programme in Mali.

The major weak points of the programme in Mali are:

Training programme for the low level Extension officers in direct contact with the farmers not yet started.

Implications: The successful take off of the SAFE training programme in Mali has implications for other francophone African countries with similar problems in their extension service to consider this type of programme.