

**MINISTÈRE DE LA COOPERATION ET DU DEVELOPPEMENT, 1987.  
RECHERCHE, VULGARISATION ET DEVELOPPEMENT RURAL EN AFRIQUE NOIRE. COLLOQUE DE YAMOUSSOUKRO.**

Paris, 245 pp.

Africa needs an enormous effort in the agricultural sector which should lead to an increased food production in the short run, otherwise the continent will face major problems. At this moment, the food production sector is unable to follow demographic expansion, to feed the expanding cities or to provide for export earnings. Moreover, intensified food cropping techniques lead to deforestation, irreversible soil degradation and, thus, desertification. Massive help programmes, apparently, have not been able to stem the tide. Numerous projects have been launched in Africa. Most of them had an important extension service attached to them. Nevertheless results have been non-existent to mediocre. The Yamassoukro meeting wanted to find out about the reasons for these failures and, learning through positive and negative experiences develop novel extension strategies to increase the chances of success. Indeed as one participant stated: "everybody knows what should be done, but it is still open to discussion what methods have to be proposed".

The seminar was attended by 48 participants representing 16 African countries without counting guest-speakers and the representation of the major financiers. Eighteen communications have been withheld for publication in the present document. They have been grouped in 6 groups, each comprising a theoretical introduction followed by relevant case-studies.

The first papers retrace the state of the art of the extension sector, whilst the second group focusses on the links between extension and cash crops. In a third part, the World Bank's Training and Visit methodology is critically reviewed. Recently the farming systems research has gained a lot of interest. The fourth part tries to look at the pros and cons of this method and its influence on the traditional research approach. The fifth part treats the role that could be played by producer groups in research and vulgarisation, whilst the sixth looks at the cost/benefit ratios involved.

A number of case studies are quite interesting and though the examples are not always readily transferable to each and every country situation there is a lot to be learned from the discussions.

The vertically integrated model where a given cash crop is plugged and promoted through one organisation gives a very interesting example of how extension using credit and working together with other technical units can result in adoption of new

techniques c.q. crops. Apart from the farmers themselves, the firms/organisations involved in the promotion/extension also benefit from this close co-operation. The best results have been obtained where these activities were combined with research, the latter giving proper backstopping and new incentives through improved varieties and/or techniques.

Cotton seems to be particularly interesting in this respect. The cotton case is presented in a very objective way stating the pros and cons of this approach. The much heralded Training and Visit system is also extensively reviewed. The Training & Visit system has been promoted for 20 years now by World Bank projects throughout the world. This rather rigid system consisting of well-scheduled visits, contact farmers and demonstration fields has been criticised for a certain time now, although it also has a number of positive points. Here again the pros and cons are extensively discussed. The most negative point still remains the lack of feedback possibility the farmer has. There still is a limited flow of information from the basis to the top, whilst the subject matter specialists which have to translate the research findings into realistic extension messages are in most cases not competent enough to do this properly. In order for the system to stay competitive, it will have to be more flexible (the principles are quite o.k., but in some cases the practical execution has not been flawless).

The bottom-up approach, however, is very much evident in the farming systems methodology characterized by (1) problem diagnosis through multidisciplinary groups working in close co-operation with the farmers; (2) inventory of technology that has been developed locally (by research institutions); (3) on farm experimentation and (4) participatory evaluation efforts leading to (5) extension of the successful introductions. Although it has a number of very positive points, the farming systems approach can not replace the conventional, "traditional", more thematic research. Both have to work together, the traditional research providing the hardware (new methods and varieties) and the farming systems approach the software (approach).

In a number of ways, farmers' associations are the logical consequence of this latter method: farmers thereby participate more and more in problem definition and solution. Although still in their teens farmers' associations have already proved they are a workable and viable alternative for the top down approaches that are now very much in use.

The book addresses itself to scholars and practitioners. To all those involved in development planning and project implementation, in extension and research. It gives more support to those advocating the participatory approaches that have recently been propagated but does still reserve an important role for the more

traditional (research) policies if and when they are willing to take over some of the advantages of the new ones.

The book is quite readable, up-to-date and to the point. The text is sufficiently clear so as not to necessitate illustrations.

Read it!!!

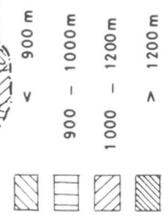
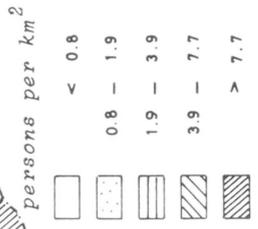
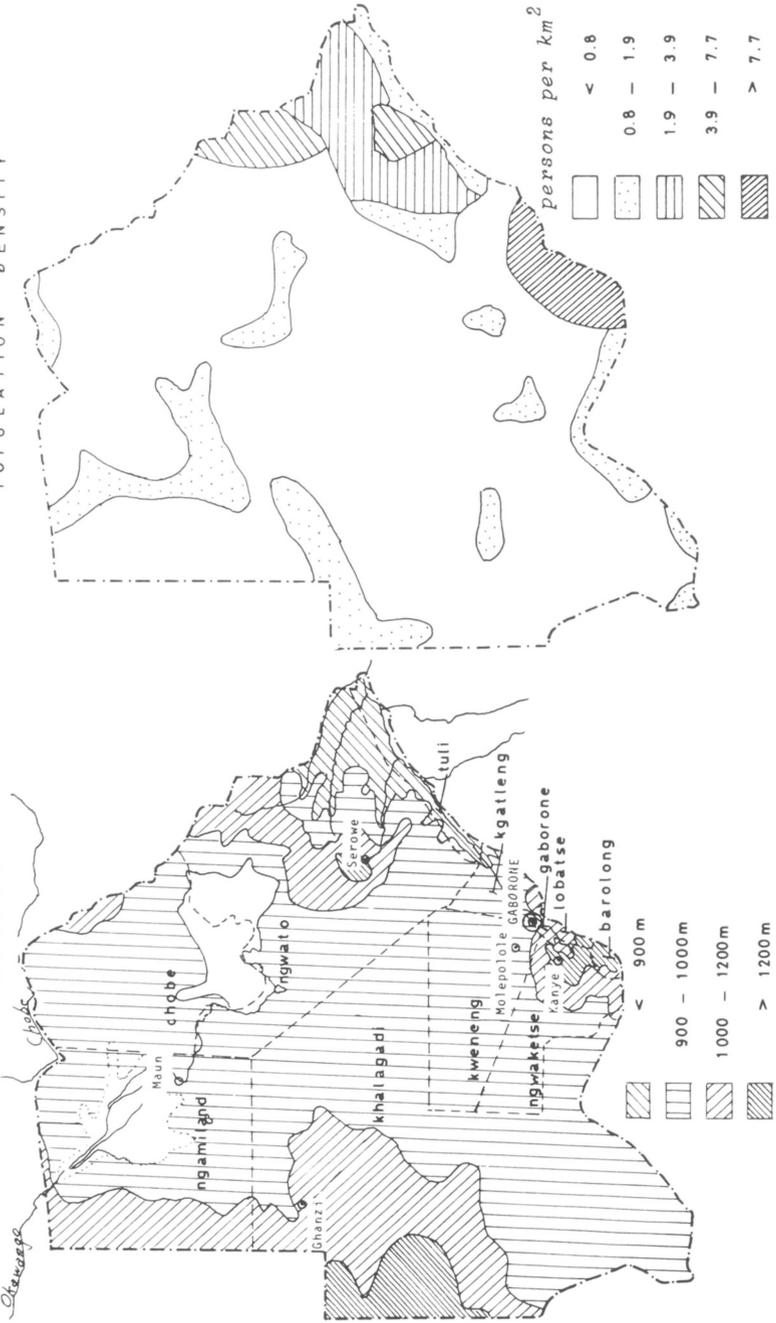
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