

**Innovations and learning processes in rural zones of Africa: interactive  
knowledge-sharing gateways for sustainable social as well as technical progress**

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The analysis of recent food crises in Sahel Africa, has shown that they were not due to major failings in agricultural production. These famines, have contributed to a renewed vision of the contribution made by agricultural research to development. Today, agricultural science needs to reach beyond this sector in order to incorporate studies into the economic, social and cultural contexts of rural areas. That new paradigm assigns a central role to technical and institutional innovation defining it as a learning process and designed to find new solutions to societal issues. The approaches promote a negotiated construction, right from the outset, between all the stakeholders involved. The food challenge in Africa therefore means strengthening the abilities of all stakeholders in the rural world to express a proper demand to solve their problems. This great challenge will necessarily involve the development of novel approaches and of learning and communication tools that will call upon new technologies whilst respecting the cultural context. Two examples of co-constructed initiatives that have helped to improve access to relevant information making it possible to enhance the impacts of an innovation on society are presented.

The first initiative is the citizens' anti-hunger caravan (la caravane citoyenne contre la faim) set up by an NGO group from Cameroon ([www.cosader.org/](http://www.cosader.org/)) to improve rural livelihood, as a strategy to mobilize all stakeholders in rural areas. The initiative helps to improve population access to information, particularly on communal development policies. Information is passed from village to village, enabling collective mobilization of the communities as a force for proposals in defence of their interests. The creation of a forum for dialogue and exchanges on agricultural training and information services, and the establishment of a rural women's platform to improve access to training through communication and scientific information, are among the activities recently backed by FAO and the Chamber of Agriculture from Cameroon.

The second initiative concerns the CTA's rural radios programme (<http://ruralradio.cta.int/>) which is based on a network of professional journalists working in 9 French-speaking African countries. Rural Radio Resource Packs have been produced in collaboration with the African journalists network, Jade Production, with backing from the "Francophonie" and the European Community. The work under way involves the production of community radio programmes and participatory management of content.

The main challenge remains to mobilize funds and train stakeholders and beneficiaries, in order to guarantee the perpetuation and scaling-out of achievements.

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