



## Strengthening the Role of Farmers' Cooperatives Training Report

**Trainer:** Dr. Sita KONE, Senior Socio-Economist Consultant

**Training Title:** Strengthening the Role of Farmers' Cooperatives in Agricultural Technology Dissemination and Ways to Link Credit Institutions with Small Farmers Report.

**Project:** Improving Agricultural RESilience to SALinity Through DDevelopment and Promotion of Pro-poor Technologies and Management Strategies in Selected Countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (RESADE)

**Place (Country):** Togo, Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Botswana, and Mozambique

### Training Objectives:

The main objective of this capacity-building training is to empower farmers' cooperatives in the RESADE project countries mentioned above with the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance their effectiveness as cooperatives, in disseminating agricultural technologies, facilitating access to credit, and managing financial resources. This should enable small farmers to be more powerful, adopt innovative practices, improve productivity, develop agribusiness, and achieve sustainable development, ultimately contributing to the overall socio-economic advancement of their communities. The specific objectives are:

- **Objective one:** Empower farmers' cooperatives with the necessary knowledge and skills in their roles of cooperation
- **Objective two:** Strengthen the effectiveness of their roles in the project-promoted agricultural technologies and practices dissemination
- **Objective three:** Promote crop/food processing agribusiness development that adds value to the market and contributes to the agri-food system development
- **Objective four:** Facilitate farmers' access to credit, and provide strategies to effectively manage financial resources by linking them to credit institutions

**Report Submission date:** 22 July 2024

**New Contacts (*name, organization, contact address*):** See credit institutions table

1. **Contact Name**, Title, Organization, Address, Email
2. **Contact Name**, Title, Organization, Address, Email
3. **Contact Name**, Title, Organization, Address, Email

## Key Features and Outputs:

### Key features:

**Participants:** The training participants are farmers' cooperatives in the RESADE project implemented areas, and the number of participants was fixed at a maximum of 200 farmers per country. In each country, the training was divided into 2 days, with one group of farmers each day (See training agenda in the appendix). Each session/day gathered different farmers' cooperatives (See the names of the cooperatives on the participant lists).

**Training Modules and Content:** the training involves an introduction and conclusion and 4 main modules including Module 1: Strengthening Cooperative Skills and Enhancing Effectiveness. Module 2: Optimizing Agricultural Technology/Practices Use and Agribusiness Value Chain. Module 3: Accessing and Managing Credits Through Cooperatives. Module 4: Organizing and Managing Savings to Overcome Financial Barriers to Accelerate Technology Adoption (See training presentation in the appendix).

**Training Delivery Methods and Participant Engagement:** The training was delivered through a 4 to 5-hour PowerPoint presentation. To engage participants, the training was interactive sessions, where participants were asked questions and vice versa participants also asked questions and shared strategies, success stories, and best practices. This motivated other individuals to join cooperatives if not members of a cooperative, and the existing cooperatives to learn new strategies to apply in their cooperatives.

### Content discussed for the four specific objectives:

**1. Empower farmers' cooperatives with the knowledge and skills in their roles of cooperation:** The project has established new farmers' cooperatives in the targeted countries in addition to some existing cooperatives. Here, we raise the awareness of farmers on the benefits of being part of and effectively engaging in cooperatives and provide them strategies on how to be more effective and powerful as cooperatives and have impactful results. We also guided them on the different activities and actions to undertake in order to reach the expected positive outcomes for their activities' development, their households, and their entire community welfare.

**2. Strengthen the effectiveness of their roles in the project-promoted agricultural technologies and practices dissemination:** Here we shared success stories on the project-promoted best practices and technologies implemented by farmers so far as well as strategies on how they can benefit their communities by effectively disseminating the promoted technologies in their communities as cooperatives. We also provided them with strategies on how to get and show good results in order to motivate other to adopt the new technologies.

**3. Promote crop/food processing agribusiness development that add value to the market and contribute to the agri-food system development:** The project has already provided training on crop/food processing to the farmer's cooperatives. Here, we provided strategies and motivated farmers to not only sell the raw products in the market but to put into practice what they learned from the processing training and start agribusiness as cooperatives by processing their products and selling in the market in

order to contribute to the agri-food value chain development and food security improvement. As well, we also provided strategies to farmers on how to improve their processing techniques, marketing, packaging, and branding strategies. We supported that by also sharing success stories of agribusiness cases developed by some farmers cooperatives after getting the processing training.

**4. Facilitate farmers' access to credit, and provide strategies to effectively manage financial resources by linking them to credit institutions:** Here, in order to help farmers overcome their financial barriers, we called credit institutions agents who provided the necessary information on the possibilities for farmers to get access to credit, thereby linking farmers to credit institutions. We also provided strategies to farmers on how to organize their cooperatives as community-based savings groups to overcome their financial barriers.

**Output:**

**Participation and women empowerment:** We are proud to have more than 900 participants in total, with around 70% of participation being from women farmers actively participating during the sessions, which is one of the targets of the project to empower women farmers. It was an amazing experience where we actively interacted directly with farmers' cooperatives, shared strategies and challenges, and how to overcome their challenges in order to be more effective and powerful. Table 1 presents the training place and number of participants by country.

Table: Training conducted delivered places and the number of participants

Country	Training place	Nb. of men participants	Nb. of women participants	Total
Togo	Atti-Akpedokoe and Anyronkopé	56	71	127
Gambia	Jarra Pakalinjing	17	183	200
Liberia	Buchanan	60	121	181
Sierra Leone	Kambia	66	144	210
Botswana	Lentsweletau	56	85	141
Mozambique	Moamba	37	51	88
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>292</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>947</b>

**Credit institutions representatives and linking farmers to credit institutions:** Credit Institutions Representatives and Linking Farmers to Credit Institutions: To address farmers' financial barriers, we invited representatives from various credit institutions in each country. These agents provided farmers with essential information on how to access credit, manage their loans, build trust with financial institutions, and ensure timely repayment. This initiative effectively linked farmers to credit institutions. At the conclusion of these sessions, the credit institutions committed to offering credit to farmers who meet the necessary requirements.

The table below presents the names of the different credit institutions represented during the training, organized by country. In countries where credit institution agents were unavailable, we provided farmers with comprehensive information on accessing credit, managing financial resources, and overcoming financial barriers. Additionally, farmers were informed about various government subsidies available through representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, particularly in Sierra Leone and Botswana.

Table: Credits institutions represented during the training

Countries	Credit institutions	Contacts
<b>Togo (Atti-Akpedokoe)</b>	I.A.D.E.S (Institution d'Aide au Developpement Economique et Social)	+228 90 37 68 65 iadesmicroloan@gmail.com
<b>Togo (Anyronkopé)</b>	Fondation Dzidula	+228 90 18 20 78
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	CEO C.T.F	079-401-129
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	Community Bank	033-703-532
<b>Mozambique</b>	CEO-Microfinance Confianca	+258 879249451

**Specific skills developed by the participants:** The training has significantly enhanced farmers' understanding of the importance of cooperatives, effective management practices, and the factors contributing to cooperative success. It has also increased their knowledge of the benefits and significance of promoted technologies and practices. Furthermore, the training has deepened their comprehension of the role cooperatives play in technology dissemination and equipped them with strategies to effectively disseminate these technologies within their communities.

In addition, the training has improved farmers' ability to connect with credit institutions, organize their cooperatives into savings groups, and manage their financial resources effectively. Most importantly, it has motivated farmers' cooperatives to initiate new agribusiness ventures by processing and selling their products, thereby participating in agri-food systems value chain development.

The training has also provided farmers with new skills in processing, packaging, marketing, and branding strategies. They have gained new agribusiness ideas and heard success stories that can inspire and guide their efforts. Moreover, the training has introduced the concept of cooperative-led microfinance, where members can borrow from their collective savings, reinforcing the importance of internal financial support systems.

Additionally, the training has encouraged the adoption of sustainable practices, such as biochar production, to improve soil health and productivity. It has highlighted the potential for cooperatives to invest in shared resources, such as machinery, to enhance operational efficiency and productivity.

Farmers have also been introduced to innovative business models and market linkage strategies, enabling them to explore new markets and enhance their competitiveness. The emphasis on continuous learning



and capacity building has instilled a culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration, ensuring that farmers stay updated with the latest agricultural advancements and best practices.

Overall, the training has equipped farmers with a comprehensive toolkit to drive their cooperatives' growth, sustainability, and success, fostering a proactive and resilient agricultural community.

**Action Plans and Commitments:** Participants are committed to applying their new knowledge to improve their cooperatives and enhance the well-being of their households and communities. Cooperative leaders pledged to support their members by optimizing farming activities for higher revenue and efficiency, securing affordable inputs, facilitating market access for their products, initiating agribusiness ventures, and helping members obtain credit to overcome financial barriers. They also vowed to enhance food security within their communities.

Additionally, leaders expressed a commitment to introducing advanced farming techniques and sustainable practices to increase productivity and environmental sustainability. They plan to organize regular training sessions within cooperatives to ensure continuous skill development and knowledge sharing among members.

Farmers who were not yet cooperative members promised to join existing cooperatives, while those in communities without cooperatives committed to establishing new ones. The exchange of strategies among cooperatives inspired others to adopt new approaches and rules for greater success. There were also discussions on forming alliances between cooperatives to strengthen their bargaining power and increase their market influence.

Moreover, participants identified the potential for developing cooperative-owned processing facilities, which would add value to their products and increase profitability. They also discussed the creation of cooperative-managed savings and loan schemes to provide more accessible and reliable financial support for members.

Overall, farmers have dedicated themselves to strengthening their cooperatives' effectiveness, incorporating innovative ideas, and achieving new levels of success.

**Networking and Linkages:** As a result of the training, farmers pledged to network and build partnerships among cooperatives, credit institutions, extension services, and other stakeholders in the value chain. These connections are expected to foster collaboration, enhance resource sharing, and strengthen the overall agricultural ecosystem.

**Participant Feedback and Testimonials:** The training garnered numerous positive testimonials from farmers, reflecting its impact:

"We increased our knowledge, we learned many new things today "

"We now understand the importance of cooperation."

"We learned new strategies to apply in our cooperatives."

"When we go back, we will implement the strategies we've learned today."

"We will share our knowledge with others in our communities."

"We will disseminate the technologies and practices in our communities."

"We will start agribusiness ventures by processing our crops or food."

"We now know how to access credit."

"When I return to my community, I will mobilize others to establish a cooperative."

Feedback collected from participants through the training evaluation form has been provided to the RESADE team for further analysis and improvement of future training sessions.

**Impact Stories:** Success stories illustrating the practical application of training content should be followed up by the project's local coordinators in each country. These stories will be reported to the RESADE team at ICBA for further case studies, highlighting the changes and improvements made by participants in their cooperatives.

**Follow-Up Activities:** The RESADE team at ICBA should design plans for follow-up support and mentoring. Additionally, they should schedule follow-up meetings or workshops to assess the long-term impact of the training, ensuring that participants continue to benefit from the knowledge and skills acquired.

**Challenges and solutions discussed:** Farmers have expressed several challenges during the training. Firstly, the amount provided for credit is insufficient. In addition, the conditions to get access to credit are difficult as well as the interest rate is higher, and the repayment period is very short. Farmers require additional funds to meet their financial needs. Additionally, they need crop and food processing machines to initiate agribusiness ventures. There is also a pressing need for more capacity-building training to enhance their skills and knowledge. Furthermore, the machines and materials currently available are inadequate for all farmers, with a particular need for more biochar production machines. Lastly, collaboration within farmers' cooperatives has proven to be difficult sometimes, hindering effective teamwork and productivity.

To address the challenges with credit institutions, farmers' cooperatives can implement several solutions. They can organize into savings groups, open a savings account with a credit institution, and consistently demonstrate loyalty, trustworthiness, and good results over a few years. This will help build trust with credit institutions, making them more likely to provide necessary credit when needed. Cooperative members can also borrow from their savings and repay with interest.

Another approach is to start small and reinvest the revenue from their activities to promote growth. This method applies to acquiring processing, biochar production, and other necessary machines. By starting small agribusinesses and continuously reinvesting their earnings, they can gradually expand their operations. Revenue can be reinvested in new materials for members, and these materials can be lent to other cooperatives in exchange for money, further increasing revenue and enabling reinvestment.

For the need for additional capacity-building training, cooperatives are encouraged to apply the knowledge gained from existing training programs. They should hold regular training and educational

meetings within the cooperative to share knowledge, new strategies, and success stories. They can also monetize their expertise by collaborating with other cooperatives to organize training sessions on product processing, generating additional income.

To strengthen collaboration within the cooperatives, members should strive for successful results and tangible benefits. Achieving positive outcomes will motivate members to engage and commit more fully, and can also attract new members to the cooperative. Ultimately, success depends on their dedication, commitment, and determination.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

The capacity-building training for farmers' cooperatives conducted in Togo, Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Botswana, and Mozambique under the RESADE project from 24 June to 12 July 2024, has seen the participation of many farmers' cooperatives including more than 900 participants. Most of the participants around 70% of women farmers and their active participation during the training, thereby empowering women farmers, which is one objective of the project.

The training has significantly empowered farmers' cooperatives. By equipping participants with essential skills in cooperative management, agricultural technology dissemination, financial management, and agribusiness development, the training has laid a solid foundation for sustainable agricultural development and socio-economic advancement in these regions.

The commitment shown by participants to apply their new knowledge and improve their cooperatives, households, and communities underscores the training's effectiveness. The training has not only enhanced the technical skills of farmers but also fostered a culture of cooperation, innovation, and continuous learning. This proactive approach is crucial for driving the growth and success of farmers' cooperatives and ensuring long-term sustainability.

## **Recommendations**

1. It is essential to organize regular training sessions and workshops to ensure ongoing skill development and knowledge sharing among cooperatives. Encouraging cooperatives to conduct internal training sessions will help disseminate new strategies and success stories among members.
2. Designing follow-up support programs will provide ongoing guidance and assess the long-term impact of the training. Scheduling follow-up meetings or workshops will allow for monitoring progress and addressing emerging challenges.
3. To strengthen financial linkages, it is important to simplify credit access procedures and provide favorable loan conditions for farmers. Exploring alternative financing options, such as cooperative-managed savings and loan schemes, could also be beneficial. Advocacy for supportive policies from financial institutions and government subsidies will further enhance access to credit.
4. Promoting agribusiness ventures requires encouraging cooperatives to establish processing facilities and explore value-added opportunities. Providing additional training on processing,

packaging, marketing, and branding strategies will support this effort. Sharing success stories and case studies will inspire and guide cooperatives in their agribusiness ventures.

5. Enhancing cooperative collaboration involves fostering networking and partnerships among cooperatives, credit institutions, extension services, and other stakeholders. Promoting resource-sharing and collaborative efforts will strengthen the overall agricultural ecosystem.
6. Implementing a robust monitoring and evaluation system is crucial to track the progress and impact of the training. Documenting and sharing success stories and case studies will highlight the benefits and inspire other cooperatives.
7. Addressing financial challenges can be achieved by encouraging cooperatives to organize into savings groups and build trust with credit institutions. Starting small agribusinesses and reinvesting revenue will promote growth and help acquire necessary machinery. Exploring collaborative efforts to secure funding for additional training and equipment will also be beneficial.
8. Promoting sustainable practices involves encouraging the adoption of methods such as biochar production to improve soil health and productivity. Supporting cooperatives in investing in shared resources and machinery will enhance operational efficiency.
9. We also urge all agricultural development projects to imperatively integrate agri-product processing activities in their project execution in order to contribute to and accelerate agri-food systems development and food security improvement.

By implementing these recommendations, the RESADE project can further enhance the effectiveness of farmers' cooperatives, drive sustainable agricultural development, and contribute to the socio-economic advancement of rural communities in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**What Follow-ups are Needed and by Whom:** Follow-up with the evaluation of the “training evaluation forms” is needed by the RESADE project officer.

## Appendix

1. Training Agenda link:
2. Training presentation link:
3. Training participant lists links:
4. Training pictures links:

[https://biosaline.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/EtoSHa8Cty1KtDJGGvyyz00B\\_kpVCKdtQaSI7hmJXmHf3A?e=jLLS18](https://biosaline.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/EtoSHa8Cty1KtDJGGvyyz00B_kpVCKdtQaSI7hmJXmHf3A?e=jLLS18)

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