



“MAISON FAMILALE RURALE” (MFR, RURAL FAMILY HOUSE) IN BURKINA FASO

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Introduction

Rural Family Houses (MFRs) are institutions devoted to training youth and adults for careers in agriculture and other occupations in Francophone countries. MFR centers also service farmer organizations (OPs) and organize literacy training with the support of the National Fund for Literacy and Non-Formal Education (FONAENF).

A typical MFR is a non-profit association of parents whose children are likely to participate in the training programs or individuals/ groups committed to the development of the rural population and the environment. Members of MFRs are trained to take control of the ownership, design and implement actions that affect their development. The activities of MFRs in Burkina Faso are derived from the Rural Development Strategy on the horizon 2015 (RDS) and the Strategy of Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development (SCADD). The objectives of MFRs are to:

- Reduce the rural-urban migration by keeping young people in their homelands.
- Promote the welfare of women.
- Improve the living conditions in rural areas.
- Improve agricultural productivity.
- Encourage and support professional and self-employment development in youth.

MFRs provide sandwich-type programs that occur on and off training centers. The two main types of training are:

Long-term (two-year) agricultural training targeted at youth between 15 and 25 years old. Participants in the long-term training program spend four days every month at the MFR training center and the remaining training period with the family and at the workplace. The long-term training qualifies participants for professional and self-employment.

Short-term (three- to six-month) thematic training on enterprises such as poultry, fattening beef or sheep and gardening. Participants spend three days every month at the MFR training center and the remaining period on their farms. The short-term training strengthens the knowledge and skills of working adults.

Background and Context

The Union of Naam of Burkina Faso is a national federation with headquarters in Ouahigouya in the northern region of Burkina Faso. The members of the union on an exchange visit to France organized by the AFDI (French Farmers and International Development) discovered MFRs in France in 1997. The idea was shared with the teaching staff and board members, who sponsored a second visit of members to the MFRs of Benin in June 1997 to confirm the relevance of creating MFR-type of training centers in Burkina Faso.

The reports of the visits submitted to members of Naam groups and village communities were used to request support from the Loire country AFDI for the establishment of two MFRs in Burkina Faso. Federations of French MFRs from Loire Atlantique and Maine-et-Loire sent two experts and conducted feasibility missions to Burkina Faso. This led to establishment of a steering committee in 1998 to coordinate the development of MFRs in Burkina Faso. A delegation of the committee traveled to Burkina Faso in 2000 to meet with the beneficiary and worked with Naam groups in Yako and Séguénéga to create the Yako and Séguénéga MFRs in 2001.

The National Union of Rural Family Houses (UNMFRBF) was founded in 2008 and headquartered in Ouagadougou as an umbrella organization for MFRs. Through the UNMFRBF, three new MFRs have emerged: in Tambaga (Eastern Region), Zabré and Diabo (Central East Region). Several projects developed as part of the MFR initiative are being implemented. The training centers set up are operational. Teams have completed training and obtained teaching qualifications.

Challenges Associated with the Creation of MFRs and How They Were Resolved

The major challenges of MFRs are lack of supervisory staff members at training centers, inadequate technical follow-up visits to farmers, and limited access to technological innovations and training. The MFRs have responded to lack of supervisory staff for training and extension by using alternate pedagogy, a method based on a two-stage approach:

- Only 25 percent of all activities at the MFR centers are devoted to theoretical training.
- 75 percent of activities focus on practical training at the family level, at the workplace or in the field.

Particular attention has been paid to the quality of linkage between the practical and theoretical phases of training. Proper study planning, supervision and support to trainers at professional and family environment levels have been introduced.

MFRs face many difficulties in the performance of activities because of the positive impact of MFR training on the livelihood of participants. The numbers of applicants always exceed the capacity of MFRs. To address this, the union has built the capacity of MFRs by mobilizing resources to make the activities sustainable. MFRs primarily recruit people literate in the local language of producers, who are mostly illiterate. The training is also done in the local language.

Farmer trainees often lack financial resources to implement small agricultural projects such as gardening. Financial institutions, for various reasons, give very little credit to farmers to meet the investment need for production activities. To address this, the UNMFRBF brings in support in the form of agricultural inputs (fertilizers and seeds). The union organizes trained people into associations or groups to enhance their creditworthiness. They are then directed to NGOs and microfinance institutions to solicit the necessary funding.

Factors Contributing to the Success of MFRs

Producers are mostly illiterate with low efficiency and inadequate means to modernize production systems (Bako, 2011). Moreover, supervision at the farm level was low. MFRs are designed to increase the productivity of poor rural communities through training and awareness creation on good agricultural practices. This is in line with one of the agricultural sector development actions within the core strategy "Development of the growth pillars" of the Accelerated Growth Strategy and Sustainable Development (SCADD) (MEF, 2010). Demand for the MFR program is growing. For example, in 2010 nearly 500,000 young people (15-29 years old) expressed the desire for training in agricultural production and productivity (MESS, 2010).

Another element of success of MFR is the development of training to meet the needs of specialized groups of people as described below in the example of women producers in Séguénéga. In 2011, MFR workers in Séguénéga were approached by a group of women producing onions in the township. Despite the potential of the area for onion production, low soil fertility and poor access to water resulted in low yields while the prices of inputs, particularly seed, remained high. These observations led MFR workers and trainers to propose a training schedule that meets the

expectations and addresses the constraints of family life of the women. The training followed the onion production cycle:

- At the MFR training center, theoretical study was done for the establishment of the nursery.
- In the field, the women practiced the knowledge acquired from the center, usually with assistance from the trainer.
- At the MFR training center, the study of soil preparation and planting was done.
- In the field, soil preparation and planting plans were put into practice.

This training approach -- periods of theoretical training at the MFR training center followed immediately with practical training in the field -- allowed for rapid and effective adoption of technologies. This training lasted over three months, including 12 days at the MFR training center, and involved 90 women divided into two groups. The community vegetable garden increased from 2 to 3 hectares. Each of the 60 women developed an area -- measuring 700 square meters ^{per} woman on average -- for production. Another group of 24 women grew onions on 350 square meters each.

The MFR provided women with subsidized inputs including four boxes of seeds and five bags of fertilizer (NPK) valued at 110,000 FCFA and 90,000 FCFA, respectively.

MFR trainers in Burkina Faso receive training on the alternate training pedagogy and production techniques in agriculture and livestock every year under the auspices of French MFR partners. In addition, trainers have participated in a training program called "Rural Technical Animateur" that strengthens the skills of young producers in project design and management (training, production, processing and marketing).

MFRs operate in an open professional and political environment. This allows them to work with various stakeholders in agriculture, fisheries and livestock subsectors. For example, the MFR trainers have in the course of carrying out their activities worked in close collaboration with the agents from the decentralized services of the ministries of Agriculture and Animal Resources.

Lessons Learned that can be Applied Elsewhere

The MFR approach is built on the idea that learning occurs at the workplace. The time dedicated to learning at the workplace constitutes a training period in the same way as the training period at MFR centers. The teaching tools and topics provided facilitate the connection between training at the center and the work in the field. Key aspects of this pedagogy are:

- It is an efficient and rapid training system; the techniques learned are transferred immediately to the workplace.
- It is not an expensive system and does not require the learners to travel to a center located far away.

- A lot of young people and adults can participate in the training.

Because of the positive impacts of MFR training activities, applications for training are received from all over Burkina Faso, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for the union to meet all demands. The need to establish technical and financial partnerships is increasing. This is the major factor of sustainability that needs to be addressed if the MFRs hope to continue their participation in economic and social development of the territory.

The National Union is considering:

- Increasing its visibility by distributing the maximum communication materials.
- Participating in calls for projects to ensure its financial capacity and increase the number of producers benefiting from the MFR interventions.
- Strengthening the technical and teaching capacities of the trainers.
- Diversifying these trainings.
- Opening three new MFRs per year in other parts of Burkina Faso.

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