



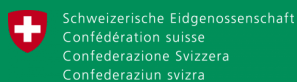
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## Capitalisation note

Boosting productivity and partnerships in the livestock and meat sector: integrated experience in fattening, fodder valorisation and capacity building for stakeholders in Sikasso



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**Project :** Pilot project to support the production and marketing of quality beef cattle by strengthening the technological and commercial innovation capacities of actors in the livestock-meat value chains in the Sikasso region of Mali

**Country :** Mali

**Implementing institution :** Consortium AMEDD, ILRI, DC-Consulting, Huilerie Ba-Mariama and Laham Industrie

## Executive summary

The project combined technical innovations (fodder production on 818 ha, fattening of more than 6,000 cattle, sheep crossbreeding, nutritional blocks) and organisational innovations (strengthening of innovation platforms, networking with commercial and financial partners).

These actions enabled the training of more than 800 farmers and 203 women producers, who sold more than 7,600 nutritional blocks for a turnover of 7.6 million CFA francs. Although only 22 producers accessed bank credit out of 214 plans prepared, the project generated new local economic momentum and strengthened the position of women in the sector. A key lesson is that stakeholder ownership, simple technical solutions and anchoring in local dynamics are essential for the sustainability of innovations.

It is recommended to strengthen the legal structure of platforms, adapt financing mechanisms to the realities of producers, and support scaling up through well-trained local relays.

### Key messages

- The project addressed two key challenges for the livestock and meat sector in Mali: the low productivity of local livestock farming systems and the lack of commercial structures between stakeholders. Against a backdrop of growing demand for high-quality meat, the intervention targeted constraints related to animal feed, genetic improvement, access to finance and the strengthening of local economic partnerships.
- Activities combined technical innovations (dissemination of *Brachiaria* grass, production of nutritional blocks, sheep crossbreeding), organisational support (strengthening of innovation platforms) and commercial and financial networking mechanisms. This integrated approach made it possible to effectively mobilise stakeholders throughout the value chain and to anchor changes in local dynamics.
- Results exceeded expectations in several key areas: more than 6,000 animals were fed, 818 hectares of fodder were produced, and more than 600 lambs were born from improved crossbreeding. These results reflect strong adoption of innovations and a local capacity to take ownership of the technical tools made available.
- The initiative has enabled many women to access new sources of income through the production and sale of nutritional blocks and the provision of sheep breeding services. Beyond the economic impact, these activities have strengthened women's autonomy and their role in the local governance of innovation platforms.
- Experience shows that the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions depend on the involvement of stakeholders from the design stage, the simplicity of technical solutions, and the strengthening of organisational capacities.
- To maximise impact, it is recommended that platforms be legally structured, access to financing be facilitated through appropriate mechanisms, and scaling up be supported through well-trained local relays.

## Challenge

### **Under-exploited productive potential in a context of growing demand**

Mali, with more than 30% of the UEMOA's livestock, is a major player in livestock farming in West Africa. However, this potential is not being fully exploited to meet the growing demand for red meat in the region. While coastal countries are seeing an annual increase in meat imports of around 15%, dominated by poultry, Mali is struggling to establish a sustainable position in this regional market, mainly due to bottlenecks in the livestock-meat value chain.

Despite its significant contribution to the national economy and intraregional trade, the livestock sector remains underfunded. Public and private investment remains insufficient to drive structural transformation in the sector. This weakness compromises not only Mali's competitiveness in the regional trade in quality meat, but also its ability to address the challenges of food security, job creation and local development.

### **A drive towards intensification hampered by limited access to resources**

In the cotton-growing region of Sikasso, agricultural intensification is booming, particularly in terms of fattening and dairy production. However, these market-oriented production systems are highly dependent on quality animal feed, in a context of increasingly scarce pastureland and degradation of natural biomass.

The low availability of animal feed, both in terms of quantity and quality, is a major obstacle to improving animal productivity. The situation is all the more worrying given that agriculture, including livestock farming, receives less than 1% of bank loans in Mali. This constraint considerably limits investment in fodder production, the purchase of inputs and animals, and the professionalisation of livestock farmers.

Furthermore, limited access to finance particularly affects small producers, women's groups and young livestock farmers, who often lack sufficient guarantees or the means to meet the requirements of financial institutions. The low level of financial inclusion – with a banking penetration rate of only 14% in 2017 – hinders rural entrepreneurial initiatives and limits the spread of innovative practices

### **A still fragile organisation of actors in the face of market opportunities**

Faced with strong demand for quality meat, stakeholders in Mali's livestock and meat value chains remain insufficiently organised to seize economic and commercial opportunities. The lack of structure, technical skills and coordination limits the collective effectiveness of feeders, traders, feed manufacturers and other stakeholders in the sector.

The innovation platforms set up in some municipalities appear to be promising spaces for consultation and co-construction of solutions. However, their functioning often remains fragile due to a lack of institutional capacity, limited legal anchoring, and a shortage of tools and resources to ensure their autonomy and sustainability.

Women, although very active in sheep fattening and the production of food supplements (nutritional blocks), also face specific obstacles. The lack of suitable equipment, restricted access to inputs and the absence of storage facilities undermine the profitability of their activities, even though these are

important levers for generating income and empowerment.

### **An urgent need for integrated transformation of the livestock-meat chain**

In this context, the pilot project implemented in the Sikasso region aims to provide concrete and integrated responses to these challenges. It targets production (by improving fodder capacities, disseminating more efficient fattening practices and introducing improved sheep breeds), marketing (by strengthening business relationships and improving access to markets) and financing (by structuring credit applications and establishing links with financial institutions).

The project thus aims to demonstrate that combined support for the technical, organisational and commercial capacities of actors in the chain can stimulate a competitive supply of quality meat, while strengthening the economic inclusion of rural populations, particularly women. The challenge is twofold: to strengthen Mali's contribution to regional meat trade and to promote more equitable, resilient and sustainable local development.



## **In practice**

### **Intensification of quality meat animal production**

#### **Activities carried out**

To address the constraints related to animal feed and improve the quality of meat animals, the project implemented a series of activities focused on strengthening local innovation platforms. These multi-stakeholder frameworks enabled livestock farmers, women's groups, technicians and local authorities to be involved in the co-construction of appropriate solutions.

Three areas of intervention structured this theme. First, the dissemination of the forage grass *Brachiaria* sp. was encouraged in the target municipalities through practical training and technical support.

Next, women's groups were trained in the production of multi-nutrient blocks (metocour blocks) to supplement animal feed. Finally, fattening workshops received regular technical support, particularly through veterinary monitoring, to improve rationing practices, reduce the fattening period from 90 to 75 days and improve product quality.

The resources mobilised included a budget of 37,898,900 CFA francs, specialised human resources (technical agents, veterinarians, trainers), and the mobilisation of innovation platforms and women's groups in each commune where the intervention took place.

### **Results achieved**

The activities carried out have yielded significant results, often exceeding expectations. In terms of fodder production, more than 818 hectares were planted with *Brachiaria* and other species, generating nearly 4,000 tonnes of fodder. Training courses ly reached more than 490 farmers and livestock breeders on fodder crops and more than 330 on their effective use.

Cattle fattening has experienced a real boom, with more than 6,000 animals fattened and sold, nearly double the initial target. On the women's side, 203 producers were trained in the manufacture of nutritional blocks. They produced more than 8,700 blocks, of which nearly 7,650 were sold, generating a turnover of around 7.6 million CFA francs.

These results demonstrate a tangible strengthening of the technical capacities of the actors involved, a better understanding of fattening practices, and a new economic dynamic within women's groups. They have also contributed to a reduction in production costs, an improvement in meat quality, and a better dissemination of innovations at the local level.

### **Challenges encountered**

Despite these advances, certain challenges have been identified. The low level of marketing of some of the nutritional blocks has led to economic losses for the women's groups, due in part to a lack of awareness among livestock farmers about the benefits of these food supplements. Furthermore, the lack of suitable premises for the production and storage of the blocks has forced women to produce on demand or to sell their production informally, thus limiting the optimisation of their income.

To overcome these constraints, the project continued to strengthen the technical capacity of the groups, encouraged their integration into innovation platforms, and supported community-level awareness-raising activities to promote the products and practices promoted..

## **Strengthening business links between actors along the value chain**

### **Activities carried out**

In a context marked by very limited access to finance and poorly structured trade, the project implemented several strategies to strengthen business links between actors in the livestock-meat value chain. The approach adopted consisted of stimulating sustainable partnerships around three levers: access to inputs, commercial structuring and improved access to finance.

To facilitate the supply of inputs (oilcake, molasses), interactive visits were organised between innovation platforms (IPs) and processing industries such as SUKALA-SA and Huilerie Ba-Mariama

(HBM). These exchanges led to the signing of group supply contracts, thereby reducing costs for livestock farmers and women's groups.

In terms of marketing, the project supported the establishment of links with the LAHAM industrial slaughterhouse. Specific training courses enabled livestock farmers to better understand the quality standards required by this partner, with a view to contractualising sales.

Finally, to improve access to finance, a series of actions were carried out: training livestock farmers in financial education, developing bankable business plans, raising awareness of livestock farming among financial institutions, and organising B2B meetings between the two parties. The aim was to remove obstacles related to the lack of guarantees, mutual ignorance of practices, and the limited availability of financial services tailored to the sector.

These activities mobilised a budget of 20,915,000 CFA francs, with the direct involvement of innovation platforms, women's groups, microfinance institutions, and partner agro-industrial companies.

### **Results achieved**

The actions undertaken have made it possible to structure new economic relationships between previously isolated actors. The innovation platforms established business links with HBM and SUKALA for the group purchase of oilcake and molasses, which facilitated access to inputs for fattening. At the same time, fatteners were made aware of the requirements of the LAHAM slaughterhouse, paving the way for future collaborations.

In terms of financing, although the objective was not fully achieved, results were recorded. Of the 214 bankable plans developed, 109 were finalised and presented to financial institutions. However, only 22 actors actually obtained credit, or 10% of the target. This low financing rate reflects the persistent difficulties small producers face in accessing credit and highlights the scale of the structural barriers that need to be overcome.

Despite this, the momentum generated has laid the foundations for new business practices. Relationships of trust have been established between platform stakeholders and partner organisations. Improved skills in management, financial planning and negotiation are also an important asset for the sustainability of business relationships..

### **Challenges encountered**

The main constraints encountered in this area mainly concerned access to finance. Financial institutions require guarantees that livestock farmers cannot provide, particularly due to their existing agricultural debt or lack of liquid assets. In addition, the low level of banking penetration in rural areas and credit institutions' lack of knowledge about livestock farming have hampered investment intentions, despite training and B2B meetings.

On an organisational level, the innovation platforms did not have the legal status to act on behalf of their members, particularly when it came to signing contracts or arranging collective loans. This limitation restricted their bargaining power with commercial and financial partners.

Finally, the movement of some feedlot operators to purchase cattle was hampered by insecurity, affecting the implementation of certain commercial activities, such as the completion of business

plans or test deliveries to the LAHAM slaughterhouse.

Faced with these constraints, the project focused on strengthening the internal capacities of the platforms, raising awareness among credit institutions, and increasing commercial partnerships to overcome obstacles related to credit and the legal structure of the groups.

## Improved productivity

### Activities carried out

In the project's areas of intervention in southern Mali, local sheep breeds are characterised by their small size and low meat yield, limiting their commercial value and the income of livestock farmers, particularly women. To address this structural constraint, the project implemented a genetic improvement programme based on crossbreeding local breeds with Bali-bali meat-type rams.

The process was conducted in a participatory manner through innovation platforms. In each commune, women members of nutritional block production groups were involved in choosing the breed of breeding ram and defining the selection criteria for the women responsible for keeping them.

Data collection from all the women concerned was followed by a feedback meeting with local authorities, steering committees and platforms. This consultation process led to the selection of 45 women leaders, beneficiaries of the rams, according to transparent criteria accepted by all. The conditions for accessing the breeding service (vaccination of ewes, feed supplies, nominal fees) were defined and recorded in a local register.

The rams were purchased through a tender process and then officially handed over to the beneficiaries at a ceremony presided over by the municipal authorities. Technical training was organised on the collective management of crossbreeding plans. Each women's group thus had an operational plan, supported by a veterinary representative in charge of monitoring reproduction.

The total cost of this intervention was 14,351,500 CFA francs, covering the acquisition of breeding stock, training, planning activities and the structuring of community management systems.

### Results achieved

The activity led to the establishment of an operational community genetic improvement system in all target municipalities. A total of 45 women were provided with a Bali-bali ram to offer breeding services within their village. In each group, 15 women were trained in the technical and collective management of the crossbreeding programme.

Over a one-year follow-up period, the rams produced 615 lambs, including 312 females, illustrating a good start to genetic dissemination. The testimonies of several beneficiaries, including Djeneba Coulibaly in N'Gountjina, attest to the transformative effects of this activity on the income, economic autonomy and social recognition of the women involved. Some have begun to generate significant income by providing breeding services to neighbouring farmers, according to a predefined and redistributive pricing system.

This intervention has helped to break a double barrier: dependence on northern regions for the

acquisition of high-performance rams, and the low productivity of local breeds. It marks a step towards a structural improvement in sheep productivity in the targeted areas

### Challenges encountered

The main challenge encountered concerned the isolation of breeding rams in certain families. This technical requirement, necessary to ensure the quality of crossbreeding, was not understood by everyone. The intervention of village and municipal authorities was necessary to gain acceptance of this practice by certain heads of families.

Furthermore, although the scheme is based on a collective ownership model, efforts are still needed to ensure transparent governance of the services offered and the traceability of financial and in-kind contributions. These aspects will be crucial to ensuring the sustainability of the system and avoiding conflicts or individual abuses..

## Lessons learned and recommendations

- ⊙ **Involving local stakeholders from the outset of activity design enhances the effectiveness of their implementation.** The project experience has shown that when innovation platforms and women's groups are involved from the outset, activities are better understood, better accepted and more easily implemented. Their active participation in selecting beneficiaries, choosing innovations and managing resources has helped to anchor the actions in local dynamics. This involvement also promoted a fair distribution of responsibilities and collective ownership of the results. To reinforce these dynamics, it is essential to systematically provide for co-construction mechanisms from the planning stage onwards, so that beneficiaries become true co-actors of change.
- ⊙ **The adoption of technical innovations depends on their simplicity, accessibility and perceived usefulness.** The technologies introduced – fodder crops, nutritional blocks, sheep crossbreeding – were quickly adopted once users could see the concrete effects on their activity and income. These are technically simple, inexpensive and immediately valuable solutions, which has reinforced their dissemination. Seeing other beneficiaries benefit from them also played a key role in their adoption. This observation highlights that, beyond technical relevance, it is the suitability to perceived needs and the possibility of quickly testing the effects that determine the success of innovations. Future interventions would therefore benefit from favouring low-cost solutions adapted to local capacities and organising visible and reproducible demonstrations.
- ⊙ **The best results were achieved in areas where innovation platforms are active and structured.** LMunicipalities where platforms have been continuously supported have recorded the highest achievement rates, sometimes well above the initial targets. Their regular operation, their ability to mobilise stakeholders, and their role as information relays have helped to create an environment conducive to innovation. Conversely, results were more limited where platforms were poorly organised. This shows that platforms are not only coordination tools but also drivers of collective performance. To maximise their

impact, it is necessary to strengthen their legal structure, management capacity, and recognition by local institutions and partners.

- ⊙ **Access to finance remains a structural constraint that hinders scaling up.** Despite the production of bankable plans, the organisation of B2B meetings and financial education training, only 10% of actors were able to secure credit. This low rate reflects the mistrust of financial institutions, the lack of guarantees from producers, and the insufficient adaptation of financial products to the reality of the livestock sector. This obstacle limits investment capacity and compromises the consolidation of the results achieved. There is an urgent need to explore alternative solutions such as joint guarantee mechanisms, tripartite agreements with MFIs, or seed grants, while continuing efforts to raise awareness and engage in dialogue with the banking sector.
- ⊙ **Scaling up innovations is possible when local support is provided.** The rapid spread of Brachiaria, nutritional blocks and breeding rams demonstrates real potential for replication. This momentum has been made possible by local technical support, appropriate training tools and a demonstration effect within communities. However, scaling up remains dependent on the availability of inputs, local extension capacities, and regular monitoring. To replicate these successes, post-project support mechanisms should be planned from the outset, the skills of local relays should be strengthened, and simple educational resources should be developed to facilitate replication in other contexts.
- ⊙ **The sustainability of the gains achieved depends on a balance between technical solutions, economic viability, institutional anchoring, and policy alignment.** The innovations promoted have demonstrated their technical effectiveness and their appropriation by beneficiaries. Women producers of nutritional blocks, agro-livestock farmers practising fattening, and owners of breeding rams have been able to integrate these innovations into their daily practices. However, economic sustainability still depends on market structuring, the ability to collectively manage resources and ensure a stable income. Institutionally, the lack of legal status for the platforms limits their ability to enter into contracts or engage in dialogue with partners. Politically, the project's actions are in line with national policy guidelines, but could be better coordinated with local livestock support policies. To consolidate sustainability, it is crucial to strengthen the economic capacities of stakeholders, support their legal structuring, and facilitate their integration into public support mechanisms for the sector.

## About this capitalisation note

This note is the result of a participatory capitalisation process conducted as part of the first phase of the Programme to Support Livestock Marketing in West Africa (PACBAO). The aim of capitalisation is to document and promote experiences in the field in order to encourage learning, accountability and the scaling up of promising approaches. The information was gathered through interviews, field visits, document analysis and stakeholder consultations.

## About the PACBAO programme

The Regional Programme to Support Livestock Marketing in West Africa (PACBAO) is an ECOWAS initiative with financial support from Swiss Cooperation (SDC). It is part of the implementation of the Regional Agricultural Policy, ECOWAP. It aims to create conditions conducive to increasing livestock farmers' incomes by leveraging the private sector in regional livestock trade and regional public institutions. During its first phase (2018–2023), the programme contributed to strengthening the institutional and operational capacities of ECOWAS and financed 16 pilot projects in 11 countries in West Africa and the Sahel, which generated around ten good practices and innovations. The pilot projects mainly aimed to increase livestock productivity, improve the competitiveness of meat produced in the region in the face of competition from extra-community imports, facilitate and modernise intra-regional livestock trade, and improve relations between value chain actors, facilities and means for processing and transporting red meat.

The second phase of the programme (2024–2028) is in line with this approach and will focus on scaling up existing innovative practices while creating favourable conditions for promoting the livestock and meat sector. Its overall objective is to help meet the red meat and meat product needs of the populations of West Africa and the Sahel through the development of intraregional trade in livestock and meat and the control of extraregional imports of meat products. Specifically, the second phase of the programme aims to increase the supply of livestock and meat in terminal markets by at least 2.6% and reach approximately 500,000 direct beneficiaries, 40% of whom are young people and women.

## Acknowledgements

We express our sincere gratitude to all the individuals and institutions that contributed to the production of this capitalisation document. Your support, commitment and participation were essential to the success of this process.



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