

Adama Dissa, a champion of inclusive maize agribusiness in Sikasso

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Key themes: PO & Cluster development, PO-Firm relationship, Sustainability of coaching services

Maize–Mali PPP

SONAF is the lead company of the maize-Mali partnership aiming to increase local sourcing of yellow maize from smallholder producers and their organisations. SONAF trades yellow maize grain with major food and feed processing industries in Mali and surrounding countries.

Summary

The author focuses her story on Adama Dissa, who needs strong partners to develop SONAF, his maize marketing company. To this end, he commits to putting in place a decentralised framework of efficient clusters. Dissa realises that for this set-up to become sustainable, coaching in soft skills is critical. He is an unusual entrepreneur as he attends as many of the cluster coaching sessions as he can, considering that his business and also he himself will benefit (directly or indirectly) from this process. As the 2SCALE project comes to an end, Dissa is keen to contribute to looking for options to embed coaching services within the business model.

It is 8:30 a.m. on this 8th of November, 2016. We are about 15 people in a workshop room at the hotel Cinquantenaire in Sikasso, Mali. The workshop starts with a session on contracting and negotiation. This is the first time I am facilitating a learning workshop for 2SCALE, since being engaged by 2SCALE as a trainer-mentor for the yellow maize SONAF partnership in Sikasso. Youssouf Traoré, the partnership facilitator opens the workshop by saying: “Now that everybody is here, we can start”.

This surprises me a bit, so I inquire about the director of SONAF who had planned to participate – at least at the start of the workshop. Youssouf replies: “Indeed, there he is”, and points at a man seated in the centre of the room. And he is right, he is clearly there – Mr Adama Dissa, the Director General of SONAF. Somehow, I had failed to notice him. And so began my discovery of a rather exceptional man. Adama Dissa is unlike any other director I know. He is a businessman, yet full of empathy and able to relate to the

concerns of farmers. Originally from the area, Adama has more than 30 years' experience in the aggregation and marketing of cereals. When he first started, he would criss-cross the villages and markets around Sikasso on his bicycle, collecting and selling different cereals: white maize, yellow maize, millet, sorghum, etc.

Yellow maize for feed

Adama's retail store is in the central market of Sikasso, and he has different storage depots in town. From his store, he supplies his clients with several cereal products. His buyers include poultry farmers, semi-wholesalers and others based in Sikasso, Bamako and Kati. He also supplies the Grands moulins du Mali, a major poultry meal and feed production industry at Koulikoro, and other big clients of yellow maize in Senegal and Niger.

Yellow maize is one of the most important components of poultry feed. Until recently, it was hardly cultivated in the Sikasso region. Every season, Adama therefore had to import about 80% of the 8,000 tonnes of yellow maize required by SONAF clients in Mali, Senegal and Niger. He found this a serious loss for the producers of Sikasso, and moreover the logistics and import costs put a strain on SONAF.

So, when he heard about 2SCALE, Adama Dissa very quickly saw the project as an opportunity. By supporting the producers' organisation members to grow larger quantities of yellow maize, SONAF could acquire its needed supply locally and get rid of the additional import costs. Moreover, it would be an opportunity for the producers of Sikasso to increase and diversify their sources of income.

Involved from beginning to the end

Although he has a very busy agenda, Adama participates in each and every major meeting (training sessions, workshops, business events) with the coaches, input suppliers, financial institutions, etc. Adama likes to explain his interest to anyone wishing to hear it: "I am involved from the beginning to the end, I do not want to miss any of the workshops and meetings. The topics addressed, such as the development of business relationships, the analysis of production costs, strategies to reduce production costs, contracting and negotiation issues, financial education and loyalty, all are of immense importance."

During these meetings, Adama seizes any opportunity to sensitise and encourage the other value chain actors, to ensure positive changes during and after 2SCALE. He also sees that someone from SONAF actively participates in the local coaching events for the ten yellow maize ABCs in the Sikasso region. He especially appreciates the work of the internal coaches who are members of the producers' organisations and who go on to facilitate the local ABC coaching sessions based on what they learned during the higher-level training workshops.

Increasing links

These learning and exchange sessions have started to produce results. For the current season, more than 60 supply contracts linking producers' organisations, individual producers, collectors, and SONAF have secured the delivery of 8,000 tonnes of yellow maize. And this at a minimum price of 90 CFA francs/kg (about €0.14), which is 5 CFA francs higher than the average market price at the start of the season. If the market price comes to exceed the contract price during a season, both contracting parties convene to agree on a new price.

Farmers and their organisations need to take measures to get the best deal possible from this promising new market. To this end, the producers' organisations are increasingly linked to the input suppliers through credit contracts in order to help their members to get easier access to seed, fertiliser and pesticides. Adama Dissa facilitates these contracts by having SONAF guarantee the procurement of the yellow maize.

Through his participation in different workshops and coaching sessions, Adama has expanded his thinking and his relationships. In this way, he has become the most qualified candidate for decision-making positions in inter-professional cereal bodies (at local, national and sub-regional levels).

Reflecting beyond 2SCALE

In today's workshop, Adama and the other participants are reflecting on how to locally embed the capacity strengthening work of the internal coaches, and so to find mechanisms to fund their activities beyond the 2SCALE project. 2SCALE has agreed to support them in this reflection process. Their reflections include possible contributions of value chain actors to support the partnership coaching and the establishment of an innovation platform at partnership level.

SONAF is working to remain at the core of the emerging dynamics of the inclusive yellow maize agribusiness in Sikasso. Adama Dissa is convinced about a bright future for the sector, and concludes: "The business partnerships presently under construction will expand and grow stronger, and yellow maize will become the driving force of development in the region". With an engaged champion like Adama Dissa encouraging actors to keep improving the yellow maize value chain of Sikasso, the future looks very promising indeed.

11 The inter-professional body is a kind of platform at national level to allow the main stakeholders (FOs, traders, processors, transporters, Government,) of the sector to discuss about regulation and policies such as taxes, pricing mechanism, etc.

