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“Solidarity in a competing world —
fair use of resources”

Farmers Organisations’ Position in the Development of Sustainable Agriculture Practices in Burkina Faso

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Abstract

The concept of sustainable agriculture aims to address the drawbacks of conventional agriculture by employing a systems approach. A systems perspective is essential to understanding sustainability, by giving the tools to explore the interconnections between the social and ecological system of the farming environment. In recent decades, a range of sustainable agriculture practices (such as soil and water conservation, intercropping and the use of organic inputs) have been promoted by many development actors in Burkina Faso in order to adapt to the increasing environmental and climatic variability. Farmers Organisations (FOs) are portrayed as key drivers in this process; due to their position as an intermediary organisation between rural farmers and institutions.

Several studies have been done with regard to the role of FOs in agricultural and rural development, but little is known on how they position themselves in the sustainable agriculture paradigm. This research addresses this gap and explores the diversity of FOs involved in sustainable agriculture practices in Burkina Faso, in order to build a typology based on their position into this paradigm. It consisted of case studies of twenty FOs by using a triangulation of research methods: document analysis, observation, surveys and in-depth interviews. The main indicator for the definition of sustainable practices of FOs’ members is the integration of ecological principles into agricultural management in order to reduce dependency on external inputs and/or increase the productive capacity of their farming system.

The findings show that, FOs can have three main positions regarding the sustainable agriculture paradigm: minor position (sustainable practices concern a few farmers), average position (sustainable practices vary per types of crops grown) and major position (where sustainable practices are the dominant system for the majority of farmers). Further, the results indicate that the degree of involvement of FOs in the sustainable practices varies according to their origin. FOs with internal origins are much more involved in the sustainable practices as compared to those with the external origins. This points to the need to look at the potential roles that these FOs could provide to their members in the promotion of sustainable practices.

Keywords: Ecological principles, farmers organisations, intermediary organisation