



Illustration by Christine Harrison.

BREAKING THROUGH THE BARRIERS OF SCEPTICISM TO CREATE CONSTRUCTIVE AND EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

My experience in Senegal – by Bernadette Sadio

Our objective was to succeed in bringing together a network of community based organizations (CBOs) working in the rice sector, with the aim of fostering greater stakeholder involvement and giving them more power and voice through the PINORD programme (Programme d'appui aux Initiatives du Nord – Support Programme for Initiatives in the North). But why did this partnership model, the first of its kind in West Africa, not create the initial hoped-for enthusiasm?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bernadette has been working for Oxfam for eight years and has held different positions in the organization, including Senegal Country Livelihood Programme Officer, Regional Campaigns Officer, and Regional Humanitarian Officer. One year ago, she joined the Programme Quality team. Her main focus is to ensure regional and country programmes are meeting Oxfam quality standards. Her experience in partnership is drawn from four years working in the Senegal Country Programme, where all projects were implemented by partners.

PARTNERING FOR IMPACT SERIES

To do the work it does, Oxfam works closely with partners at all stages of the programme, in all kind of contexts: humanitarian, influencing, development, etc. But what does it mean for our staff? Each day brings new challenges and opportunities, so how do they do it? Following a reflective and productive writeshop,¹ this Partnering for Impact series was developed to share and explore learning from experienced practitioners about what it takes to 'work well in partnership'.

1 THE SPECTICISM BARRIER

The process was fraught with challenges, characterized by a shared mutual scepticism. The different points of view within Oxfam and the reluctance of some CBOs² was understandable, given that the traditional commitment rules between partners were being overturned in order to move to a lesser-known partnership model: the network model. Human beings are generally quite resistant to change and this partnership model (a network of community organizations) was quite new for Oxfam in West Africa.

Oxfam needs to invest further in a partnership approach that is more inclusive and which highlights our partners' capabilities. This not only forms part of our values, but is also a pillar of our partnership policy.

From the start of the networking process, both sides had reservations.

WITHIN THE CBOS

The reservations primarily came from the FDL (Fédération du Lao – Lao Federation), who have been an Oxfam partner since 1986.

*'They want to absorb us. We are still not happy with the idea of uniting. We have our community anchorage, we have projects underway, and we will have to share our meagre resources with them. We have to be really careful.'*³

– Mr. Guelei Niang, President of the FDL.

In fact, in its day, FDL benefited from a certain legitimacy through the success of projects implemented and funded by Oxfam, in particular those supporting women. The testimonies from women, collected during a review of CBOs (funded by Oxfam in the area), confirmed the community's satisfaction and principally that of women who had received funding for market garden activities and for the marketing of rice and milk.

WITHIN OXFAM

Members of Oxfam's regional office, in particular its new management, expressed scepticism towards the partnership model, as it was a new model of partnership, with collaborative ways of working, that was still new in the region in those days.

Members of the management team also expressed scepticism about the relevance of such a model in the rice sector in Senegal. For them, creating a network of partners in the rice sector was doomed to fail:

'It's a waste of time, you're never going to succeed. The place of rice imports in the national market and the policy concerning imports, as well as eating habits, makes your partnership project impossible.'

In contrast, the country team was convinced that networking would be the best way to provide more support to community organizations to manage the issue of local rice in the intervention area:

'Networking of community-based organizations will enable them to:

- Improve the access of local rice into the markets.
- Build the capacities of producer organizations.
- Develop the entrepreneurship of women within the rice sector.'

2 HOW DID WE MANAGE THESE OBSTACLES?

Despite the initial reservations, the PINORD member organizations, as well as the team in the Senegal office, overcame these obstacles.

Determination and dialogue were the keys to success.

Both the Oxfam team in Senegal and PINORD's member organizations were convinced that together they would have more of an impact, and that the community-based organizations working in the same sector had to join forces to achieve the desired results. This realization then motivated the team in the Senegal office, as well as the community organizations, to ensure the success of their partnership.

The frank and sincere dialogue between the team in the Senegal office and the members of PINORD was a determining factor in the programme implementation. From the start of the programme implementation and all through the partnership, we have had very good discussions and set up very good lines of communication together. Meetings in the Senegal office and on the ground with partners enabled us to lay the foundations for the partnership, to remove any ambiguity and to better understand the outline of this new partnership model. And throughout the partnership, this open communication has never waned.

Success of the PINORD programme

PINORD Grassroots organizations	No of members	Men	Women
ADENA – Association pour le Développement du Namarel (Association for the Development of Namarel)	7,030	3,375	3,655
UJAK – Union des jeunes agriculteurs (Union of Young Farmers)	4,828	1,884	2,944
ADESCAW – Amicale Socio-économique Sportive et Culturelle des Agriculteurs du Walo (Socio-economic, Sporting and Cultural Friends Association of Walo Farmers)	22,897	10,770	12,127
FPA – Fédération des périmètres autogérés (Federation of self-managed areas)	15,000	11,500	4,500
FDL - Fédération du Lao (Lao Federation)	17001	8,514	8,487
FAFD - Fédération des associations du Fouta pour le Développement (Federation of Fouta Associations for Development)	22,600	9,040	13,560
TOTAL	89,356	45,083	45,363

The programme immediately achieved significant results, registered during the programming period:

- **Strategic alliances between the agricultural, national and international organizations were created** (for example, with the le Conseil National de Concertation des Ruraux (CNCR – National Council for Rural Consultation), and the Organisations paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA – Farmers Organizations and Producers in West Africa).
- A consensus emerged between the different actors in the sector for high-quality rice, leading to the Valley Charter on Rice Quality in 2007 (to promote high-quality rice). This was the first of its kind in Senegal.
- Establishment of 'quality approach' credit funds and a guarantee fund for rice mass marketing.
- **Being consulted by the Senegalese government in all discussions affecting the rice sector.** Since 2007, PINORD has continuously been part of the Senegalese delegation in the negotiations for the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). Furthermore, PINORD was cited by the President at the time, Mr Abdoulaye Wade, as being a model domestic programme.
- PINORD **strengthened the spirit of solidarity between its member organizations:** the partner organizations support each other. For example, the community of one of its partners was devastated by floods and the whole of PINORD acted to support them.
- The PINORD programme has been successful **in assisting female entrepreneurs in the rice sector in the Senegal river valley.** For example, Mrs Bassine Gaye, a member of PINORD, was the first woman in the whole of the River Valley to create her own rural micro-enterprise. Furthermore, Mrs Korika Diaw, a member of PINORD, was the first rural illiterate woman to head her own company. In 2015, she was one of the top ten female entrepreneurs and leaders in Senegal.⁴

Her company currently has three processing units, owns rice-producing areas and employs young people and women.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

INTERNAL

- **Strengthen the links between the regional office and the country office.** Tensions can exist between different offices within the same organization. However, despite our different viewpoints, we also have the opportunity to work together and to learn from each other – for example, by creating the conditions for open and regular communication between the regional office and the country office, with a view to improving dialogue and also ensuring greater understanding and mutual ownership of the objectives and directions of the country office's programmes. Support and site visits are also desirable as these would demonstrate the importance placed on the country programmes, and would also give the organization more credit in the eyes of the partners and communities we work with.

WITH PARTNERS

- **Increase the bonds of solidarity and coaching of partner organizations.** Partnerships go beyond funding. For example, they enable us to link up with other organizations tackling the same subject of rice at national and regional levels, and capacity building in terms of advocacy so that they can defend their sector better.
- **Highlight and support the capabilities of community-based organizations** in dealing with the issues that concern them and provide appropriate support, especially institutional support: premises, office equipment to build capacity (training on key aspects of programme management such as finances, monitoring and evaluation work, advocacy actions, etc.).
- Find a way to **document and communicate this implementation process** through the procedure manual. Unfortunately, a comprehensive document, explaining how this partnership was created and summarizing the lessons learned from this process, does not exist. This would enable better learning on the networking process both inside Oxfam and for partners outside the country.
- Allocate more resources to support this type of partnership approach. For example, **lead lobbying activities with funding donors in order to promote investment in the networking partnership model**, and take care to clearly define everyone's roles and responsibilities.

4 CONCLUSION

The experience of the PINORD network enabled this partnership to be approached in an innovative way. PINORD, which is both a network and a programme at the same time, has become a federation of farmer organizations recognized nationally, regionally and internationally. It is active even beyond the programme and has become an indispensable actor in the sector, not only in the rice sector, but also in the Senegalese agricultural sector.

PINORD is therefore **a concrete example of partnership and sustainable development** because, despite Oxfam's withdrawal in 2009, the programme continues to develop, to levy its own funding and to play an influential role in the rice production sector. It has become an indispensable actor in the rice sector in Senegal.

NOTES

- 1 A 'writeshop' is an intensive, participatory process that brings together experts and process facilitators under one roof to produce simple, user-friendly materials in a short period of time.
- 2 CBO: Community Based Organization. A community based organization, public or private non-profit (including a church or religious entity) that is representative of a community or a significant segment of a community, and is engaged in meeting human, educational, environmental or public safety community needs.
- 3 Quotes taken from a 2006 evaluation report about partnership strategy.
- 4 This ranking was carried out by a Senegalese press organization, REWMI

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email programme learning team at programmelearning@oxfam.org.uk

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