

A FARM ADVISORY IN SENEGAL,

AN INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCE



WHY WOULD A FARMERS' UMBRELLA ORGANISATION SET UP A FARM ADVISORY?

FONGS is a farmers' umbrella organisation in Senegal that is composed of 30 local primary organisations. It has been promoting and using a farm advisory for almost 20 years through the simplified balance sheet methodology.

The farm advisory addresses a need expressed by the members of farmers' organisations and is justified by the fact that the State has in great part withdrawn from this sector, following the implementation of structural adjustment programmes aiming at reducing the costs of the public sector and rebalancing the budget.

The aim of structural adjustment is to revive economic growth and restore a country's financial equilibrium. This is done by taking drastic measures such as cutting public spending, reducing the size of the public services, raising the prices of basic necessities and liberalising certain sectors.

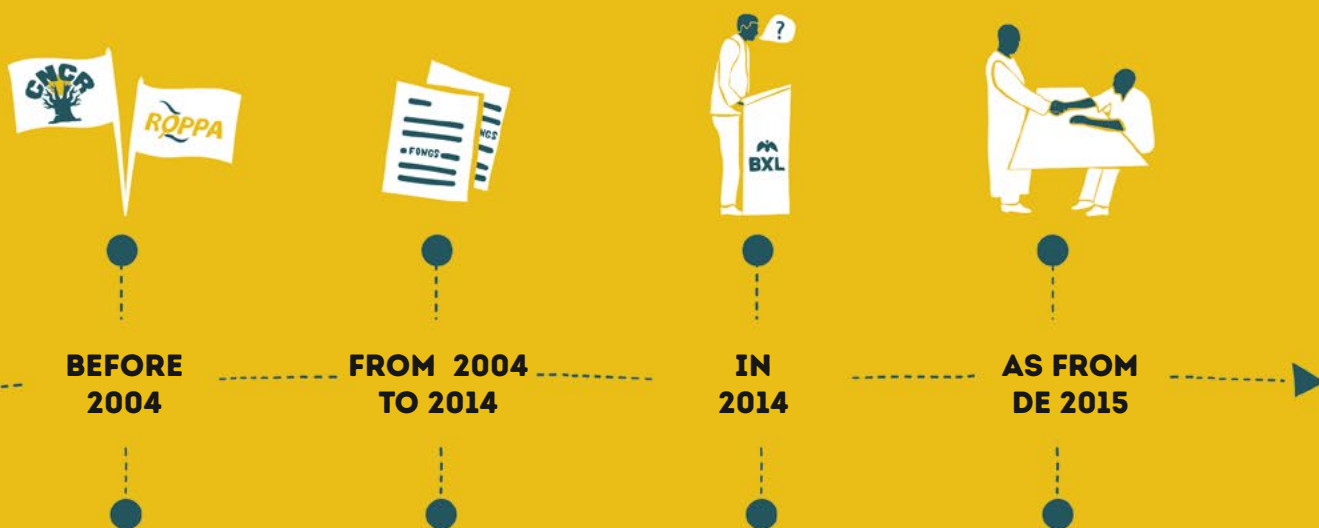
In Senegal, the first programmes were launched in the early 1980s under pressure from the Bretton Woods institutions, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.



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MAIN STEPS OF THE

FONGS



BEFORE 2004

FONGS has been engaged in the setting up of the national and regional farmers' movements, respectively Conseil National de Concertation des Ruraux du Sénégal - CNCR created in 1994 and Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs d'Afrique de l'ouest - ROPPA, created in 2000.

FROM 2004 TO 2014

family farms are recognised in several texts:

Loi d'Orientation Agricole Sylvo Pastorale (LOASP) en 2004

The agricultural policy of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAP) in 2005

La Grande Offensive Agricole pour la Nourriture et l'Abondance (GOANA) in 2008

The 2008 food crisis helped facilitating this recognition.

IN 2014

in the context of the international year of family farming, a symposium organised in Brussels addressed the issue of "how to support the transformation of family farms?".

FONGS was one of the mains stakeholders.

AS FROM DE 2015

FONGS launched the implementation of a series of proximity support and guidance systems for family farms, based on a partnership between the State and farmers' organisations.

THE METHODOLOGY

The simplified balance sheet is set up at family level. The original aspect of the approach is that the balance sheet is drafted in a “family assembly”, with all the members of the farm, making sure that women and young people are involved. Everyone gets a say!

With the support of a facilitator, the family will establish every year its identity card, describing its production means, its total agricultural production and its non-agricultural sources of revenues. The sum of revenues is then balanced with production costs and non-agricultural costs.

The result will help defining the number of months the family can live on its net agricultural production: its the hedging rate (HR).

Family farms are classified in 4 categories:

HR less than 3 months

HR between 3 and 6 months

HR between 6 and 12 months

HR beyond 12 months

FONGS has been using the simplified balance sheet for more or less 20 years.



This is how
1800 families
have been regularly
monitored in
preparation of the
international year of
family farming (2014).
At the moment,
600 families are still
participating in the
programme.

THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE SIMPLIFIED BALANCE SHEET



THE IDENTITY CARD

localisation, head of family, number of members in the family farm and their level of education, statement of migratory and exodus movements within the family with potential incoming money transfers.



PRODUCTION MEANS

land available, animals, investment made in the past two years and the available agricultural equipment.



NON-AGRICULTURAL REVENUE STREAMS



THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

balanced by type of culture (surface, total production, self-consumption, sales value); breeding, by animal type (pasture, number of animals, self-consumption, sales including sub-products like milk)

→ All this to allow for the calculation of the total value of what is being produced (self-consumption + sales).



• PRODUCTION COSTS:

costs such as seeds, fertilizers, phytosanitary products, cattle food, veterinary charges, loans etc.

→ The net value of the family farm is then calculated: this is the wealth created in one year by the farm.



ANNUAL REVENUES

- PRODUCTION COSTS

= **AMOUNT AVAILABLE TO COVER NON AGRICULTURAL EXPENSES** - groceries, phone, products such as soap, candles, gas, charcoal, health related costs, donations

THIS AMOUNT IS DIVIDED BY THE HOUSEHOLD'S MONTHLY EXPENSES TO CALCULATE THE COVERAGE RATE

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

An evaluation has been carried out at the beginning of 2020 within 3 farmers' organisations members of FONGS:

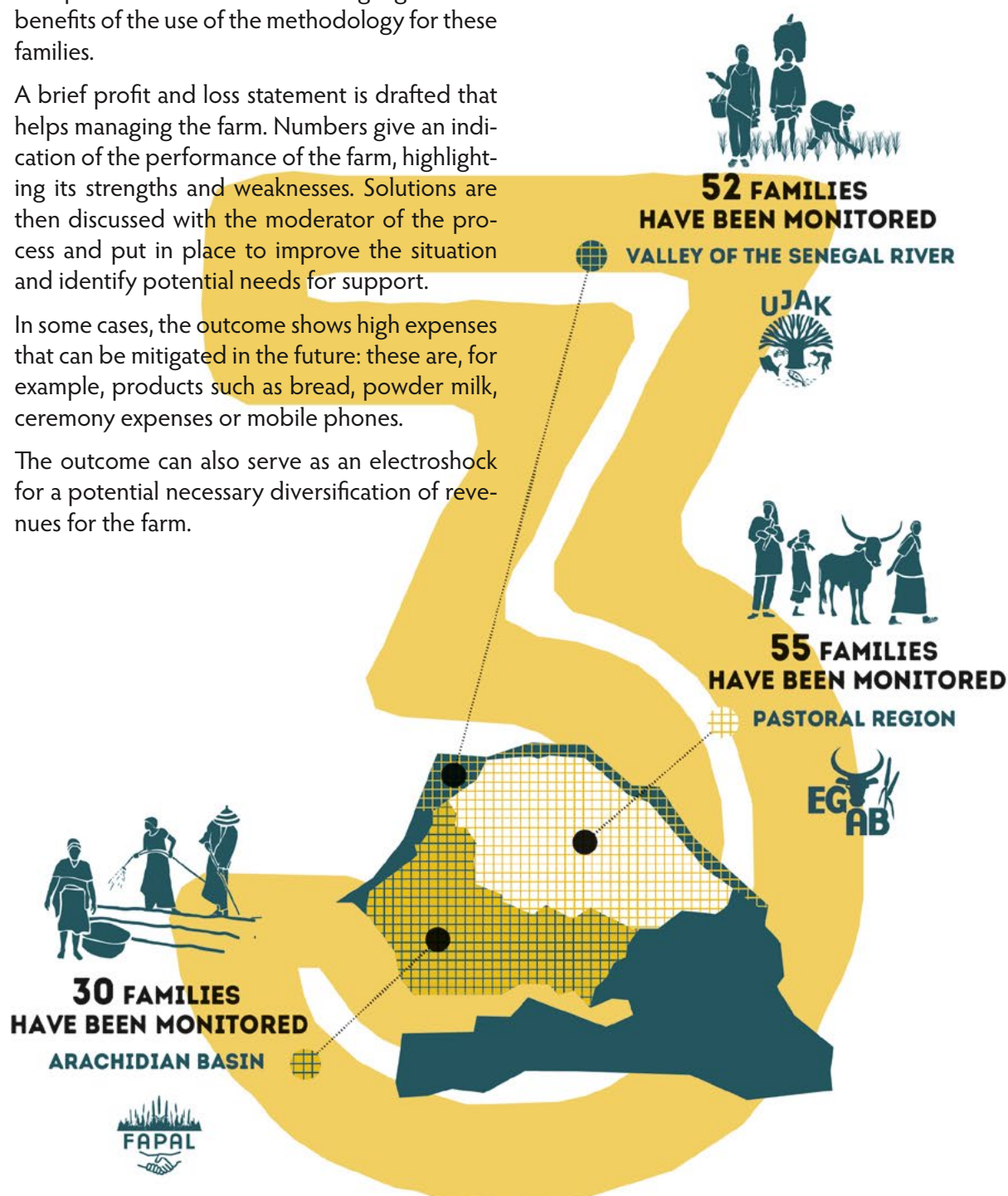
In total, these 3 farmers' organisations evaluate 137 families every year.

This process of evaluation has highlighted the benefits of the use of the methodology for these families.

A brief profit and loss statement is drafted that helps managing the farm. Numbers give an indication of the performance of the farm, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses. Solutions are then discussed with the moderator of the process and put in place to improve the situation and identify potential needs for support.

In some cases, the outcome shows high expenses that can be mitigated in the future: these are, for example, products such as bread, powder milk, ceremony expenses or mobile phones.

The outcome can also serve as an electroshock for a potential necessary diversification of revenues for the farm.



THANKS TO THE SIMPLIFIED BALANCE SHEET

Local farmers' organisations have a kind of barometer of their member family farms.

This data analysis bears a potential for these farmers' organisations that could be translated into a strategy to act and defend their members. However, factually, it can be noticed that these analyses are still very basic.

On the other hand, simplified balance sheets are actually complementing other sources of information which allow a farmers' organisation to prepare its strategy: village assemblies, changes in prices, contacts with technical services and other stakeholders.

In general, it is the more "advanced" families that are monitored. They possibly are more advanced partly because they receive advice. But maybe they are also chosen because they are relatively advanced. A big part of the leaders come from the family farms that use a simplified balance sheet.



A GLOBAL VIEW

For the umbrella organisation FONGS, simplified balance sheets are useful to have a global view on the sector at national level and to translate this view into a national (with the Conseil National de Concertation des Ruraux du Sénégal), or even international advocacy (with the Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs d'Afrique de l'ouest).

This is completed by a more refined analysis which allows to compare the coverage rate with several criteria such as: the density of the livestock, the link between the family farm and the market and the quantity of agricultural equipment.

For FONGS, simplified balance sheets have historically been very important because they have ascertained its credibility as a significant farmers' organisation in the different agroecological areas of the country. Simplified balance sheets have also helped reinforce the arguments in favour of family farms versus agrobusiness.

The production of knowledge by a farmers' organisation is a breakthrough in the self-management of its destiny by the farmer's movement. FONGS has become a reference in this domain compared to the national federation CNCR.



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THIS BEING SAID, THERE ARE NUANCES BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE



The tool does not seem very fit for stock breeders because it does not take into account the evolution of the livestock on the long term, over several years.



In the case of family farms, there are some doubts as to the reliability of data, in particular when it comes to whether family really declare their entire revenues or not.

Once the simplified balance sheet is completed, the facilitator takes the documentation with him and there is no trace of it in the family; conclusions and potential decisions are in general not computed in the sheet. The whole process can thus take more the aspect of a survey than that of a decision-making tool.



For the past 10 years, the same family farms have been monitored, which on the one hand bears the advantage of long-term monitoring , but which, on the other hand, does not allow to increase the number of farms benefiting from advice.

Another reason for the low number of participating family farms is the relatively important cost of the process. Some beneficiaries are not able to financially participate, which questions the sustainability of the process without any support from the State.



Finally, in some cases, part of the family does not participate in the process.

FARMERS' ORGANISATIONS AND INNOVATIONS

The simplified balance sheet is also a good tool to follow-up on innovations within family farms. Here are a few examples.

One thing these innovation approaches have in common is their wide communication towards members and the identification of the most motivated families (through facilitators, community radios), who are often very few. This is where you will find a lot of leaders. This low number limits a spreading effect.

A more or less significant financial support is provided in the context of these innovations (up to 600 000 FCFA in UJAK), under the form of a donation or a loan or a mix of both. Sometimes this also takes the form of a donation in nature for which the beneficiary does not necessarily realise the value. It is the case of FAPAL's compost pits for example.

In terms of financial support, the approach often depends on the type of projects and the available sources of financing.



For 80 families associated to EGAB, enclosure stables and fodder cultures have been put in place. This innovation allows for milk production during the dry season with a noticeable increase in sales.





At FAPAL, **55 families** benefit from the installation of compost pits and a local products transformation unit (cowpeas, millet, sorghum) is employing 24 women and promoting local consumption to substitute rice.



UJAK is located in an irrigated area, in the valley of the Senegal river, which allows to have 3 cultural seasons a year and a big diversity in terms of cultures and livestock.

UJAK promotes enhanced henhouses and sheep pens, combined with vaccination and food improvements. **997 families** have been supported in 2019. This innovation is relayed by the community radio, with the particular help of women.



CONCLUSION

Despite the few limitations that have been highlighted, related in particular to the long-term aspect of the financial support provision, the farm advisory FONGS has implemented is useful at the same time for family farms and to the farmers' movement that, by producing knowledge, has gained some credibility and capacity to defend family farms. The simplified balance sheet tool is also a good way to deploy and follow-up on innovating initiatives within farmers' organisations. Following the evaluation carried out, a number of measures will be implemented in the short and medium term by FONGS to improve its farm advisory system.

This issue of *Farming Dynamics* was written by Marc Mees (Head of Knowledge Management at SOS Faim Belgium).

Sources:

- Evaluation of farmers' tools for support and advice to the family farms' transformation, Sylvain COLMET-DAAGE et Aladj DIACK, TERO, 2020.
- From the political plea for the recognition of family farms to the operationally challenging support to their transformation through local proximity support frameworks for family farms: follow-up on Brussels symposium, FONGS 2017.

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