

## Monitoring Report

**Subject:** EOA monitoring visit in Mali

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**Date:** 7<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> September 2015

**Visited:** Visited MOBIOM, AOPP, REMATRAC, IER, HELEVTAS Swiss Interco operation and SDC. Also visited Agricultural farms practicing organic agriculture and also EOA marketing stalls

**Venue:** MALI

**Participants :** Venancia Wambua (EOA Project Manager), Robertson Nyikuli( Senior Accountant )

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## 1. Introduction

The Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) Initiative is an African led initiative aimed at promoting organic farming in Africa. This Initiative came about in response to the **African Heads of States Decision EX.CL/Dec.621 (XVII) on Organic Farming** that was made following the report of the Conference of Ministers of Agriculture held in Lilongwe, Malawi on 28 and 29 October 2010 on Organic Farming and issues facing African agriculture.

The Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I) has a mission to promote ecologically sound strategies and practices among diverse stakeholders in production, processing, marketing and policy making to safeguard the environment, improve livelihoods, alleviate poverty and guarantee food security

The overall goal of the initiative is to mainstream Ecological Organic Agriculture into national agricultural production systems by 2025 in order to improve agricultural productivity, food security, access to markets and sustainable development in Africa. And has 4 key strategic objectives;

1. To increase documentation of information and knowledge on organic agricultural products along the complete value chain and support relevant actors to translate it into practices and wide application.
2. To systematically inform producers about the EOA approaches and good practices and motivate their uptake through strengthening access to advisory and support services.
3. To substantially increase the share of quality organic products at the local, national and regional markets.
4. Strengthen inclusive stakeholder engagement in organic commodities value chain development by developing national, regional and continental multi-stakeholder platforms to advocate for changes in public policy, plans and practices.

The initiative under SDC is driven by six strategically focused pillars, namely: Research, Training and Extension; Information and Communication; Value Chain and Market Development; networking and partnerships, policy and programme development and institutional capacity development explained briefly as follows;

1. **Research, Training and Extension:** This pillar helps build up the body of scientific data supporting EOA.
2. **Information and communication:** This pillar is an avenue through which EOA reaches out to a vast majority of stakeholders on the continent.
3. **Value Chain and Market Development (VCMD);** Stimulating development of sustainable markets and increase trade in traditional and high value agricultural produce both at domestic and export levels within EOA.
4. **Networking and Partnerships;** Promoting engagement by relevant stakeholders including governments, farmers, civil society, private sector, and the international community.
5. **Policy and Programme Development;** Supporting the development and implementation of enabling policies and programmes.
6. **Institutional Capacity Development** Supporting and equipping professionals with skills and competences to promote EOA in Africa.

Under the current phase, ecological organic agriculture has 2 main streams of funding from Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) and Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC). The support from SDC runs from 2014 to 2018 and is spread in 8 countries of Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Benin while the support of SSNC is from 2013-2015 and is focussing on Eastern Africa Countries of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia

The EOA initiative in Mali is under the support from SDC which focuses on a multi stakeholder engagement. During inception workshops held in each of the 8 countries to roll out the project, organisations with capacity to take lead in the implementation of activities were democratically elected in each country.

Mali' s workshop, graced by the Minister for Agriculture, His Excellency Dr. Bokary Théréta, was held in CICB, Bamako, on 25 March 2014 and was attended by 67 participants. The Mouvement Biologique Malien (MOBIOM) was confirmed the Country Lead Organisation (CLO) and the Pillar Implementing Partners (PIPs) as Institut d'Economie Rural-Centre Regional de la Recherché Agricole (IER/CRRA)-Sikasso to be responsible for RTE, Association des Organisations Professionnelles Paysannes (AOPP) for IC, and Réseau Malien des transformateurs du coton biologique (REMATRAC Bio) to

undertake VCMD. A fully fletched Steering Committee consisting of 14 members including executive officials was created.

The visit therefore focussed on Mobiom as the CLO, on IER as the Pillar Implementing Partner of RTE, AOPP as Pillar Implementing Partner of IC and REMATRAC as Pillar Implementing Partners for VCMD.

## **2. Summary of visit**

The team from Biovision Africa Trust comprised of Mr. Robertson Nyikuli the EOA Senior Accountant and Ms. Venancia Wambua the EOA Project Manager. The team left Nairobi on 6<sup>th</sup> September in the morning and arrived in Bamako, Mali late in the afternoon same day. The team started its monitoring visit on 7<sup>th</sup> September by visiting Mobiom offices located 200 kilometres from Bamako city in a town called Bouguni

On 8<sup>th</sup> September the team visited AOPP an organisation that is in charge of implementing Pillar 2 of the EOA project and the same day in the afternoon visited farmer resource centre and one farm of a farmer practicing organic farming. On the 9<sup>th</sup> day we proceeded to hold a meeting with REMATRAC – BIO in charge of pillar 3 of EOA in the afternoon of 9<sup>th</sup> we visited farmers organic shop manned and managed by REMATRAC in Bamako. On 10<sup>th</sup> the team visited IER research institute in charge of Pillar 1 for research. In the afternoon the team visited Helvetas Swiss Cooperation offices for a courtesy call and discussions on EOA. On 11<sup>th</sup> afternoon the team paid a courtesy call to SDC offices in Bamako where they discussed the ongoing EOA initiative. The team arrived back in Nairobi on 12<sup>th</sup> September early morning.

### **Purpose & Objectives**

- I. Monitor the status of the project implementation and status in Mali and other
- II. Monitor financial situation of the partners in Mali
- III. Visit beneficiaries of the project
- IV. Get feedback on what is working and what is not
- V. Give recommendations on workable solutions for Mali

### **3. MOBIOM**

On 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015, the team visited Mobiom offices where we had a meeting with MOBIOM coordinator Djibril among others. The meeting was opened officially by Mobiom president Louka Cisse who also gave a brief background on Mobiom operations and history. The following were present;

- i. Djibril Traore- Mobiom Administrator/Director
- ii. Abou Dialo- Mobiom member
- iii. Louka Cisse- Mobiom President
- iv. Abdoulaye Diakite- Mobiom project coordinator
- v. Siaka Doumbui- Helvetas , Bouguni
- vi. Venancia Wambia- Biovision Africa Trust
- vii. Robertson Nyikuli- Biovision Africa Trust
- viii. Mousa Diarura- Mobiom member

#### **3.1 Background of Mobiom**

Mobiom is a farmer organisation with a network of 76 cooperatives with 10,000 persons. The cooperatives are spread over 80 areas and form an umbrella organisation. The 76 cooperatives have representation of 2 persons to the board of Mobiom. The board has 12 members in which 5 are committee members while 7 are executive members

The Farmers in Mobiom network produce cotton, sorghum, organic shoe, soya beans, mangoes and cereals. Mobiom links the cooperatives to Markets. In terms of operations, 5 members of the cooperative are in charge of monitoring by undertaking field visits to farmer fields to monitor the practice and adherence of organic farming practices. The cooperatives are certified by ECOSER. Yearly meetings of the groups take place in order to update members on progress of work

Mobiom established with support from Helvetas who are their main donors. IER, CMDT and Helvetas have done research on organic production in Mali. EU, ICCO, OXFAM are the main donors of Mobiom and now Mobiom is in current partnership with IFDC. Mobiom has introduced new crops to diversify income and improve soil fertility and also produces 2,000 tonnes per year of cotton.

Mobiom is also a member of COPAGEN which is a regional movement that fights GMO' s in West Africa. Mobioms biggest market is in the United States where they sell to Victoria Secretes Company with also TDV in France being a good market. It was noted that France is very much keen on organic cotton for their garments thus having cotton as the main source of income in Mali

It was noted that 32% of the farmers producing cotton are women. Most farmers are moving to organic farming because they have realised conventional agriculture reduces soil fertility drastically. However organic cotton production is still meeting a lot of challenges and competition from conventional farming which is considered a viable option because it has capacity of large scale production and given the fact that organic certification is expensive to farmers. Government also supports conventional agriculture more and for this reason had subsidised fertilizers unlike organic fertilizers. Mobiom is however supported by Government and for this reason attended the Mobiom Inception workshop that was held to roll out the project. The inception workshop was attended by the Minister of rural development and Mobiom has the opportunity to work with the minister' s local advisor

The ministry of rural development also was represented by 2 of its officials during the 3<sup>rd</sup> West Africa Conference held in Benin. Thus there is some support from the government on organic agriculture. In the meantime, Mobiom is making steps to have some elements of organic production entrenched in Mali' s production plans and policies

### **3.2 Mobiom Operations**

Mobiom has 3 bodies namely the General Assembly of cooperatives in which each cooperative sends in 2 delegates where each has 1 term of representation, the 2<sup>nd</sup> body is the Board of Directors (B.O.D) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> body is the Monitoring Board.

All decisions are passed during the General Assembly meeting held annually and implemented by the board that also controls financial decisions which are back to the General Assembly

The Board has qualified technical staff namely the Executive Director, technical staff, internal controller, field officers, supervisors and technical advisors who work closely with

farmers. The technical advisors recruit farmers to the cooperatives. 3-4 cooperatives have 1 organic advisor

The internal control system is in place to support the cooperatives and comprises of the following;

1. 1 farmer representative
2. 1-3 village representatives

Mobiom has several other donors;

1. Swiss Development Corporation (SDC)
2. Helvetas Swiss Interco operation
3. Outilde Financement du Government Francais (AFD)
4. European Union (EU)
5. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture -FiBL
6. ICRISAT- Africa rising project
7. USAID Project through IFDC
8. Tree life- Arbedare Cotton Solidairs

Current technical staffs who are women in Mobiom are 6 with the board also having 1 woman representative

### **3.3 Challenges**

- Change in leadership of Mobiom which was not done in a smooth legal manner thus causing leadership instabilities and resulted into a tag of war between former director and current management with claims that former director mismanaged funds and therefore former director decided to take the matter to court.
- This has necessitated the current director to spend a lot of his time following up on legal issues instead of focusing on leadership and management aspects of the organization
- Donors have thus withheld funds as the tag of war continues
- Delays in submission of EOA project operational reports and financial reports with financial reports for the year 2014 being submitted mid 2015.
- Communication breakdown and lack of transparency thus causing a lot of mistrust by the management in BvAT who have for a long time not been able to know the status of the project in Mali

## 4. AOPP

Meeting with AOPP and EOA BvAT team was held on 8<sup>th</sup> September in the morning from 8:00am to 12:00noon and we visited a nearby farmer resource centre managed by AOPP in the afternoon from 2pm to 5pm. The following members were present during the meeting;

- i. Louka Cisse- Mobiom President
- ii. Djibril Traore- Mobiom Administrator/Director
- iii. Issa K. Coulibaly- AOPP Administrator/Director
- iv. Tiase Coublas- AOPP President
- v. Mamaou Traore- AOPP comptable/finance officer
- vi. Venancia Wambua- BvAT
- vii. Robertson Nyikui- BvAT
- viii. Siaka Doumba- Helvetas Swiss Interopération

### 4.1 Brief Background and operations of AOPP

AOPP is an association of farmers in Mali. Only farmers form this organisation. It was established on 16<sup>th</sup> of September in 1995 in Kuchala, Mali. It started with 24 farmers who have in time grown to currently 244 farmer organisations comprising of individual farmers and farmer associations. AOPP is also part of a regional farmer network like ROPPA and COPAGN which are regional network organisations.

AOPP board has 21 members with 1 woman representing every region. AOPP has networked a lot and created partnerships with unions like Cotton Unions like Cypov, Cyvac and SPCK. The cotton unions have also formed a cluster for coordination of issues on seed, livestock, farmer trainings, monitoring and evaluation aspects. The technical team is managed by 1 coordinator.

AOPP has various donors including Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) funding EOA through Biovision Africa Trust, Helvetas, European Union (EU), Agriculture Francais Development International (AFD), Catholic Committee Fight against hunger (CCFD) and others like SOSFN. AOPP has 30 permanent staff currently and has 60 support staff. All the staff has an Agronomy background. AOPP also has 3 main Farmer Resource Centres (F.R.C) where farmers meet to discuss policy and law, advocacy and other farming information. AOPP is also part of other networks like the APCAM where they discuss

' government vision in Agriculture. This team recently had a meeting to review farmer opportunities in Agricultural systems ad renewal of rural farer organisations

The team was informed that currently OXFAM and SDC are currently supporting ecological organic agriculture

#### **4.2 EOA Pillar 2 Progress Implementation**

The technical officer who was in charge of the coordination of the information and communication pillar has since on passed away early 2014 and since then the AOPP director has taken over as they seek to recruit a replacement with project implementation on track.

The EOA project has focussed on 2 regions of Sikas and Kayes with 10 hectares being dedicated for demonstrations on ecological organic agriculture farming practices and also undertaking EOA training the same place. However the demonstration plot in 2015 was not planted as the organisation seeks to source good organic seeds for the demonstration

During 2015, farmers were trained on application EOA practices with an attendance of 25 farmers. They were also trained on the use of bio pesticides and general organic practices

#### **4.3 Challenges**

##### **➤ Internal**

- Delay in release of funds from MOBIOM to AOPP
- AOPP' s delays in implementation of activities due to the demise of the lead project person and lack of funds

##### **➤ Externals**

- Lack of good quality seeds to give farmers and for demonstrations
- The 10 hectare demonstration plot has been faced with a lot of challenges from insecurity to water scarcity
- Soil degradation leading to poor infertile soils
- Impact of Climate change
- Human behaviour and attitude towards organic agriculture
- Common use of subsidised fertiliser from the government
- The state is not offering much support to organic farming

#### 4.4 Lessons

- There is need to keep building the capacity of farmers who do not regularly apply organic farming practices inspite of being trained
- There is also need to instil in them traditional practices of ancestors that would enhance their fight against climate change
- There is a big challenge on availability of good quality seeds and thus AOPP is working hard to introduce such as currently they are the brand leader of seed in Mali with the major challenge for seed being for cereals and vegetables
- AOPP is currently in consultation with research department of IER to introduce a new seed variety for millet
- A study has shown the need for farmers to have farming equipment. Majority are ready to work and practice organic farming but lack equipments especially women. OXFAM is currently providing farming equipments
- Due to seed challenges farmers have formed a seeds union
- There are plans to advertise the seeds and also organise farmers to decentralise seed distribution
- It has been observed that the seed has 30-40% success rate with farms

#### 4.5 Opportunities

1. Partners who are ready to support various aspects connected to EOA like mitigation of effects of climate change using climate smart agriculture
2. Mali is well known globally for producing organic cotton and thus they need to tap into this opportunity
3. Funding opportunities with various partners seeking to fund the various initiatives
4. Opportunity within the Land tenure law
5. Agricultural orientation law that has national fund to support agriculture
6. Opportunity with the Agriculture Development Policy (PDA)
7. Opportunity with the land policy (PFA)

## **5. REMATRAC- BIO**

The meeting was held on 9/9/2015 starting at 9am. The following were present during the meeting;

### **5.1 Brief background of REMATRAC-BIO**

Rematrac is a network of 12 enterprises that undertake processing of organic cotton with support for the establishment offered by Helvetas. The network has a secretariat and a treasurer with the network having 5 men and 7 women and includes all regions in Mali with most of their products coming from the Northern Part of Mali.

Rematrac was founded in 2012 and currently Rematrac has 12 staff and 1 president. They currently have 3 donors namely SDC, Helvetas and International Trade Centre. Other partners include the Platform National of Handcraft (PNpatex) which is in the ministry of agriculture, ministry of handcraft and ministry of finance and trade. This kind of support has enabled them not to pay export taxes within the ECOWAS countries.

African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA) supports them in the export of organic cotton to USA and this has enabled exports without any charges. Rematrac is legally registered and have general assembly on a yearly basis where majority decision carries the day while they undertake annual audits on a yearly basis and are part of a platform called COMATEX that processes cotton

The network has a shop which was established in December 2014 with much support from Helvetas and 10% of profits from the shop is ploughed back to the network and the rest allocated to other expenses like paying the shop manager and paying rent. The shop brings in profits of 20,000 FCFA /year to the network and interested persons join with a fee of 100,000 FCFA. COMATEX platform for organic cotton production is not certified and this brings in a lot of hindrance

### **5.2 Implementation of EOA activities under Pillar 3**

- It was reported that Rematrac received part of the funds transfer from Mobiom of USD 6,770 in November 2014 instead of receiving the full amount of 14,554.27 a delay that could not be explained

- A training on value chain development and marketing was undertaken where partners were trained on mechanisms of how to export handcraft goods to Burkina Faso capital city
- Network also planning to participate in the SICOA trade fair in Burkina Faso
- The network also took part in the national stakeholders meeting brought together by Mobiom in order to review the continental strategic plan
- The network has plans to train producers on organic production and gardeners on Value Chain and Market Development

### 5.3 Opportunities

- Before the creation of the marketing networks, Rematrac did not have access to financial support
- The network has enabled them to have access to raw materials

### 5.4 Challenges

- Lack of sufficient funds due to the release of insufficient funds by Mobiom to Rematrac with a lot of pillar 3 activities being pre financed
- There is currently no staff hired to manage and implement project activities and they currently supported by staff from Helvetas
- Rematrac does not have a physical office and only use the shop for office work
- The network is finding it hard to access organic cotton because majority of farmers prefer to grow the conventional cotton
- Organic certification a big challenge too because the whole Rematrac network is not certified
- Processing of organic cotton is a challenge because it is expensive. This given the fact that the processing has to be done separately from the conventional cotton yet using the same processing machines.
- The network lacks equipments for processing the cotton like spinning machines and dye equipments
- The local market in Mali does not also attract good profits
- The spinning of materials takes long and this slows down the production of finished products and also makes the products expensive
- The local citizens/buyers are not aware of the benefits of wearing/using organic cotton
- There is little training going towards persons producing organic products

- There is a big challenge processing of organic cotton by COMATEX who are currently not certified

### **5.3 Way forward**

- There is need for a lot of Advocacy on organic farming production systems to the government
- There is need to establish independent mechanisms for processing organic cotton like owning their own processing machine
- There is need to for training members on packaging of finished products and marketing

## **6. IER**

The meeting took place on 9<sup>th</sup> of September from 8.00am to 12:00pm. The members present were 7 as follows;

1. Sissoko Fagaye- IER
2. Ibrahima Londuwia- IER
3. Abdoulaye Diakite- Mobiom
4. Louka Cisse- Mobiom
5. Venancia Wambua- BvAT
6. Robertson Nyikuli-BvAT

The team was welcomed by Dr. Sissoko who is heading this project and the rest also introduced themselves.

### **6.1 Background of IER**

IER started working on EOA in 1998 with support from Helvetas on areas of ecology and entomology and also support on soil fertility research. They started with various projects and other stalled for various reasons like a project of cotton and termite mounts which failed because of the perception of destroying termite mounts. They also tried a project on collection of house hold waste and later realised a lot of heavy metal deposits thus it had to be stopped. However other organic related projects have been successful like research on bio pesticides, agroforestry work to improve on soil fertility and a sypro-bio project funded by Swiss government

## **6.2 EOA project implementation status**

The project implementation has been ongoing in spite of delayed funds from Mobiom. The research on identification and documentation of farmer knowledge gaps is ongoing with also of focus on cotton which is the major cash crop in Mali. IER for this purpose is closely working with Association of African Cotton Producers (APROCA) on soil fertilisation issues. A demonstration plot has also been set up in Sikaso for purposes of demonstration and experimentation

## **6.3 Challenges /Various knowledge gaps in EOA have been identified as follows;**

- I. Crop management knowledge- farmers lack capacity in terms of manure preparation and application. Farmers are not aware of manure quality they use and also the quantities to apply unlike in conventional agriculture where application levels, the nutrient component are well indicated in the bags.
- II. Economic visibility of EOA- the yield of organic cotton is low compared to conventional cotton that can be grown in large scale thus farmers are more focused on quantities rather than quality of the cotton
- III. Cotton companies are also interested in quantities not quality

## **6.4 Way forward**

- I. EOA economic benefit analysis is important to ascertain economic value of organic cotton
- II. Bio pesticide development is also lagging behind and needs more focus
- III. Farmers also need training on rapid decomposing of manure

## **7 COURTESY VISIT TO SDC-MALI OFFICE**

The Biovision Africa Trust team, Helvetas team and Mobiom team paid a courtesy visit to SDC main office in Bamako, Mali. The meeting took place on 9<sup>th</sup> September from 2pm to 3pm. In attendance from SDC were Loebell Andreas, Diani Djibri and Bloch Marc.

The meeting started with introductions with participants introducing themselves and which organisations they work for with opening remarks from Andreas Loebell who welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The meeting started by a briefing from Venancia Wambua on the ongoing EOA Initiative funded by SDC

The team from SDC Mali were keen to know the status of EOA in Mali.

## 8 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Generally the state of implementation of the project is lagging behind drastically. It was noted by the EOA Biovision team that there hasn't been much progress in project implementation in 2015. This has been majorly due to leadership struggles in Mobiom where the board of Mobiom and former director are involved in court cases after the former director took the board of Mobiom to court for wrongful dismissal. Another reason for the project lagging behind was the administrator/director of Mobiom at that time was ailing with ill health for approximately 6 months.

This current situation has slowed down tremendously the implementation because funds transferred to Mobiom at the start of the project in June 2014 were not released to Pillar Implementing Partners on time with some partners receiving their funds as late as December 2014.

It was also observed that the contracts between Mobiom and its Pillar Implementing Partners (AOPP, REMATRAC&IER) did not follow the given guidelines. The contracts only covered one year (2014) and as at the time of monitoring in September 2015, the contracts had not been renewed. Thus Mobiom has been operating with PIPs with outdated contracts. This issues needs to be addressed urgently and Mobiom urged to develop new contracts that spell out well the requirements and guidelines as provided by BvAT through SDC

It was also observed with concern that Mobiom did not release funds to PIPs as outlined in their contract with Biovision Africa Trust. As per the signed contract with Mobiom, funds to PIPs should be sent in full as outlined in the financial disbursement schedule annexed to the main contract. However it was noted that PIPs were not even aware of the amount of funds that were supposed to be released to them and thus the funds were not released in full. There is thus need to ensure communication from BvAT is very clear on amounts and schedule of funds disbursements to PIPs

Due to failure of Mobiom to release funds in full as agreed upon, PIPs have not had sufficient funds to carry out their activities now for a year and for this reason not much has been accomplished in terms of project implementation in Mali. There is thus need to address the current issues facing our partners in Mali in order to fast track the activities

There was also a disconnect and breakdown of information between Mobiom and its PIPs and also a breakdown with the entire West Africa Cluster Network and with the Lead Coordinating Organisation (BvAT). This early 2015 when Mobiom was not able to keep track of emails sent to them and their inability to submit necessary documents like reports and support documents. It was also observed that the EOA partners from Mali were entirely not aware about the planned 3<sup>rd</sup> Africa Organic Conference in Nigeria. This was a major event and it was worrying to note that our partners in Mali were not aware.

REMATRAC in charge of Pillar 3 had also not internalised their work plan and thus it was not clear to them of what was expected of them in terms of implementation of value chain and market development pillar. The Biovision team had to take time approximately 2 hours to take them through the work plan and agree on what needs to be done. This means that Mobiom as the CLO did not and does not hold planning meetings with its PIPs for purposes of project planning and development of work plans.

At the time of the visit, Mobiom and its PIPs had not yet been able to submit financial reports for 2014 and the supporting documents as agreed in the contract with BvAT. This could be attributed to leadership wrangles mentioned above.

It was also noted from discussions held with PIPs that majority are not confident with having Mobiom as the Country Lead Organisation.

Due to this lack of trust, PIPs requested that BvAT seeks options of having direct contracts with them as they seek to sort out the issues facing Mobiom

Given the leadership wrangles facing Mobiom currently, there is need for options to be explored on how to salvage the project implementation status in Mali.



**Monitoring visit in Mobiom; Team of Helvetas, BvATand Mobiom**



**Biovision Africa Trust Staff undertaking the Monitoring visit in Mali**



**Farmer communication materials**



**AOPP staff following deliberations of the monitoring visit**



**A visit to one of the Farmer Resource Centre in Mali**





**A farm visit to a farmer practicing organic agriculture**



**Farmer resource centre**