



SOLINSA
Support of Learning and Innovation
Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

Agricultural Knowledge Systems In Transition:
Towards a more effective and efficient support of Learning
and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

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ASSOCIATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FODDER PRODUCTION (ADCF)

LINSA Case Study Report: Switzerland

David Bourdin & Kim Anh Joly



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Partners in the Solinsa projects are :

- Heidrun Moschitz, Robert Home, Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), Switzerland
- Gianluca Brunori, Adanella Rossi, Antonella Ara, Elena Favelli, Giaime Berti, University of Pisa, Italy
- Julie Ingram, James Kirwan, Chris Rayfield, Nigel Curry, Damian Maye, CCRI (University of Gloucestershire and University of West of England), United Kingdom
- Dirk Roep, Laurens Klerkx, Frans Hermans, Wageningen University, The Netherlands
- David Bourdin, Kim Anh Joly, Niels Rump, Pierre Praz, AGRIDEA, Switzerland
- Dominique Barjolle, Loredana Sorg, Delphine Enaudi, Federal Institute for Technology, Switzerland
- Talis Tisenkopfs, Sandra Sumane, Ilse Lace, Baltic Studies Centre, Latvia
- Anne-Charlotte Dockès, Delphine Neumeister, French Livestock Institute, France
- Volker Hoffmann, Simone Helmle, Stefan Burkart, Vinzenz Bauer, University of Hohenheim, Germany
- Gusztav Nemes, Judit Kis, Viktória Tési-Páll, Agi Varga, Zoltan Bakucs, Institute of Economics of Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary

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1 SUMMARY

Association for the development of fodder production “ADCF” is gathering some institutions of the Agricultural Knowledge System “AKIS”, seeds firms and farmers with the objective to foster fodder production and conservation based on the natural resources of Swiss farms.

The French section of the “ADCF” was our main partner in the project. The board of its technical commission “CT-ADCF” is the place for exchanges between experts from a same disciplinary field having different interests (research, education, extension, seeds sale) in order to develop practical solutions based on scientific evidences and field experiences to address the needs and problems of farmers. Solutions are then shared inside LINSAs through so-called boundary objects, such as labelled seeds-mix for pastures and grasslands, technical datasheets on fodder production, training for extensionists and visits dedicated to farmers.

The ADCF as a LINSAs is a boundary organisation acting as a bridge between the AKIS and the practitioners. The main objective of the association fits to the current trend towards sustainable development challenges (climatic change and resources scarcity), the Swiss agricultural policy objectives (maximize grass in cattle food) and the consumer preferences (meat and dairy products based on a grass-fed animals). The great challenge remains to ensure the continuation of this fruitful collaboration while needs for further support appear at two levels: (1) the availability of resources within the network for the technical commission’s activities, research at national level and extension at a more regional level and (2) a policy and market contexts that value the quality of farm fodder based animal husbandry.

Throughout our collaboration, different interactions took place. After a preliminary desk study, we facilitated five interactive workshops (i.e. SWOT analysis, outcome mapping) over 2 years at CT-ADCF board meetings. To deepen the analysis of data and address LINSAs and SOLINSAs issues, 4 semi-structured interviews with members of the board of CT-ADCF and a satisfaction questionnaire to farmers were conducted.

The CT-ADCF is a community of practices with mutual engagement through regular participation to meetings, joint enterprise as roles a clearly shared to meet a common goal and shared repertoire with a strong common culture. It validates and reifies innovations and knowledge from a larger network of both researchers and farmers. Main boundary objects are products and activities described above but do not overlook the importance of founding documents of the association (i.e. principles, goal, and strategy) and the logo. Even if radical innovations do not take place within the association, it has tools to identify, support and disseminate novelties and of course support incremental innovations.

The contribution of the ADCF to learning and innovation requires better communication. Policy actors and the AKIS must recognise that boundary objects (products and activities) are indicators of on-going learning and innovation processes. Boundary objects have a broader added-value where invisible results are continuous training of advisers, identification of research topics and information sharing between peers. In a context where public resources for AKIS organisations are getting scarce, competitiveness and the need for visibility from the different organisations are gaining importance, the association is strongly affected by extension and research organisations' or private seed firms' strategies. Actual context and market trends remain decisive for innovation in the field of fodder production and conservation. The association's influence on this context could be reinforced.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Description of the LINSAs

The LINSAs are an association gathering institutions of the formal Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System “AKIS”, seeds firms and farmers. Its main objective is to foster fodder production and conservation based on the natural resources of Swiss farms. The French section of the Association for the development of fodder production (ADCF) was our main partner in the SOLINSA project.

In terms of organisation, the association is well institutionalized. It includes:

- A national committee of representatives of the main public funded AKIS organizations;
- A technical commission, a board of 14 experts from various public funded AKIS organizations (research, extension, education) and from a firm selling seeds for pastures and grasslands, some of the experts being also farmers. The technical commission’s management is conducted by two persons;
- The members of the association who are mainly farmers but also AKIS organizations.

In the network, the technical commission of the ADCF “CT-ADCF” acts as an important interface between:

- Research stations active on the field of fodder production at national level;
- Institutions of the AKIS responsible for education or extension at cantonal level;
- Farmers who are implementing their own practices.

The CT-ADCF is the place where coordination and exchanges between experts from a same disciplinary field but having different interests can take place. Through collecting problems and needs from farmers, they exchange to develop solutions based on scientific evidences and practices based experience. They also offer different activities or products to their members:

- labelled seeds mix for pastures and grasslands,
- technical datasheets on fodder production,
- training for extensionists,
- visits dedicated to farmers.

In term of resources, the ADCF is receiving a funding from the ministry of agriculture, through the membership fees, the sale of their products and taxes on labeled seeds’ sales. The AKIS institutions that have involved an expert in the CT-ADCF are indirectly participating through the time allocated by their experts (working hours).

2.2 Characteristics of the LINSAs

It is a network composed of cantonal clusters (farmers, advisers and teachers), a regional cluster for the French-speaking part of Switzerland and a national cluster for agronomic research and marketing seeds' sales. The association formalizes and institutionalises this network.

It contributed and contributes to innovation (labelled seeds, improved techniques and processes for sustainable fodder production and conservation). The current challenge is on one side to maintain the know-how and on the other side to find adequate solutions to challenges to come: climatic change and scarcity of resources.

There is learning: questions and problems faced by farmers are regularly analyzed and existing or new solutions identified. Results from research and practice are confronted. New products or processes from private firms analysed and tested. Events for experience sharing, demonstrations and technical datasheets allow transfer of knowledge and information.

It contributes to sustainable agriculture by reducing the dependence on fodder imports and concentrated feedingstuffs (i.e. soya) using fodder produced on the farm and having a better balance between animal needs, production of meat and milk and capacity of the agro-ecosystem.

2.3 Main aims of the analysis

“On the paper”, the association looks like an interesting model to ensure coordination and adequate knowledge flow on a topic within the AKIS. The collaboration with the SOLINSA project aims to address some issues:

- What is the resilience capacity of the network to contribute to emerging innovations?
- How is the coordination between the AKIS organisations really working?

Compare the organisation structure and official processes of the association with the learning and innovation processes that are really taking place within the network.

3 METHODS

During the collaboration with the technical commission of the ADCF, a combination of different methods has been employed: a desk study, interviews, a satisfaction questionnaire and five interactive workshops. This combination allowed the collection and the analysis of the data.

The desk study was based on existing documents relative to the association: its website, technical datasheets, the strategy of the association, the formal documents describing the association (i.e. by-laws, strategy) and some presentations made by the leaders as well as a book describing the activities of the association for the past 75 years.

First contacts with the manager of the technical commission and the other leaders were made to present the SOLINSA project and a possible collaboration. An agreement was obtained to have a first workshop during one of the meeting of the board of the technical commission. Each meeting of the board lasted one day and some 2 to 3 hours were spent to SOLINSA workshop. During the first meeting, a first analysis of the network, based on a quick desk study, was presented and discussed using visualisation techniques (flipchart, moderation cards). An agreement for further collaboration was then made.

Between the first and the second workshop, the SOLINSA team did 4 semi-structured interviews of member of the CT-ADCF board and a more in-depth desk study. The information and analysis about *Scale, origin and function* and *Temporality* were done during the first workshop, the desk study and the semi-structured interviews.

During the second participatory workshop, similar visualisation techniques were used (flipchart, moderation cards) in order to make a SWOT analysis, and imagine scenarios on the future of the association, different brainstorming were done. It allowed a deepening of the analysis with specific focus on learning and innovation processes and on the *Degree of integration*. Two main questions were identified by the members of technical commission for further analysis with the SOLINSA team:

- How to increase interactions with farmers (target audience)?
- How to adapt the available products and activities of the technical commission?

The third and fourth workshops were more ‘action oriented’ in order to deepen the two questions previously identified and develop possible answers. Together with the technical commission, a satisfaction questionnaire, to be sent to the members of the association, was designed both as a paper and an online version and the results analysed. A workshop with farmers was planned but then cancelled due to low participation (though it is still planned to be organized

during the winter, when farmers have more time). A workshop using the Outcome mapping method was organized in order to identify possible adaptation of the activities and products of the technical commission. The collaboration on those two main questions allowed deepening the analysis on the *Learning and innovation processes* as well as on the *Governance*.

The last workshop focused on project design and was used to evaluate the collaboration. Specific aspects on the support measures mobilised by the technical commission, on the *Link to the AKIS* and on *Effectiveness and cost efficiency* were discussed.

4 RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

4.1 Constraints and opportunities for LINSAs within their particular context and the support needs for successful LINSAs

The objectives of the association (to support to the development of on farm fodder production) fit with the current trend towards sustainable development. In the agricultural policy presently discussed in Switzerland, a new policy instrument will provide direct subsidies for farms producing animals with a high proportion of grass in the daily food ration. The cross compliance already implies that fodder from the farm are well valorised. The good perception on the market and by consumers of meat and dairy products based on a grass-fed animals is also a trend (private labels are appearing). There are also new potential target groups for the activities of the association: goat and sheep breeders and entrepreneurs. The use of new information and communication technologies with the Web 2.0 development is also a potential for renewed activities of the association.

The main constraint or risk is related to the availability of the resources. For each organisation of the AKIS, the trend goes towards a decrease of the resources and that affects directly the technical commission as the time allocated for participation is decreasing. Furthermore the link between advisers and farmers on technical issues is getting less importance. In the present context, buying fodder from outside or concentrated feedingstuffs is convenient and from an economic perspective often a valuable option chosen by the farmers. Importation increased quite a lot in the recent years in Switzerland.

The support needs are at two levels:

- (1) the availability of resources within the network for the technical commission's activities, for research at national level but also for extension and knowledge exchange at a more regional level and,
- (2) a policy and market contexts that valorise and recognise the quality of on farm fodder based animal husbandry.

4.2 Mechanisms of the network development, learning and innovation processes and connections with the formal AKS systems

In technical commission, the members of the board are chosen to represent the different institutions of the AKIS on one hand and the different regions on the other hand. They also need to have, in the case of advisers, a strong link to practice (experience, implementation of on-farm trials, being a farmer as well,

etc.) and agree with the principles of the association. Farmer-members' effective has continuously been decreasing since 1990. Two hypotheses can explain that: the number of farmers is decreasing anyway and the techniques promoted by the ADCF where innovative (novelties in the 70's and 80's: barn hay drying techniques, silage, manure management) and became part of the regime (cross compliance rules) since the 90's. There is probably not growth potential in terms of farmer members.

The technical commission can be considered as a community of practices: mutual engagement through the regular participation to the meetings, joint enterprise as roles a clearly shared to meet a common goal and shared repertoire with a strong common culture. Innovations and knowledge issued from a larger network both of researchers for scientific evidence and farmers for practices based experience are reified by the technical commission. Main boundary objects are the label for seeds, the technical datasheets and the documents describing the principles and aim of the association. The logo of the association is also an important boundary object as it is somehow the condition for each organisation to contribute with resources: it is for the association and not for one or the other leader's organisation. The technical commission is in that sense a boundary organisation acting as a bridge between the conventional AKIS and the farmers.

Radical innovations are mainly occurring in farmers group, private firms or abroad. Informal or formal networks can be created mostly beside the CT-ADCF and often at a more regional level. But quite rapidly, the association is able to identify, support and disseminate radical innovations. It also has the capacity to combine a large amount of knowledge and experience available to support incremental innovations.

4.3 Learning approaches, methods and tools used in LINSAs

In the network, different types of learning approaches are used:

Within the technical commission, knowledge exchange and co-production of knowledge is taking place using the products of the ADCF as boundary objects (technical datasheets, training courses, etc.). The objective is to reach a consensus on how to answer to questions and problems encountered in practice (ex: pests). Knowledge exchange is also taking place between farmers but is not formalized as an activity of the association. The experts of the board of the technical commission through their activities in their own organisation do have exchanges with farmers: on farm trials, advisory group, advisory activities, etc. with the aim is to respond to the demand of the farmers. For the association, the aim is to identify successful practices and knowledge demand.

This demand and need analysis is quite not explicit. It is not allocated a lot of resources for now but more investment does not guarantee better results.

Research organisations are implementing trials in order to provide scientific based and neutral evidence. This scientific based approach combined with the practice experience ensures the credibility and the added-value of the activities and products of the technical commission.

The ADCF products and services (datasheets, trainings, etc.) are typical knowledge and information transfer activities both mostly for codified and formal knowledge. Trainings, field and trial visits provide the opportunity to share non formalised and implicit knowledge. The information and documents are used by farmers directly or by advisers and teachers for extension and education. Those activities allow the association to reach a large number of farmers. They are quite offer oriented and sometimes, it doesn't match with the demand (low participation).

4.4 Tasks, roles and emerging quality needs for the knowledge and skills of actors and institutions

In the technical commission, different roles are defined: the president, the manager and the members. The leadership positions are here to guarantee an efficient and smooth process in order to facilitate exchanges and the development of the activities and products. Management skills are recognised as potential skills that require further development: new information and communication technologies and web 2.0 skills as well as project management especially for needs analysis, funding and evaluation. The technical knowledge is high and the other management skills good.

Research organisations are facing different challenges: find resources and mobilize funding, publish the results of research as it is the main evaluation criteria and finally, answer to the knowledge needs identified. The third aspect is not always the main priority as the needs are often practice and development oriented and the results difficult to publish and the activities difficult to fund on a project base.

Extension organisations need to provide advices with a holistic approach. Social and economic aspects of advisory are gaining importance while technical aspects of advice are remaining important. The challenge for organisations is to be able to combine generalist and specialist approaches.

4.5 Support measures which are most effective and cost efficient

The first types of support measures are for the resources allocated to the technical commission. In terms of finance, it is receiving a funding from the

ministry of agriculture, getting funds through the member sheep fees, the sale of their products and the tax on labeled seeds' sales. This type of support guarantees a great flexibility for the technical commission to develop the activities they think relevant and to target a large group of beneficiaries.

The AKIS organizations that have involved an expert in the board of the CT-ADCF are indirectly participating through the time allocated by their experts. This support measure shows the dependency towards the general support received by the organizations of the AKIS. These measures will soon or later be questioned since they are not explicit so there is a strong risk due to the decrease of funding in the different organizations and the on "project-based" allocation of support. In terms of networking and connection with the regional components of the network, it is quite effective but it might be considered by some people as not very cost efficient. Similar products and activities could be proposed using probably less resources but the learning process behind would be reduced and the risk of non-relevant products increased. For example, an actual issue at the national level is related to the willingness to centralise more the production of the technical datasheets in one language and translate them afterwards in 3 of the national languages existing in Switzerland. This might increase the cost efficiency of the datasheets production, but we have no idea about impact on benefits. Technical datasheets are boundary objects that allow a lot of other discussions, exchanges and learning during their production process.

From our point of view, the AKIS organisations are putting together their resources and know-how in a quite efficient way. The outcome in terms of coordination between the AKIS organisations is also quite good. The main question mark stays the targeted topics as well as the capacity to analyse the demand/needs of the farmers. It is possible to improve the targeting of the activities with the risk of inducing more costs and probably a narrower target group than today.

The most effective support measures are probably the rules linked to cross compliance in the agricultural policy and the market based initiatives that promote grass based production if the prices are adequate.

4.6 Evaluation criteria used for assessing the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of support measures that are exploited by LINSAs

Membership fees, participation to the events organised and use of the labelled seeds are clear indicators of the interest shown by the farmers as members of the ADCF. The decrease in the number of members does not seem to be an indicator of disinterest towards ADCF products; indeed this reduction is proportional to the number of farms at national level. The importance of the indirect participation through the salaries of the experts' members of the CT-ADCF and the fact that it is not clearly recorded makes

it difficult to evaluate. The tendency is that the AKIS organisations use the visibility of their contribution as criteria to evaluate the opportunity of their participation. This criterion induces a risk for the technical commission as its present functioning is based on a voluntary contribution with a visibility given to the association itself and not for the organisations contributing to it.

4.7 Operational tools that AKS actors (policy actors) could use to improve support for LINSAs and to enhance the capacity of involved actors, in order to foster successful LINSAs

In addition to the “usual business” in place today that allows exchanges, the elaboration of technical datasheets, trainings, etc. requires a stable amount of resources per year and continuity from year to year. To provide punctual added resources on a project base would be interesting. Those added resources could target evaluation of the activities, demand analysis or the development of new products and activities in particular using the Web 2.0 possibilities. The current members of the technical commission do not have the means in terms of resources and competences to develop such projects in addition to the actual activities and tasks.

As mentioned already, the quality and relevance of the activities depend on the informal links between the members of the technical commission and the farmers. There is here probably room for improvement. A possibility would be to provide resources to the association to fund research development projects at an intercanton level that would imply the implication of farmers, researchers, advisers, private companies, etc. Those projects would be like laboratories where new techniques and processes could be tested. The results would be disseminated through the association.

The organisations that are requesting more visibility or information on the outputs to which they contribute should make their demand transparently and explicitly.

5 CONCLUSION

The contribution of the association to learning and innovation is not always clearly communicated and identifiable from outside the technical commission. The policy actors must recognise that the boundary objects are more than just products and activities but also the witnesses of learning and innovation processes. The visible results are visits, training courses and technical datasheets but other results are continuous training of advisers, the identification of research topics and information sharing between peers.

The learning and innovation processes are implicit and not correspond to the official organisation of the association. The most sensitive issue concerns the links to the farmers that are used to evaluate the knowledge demand and the practice based know-how and experience. As those links are informal or depend on the activities of the advisory organisations, the association has no control on them.

Any evolution of the advisory, research organisation or private companies will directly influence the activities of the association even if it is not intended to do so by the policy actors (domino effect). In a context where public resources for AKIS organisations are getting scarce, competitiveness and the need for extreme visibility from the different organisations are gaining importance and might question the principle of an association where AKIS organisations share their resources.

The identity of the association has been until now strong enough for each organisation to contribute with resources and to lead to a spirit or culture where the experts of the technical commission are working for the members of the association (the farmers) although the members are not represented or directly consulted on their needs.

There is a sense of responsibility and of public interest that guides the activities of the technical commission. It induces a spirit that the activities should be for a majority of the farmers and not for a minority. This spirit might reduce sometimes some possible innovations like for example the ones using Web 2.0 possibilities.

Actual policy context and market trends remain decisive factors for the development of innovation in the field of fodder production and conservation. The association's influence on this context could be reinforced.

APPENDICES

Appendix I – In-depth description of the LINSAs

Association for the development of fodder production in the French speaking part of Switzerland (ADCF)

The LINSAs are an association composed of institutions of the “official” AKS (Agroscope for research, agricultural schools for learning, extension at local and national levels, etc.), seeds firms and farmers interested or active in the field of fodder production and conservation.

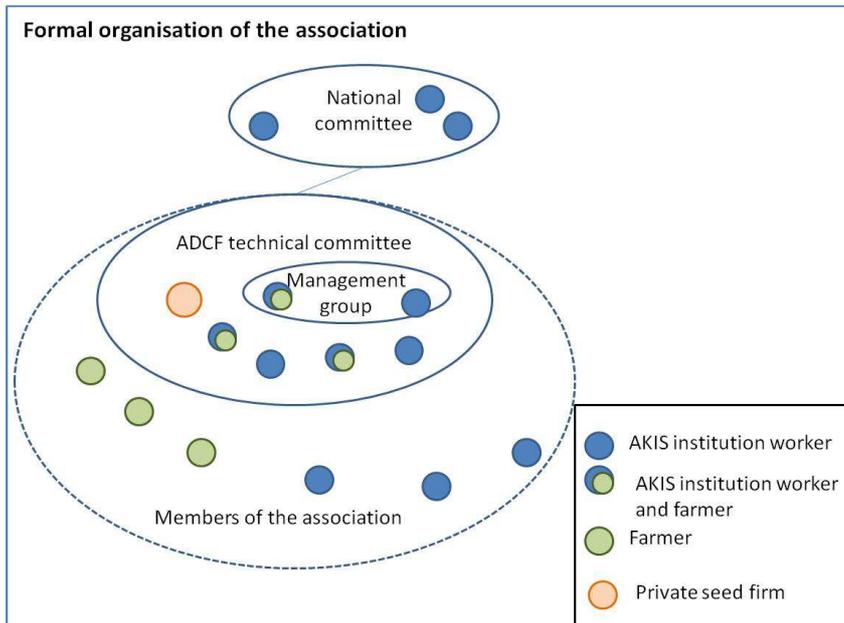
The association is active at national level. It is structured with a national committee and three regional sections a French- (ADCF), a German- (AGFF) and an Italian-speaking section (APF).

Its main objective is to foster animal husbandry using the optimum on-farm fodder. The optimum is defined based on the potential of the land as a natural resource as well as the environment, social and economic components of farming.

The French section of the Association for the development of fodder production (ADCF) was our main partner in the SOLINSAs project.

In terms of organization, the association is well institutionalized organized (see also graphic 1):

- A committee composed of representatives of the main public funded AKIS organizations (head of organizations or units)
- A technical commission composed of 14 experts from different public funded AKIS organizations (research, extension, education) and from a firm selling seed mixture for pastures and grasslands. Some of the experts are also farmers. Two persons are responsible for the management of the technical commission (named management group in the graphic)
- The members of the association which are mostly farmers but also AKIS organizations (ca. 1000 persons)



Graphic 1: Formal organization of the association

In the network, the technical commission of the ADCF “CT-ADCF” plays an important interface role between:

- research organizations active on fodder production;
- institutions of the AKIS working in education or extension;
- farmers who are implementing their own practices.

The CT-ADCF is a place where coordination and exchanges is taking place between experts on fodder production from the AKIS coming from different angles: research, extension, education, practice, input commercialization. They collect problems and needs from farmers, exchange and develop solutions based on scientific evidence and practice based experience. They also propose different activities or products to their members:

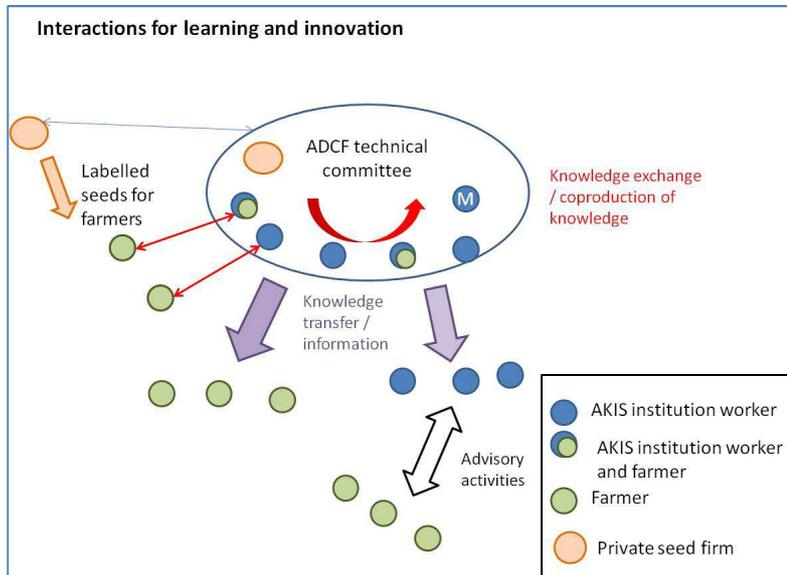
- labelled seeds mix for pasture and grassland;
- technical data sheets on fodder production;
- training for extensionnists;
- visits dedicated to farmers.

It also takes part in action research projects.

Through these activities, it contributes to the elaboration of new knowledge and its dissemination within a larger network.

The graphic 2 illustrates the different types of relationship in terms of learning and innovation:

- Within the technical commission, knowledge exchange and co-production of knowledge is taking place using the products of the ADCF as boundary objects (technical datasheets, training courses, etc.).
- Knowledge exchange is also taking place with farmers but it is not formalized as an activity of the association. The members of the technical commission through their activities in their own organization do have exchanges with farmers: on farm trials, advisory group, advisory activities etc.
- The ADCF products and services (datasheets, trainings, etc.) are typical knowledge and information transfer activities.
- Those information and documents are used by farmers directly or by advisers and professors for advisory and education.
- The ADCF is also putting in place a system to label the seed mixture from the private seed firm.

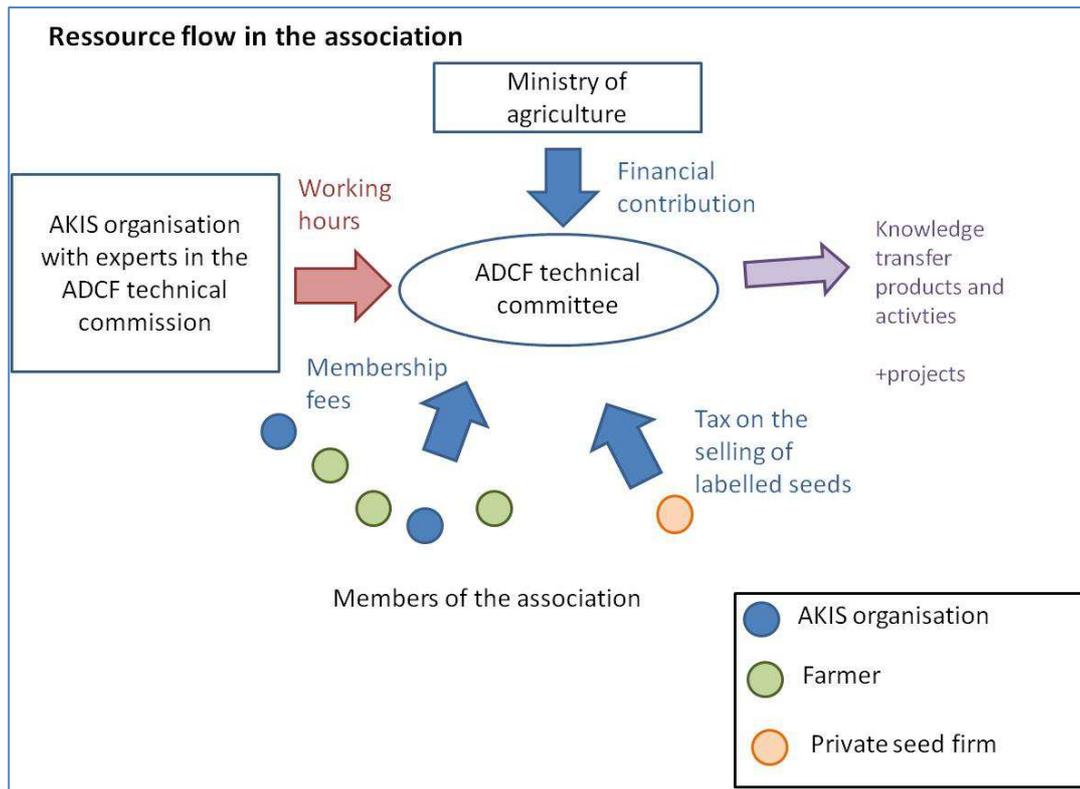


Graphic 2: Interactions for learning and innovation

In term of resources, the technical commission is receiving funding from the ministry of agriculture, through the member sheep fees, the sale of their products and the tax on selling the labeled seeds. The AKIS organizations which

have an expert in the CT-ADCF indirectly participate through the allocated hours of the experts.

The resources are used to fund the exchanges, some data collection and research activities and the dissemination activities and products. Some projects can also be funded.



Graphic 3: Resource flow in the association

Appendix II - Poster



Agricultural Knowledge Systems In Transition:
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 and Innovation Networks for Sustainable Agriculture

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ASSOCIATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FODDER PRODUCTION FRENCH SPEAKING PART, SWITZERLAND



01. THE LINSA

- A. Aim:** Foster fodder production and conservation based on the natural resources of Swiss farms.
- B. Membership:** Institutions of the formal Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System "AKIS" (research, education, extension), private seeds firms and farmers.
- C. Organisation:** The association has a national committee and three regional sections. In the french speaking part, the section is managed by 14 members of a board named the technical commission. Around 1'000 farmers are membership of the association.

02. INTERACTIONS WITH THE SOLINSA PROJECT TEAM OVER THREE YEARS



03. HOW TO SUPPORT A LINSA ?

- Find a balance between ressources that allow stability and mid-term work and more project based fundings that allow reactivity
- Support the network with competences to develop activities and interactions based on Web 2.0
- Support regional based action-research programmes to test new practices techniques and processes

04. QUOTATIONS AND PICTURES

It was an highlighting moment when it has been made explicit that the association could do its job without members!

It was very good for us to have a look on us from outside

We were lucky to benefit from external support

