

## MEDAE Webinar

# Pilot farms, leading farmers... Catalysts and facilitators of the agroecological transition?

*Thursday, June 11, 2026*

Presentation	Speakers
Introduction	<b>CARI</b> Marion Comptour
The co-design of innovative agroecological cropping systems - FAIR Sahel Project	<b>CIRAD</b> Eric Scopel
The RIPAT Method - Tanzania	<b>RECODA</b> Josephine Ng'ang'a
Questions & Answers	
"Leading Farmer" scheme - Tunisia	<b>INGC</b> Hayet Maaroufi
Testimony from a leading farmer	<b>Leading farmer</b> Salim Ben Moussa
Questions & Answers	
Exchanges with the public	
Conclusion	

## Introduction

### Marion COMPTOUR - CARI

This webinar is organised in the framework of the [MEDAE](#) network : multi-stakeholder network on agroecology in the Mediterranean. This network brings together research centres, technical institutes, NGOs and associations, but also at a more local level, producer organisations or local authorities. Its objectives are to promote collaboration and exchanges between members and to build advocacy actions to promote the agroecological transition in the Mediterranean.

The agroecological transition requires the acquisition of locally adapted knowledge, practices and know-how. In the first few years, the agroecological transition can lead to risks and uncertainties for farmers related to possible declines in yields, new marketing outlets to be identified or the investments necessary to change practices.

These factors can be significant obstacles to the adoption and dissemination of agroecological practices. In this context, **mechanisms for testing, evaluating and disseminating practices are essential to secure and accelerate the agroecological transition.**

This webinar gives the floor to 4 diversified speakers who have been involved in such schemes : researcher, NGO, technical institute, and farmer.

### Eric SCOPEL - CIRAD

#### *The co-design of innovative agroecological cropping systems: FAIR Sahel project (DESIRA)*

The FAIR Sahel project has intervened in Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal with the objective of co-designing agroecological intensification options in 3 types of agrarian contexts:

- Irrigated areas for horticultural purposes
- Rainfed agriculture areas with semi-arid climates (e.g. the groundnut basin in Senegal)
- Rainfed areas with a Sudano-Sahelian climate (e.g. cotton-growing areas)

The co-design approach involved researchers, farmers, farmers' organizations and technical support operators (NGOs, technical services).

The approach began with a shared diagnosis in the form of interviews and workshops with producers, to understand the agrarian context and identify the challenges and obstacles to production. These exchanges led to the formalization of a "problem tree" from which the actors identified technical options for the different problems ("innovation technical box").

Based on the solutions identified, workshops made it possible to build ideotypes, i.e. "ideal" theoretical cropping systems, and coherent from an agronomic and social point of view.

To test the technical solutions, prototypes were set up in "central fields" - which are experimental sites co-managed with producers. These fields make it possible to compare solutions, make participatory evaluations, and compare producers' visions. Other experiments were set up in farmers' fields, or "satellite fields" under the supervision of producers who could test the elements of the

system that interested them. These satellite fields have also been used as support for knowledge exchange.

At the end of the experiments, participatory evaluations made it possible to compare the scientific measurements and the evaluations made by the producers.

*Focus on the gender dimension in the project:* in the Sahel region, women generally have little say in decisions related to family farming, even though they are active in production activities, and sometimes have their own plot. The project has adopted an active inclusion approach by setting up spaces dedicated to women's voices and exchanges. This made it possible to take into account their point of view on the farm in general, but also the specific issues of their fields.

Co-design is done at the community level, but this action has been complemented by other actions at the territorial, country and sub-regional levels, to support the establishment of conditions conducive to the agroecological transition.

The documentation related to the project is available on the FAIR Sahel website (<https://www.fair-sahel.org/>), in particular concerning the co-design mechanism (including a [capitalisation report](#) in French and a policy brief available in [French](#) and [English](#)).

### Josephine Ng'ang'a – RECODA, Tanzania The RIPAT approach

RIPAT is an extension approach dedicated to bridging the technology gap of smallholder family farms that have low productivity and are threatened by environmental degradation.

The first step is to carry out an analysis of the situation to identify the issues and challenges of the area of intervention. Then, we discuss with the population, we raise awareness among producers and we ask the communities what vision of development they have (in 10 – 20 years). An animation around an image of a "Super household model" makes it possible to show an "ideal" agricultural system that is diversified and integrated, allowing more resilience in the face of drought situations, for example. This image gives a direction that is then adapted to build the intervention.

Producers are empowered, put in the position of decision-makers of their own development, and consultation also makes it possible to dispel certain preconceived ideas.

Groups of farmers are then set up in the supported villages. The members of these groups will be trained, accompanied, and then made responsible for the dissemination of their knowledge within the community. Each member of the group will have to train 3 other people from the village.

Groups choose from baskets of options which techniques and practices they wish to incorporate into their systems, depending on what would be appropriate in their home. These option baskets are made up according to the characteristics and stakes of the area.

The decentralised technical services, in charge of agriculture and livestock, are also involved in the action so that their skills are strengthened.

The RIPAT approach often makes it possible to integrate livestock activities into production systems, to diversify crops (introduction of market gardening, fruit trees).

The cultivation techniques are presented on demonstration plots (made available to the collective) which serve as training support. The members of the groups meet there every week. These plots also allow comparisons to be made between different practices and techniques (e.g. different amendments, or different varieties). Demonstration plots should be located in a location where group members can easily gather. Everything produced on the collective plot belongs to the group. The plots are places of learning, and also make it possible to show the economic viability of the practices.

Demonstrations related to livestock activities are given to a farmer who has a breeding unit or who is supported for his integration.

Agroecological champions have a farm that should serve as a model for the community. The project supports them, but the farmer must invest in his farm.

Leading farmers are being trained more to set up groups in nearby villages.

In addition to the introduction of techniques, RECODA also supports access to the means of production through the establishment of collective savings systems at the village level. The creation of these systems strengthens cohesion among group members.

Diversification of cropping systems has a direct effect on improving food and nutrition security. RECODA also organizes awareness and training of farmers in terms of nutrition and cooking.

The RIPAT method allows for a sustainable adoption of practices and techniques. This level of adoption depends on the context and the means of the farmer.

Areas for improvement have been identified:

- The introduction of rainwater collection and storage systems – necessary for the establishment of market gardening activities but requiring significant investments.
- The use of new technologies for information sharing and monitoring

### Q&A with panelists:

**Marion notes the similarities between the two approaches presented** (diagnosis – identification of problems – identification of technical options – development of a model or ideotype system – experimentation in learning plots – demonstrations, dissemination, appropriation – involvement of local stakeholders)

**Question about ideotypes: did they only have to answer agronomic/technical questions, or did they take into account social, environmental constraints, etc. ? ?**

**E.S:** Ideotypes must respond to technical constraints, but also to constraints related to the social context (availability of labour, etc.) or economic context (existence of a market, etc.). An ideotype cannot solve everything, but it offers answers to a set of constraints that are consistent with each other.

## Challenges and lessons learned

**E.S:** Constraints have been observed in terms of the posture of the actors: the co-construction approach with the producers requires changes in posture on the part of research and development operators, who are often in top-down habits. Similarly, farmers have had to move away from a position of learning alone. It was necessary to break down the barriers of "who constructs knowledge".

These are processes that take time, to build trust with producers, to bring out their leadership.

**J.NG:** Some of the difficulties encountered are cultural. Cultures and beliefs are not the same in different regions of Tanzania. It takes time to familiarize yourself with the different contexts, and then to change the representations.

For example: in an area with a high monoculture of maize and sorghum, the introduction of livestock took time, because farmers thought that the herds would destroy their crops.

Climate change poses other challenges such as the destruction of crops and demonstration due to drought or flooding.

We shouldn't expect results too quickly. It may take a few years for the practices to yield conclusive results and be adopted more sustainably.

### Hayet MAAROUFI – National Institute of Field Crops (INGC) in Tunisia *The leading farmer – a catalyst for the agroecological transition*

The INGC is a public institution created in 2019 to deal with the crises threatening cereal imports. It acts as an interface between research and farmers.

Tunisia faces several challenges, including climate change, the degradation of natural resources and the increase in production prices

The Leading Farmer scheme was then developed by the INGC in collaboration with various technical partners and local actors in order to directly involve producers in the innovation process and promote the adoption of agricultural "good practices". This participatory approach is a lever for the adoption of agroecological practices adapted to local realities.

Leading farmers are a local relay to disseminate and disseminate "good practices" and ensure rapid and wider adoption.

Roles of the farmer leader: testing "good practices"; support producers in the adoption of practices; strengthen the technical and organizational capacities of farmers; creates links between farmers and support institutions; encourage cooperation and exchange of experience at the local level; Promote sustainable and resilient agriculture.

This approach makes it possible to create a relational network between farmers.

Steps of the system

- Close supervision: leading farmers benefit from local technical support
- Partnership workshop: co-construction of solutions with local farmers
- Technical Training
- Support sessions: adjustment of training outcomes with trained farmers
- Outreach: dissemination of technical training, exchange of experiences

*Constraints and challenges of the approach:* resistance to change; limited financial resources; variable access to information; climate constraints; long-term monitoring difficulties

*Prospects for improvement:* strengthening the networks of leading farmers, further developing field training; encouraging institutional partnerships

Currently: 120 leading farmers have been trained in 6 classes

## Salim Ben Moussa – Leading Farmer

### *Testimonial*

Living in conditions that are becoming arid (rising temperatures and lower rainfall) requires finding solutions to be able to continue producing cereals and doing agriculture. Around him, farmers have abandoned their activity due to climate change. The need to find solutions and the opportunity to collaborate with science pushed him to become a leading farmer.

With the INGC, they worked on soil conservation, increasing organic matter, etc. This has yielded results while reducing fertilizer inputs.

The collaboration has also made it possible to diversify production, introduce crops tolerant to water scarcity such as vetch, and test new practices such as no-till.

The practical experiments began with small plots on which they evaluated the results. What was successful was adopted on a larger scale and disseminated within the operating network. Tests are continuing, with new crops, varieties and techniques. An olive grove has been set up on completely uncultivated land. It is combined with soil cover (branches, shredding) which significantly improved water retention. Organic olive production is working well after 8 years.

### Q&A with panelists:

**H.M:** The adoption of innovations is facilitated by the observation of convincing results among farmers.

**S.B-M.:** Regarding crop outlets, market requests come after their introduction. For example, vetch was initially planted only for soil maintenance (legumes) reasons. A small market has been created with a demand from breeders for vetch seed.

Regarding fertilization, we had to find alternatives to manure, the cost of which is too high. Crops such as peas and vetch have been planted to provide straw and crop shredding. This gradually enriches the soil and improves soil water retention.

**E.S.:** The most interesting successes of the approach concern changes in postures. Some practices have been proposed by farmers, such as the combination of legumes with each other to limit the risks to a crop and meet the household's food needs. This type of original proposal, which is not very aligned with the systems usually conceptualized by research, has shown the success of the approach in terms of peasant leadership.

Collective reflections have taken place on land use planning, for example for the introduction of fodder crops.

The construction of ideotypes has also allowed farmers to build the path towards the realization of a projection of the future, and to rely on the collective.

**J.NG.:** The RIPAT approach was supported by the previous director of RECODA. There was a first question: why did projects spend so much money, and in the end we don't see results for farmers. A second question: why are there so many techniques developed by research, and which are not disseminated?

It is in response to these two questions that the RIPAT approach was gradually built in the early 2000s, evaluated, and then formalized in capitalization documents and guides.