

## ***IIABA Project, Breaking Ground:***

### ***AfrONet's Pioneering Initiative Unveils Institutional Innovations for Organic Agriculture across Africa"***

The "Institutional Innovations for Organic Agriculture in Africa" (IIABA) initiative, led by the African Organic Network (AfrONet) and supported by the French Development Agency (AFD), is propelling organic agriculture beyond production augmentation.

Commencing in 2020 and extending through 2023, this collaborative effort involves seven partners, including research institutions CIRAD and INRAE from France, alongside African organizations like TOAM, NOGAM, RIAM, and FIMABIO. Together, they strive to identify and advocate for institutional innovations in markets, certification, and public policies on national and continental scales.

Orchestrated by CIRAD and INRAE, the research initiative spans diverse studies and over 20 roundtable discussions, focusing on pilot countries Tanzania, Uganda, and Morocco. This holistic approach integrates research institutions with organic movements and federations, emphasizing practical solutions.

The project aims not only to identify but actively promote the implementation of institutional innovations, fostering a conducive environment for organic agriculture to thrive.

Recognizing the increasing importance of organic agriculture in Africa, the project addresses diverse challenges. It acknowledges the sector's role in ensuring food security, nutrition, and climate change mitigation, with a focus on public health due to lower synthetic chemical input usage.

To overcome market challenges, the initiative strives to develop equitable domestic markets, experimenting with various solutions. Emphasis is placed on participatory guarantee systems (PGS), engaging stakeholders in formulating standards and fostering knowledge exchange. The project advocates for conducive public policies at national and local levels to support organic agriculture.

With a budget of 1.5 million euros, funded by AFD, the IIABA initiative seeks to empower AfrONet and partners with manuals and tools for ongoing initiatives. As AfrONet and partners embark on this collaborative journey, the project serves as a model for effective coordination, bridging gaps between research institutions, grassroots movements, and federations. The strategic choice of pilot countries underlines the initiative's commitment to impactful change in Africa's organic agriculture landscape.

The collaborative research effort, orchestrated by CIRAD and INRAE, involves a comprehensive approach, including numerous studies and the facilitation of more than 20 roundtable discussions. The chosen pilot countries for the project are Tanzania, Uganda, and Morocco.

In this concerted endeavor, AfrONet and its partners recognize the significance of integrating research institutions, represented by CIRAD and INRAE, alongside key organic movements and federations in the designated countries.

This holistic approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the organic agriculture landscape and facilitates the development of innovative solutions. The collaboration extends beyond theoretical research to practical, action-oriented initiatives, reinforcing the project's impact on the ground.

The project's focus on institutional innovations spans three vital areas: markets, certification processes, and public policies. The aim is not only to identify these innovations but also to actively promote their implementation. Through a combination of research studies and extensive roundtable discussions, the project seeks to foster a conducive environment for organic agriculture to thrive.

Designating Tanzania, Uganda, and Morocco as pilot countries strategically positions the initiative to address diverse contexts and challenges. This selection allows for a nuanced understanding of regional variations and the tailoring of institutional innovations to specific needs.

Despite the initial genesis of organic agriculture in Africa being driven by export markets, addressing the escalating demand from North-bound consumers, its current recognition in the South extends beyond export purposes.

It is increasingly acknowledged as a cornerstone for ensuring food security, nutrition, and integration into climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Additionally, organic agriculture assumes significance as a public health imperative, given the relatively lower prevalence of synthetic chemical inputs, such as pesticides, in Africa, albeit sometimes inappropriately and perilously applied.

In pursuit of equitable and inclusive markets, the conventional strategy of linking smallholder farmers to international markets, while profitable, severs ties with local markets and precludes African consumers from accessing organic products. To address this, there is a need to develop domestic markets, focusing on constructing new market models that are both equitable and inclusive.

This involves the establishment of market observatories, roundtables, and platforms for producer-consumer dialogue, with the objective of tailoring market approaches to each local context. The project, responsive to partner requests and local dynamics, will experiment with diverse solutions, be they grounded in physical infrastructures, contractual agreements involving public authorities, or leveraging new technologies and social media.

In tandem with market development, robust systems ensuring the "organic" quality of products are pivotal for sectoral growth. While third-party certification is the norm for exports, it proves costly and often impractical for small producers.

Enter "participatory guarantee systems" (PGS), emerging in recent years as a more socially relevant alternative. PGS engages stakeholders—primarily producers, consumers, and other sector participants—in collaboratively formulating standards, specifications, and participatory inspection rules. Beyond mere certification, PGS fosters knowledge exchange and dissemination of best practices among stakeholders.

The IIABA project does not seek to prescribe an ideal PGS but endeavors to support stakeholders in developing these innovative systems, refining mechanisms and technologies according to their specific needs. CIRAD has notably developed proprietary software to enhance inspection organization.

In addition to markets and guarantee systems, conducive public policies are imperative for the organic sector's development in Africa. The IIABA project champions multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral dialogue, involving policymakers at various administrative levels within each country.

The establishment of dedicated regulatory policies at the national level and other incentive measures are advocated to garner support for organic agriculture. At the local level, a spectrum of innovations such as municipal compost, territorial markets, organic fairs, and supply agreements for mass catering can be endorsed.

Research across these three domains of institutional innovation aims to generate specific manuals and tools. These resources empower not only AfrONet at the continental level but also partners in the designated countries to enhance their capacities and bolster ongoing initiatives. Financed by AFD, the IIABA initiative operates with a budget of 1.5 million euros and a mandate of three and a half years to expedite the advancement of organic agriculture in Africa.

As AfrONet and its partners embark on this ambitious journey, the collaboration serves as a model for bridging the gap between research institutions, grassroots movements, and federations. The synergy between theory and practice, coupled with the strategic choice of pilot countries, underscores the initiative's commitment to fostering sustainable and impactful change in the landscape of organic agriculture across Africa.

The allocation of responsibilities among AfrONet, research institutions, and country-specific organizations enhances the project's effectiveness, ensuring a holistic and well-coordinated approach to institutional innovation in the organic agriculture sector.