



An International Center
for Soil Fertility and
Agricultural Development

Success Story

RAFIA Moves Toward Self-Reliance

In 1992 the Togolese nongovernmental organization (NGO)—Research, Support, and Training for the Initiatives of Self-Development (RAFIA)—was created to continue the work that the Belgium NGO Vredeseilanden started during the 1980s. The principal motto of both NGOs is that “real aid is making aid unnecessary.” It was in this perspective that RAFIA structured its organization and its activities. RAFIA supports the regional farmers’ organization and members with technical assistance and capacity-building activities.

All activities are demand driven, upon request by farmers to ensure that they are highly motivated. With respect to soil fertility management, farmers—in collaboration with RAFIA and IFDC—have developed integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) options. These options combine the judicious use of mineral fertilizers with organic resources, such as composting. The development of ISFM options was backed by IFDC’s activities to promote institutional development, such as revolving funds and improving farmers’ access to mineral fertilizers by linking farmers to input providers.

After 10 years of work, the road to self-reliance of the population is beginning to show more and more of its fruits due to a continuous transfer of competence at the grassroots level. Farmers train other farmers in ISFM during inter-village exchange days. According to Yvette Nagou, a RAFIA field worker, who is in charge of support to the Center for Self-Promotion of Farmers (CAP), farmers are sometimes better field agents than she is, and occasionally she receives detailed questions to which she cannot respond. She says that RAFIA is converting from an NGO to an organization providing paid services to farmers and their organizations. Paul Kanfitine, RAFIA’s Coordinator, explains that much work has been done on food crops, and the farmer organization is operating independently of RAFIA.

The focus of RAFIA’S agricultural activities is moving toward cash crop farming and especially to vegetable farming. Another illustration of the process of self-reliance is that in early 2003 the communications department of RAFIA has become a separate unit with its own funding and is operating independently from the other divisions of RAFIA. The unit will provide information and communications services, including a library and access to the Internet, to the CAP and the general public. The unit will collaborate with the other divisions of RAFIA, concerning monitoring, evaluation, and data collection. In the future, Kanfitine hopes that every division will work not only independently but also cooperatively; each division would have its own funding and specialized services.