

Mechanization needs prudent policies and tailor-made strategies

Workshop makes key recommendations for West Africa

Mechanization is crucial to improving farm productivity. However, like every other aspect of agriculture, it needs careful planning and supportive policies.

In February 2017, the Syngenta Foundation and partners hosted a mechanization workshop in Dakar, Senegal. Top of the partner list was the Ministry of Agriculture. As well as from Senegal, the event attracted participants from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Mali. They were joined by representatives of research organizations and a wide range of international and national institutions and companies.

Syngenta Foundation organizers Oumar Niangado and Youssou Diagne shaped the workshop around three panels. The first discussed the vision, experiences and challenges of agricultural mechanization in West Africa. The next panel examined supply and demand, and the third looked at mechanization in depth. Case study presentations by professionals working directly in the field preceded each panel. Among the speakers was our Executive Director, Marco Ferroni (*photo*).



“The workshop generated several important recommendations”, says Youssou Diagne, Regional Coordinator of our rice program. “In particular, it pointed to the need for appropriate mechanization policies and for specific strategies to match each country, value chain, and production system.”

Overall workshop facilitator was our regional advisor Oumar Niangado. “Participants also strongly recommended placing the private sector, rather than governments, at the heart of mechanization supply”, he comments. “There was also general agreement that the correct starting point is real demand from producers, not just *ad hoc* external financing opportunities.”

The need additionally became clear for a strategic oversight structure (“West African Mechanization Observatory”) at the sub-regional level. This should harmonize visions and provide policy messages to guide public projects in line with the recommendations above.

“We are now working on a brief specifying all these aspects as well as next steps”, reports Robert Berlin. Our Head of Agricultural Services led one of the workshop panels. “We intend to hand the brief to authorities in each country. We’ll also be working with the Hub Rural to coordinate implementation of the key measures and ensure the advocacy at ECOWAS level.”