

# Mobilizing Local Knowledge in support of Agroecological Intensification

## Lessons from practice of the Groundswell consortium AEI2





# 1. Identify and engage innovative farmers

- In every village, there are farmers that the community recognizes as not just hard working, but innovative, first to test new practices, or new seeds.
- They are known within their communities as the “best farmers”
- ANSD and AMSP both have developed specific methods to seek out, identify and engage such farmers who consistently 1) outperform other farmers due to better practices or innovation 2) exhibit a genuine interest in testing new ideas
- This a key knowledge resource within communities that Groundswell seeks to mobilize in the co-development and testing of innovations





## 2. Engaging the wider community in identifying priority problems, and diagnosing root causes

- Groundswell engages leaders and family heads, and women in rural communities in **identifying priority problems affecting their farming systems**
- A key participatory method is to facilitate community discussions about **major “trends” comparing how farming and food security has changed from 20 years ago, to 10 years ago, to the present, and WHY this changes occur**
- For each of these problems, Groundswell asks communities 1) **“what local solutions have you tried? 2) Who? Source? 3) to what extent is it working?**
- This approach seeks to make **explicit the communities collective knowledge about the problem, and local practices** developed in response
- Groundswell then seeks to **either build on, improve local solutions, or suggest new ideas to test** after showing respect for local knowledge





### 3. Engage farmers (men and women) at the “intra” and “inter” village levels to assess results of on-farm experiments of new practices

- After enabling farmer innovators across many villages to conduct small scale experiments of new practices on their own land (i.e., multiple replications in different conditions), **Groundswell convenes sessions first at the community level to present and assess the results**
- As a second step, **Groundswell brings delegates from each of the villages in a given commune (or agroecological area) to present and compare the results** of the same experiment across all replications in different conditions
- This process often **generates intense and long debate by farmers, and draws on their deep local knowledge about context, to interpret results** (why some replications generate much more positive results than others)
- Applying **local knowledge in this way generates deeper understanding of what “conditions” need to be in place** (soils, time of sowing, labor etc), for an AE innovation to do well, **leading to an assessment to “promote” widely or not.**





## Engaging communities knowledge of local conditions to assess AEI innovations





## 4. Massive mobilization of volunteer farmer trainers (men and women) to promote and spread AEI practices

- Once farmer leaders/innovators across many villages in a geographical area with similar agroecological conditions decide that a particular AEI innovation merits promotion/spreading (and not further testing), **Groundswell works with villages to recruit volunteer trainers**
- In each village, AMSP and ANSD encourages a village to **identify volunteers, at least 3 for each major “neighborhood” within the village, who are trained in the agreed AEI innovations**
- Each of these volunteer trainers are **requested to train and support at least 3 to 5 interested neighbors** as part of the community “extension” program
- This approach makes **effective use of local knowledge, not just “technical” but social and cultural** of the volunteers, in the work of spreading AEI innovations.





5. Across all these processes, ensure that women farmers' interests, knowledge and capacities are also mobilized





## 6. Help farmers/communities identify and assess many local seed varieties that are disappearing



ANSD (Burkina)



7. Finally, taking agro-ecology innovations to scale must be based on community social and cultural knowledge



**Farmer to farmer:** learning and spread of agroecology requires building on local knowledge and capacities of communities to lead and manage their own programs