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**CASE STUDY "OPA
D'EXCELLENCE"
THE CASE OF THE PROCIVA/
GIZ PROJECT**



KEY MESSAGES

- The OPA d'Excellence process sits within a holistic **OP-CIV concept**, which was co-created by DLROPEA and ProCIVA in 2016
- Professional Farmer Organizations (OPAs) are measured every 2 years to assess functionality and governance; and this is underpinned by Government decrees
- ProCIVA worked with Apex Organizations, such as Unions, in order to test the approach and prepare the ground for scaling the approach to Primary cooperatives.
- Good governance is considered vital to OPA success, and only 1 of the 3 Unions supported sustained their progress on governance metrics
- Success can be gauged by the available business metrics:
 - More than 50,000 farmers were reached
 - Total commercialization of produce surpassed 1,000 MT, which was considered weak to fair for all value chains
 - Total new credit obtained (in FCA) surpassed 700,000,000, which was considered weak to fair for all value chains
- Despite the mixed results, the system is well thought through and anchored in Government guidance. The potential for scaling is therefore high.
- There remain unanswered questions on cost-effectiveness of the approach and the expected multi-stakeholder service delivery model. These need to be answered by the next phase of development projects.

INTRODUCTION

Benin's agricultural production sector, which employs around 70% of the working population, is characterised by the predominantly family-type farms, low productivity of these farms and their vulnerability to climate change. The development of the cooperative movement is a key strategy to reach larger numbers of small producers; and there have been many private and public initiatives aimed at supporting cooperatives. Despite this investment, cooperatives in Benin remain weak and unable to deliver services expected by members. There is clearly a need to find approaches that can be successful in developing cooperatives. This case study examines one initiative to support cooperatives that appears highly effective and has potential to be scaled. This approach is called the 'OPA d'excellence', which was developed through the Centres d'Innovations Vertes pour le secteur agro-alimentaire (ProCIVA) project of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). OPA refers to "Professional Agricultural Organization". The case study examines the application of the "OPA d'excellence" process to three of the seven OPAs who are engaged in the soya, rice and poultry value chains: the Union Nationale des Aviculteurs Professionnels du Bénin (UNAP-B), the Union Nationale des Coopératives de producteurs de Soja du Bénin (UNCPS) and the Conseil de Concertation des Riziculteurs du Bénin (CCR-B).

SELECTION OF OPAS

ProCIVA targeted OPAs for collaboration that met the following criteria :

1 *Geographical coverage and inclusiveness within the OPA*

ProCIVA focused on OPAs that have the potential for a wide impact in terms of adoption by members at departmental, communal and even village level. In addition, ProCIVA selected OPAs that could bring stakeholders in the value chain together and could act as a representative body. This increased the potential for positive spin-offs of the “OPA of excellence” process.

2 *OPA’s ability to mobilise its own resources*

This criteria aimed to increase the potential for the OPAs to sustain the various good practices/ innovations developed within the framework of the collaboration. ProCIVA therefore assessed the OPA’s ability to raise funds as a means to provide economic services to their members.

3 *OPA’s openness to innovation*

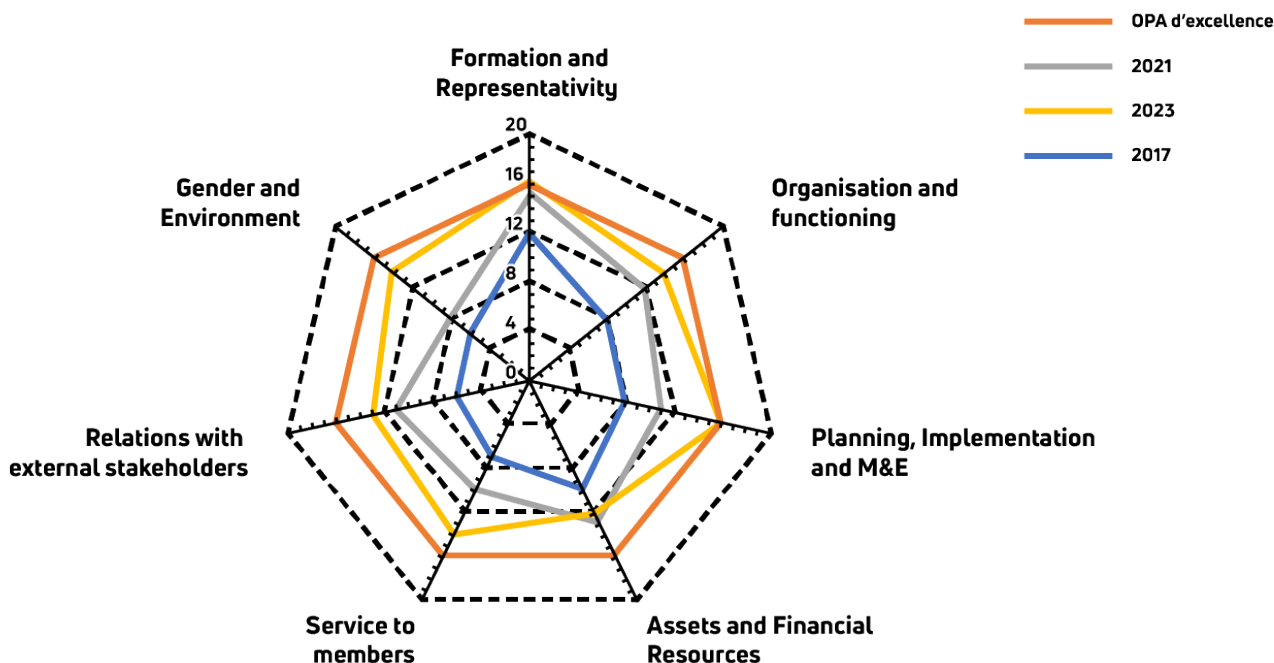
ProCIVA also takes into account the capacity of the OPAs to lead the process of introducing innovations/ good practices with the vision that OPAs will promote and develop these innovations for the benefit of member stakeholders. In the long term, these OPAs are expected to become ‘innovation hubs’ ensuring the profitable and sustainable management and dissemination of innovations.

It appears this segmentation/selection process is a strategic approach aiming at value chain transformation in comparison with other approaches which may focus on selecting smaller, less influential enterprises based on their perceived potential to grow.

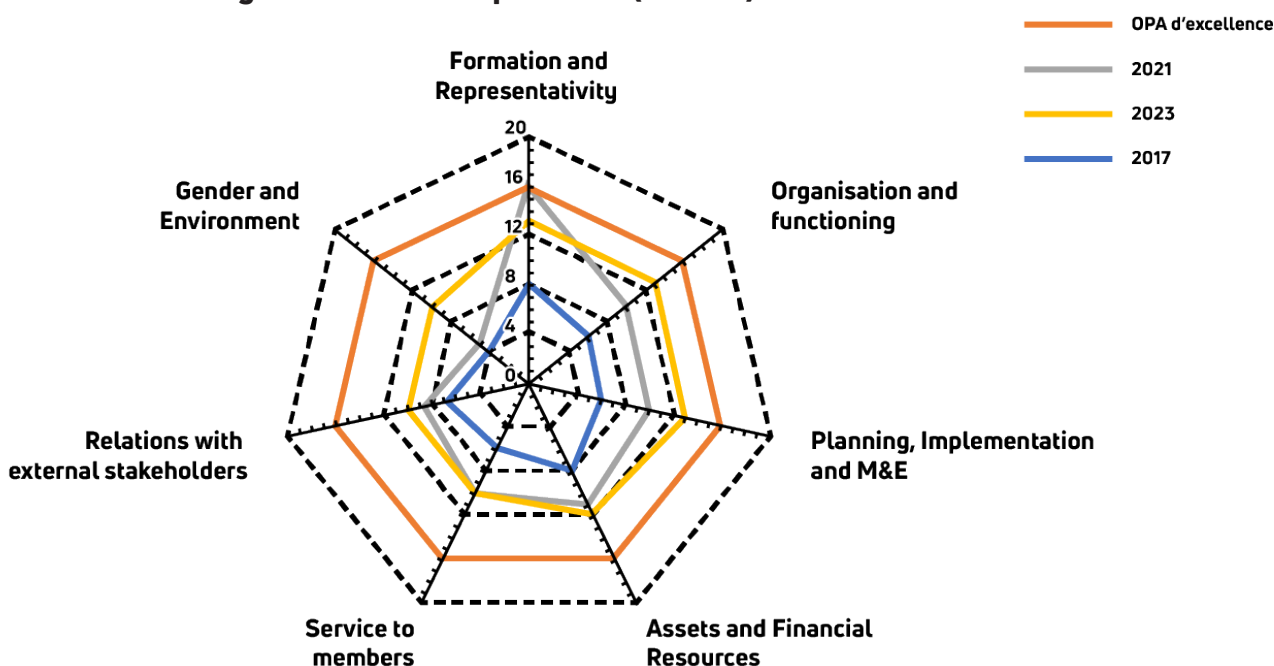
RESULTS

CCR-B, UNCPS and UNAP-B were involved in the “OPA d’excellence” process between 2017 and 2023. During these 5 years, their progress was measured three times and the results are shown below. Overall we can see a significant improvement in both the Rice and Soya Producers Unions/Coopératives which is attributed to the significant efforts made to address weaknesses. In contrast, the Poultry Union struggled and appears to have been highly affected by restructuring following its’ separation from the Interprofession de l’Aviculture du Bénin (IAB). This shows the importance of having a relatively stable organisation within which to work on improvements.

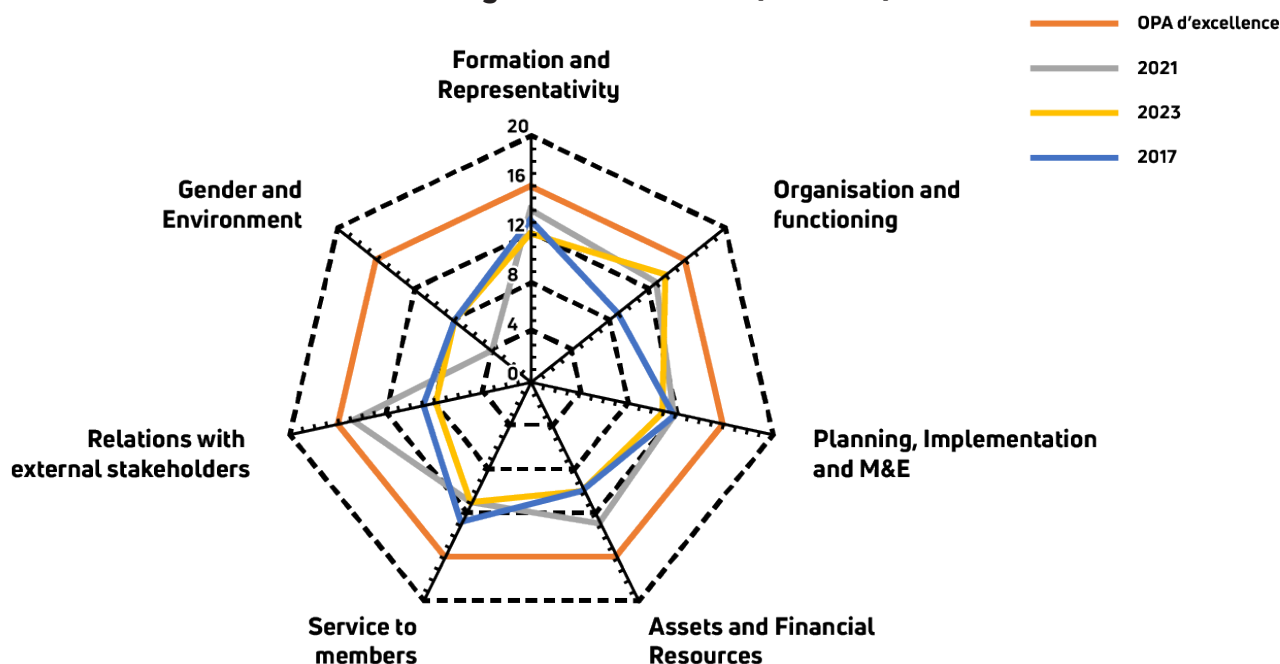
Benin Rice Growers’ Consultation Council (CCR-B)



National Union of Soya Producers’ Cooperatives (UNCPS)



National Union of Professional Poultry Farmers of Benin (UNAP-B)



This capacity development led to the following business performance:

	CCR-B (rice)	UNCPS (soybeans)	UNAP-B (poultry)
ASSESSORS TRAINED	7	2	2
TRAININGS	5	5	7
MT OF COMMERCIALIZED PRODUCE	889*	253	n/a
NEW CREDIT OBTAINED (FCA)	46.670.00**	565.142.360**	100.000.000*
NUMBER OF FARMERS REACHED	> 30.000	> 22.000	n/a

*This indicates a weak performance (as evaluated by the project)

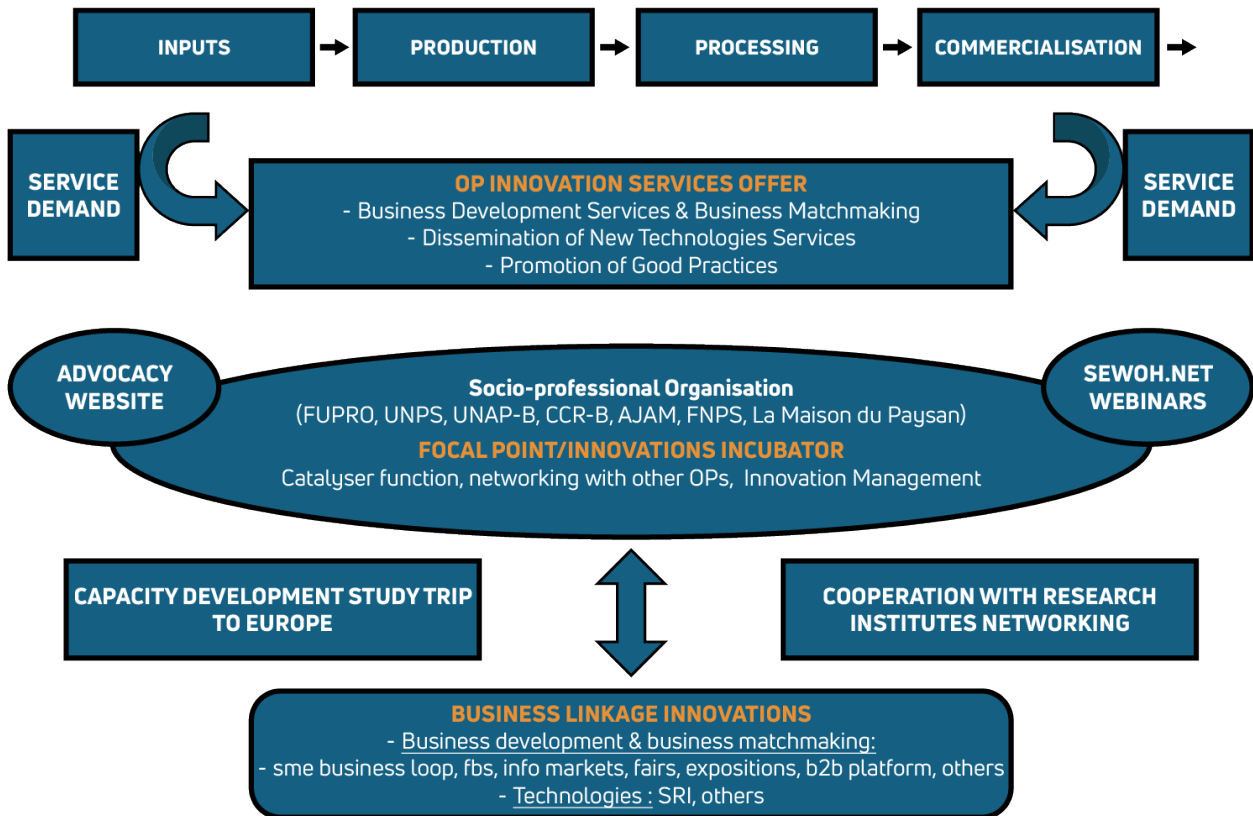
** This indicates a fair performance (as evaluated by the project)

These results underscore two main points:

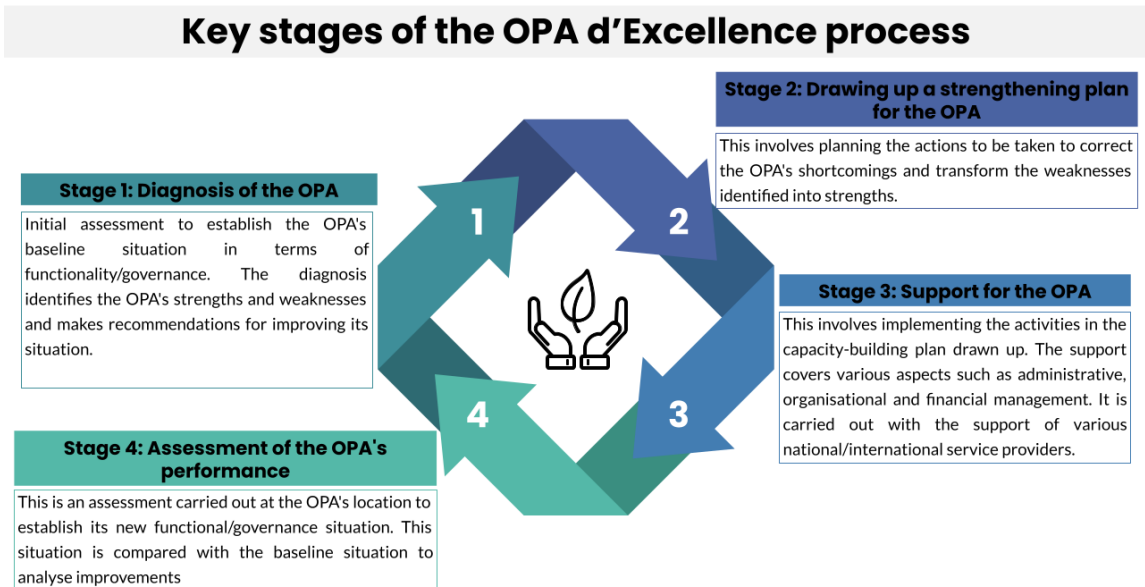
- 1 There is a need to collect more in-depth data and collect data more consistently. This is generally affected by turnover of staff at project level and by the lack of a solid data collection process in the OPAs;
- 2 Available business metrics illustrated mixed results, with some value chains showing weak to fair performance (as evaluated by the project).

BDS DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Below we assess how these results were achieved and consider whether this approach is effective and can be scaled. The OPA d'Excellence process sits within a holistic **OP-CIV concept** (below) which was co-created by DLROPEA and ProCIVA in 2016.



The **OPA Excellence process** can be summed up in four iterative stages: (i) Diagnosis of the OPA (initial assessment to establish a baseline situation); (ii) Drawing up a strengthening plan for the OPA; (iii) Support for the OPA; and (iv) Assessment of the OPA's performance.



DIAGNOSIS

Two assessment tools are used: the functionality assessment tool and the governance assessment tool. The functionality assessment tool raises members' awareness of how their organisation works and potential solutions/actions. Its purpose is to identify the OPA's strengths and weaknesses and to determine its overall level of coordination based on seven (7) areas of analysis. The governance assessment tool analyses the system by which the OPA takes decisions and applies them to achieve its objectives, using the management documents/tools at its disposal. These assessments are carried out with the active participation of the members of the board of directors, the OPA's technical staff and representatives of some grassroots members, making it an inclusive self-assessment that monitors the OPA's overall state of operation.

The governance assessment is also accompanied by a certification process which is conducted by DLROPEA. An OPA with a score above 12 is eligible to obtain a certificate of good governance valid for two years. This certificate states the level of good governance (good, very good or excellent). From the results below we can see the evolution of governance scores for each OPA

WORDING	OPTIMUM SCORE	REFERENCE SCORE (2021) VS CURRENT SCORE (2023)					
		CCR-B		UNCPS		UNAP-B	
		2021	2023	2021	2023	2021	2023
Certificate of registration	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Minutes of the last AGM at which the governing bodies were elected or re-elected	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Minutes of handover between elected representatives	1	1	1	0	1	1	0
Minutes and/or reports of AGM sessions	1	0,5	1	0,5	1	1	0,5
Minutes and/or reports of sessions of the management body (Board of Directors, General Meeting and others)	1	1	1	0,5	0	0,5	0,5
Annual audit report or minutes of meetings of the internal control body (SC, CC)	1	0,5	1	1	0	1	0,5
PTAB or annual campaign plan	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Procedures manual	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Up-to-date register of members	1	0	1	0	0	1	1
Basic management tools	2	2	2	2	1	2	2
Annual business report for the last two financial years approved by the AGM	1	0	1	1	1	0,5	0,5
Annual financial report approved by the AGM	1	1	1	1	0	0,5	0,5
Strategy document for mobilising resources and services for members	1	0	0	0	1	1	0,5
Resource mobilisation point	1	1	1	0,25	1	0,5	0
Strategic development plan	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Communication plan and/or capacity-building plan	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Certified financial statements	2	2	1	2	0,5	1	0,5
Code of ethics and good governance adopted at AGM	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
TOTAL	20	16	18	13,25	9,5	16	12,5
Certificate of good governance		Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

MENTION

Fair (X = 12)
If X < 12, no certificate

Good (12 < X ≤ 15)

Very good (15 < X ≤ 18)

Excellent (X > 18)

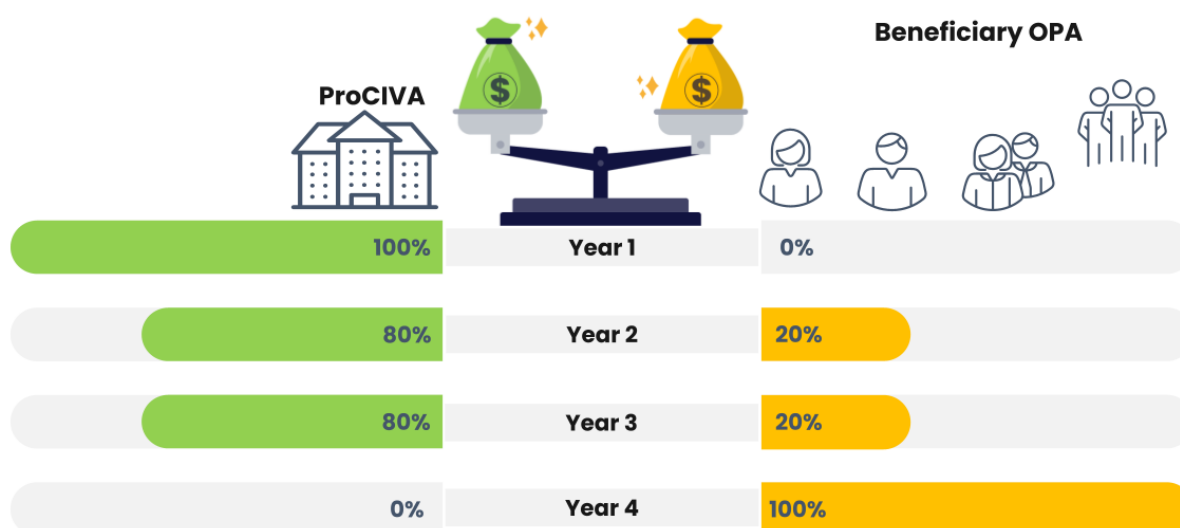
CAPACITY BUILDING

The assessments enable support partners, such as ProCIVA, to identify and implement actions or innovations to address shortcomings so that they can achieve excellence in terms of operation and governance. Overall, the support provided to the OPAs can be classified in the following six areas:

- 1** Promotion of the sectors in which the targeted farmers' organisations operate
- 2** Organisational development at national, departmental and local level
- 3** Elaboration of business models and development of OPA economic services for the benefit of their members, such as the SME Business Training and Coaching Loop
- 4** Capacity-building for elected representatives and technicians of farmers' organisations
- 5** Capacity building for grassroots members, such as GIZ's Farmer Business School
- 6** Scaling up and disseminating capitalised innovations

ProCIVA also recognizes that the OPA cannot immediately pay for the required support, including the costs of technical staff. The project therefore recruited local experts for the OPAs and paid their salaries according to a degressive model (see below).

Degrressive scheme to cover the cost of services provided by local experts under the ProCIVA programme



The assessment tools are then used to assess performance after the capacity building support has been provided. In this case, re-assessments were conducted every two years. As the governance results show there is progress but it is uneven and a challenge to sustain.

LESSONS

The main factors which enabled progress towards excellence were:

OPAS' COMMITMENT/WILLINGNESS TO PROFESSIONALISE

The OPAs involved in this process are all unanimous on the need for them to strengthen their functionality and governance, given the important role they play for the grassroots members they represent. For the most part, the OPAs were open and receptive to the various forms of support and innovation provided as part of the process.

COHESION AND MOBILISATION OF MEMBERS

The "OPA d'excellence" process requires strong inclusion of various stakeholders from the grassroots to the strategic level. Various members of the targeted OPAs were mobilised and the assessment results have led to the OPAs working harder to strengthen their cohesion.

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF PUBLIC SUPPORT STRUCTURES AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

The progress made is not solely due to ProCIVA. Stakeholders, both public and private, have provided support in various areas, including restructuring, governance and member services. In addition, the OPAs have benefited from mutual learning and networking.

The main factors which prevented progress towards excellence were:

OWNERSHIP OF THE PROCESS

Some OPAs found it difficult to take ownership of the process at the start of the interventions. This somewhat limited the achievement of positive results. It should be noted, however, that this was corrected later on in the project.

LEADERSHIP CONFLICTS

Conflicts over leadership and failure to respect the principles of accountability did not encourage consultation or decision-making within the OPAs. This led to a focus on supporting conflict resolution before other forms of support could be provided.

FINANCIAL AND ACCOUNTING MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

This major constraint severely limited the support provided. As a result, ProCIVA needed to closely monitor the OPAs.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

The COVID 19 crisis had a considerable impact, resulting in a delay in some activities which affected the expected results. In addition, the OPAs had difficulty adapting to the online working mode following the advent of the crisis, an aspect that severely limited interactions with them.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALABILITY

There are two levels to consider in terms of sustainability and scalability :

- The ability of the OPAs to sustain their results and scale them
- The cost effectiveness of the OPA excellence approach and scalability

OPA SUSTAINABILITY/SCALABILITY

ProCIVA aims to support OPAs to have capacity and resources to sustain their activities, such as delivery of services to members. The governance assessments suggest that additional support is still required to strengthen some of the OPAs. Without that support, the sustainability of the results may be difficult to achieve. The issue of mobilising resources remains a major problem for OPAs. This includes replenishment of resources through loan repayments by their members.

DLROPEA is the public body responsible for coordinating the next phase of OPA development, in line with the key provisions contained in Decrees 136 and 137. It is recommended that DLROPEA encourages all development partners to use the OPA excellence approach and base their support on the assessment data. This may also mean DLROPEA encouraging development partners to focus their support on OPAs with good governance certificates and to use the assessment tools to identify needs and track performance.

The technical public support services represented by the ATDAs and the DDAEP must also continue to support the OPAs by setting up a specific capacity-building programme. The technical services should also support the DLROPEA in its efforts to enforce stricter quality criteria for the environment in which the OPAs operate, in order to strengthen their credibility vis-à-vis development partners who wish to use OPAs to support individual members within a given commodity chain. Technical support partners should also assist OPAs in identifying dynamic technical service providers who will provide specific support which is targeted to the level of the OPA development.

As funding is a relatively important factor in the progress of OPAs towards excellence, the effective involvement of financial services is necessary to strengthen OPAs. They could therefore support only those OPAs that demonstrate good application of the process the observable effects of which, at a grassroots level, is reassurance that members are able to repay loans. The financial services could also build the capacity of the OPAs to manage their financial resources properly, in order to make it easier for them to recover their loans.

OPA EXCELLENCE APPROACH SCALABILITY

The OPA excellence process is part of the holistic **OP-CIV concept**. This has been developed over two decades which suggests that DLROPEA and partners are investing in continual improvement of the system of delivering support to OPAs. This has also been institutionalised through the adoption of decrees 136 (on registration in the OPA register) and 137 (on the criteria for OPA representativeness) by the Beninese government. This has led to the development of an assessment process which has potential to be used by all stakeholders interested in OPA development, and these tools appear well aligned with the upcoming [International Standard](#). Stakeholders are also considering digitising the assessment tools which could enable databases to be developed that are useful for both strategic and operational decisions by stakeholders.

It therefore appears there is significant potential for scalability however there are some unanswered questions such as:

- The reliability of a governance certification process with a self-assessment process, especially if development partners are encouraged to focus only on those with certificates.
- The cost of the OPA excellence process and how this can be resourced in the future.
- The effectiveness of different tools such as the Farmer Business School and SME Training and Coaching Loop and how this relates to the expressed need for dynamic, local service providers.
- The return on this investment in terms of improved viability of the OPA and increased benefits to members.
- The service delivery model which is likely a combination of public sector, private sector and financial sector delivery and how this combined effort can be coordinated.

It is therefore recommended that future development projects take into account the learnings from this project and consider how future projects can contribute to answering these questions and building a system of support for OPAs.



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