



# Promoting Inclusive Contract Farming in Agri-food Value Chains

Experiences from German Development Cooperation

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On behalf of BMZ, the policy brief series of the sector project "Agricultural Trade, Agribusiness, Agricultural Finance" summarises the results of working papers that are relevant to specialist audiences.



## SUMMARY

Cooperation with the private sector, such as through inclusive business models (IBM), is crucial in order to achieving rural economic transformation, better employment and income opportunities for improved livelihoods. Inclusive contract farming (ICF), one example of IBM, refers to agricultural production based on agreements between business parties: On the one side are producing and selling farmers while on the other are buying companies (industry and trade) who purchase agricultural products as agreed. The aim is to integrate small-scale farmers into value chains (VCs) in a sustainable way and to establish a reliable relationship between producers, off-takers and processing or trading companies. This can be mutually beneficial through the improved planning and reduction of risks and the fair combination of common interests. For smallholders, many advantages arise as a result, such as improved access to the means of production, advisory services, mechanisation and to finance and markets, along with more predictable prices.

Approaches to promoting cooperation between smallholder farmers and companies are now an established standard in the agricultural portfolio of international cooperation. ICF models are promising instruments for the long-term integration of smallholder farmers into sustainable agricultural value chains. The main task of development cooperation is to strengthen the negotiating position of small farmers and to work towards fair and transparent contractual arrangements. GIZ considers CF an IBM whose implementation requires a holistic view of the value chain and the framework conditions.



To facilitate such IBM arrangements, GIZ (on behalf of BMZ) published two contract farming handbooks in 2013 and 2015 that provided practical guidelines for linking small-scale producers and buyers through business model innovation. Responding to the projects' demands and those of their partner organisations, GIZ began implementing an up-scaling strategy for the approach. In 2019, 13 international trainers/coaches were trained in Bonn and Feldafing who are now part of a pool of 38 experts. Within the framework of 30 projects in 20 countries, these experts have facilitated the integration of farmers into ICF schemes. Impact studies have shown that farmers in ICFs have increased their incomes.

This policy brief provides an overview on the topic, describes the GIZ methodology for ICF, shows the impacts and provides recommendations for further support of ICF in agricultural technical cooperation.

## BACKGROUND

### Private sector engagement for rural economic transformation

In many developing and emerging economies, smallholder farmers and upstream and down-stream small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are by far the largest private sector investors. They are the driving forces behind job creation and income generation in rural areas. In Africa, "About 80% of the midstream of the value chains comprises SMEs. These are the motors of the value chain transformation, and of rural employment off farm" (AGRA, 2019, p.vi).

Larger local, regional and multinational trading and processing companies are developing an interest in sourcing from smallholder farmers. The main reasons for this are that urban markets are growing in many countries, consumers are becoming more demanding and regional economic communities are increasingly proving to be promising markets for local value addition alongside traditional and non-traditional commodities. To take advantage of these domestic, regional and global market opportunities, yields in agricultural production and in processing must increase, food safety and quality have to be managed from farm to fork and transaction costs reduced to become price competitive even against imports. To achieve this, it is necessary to modernise smallholder agriculture, empower farmers to become agripreneurs, join forces in farmer-based organisations (FBOs) and to develop sustainable business partnerships between farmers and off-takers, processors and traders. Better performance and reliable collaboration along value chains (VCs) will also help to develop joint solutions for becoming more resilient to climate change and respond more quickly and effectively to external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

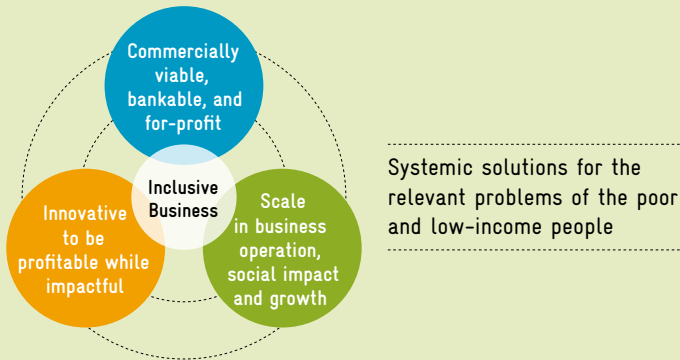
If well-managed, inclusive contract farming (ICF) can work as an innovation system in itself, bringing together farmers, FBOs and off-takers in a joint undertaking in which innovations can be tested, brought into economic use and scaled up. By doing so, the private agribusiness sector can contribute to creating jobs and generating income, thereby improving rural livelihoods and enhancing food security.

## ANALYSIS

### How to develop contract farming as an inclusive business model

For smallholder farmers to professionalise, they need access to quality inputs, competent advisory services, efficient low-cost technologies, appropriate financial products and lucrative markets. Sustainable integration into VCs through **inclusive business models (IBMs)** that offer benefits to farmers can facilitate the required transition to more modern and sustainable farming systems.

As Figure 1 shows, holistic approaches are required to succeed with inclusive business models: IBMs must be rewarding and bankable to be commercially viable and financially sustainable; they must be innovative to be profitable and achieve impact; and they must be scalable to achieve broad social impact and contribute to economic growth.



**Figure 1** Elements of inclusive business  
Source UN ESCAP and iBAN (2019)

” In the case of agribusiness, inclusive business practices create growth opportunities for smallholders and companies alike. The growing awareness from downstream and upstream value chain actors that IBMs can open attractive business prospects in ever more competitive and demanding markets is driving an increasing interest in such models as a means to create shared value. Meeting a growing demand for agricultural products will become increasingly difficult without sourcing from smallholder farmers. (GIZ MIERA (2018), p.4).



**Inclusive contract farming (ICF)** can be one among other types of inclusive business models to promote sustainable rural development in this sense. IBM in general, and ICF in particular, can contribute to the promotion of sustainable development in all its dimensions – economic, social and environmental.

Contract farming is defined as “forward agreement specifying the obligations of farmers and buyers as partners in business. Legally, farming contracts entail the sellers’ (farmers’) obligation to supply the volumes and qualities as specified and the buyers’ (processors’ or traders’) obligation to off-take the goods and realise payments as agreed. Furthermore, the buyers normally provide embedded services such as upfront delivery of inputs (e.g., seeds, fertilizers, plant protection products); pre-financing of input delivery on credit; and other services (e.g., extension)” (GIZ (2013), p.16).

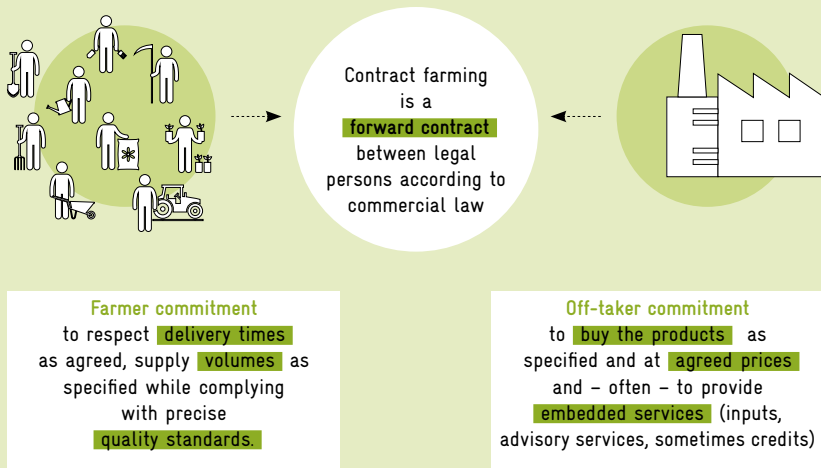
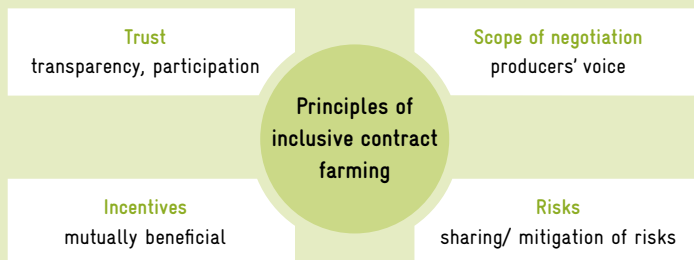
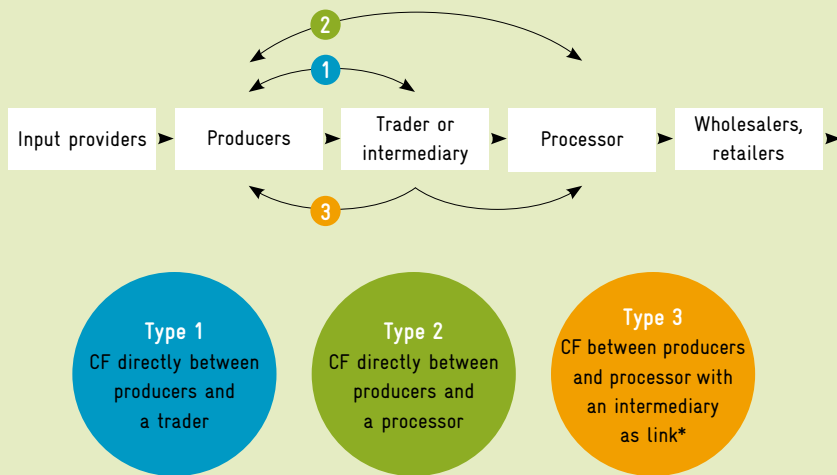


Figure 2 Main characteristics of contract farming  
Source Will (2015)

CF is not inclusive by itself; it only becomes inclusive when the general features of IBMs as outlined earlier are implemented, along with the following **principles of inclusive contract farming** :







\*(FO, lead farmer, trader or other)

**"Outgrower schemes" are a special type of CF Option 2,** in which contracted farmers are producing in the close neighbourhood of an off-taker or even on land rented from the off-taker.

**Figure 3** Different types of contract farming

Source Will (2020)

By linking farmers to markets and off-takers to procurement sources, contract farming as such is not a new business concept in developing and emerging economies. On the contrary, a wide range of informal and formal contractual arrangements have long since existed, featuring different types (see Figure 3): Farmers may conclude contracts directly with traders (Type 1) or with processors (Type 2) or, (Type 3), intermediaries make the link and provide services to both partners. The role of intermediaries may be fulfilled by farmer based organisations (FBOs), lead farmers, aggregators or traders who may serve as party to the contract or be contracted as external service providers.

**In recent years, the interest in setting up ICF schemes is on the rise** : urbanisation, population and income growth, changing consumption patterns and the possibility of replacing for imports offer agripreneurs and off-takers in developing countries good market prospects. Those willing and capable of changing business attitudes, adopting new technologies, improving the quality of products and the reliability of supplies and venturing into local value addition can tap growing market opportunities.

However, opportunities will only unfold if:

- the farming systems, the business models of FBOs and SMEs and the ICF scheme are economically, ecologically and socially sustainable;
- financial and non-financial services competently support innovations all along VCs (from inputs to marketing, in entrepreneurship and organisational development);
- policies, legislation, public infrastructure, enforcement mechanisms, promotion policies and administration provide an appropriate business enabling environment;
- and most importantly, if business relationships are reliable and built on mutual trust.



Aiming to ensure the procurement of sufficient volumes of quality products, off-takers engaging in IBMs pursue business strategies that facilitate smallholders' access to finance, support services, new climate-smart and environmentally-friendly technologies and rewarding markets. At the same time, they create jobs for young people while developing more decent working conditions and contributing to the empowerment of women as entrepreneurs and workers along the VCs.

**To achieve these impacts**, farmers and off-takers need to realise the potential benefits. Here, development cooperation can take on a role of facilitation and coaching; competent financial and non-financial services as well as a sufficient time horizon for third party technical assistance have to be available given the urgent and wide-ranging need for capacity development along the VCs. If these conditions are met, ICF can directly contribute to the achievement of seven of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (see Figure 4).

#### **Inclusive contract farming – an opportunity for agribusiness development in Africa**

Less than 5% of smallholder farmers in Africa are engaged in contract farming (AGRA, 2019, p.30). However, this only refers to formal written contracts and large-scale schemes for commodities (coffee, palm oil, sugar cane, etc.) driven by large-scale local or regional companies or multinational corporations. Studies taking stock of contract farming often ignore informal contracting, even though this exists in many places. The reason is that the notion of „contract farming“ remains unknown and existing cases are not recognised. In Ethiopia, for example, the “sell-produce” agreement (“Sheto-Mamerete”) follows essentially a contract farming business model, as is the case of informal contracting of smallholders by wholesale maize traders in Ghana (Will and Plewa, 2013). If promising, such cases of informal contract farming could well serve as an entry point for upgrading and scaling up. Framework conditions for ICF are in general improving. The African Union sets the agenda for “Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for shared prosperity and improved livelihoods” and stipulates the transformation of the economy through sustainable and inclusive economic growth as an important development objective (Goal 4) in their Agenda 2063. Within this framework, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which entered into force on 1 January 2021, opens up a market with a combined population of 1.3 billion and a joint GDP of over 3 trillion US dollars. In line with this, national governments and regional economic communities are attaching increasing importance to ICF. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for example, declares in their Regional Agricultural Investment Plan under Strategic Pillar 2 [“...to promote contractual, inclusive and competitive agricultural and food value chains oriented towards regional and international demand.”] (Source ECOWAS (2017), p.29)

**Inclusive Contract Farming:  
value proposition as incentive to change**

**Farmers can gain from:**

- increased farm productivity and sales volumes
- reduced production unit costs
- increased prices for quality products

**Off-takers can gain from:**

- reduced product rejection
- better utilisation of installed capacities
- access to higher-end markets

**Both can gain from:**

- reduced post-harvest losses
- reduced transaction unit costs

**Inclusive Contract Farming:  
innovations required to support change**

**Farmers require:**

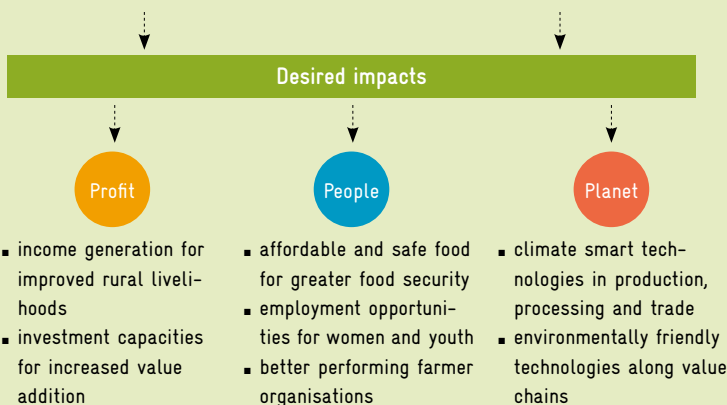
- access to stable markets
- quality inputs
- low-cost technologies
- sufficient farm labour
- financing solutions
- strong FBOs

**Off-takers require:**

- remunerative markets
- quality raw materials
- sufficient volumes
- timely supplies
- skilled workers
- financing solutions

**Both require:**

- reliable business enabling environment (BEE)
- access to adequate financial and non-financial services



**Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):**



**Figure 4** Inclusive contract farming: From incentives and innovation to impact  
Source Authors



### GIZ Methodology to promote inclusive contract farming

GIZ developed a methodology for promoting 'Contract farming as inclusive business model'. Based on the aforementioned IBM guidelines and ICF principles, the core concept of this methodology is a joint business model at the 'interface of farmer supplies and off-taker procurement' (see Figure 5).

Inclusive contract farming (iCF) is a Business Model at the farm supply-off-taker procurement interface linking the **off-taker's strategy** with the **farmers' production systems**

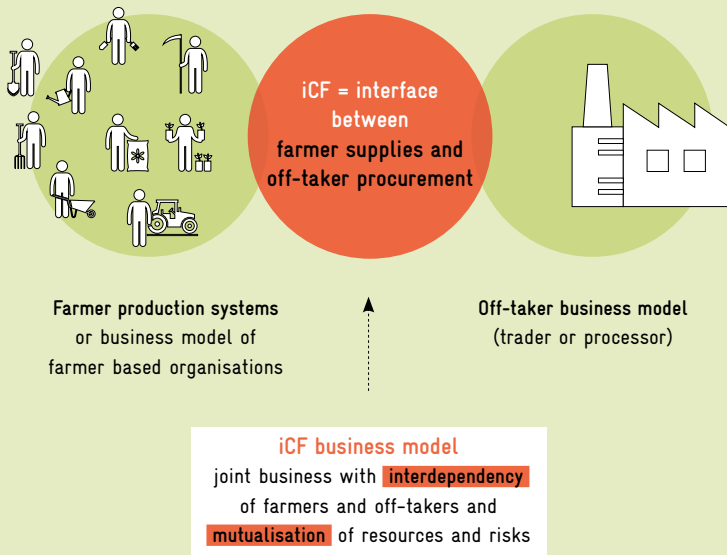


Figure 5 GIZ concept for promoting 'contract framing as inclusive business model'  
Source Will (2020)

GIZ realised through its experience in implementation that for ICF to be successful, farmers, FBOs and off-takers needed to understand their respective roles and responsibilities and agree on sharing resources and risks. A necessary precondition is the recognition of their mutual interdependence. This common ground forms the foundation for designing, implementing and scaling up ICF business models. However, common reasons for failure of contract farming arrangements need to be considered and avoided – for example:

- insufficient consideration of necessary investments into increasing productivity;
- insufficient consideration of possible trade-offs between household food security and crops produced under contract (i.e., the resources of the farming system);
- insufficient assessment of the sustainability of the business model in favour of anticipated quick-wins;
- lack of scope of within which farmers can negotiate contract terms;
- instead of selecting farmers via off-takers, government extension services or projects should do this, considering the need for efficient logistics for providing embedded services and collecting the produce in order to establish trust-based relationships with farmers;
- a default on contracts either by off-takers (e.g., delayed delivery of inputs, delayed payments, unjustified rejection of products) or by farmers (e.g., side-selling, diversion of inputs or supply of low quality);
- the failure to include dispute resolution solutions in the contract.

Since the situation on the ground, the capacities and attitudes, product features and market requirements as well as support services and framework conditions differ from case to case, there is no blueprint for designing and operating ICF business models. Rather, every single scheme calls for a situation specific analysis at the onset, the design of the ICF business model, the outline of the ICF management system, the financing concept and the business plan. Making ICF business models a success requires fundamental changes in behaviour and business practices and the learning of new skills for all involved. Given the innovative approaches and new challenges, GIZ learned and promoted an approach of standardised trainings and – most importantly – of coaching the contract partners for a sufficient period of time in planning and managing their joint business.

Therefore, GIZ on behalf of BMZ developed an ICF manual and a toolkit, a training and coaching approach and a scaling concept. Further, GIZ developed an online introduction course on contract farming.

ICF promotion complements and builds on other methodologies and instruments used in German development cooperation. Most relevant are the ValueLinks methodology, tools developed by the inclusive Business Action Network (iBAN), approaches for FBO development (e.g. Cooperative Business School, BizFBO, FO Cycle), the Farmer Business School (FBS) and SME Business Training and Coaching Loop (SME Loop) as well as agricultural and SME financing including insurance. Furthermore, capacity development on technical skills such as Good Agricultural Practices and quality management along VCs are decisive to making ICF a success.



### GIZ iCF Manual

The iCF Manual provides a practical and process-oriented approach for sound planning, starting up, consolidation and scaling up of iCF business models. The GIZ CF Handbook provides guidance for practitioners and hints for 3rd parties interested to support iCF development with technical and/ or financial assistance.

GIZ (2013) CF Handbook Volume I [ [Link](#) ]



### GIZ iCF Toolkit

The iCF Toolkit provides instruments and case studies that assist practitioners (contract parties, trainers/ coaches, 3rd party supporters) in taking informed decisions on initiating, implementing, scaling up and supporting iCF business models. Based on field experiences, the range of available tools is constantly being expanded.

GIZ (2015) CF Handbook Volume II [ [Link](#) ]  
GIZ (2017) ICT CF Toolbox (ICT4CF) [ [Link](#) ]



### GIZ iCF Training and Coaching

To ensure that farmers, FBOs and off-takers truly embrace their joint iCF business model, a participatory, action-oriented training and coaching approach has been developed. Following initial sensitisation and basic skills training, coaches accompany the contract partners in developing their own solutions tailored to their situation.

GIZ Virtual CoP Contract Farming [ [Link](#) ]  
GIZ CF Trainers and Coaches [ [Link](#) ]



### GIZ iCF Scaling up Concept

The concept provides recommendations for the transfer of successful approaches and the harmonisation, standardisation and institutionalisation of GIZ's iCF methodology. It gives guidance to project staff and their partner organisations for scaling up iCF in response to the specific contexts and needs of their private sector partners.

GIZ (2017) Concept Scaling up iCF, unpubl.  
GIZ (2014) Corporate Strategy Scaling [ [Link](#) ]

## Use of the GIZ methodology for promoting inclusive contract farming

The GIZ methodology has already been implemented in more than 20 partner countries, mainly in Africa, and has been used by more than 30 programmes of the German development cooperation as well as other donor organisations and non-governmental organisations. These include:

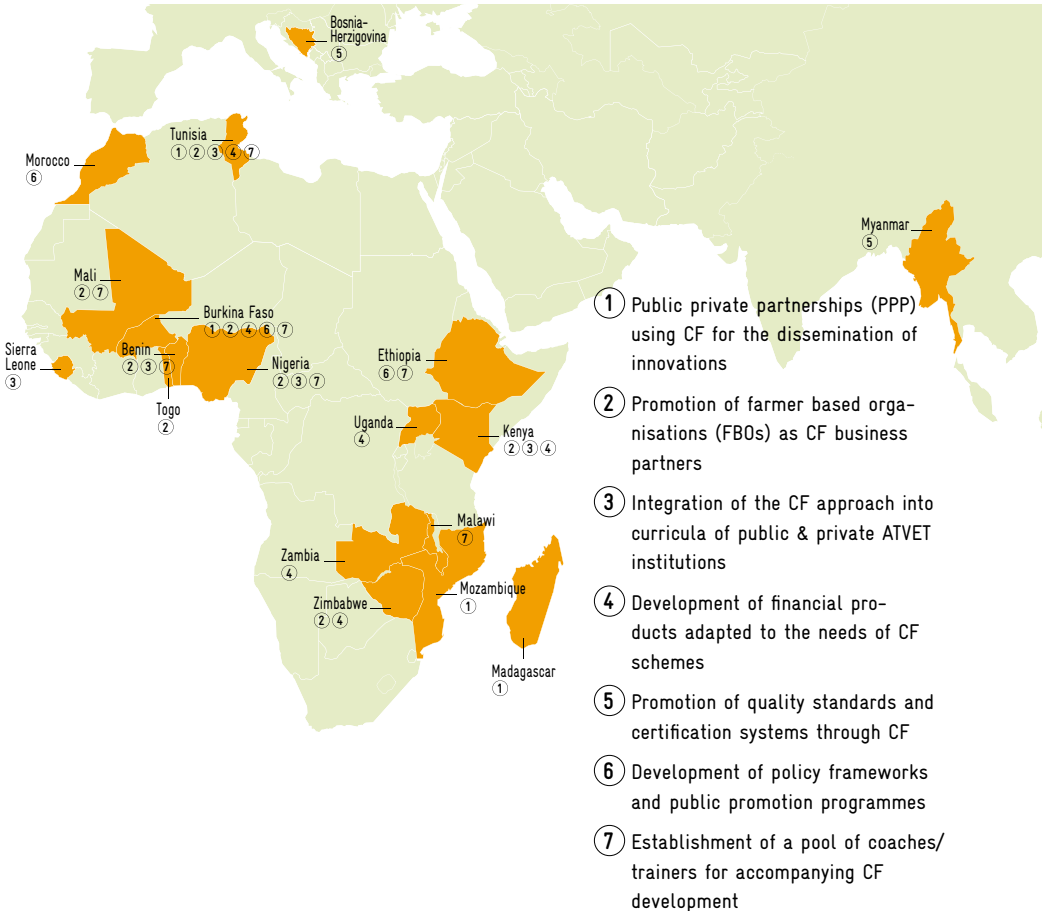
- **Bilateral GIZ programmes** ;
- **Regional GIZ programmes** (especially the Competitive Africa Rice Initiative (CARI))
- Global **Special Initiative of the BMZ "One World – No Hunger"** projects (especially the Green Innovation Centres for the Agriculture and Food Sector);
- **Public Private Partnership projects** (develoPPP);
- **CAADP** Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training (ATVET)
- Inclusive Business Action Network (iBAN);
- German contribution to implementing the G7 **Climate Risk Insurance Initiative** (InsuResilience);

■ **Other donor organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) :**

- Agence Française de Développement (AFD)
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
- Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)
- Moroccan Agence pour le Développement Agricole (ADA)
- World Bank
- Agriterra and SOS Sahel.

The ICF approach is used across many different value chains such as in staple crops (e.g., rice, wheat and manioc), oil seeds (e.g., soy and sesame), fruits and vegetables (e.g., French beans, potatoes, avocados and mangoes), nuts (e.g., cashew and macadamia), livestock (e.g., dairy products and poultry), and others (e.g., Baobab, dates and seed production).

The graph illustrates the geographical spread and the variety of applications of the ICF methodology (the list is not exhaustive).



## IMPACTS OF INCLUSIVE CONTRACT FARMING

ICF can create a win-win situation for farmers and agripreneurs, FBOs and off-takers, and contribute to rural economic transformation, if well-designed, well-managed and accompanied by adequate services and an enabling environment.

“ We want farmers to be more efficient and more productive. From the usual practice of about 900 kg oilseed harvest per ha, with good agricultural practices, smallholder farmers can get up to 2-3 tons per ha. This will increase the income of farmers and improve capacity utilisation of our company, a true win-win situation. Direct linkages between farmers and the company will also reduce transaction costs in trade and increase margins of farmers and company alike.

**Source** GIZ MIERA, 2018, p.20

Manoj Kumar Vats, General Manager,  
Sunseed Oil Ltd., Malawi

“ Thanks to the contract we have a secure market and access to other services. The contract facilitates our access to loans from the credit union to buy seed and fertilizer. This allows us to respect the agreed cultivation calendar. This year, we obtained 3 million CFA francs [about 4,500 EUR] in campaign credit. ... The partnership with NAFASO is a long-term relationship and gives us stability. We have access to markets, the banks trust us and we can make investments. In addition, we benefit from training in the technologies for producing basic seeds.

**Source** GIZ GIAE, 2020, p.4

Odette Millogo, female farmer producing seed under contract for NAFASO, a leading seed company with a distribution network in 11 West African countries from Burkina Faso



### Achieving impacts: The case of the Green Innovation Centre for the Agriculture and Food Sector (GIAE) – Nigeria<sup>1</sup>

Having identified the supply of raw materials as a major bottleneck for processing companies, GIAE Nigeria started to promote ICF in 2016. According to the preliminary results of a recent impact assessment, the following results have been achieved after more than 2 years of implementing the standard facilitation process with 14 partner companies in the cassava, maize, potato and rice VCs.

<sup>1</sup> Sources: GIAE Nigeria, n.d.: Green Innovation Center Nigeria – Scaling up Contract Farming; GIAE Nigeria, 2020: Contract farming implementation: GIAE Nigeria impacts achieved (preliminary information on the results of the impact assessment, received 27 April 2020); personnel communication



The following results were achieved at the level of partner companies:

Key performance indicators (KPI)	Companies reporting results: no./%	Results reported (baseline = 0)
Turnover	7/14	+ 50% on average
No. of customers	14/14	no details available
Formalised business relationship (FBR) between the processing company and customers	10/14	4 per company on average
Processing costs	10/14	- 80% per month
Investments	8/14	+ 100% on average
Employment		total: 125 permanent jobs, there of 43% women and 48% youth
Inclusive CF (ICF)	14/14	all companies adopted ICF

Results achieved at the level of farmers and farmer-based organisations:

Key performance indicators (KPI)	Results reported (baseline = 0)
No. of farmers	8,349 farmers contracted (about 33% women/40% youth) either individual contracts or via FBOs*)
No. of FBOs*	562 FBOs (with 30, 10 or 5 members respectively)
Productivity	2-3-fold increase for past two seasons (anecdotally reported by farmers and off-takers; no survey data obtained yet)

In the Green Innovation Centre in Burkina Faso, the following impacts were achieved:

**Green Innovation Centres for the Agriculture and Food Sector Burkina Faso:**  
**1 iCF scheme in rice**

- 6,000 farmers contracted within three years
- Increase in yields from 2-3 t/ha in 2018 to 4-6 t/ha in 2020
- Increase in prices from 0.17 EUR/ kg to 0.22 EUR/ kg due to quality
- Increase in turnover of the rice mill from EUR 200,000 to 685,000

The regional program CARI (Competitive African Rice Initiative) is another example as to how considerable impacts could be achieved: 55,000 rice farmers in Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Tanzania who were integrated into 16 CF schemes increased their average yields from 2t/ha in 2013 to 6t/ha in 2020.



## CONCLUSIONS

Inclusive contract farming can be an important pathway to leveraging private investment in smallholder agriculture for sustainable rural economic development. ICF can build the oft-missing link from smallholder farmers to rapidly growing local consumer markets, as well as to lucrative regional and global export markets. ICF can drive rural economic transformation in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and develop more resilient food value chains.

With regards to achieving sustainability of ICF systems, the role of FBOs as partners to negotiate fair contracts with mutual benefits is crucial. They can take up a role in CF management and service provision (e.g. joint learning, input distribution, produce collection, mentoring and monitoring, internal audits in case of group certification, group lending, risk sharing, or dispute resolution). Further, they can assure that the interests of their members are adequately represented and thus, ensure sustainability of the business arrangement.

German development cooperation has played a successful role in facilitating the process of creating trust-based and mutually beneficial ICF business models. We have gained a lot of experience, we know about the importance of trust between farmers and their business partners, we know how to coach successful ICF models over time and will continue to monitor their impacts. The challenge now is to scale these successes. Further action is required: in capacity development for competent business development service providers, in developing appropriate financial services, in strengthening and further empowerment of membership-based organisations (FBOs and SME business associations) as well as in establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships for facilitating public-private dialogue on inclusive contract farming and at the macro level of agricultural policymaking.

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## Selected Websites

Atingi: Web-based online introduction course on contract farming (sensitisation)  
[ [Link](#) – please register with the platform and search for the training ]

GIZ Sector Network Rural Development (SNRD) Africa:  
Virtual Community of Practice on Contract Farming [ [Link](#) ]

GIZ Sector Network Rural Development (SNRD) Africa: Trainers and Coaches [ [Link](#) ]

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