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Transformations in West African agriculture and the role of family farms

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List of abbreviations

ACP	Africa-Caribbean-Pacific
AGOA	Africa Growth and Opportunity Act
AGRHYMET	Centre Régional de Formation et d'Application en Agrométéorologie et Hydrologie Opérationnelle (du CILSS)
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy (European Union)
CFAF	West African Monetary Union franc
CILSS	Comité Inter-états de Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel
CIR	Carte d'Identité Rurale
CIRAD-TERA	Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement Département Territoires, Environnement et Acteurs (France)
CMA/AOC	Conférence des Ministres de l'Agriculture de l'Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre
CMDT	Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles
CNCR	Comité National de Concertation des Ruraux (Senegal)
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
EBA	Everything But Arms
ECOLOG	Programme to revive local economies in West Africa
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
ETN	EU Trade Network
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FUPRO	Fédération des Unions de Producteurs (Benin)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOPDC	Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation (GOPDC)
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Country
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development (UK)
IITA	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture
IPCC	Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change
LDC	Least Developed Country
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NTB	Non-tariff barrier

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PADCLA	Project to Support Skills Development for Agricultural Leaders in Western Africa
PAF	Projet Agro-forestière (Burkina Faso)
PO	Producer Organisation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Process
ROPPA	Réseau des Organisations Paysannes de l'Afrique de l'Ouest
SEXAGON	Syndicat des Exploitants Agricoles à l'Office du Niger (Mali)
SKBo	An approach to local development across borders in the Sikasso–Korhogo–Bobo Dioulasso area
STABEX	The European Commission's compensatory finance scheme to stabilise export earnings of the ACP countries (for agricultural products)
SWAC	Sahel and West Africa Club (OECD)
SWC	Soil and Water Conservation
UPA-DI	Union des Producteurs Agricoles – Développement International (Canada)
UEMOA	Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine
WALTPS	West Africa Long Term Perspective Study
WTO	World Trade Organisation

1. Introduction

This paper was prepared as an initial scoping study for the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) Secretariat to provide the basis for developing a longer term programme of work to examine the transformations underway in West African agriculture, and the challenges faced by smallholder production systems. The following question was a key driver behind this work: *what is the future of the family farm in West Africa, in the light of the enormous changes that have taken place within agriculture over the last two decades and further likely changes to come?*

The broad objectives of the overall initiative were to:

- 1 Raise debate regarding agricultural policy and the future of family farming in West Africa, at national, regional and international levels;
- 1 Highlight key issues and trade-offs between policy objectives;
- 1 Develop partnerships with West African organisations, and support their strategies for engaging with policy debate nationally, regionally, and internationally;
- 1 Identify and document impacts from OECD agricultural and trade policy on prospects for West Africa's farmers;
- 1 Develop partnerships with OECD-based groups working on trade issues, to ensure the voices of West African producers are better heard and taken into account.

This initial scoping study has involved the collection of background material, consultation with groups in West Africa and OECD countries and preparation of this paper. A detailed proposal for future work to build on the results presented here has been prepared to feed into SWAC discussions on follow up.

This work on the transformation of West African agriculture and the role of the family farms has close linkages to several other areas of work being undertaken by the Sahel and West Africa Club, notably:

- 1 Promoting competitiveness of the West African economy, exploring the drivers for change and adaptive capacity within indigenous structures, assessing the impact of OECD member state policies on agriculture and trade on West African producers, and mapping regional economic spaces with respect to potential economic opportunities and comparative advantage;
- 1 The strengths and weaknesses of research and extension, as means to enable family agriculture to innovate in a changing environment, promoting dialogue between multiple actors on ways to “modernise” the agricultural sector, and support regional producer organisations (ROPPA) to influence national and sub-regional policy as it relates to agriculture and trade negotiations;
- 1 Strengthening a mapping approach to understanding the spatial dimensions of economic development and change, the analysis of opportunities and challenges within cross-border areas with tightly woven flows of trade and people;
- 1 Issues of governance, within a context of decentralisation, and understanding the dynamics and causes of conflict.

At the same time, the proposed follow-up to this scoping study provides potential for developing strong partnerships within both the West African region and OECD member states. In the first case, a multi-stakeholder approach is essential to strengthen opportunities for poorly represented groups to get their voices heard in the design and implementation of agricultural policy. Here, the role of producer organisations is of particular importance. In the second case, there are a large number of groups, networks, and arenas within which questions of agricultural reform and trade negotiations are being discussed, as well as a move towards greater policy coherence across the fields of trade reform and poverty reduction. Consequently, the SWAC has multiple opportunities to develop a programme of work in this field which would neatly complement other ongoing work and make a major contribution to its overall objectives.

Finally, it is important to note that this scoping study was developed through two interlinked processes of review and consultation.

- 1 A series of consultations was held in the West African region with key resource people and institutions, through interviews and several workshops in the West Africa region. At the same time, a range of organisations in OECD member states were approached to understand better their involvement with trade, development and agricultural policy issues both within Europe and North America and in West Africa. These consultations have had the objective of raising levels of debate as regards the main challenges and difficulties faced by agriculture in West Africa, in the current global context. These meetings and discussions also have provided the basis for building future alliances on the future of West African agriculture.

- 1 An extensive review of the literature was undertaken on the evolution of agricultural production, poverty and livelihoods in different parts of West Africa. This review was complemented by commissioning studies by several experts in the field.

2. The role of agriculture in West African development

Agriculture remains a centrally important part of the West African economy, providing 30–50% of GDP in most countries, the major source of income and livelihoods for 70–80% of the population, food supplies and revenue from export of cash crops. While the economies and peoples of the region are diversifying into a range of other activities, farming is likely to remain of central significance to incomes and livelihoods for the foreseeable future (Fafchamps, *et al.* 2001). In the early years following independence, most countries followed state-led policies aimed at rapid economic growth, based on industrialisation and taxation of the agricultural sector. Such approaches brought disappointment and led to great structural changes in the 1980s, with the introduction of structural adjustment programmes and greater attention to the importance of agriculture as the basis for economic growth. The current focus of donors and governments on meeting the Millennium Development Goals has refocused attention on the rural economy, given that it is estimated that 70% of the world's poorest people are rural dwellers. Improvements to the productivity and returns gained from agriculture have been identified as a key means to reach the poverty reduction targets. Governments in the region are therefore interested in seeing how agriculture might be “modernised” better to meet the many demands made of it.

Important questions remain regarding what is meant by “modernisation”, whether agriculture can “modernise” on the basis of the smallholder family farm sector, and consequences for meeting poverty reduction targets if governments favour large-scale over smallholder farms. Equally, agricultural policy has multiple linkages with other government strategies and associated measures. For example, new land tenure legislation will affect the structure and performance of the farming sector. There are also important trade-offs to consider between support to large-scale commercial farms and broader objectives in relation to productivity and equity.

Access to land and natural resources has increasingly become a political issue, with the rise in multiparty activity. The association of different parties with ethnic or economic interests, and their relations with customary

leaders have served to politicise land questions, adding further tensions to local land conflicts. Those in dispute seek to gain support from higher level political figures as a means of pursuing their case, leading to an escalation of the issues at stake. Competition over land and resources have thus become a major source of conflict.

3. Transformations in West African agriculture and family farming

3.1 Definitions and typologies

Family farming, or agriculture familiale, although widely used as a term, covers a broad range of situations which are often very different. Thus, some authors strongly advise the use of the term in its plural form (agricultures familiales) to demonstrate the diversity of systems and contexts under discussion (Belières, et al. 2002). The organisation and practice of farming systems vary greatly between agro-ecological zones, from one country to another, and between different socio-cultural groups. Within such diversity, however, there are certain key features which characterise family farming, relating to the particular connection between the structure and composition of the household and its associated farm assets and activities. This relationship has important implications for how decisions are made regarding the choice of crops, the organisation of family labour and its allocation to different tasks, management of farm land and other assets, and questions of inheritance (CIRADTERA in Belières, et al. 2002). In most parts of West Africa, farm production is based on family labour which, while often unpaid, is assured a return in the form of longer term rights and expectations. Thus, family farms rely on labour contributions from their various members who, in return, will receive food and shelter, support in times of illness and old age, and help with costs of marriage, tax payments, and so on. Equally, commitment of labour to the family farm enterprise ensures its members maintain their rights to the family's property, when a division of the estate takes place. This web of mutual obligations and rights is under strain in many areas, as a result of economic pressures, shifts in religious and cultural values, and the breakdown of large domestic groups into smaller nuclear units.

While agricultural production relies heavily on family labour, non-household labour can often provide a significant additional source. Many farmers rely on hiring labour from other families in the village or on seasonal farm workers for land preparation, cultivation, harvesting and processing their crops. This may be due to insufficient labour being available within the family (as a result of illness, or outmigration) or due to a strategy of agricultural expansion. Thus, it is important to avoid seeing the family farm as an isolated economic unit focused entirely on agriculture and

reliant exclusively on its own resources. Further characteristics of family farms typically include a diverse set of activities and outputs involving a range of crop and livestock production, fishing, hunting and gathering, trade and craftwork as well as seasonal or longer term migration (Zoundi, 2003). Family farms often rely on a set of social networks linking relatives and neighbours in near and more distant locations, through which mutual support is provided. Maintenance and investment in these networks constitute an important element in the household's strategy since they can provide an essential safety net in times of crisis. Within the family farm, access to land and farm assets tends to be acquired through inheritance or other social arrangements, such as loans.

Box 1. Family or household

Family farm or farm household? What is the difference between the two? Which term should be used? *Farm household* is the term usually employed to describe the unit of production which farms a common field and eats from a common granary. In practice, farm households usually operate in more complex ways. For example, individuals within the household may have their own private fields and granaries. Some livestock are owned individually, while others are the joint property of the household as a whole. Several farm households may make up a *larger family group* which no longer functions as a single production unit. Nevertheless, there may be some residual functions which are carried out by this larger family group, such as the management of lineage land, the planning and negotiation of matrimonial alliances and certain religious ceremonies. Here, we use the term 'family farm' or 'farm household' interchangeably to mean the domestic group which works a common field and eats together, while recognising that, in reality, family life is always more complex than this.

The family farm, its land and associated assets (equipment, livestock, trees, etc.) are under the authority of the household head who is responsible for the collective management of these assets, the allocation of labour between different activities, management of grain stores, and deciding on new strategies and directions to be pursued. In practice, the household head will often delegate day-to-day management of fields and animals to a younger brother, while monitoring activities closely. The principal objective of the family farm is first to provide its members with food and shelter, second, to sell whatever is needed to gain cash for satisfying the range of other needs of the household, such as clothing, medicines, school fees, investment in new equipment, and tax payments. Surplus crops may be stored to protect against future harvest failure, or sold and reinvested in livestock, other assets or social networks.

Family farms thus are made up of three broad dimensions:

- 1 A socio-cultural dimension, since this form of agriculture is mainly reliant on the human resource base of the family, strongly anchored in a particular community, through a web of relationships and strategies, both individual and collective, and reinforced by values of solidarity and long-term commitment.
- 1 An economic dimension characterised by an integration of diverse activities in household production, given the various opportunities available in immediate and more distant areas, and operating according to the following priorities: consume, store, sell.
- 1 A technical dimension characterised by a desire to maintain and improve the land and resources on which they rely, and combining activities in ways which reduce exposure to risk.

In contrast to commercial enterprises, family farms tend to work relatively small areas of land. In Ghana, for example a study in 1997 showed there to be 800,000 cocoa smallholders, with an average farm size of 3 hectares, of which 60% had less than 2 hectares, and 80% less than 4 hectares (Owusu, 2002). In Benin, farm holding size averages 3.3 hectares (Minot, *et al.* 2001). For Mali, cotton is grown by more than 200,000 farm households averaging 15 people, cultivating 10 hectares. The prioritisation of consumption over commercialisation is, however, undergoing change in many areas, given the growing need for cash, leading to important shifts in how land and labour are allocated between food and cash crops. Equally, grain is an important cash crop for some farmers, as well as providing for the household's food needs.

Nevertheless, family farms face distinct problems, which include:

- 1 A growing shortage of land and its rapid increase in value, especially in peri-urban areas. Most West African smallholders claim rights over land through customary procedures and do not hold formal paper title. As a result, these land claims may be vulnerable to stronger interest groups who are seeking land and can get governments to back their claims through formal procedures.
- 1 Illiteracy and poor access to schooling for many rural people, so that

Table 1. Comparison between family farms and commercial agriculture

Characteristics	Family farms	Commercial agriculture
Role of household labour	Major	Little or none
Community linkages	Strong: based on solidarity and mutual help between household and broader group	Weak: often no social connection between entrepreneur and local community
Priority objectives	Consume Stock Sell	Sell Buy Consume
Diversification	High: to reduce exposure to risk	Low: specialisation on very few crops and activities
Flexibility	High	Low
Size of holding	Small: averaging 5–10ha	Large: may exceed 100ha
Links to market	Weak: but becoming stronger	Strong
Land access	Inheritance and social arrangements	Purchase

they have limited power to engage with the formal sector, whether in marketing, producer organisations, or contacts with government. Low levels of literacy may also hinder easy access to new technologies and innovative practices, as well as achieving more effective management of the farm enterprise.

- 1 The low value accorded to the status of an agricultural smallholder, with the sons and daughters of farming households doing their best to escape a life of hard labour for little return. This low status also translates into little respect given to local knowledge and ways of life such as traditional medicine, skills in local craftwork, or systems for classifying grasses, soils and trees.
- 1 The poorly developed organisation of smallholder agricultural producers constitutes a serious problem in a context of rapid integration of marketing and production systems. While government parastatals used to play an important role as providers of inputs and credit, and buyers of certain crops, most governments have been forced to disband these organisations and privatise these functions. In the absence of a well-developed co-operative movement, small farmers have very

little organised marketing power or negotiating ability with input suppliers and crop buyers.

- 1 The question of inheritance and fragmentation of land holdings is a serious problem for the viability of the family farm, which benefits from certain economies of scale when able to combine the labour and assets of several family members, rather than being limited to a nuclear family or single individual. While it is not always the rule, the death of the household head often leads to the break-up of the family into two or more separate units, with a division of the land and other assets. This fragmentation can lead to them becoming more vulnerable to risk and less able to maintain the livestock and equipment needed to run the farm.

Farming households are complex and dynamic institutions, which evolve over time, as shown below.

Box 2. Dynamics, diversity and differentiation in West Africa's family farms

Farm households in West Africa are highly diverse in size and structure. In any rural setting, there is usually a wide range of farm households, varying in size from small nuclear groups, comprising a married couple and young children, to larger complex domestic units in which there are several married couples, their children and aged parents. The size and structure of farm households is partly determined by cultural values, but is also the consequence of demographic processes, the skill exercised by the household head, and responses to economic opportunities.

The large, extended farm household traditionally associated with West African agricultural society has undergone major changes in recent generations. In some places, these large groups have broken up into smaller, nuclear families. Such a break-up may be a response by younger men seeking greater autonomy from their elders and no longer being willing to submit to their authority. Thus, Amanor (2001) describes the dissolution of forms of mutual obligations between fathers and sons – the former to provide land, pay tax, and contribute marriage expenses for the latter, who in return are expected to work for the family estate. Similar contests between senior and junior family members are described for Côte d'Ivoire (Chauveau, 2002) and Nigeria (Smith, 1966).

In other contexts, the large extended household remains of great significance. In the village of Zaradoukou in southern Mali, for example, 85% of the population lives in

large complex households, ranging from 10–90 people in size. These domestic groups combine cotton and maize farms with cocoa and coffee plantations in Côte d'Ivoire as well as livestock, orchards and trading activities. Large size enables a diverse portfolio of incomes and assets (Brock and Coulibaly, 1999). Within these large households, there is commonly a distinction maintained between collective and individual economic activity. Thus, household members are expected to work on the joint family field for a certain part of their time, being free to pursue their own interests in the remaining period. Maintaining a balance between collective and individual economic activity is a key management skill which some family heads master well. Where they fail, large households usually break up into their component units.

In risk prone environments, there are considerable advantages to living in large domestic units. For example, in the village of Kala in central Mali, larger households were associated with higher levels of livestock wealth (cattle per person) and access to farm equipment (plough teams per person), as well as greater food security (harvest per person). Benefits from shared production and investment in large households (averaging 24 people in size) were substantial. Nuclear families (averaging eight people) were much more vulnerable to risk and were not able to benefit from economies of scale in production, investment and income diversification (Toulmin, 1992). Differentiation between farm households takes place over time as some families do better than others and can increase their control over key assets (land, livestock, labour and capital). Others suffer impoverishment, due to harvest failure, family illness, sale of assets and the need to work for others. Such processes of social differentiation have always existed to some extent. But it is important to ask: are such processes now becoming more significant? Is socio-economic differentiation linked to increased integration with the market economy? How might poorer farm households be enabled to protect their assets at times of crisis and reduce vulnerability to impoverishment?

3.2 Towards a typology of farm households

West Africa exhibits a very diverse array of family farms, in terms of factors such as size, assets, market orientation, income, diversification of activities, reliance on migrants' earnings and vulnerability to risk. A typology of farm households within such diversity depends, as with all classification systems, on the objectives sought. For example, in the cotton-growing region of southern Mali, the CMDT⁶ uses a fourfold classification of farm households based on a combination of farm size and type of equipment used, which enables the CMDT to target different kinds of technical advice.

⁶ Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles, the parastatal body responsible for cotton production and marketing.

A recent review of family farms in the global setting proposes a three way classification of rural producers (Vorley, 2002), as shown in Box 3 below. The purpose of this typology is to examine levels of market involvement, access to technology and exposure to risk. Such an analysis of rural differentiation shows family farms, such as those in West Africa, largely caught in the second and third categories. While able until now to manage more or less, these farming enterprises may face a more challenging future as local markets and food systems become increasingly globalised.

Box 3. The three rural worlds

Rural world 1: globally competitive, embedded in agribusiness, commodity producers and processors, politically well-connected, export-driven, adopters of Green Revolution and trans-genic technologies.

Rural world 2: locally-oriented, with access to and control over land, multiple and diverse enterprises, undercapitalised, declining terms of trade and at serious risk of future impoverishment.

Rural world 3: fragile livelihoods, limited access to productive resources, multi-occupational migrants straddling rural and urban life, unskilled and uneducated, dependent on low-wage labour, redundant to global food and fibre production systems.

Source: Vorley (2002: 9)

Zoundi (2003) presents a threefold classification of family farms, which echoes the categories outlined above. The first category comprises those with a strong involvement in crop production for the market, and where this guides very substantially the choices made regarding resource allocation. The second category is made up of those farm households largely focused on production for satisfying their own needs. A third intermediary category can be identified for which some balance is maintained between market and subsistence activities. As Zoundi notes, such intermediary households are often those who, while formerly focused on subsistence production, are now allocating more time and resources to market production, as a result of the rising need for cash to satisfy diverse household needs.

A threefold classification of this sort seems best, building on the above discussion and corresponding with the range of situations found in different parts of West Africa, the characteristics of each being as follows:

Type 1: farmers oriented towards the market, organised around one of the major cash crops, such as cotton, cocoa, coffee, fruit and vegetables. Often

highly specialised, they are exposed to significant risks from fluctuations on global market prices. Within this group can also be found farms in the urban and peri-urban zone, specialised in producing for the market.

Type 2: farms in which cereal production and cash crop activity are more or less balanced in terms of their relative importance. Such farm households often pursue considerable diversification, as a means to protect themselves from climatic and market risks, the level of diversification depending on local conditions, access to land and the size of household.

Type 3: farms oriented towards grain production for subsistence needs, some part of the harvest being sold to raise cash. They constitute the poorer households with limited access to inputs and markets, with little equipment and few livestock. In many places, these households are finding it particularly difficult to make ends meet and undergoing a process of decapitalisation which will lead eventually to their disappearance.

However, it should be recognised that within each of these categories can be found a wide range of households in terms of size, activities, reliance on off-farm sources of income, land tenure situation and so on. Equally, it should be remembered that these are not watertight categories. There is likely to be mobility between these categories over time, and from year to year. For example, a farm household which suffers the loss of a key family member, through out-migration or death, may be forced to reorient its pattern of production from a market focus to satisfaction of food needs. Conversely, a very good harvest in one year may provide the means for a household to invest in new equipment and pursue a more market-oriented cropping pattern in future.

It is due to this diversity of farm households and their differential ability to respond to market opportunities, invest in productive assets and meet their needs, that has led some observers to pronounce the end of the family farm. Those in favour of promoting investment in large-scale commercial agribusiness can always find examples of impoverished, subsistence-based families, unable to cope with the multiple challenges of prices, climate and risk. Those seeking to demonstrate the dynamism and viability of family farms can point to a very different set of smallholders who have clearly demonstrated their ability to address new markets and adopt new technologies. Policy measures need to consider how best to address the very different needs and pathways associated with each kind of producer.

4. Mapping agrarian change in West Africa

West Africa is a highly complex and diverse region, stretching from the deserts of Mauritania, Mali and Niger, southwards to the tropical forest areas of the Gulf of Guinea, and from the hilly savannas of upland Guinea to Sahelian grasslands and extensive rain-fed millet fields. Patches of wetland provide high value resources in the heart of drier areas and allow for intensive production of rice and vegetables. Around major settlements and within reach of trunk roads, farmers have developed high density systems for crop production to sell in near and more distant markets.

This diversity of setting presents a major challenge for understanding change and the evolution of farming and socio-economic systems. The approach taken by the West Africa Long Term Prospective Study (WALTPS) and other such surveys has been to identify several large geographical regions within which there is somewhat greater homogeneity. Thus, the WALTPS took three zones: the Gulf of Guinea, Atlantic Sahel and Forest areas, and the landlocked Sahel. This choice of region combined issues of ecology, demographic pressure, and the role of economic poles or growth centres that draw in materials and act as regional markets. Raynaut *et al.* (1997) draw on a range of case studies and materials from across the Sahelian region to identify a series of more micro-focused territories or geographical areas with certain characteristics, and focused around a well-defined local centre, as described below. The evolution of rural areas is the result of a combination of several factors, as noted by

Box 4. Mapping the Sahel

The 14 geographical territories used by Raynaut *et al.* (1997) often have a particular identity, associated with an ancient pattern of land use surrounding a long-settled market town or administrative centre (such as around the Hausa cities of Maradi and Kano), a geographical coherence in terms of soils, farming practice and commercial crop development. These areas include: the Senegalese groundnut basin, the inner Niger Delta, the Senegalese river valley, the pioneer farming zones of southern Mali and south-west Burkina Faso, the Sahelian belt of agro-pastoral systems, the Casamance, the Ader massif, and extensive pastoral rangelands. While recognising the risks of an over-simple characterisation of these major types of situation, this approach does allow for a means to understand the different patterns of economic and social change which can be discerned

between settings, and to highlight the importance of certain factors underlying trends and evolutions in different places. Raynaut *et al* identify four main processes which help explain change: agroecological constraints, demography, market constraints and state interventions, and peasant strategies in response to the diverse opportunities available.

Similar approaches have been taken by other writers to identify areas which have a certain meaning in social, economic, political or ecological terms. Thus, for example, the Adja Plateau in southern Benin or the *terres de barre* have long symbolised a particular socio-economic pattern. Equally, writers have talked of the pioneer farming areas of central Benin, the densely populated upper east region of Ghana, the current cocoa frontier of western Côte d'Ivoire, or the abandoned cocoa lands of eastern Ghana. While to some extent this attempt to create a series of socio-geographic regions is an artificial device, it helps in understanding the different dynamics and pathways of change being followed, as well as the inter-connections between these areas. The massive inflows of migrant farmers into the south-west of Burkina Faso cannot be understood without knowing the difficult circumstances faced on the drought-prone Mossi Plateau further north, and by Burkinabé migrants in Côte d'Ivoire.

Raynaut *et al.* above, amongst which the strategies employed by peasant farmers themselves constitutes a central component. In cases such as the Sourou Valley, farmers have worked on their own initiative to seize new opportunities for irrigated agriculture in a dry zone.

Box 5. New opportunities seized in dryland Mali

The Sourou Valley in southern Mali was until recently a dryland forest area used for grazing (Woodhouse *et al.*, 2000). As a result of the construction of a dam in 1988 downstream in Burkina Faso, the river level has risen and extended upstream which allows Malian cultivators to farm rice as well as their traditional millet crop. This has led to the rapid clearance of forest in the floodplain of the Sourou valley in a process without any specific government or other project intervention. An estimated 6,000 hectares have been brought under cultivation as a result. Increased competition for land has led to a substantial in-flow of people including herds in the dry season seeking grazing on the rice stubble. This new cropping activity is said to have greatly reduced food insecurity in a formerly very vulnerable area, with many households and individuals gaining rising incomes and levels of consumption, and also leading to falling rates of out-migration. Evidence of increasing differentiation between households is emerging with better-off households characterised by those with oxen and other cattle, large and well-flooded rice fields, and higher yields per hectare.

In more marginal regions, the joint effects of environmental change, demographic growth and structural adjustment have led to farming becoming less central to household livelihoods.

Box 6. Adapting to increased risk and withdrawal of services in Niger

The Zarma farmers of Fandou Beri, south-west Niger (Batterbury *et al.*, 1996), practice an extensive form of agriculture, mainly producing millet for household consumption. Reduced fallows and changes in rainfall, combined with structural adjustment measures have led to increased reliance on seasonal migration and petty trading. Over the period 1952–92, the area of the village territory under cultivation increased from 11% to 23%. Good quality soils within the village territory have disappeared and yields have declined. However, little intensification of production has occurred. Fertilisers were used for a period in the 1980s, but after project support and subsidies were withdrawn, their use has dwindled. Zarma farmers do not routinely apply manure to their fields. Their limited livestock holdings are entrusted to Peul families and there is little integration between crops and livestock on Zarma farms. Cropping appears to have become less diverse as a result of changing environmental conditions, such that sorghum is no longer cultivated in significant quantities and cash crops such as cotton and groundnuts are rare. Short-cycle millet varieties have been adopted by farmers. Livestock ownership is becoming more attractive to Zarma farmers as a result of favourable animal prices, but there is little indication of any trend towards more integrated animal and crop production. Sales of crop surpluses are now rare compared to 1980s because of very low yields. Almost all young men leave the village by harvest time to earn cash. Women derive income from selling a variety of items, such as prepared food and bush sauce ingredients and from petty trading. Other home-based activities include mat making and raising animals.

In areas where cash crops used to be dominant, farmers are learning new ways of making ends meet (Faye *et al.*, 2001). Senegal has witnessed a steep fall in groundnut production since the 1960s, when this crop was the major source of export earnings and farm income. Conventional explanations have blamed population growth, leading to a scarcity of land and the reduction of fallows. The latter was blamed for falling yields, and together with a fall in woodland, was taken as a sign of environment degradation. Only gradually was it realised that economic factors were also at work, particularly a price and marketing system that forced farmers in a risky environment to rely on credit for access to inputs, and which deprived them of much of the benefit of world prices.

Box 7. Diversifying away from agriculture in Senegal

In Diourbel Region, a new dynamic is observable, according to Faye *et al.*, (2001), particularly since the change in agricultural and pricing policy which began in the 1980s. People in the area have always responded to different market opportunities for their produce and labour. Despite a decline in rainfall, farmers have maintained or raised yields per unit of rainfall, selectively using technologies introduced by the extension service. Rising meat prices have led to a massive swing to livestock production, using new fattening methods. Farm trees have been conserved, and crops diversified in favour of cowpeas and hibiscus. However, despite Senegal's heavy imports of rice, millet production has been limited to rural consumption needs, since there is no urban market for this crop.

Low agricultural incomes due to falling output prices and rising input prices have encouraged such substantial diversification into non-farm activities and urban out-migration that the proportion of land farmed may have declined despite population growth. The headquarters of the Mouride brotherhood, Touba, is the largest town in the Region, despite officially still being regarded as "rural". Touba, Dakar and overseas destinations have all attracted migrants, and many rural families have an urban branch. Remittances are not used for farm investments, but for consumption needs, and the little farm investment that takes place is livestock-orientated.

5. Central elements of change in West African agriculture: key drivers and challenges

5.1 Land use change

Patterns of land use have undergone enormous change in the last 30-40 years with a large and continuous expansion of cultivated area. This has led to clearance of much forested land in coastal and savannah regions, and a large number of farmers moving from high to less densely settled areas, seeking land. Thus, for example, it is estimated that in Ghana cropland occupied only 14.5% of national space in 1961 but 25.5% in 1995. Equally, in Côte d'Ivoire cropland increased from 8.5% to 23.5% over the same period. Similar rates of growth can be found in much of the region, though the paucity and quality of data remains a problem.

Such a large increase in cultivated area stems from various sources. Demographic growth is clearly an important driver with natural growth in the farm population of 2–3% per year, producing equivalent growth in farmed area, where land is still reasonably abundant. Migration flows into a particular area can generate very rapid rates of land use change, such as has happened in west and south-western Burkina Faso, where more than 80% of the land is farmed by people who have come from elsewhere, especially the drought-prone Mossi plateau, where land is scarce. Large-scale programmes to clear onchocerciasis have helped open up broad areas for settlement that were formerly very lightly used. The widespread adoption of animal traction and, in some places, tractors has also led to very large increases in farmland. Many pastoral groups have adopted a much more settled pattern of life, given livestock losses during previous droughts and their increasing desire to establish firmer rights to land. National land tenure policy has also prompted greater land clearance in some areas where, for example, rights to land are conferred through its *“mise en valeur”*⁷. This has encouraged strategic behaviour by some to cut and clear land in excess of what is actually needed, as a means of demonstrating use and consequent land rights.

7 “Being put to good use” – evidence for this usually being taken as making a physical investment, such as digging a well, constructing a building or soil conservation structures.

Expansion of land for cultivation is likely to continue in those areas where resources are available, since this provides the best return on scarce supplies of labour. This massive investment of labour in clearing new land has often been portrayed in negative terms and described as “deforestation” and “land degradation”. Yet, in many cases, it constitutes a landscape transformation bringing higher returns to the land user than semi-natural vegetation. As noted by Mortimore (2003) “such a landscape transformation represents an immense investment of effort in clearance... The value and achievements of private investments in African agrarian landscapes have been consistently underestimated by outsiders.” This is not to deny that removal of the vegetation for farming will likely render the land more vulnerable to erosion, while reducing the availability of fallow land also cuts back on pasture and wild produce. As land becomes scarcer and hence more valuable, farmers are likely to make greater investment in ways of intensifying land use which should address some of these concerns. Such intensification will be more probable where agriculture prices bring a reasonable return, and land users have reasonably secure rights over the land they farm.

5.2 Environmental change

Environmentally, over the last 30 years, there have been major changes in patterns of rainfall, land cover and vegetation throughout West Africa. The dry Sahelian region has been most affected by rainfall changes, having experienced a decrease of 20–30% in expected rainfall between the periods 1931–60 and 1961–90 (Hulme, 1996). Not only has rainfall fallen substantially, but its distribution within the farming season has become more unpredictable. The major droughts of the 1970s and 80s prompted a substantial shift southwards by farmers and herders in search of better watered areas, bringing major increases in population pressure in southern areas and the coastal region. It is unclear as yet what will be future trends in climate for the region as a whole (IPCC, 2001).

Despite such adverse climatic conditions, many farming communities have managed to cope through changing their practices, diversifying incomes, and adopting new crops and forms of land use that bring reasonable returns. The Mossi Plateau in central Burkina Faso demonstrates such adaptation and the important role of simple technical improvements in strengthening farmer response to climate change. Urban growth and rising demand for food, fibre and other farm products provide a

Box 8. Investing in soil conservation brings results in Burkina Faso

Central Plateau of Burkina Faso has undergone many changes over the last 20 years (Chris Reij, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, pers. comm.). With 500 – 700 mm rainfall, it is characterised by marginal soils and high population densities (up to 100 people per km²). In 1980 this was considered the most degraded region of Burkina Faso. The vegetation was rapidly disappearing, cereal yields were on average 400 – 500 kg per hectare, groundwater levels were falling rapidly and between 1975 and 1985 up to 25% of families left the villages to settle in higher potential regions. Improved methods of soil and water conservation (SWC), introduced over the last 15–20 years, have helped address some of these difficulties and led to major benefits, which include:

- 1 Yields of sorghum and millet have increased substantially, and household food security has improved.
- 1 The process of vegetation degradation has been reversed on cultivated fields treated with soil and water conservation (over 100,000 ha).
- 1 Increased investment in livestock by both men and women, and more intensive animal management mean that more manure is available for improving soil fertility.
- 1 More forage is available for livestock due to regeneration of vegetation.
- 1 Many villages have seen rising water tables (+ 5 m or more) due to increased infiltration of rainfall and runoff.
- 1 Rural to rural and rural to urban migration has decreased since the start of SWC programmes.
- 1 Organisational capacity of villagers has improved.
- 1 Local people reckon there has been a substantial reduction of rural poverty (up to 50%) between 1980 and 2002.
- 1 The cumulative impact of SWC can also be found in agro-statistical data at provincial level. For instance, in Bam province the cultivated area did not increase as expected, but decreased slightly since 1989, while cereal yields increased by 50%.

Comparing villages with and without SWC projects, it is clear that the introduction of low-cost, riskreducing and productivity-enhancing SWC has played a key role in triggering agricultural intensification and environmental improvement. Other factors have also played a role. For instance, the devaluation of the West African currency (the CFA franc) in early 1994 stimulated investment in livestock, and the improvement of major roads between Ouagadougou and two regional capitals reduced transaction costs and allowed traders from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and even Nigeria to send their lorries to Yatenga province to buy sesame, cowpea and vegetables.

One interesting farmer-innovator on the Mossi plateau is Ali Ouédraogo, (Reij and

Waters-Bayer, 2001) now around 70 years old, who started to rehabilitate degraded land in 1983. Living on the edge of the small town of Gourcy, Zondoma Province, he was trained by the OXFAM PAF project to lay out and construct stone bunds. He has now treated many hectares of formerly barren land with a mix of bunds and planting pits, or *zaï* creating a much better environment for his sorghum crop. At the same time, he has encouraged regeneration of trees through planting indigenous tree seeds along the contour lines and preserving those seedlings that sprout in his field. In this way he can combine cereal cultivation with availability of perennial forage for his animals, the dung from which then returns to the soil via a large compost and manure pit he has established.

5.3 Land becoming scarcer and more valuable

The last 30 years have witnessed a very rapid growth of population, expanding urban centres and major migratory flows throughout the region, although the impact of such processes has been uneven. Having once seemed in ever abundant supply, in many areas good land is now becoming relatively scarce, due to a variety of factors. Such scarcity brings rising market values and greater difficulties for poorer groups seeking access to this resource.

Gaining secure access to land is of particular importance to poorer people, whose livelihoods depend on balancing a range of different activities, including negotiating access to a plot of land and being able to use the local commons. These rights are often not full property rights but various forms of secondary access. Yet such rights are increasingly subject to threat, as land values rise and new interests enter the land arena. There is growing competition for high productivity land, and where a reliable water supply will permit irrigation. The poor tend to be particularly vulnerable in areas undergoing rapid change, such as on the peri-urban fringe and in cash-crop producing zones. While in past decades, local land users were vulnerable to the state alienating their resources, the last few years have seen the emergence of private sector investors in much of West Africa, seeking land for farming.

The price of land is rising as it becomes scarcer. In Côte d'Ivoire, 30 years ago, incoming farmers could gain large areas of land in the forest zone in exchange for customary payments of kola and a chicken, and a small cash sum (Koné, 2002). Now, in many places it is impossible to access land except through major cash payments to land rights holders, either in

terms of annual rents, or through mortgaging arrangements. Equally, in western Burkina Faso, arrangements for accessing land have shifted substantially from long-term loans, to shorter term rental, with payments either in cash or through provision of services (labour, ploughing) (Paré, 2001).

Box 9. Rapid changes in the 1980s and 90s in western Burkina Faso (Paré, 2001)

In the former pioneer farming area of western Burkina Faso, customary forms of access to land persisted until the late 1970s, including the time of mass settlement by Mossi migrants fleeing drought further north. In the 1980s, as a result of the large numbers of non-indigenous people in the region and rapid disappearance of land reserves under the combined impact of migration and cotton production, settlement systems gave way to loans on harsher conditions and rental. Conflicts within indigenous families and increasingly tense relations between migrants and hosts have recently led to a spate of land withdrawals from migrants and the replacement of open-ended loans with rental arrangements, which are renewable but at rising prices.

Box 10. Innovation in charging practices in southern Benin (Edja, 2001)

In southern Benin, around Dedomé, the development of rental is putting pressure on open-ended loans (although they are not being challenged). Lenders are less and less inclined to put up with excuses from borrowers who do not provide the expected gift of farm produce, claiming that the soil is poor and does not give a satisfactory yield. Since 1997, a new way of charging for land that was formerly lent has been tested by landowners. At the end of each season, the head of the landowning family sends a representative to check on the harvest reaped by the tenant. This person collects the payment due, which he sets in accordance with the level of output and which usually represents between one-eighth and one-fifth of the crop. Hitherto tenants were the only judges of the amount of the crop they gave to the landowners, but they now face a formula akin to sharecropping, with a fee in proportion to the harvest and a representative of the plot owner present at the harvest.

5.4 Structural adjustment, devaluation and liberalisation

From the 1980s onwards, all countries in the region have been through a process of structural adjustment, involving liberalisation of the economy, devaluation of the currency and a range of associated measures. The effects of such liberalisation have been mixed and difficult to evaluate,

given partial adherence to structural adjustment policies in some cases, great diversity of settings, and lack of good time series data (Kherallah *et al.*, 2002). In general, where liberalisation helped remove tax and levies on agriculture, this brought benefits to the farming sector and provided a boost to the millions of smallholders making up this sector (Kherallah *et al.*, 2002:102). One major consequence has been the near-total disappearance of state and parastatal marketing structures involved in marketing of agricultural produce. A few such organisations still exist (such as the CMDT in Mali) but, even where they have survived, their power and functions have been greatly slimmed down. The purpose of liberalisation has been in part to promote the free play of market forces, but also to relieve the state of a financial burden which was, in many cases, draining away central government resources. Liberalisation has certainly created space for the multiplication of economic actors (input suppliers, traders) in those places where their operations are profitable, but with the abandonment of panterritorial pricing, poorer farmers in more marginal areas have faced difficulties since the services provided by a parastatal structure have not been replaced by the private sector. Elsewhere, the removal of tight production and marketing controls has helped open up many new possibilities to farmers, as can be seen by the rapid expansion in off-season fruit and vegetable production in Mali's Office du Niger (Dembélé *et al.*, 2001).

For export crops, such as cotton, groundnuts, and cocoa, the impact of withdrawal of agricultural subsidies and cheap fertiliser was offset for a period by a combination of better world market prices and gains associated with devaluation. Thus, for cotton production in Mali, the combination of higher producer prices due to devaluation and rising world market prices in the mid-1990s more than outweighed the extra costs of buying the inputs needed to guarantee a good harvest. However, current world market prices are at their lowest level for thirty years, due to overproduction at global levels, fuelled by agricultural subsidies in the US and EU. In the case of livestock, the higher returns from animal sales post-devaluation much more than compensated producers for any input costs.

However, liberalisation also brought multiple and damaging impacts where it overturned the established systems for input supply, marketing, and provision of credit. A recent assessment of the effect of such policies in Côte d'Ivoire clearly points out their contribution to the current political and economic crisis, by accelerating the tearing up of the economic

and social fabric which had provided the basis for some level of political consensus between competing groups (Losch *et al.*, 2003). One consequence has been the rapid descent of much of the population into poverty, with income per head falling by half, further aggravating the social and ethnic tensions between groups. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, it is estimated that the number of those in poverty tripled from 10 to 31% of the population over the period 1987–2002. Measures to liberalise the economy were particularly damaging because of their simplicity, and dogmatic quality, based on short-term perspectives and lack of proper preparation and supportive measures. Thus, the old state monopolies were merely replaced by private oligopolies, very often foreign owned, which eliminated the role of and possibilities for Ivorian enterprise. The downturn in world market prices for cocoa and coffee further damaged incomes and prospects.

5.5 Increased linkages into markets: the role of urban centres

Between 1960 and 1990, the population of West Africa grew at an annual rate of 2.7%. In 1990, the region's total population was roughly 215 million and, by 2020, it is expected to double, rising to 430 million. Although remaining relatively under-populated, compared to many other parts of the world, this continued population growth will bring about a significant rise in the overall population:land ratio.

Urbanisation has, in the last few decades, been rapid. In 1960, the urban population of West Africa represented only 13% of the total population; by 1990, towns and cities accounted for 40% of the total population. Although the pace of urbanisation is expected to slow down, by 2020 it is predicted that 60% or more of the region's population will be living in urban areas. In 1990, there were 90 cities with populations greater than 100,000; by 2020, there are likely to be 300 such cities. Over the next twenty five years, then, West Africa will experience a trebling of its urban population.

Since the beginning of the colonial period, the geographical distribution of West Africa's population has changed considerably. In broad terms, coastal and more southerly populations have grown faster than those in the Sahelian interior, since greater economic opportunities along the coast have resulted in migration from further north. Between 1930 and 1990, for example, the population of Burkina Faso grew threefold, from

2.8 to 8.7 million; that of Côte d'Ivoire, by contrast, grew eightfold, from 1.4 to 11.4 million, with in-migration making a significant contribution to population growth.

Urban and peri-urban areas in West Africa have long exercised a very powerful influence over the neighbouring hinterlands, spreading economic development through market relations, and political and administrative control through the imposition of taxation and military levies.

Box 11. Kano: a long established city state in northern Nigeria

The Kano Close Settled Zone is well-known for the long-established system of farming which it has supported for several centuries (Mortimore and Adams, 1999). It provides “an example of a farming system which has reached the point in the intensification process at which all land is under cultivation, all palatable crop residues are used as fodder, and trees are conserved” (Harris, 1996: 13). Soil fertility is maintained by labour-intensive management involving the close integration of livestock and crops. Long before inorganic fertilisers became available, and even now for those who cannot afford them, animal manure with bedding and compound sweepings are vital components in maintaining the physical and chemical properties of the soil. Hence, every household aspires to own as many sheep and goats as possible. The crops are weeded very regularly and the plant biomass fed to animals. Trees are browsed and their fodder used as forage. Fuel wood is harvested from dead wood and cut branches. All trees are privately owned so they are protected for the future. The resulting landscape is one of ‘farmed parkland’, similar to that found in the forest transition zone of Guinea (Fairhead and Leach, 1996) and in the long established areas to the south of Ségou in Mali. However, even in the lower density, drier landscapes further to the north and east of Kano city, the landscape is one created and maintained by farmers and their livestock to generate a sustainable set of crops, forage and bush materials.

Yet this beneficial impact from improved access to markets is matched by a growing level of land insecurity, as can be seen from the examples below.

Box 12. Uncertain land rights for peri-urban farmers in Ghana and Nigeria

Change and development in the peri-urban region of Kumasi (based on Brook and Davila, 2000) have followed a pattern of intensification and increasing returns over the last 30–40 years. While in the 1960s, forest cover and fertile soils were still supporting cocoa production in the 10–20 km belt around the city, by the 1970s production had shifted to cassava, maize and okra, with a rapid rise in production for the city's market in the 1980s and 90s. Cassava has now become the most important crop, associated with tomatoes and other vegetables. Declining soil fertility and farm size have brought about increased use of fertilisers and agro-chemicals and growing interest amongst younger farmers to engage in farm production. Often migrants renting land, they constitute a more entrepreneurial class of younger male farmers. The rapid growth in Kumasi is provoking considerable uncertainty amongst farmers close to the city who see much cultivated land being converted to building plots. As a consequence many land users feel increasingly insecure regarding their usufruct rights, and vulnerable to finding themselves landless, the chief selling the land over their heads for building plots and paying the land user no compensation. As a result, there is a growing reluctance amongst farmers to invest in improving soil fertility and applying other agricultural inputs since they risk losing all benefits from this. By contrast in the more distant areas some 20km or more from Kumasi, farmers are intensifying production with greater assurance that they will benefit from such investments.

Even those with land feel the need to pursue more promising livelihood options, given the threats to land holdings. Kasanga (1998) notes that many people consider urbanisation to have generated rising poverty and insecurity (52%) with only 2% considering urbanisation to have brought increased incomes. The rising cost of living from increased rents has pushed some people into more distant areas, with many people no longer being able to gain access to land through traditional channels, given its appropriation and conversion to house-building.

In peri-urban Port Harcourt, insecure and uncertain rights over land provide a similar disincentive for land users to invest in higher levels of productivity (Anikpo, 2000). Despite a very large urban market on their doorstep, many land users are part-time farmers, seeking to supplement their incomes with a little extra food but hoping to find a paid job in the city rather than concentrating on market gardening, given the risks associated with land.

valuable motor for agricultural intensification, and transform property rights. The key questions concern how best to manage the scramble for land rights in peri-urban areas where land values are rapidly escalating, to ensure that land users retain a strong incentive further to invest in the productivity of their plots and feel assured of their longer term claims.

5.6 Social change

In social terms, much of West African rural society is experiencing the fragmentation of large domestic groups into smaller family units with principles of long-term reciprocity being replaced by shorter term calculation of economic advantage (Amanor, 1999). This means that elders can no longer assume the free provision of labour services from their sons, since the latter have equally had to abandon their expectations of gaining land from their fathers, due to land shortages and sales of land outside the lineage (Chauveau, 1997; Paré, 2001). Equally, relations between women and men have undergone significant change, with women increasingly demanding that they be paid for work done for their husband's estate.

Box 13. Changing rights and expectations in the family

There have been important shifts in social expectations and domestic organisation in eastern Ghana, which have led to the development of monetised relations between family members. Formerly, it was expected that young men would work for nothing on the family's land, with the prospect of longer term returns in the form of help with marriage costs, and increased access to land and family wealth over time. However, this implicit contract between elders and youth has disintegrated in many areas, due to both sides feeling that their expectations regarding the other had not been properly fulfilled. As a result, youths have withdrawn their labour services from family activities, and prefer to work for cash on a neighbour's farm (Amanor, 2001).

Such transformations to the social structures and institutions within which people plan their lives are widespread. As noted by Guyer (1997) for south-west Nigeria:

The "household" of man, wife (or wives) and dependent children is even less of a production in 1998 than it was in 1968. Young people work for wages, even from their senior kin. Wives farm on their account, and husbands hardly intervene in any way with their wives' farms... the work that kinsmen used to carry out for each other under the rubric of long-term

cash reciprocity, such as portering by wives in return for ceremonial contributions and labour by juniors in return for bridewealth, have been obviated by changes in social life and translated into much more short-run forms. (Guyer, 1997: 206)

These changes to social structures, expectations, values and domestic institutions will have major consequences for patterns of economic development, especially in the agricultural sector, protection of more vulnerable groups from diverse sources of risk, and levels of poverty. The shift from collective to individual forms of activity and wealth creation, and breakdown of large into small domestic units seem inevitable results from the process of social modernisation. Government rarely, if ever, explicitly considers the potential damage to social well-being and loss of social capital which these changes bring with them.

5.7 Diversification of agriculture and livelihoods

Throughout West Africa rural incomes have become increasingly diverse, with farming accounting in many cases for only 30–40% of total revenue (cash and kind combined). Diversifying to protect against risk has long been part of many households' strategies for survival and growth, whether it be by growing a range of different crops, raising different species of livestock, and investing in a broad set of assets and social networks. The last 30–40 years have witnessed substantial shifts in patterns of consumption and potential markets. While rising incomes and urban development have provided new market opportunities for certain skills, some traditional crafts have been forced out of business, with the arrival of cheaper substitutes. Thus, today, rural women rarely wear home-spun cotton cloth, given the wide range of cheap, machine-woven cotton fabrics now available. Equally, the makers of clay pots, and menders of calabash bowls find far less demand for their skills now, given the availability of light and strong plastic and galvanised iron vessels.

Adverse circumstances have forced some people to develop new sources of revenue, as when herders have lost so many animals they can no longer maintain a pastoral existence and must start to farm. At the same time, some people have turned to find a new livelihood in town due to a collapse in their former way of making a living. But in many cases, livelihood diversification has been a positive, conscious choice, with people seeking out new opportunities that provide a better return on their effort. Examples include the large number of farmers from Burkina Faso

and Mali seeking land to farm in Côte d'Ivoire, and the widespread take up of fishing as an additional source of activity throughout the region (Morand *et al.*, forthcoming). Equally, while some traditional crafts have suffered a loss of markets, others continue to thrive, while the increase in consumer goods and equipment has generated many additional sources of activity (such as bicycle and mobylette repairs, sowing machines, building work in town, loading and unloading lorries, and so on). Migration, whether to town or to another farming area, is often portrayed as a response to desperation. But this paints too negative a picture of what, for many of those involved, constitutes an opening up of many new opportunities, bringing a significant cash income.

Patterns of diversification tend to be associated with location and the kind of household (size, wealth, etc.). Wiggins (2000) argues that there is likely to be more diversification taking place in higher potential, more ecologically varied farming areas, as the local economy provides a greater range of options for people to pursue *in situ*. However, there is also strong evidence for households in low rainfall, higher risk settings to develop more diverse income sources, though this frequently involves migration away from home (Reardon, 1997). Larger and wealthier households also tend to diversify more successfully than smaller, poorer households, the former being able to take risks and having both the labour available and the assets to invest in new activities.

As in other fields, it is often the early innovator who faces both the highest risks but also is able to reap the higher rewards. Diversification of income and assets in the form of a broad household portfolio provides greater protection against the multiple hazards faced by farm households everywhere, as shown by recent thinking on rural livelihoods (Ellis, 2001; Hussein and Nelson 1998; Scoones, 1998). Maintaining and expanding the large domestic unit is an integral component in such a diversification strategy.

Box 14. Patterns of diversification shift over time: Mali

In Dalonguebougou, central Mali (Toulmin, 1992; Brock and Coulibaly, 1999), eight broad categories of livelihood diversification were being followed by different groups, including trade (at both individual and household level), agricultural wage labour, small stock rearing, cotton weaving and spinning, granary making, fortune-telling, and a range of other skills (carpenter, tailor, bicycle mechanic). Successful farming households have pursued a series of investments bringing good returns over the last 50 years, as can be seen below.

Date/period	Form taken by diversification
1950s/60s	Expansion of groundnut cultivation, first by hand and then through the purchase of ox-drawn ploughs
1970s	Purchase of cattle herds, particularly during drought years, when grain and livestock prices favourable
1980s	Well-digging, dung-water contracts to fertilise much expanded village fields, trading develops
mid-1990s	Enlargement of bush fields using plough teams, expansion of trade into shop-keeping

5.8 Agro-industry and “nouveaux acteurs”

While the vast majority of West African agriculture and land remain in the hands of smallholders, there has been a significant interest in farming from the industrial sector, though this has ebbed and flowed depending on circumstances. Thus, in Nigeria in the 1970s and 80s government aimed to encourage large-scale, private investment in agriculture, and backed up such an approach by changes to land tenure laws. In more recent times, a number of West African governments have opted for policies in favour of the “modernisation of agriculture”. One central element has been to promote more secure forms of land tenure to allow for privately owned land as a means to encourage long-term investment in land improvement. Another element has comprised positive measures to encourage the establishment of agricultural entrepreneurs in rural areas, by ensuring access to land and preferential access to key inputs. Thus, for example, Senegal has just approved a project *Sénégal Agricole* which plans to put in place 25 large-scale agricultural schemes and half a dozen agropoles. Together these are hoped to provide an additional 30,000 hectares of irrigated land over the next five years (Walfadjri, 2003).

Some governments espouse policies aimed at “agricultural modernisation” which assert the need to do away with many small-scale peasant farms, on the grounds that they can no longer cope with competition and technological change (*Observatoire Paalga*, 2001). Others, such as Senegal, explicitly commit themselves to support for family farms, while seeking to complement their presence with large-scale agro-industrial developments (Govt. of Senegal, 2003). However, in the West African context, there is no evidence for the superiority of large-scale commercial agriculture, which has performed very poorly over recent decades (Belières *et al.*, 2002). The global evidence on farm size and productivity

Box 15. Farm size and productivity

Are small farms more or less productive than large farms? A substantial body of research shows that productivity, taken as output per hectare, is higher on small than large farms (Deininger and Squire, 1998; Netting, 1993). The data stem mainly from Asia and Latin America, with little work done on farm size issues in sub-Saharan Africa. This inverse relationship between farm size and productivity is the result of several factors. Small farms rely much more on family labour which tends to require much less supervision than hired workers. Given differences in land area available, it is rational for small farmers to maximise returns to their scare factor, land.

A recent survey of “new agriculturalists” in Burkina Faso suggests that the large farms being established have low yields and poor performance in comparison with neighbouring peasant farms. However, many of these new farms are very recent in their setting up and may improve productivity over the longer term (Ouédraogo, 2003).

Work amongst West African farmers suggests that there may be some economies of scale in farming such that farm households with 10–20 people and one or two plough teams available do better than a nuclear family, containing a single couple and young children, reliant on hand tools (Belières *et al.*, 2002; Toulmin, 1992). However, moving beyond this size does not appear to bring additional benefits but rather is associated with lower returns and greater vulnerability to market price variability, access to cheap credit etc.

also shows small farms generate higher yields than large-scale enterprises. Current debate regarding the future of agriculture in West Africa has focused on the choice between family farming and agribusiness. The first is often presented as backward, inefficient and subsistence-oriented, while the second is attributed the virtues of being modern and forward-

looking, efficient and market-oriented. Yet, in practice, such distinctions are false, with levels of performance largely the product of external conditions and incentives. Large-scale commercial farming is itself highly differentiated, with a range of strategies being pursued. Some large farmers are seriously engaged in running a profitable business, while for others, the receipt of preferential inputs and access to credit may be a prime motive. Equally, some “large farmers” are more interested in acquiring claims over land for speculative, rather than productive purposes. Many examples show that these farms have suffered damaging reversals when government preferences are withdrawn, and access to inputs and foreign exchange becomes harder. By contrast, small-scale family farms maintain a degree of autonomy which allows them to cope with adverse circumstances, while family labour enables a rapid and flexible response to emerging economic opportunities. There are also distinct differences within the family farm sector between large, adaptable farm households, and small, highly vulnerable groups with few assets or capacities to cope with change, as discussed earlier in Section 3.2.

Amanor (1999) and Guyer (1997) describe how during the 1970s, the governments of Ghana and Nigeria tried to encourage foreign firms to invest in agriculture.

Box 16. Private sector investment in large farms – a dismal story

Many transnational companies with operations in Ghana had accumulated profits from their activities but were unable to transfer them abroad due to shortages of foreign exchange. It was hoped that their investment in joint private-state farming enterprises would increase agro-industrial activity. The government guaranteed access to land, social infrastructure and tax exemptions for equipment and other inputs. However, only 12 companies were in fact willing to take up these schemes, with four of these still in business in the late 1980s, failures having been due to litigation relating to land, and poor access to foreign exchange for imports of inputs. Nevertheless, the scale of land appropriation for some of these schemes was very considerable, with the Benso Oil Palm Plantation taking 27 square miles of land, displacing 3,000 peasant farmers. The expansion of oil palm production and expropriation of land for the Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation (GOPDC) has resulted in a scarcity of land for many farmers and for food production. With few opportunities in agriculture, many youths are moving into informal sectors that are being criminalised by the state, such as chainsaw timber production and small-scale mining, and engaging in activities which involve pilfering, such as night-time harvesting from the GOPDC oil palm plantations. These

activities reflect the recognition amongst rural dwellers that state policies are not in their interests or administered on their behalf. The Nigeria indigenisation decrees passed in the 1970s obliged foreign firms to reinvest profits in the Nigerian economy. The Land Use Act of 1978 was also designed as a means to free up land from customary claims for allocation to modern agribusiness. Land was nationalised and long-term leases put into place, with customary owners ceding rights for up to 99 years. Numerous interests started looking for land: the boy scouts of Nigeria, General Obasanjo, the United Africa Company (UAC), civil servants, various churches, etc. Structural adjustment in 1985 brought a ban on imports of wheat, barley and other ingredients for brewing and animal feed, so companies sought regular sources of supply through developing their own farms. For example, UAC and Leventis set up their own farming ventures for sourcing needed inputs. The Texaco farm in Ogun State covered a total of 3,886 acres, having been set up in 1975 as a means of using oil profits. However, it closed in 1987, due to economic difficulties and financial irregularities. It focused on cassava production and also provided a site for experimentation with new varieties generated by the neighbouring IITA research centre. A factory was built on-site to process cassava into flour, using mainly women workers. But it was very difficult to run the business at a profit, due to strong competition for wage labour from local farmers, and volatile prices for the processed gari. The devaluation of the currency took a further turn in 1986, making imported inputs prohibitively expensive. Vertical integration of these farms means they operate as enclaves within rural areas and have few linkages to the local economy, apart from employing a certain number of workers, and land acquisition.

Such examples tend to confirm the evidence presented by Belières *et al.* (2002) regarding the difficulties faced by large commercial farm enterprises in Senegal. Here, considerable areas of land were allocated to applicants seeking big holdings, who relied on access to cheap credit to develop and work the land. The devaluation of 1994 combined with market liberalisation and restrictions on credit led to the collapse of many commercial farms, unable to compete with smallholders and imports of cheap rice. By contrast, family farms have been able to adapt and intensify, using cheap labour in preference to costly credit and machinery.

5.9 Producer organisations and institutional change

For a decade or more, throughout West Africa, a range of producer organisations (POs) have established themselves and strengthened their position, at local, national and sub-regional levels. These organisations are in part the result of government withdrawal from important areas of economic activity, including agricultural input supply and marketing.

They also have emerged in a context of greater political liberalisation, and now represent a political force to which governments must listen. This became clear from the strike by Mali's cotton farmers in the 2001 season, due to low prices and continued waste and corruption within the CMDT. The strike cut output by half, with many cotton farmers switching to maize and other cash crops for that season.

Producer organisations cover a wide range of activities, from management of a common woodland or pasture resource, water user associations, collection and sale of a particular crop, as well as providing access to fertiliser, seed and credit (Bosc *et al.*, 2001). Grouping together through collective action enables producers to take advantage of economies of scale, as well as making their voices heard in government policy and decision-making. Additionally, producers hope to increase their negotiating power with companies buying their crop, all the more necessary as globalisation is bringing an increased concentration and integration of agrobusiness throughout the world. In some cases, producer organisations have also provided a valuable bridging function between farmers and sources of technical expertise, such as research and extension structures. Foreign aid funds have often been instrumental in strengthening the role that POs can play, with associated risks of the leadership becoming increasingly distant from the interests and needs of the membership.

Examples of producer organisations operating at national level include the Comité National de Concertation des Ruraux (CNCR) in Senegal, the Fédération des Unions des Producteurs (FUPRO) in Benin, and the Syndicat des Exploitants Agricoles à l'Office du Niger (SEXAGON) in Mali (GRAF/GRET/IIED, 2003). The CNCR provides an interesting case, which brings together a series of PO federations in Senegal, and has become a central actor in dialogue between government, donors, and producers on agricultural strategy and related issues, such as land tenure. Such POs have the advantage of providing a channel to make the case for greater support to agriculture in general, as well as to take account of the particular constraints faced by smallholders. Policy and decision-making in government tend to follow both formal and informal procedures. Smallholders have less easy access to informal mechanisms that operate via old-boy networks, and lobbying through high-level political contacts, which are usually the preserve of powerful economic actors, such as large commercial farmers and agribusiness. Thus, POs need to make best use of

official channels and opportunities to give voice to the needs of less powerful actors.

At sub-regional level, there has been increased interest in generating pressure on governments and regional institutions to ensure producer interests are better taken into account in negotiation processes relating to the WTO, CAP reform, and Cotonou negotiations. Examples include the Réseau des Organisations Paysannes de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA), the Association Cotonnière Africaine and the Union of Chambers of Agriculture for West Africa. ROPPA and its members have been particularly vocal in support of family farming, and opposed to the agribusiness model being promoted by some as the means to "modernise" agriculture. "This vision (in support of family farming) has been inspired by a global perception of the role of agriculture in society, not only for producing food and fibre but also performing many other economic, social and environmental functions" (Belières *et al.*, 2002). Thus, the argument being made by ROPPA and others supports broader debates regarding the "multi-functionality" of agriculture and consequent need to avoid a purely economic or market-based approach.

Box 17. Regional network of producer organisations – ROPPA

The ROPPA was established in 2000 as a West African network, with members initially in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. The main aim has been to strengthen capacity building within member organisations by adopting a regional approach.⁸ Key objectives include to:

- 1 Promote and strengthen the values of competitive and sustainable family farming;
- 1 Collect and share information on successful POs;
- 1 Strengthen skills within POs to negotiate and deal with policy-making;
- 1 Promote solidarity amongst POs;
- 1 Ensure effective representation of PO interests at regional levels.

Current activities include establishing a Carte d'Identité Rurale (CIR), lobbying for family farms to be central to agricultural policy making at national and regional level, and building links with global peasant movements to develop joint advocacy within world trade and other negotiation processes.

⁸ A range of capacity building initiatives are under way to strengthen the skills of PO leaders, such as the African Farmers' Academy and the PADCLA programme of UPA-DI.

5.10 Agricultural policy and modernisation of agriculture

Agricultural policy aims to address a broad range of objectives, such as increasing agricultural productivity and contributing to food security, reducing poverty and improving the livelihoods of rural producers, increasing capacity to compete with imported agricultural products, diversifying agricultural exports, managing the sustainable use of natural resources – soils, water, forests, grazing – on which agriculture relies, as well as ensuring a balanced pattern of development within the overall territory of the country (Govt. of Senegal, 2003). Much recent debate on agricultural strategy within a number of West African countries has emphasised the need for “modernisation”, a term which has been interpreted in diverse ways, depending on context, but which tends to translate into:

- 1 Establishment of land tenure legislation to support private property, through titling of land, and associated measures to increase the volume and security of transactions in land;
- 1 Increase in the size of agricultural land holdings through the allocation of concessions to large-scale commercial farmers, and associated preferential access to inputs, credit, equipment, etc.;
- 1 Decrease in the number of very small farm holdings and associated population, as the modernisation process develops.

Questions of agricultural policy and strategy are currently being debated at three different levels: the place of agriculture within the context of national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs); the common agricultural policy being developed for the UEMOA sub-region; and the New Programme for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) framework, being discussed by the G8 and other global fora. Together these different levels of strategic thinking should lead to a clearer focus on the choices faced at national and global levels, and the extent to which there are major trade-offs between:

- 1 Reducing poverty and improving economic opportunities for West African farmers versus continuing the funding of enormous farm subsidies in OECD member states (currently at \$350b per year);
- 1 Small-scale family farms and large-scale commercial agriculture;
- 1 Securing the rights of customary land users and providing private title to land for inward investors.

In some cases, these trade-offs may be less clear-cut, with possibilities of “win-win” situations, and complementarities between say, promotion of agribusiness and creation of widespread benefits to local communities. In other cases, these trade-offs involve clear political choices regarding the distribution of benefits to different groups, both at national and global levels.

6. Agricultural production: yields and harvests

6.1 Food crops

The table below presents data for six West African countries on per capita production of major food crops for the period 1961–63 to 1997–99, derived from FAO statistics (Mortimore, 2003). The figures demonstrate the diversity between countries' experience, with the case of Senegal and Niger sharing a marked negative trend for major cereals (rice, millet, maize, sorghum) over the period, but much more positive trends in cereal production for Ghana, Nigeria, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire. For Ghana and Nigeria, there was a deep trough in farm production in the early 1980s and growing dependence on imported food. Subsequent policy shifts in favour of domestic agriculture helped provide greater incentives to farmers and a recovery in production levels.

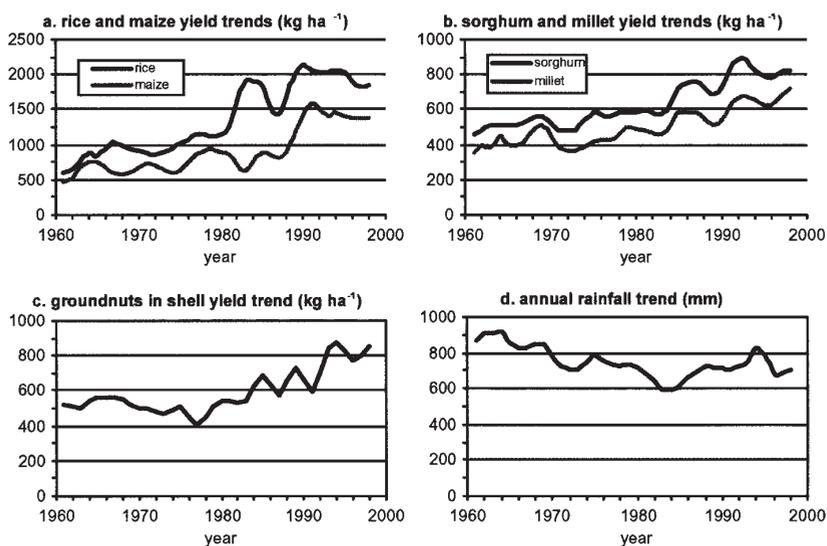
In the case of Niger, lying almost entirely in the Sahelian and Saharan zone, the agriculture sector is particularly vulnerable to drought. As a consequence, cereal production has been badly hit by the rainfall failures of 1973–5 and 1983–4. Nevertheless, evidence from Maradi Department in southern Niger shows increasing output per capita and rising yields. Growth in cowpea production was strongly positive, due in large part to high levels of demand from neighbouring Nigeria. In Mali, all four cereals recovered strongly from a trough in 1981, this upward trend continuing for rice and maize, while faltering for millet and sorghum. In Côte d'Ivoire, per capita production of rice, maize, and millet rose by 30% over the period, although root and forest crop production declined by a similar percentage.

Comparable evidence is provided by a recent study of Burkina Faso (Mazzucato and Neimeijer, 2000). Here, taking data from FAO for the period 1961–1998, they show that yields of the most important crops have considerably increased over the last 40 years, despite a 20% decline in rainfall. Rice and maize yields increased threefold while those for sorghum, millet and groundnuts doubled (Mazzucato *et al.*, 2001). They go on to argue that “while increased mechanisation, migration and fertiliser use have contributed to some degree to the increase in rice and maize yields, those are unlikely to be significant factors in the case of the other crops... Farmers seem to have been able to even increase output without relying on external inputs to replenish soil fertility” (Mazzucato *et al.*, 2001:

Table 2. Change in per capita production of major food crops, 1961-63 to 1997-99 (%)

Country	Cereal crops	Root and forest crops	Change
Ghana	rice maize, millet, sorghum		+59.8
		cassava, yams, plantains	+66.3
Nigeria	rice maize, millet, sorghum		- 1.2
		cassava, yams, plantains	+76.3
Mali	rice maize, millet, sorghum		- 2.6
Niger	rice, millet		- 24.2
	cowpeas		+131.2
Côte d'Ivoire	rice, maize, millet		+30.5
		cassava, yams, banannas, plantains	- 28.5
Senegal	rice maize, millet, sorghum		- 41.2
		cowpeas	+33.3

Figure 1. Yield trends for Burkina Faso (1961-1998)



Source: Mazzucato and Neimeijer (2000)

Thus the overall trends for food crop production show a remarkable degree of stability for some crops, and increases for others despite often adverse climate, economic and policy environments. Such performance is particularly striking when combined with data on export crops, which show, in many cases, very large rates of growth (as discussed in Section 6.4 below).

6.2 Export crops

The table below shows the substantial decline in export crop prices for major commodities produced by West African agriculture, and sets the broader context for discussion of farm performance.

Commodity	Period			
	1970-80	1980-90	1990-98	1980-98
Cotton	13	-36	-24	-51
Cocoa	35	-65	27	-55
Coffee	5	-74	48	-61
Palm oil	-22	-64	123	-20

Cotton

Cotton has been a major export commodity from West Africa for the last 50 years. Current estimates show that 6 million farming households rely on cotton production in West Africa, involving perhaps as many as 18–20 million people. Cotton is produced entirely by smallholders, on farms varying from 3– 20 ha in size. West Africa produces an estimated 2 million tons of seed cotton, 80% of which stems from the French-speaking countries, amongst which the principal producers are Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Burkina Faso. Growth in output has been substantial over the last decade, with a doubling in area cultivated between 1978/9 and 1988/9 and a further doubling to 1998/9 (Ton, 2001).

Table 4 compares the performance of large and smallholders growing cotton in Mali, and shows that returns per hectare from cotton production are highest for those in class with a single pair of oxen. There appear to be no economies of scale once a farm household moves from manual labour to use of a single plough team. There has been increasing investment in tractors by some of the largest cotton producers, with tractors

servicing both to plough their own land and that of others, as well as to transport goods, thresh grain, etc. However, while tractors allow for a substantial area to be farmed, the returns per hectare are lower than for smaller farms, as a result perhaps of less effective weeding, and higher input costs.

Table 4. Farm performance by size and levels of mechanisation, CMDT zone, Mali

	One tractor	At least 2 pairs of oxen	One pair of oxen	Manual labour
No. of cases studied	25	15	15	17
No. of persons/farm	31.2	15.3	9.9	7.9
Total land area (ha)	34.8	15.9	9.2	3.8
Land area/person (are)	112	104	93	48
Total labour days/person	88	89	77	40
Total labour days/ha	79	86	83	84
Monetary income from agriculture in CFAF	1.018.000	436.000	312.000	71.000
Monetary income from agriculture: CFAF/ha	29.000	27.000	34.000	19.000
Monetary income from agriculture: CFAF/person	33.000	29.000	32.000	9.000
Monetary income from agriculture: CFAF/day's labour	372	320	407	223

Data: 1990/91 and 1991/92 crop years, 12 farms per village (Faure, 1994)

Ton (2001) argues that expansion of cotton production in West Africa has accelerated differentiation within the agricultural sector, households equipped with animal traction being able to do well and expand production while the 30% or so of households with only manual tools have been unable to participate effectively in this source of income. Being reliant on access to plough equipment once everyone else's fields have been prepared means that crops are sown late, with adverse impacts on yield. Similarly, critics of Mali's CMDT argue that existing policies for agricultural intensification have increased the technical options available to middling and wealthier households but lack a poverty focus, providing little opportunity for those with limited capacity to invest. Given the intensive inputs required for cotton, in labour, credit, inputs and management, cotton may well not be the most appropriate for small, poor farmers to

adopt. Analysis of income sources for farm households in the village of Zaradougou, southern Mali identified cotton as the major source of income for households in the wealthier and middling income classes, while several households in the poorest group did not cultivate cotton at all, in several cases having fallen into debt with the CMDT (Brock and Coulibaly, 1999). Women rarely have direct access to credit, inputs and extension advice from the CMDT.

Cotton farmers are strongly affected by world market prices for cotton. World cotton prices are currently at their lowest levels for thirty years, at half the long-term average. This is the result of a large global harvest, generated in part by high subsidies paid to farmers in rich countries, combined with low levels of demand (see later section for more detail). Farmers in the US and EU are protected from this price slump by high levels of producer support in the form of subsidies. By contrast, major losses in incomes and revenues have been felt by many developing country farmers. West African producers have been badly hit, since there is no system of subsidies to protect farmers from such an adverse shift in world market prices. Given that all cotton production relies on smallholders, one can reasonably assume that they have all been damaged to some extent by the recent fall in world market prices.

Cocoa

Cocoa production in West Africa is mainly the business of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, with minor levels produced by Nigeria, and Cameroon. New sources of global supply have been entering the market, from Latin America and East Asia (especially Vietnam, Indonesia). Hence West African farmers no longer have such a dominant role in global supply of cocoa. The current conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, which in 2000 provided more than 40% of world market supply, has provoked a substantial hike in prices, of considerable benefit to neighbouring Ghana, as well as more distant producers. Cocoa is produced principally by smallholders in West Africa. There are a few large-scale plantations in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, but overall they represent a small percentage of output and cropped area. It is estimated for example that there are one million smallholdings producing cocoa in Côte d'Ivoire and 800,000 in Ghana. Thus, improved trade opportunities and good prices for cocoa have the potential to benefit a large number of small farmers in the region.

Cocoa production requires a very labour-intensive process to clear land, plant and maintain cocoa trees and harvest the crop, and has always

relied heavily on access to labour, both family and hired. In Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire much of this labour came from other parts of the country and neighbouring states. Those with labour to offer could exchange their work for access to land through various sharecropping arrangements, thereby enabling migrants to acquire their own farms. Over the last 40–50 years such opportunities drew in several million Sahelians from Burkina Faso and Mali to Côte d'Ivoire, seeking to acquire land holdings of their own. While land reserves were still substantial and cocoa prices good, this policy of expansion based on in-migration could be maintained. But, with the downturn of the 1980s, and perception that land reserves were being exhausted, conflicts between local people and incomers have grown, with rising levels of contest regarding “rights” and claims to land. In Ghana, the Aliens Act of 1969 brought the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Sahelians who had come to make a living from cocoa, many of whom subsequently moved to Côte d'Ivoire. Migrant labour remains important in western Ghana, but this is principally provided by people from other parts of Ghana who, as citizens, can claim firmer rights than non-nationals.

Thus, cocoa production has, in the past, been an important channel through which poorer farmers with labour to invest could acquire land and rising incomes. However, this option has now disappeared so far as most Sahelians are concerned. With the current conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, it remains to be seen how the cocoa sector will re-establish itself there and the respective rights and opportunities available to non-indigenous groups.

There is limited evidence for the distributional impacts of recent trends on different parts of the cocoa farming sector. In the case of Ghana, the liberalisation of the cocoa marketing sector has been only partial, with some part of the export market opened to private licensed exporters, while the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) retains the majority share. Konadu-Agyemang (2000) notes that while structural adjustment has brought improved incomes for some cocoa producers, it is principally the large-scale producers who have gained the lion's share. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the impacts of liberalisation of the cocoa sector have been widespread across the sector. Combined with growing political tension, they have generated deep and damaging cuts in income, and a rapid rise in poverty in many parts of the country (Losch *et al.*, 2003).

6.3 Livestock production

Livestock numbers, according to FAO, have grown throughout the region over the last 30–40 years (Mortimore, 2003)⁹. While individual countries have experienced major fluctuations during periods of drought in the 1970s and 80s, the index of livestock units per head of human population has remained broadly constant, implying a level of growth of 2–3% per year. There have nevertheless been major changes in terms of the distribution of livestock numbers within the region, as well as the make-up of herds. In general, livestock have shifted southwards into higher rainfall areas, with a larger proportion held by settled farming groups. In addition many former mobile herders are now becoming more sedentarised. Thus, for example, the major part of the national herd in Mali is now found in the Sikasso region, where cattle provide valuable inputs into the local cotton farming system (traction, manure, assets). Equally, Côte d'Ivoire has pursued a strong pro-livestock policy in the northern part of the country, attracting herders from neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as encouraging investment in cattle amongst Ivorian farmers and traders. The proportion of the national herd made up by sheep and goats has risen, these animals conferring greater flexibility and resilience in the face of risk than cattle and camels, and offering prospects for lucrative fattening activities especially in the neighbourhood of major towns. Such fattening is of especial interest in the weeks before major festivals. Intensive milk and dairy production around major cities is also gradually being established.

There is little or no data regarding the structure of livestock ownership in different parts of West Africa. During the droughts of the 1970s and 80s, concern was raised regarding the impoverishment of many pastoral herders, forced to sell remaining breeding stock. While there was evidence for acquisition of herds during the drought by urban investors and farming populations able to benefit from falling animal prices and the desperate situation faced by pastoral households seeking food, there are no data to show whether such a shift in ownership has been maintained. Local level studies in farming areas tend to show a few households own the major share of village-held animals. Economies of scale make it easy to maintain a large herd, but difficult and slow to build up from a small

⁹ Statistics on livestock numbers are notoriously unreliable, given that they represent wealth for many people and, in some countries are still a taxed asset. Aerial survey has helped get a better idea of the relative distribution of different livestock species in terms of location, but data on ownership of animals are especially poor.

base. Thus, for example, data from village studies in Mali show that many households own a pair or two of oxen. But large herds are restricted to a small number of households (Toulmin, 1992; Brock and Coulibaly, 1999).

6.4 Overall agricultural performance

Taking food and export crops together, many West African countries have been remarkably successful in generating rising levels of output in response to market demand at national, regional and global levels. Such evidence suggests that the farming sector has great capacity to increase production when conditions are right. This is even more marked if account is taken of the growth in many lesser crops for which data are not collected on a systematic basis, such as shea nut, sesame, fruit and vegetables (Wiggins, 2000). As Guyer (1997) notes for Nigeria:

Production and distribution systems have grown over the past several decades, and possibly at a rate which compares favourably with other historical cases even if not with the great spurt achieved in Aisia through green revolution technologies. The food system has responded to demand despite difficulties of transport, no refrigeration, a narrow range of storage techniques and no commodity futures markets. So even if up to 20% of food has been imported at certain moments, even if some of the urban poor fail to meet nutritional standards, and even if many urban inhabitants also farm, in comparative and historical terms, the feeding of Nigerian towns across the great waves of macro-economic and political fluctuation has been an impressive achievement of productive technique and social achievement. (Guyer, 1997: 4-5)

West Africa's agriculture, far from facing "crisis", has been remarkably successful and responsive to new markets and opportunities. As shown by Mortimore's study (2003) of farm performance over 1960–2000 for six West African countries, smallholders in most countries have been able to increase substantially their levels of output and productivity, despite often adverse conditions.

However, description and analysis of West Africa's agricultural sector and processes of transformation depend on a limited and unreliable body of data. There is particular difficulty with information regarding land use changes, the distribution of holdings, access to land and levels of productivity. National level data suffer serious weaknesses due to the limited capacity of many governments to maintain effective statistical coverage

Box 18. Accounting for trends in West African crop production

- 1 Four of the six countries (the exceptions being Senegal and to a lesser extent Niger) have maintained food production per capita in terms of a “basket” of staple food commodities, or improved it, and some have recovered from deep crises in the early 1980s, to levels comparable to or better than those of the early 1960s. Only in Senegal did the indices decline from the beginning to the end of this 40-year period; in Niger decline was arrested (though not reversed) after 1985.
- 1 The performance of major crops, or of groups of crops, has often differed within the same country. An overall “food sufficiency index” takes account of grain-tuber energy equivalents, allowing room for adaptive swings in crop preferences, both of consumers and of producers.
- 1 Fluctuations, clearly attributable to rainfall variability (especially in Niger, Mali and Senegal), translate in per caput terms to a threat to food sufficiency at a national level, which increases the likelihood that food *security* comes under threat in poorer households, including those of many producers, who may decapitalise their productive potential afterwards.
- 1 There appear to be many adaptive strategies at work as producers shift among crops and diversify in response to food marketing opportunities. This process has been noted in Senegal where the traditional crops are most under threat.
- 1 Since the production of food per capita only rarely correlates with either the growth of the total population or the growth of the agricultural population, a simple demographic mechanism must be discounted in the food equation.
- 1 Much more important is policy and the global economic environment, which better explain the widespread decline in food sufficiency that occurred in many countries during the 1980s, and the subsequent recovery in most of them.

Source: Mortimore 2003

of agricultural production throughout the country. Some countries are now strengthening such systems of data collection, which are essential to understanding the dynamics of change within different farming systems, as well as pointing to areas of food deficit or falling productivity. Given the weak statistical base, analysis of changes to West African farming requires the combination of different sources and forms of evidence.

These include local level studies, aerial photographs and satellite imagery, focused household surveys, poverty studies, and national level data. The absence of good quality data helps explain the different interpretations made of trends in West African agriculture. A second reason for there being quite marked disparities in the discourse and narrative adopted by different actors relates to the diverse experience undergone by different countries in the region over the past forty years.

Summary

Thus, for five of the seven countries examined above,¹⁰ the last 30–40 years have shown much more positive experience with agricultural growth than is usually admitted by those asserting Africa's agriculture to be in crisis. Despite periodic drought, switches in policy, devaluations and cutbacks in state support, farmers have managed to maintain growth in food production and kept pace with population growth, while at the same time expanding exports of key commodities. Livestock numbers have also been maintained, with a growing level of integration between animal and crop production in many areas. Cropping patterns have shifted towards a more diverse range of commodities, from basic grains to maize, cowpeas, sesame and market gardening, in response to growing urban demand generated from expanding urban centres (OECD, 1998).

The widely experienced trough in agricultural productivity in the late 70s to mid 80s was corrected through changes in government policy towards the agricultural sector, such as liberalisation of markets for key commodities and abandonment of price controls on basic grains. Equally, tight controls over choice of crops within state-managed irrigation have been lifted, freeing farmers to take advantage of new markets, such as fruit and vegetables within the Office du Niger in Mali. Where consistent support to farmers has been provided (such as technical assistance, credit, access to inputs, marketing), performance has often been remarkable with great capacity for growth in output and increasing yields (such as in the cotton zone of Mali).

But continued ability to adapt and respond to new opportunities and to the challenges of globalisation are by no means assured. Farmers will continue to invest effort and capital in improving farm production where a reasonable return can be assured. But such returns are threatened by cheap

10 Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal and Mali from Mortimore's study (2003), and Burkina Faso (Mazzucato *et al.*, 2002).

imports, falling world market prices, and difficulties in accessing credit and inputs. At the same time, policies in favour of agricultural modernisation would appear to favour large-scale producers at the expense of the millions of family farms which make up the current agricultural sector. Such favouritism is justified by policy-makers on the basis of family farms being unable to deliver a “modern” agricultural economy. Yet this position is based on a highly partial interpretation of the evidence available, which ignores the great contributions made to domestic food supplies and exports by millions of small farmers, as well as the broader multi-functionality arguments in favour of promoting smallholder agriculture.

7. Who is gaining, who is losing? Overall impacts on poverty and livelihoods

The evidence above paints a varied picture, in which many rural producers have continued to adapt to new agricultural and economic opportunities with remarkable energy and ingenuity. Incomes and livelihoods have become more diverse, and migration now constitutes a central component in many household budgets.

- 1 How have these changes in agriculture, markets and opportunities translated into overall levels of incomes and welfare?
- 1 Have rural people become better off over the last 20–30 years?
- 1 Which social categories have done particularly well, and who has done badly?

These are complex questions given the very wide range of circumstances and the weak data base on which to rely.

7.1 What evidence for poverty?

Conventional wisdom, as expressed in many studies on rural poverty in Africa, asserts that farmers have seen few if any improvements in yields and incomes, and are, in many cases, becoming further impoverished. According to this view, the combined effects of low yields, poor market prices, and limited access to credit and other inputs are leading to a downward spiral of impoverishment and decapitalisation. It is common to hear of African agriculture being “in crisis”. However, there are also reasons to question this pessimistic interpretation of the changes underway in the case of West Africa, to do with the adequacy of the data on which such assessments are made, and the counterfactual evidence from many micro-level studies. There are also risks that people are seeking to demonstrate higher levels of impoverishment than may actually be the case.

Data adequacy

There are inevitable weaknesses in the quality of data available to assess levels of poverty and how these have changed in recent times. Such weaknesses stem both from how household surveys have been carried out (size, representivity, time period, etc.) and from assumptions made regarding the nature and sources of household income. Thus, for exam-

ple, household budget data is notoriously difficult to collect due to inability or unwillingness to recall the details of incomes received and transactions undertaken. This is especially so where, as in many large rural households, members are pursuing both collective and individual activities. The household head will rarely be able to speak on behalf of the many individuals within the family and their private patterns of spending. Equally, there may be a strong reticence in admitting to the significance of private activities and incomes, since these represent an aberration from the social ideal of collective endeavour. Thus, there is likely to be a particular problem in getting good budget data particularly for larger households, in which a significant amount of time and activity is spent on individual enterprise. The question of valuing income is also problematic for households which rely on food and services largely produced by household members. These comprise not only the family's regular grain supply, but also a range of other food stuffs, livestock produce, and a range of materials gathered from the bush.

Incomplete understanding of household income diversity

Household surveys often fail to provide complete coverage of all sources of income, focusing on the most obvious activities and ignoring the rest. Thus, for example, the Mali poverty survey of 1998–9 came up with the surprising conclusion that families in the southern part of the country were amongst the poorest, a result which the authors of the report themselves noted as being counter-intuitive (ODHD, 1999). However, a closer look at the data showed that this finding had emerged because the survey had focused only on the incomes gained by farmers from sales of cotton. Most farm households in southern Mali practice a much more diverse range of activities, which include trade, livestockrearing, vegetable and orchard production, and reliance on bush produce. In addition, many such households gain a large proportion of income from migrants' remittances, especially those stemming from Côte d'Ivoire. Hence, actual income was probably two to three times higher than that estimated by the survey.

Risks of bias

There may be some temptation for governments to under-estimate incomes in order to ensure their country remains within the UN category of "Least Developed Country", and qualifies for poverty-focused aid funds. There are grounds for concern that using poverty as a major criterion for distribution of aid funds will encourage countries to demonstrate

low and falling levels of income, in order to maximise their receipts of donor funding.¹¹

Further attention is needed to examine the underlying concepts on which the various poverty assessments are based and so the areas of weakness which need to be addressed, including the limited amount of time series data. The net effect of such difficulties with the data is to produce an overestimate of the incidence and degree of poverty amongst those rural households with significant nonagricultural incomes, where much food consumption is based on own production, and where people may be unwilling to report their entire cash earnings, either at household or individual level.

7.2 A broader look at rural livelihoods

A detailed study of rural livelihoods in southern Mali showed that three elements were considered the key to sustaining household welfare and avoiding impoverishment (Brock and Coulibaly, 1999):

- 1 *Household management*: which refers to how well the household is managed, it being widely believed that the situation faced by a poorer household can be considerably improved by good judgement and handling. Conversely a well-off household can see its fortunes ruined by bad management of people and assets.
- 1 *Labour*: which describes not only the number of people in the household workforce but also its composition in terms of age and gender. A household with a relatively young labour force with a balance between the genders is considered much more sustainable than one where there are few children, or where these are mainly girls or women.
- 1 *Wealth*: which incorporates ownership of various assets, such as agricultural equipment, and livestock of value to the farming enterprise as well as a source of cash in times of need.

According to these criteria, the better-off households were those who were able to mobilise a large workforce, not only to cultivate several fields and crops, but also to pursue a diverse range of income generating

¹¹ A similar risk arose during the negotiation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, when a surprisingly large number of countries claimed to suffer from desertification, since they had hopes of substantial funds becoming available for "affected countries".

activities both collectively and for their individual gain. At the same time, larger households could provide better protection for their members from demographic variability, and generate a larger surplus from which to build up household assets. By contrast the poorest and most vulnerable households were typically small in terms of workforce, with few livestock and other productive assets. As a result, they found it difficult to maintain a viable farming enterprise and could offer their members few opportunities to earn incomes of their own, since all earnings must be put into the common pot. Often they also had few social links to other members of the village, having settled relatively recently. These factors together help explain how some families could develop and expand activities while others suffered misfortune.

Box 19. Successful livelihood diversification in Zaradougou

Household B is a complex household, comprising the household head, his married son and his brothers, all of whom have families. The household is noted by its neighbours as one which functions well, with high morale and good teamwork. Like most of the large Senoufo households in the village, in addition to the cultivation of cotton, the household also owns a plantation in Côte d'Ivoire and an orchard in the village. These three enterprises are managed at the level of the central household. One member of the household is the person in charge of cash. Some of the profits of the three major enterprises of the household are divided between the members of the household once costs have been met. Investments at the household level are decided by a council of male household members.

Small stock and poultry rearing are carried out at the level of the nuclear sub-family (*ménage*) within the extended household. Although the *ménage* has no traditional social function within the complex household, it has an important contemporary economic function in allowing the disaggregation of certain income generating activities. Profits from these activities are kept by those who carry out the activity. Finally there are individual-level activities – off-season vegetable cultivation, sales of firewood, individual women's fields, shea nut butter production, petty trade – from which the individual is allowed to keep the revenue generated.

The sustainability of this household is perceived as very high, despite the fact that their yields of cotton are considerably lower than many other households of similar size. There is no danger of break-up, since all members are compensated in cash for their labour and individual activities are sanctioned.

Source: Brock and Coulibaly (1999)

By contrast, the limited opportunities available to poor, small households are evident below.

Box 20. Pooling limited resources: the option of poor households

This simple household consists only of the household head, his wives and their children. They engage in several diversification activities aside from farming, including sales of firewood and thatching material and small stock rearing. Their most important income generating activity aside from the cotton is the sale of smoked fish, which they buy from neighbouring Kléla and sell on to traders from the town of Koutiala, 120km to the north. As a simple household, all revenue is pooled for the use of the family, with the household head being the chief decision-maker. Unlike most of the other households in the village, the women do not cultivate individual fields.

Source: Brock and Coulibaly (1999)

Evidence from case study materials would suggest a mixed picture regarding processes of wealth creation and impoverishment at household level. There are relatively few studies of changes to household circumstances which span a 10–20 year time period. However, where such evidence does exist it points to a diverse set of pathways, only some of which imply greater impoverishment. A study of Dalonguebougou, in central Mali (over the period 1980–1998) found a mixed picture, but with most households better-off over the 18 year period. The local Bambara say that a family's fortunes are like the feet of a traditional weaver – at one moment the left foot is up, but later on it will fall and the right foot will rise high. This suggests a level of social mobility which is probably closer to theory than reality. In practice, it is easier for larger, better-off families to withstand risk and invest in the equipment, cattle and marriage alliances necessary to assure their longer term sustainability. Nevertheless, a large well-off family can see its fortunes diminished through a combination of misfortunes such as illness, death, internal dissent and household break-up (Toulmin, 1992; Brock and Coulibaly, 1999).

One demonstration of the increased income and purchasing power of villagers in a rural community like Dalonguebougou can be seen by the enormous change in their access to goods over 18 years. From two small table-traders in 1980, the village now has five stores stocking many different goods. Box 21 shows the content of Babou Dembélé's shop in the village, which is a symbol of such changes.

Box 21. What can I buy in Babou's shop?

Items in Babou Dembélé's shop: 1980

Tea, sugar, soap, cigarettes (Liberté only), salt, petrol, sweets, kola and dates.

Items in Babou Dembélé's shop: 1998

Tea, sugar, soap, cigarettes (many brands), salt, petrol, sweets, kola, dates, nail varnish, chocolate biscuits, scissors, rattles for babies, honey (local), biscuits (chocolate), rope (nylon), rope (baobab), string, razor blades, lamps, milk, soap powder, spare parts (bike), spare parts (moped), tyres, clothes, well pails, plastic pots, cooking pots, knives, tomato concentrate, bike pumps, thread, cotton fabric (local), cotton fabric (manufactured), batteries (several sizes), tea (brown), coffee, flip flops, kerosene, matches, etc.

Source: Brock and Coulibaly (1999)

However, while some farm households have been getting better-off, others have not been so successful. A process of growing social and economic differentiation is frequently noted as taking place (Watts, 1983). This is not a recent process but has probably always existed, due to the differing capacities of households to cope with risk and shocks. Associated with differentiation is a widespread increase in market-based relations, which means that many commodities which were formerly given freely, lent or exchanged are now being traded for cash. As noted earlier, in many areas, access to land is now often subject to a significant cash payment, while formerly it could be got on long-term indefinite loan (Lavigne Delville *et al.*, 2002). Where sales of grain had in the past been discouraged, to retain sufficient stocks for times of need, villagers are now selling off their surplus. Looser collective ties within the broader community and the family group, combined with weaker commitment to long-term reciprocity, bring greater vulnerability for weaker members. Not only are richer households less willing to help out a poorer neighbour, but, in some families, the old and poor may be left to care for themselves much more than before. Recent research in southern Burkina Faso speaks of an increasing number of elderly people left with no-one willing to care for them (Dabiré and Zongo, pers. comm.). At the limit, those who have no other option may move to town, in the hopes of finding work, food and shelter.

Summary

Have rural people become better off over the last 20–30 years? It is difficult to paint a clear picture as regards overall changes in incomes and welfare for West African farmers. While some have done well and flour-

ished, others have become poorer. Micro-level case material shows that many households have been able to take advantage of new opportunities and improve their circumstances, through more dispersed allocations of family labour, into migration and other activities. The evidence does not support a picture of growing immiseration for all. Certain social groups have been particularly vulnerable to impoverishment. These include:

- 1 Households suffering a combination of misfortune, such as harvest failure combined with illness within the family and poor leadership;
- 1 Pastoral herders who suffered heavy livestock losses in the 1970s and 80s and have been unable either to restock, or gain secure access to land for farming;
- 1 Those with weak claims to land, and those in peri-urban areas who find themselves thrown off their plots as land values rise.

There are also clearly cases where, due to major events such as civil conflict, a large number of people find themselves substantially worse off than before. As noted earlier for Côte d'Ivoire, the impact of structural adjustment measures combined with a collapse in world market prices and breakdown in social and political cohesion led to a threefold increase between 1987 and 2002 in those below the poverty line (Losch *et al.*, 2003). The subsequent period of escalating conflict can only have brought a further rapid downward spiralling in incomes, livelihoods and security, except for those who have found a new niche in a war-based economy.

8. Main trends in West African agriculture and family farms: prospects for the next 10-20 years

Looking forward, can family farms “feed the nation” and compete in global markets? Based on past experience, the answer is a qualified “yes”, but it all depends. The future structure and performance of West Africa’s farming sector will be the result of a number of factors, some of which are not in the hands of national level decision-makers.

- 1 *Demand for staple food commodities is unlikely to decline, given current rates of population growth and food preferences determined by both culture and poverty.* Rising incomes will provide a more diversified market for a broader range of grains, fruit and vegetables, live-stock produce and other higher value products. The strongest evidence that family farms will continue to satisfy these markets is the strength of recovery from stagnating food production in the 1980s. Economic incentives rather than capacity are the chief constraint, hence the importance of increasing the competitiveness of West African agriculture within the sub-region and ensuring protection from cheap imports.
- 1 *National agricultural policy and strategy are important factors affecting the direction and form taken by the farming sector.* Governments face choices between the kinds of agriculture they wish to promote. Design of agricultural strategy does not take place in a vacuum, but is subject to lobbying and pressures from a range of internal and external actors. If the family farm is to continue as a central component of the agricultural sector, national farmer federations and producer organisations will need to argue the case in their favour and challenge alternative visions which see “modernisation” as needing to follow a route favouring large commercial farms. With the growing importance of sub-regional policy debate and decision-making, such lobbying also needs a sub-regional dimension.
- 1 *Other national policy measures have important linkages to the future performance of the farm sector, most particularly reforms to land tenure legislation and administration.* Tenure reform is under discussion in many West African countries, with a focus on ways to increase

levels of agricultural productivity, reduce conflicts, ensure equitable access, and promote sustainable land use. Changes in the law and administration of land tenure inevitably have distributional consequences. Many governments have sought to assert their underlying rights to manage land and allocate it to those they choose, by wresting control from customary structures. In some cases, this can open up opportunities to acquire land for groups with weak rights under customary systems but, most often, this assertion of control by government becomes a means to disempower ordinary farmers in favour of the elite. If smallholder agriculture is to have a secure future, it needs an appropriate system of tenure legislation and administration which firmly supports the rights of the small farmer against land-grabbing.

- 1 *Environmental challenges constitute a potential threat to continued growth in agricultural output.* Future trends in rainfall are unknown, and global climate models are not able to predict with any confidence the likely change to weather patterns in the West African region. However, rising global temperatures seem certain, and these will bring increasing levels of evaporation. This means that the value of any given level of rainfall will lessen in terms of its contribution to primary production. For this reason, all farmers will need to pay greater attention to more intensive management of water and soils.
- 1 *Rising levels of demographic pressure, especially around major towns, will increase the scarcity and value of land.* In many peri-urban areas, these processes are leading to high levels of insecurity for rural dwellers, whose rights as long-term occupants of the land are ignored by the powerful in the rush to grab a precious asset. Governments must find ways to provide greater security over land, to encourage investment, ensure equitable access and reduce risks of conflict, especially in these high risk zones. Farmers have shown themselves ready to invest substantial amounts of effort in land improvement where they face promising markets for their crops, and are confident of their land rights. Security does not necessarily stem from issue of paper land titles, but is the consequence of the state recognising the legality of local processes for managing land.
- 1 *The composition of West African farm production must continue to evolve in response to emerging markets for some products, and falling returns for others.* For example, there are serious questions about the

viability of rice farming in the Senegal River Valley, given the availability of cheap rice from South East Asia. A better strategy might be for Senegal's irrigated agriculture to focus on higher value commodities which can better offset the costs of pump irrigation. Crop diversification in this direction has been apparent for some years, such as into okra for Dakar's markets. Rice growing in the Office du Niger, Mali faces a more promising option for the future in part due to some natural protection from imports as a result of the country being landlocked, as well as reliance on gravity irrigation rather than diesel-fuelled pumps. The future of the West African oil seed sector needs thought, given its need to compete in an over-supplied global market. Establishing a quality product for domestic and foreign markets will be important, as well as ensuring compliance with stringent new phyto-sanitary controls, especially for groundnuts, which face particular challenges to demonstrate no trace of aflatoxin.

- 1 *New niche markets may offer promising alternatives through fair trade, organic or ethical trade initiatives.* While currently only a tiny proportion of the market for most products (the exception being coffee), there is a rapid growth of interest amongst Western consumers regarding where their food and drink comes from. However, such interest is a two-edged sword, with part of the environmental movement keen to promote local food systems above all else, a move which could shut off opportunities for many Southern farmers. Niche markets need good transport and infrastructural connections if they are to offer a significant outlet for farmers. Currently, many fair trade and organic schemes present serious obstacles to smaller producers because of the transaction costs associated with being part of such a scheme. Evidence shows that if smallholders are to benefit as a group, the standards or certification scheme must have promotion of "small farmers" as an explicit objective. If this is not the case, then the tendency will be for them to be squeezed out by larger, better organised producers.
- 1 *The future impact of global markets on economic incentives in West African agriculture will depend on successful negotiations at the WTO and attention to improving farm-gate prices, including measures to protect the agricultural sector, where necessary.* The end of surplus dumping by the USA and the EU is a precondition for improved market incentives for family farms or large-scale commercial farms alike. If

West African farmers continue to face falling world market prices for their principal exports abroad, and fierce competition from OECD farm surpluses in their home markets, the future of the rural population will be greatly damaged. The farming sector has managed remarkably well over the last 20–30 years in the face of serious difficulties, but there are limits below which rural life becomes insupportable.

- 1 *There is a stark mismatch between the commitment from OECD nations to meeting the MDGs, especially to making a reduction in global poverty levels, and current policy towards their own farming sector and trade measures.* This provides a valuable lobbying and advocacy opportunity for informing the OECD public and working with a range of groups able to exert pressure on current processes of negotiation and efforts to increase policy coherence. Such pressure will be more effective where backed by strong evidence which underlines the links between OECD farm and trade measures and the prospects for a sustainable livelihood for farmers in West Africa.
- 1 *Export agriculture has been promoted as the obvious escape route from economic stagnation in African countries. But does this strategy make sense in the context of a long-term decline in the terms of trade for tropical commodities? Is a downward pressure on world market prices not inevitable if all countries pursue the same policy of expanding agricultural export?* Increased processing of primary commodities is a key means to add value to exports as well as feeding into sub-regional markets (such as instant coffee produced in Côte d'Ivoire). Continued pressure is needed for change to tariffs imposed by OECD nations for processed commodities which would otherwise offer an important means of generating increased incomes and employment in poor countries.

Summary trends and prospects

- 1 A growing level of demand within the region is likely for more diverse grains, fruit, vegetables, meat and dairy produce, which may be met by a mix of domestic production, subregional sources and imports from other major producers (EU, US, Latin America and South East Asia).
- 1 Land will become increasingly scarce and valuable, especially in peri-urban areas and highpotential zones. A pragmatic approach is needed

to provide greater security for millions of smallholder farmers, to encourage further investment and productivity growth.

- 1 Smallholder farmers must organise to lobby their governments to ensure their particular needs and priorities are taken into account in design of new strategy and policies, not only in the agricultural sector but also a range of other related fields, such as land tenure and trade negotiations.
- 1 The future for family farms in West Africa depends greatly on agricultural trade negotiations under the WTO Doha round, to cut over-production and dumping by richer countries, as well as easier access to developed country markets.
- 1 Reliance by West African farmers on traditional export crops does not provide a secure route out of poverty given global over-production, declining terms of trade, and tariff escalation on processed produce.
- 1 The sincerity of OECD countries' commitment to meeting the MDGs will be seriously tested by whether they are ready to cut farm subsidies, and help smallholders in poor countries "grow their way out of poverty."

9. Transformation of West African agriculture: the global context

9.1 West African agriculture and broader processes of globalisation

The West African region has long been part of the global economy and trading system, from the commerce in gold and salt of several millennia, through the misery of the slave economy to presentday patterns of production and trade. Such interactions have transformed patterns of settlement and agrarian relations in the region, as well as broader structures of social, economic and political power. Yet, recent decades have witnessed a decline in West Africa's share of world trade.

Within the global economy, OECD member states occupy a position of overwhelming dominance, comprising the richest and most powerful countries in the world in economic, political and military terms. Their agricultural policy measures, though designed to achieve domestic objectives and satisfy particular constituencies, have major and very significant impacts on the rest of the world. Equally, policies in the fields of trade, investment and aid have enormous effects on countries around the world. Until recently, most attention has been focused on aid policy and transfers from rich to poor countries. But it has become increasingly clear that the intended or unintended consequences of trade, agricultural and investment policies of OECD nations can exert much larger impacts on the developing world than aid flows. In the past, such areas of domestic policy were not open to broader global debate but are now being increasingly challenged in formal negotiating arenas such as the WTO, and by a coalition of developing country governments, lobby groups and NGOs who point to the hypocrisy and contradictions between different branches of government policy. As a result, there is increasing commitment to the idea of policy coherence amongst OECD member states, at least in theory. Whether domestic political constraints will allow for greater commitment in practice remains a serious and unresolved question. Although farmers represent a small proportion of total population in rich countries, they frequently exercise a disproportionate level of political power and leverage on government.

All UN member governments have signed up to the Millennium

Development Goals which include a clear commitment to halve the number of people living in extreme poverty and hunger by the year 2015. Goal 8 includes commitment to a global partnership for development, to comprise an “open, rule-based, predictable non-discriminatory trading and financial system”, which addresses the particular needs of least developed countries, such as through tariff and quota free access, enhanced debt relief and additional funds for those committed to poverty reduction. The need to push for much greater policy coherence by OECD countries is especially evident when considering how to meet the MDGs, given the very damaging impact on poor developing country farmers of current agricultural and trade policy measures. Examples of such adverse impacts are outlined below, before examining the various arenas and opportunities for making progress towards more equitable outcomes.

Earlier sections have described the remarkable strength and adaptive capacity of smallholder farmers in West Africa. But levels of poverty and food insecurity remain worrying, and the sustainability of the family farming sector in future is by no means assured. Low returns to farming limit the capacity and interest of farmers to invest in their land and discourage younger family members from staying in the sector. Low and uncertain farm incomes provide a weak foundation on which to build more diverse local economies in rural areas.

It is widely believed that growth in agricultural yields and output is an essential precondition for broader growth, as well as being likely to benefit poorer groups in society. Apart from exceptional cases where access to a specific resource has allowed the normal model of economic growth to be bypassed (such as Hong Kong and oil rich states), economic development seems to depend on the prior strengthening and intensification of agriculture as a means for broader diversification. Agricultural development provides a food supply for the cities, and resources to process for domestic and export production.

Yet this model of economic development, diversification, and growth has run up against serious barriers in the case of many African countries, which have been forced to liberalise their economies within a global economy in which they face fierce and unfair competition. As argued by Mazoyer (2001) there is such a marked difference in levels of productivity between industrialised farming in richer parts of the OECD and small-

scale farmers elsewhere, due to a combination of mechanisation, input use and agricultural support measures which mean that staple crops can be produced in great quantity and sold around the world at prices which beggar developing country farmers (Mazoyer, 2001).

Such conditions have led to calls for developing countries to re-establish tariff barriers for agricultural commodities, creating a more favourable environment in which their farming sector can develop, and setting up barriers against dumping of farm produce from other parts of the world (Koning, 2002). The Asian tiger economies operated behind such barriers, which enabled them to grow rapidly. Without such protection, it is argued, the virtuous circle – of rising demand and prices for food, increased investment and intensification of farm land, increased incomes and investment of surplus in economic diversification, leading to further growth in food demand – cannot be expected to occur. Improved price ratios for farmers constitute the *sin qua non* for addressing poverty in many poor countries, while revenue generated by tariffs on agricultural imports would provide a significant source of income for governments. It remains to be seen whether West African governments have sufficient room for manoeuvre within WTO and other negotiating arenas to argue successfully for getting such measures accepted as special and differentiated treatment essential for longer term growth and poverty reduction (Koning, 2002).

9.2 OECD agricultural policy and developing country farmers

Recent research has been carried out to assess the impacts of OECD member states' agricultural policy on developing country farmers. In particular, OXFAM has issued several reports on specific commodities aimed at informing debate during negotiations of the WTO round and CAP reform.

The reports cover sugar, dairy and cotton production and, while the first two are not focused particularly on West Africa, they all nevertheless raise important broader issues. This research highlights the large damaging impacts on developing country farmers of EU farm subsidies and various export refund schemes. There is a clear need for more work in this area, focusing on commodities of greatest importance for West Africa, and aiming to identify in more detail the differential impacts on small and larger farming enterprises.

Box 22. Evidence of damage from OECD farm subsidies on poor country farmers

Dairy

The EU dairy policy currently costs 16 billion euros each year, equivalent to more than \$2 per cow per day, and representing 40% of the value of EU dairy production. The policy provides for a mix of price support, production quotas, import restrictions and export subsidies. Despite the imposition of quotas, production exceeds consumption, and surplus must be disposed of in both domestic and foreign markets. The EU remains one of the largest exporters of milk and milk products globally, accounting for 40% of whole milk powder exports, a position which can only be maintained by continued subsidies. Export subsidies are used to enable dairy produce to be sold at prices well below cost, in many cases undercutting local producers. Thus, for example in Kenya, India and Jamaica, while development aid has been spent encouraging more effective local dairy production, export subsidies are destroying markets for local producers. Far from bringing benefits to small-scale family farmers in Europe, the main beneficiaries from dairy subsidies are large processing and trading companies, not farmers.

Sugar

The EU is one of the highest cost sugar producers in the world, yet is also the second largest exporter, due to the export subsidy system. Current world market sugar prices are low and unstable, given chronic over-supply. In 2000–01 the EU exported almost 7 million tons of sugar at prices far below the costs of production, despite a quota system intended to curb supply. Export refund systems and crosssubsidies allowed this sugar to be sold at prices far below production costs, depressing world market prices and pushing low cost developing country producers out of third markets. Taking Mozambique as an example, production costs are amongst the lowest in the world, and the sector provides incomes and employment to 23,000 people, with great additional potential if export markets could be further developed. A World Bank study estimates that EU subsidies have brought a fall of 17% in world market prices and made it impossible for Mozambique to compete in third markets. For example, in 2001, Europe exported 770,000 tons of sugar to Algeria and 150,000 tons to Nigeria – both natural markets for competitive producers like Mozambique. While the EU has a system of preferential access for African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) countries, this constitutes a small fraction (8%) of the EU consumer market and is counter-balanced by an equivalent volume of sugar re-exported with export refunds. The Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative is providing additional access to sugar-producing least developed countries, but this is being achieved by cutting back on other ACP countries, rather than by curbing domestic production within the EU.

Cotton

Agricultural subsidies in the US are at the heart of a deep crisis in world cotton markets. American cotton farmers benefit from substantial farm subsidies while farmers in rural communities in the poorest countries suffer the consequences of such largesse. World cotton prices have fallen by half since the mid-1990s, with particularly devastating impacts on West and Central Africa, where more than 10 million farm households depend on cotton production. All of these producers are in the smallholder sector. Many millions more people are indirectly affected because of the enormous importance of the cotton sector to the overall economy of many countries in the region. Cotton supplies one of the main export crops and sources of government revenue, as well as ensuring producers with an income and means of feeding their families. West African cotton farmers are reckoned to be amongst the lowest cost in the world and yet they are losing world markets and suffering growing poverty. Costs of production in the US are three times those of Burkina Faso, yet the US has expanded production in the midst of a price slump, bringing further collapse of world market prices.

The scale of support to US farmers reflects the political importance of the 25,000 cotton farmers in key states. Every acre of cotton farmland gains a subsidy of \$230, which is five times the amount set for cereals. Total subsidies equal \$3.9 billion, which exceeds the GDP of Burkina Faso and constitutes more than 3 times USAID's budget for Africa. Research estimates that removal of US subsidies would raise cotton prices by 26%. It is estimated that such subsidies have led to losses of more than \$300 million for the region as a whole, with the eight principal cotton growing countries losing more than \$190 million in export revenue forgone. Thus, for example, it is reckoned that in 2001 Mali gained \$37m in aid from the US but suffered a loss of \$43m from the impact of cotton subsidies. Cotton subsidies have also undermined the benefits from the HIPC debt relief programme, since countries have lost more in trade earnings than they received in relief. As with dairy and sugar payments in the EU, the largest share of these subsidies goes to a small proportion of farmers and processors, with the ten largest cotton farmers in the US reaping three-quarters of all payments.

Source: Oxfam Briefing Papers (2002)

The Brazilian government has challenged the US cotton subsidies through the WTO procedures, on the grounds that they constitute clear evidence of dumping, with cotton being sold at prices which bear no relation to farm production costs, thanks to heavy export credit payments. Several West African cotton growing associations are also urging their governments to follow suit. Nevertheless, there are fears that a threat of legal action could lead to retaliatory action by the US and withdrawal of aid, trade and debt relief.

Livestock provide another example of adverse impacts from OECD agricultural and trade policy spilling over into West African markets.

Box 23. Trends in meat imports into West Africa

Trade in livestock from the West African region to Europe and elsewhere is relatively limited, consisting primarily of small stock exports to North Africa. Impacts from trade have been mainly felt in the converse direction, with much concern raised in the 1980s and early 90s regarding the dumping of cheap frozen meat by the EU at highly subsidised prices. While providing urban consumers with access to cheap meat, livestock producers and traders in West Africa mounted a successful campaign with support from several NGOs to lobby the European Commission to seek an end to such dumping which, they claimed, had had adverse impacts on prices obtained for their own animals. The devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 further added protection to livestock trade within the region, and generated a substantial increased flow of animals from the Sahel to coastal markets. It is, however, unclear how the benefits from increased sales have been distributed within the trading system and between small and larger livestock holders.

Despite the fall in dumping of frozen beef cuts since the early 1990s by the EU, there has been a very significant rise in very cheap poultry cuts in West Africa. Mainly from Europe, where costs of production are very low, these meat exports are providing intense competition on domestic markets and adversely impacting on margins for local producers. Such quantities of imported poultry meat are considered likely to increase substantially in future, with additional sources of supply from the US, Brazil and others.

Source: Solagral (pers. comm. 2002)

9.3. OECD trade policy and developing country farmers

West African countries have slipped behind in terms of the share of global trade, due to various factors:

- 1 Most countries remaining heavily reliant on primary commodities for export in a largely unprocessed state. As was seen in Section 6.2, the past 30 years have seen a continuous decline in the price of the main export crops.
- 1 Concentration and restructuring of the global food and agri-commodity chains leading to higher margins being taken by middlemen, and a further squeeze on the values obtained by primary producers.

- 1 Increasingly tight food standards set to address the concerns of rich consumer markets, but with no consideration taken of developing country capacities, the certification requirements and adverse effects on smaller producers for whom the transaction costs of meeting such requirements may be prohibitive.
- 1 Changes to products to minimise raw material components and substitute other elements, such as the EU Chocolate Directive and development of synthetics.
- 1 Tariff escalation on processed goods limiting market access and discouraging domestic industrialisation and value added.
- 1 Continued quotas on key commodities such as sugar, rice and cotton.
- 1 A mix of agricultural support measures in developed countries which make it very difficult to compete whether in OECD, third or domestic markets.

The current Doha round of trade negotiations under the auspices of the WTO are intended to focus particularly on the needs of developing countries. It is widely agreed that change in agricultural provisions will be key to making progress, given disappointments in the past and the perception of developing countries that their interests and needs have been ignored. There is much suspicion that the most powerful countries will continue to use the process to force change on poorer countries, by using their economic and political muscle, while refusing to make significant concessions of their own. The WTO rules have led to a shift in the nature of agricultural support measures with OECD governments moving funds from the red and amber boxes (those that have a clear linkage to output) to green and blue box measures (those de-coupled from output). But since overall levels of financial support have remained the same and often increased, the net effect on farm income has been broadly constant. Thus there has been no real change in net impact.

Current negotiations of the Agreement on Agriculture suggest that little progress will likely be made. The March 31st deadline has passed without reaching agreement on final text. Neither the EU nor the US are showing much willingness to shift their policy in substantial ways, each arguing that the other is far worse in terms of trade distorting practices. Within

the EU, France has maintained a staunch defence of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which is unsurprising given the large share of the overall CAP budget and enormous benefits gained by France's farmers from the funds disbursed and the consequent political costs of dismantling such a system. Equally, the US has made it clear that "we need to make absolutely certain that these WTO agricultural negotiations result in a good deal for America's farmers, ranchers and agricultural producers", (Senator Grassley quoted in www.iatp.com newsletter March 2003) without which there will be no domestic agreement to proposed changes. Such domestic constituencies are likely to be of great importance in the run-up to the next US presidential election in 2004. Other countries with substantial programmes to support their farmers (Norway, Japan, Switzerland) are arguing for the need to adopt a multi-functional approach to the agricultural question, so that issues such as food labelling, environmental issues and animal welfare can be brought into the equation, and justify continued protection of their own farmers.

Many developing countries are arguing for the right to erect higher tariffs, especially on farm goods that they think are being dumped. Normally, countries suspecting dumping have to follow a lengthy procedure before being allowed to impose tariffs, by which time a lot of damage may have been done to domestic producers. Least developed countries have some room for manoeuvre within the context of the special and differentiation treatment allowed under the WTO negotiations, which require further investigation, given the large number of West African countries which fall into the LDC category.

9.4 MDGs, Poverty Reduction Strategies and policy coherence

Donor agencies have committed themselves to trying to meet the MDGs, especially those concerning poverty reduction. Various measures are being used for this purpose, most particularly the establishment of Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) by recipient governments, to provide the framework for a major focus on service delivery for health and education likely to bring improvements to poorer members of the community. The PRS process focuses almost entirely on national level conditions and constraints, and the necessary changes to policy and implementation required to achieve major improvements to the livelihoods of poorer people. Thus, for example, the DAC Guidelines *Rising to the Global Challenge* (OECD, 2001) identify a number of thematic areas, such as pro-

moting pro-poor growth and reducing inequality which addresses an entirely domestic set of constraints, empowering the poor through reform to judicial, institutional and political systems, provision of basic services, adopting a sustainable livelihoods approach and reducing vulnerability and managing shocks. At no point does discussion under any of these themes touch on international issues or blockages which might need lifting. Only one page out of 24 covers the possible adverse impacts of policy in trade and other fields which might hamper or negate action within national level PR strategies. While one page is better than none, it suggests that these issues are not as yet at the forefront of donor thinking which is still resolutely focused at bilateral level, and at the nation-state and below. This may be due to inadequate knowledge and understanding of the adverse impacts of higher level processes. It may also be due to the very real and difficult conflicts in policy objectives and the need to face up to a series of domestic constituencies which will resist change. This suggests the importance of generating further evidence of how such policy measures affect people in different parts of the world, and presenting this information in ways which capture the public imagination, as a means to provoke calls for policy change within OECD nations.

Summary

West African farmers are increasingly exposed to the diverse consequences of globalisation. In many OECD countries, farming is carried out on an industrial scale, supported by extensive subsidies, and generating a variety of environmental and social externalities at local and national levels. Overproduction of agricultural commodities leads to falling prices and dumping of surplus on markets around the world, including West Africa. At West Africa's current level of economic development, agriculture remains central to GDP, employment, livelihoods and export revenue. Such dependence is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Further agricultural development is the best option for generating increased growth in incomes, diversification of the economy, and reduction in poverty levels. West Africa's farmers need a decent return on their labour and capital if they are to continue to invest effort in further intensification of agriculture. Yet the broader global context is making such a growth pathway increasingly difficult to tread. Family farms, which make up the vast majority of holdings in West Africa, have demonstrated great flexibility and capacity to adapt to new circumstances, but adaptation has its limits.

The current global policy environment offers three interlinked opportunities for addressing the problems faced by West Africa's agricultural sector. *First*, commitment to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals has been clearly espoused by all OECD member states. A halving of the number of people suffering absolute poverty by 2015, and the establishment of a rule-based approach for trade and financial systems are amongst the key goals to be attained. *Second*, the US and EU are both under pressure to cutback on farm subsidies. The WTO Doha trade talks provide the key arena for negotiations on farm subsidies. EU member states are also facing the prospects of enlargement to include an additional ten member states in 2004, which will force changes in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Can these and other processes (such as Cotonou and the Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative) bring results favourable to poor countries in West Africa? Or will the Cairns group of major agricultural exporters be the primary beneficiaries of any cutbacks in farm subsidies and dumping by the US and EU? *Third*, current security concerns have heightened awareness of the potential link between impoverishment, resentment, global migration and risks of terrorism. There are two strategies for addressing such risks, the first involving repression and tighter measures to protect rich nations. The second recognising the need for fairer, more inclusive patterns of social, economic and political development at national and global levels. Greater fairness would require a more equitable distribution of the burdens between rich and poor nations in adjusting to globalisation. Selling such a policy of negotiated adjustment in rich nations requires good evidence and leadership.

A wide range of initiatives and organisations are currently engaged in the field of trade, agricultural reform and promotion of Africa's economic development. These include the search for greater policy coherence within the OECD and a quantitative analysis of the distributional implications of various OECD policies for populations in several poor countries (Brooks, pers. comm.). Achieving significant improvements in the prospects for West Africa's family farms will depend on combining work at different levels:

- 1 Strengthening the voice of producer organisations at national and regional levels and their ability both to represent their members effectively and to articulate clearly the priorities they espouse.

- 1 Working in OECD countries (especially the EU and US) with like-minded organisations to demonstrate the consequences of current policy on the livelihoods of many millions of farmers in poor countries, and lobby OECD governments in favour of changes to farm and trade policy measures.
- 1 Work at global level linking actors from West African and OECD nations in the various arenas available, to provide a platform for dialogue and assessment of short and long-term consequences of current policy directions.

10. Conclusions

This scoping study has sought to describe the broad transformations underway in West Africa's agricultural sector. It has engaged in a process of discussion involving many actors within the West African region and with organisations based in OECD countries, to identify the main issues affecting future prospects facing West Africa's farmers, and the principal arenas in which progress must be made to ensure their longer term viability.

Agriculture is central to the West African region and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Further agricultural growth is essential if poverty reduction goals are to be realised. Family farms, in all their diversity, remain by far the most dominant component of the agricultural sector. Improvements to national, regional and global marketing opportunities would therefore make a major contribution to the welfare and livelihoods of many millions of people.

Family farms have been remarkably successful in generating increased food and export crop production for domestic and foreign markets. The category "family farming" covers a wide range of agricultural operations from highly market-oriented farms, closely linked into global markets, through mixed market and subsistence-based farm households, to those who are barely scraping a living from the land. Key characteristics of family farming include the close link between the structure and composition of the household and its associated farm assets and activities. These links have important implications for the choice of crop, organisation of family labour, management of investment and assets, and questions of marriage and inheritance. Adopting a threefold typology of family farms (see Section 3.2), brings a more explicit recognition of the great diversity within the sector, which needs consideration in design of agricultural policy and support measures. An understanding of the family farm and its various components should help governments better to assess the multiple values provided by this pattern of agrarian structure. While this threefold typology is valuable in distinguishing different kinds of farm household, it should be remembered that these are not watertight categories, and there may be considerable movement between categories. Such upward and downward mobility is the consequence of the interplay between

economic and social dimensions, especially the tensions between younger and older household members, and between those of different parentage. These frictions can lead to cleavages within the household and break-up of large extended domestic groups, leading to reduced resilience in the face of risks.

The weak statistical data base makes it hard to assess in detail the distributional impact of recent transformations on different kinds of farm household. However, taking cotton as an example, which is grown by some 10 million households in West Africa, it is reasonable to assume that they have all suffered the consequences of recent falls in world market prices, given the liberalisation of marketing systems and the abandonment of price stabilisation by parastatal bodies. Equally, the ups and downs of cocoa prices will have been felt by the two million or more smallholders in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire who provide the bulk of West Africa's harvest. When devaluation of the CFA franc and anti-dumping measures led to improved market conditions for West African livestock production, animal owners throughout the region responded by investing further in this sector and intensifying production through stall-feeding and fattening activities. The widespread response to better prices suggests that all producers gained some benefit. Policy change, such as the EU Chocolate Directive, allowing reduced levels of cocoa content in confectionery sold as "chocolate", is likely to have led to a shift in benefits from cocoa producers in coastal states to collectors and processors of shea nut butter, the substitute fat used in chocolate, produced in the Sahelian region. Further work could usefully address these distributional issues in more detail.

There is growing understanding and concern amongst rural producers, producer organisations, National governments, NGO networks, and some donors about the very damaging effects of OECD trade and agricultural policy on the prospects for farmers in the developing world. The ongoing WTO negotiations provide the main forum for inter-governmental discussion and pressure group lobbying as regards future agreements on agricultural trade and domestic policy. Major imbalances in global power limit the room for serious gains by African countries within such negotiations. The only means to achieve significant progress in the opportunities facing West Africa's farmers will be through strengthening domestic pressures in OECD member states to curb agricultural handouts, cut export subsidies and address the need for policy coherence. Long-term self-interest and

security concerns make such a shift in policies somewhat more “saleable” today than in the past. Adopting such a strategy would require the development of multiple partnerships with a wide range of groups, in West Africa and the OECD, and the marshalling of clear evidence of the impacts caused by OECD government policies on local livelihoods.

Work complementary to such a strategic process would include:

- 1 Assessing the place of agriculture in general, and family farming in particular within national Poverty Reduction Strategies, as well as in broader donor policy.
- 1 Reviewing the weight given to policy coherence in key OECD member state decision-making, particularly as it affects farmers in West Africa.
- 1 Examining in more detail the impact of trade and agricultural policy on crops of particular importance to the West African farm sector – such as cereals, oil seeds, fruit and vegetables. This needs to address impacts on world market prices, opportunities for exports to third countries, and dumping of surplus on West African markets. Additionally, it would be valuable to assess the distributional impacts of such policy measures, as regards the different positions faced by smaller and larger farming enterprises.¹²
- 1 Working with ROPPA and other producer organisations to assist them in developing materials and strategies for influencing national, sub-regional and global decision-making arenas. This would include information and communication materials explaining the different trade negotiation arenas, the regulations relating to different agreements, and implications for West African agriculture.
- 1 Strengthening coherence within West African government policy making as regards agricultural strategy, and other key fields such as decentralisation and land tenure reform.
- 1 Describing through a series of case studies the very diverse and adaptive strategies and outcomes achieved by different family farms in vari-

¹² This could be done in collaboration with ongoing work at the OECD on analysis of distributional impacts in developing countries of current OECD policies on agriculture and trade. However, the weak statistical base and limited coverage of data over time for most West African countries should be kept in mind.

ous West African settings, placing these case study stories within broader processes of change and transformation of the recent decades.

- 1 Describing through a series of case studies the nature and strategy of *les nouveaux acteurs*, now entering the agricultural sector, to outline the range of interests and perspectives they represent, including the difficulties they face and linkages forged with other forms of farm production.
- 1 Analysis of the design and implementation of agricultural policy at national level, the processes involved in terms of elaboration, consultation, lobbying and targeting of measures. This would aid the better understanding of the political economy underlying particular national policy choices.
- 1 Getting a better assessment of income and poverty levels in complex domestic groups, and how they have changed.

A range of international and regional initiatives already exist to explore the issues raised here. The SWAC Secretariat might best add value in the following areas:

- 1 Consultation and providing a platform for discussion amongst stakeholders in West Africa regarding priorities for agricultural development, trade negotiations and the trade-offs involved with different options;
- 1 Identifying key themes with West African partners for action research to highlight the implications of current trends and policy measures, distributional implications, and choices to be made;
- 1 Working with government and civil society groups in OECD member states to push for greater policy coherence, and understanding of the global risks associated with short-term considerations of electoral politics at home;
- 1 Feeding materials and ideas into high-level debate in global arenas, to inform the various stakeholders of the interlinkages between trade and farm policy in countries north and south, and to provide a means to build bridges between different constituencies, based on the influence, access and reputation of the SWAC.

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