

Future of Family Farming Report on IIED's work 2000-2005

Many governments in the Sahel are pursuing radical agricultural reform. Policies to support modernisation of the sector and promote large scale commercial enterprises are seen as crucial to increasing agricultural productivity and reducing poverty. But will it work?

Debate continues on the appropriateness and feasibility of this policy direction. Some fear it will increase poverty, while others claim that modernisation through foreign investment is the way forward. This is the final report of IIED's programme on the Future of Family Farming. This initiative contributed this discussion by providing case study material and enabling partners to debate these issues at local, national and international levels.

The Future of Family Farming

Agriculture is central to countries in West Africa. Over 70% of the population rely on farming for their livelihoods and it accounts for between 30 and 50% of gross national product. Family farming is the economic backbone of the region. But equally, it is crucial to the fabric of society; this livelihood system encompasses, social, cultural and spiritual values and benefits as well as food production. It provides the means for both social and economic production and reproduction. Understanding these multiple roles requires a more holistic perspective which needs to be adopted when addressing the productivity of farming systems in Africa.



While we are now seeing some diversification of the activities and economies in West Africa, for the foreseeable future agriculture will remain central to income generation and the food supply. We expect to see some major changes agricultural production over the next twenty years, but the nature of these changes is still the subject of heated debate. Will the changes underway inevitably lead to a smaller number of large scale agri-businesses, or can the small family farm still have an important role to play in terms of output and productivity growth? To what extent can government actively promote and support the smallholder sector? What political and economic choices need to be made in order to ensure its continued survival?

An offshoot of IIED's Making Decentralisation Work, the Future of Family Farming programme generated knowledge and promoted debate on strategic choices of economic policy – particularly on the role of family farming and large-scale commercial agriculture in the “modernisation” of agriculture in West Africa. In official discourses, family farming is often presented as backward, inefficient and subsistence oriented, with farmers unable to access credit to invest and increase productivity. Commercial agriculture, on the other hand is seen as modern and forward-looking, efficient, market oriented, and more suited to meeting Millennium Development Goal targets of poverty reduction.

Our Methodology

We used three inter-related activities in this programme on the future of family farming:

- Research
- Communication
- Lobbying and advocacy

Research

In order to understand better the issues involved we carried out a series of studies on how national and international processes and policies affect small scale farm enterprises. These addressed the following themes:

1. Case studies in the form of "portraits of family farms" to give greater visibility to the very diverse range of families and farms. These studies demonstrate the adaptation and innovation strategies adopted by family farming enterprises. These portraits challenge the stereotypical image of family agriculture as "backward" or archaic. Family farms produce food for both subsistence and markets; and farmers do respond to market and policy incentives to raise productivity, diversify and adopt more efficient techniques.
2. The impact of trade subsidies and cheap food imports from the EU/US on local small scale agriculture. It is increasingly recognised that agricultural and trade policy in developed countries is having an adverse impact on the incomes and livelihoods of farmers in the developing world and there is a need to document such impacts.
3. Studies of "new actors" in rural land markets. In many parts of West Africa there appears to be an increasing number of people from outside the agricultural sector who are now investing in land in rural and peri-urban areas. This research looked at the effects this has on access to land and on agricultural production. The links between land relations and remittances was also examined. For many developing countries, remittances from overseas migrants exceed development aid and foreign direct investment. Despite extensive work on both migration and development, the links between the two remain little understood. What role does foreign currency revenue play in land access? Does it support small scale farming or larger commercial enterprises?

Further detail on these studies can be found in the Annex. English and French versions of all the publications detailed within this report are available to download from our website www.iied.org.

Communication was an important programme activity ensuring that our findings were shared with a wide audience. This was achieved through national and international meetings to discuss findings, publications, a feature and articles in Haramata magazine. We also produced a video "Keeping it in the family" with Television Trust for the Environment (TVE) which was shown on BBC World, BBC News and is being translated for audiences in Senegal.



Work on communication was accompanied by support to partners to carry out **lobbying and advocacy** activities at local, national and international levels. Given that the programme coincided with the meetings of the WTO in Cancun and the G8 in Gleneagles we were able to feed the findings from our work into high level discussions and debate. For example, representatives from IIED gave presentations and participated in the NGO meetings held along side the WTO negotiations.

Key Publications

Camilla Toulmin and Bara Guèye, 2003, *Transformations in West African Agriculture and the role of family farms*, IIED, London, Issue Paper 123

Lorenzo Cotula and Camilla Toulmin (eds), 2004, *Till to tiller: international migration, remittances and land rights in West Africa*, IIED, London, Issue Paper 132

Oussouby Touré and Sidy Mohamed Seck, 2005, *Family and Commercial farming in the Niayes area of Senegal*, IIED, London, Issue Paper 133

Su Fei Tan and Bara Gueye (eds), 2005, *Portraits of family farming in West Africa*, IIED, London, Issue Paper 134

Sayouba Ouédraogo, 2006, *New actors and land acquisition around Lake Bazèga, Burkina Faso*, IIED, London, Issue Paper 138

Complementary work

Much of our other work supports the objectives of the Future of Family Farming programme. For example, support to pastoral civil society in East and West Africa is based on developing arguments for pastoral production systems. This kind of production is based on principles of mobility, negotiation, reciprocity and rational management of natural resources. Within a context of variable and unpredictable levels of rainfall, it is appropriate to the ecology of the region. Policy makers, however, argue that pastoral production must be modernised through intensifying production, sedentarisation and the introduction of improved breeds. But in practice there are few examples of successful "modernisation". We are supporting pastoral civil society organisations to argue the case for their production system by demonstrating that it is the most rational and ecologically appropriate way of rearing livestock in the region.

Our work on land and water rights also complements the Future of Family farming programme. The modernisation of agriculture often involves the establishment of large scale irrigation schemes. Funding for upgrading and expanding irrigation schemes has become a key challenge for Governments. As a result they are increasingly looking to the private sector as a source of investment to pay for irrigation infrastructure. Granting tenure security to private operators is seen as key to promoting this type of investment. Government efforts to attract private capital to expand irrigation facilities exemplify the current policy thrust in favour of agribusiness in the Sahel.¹

Attracting large-scale capital

In December 2004, the Malian government decided to sell some 3,000 ha of land in the Office du Niger to private operators – who, as a result, may retain full ownership rights over that land. This new approach is expected to attract large investors and constitutes a major change of policy. Until now, land ownership in the office area was squarely vested in the State.

¹ For further information see: Cotula and Sylla, 2006 "Land/water rights and irrigation" in Cotula (ed) Land and water rights in the Sahel: Tenure challenges of improving access to water for agriculture. Issue Paper No 139, IIED: London.

Senegal's Agro-Sylvo Pastoral Law

The first version of this law sets out the general principles for agro-sylvopastoral activities (*loi agro-sylvopastorale*), was entirely geared towards supporting commercial agriculture. It put in place a national agency responsible for securing available land and leasing it out to entrepreneurs.

The law juxtaposes two different versions of the future for agriculture (commercial and small scale), without giving any indication of how they might interact or which one will take precedence.

The stir caused by this reform led the government to suppress any mention of land tenure in the draft bill. But how can the process of drafting a law setting out the guidelines for agriculture move forward with no clarification of the type of farming to be encouraged and no mention of land tenure?

Source Haramata 47, IIED, 2004

The results

Our work, building on the work of others,² challenged the assumption that small holder farming is backward. It shows how family farming, the backbone of Sahelian agriculture, is highly dynamic and responsive to change and to market incentives. Research covered issues as diverse as the nature and challenges of family farming, the growing role of commercial agriculture and its impact on family farmers. We also looked at the impact of dumping and agricultural subsidies on West African producers, and the role of international remittances in supporting family farms in West Africa.

In addition to research, the programme worked with farmers' associations at national and regional levels, particularly ROPPA (Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique

de l'Ouest), and policy-oriented institutions such as the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) of the OECD. **The Future of Family Farming** promoted an informed and more balanced debate on these issues through national consultations held in Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal with key stakeholders and the production of a video, *Keep it in the Family*. The video, produced in collaboration with Television Trust for the Environment (TVE), profiles a number of successful small-farmers in Senegal and shows how, in spite of unfavourable national policy environment, they succeed not only in meeting their family's food requirements, but are also able to produce for the market. With the right policies in place, they could play a central role as the key drivers of economic growth in the region. BBC World broadcast the video in its prestigious Earth Report series five times in the week leading up to the G8 meeting in Gleneagles in Scotland in June 2004 reaching an estimated 230 million homes and hotels in 220 countries. BBC News 24 also broadcast it twice as a backdrop to coverage on the G8 meeting. A longer version of the video will be used as a policy dialogue tool in Senegal and in the Sahel more broadly to stimulate debate and call for agricultural policies supportive to family farming in the latter half of 2005.³



Conclusions

While advocates of agricultural modernisation claim that small scale farming is backward and unproductive our studies paint a different picture. Despite unfavourable policy environments these farmers:

² For example: Mortimore, Michael, 2003 "The future of family farms in West Africa. What can we learn from the long-term data?", London, IIED Issue Paper 119 (also available in French).

³ Table 1 in the Annex contains further details on the activities undertaken and the outputs achieved.

- Adopt sustainable environmental practices because land is seen in broader cultural/spiritual terms rather than just as an economic asset; land is managed from a generational point of view, not 50 year lease perspective.
- Undertake a diversity of activities to minimise risk and reduce vulnerability to environmental shocks such as drought.
- Are flexible and adaptive responding to market and climatic changes.
- Are integrated into social networks using them to access labour and other resources. These networks also provide an essential safety net in times of crisis.
- Invest in land. Popular belief says that small-scale family farms are backward and too poor to manage natural resources sustainably. But evidence from our work and that of others (eg Drylands Research) shows that given the opportunity these farmers will invest in their land.
- Family Farms also provide rural employment and if they were to be displaced this would lead to a shortage of employment in rural areas with the related costs such as increased migration to urban areas, social strife etc.

These farms are the backbone of rural life in West Africa. As such support for small scale agriculture should form a central element of poverty reduction initiatives in the region. This need not be done to the exclusion of commercial enterprises but the potential of small farms should be recognised and their development supported through government and donor policies and programmes.

Areas for further work

Our initial phase of work on the Future of Family Farming had a slight emphasis on generating knowledge and case study material. The objective was to ensure that arguments for the modernisation of agriculture were built on evidence rather than stereotypes.

Although the work carried out provides useful information on the nature of family farming there remain some gaps which merit further investigation. These include:



- The economics of small-holder pastoralism and agro-pastoralism. Both activities are essential to the future of dryland areas but their true contributions have not been accurately measured.
- A gendered analysis of family farming particularly in the light of increasing population, increasing competition over natural resources. For example, how women's access to land changes as populations grow and competition over land increases.

Further work will focus on communicating information and on supporting partners to use the material for lobbying and advocacy activities; providing support to farmer, agro-pastoral and pastoral organisations to fight their corners and assert their rights. For example, we would like to reinforce links between East and West African farmer organisations. Our goal is to promote cross learning and mutual support amongst these groups and to build dialogue on the Future of Family Farming at international, regional and national levels.

Annex: Table 1

Activities	Outputs
<p>1. Portraits of Family Farms</p> <p>Portraits of family farms were carried out in Mali, Ghana and Senegal, to demonstrate that the stereotyped image of family farming as archaic and hide-bound is false. Like the case studies undertaken, throughout West Africa, there are many examples of small-scale producers who have established economically viable farms. And who are contributing to the sustainable management of natural resources.</p>	<p>Portraits of family farming in West Africa Drylands Issue Paper 134 Edited by Su Fei Tan and Bara Gueye, March 2005</p>
<p>2. The impact of trade subsidies</p> <p>What is the impact of trade subsidies and cheap food imports from the EU/US on local small scale agriculture? It is increasingly recognised that agricultural and trade policy in developed countries is having an adverse impact on the incomes and livelihoods of farmers in the developing world and there is a need to document such impacts. For example, are imports of certain foodstuffs having a damaging effect on the market opportunities and prices gained by farmers in West Africa? What are the implications for local production of rice by small scale family farms? In addition to having to compete with subsidised imports farmers face further constraints which restrict their ability to increase production. To explore these questions a study was carried out in Ghana on the impacts of the import of subsidies commodities on local production.</p>	<p>Research Report available</p>
<p>3. New Actors in Land Management</p> <p>Across West Africa the promotion of policies to support the commercialisation of agriculture has led to the emergence of a new category of farmer or agricultural entrepreneur. For the most part these entrepreneurs come from an urban background (civil servants, shopkeepers, political officials etc.) and benefit from favoured access to economic and political networks providing an entry point to land tenure, privileged access to strategic information and credit, close relations with support agencies and accumulation of significant sums of money in the non-farming sector. Studies were undertaken in Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso to explore the impact of the emergence of this category of "new actors" in land relations within the region. In addition research was carried out on the impact of remittances the linkages between international remittances and access to land in West Africa (Ghana and Senegal).</p>	<p>Till to tiller: international migration, remittances and land rights in West Africa, Issue Paper 132 Lorenzo Cotula and Camilla Toulmin (eds), November 2004</p> <p>New actors and land acquisition around Lake Bazèga, Burkina Faso Drylands Issue Paper 138 By Sayouba Ouédraogo, March 2006</p> <p>Family and Commercial farming in the Niayes area of Senegal Drylands Issue Paper 133 By Oussouby Touré and Sidy Mohamed Seck, March 2005</p> <p>Research reports also available from Mali, Ghana and Niger.</p>

4. Advocacy and networking

In addition to generating knowledge the objective of the studies carried out during this programme was to share information and contribute to debate on the Future of Family Farming. As a result, the programme facilitated a range of networking and communications activities at several levels.

International debate

- Harmata 47 (IIED's Bulletin of the Drylands) featured an article on the future of farming in Senegal to highlight the debate on agricultural modernisation and to discuss some of the challenges of the newly introduced agro-sylvo pastoral law.
- Bara Guèye of IED Afrique (formerly IIED Sahel) presented programme findings to regional SIDA meetings in 2005 and 2006 (Zambia and Burkina Faso). He also participated in the March 2006 meeting in Sweden on African Agricultural Policy.
- As a result of collaboration with ICTSD (Geneva) Bara Gueye and Camilla Toulmin gave presented programme findings at the NGO conference which took place at the WTO meeting in Cancun.
- One of the final activities carried out in the phase of our work on the Future of Family Farms was to work with TVE (Television Trust for the Environment) to develop a programme on Family Farming in Senegal as part of its Earth Report Series. This video was shown on BBC World and is currently being translated into French so that it can be used as an information and advocacy tools by IIED's partners in West Africa. The video is available to purchase from the TVE website www.tve.org.

National debate

- IED Afrique worked with FONGs in Senegal to develop their strategy on family farming.
- IED Afrique has also carried out a detailed analysis of the Loi Agro-Sylvo pastorale with a view to supporting the capacity of national organisations to lobby and advocate for a more favourable policy environment for family farming.