

# Transformation of West African Agriculture: Policies and Actions to Improve Access to Agricultural Innovation

## Summary

*An Initiative of the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC)<sup>1</sup>*

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### 1. Context

Agriculture constitutes a key sector of West African economies: it contributes about one third of the regional GDP and occupies 50 to 80% of the active population. Consisting mostly of family farms, West African agriculture is in a state of perpetual change in response to various factors linked both to the natural environment and to a socio-economic and political context characterized by the disengagement of the State, trade liberalization, and globalization.

Several possible trends can be envisioned for the future of West African agriculture, including the replacement of family farming<sup>2</sup> by a profitable and competitive “modern” form of agriculture. This latter type is generally typified by large and specialized farms that rely on the intensive use of agricultural inputs and equipment, as well as the use of paid labor. This vision, however, is not shared by all stakeholders. For example, the majority of producer organizations believe that when political and economic conditions are favorable, family farming can be competitive and effective through improved production and productivity.

Macroeconomic reforms (liberalization, globalization, structural adjustment policies...) have had some positive impacts, but also negative effects on certain types of family farming in West Africa. There has also been a lack of policy coherence that is evident at least two levels:

- *at the international level:* some northern countries that promote unrestricted competition, implement protectionist policies and agricultural subsidies. This could lead to lower prices for certain agricultural imports in West Africa, thereby stifling demand for comparatively costly domestic products;

- *at the regional and national level:* for example, land policies are not coordinated at the regional level and national land legislative frameworks differ substantially, with impacts on land use patterns, access to land and use rights and ownership.

Political and economic changes are always accompanied by social transformation. West Africa is currently experiencing a shift from collectivist forms of activity to more individualistic ones. For example, some thirty years ago, young people provided their labor to their families in the hope of later receiving various forms of assistance in times of great financial need (dowries, marriages, etc.) and of eventually inheriting land. Due to scarcity of land, among other factors, young farmers now prefer to engage in salaried work that provides immediate income. We should also note a trend among women farmers who prefer wage labor or working on their own land to working on communal or family fields.

These concerns lay at the heart of the studies carried out by the SWAC Secretariat in 2003 on the transformation of West African agriculture, one of whose themes dealt with the role of agricultural innovation in the process of structural change of family farming at the regional level. The present initiative builds upon the conclusions of that study.

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<sup>2</sup> For a definition of family farming, see Toulmin et Guèye, 2003, The Transformation of West African Agriculture and the Role of Family Farms, SWAC, Paris. (available at: [www.sahel-club.org/en/agri/index.htm](http://www.sahel-club.org/en/agri/index.htm))

## 2. Key issues and objectives of the Initiative

Beyond the inadequacies of agricultural institutions, it seems evident that agricultural innovation—whether endogenous, generated through regional exchanges, or stimulated by research and extension institutions, NGOs, or agribusiness and the private sector—plays an important role in family farming. Agricultural innovation offers solutions to practical questions, such as productivity, sustainability, and price-quality ratio. Family farming needs to respond to these challenges in order to both deal with the constraints and benefit from the opportunities created by the opening of international markets, increasing demand due to population growth, and regional trade.

For several years, many have worked in collaboration with family farmers and other stakeholders on developing better-adapted and more effective agricultural technological innovations. However, a fundamental question remains:

*How can access to agricultural innovation be improved for all categories of family farmers with a view to enabling them to benefit from the comparative advantages offered by the West African regional market and to generate added value?*

Based on concerns raised in the SWAC Secretariat's analysis of the transformation of family farming<sup>3</sup> and on the expectations expressed by stakeholders during an extensive electronic consultation conducted by the SWAC Secretariat from June to September of 2003, three areas of work have been chosen for this initiative.

**(i) How can the access of different categories of producers to agricultural innovation be strengthened?**

- a. Innovation and socio-economic and institutional factors (policies stimulating innovation, role of securing access to land for all categories of farmers, and impact of agricultural policies on agricultural innovation)
- b. Innovation and the place of the rural youth
- c. Regional trade and innovation
- d. Problems of access to innovations experienced by different categories of farmers (e.g. migrants, ...) and farm types (e.g. those more or less connected to markets)
- e. Gender issues and women's access to innovations in West Africa.

**(ii) How to increase the role played by innovation in improving producer livelihoods and in optimizing their resources, in a regional perspective?**

- Based on the potential offered by the regional market, what kind of innovation would be beneficial to family farmers?

**(iii) How to strengthen the role played by services at both the upstream and downstream ends of production in improving access to agricultural innovation?**

- a. What are the roles played by agri-business networks, input supply services, etc.?
- b. How does agri-food processing facilitate access to agricultural innovation?

Certain strategic commodities have already been identified as priorities for analysis in West Africa by the SWAC Secretariat: oil seeds, cotton, livestock products, fruit and vegetables. By addressing these questions, the overall objective of the study is the promotion of appropriate actions and policies to increase the access of rural populations to agricultural innovation and to optimize regional opportunities for family farms in West Africa. The ultimate objective is to provide concrete advice to decision-makers in institutions, States, producer organizations, and other key stakeholders to make appropriate decisions to increase the access of rural populations to agricultural innovation.

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<sup>3</sup> Documents available at: [www.sahel-club.org/en/agri/index.htm](http://www.sahel-club.org/en/agri/index.htm).

### 3. Activities

The main activities include analyses of commodities and crop production in specific contexts in the region. It will include 3-4 country case studies. The analyses will include coastal and inland areas that provide key cases of regional innovations and promising innovation dynamics and some examples where there is a significant cross-border dimension and/or an active private sector. The existence of innovative institutional approaches (for example, the restructuring of agricultural services, the involvement of civil society and private sector actors) will also be taken into account. Visits to four countries are being considered: Ghana, the Gambia, Burkina Faso, and Mali or Guinea. These activities will aim to identify lessons and implications with regional importance.

### 4. Methodology and approach

These activities of the SWAC Secretariat seek to complement other ongoing initiatives by providing a regional perspective. The approach will be centered on exchanges and consultations with regional stakeholders aimed at capitalizing on their experiences, analyses, and visions. With the objective of identifying practical solutions for actions and supporting decision-making, this initiative will develop an innovative analytical process articulated around three axes:

- An informal consultation of diverse stakeholders (officials of regional organizations, policy makers of countries ready to commit themselves to this initiative, representatives of research and extension institutions, producer organizations, as well as private sector, agribusiness, and NGO actors) on the obstacles limiting access to innovations and innovative solutions. This consultation will involve a core group ready to engage itself in work for this initiative.
- Lessons drawn from SWAC's work on the roles, trends, and dynamics of the transformation of West African family agriculture will be used as well as those emerging from its work on the development of agricultural sub-sectors, regional markets and the private sector. Relevant information will be drawn from the experiences of national, regional, and international institutions, research and extension organizations, as well as development projects and programs. Lessons from the experiences of other West African stakeholders will also be welcomed.
- A process of exchange and validation of the key issues and analyses at every level will be at the heart of our approach. This initiative thus seeks to be **a truly participative consultative process** with various stakeholders: producer organizations, regional organizations (for example: WAEMU, ECOWAS, CORAF/WECARD, SAFGRAD, etc.), international development and research institutions (for example: IFAD, World Bank, CIRAD, IIED, ENDA etc.).

### 5. Key stages of the process

The tentative agenda for the implementation of this initiative is as follows.

Key actions	Indicative dates
1. Exchanges with regional stakeholders on the Terms of Reference	November 2003
2. Electronic consultation and study launch	December 2003-January 2004
3. Data collection and analysis (case studies)	January-April 2004
4. Regional meeting with key actors	February/March 2004
5. Drafting of a synthesis document and briefs for stakeholders and decision-makers	April-May 2004
6. Regional validation	May/June 2004
7. Presentation of the initiative in regional forums and seminars	To be defined
8. Validation of the study by the SWAC and northern stakeholders	September 2004
9. Finalization and distribution of reports	September 2004