

Part V: Conclusions & Policy Implications

West Africa's agricultural growth prospects have never been stronger. Greater regional integration and better policy implementation are critical to realizing these prospects for the region's next generation.



CHAPTER 14

Conclusions, Policy Implications, and Lessons Learned

Conclusions, implications politiques, et enseignements

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Abstract

This chapter highlights key findings of the SRAI research and policy outreach program, discusses their policy implications and how policy in West Africa is responding to the challenges they represent. The chapter concludes by presenting a few broader lessons that the SRAI team learned about the policy process in West Africa. Key findings include: (a) the high opportunity cost of measures taken to limit the transmission of price shocks in world grain markets to West African domestic economies; (b) the rapidly changing nature of food demand in West Africa; (c) how significant transaction costs are limiting the response of actors in the agrifood system to this changing demand and other challenges facing them; (d) the multiple pathways through which greater regional agricultural integration can help address those challenges; (e) the need to link the regional agricultural trade agenda to social-protection and risk-mitigation agendas; and (f) the need to focus beyond the farm level to entire value chains if West African agriculture is to be competitive even on a regional level. These findings imply that food policies, to be successful, need to take into account how demand patterns are changing (including the rapid growth in the demand for perishable products, such as animal-based foods, and fruits and vegetables) and increasingly link with concerns outside the traditional mandates of ministries of agriculture, such as nutrition and health. Bolstering regional trade will also require attention to *soft infrastructure*, such as harmonizing grades and standards and reforming trucking regulations, in addition to improving *hard infrastructure*, such as roads, ports, and telecommunications. Broader lessons learned include: (a) the critical importance of *good governance* aimed at limiting the rent-seeking behavior of those who are in a position to hinder regional integration; (b) how such integration is dependent on strengthening local policy analysis and outreach capacity; (c) the ongoing nature of policy outreach; and (d) the need to tailor policy interventions that have an overt political aim so that they also address underlying structural constraints to broad-based growth.

Résumé

Ce chapitre met en lumière les principales conclusions du programme de recherche et de sensibilisation politique SRAI, expose leurs implications politiques, explique comment la politique en Afrique de l'Ouest répond aux enjeux qu'elles représentent et esquisse quelques enseignements plus généraux que l'équipe de SRAI a dégagés concernant le processus politique en Afrique de l'Ouest. Les principales conclusions qui en découlent sont les

suivantes: (a) le coût d'opportunité élevé des mesures prises pour limiter la répercussion des chocs des cours mondiaux des céréales sur les économies des pays ouest-africains; (b) le changement rapide de la nature de la demande alimentaire en Afrique de l'Ouest; (c) les coûts de transaction élevés qui limitent les réactions des acteurs du système agroalimentaire face à cette évolution de la demande et aux autres enjeux; (d) l'existence de multiples moyens par lesquels une plus grande intégration agricole régionale peut contribuer à relever ces défis; (e) le besoin de relier le programme régional de commerce agricole avec les programmes de protection sociale et d'atténuation des risques et; (f) le besoin de s'intéresser aux chaînes de valeur dans leur ensemble, au-delà du niveau de l'exploitation, si l'on veut que l'agriculture ouest-africaine soit compétitive, même à l'échelle régionale. Ces conclusions impliquent que pour réussir, les politiques alimentaires doivent tenir compte de la transformation des modèles de demande (notamment l'augmentation rapide de la demande de produits périssables, tels que les produits animaux, les fruits et légumes). Ces politiques doivent s'intéresser de plus en plus aux préoccupations traditionnellement hors du champ des missions des ministères de l'agriculture, comme par exemple la nutrition et la santé. Stimuler le commerce régional exigera aussi de faire attention aux *infrastructures* dites *soft ou institutionnelles*, à savoir l'harmonisation des catégories et des normes ainsi que la réforme des réglementations du transport routier, outre l'amélioration des *infrastructures physiques* telles que les routes, les ports et les télécommunications. Les enseignements plus généraux comprennent les éléments suivants : (a) l'importance cruciale de la bonne gouvernance visant à limiter la recherche de rente par ceux qui sont en position de miner l'intégration régionale ; (b) la nécessité de renforcer les capacités locales en analyse des politiques et sensibilisation ; (c) le besoin de mettre en place un programme continu et non ponctuel de sensibilisation dans le domaine des politiques et (d) le besoin d'adapter des programmes à court terme, en partie motivés par les considérations politiques, pour qu'elles remédient aussi aux contraintes structurelles qui minent la croissance.

14.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Strengthening Regional Agricultural Integration (SRAI) program began in 2009 in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 world food crisis. As a result of that crisis, many West African leaders lost confidence in the reliability of international and regional markets as sources of food for their growing populations and called for increased national food self-sufficiency. Consequently, the region entered into a process of *globalization in reverse*, in which much of the impetus towards greater regional agricultural integration that had built up since the 1990s appeared to be threatened (see Chapter 2). While the SRAI program initially focused primarily on the impact of the 2007-2008 crisis on West African grain markets and the policy responses to it, the program gradually broadened its attention to cover several topics that are central to policies affecting regional agricultural integration. The resulting analyses fed into national and regional policy discussions that gained momentum following the crisis, as discussed in Chapter 13. Chief among these was the African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), which in West Africa was integrally linked to the ECOWAS Regional Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP).

The remainder of this chapter summarizes key findings from the SRAI program, discusses their policy implications and highlights lessons learned about the policy process in West Africa.

14.2. Key Findings

Six broad findings emerged from the SRAI program:

West African Governments Were Able to Reduce the Transmission of Global Price Shocks to Their Markets, but at High Cost

Among the countries analyzed (all in the CFA franc zone), about one-third of the magnitude of price changes in world rice prices (denominated in U.S. dollars (US\$)) was transmitted to domestic markets over the period 2000-2008. A somewhat higher share (averaging around 40%) of global maize price changes was transmitted to those markets. During the height of the crisis (2007-2008), these shares increased, but never exceeded 40% for rice and averaged around 50% for maize in three of the four countries studied. Part of this muting of international price shocks was an artifact of the declining value of the dollar relative to the CFA franc over this period (a situation that has reversed since 2010), but much of it was due to policies implemented by West African governments to protect consumers. These policies included, among others, cuts in import taxes, export restrictions from traditionally grain-surplus countries, and subsidized sales to consumers. While partially successful in reducing pressure on consumers, the policies had high opportunity costs in terms of foregone government revenues that could have supported programs to expand domestic production and in terms of reduced price incentives to domestic farmers.

Food Consumption Patterns in West Africa Are Changing Profoundly

SRAI aimed to understand how West African countries responded to the 2007-2008 food crisis, but do so in the context of longer-term forces driving change in the region's agrifood system. It became apparent that chief among those driving forces is the changing pattern of food availability and consumption in the region. Per capita supplies of many agricultural products in the region have increased since 1990 as the result of improvements in agricultural technologies and infrastructure, more favorable economic policies, better weather, and expanded trade.¹ The analysis of food balance sheets covering the 30 years from 1980 through 2009 (Chapter 4) showed that per capita calorie, protein and fat availability increased, in some cases dramatically, in almost all of the 15 member states of ECOWAS. Furthermore, diets diversified. Amongst starchy staples, consumption increases were particularly dramatic for rice and wheat (supplied largely through imports), but also for maize, cassava and yams in several countries, while growth in per capita availability of millet and sorghum was much slower. More broadly, per capita availability of fruits, vegetables and animal products increased sharply across the region, with the greatest changes occurring in countries experiencing the most robust economic growth, such as Cape Verde and Ghana.

When demand is analyzed further by income group and place of residence (Chapters 5 and 7), it becomes evident that both urbanization and per capita income growth, including the expansion of West Africa's middle class, are pushing demand strongly towards perishables and products that are more convenient to prepare and consume. The projected percentage rate of growth of demand through 2040 for animal-based products, fruits and vegetables and vegetable oil all exceed that for cereals, with the bulk of the increase in demand coming from urban areas (Chapter 7). The evidence also suggests that improvements in grain processing has increased

¹ For details, see Hollinger and Staatz (2015), Chapters 2 and 11.

the willingness of consumers to substitute milled coarse grains, such as maize, millet and sorghum, for rice during periods of sharp price increases for rice (Chapter 5).

Processed products and perishables incorporate a much higher degree of post-harvest value-added (through processing, packaging and marketing) than do basic staples, offering the potential to create many additional jobs in the non-farm segments of the agrifood system. At the same time, three-quarters of the population of the region continues to subsist on less than US\$2 per day and has a primary focus on obtaining basic calories at the lowest price possible. The degree to which West African staple food value chains can be competitive globally (see Chapters 10 and 11) will largely determine whether these consumers will *eat locally* or turn to imports.

West African Agrifood System Actors Are Responding to New Opportunities, but Face High Transaction Costs

West African farmers, input providers, merchants, agro-processors, exporters and retailers are responding innovatively to many of the changes in demand, international market conditions, technologies and physical environment that they face. The rapid expansion in the production of rice, maize and cassava in the region in recent years reflects farmers' response to burgeoning demand and the adoption of new technologies, such as the NERICA rice varieties. Peri-urban horticultural and dairy producers have rapidly grown their operations in response to consumers' diversification and upgrading of their diets. Regional trade in agricultural products within West Africa, although imprecisely measured, appears to have expanded rapidly since the 1990s (see Chapter 3). The emergence of new regional trade corridors reflects adaptation to changing regional patterns of demand, such as the growing demand for feed grains in Nigeria. As economic policies and agricultural prices in the region have become more favorable, domestic and international firms have increasingly invested in agricultural production and agro-processing. As discussed in Chapter 12, they are experimenting with various partnership models to link small and medium-scale farmers into their enterprises. Agro-processors, ranging from large-scale industrial operations to small-scale street-food producers, have developed new forms of convenient fast foods for time-constrained urban consumers.

While actors across the agrifood system have shown remarkable dynamism in responding to changes in their socio-economic and physical environments, they have faced substantial transaction costs in doing so. Some of these stem from increased physical insecurity in West Africa in recent years. Many, however, result from policies that change frequently, are sometimes inconsistent across countries and are often opaque in their application. This is particularly the case with rules governing trade in both agricultural products and inputs among different countries within the region. Because the rules are not always clear to all involved, enforcement tends to be arbitrary, opening the door to corruption and other unofficial fees. Reducing these transaction costs will be an important step in increasing the responsiveness of actors throughout West Africa's agrifood system to the new opportunities facing them.

Regional Agricultural Integration Can Improve Growth and Food Security through Several Different Pathways

SRAI's research initially focused on understanding how disruptions in regional trade, such as ad hoc export bans, depressed local prices, raised market risks, and lessened the gains from

regional comparative advantage and specialization, thereby reducing incentives for farmers, traders and agro-processors to adopt productivity-enhancing technologies. As SRAI's work progressed, however, it soon revealed that regional agricultural integration has the potential to spur growth and food security through at least three major pathways:

Broadening markets for farmers, traders and agro-processors through establishment of transparent rules for regional trade and mutually recognized grades and standards across countries. Following the 2007-2008 crisis, rules changed frequently in an ad hoc manner from one country to another about the conditions under which agricultural goods could be imported or exported. Often these rule changes were poorly communicated to different actors in the value chains, leading to increased uncertainty about the conditions under which regional trade could take place. The resulting policy volatility increased the transaction costs for those engaged in regional trade. To offset the risks, traders offered lower prices to farmers in the exporting countries, charged higher prices to consumers in the importing countries, minimized investments in warehousing and other trade-related infrastructure and reduced the scale of their operations. Agro-processors were largely precluded from sourcing raw materials from neighboring countries and faced volatile domestic prices, in part because national governments did not honor the ECOWAS agreements regarding the free movement of agricultural goods within the region (see Chapter 9). As a consequence, many agro-processors turned towards imports as a more reliable and less costly source of raw materials.

Capturing economies of scale. With the exception of Nigeria, most national economies in West Africa are small by global standards. In 2015, of the 15 ECOWAS countries, 14 had fewer than 30 million inhabitants and 7 had fewer than 10 million (UNDESA 2017). The small national populations combine with low per-capita incomes and country-specific market regulations, grades, and standards to result in economies that are too small to capture the scale economies enjoyed by global agricultural powerhouses such as China, India, Brazil and Indonesia. The lack of scale inhibits competitiveness and efficiency in agricultural research, extension and agricultural higher education, as it is difficult to assemble a critical mass of specialists in all the domains facing agriculture in each country. It also impedes the production of productivity-enhancing inputs such as fertilizer and improved seeds. For example, no ECOWAS country except Nigeria has an annual consumption of urea close to the minimum efficient output of a urea factory (500,000 tons/year), and varying national fertilizer regulations across the zone have hindered the establishment of plants that could market to multiple countries (Hollinger and Staatz 2015). International seed companies have little incentive to invest in producing and selling improved germ plasm in the region if they have to go through separate approval processes in 15 different countries, many of them with very small markets. As discussed in Chapter 13, ECOWAS has made progress on paper in harmonizing many of these input regulations, but to date, implementation on the ground remains very limited. Until the West African market becomes much more integrated for such inputs, access of farmers to critical sources of improved productivity will remain limited.

Promoting consumers' ability to substitute across commodities. Consumers' ability and willingness to shift among different staple foods appears to be increasing in recent years, as diets have diversified, processed forms of maize, millet and sorghum have become more available, and per capita incomes have increased (see Chapters 4 and 5). But as the analysis in Chapter 6 vividly illustrates, the ability of consumers in Sahelian countries to substitute across staple foods during periods of shortfalls in domestic production or spikes in the world price of

rice depends critically on fluid regional trade. Both the poor and the nonpoor suffer from restricted trade during periods of local food shortfalls and higher world prices, with the poor absorbing the worst effects. For example, consider the scenario of a 50% increase in world rice prices and a moderate willingness of consumers to substitute from more expensive rice to cheaper staples such as millet, sorghum and maize as rice prices increase.

The analysis in Chapter 6 indicates that in this situation the urban poor's calorie consumption would fall by 7.5% if no increase in regional trade of the cheaper staples took place, while that of the urban nonpoor would fall by 3.5%. With the possibility of importing these cheaper staples from neighboring countries, the supply of such staples would increase, and the poor's calorie consumption would fall by 4.9% (35% less than under the restricted trade scenario) while the nonpoor's consumption would remain virtually unchanged from its level before the spike in world rice prices. Thus, while efforts to promote the greater availability of processed and easy-to-consume forms of coarse grains such as millet, sorghum and maize do increase the range of consumer choice, their ability to help protect consumers during periods of drought and world price spikes depends critically on maintaining fluid regional trade.

Addressing Regional Trade in the Absence of Social Safety Nets and Risk Mitigation Is a Non-starter

In low-income, grain exporting countries of West Africa, such as Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, policy makers are justifiably concerned that in periods of food shortages in neighboring countries, maintaining open borders will bid up domestic food prices, hurting their poor. The bidding wars between poor and nonpoor for food during periods of shortage described in Chapter 6 operate on a regional basis as well as on a national basis. Most of these low-income grain-exporting countries are surrounded by richer neighbors, leading to the risk that the neighboring countries could bid supplies away from poor Sahelian consumers. Maintaining open borders helps the poor in Sahelian countries during periods of local shortages in their own countries when other supplies are available from neighboring countries. The opposite, however, is not likely to be the case when the neighbors are short of food and want to import large quantities from the Sahelian countries. This is particularly true if the shortages are regional or global rather than localized. Most policy makers in the Sahelian countries understand that imposing export bans hurts long-term agricultural growth by depressing the incentives of farmers and traders to invest in boosting production. Many also understand that in the long run, increasing productivity throughout the value chain offers the prospect of holding down the price of food while maintaining the profitability of production and trade. But policy makers and politicians live in the short term and need to have reliable tools to protect vulnerable populations from spiking prices. As a result, the regional trade agenda needs to go hand-in-hand with the social protection agenda. There is a need to develop targeted social safety-net programs to protect the most vulnerable from the higher food prices that will result, at least in the short run, from burgeoning regional demand.

The need to link the trade agenda with an agenda dealing with risk mitigation and safety-net assistance to the vulnerable is reflected in the design of the ECOWAP/CAADP regional agricultural investment plan as well as many of the national plans (see Chapter 13). For example, the ECOWAP regional investment plan includes a component aimed at experimenting with and expanding various types of safety-net and disaster mitigation programs. Yet the design of such programs in a way that is financially sustainable is challenging in a region where three-

quarters of the population subsists on less than US\$2 per day. Successful design will require, as an important component, improved understanding of the food consumption behavior of different income and social groups in the population, such as that discussed in Part II of this volume.

West African Agriculture Can Be Competitive, but only if the Entire Value Chain is Addressed

The analyses in Chapters 10 and 11 indicate that for key products such as rice and maize, selected West African production systems can be competitive with imports from overseas. But as stressed in Chapter 10's discussion of the competitiveness of West African irrigated rice systems compared with those of Asian exporters, competitiveness in the future will increasingly depend on the efficiency of post-harvest operations, such as milling, marketing and quality control. This finding is consistent with findings of other SRAI-supported work on determinants of import parity prices (Diallo, Dembélé, and Staatz 2010) as well as other analyses of the competitiveness of African agriculture (e.g., World Bank and FAO 2009; Hollinger and Staatz 2015). Unfortunately, until very recently, most agricultural policies and investment plans, such as those developed under ECOWAP/CAADP, have concentrated most of their attention at the farm level. They have devoted relatively few resources to improving the post-harvest segments of the value chain—segments that will increasingly determine the competitiveness of West African agriculture in the future (see Chapters 7 and 13).

This imbalance in focus has been recognized at the regional level, and plans for the 2016-2025 of the ECOWAP/CAADP program call for a much stronger value-chain approach to spurring agrifood system development (see Chapter 13). Such an approach will need to strengthen vertical coordination along entire value chains, from input provision to sale to the final consumer. Improved models, involving various forms of joint action and contracting, will be needed to link small farmers to the region's growing value-added markets if these farmers are to benefit from the growth of the value chains. Linking such smallholders to the burgeoning demand is also essential for ensuring that the resulting economic growth has a strong impact on reducing food insecurity. The case studies of contract-farming models summarized in Chapter 12 demonstrate that the ability of such models to address the financing and risk-management needs of different actors is critical to their success, but that no single model is optimum in all cases. These models need to be tailored carefully to the commodity in question and the physical and socio-economic environment in which it is produced. The analysis in Chapter 12 provides some guidance regarding which types of partnership models are likely to be most successful in different circumstances, but there is no substitution for careful efforts by the stakeholders involved to work out the particular details suited to a given setting.

14.3. Policy Implications and Policy Response

The preceding sections have already discussed, either implicitly or explicitly, some of the policy implications of SRAI's major findings. Among these is the need to shift the focus of agricultural policy from just farm policy to a broader food policy that takes into account the entire value chain, including its off-farm elements such as agro-processing, wholesaling and retailing. Given the increasingly regional nature of agricultural markets and the growing demand for healthier foods, such policies also need to address the links between agriculture,

trade, nutrition and health. This broader food policy focus thus involves areas beyond the traditional mandate of ministries of agriculture, necessitating much greater inter-ministerial cooperation and programming.

The evolving pattern of food consumption in the region implies that a firm understanding of the nature and dynamics of food consumption patterns is critical to designing demand-driven policies. Without understanding how demand is changing, policies are likely to miss important opportunities to promote growth and food security. In particular, SRAI's findings imply that while production and competitiveness of basic staples will remain important, the focus of food policy needs to broaden in order to give much greater attention to perishables such as animal-based products, fruits and vegetables, for which demand is growing exponentially (see Chapter 7).

Achieving greater regional agricultural integration is critical to addressing many of the challenges facing West Africa's agrifood system. This will require a strong political commitment by individual ECOWAS member states to go beyond the rhetoric of favoring regional integration to actually taking the actions necessary to lift the barriers to cross-border trade. Such actions will need to include more than just investments in hard infrastructure such as improved roads, telecommunications, electricity grids and systems of cold-stores, important as they are. It will also require strong efforts to supply the complementary soft infrastructure, such as regionally compatible grades and standards for agricultural products and inputs, reforms of transportation regulations to foster greater competition in the trucking industry across the ECOWAS region, and joint educational programs, such as *border conferences* that involve both the private sector and government officials such as customs agents in discussions about the rights and responsibilities of those involved in intraregional trade and how to facilitate regional trade.²

Policy makers in West Africa are responding to many of these challenges. As discussed in Chapter 13, policies have become much more favorable towards agricultural growth in West Africa since 2000. Despite setbacks experienced in the wake of the 2007-2008 world food crisis, there has also been important progress in fostering regional integration under the leadership of WAEMU and ECOWAS. Most ECOWAS countries explicitly include some degree of regional trade in their agricultural development strategies, despite occasional calls for national self-sufficiency in basic staples. And ECOWAS, in its regional investment plan and related policies, has identified actions to promote regional trade, harmonize grades and standards for products and agricultural inputs, and capture economies of scale in emergency relief through the creation of a regional food reserve. There has also been increasing recognition of the need to address agricultural development from a value-chain perspective, including value chains that transcend national boundaries within the region. Such a perspective, which recognizes the changing nature of demand for agricultural products in West Africa,

² MSU has helped facilitate such border conferences between Mali and Guinea in 2009 (see http://fsg.afre.msu.edu/wa_mkt/Synthese_Atelier_Siguiriri_Mai_23.pdf) and between Mali and Senegal in 2011 (see http://fsg.afre.msu.edu/promisam_2/Rapport-conf%C3%A9rence.pdf). Discussions at these conferences revealed that some of the alleged harassment of traders at border crossings reflected a lack of understanding on their part of the rules governing trade. For example, the security crises in the region in recent years have increased the legitimate need of customs officials to inspect goods, particularly those shipped in mixed lots on trucks, for clandestine arms shipments hidden beneath produce. Many traders seem unaware that they could avoid such inspections (viewed by them as harassment) by shipping entire truckload lots that are inspected upon loading and then sealed during transport.

implies the need for greater coordination of decisions among all stakeholders, from the supranational to the local level, across areas under the mandates of different organizations and ministries (e.g., agriculture, transport, trade, and health) and between public and private actors. Some structures have been created to facilitate such coordination, such as the Interdepartmental Committee for Food and Agriculture within the ECOWAS Commission and similar organs in a few individual countries such as Ghana, but much remains to be done to make them fully functional.

Designing and implementing agricultural policies, however, has become more complex in recent years, as the range of stakeholders and issues involved has broadened dramatically. While in the past, agricultural policy was formulated primarily within national agricultural ministries, it now increasingly involves input from trade and health ministries, local governments, regional organizations, farmer groups, food traders and manufacturers, consumer groups, environmental groups, other civil-society organizations, and development partners. Frequently, the policies that emerge call for public-private partnerships. A big question is how to translate this broad idea into workable arrangements on the ground (see Chapter 12).

In addition, in recent years two political time bombs have come to shape many agricultural policy discussions: how to generate rewarding jobs for the millions of young people who will enter the job market in the coming decade and how to deal with the thorny issue of land tenure. Each of these questions has important technical aspects that affect the pace and pattern of growth in the agrifood system, and each is deeply political, influencing who will benefit from that growth. How well policies grapple with these two issues will strongly influence the pace and shape of agrifood system growth in West Africa over the coming decade.

While tough policy design challenges remain, bigger challenges lie in implementation. As discussed in Chapter 13, improving implementation will require much better and more detailed data, particularly on the post-harvest segments of the food system (including agribusiness, agro-processing, marketing and regional trade) and reinforced human capacity for policy design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Such strengthening needs to include not only governmental and intergovernmental organizations at all levels, from supranational (e.g., ECOWAS) to local (e.g., *commune* or township), but also private-sector stakeholders, including farmer groups, who are increasingly called upon to implement and monitor policies and programs jointly with government. Such capacity strengthening needs to draw more on the under-used policy analysis capacity of West Africa's universities and policy research institutes. Drawing personnel from these organizations to help with the on-the-ground challenges faced in policy design and implementation could be one component of a much larger effort to transform West Africa's educational system to produce the skills needed for a 21st Century agrifood system.

14.4. Lessons Learned about the Policy Process

In addition to its findings about the forces driving agrifood system dynamics in West Africa and the policy challenges to promoting greater regional agricultural integration, the SRAI team also learned key lessons about the policy process itself. Four of these are particularly important.

Good Governance is Essential

Effectively implementing the regional integration policies that all ECOWAS member states have endorsed requires good governance at all levels. But what does good governance mean in this context? Barriers to regional integration create economic rents, which those in charge of maintaining the barriers can appropriate for themselves. For example, maintaining differing standards for selling fertilizer from one country to another protects the income of the companies that currently have the contracts to supply the input in the individual countries. If standards were harmonized, those companies could face greater outside competition. Similarly, a customs official who can delay a truckload of ripe tomatoes at a border crossing because of phytosanitary rules is in a position to extract a hefty under-the-counter payment if he ignores those rules. Thus, any move to implement more fluid regional trade is likely to be opposed by some people, many of them quite powerful. In the context of promoting regional agricultural integration within West Africa, good governance requires that government leaders at all levels work to reduce the opportunities for such rent extraction, punish when it occurs, and work to change the incentives facing those in a position to hinder regional integration. No country in the world has eliminated rent-seeking behavior, but without a firm political commitment to combat it, regional agricultural integration in West Africa will proceed much more slowly than it otherwise could.

Local Capacity is Critical

To the extent that SRAI was influential in helping to shape national and regional policies in West Africa, it was because it worked through national and regional teams, combining research with capacity building. Outside researchers, such as those from a foreign university like MSU, can help with technical analysis and provide an imprimatur of quality control on reports. But correctly identifying the political-economic context of the issue under analysis, as well as how it was addressed in the past, requires local knowledge. In addition, the receptiveness of policy makers to the results is frequently higher if they are “owned” by national researchers and research institutions. Furthermore, the local analysts are in a much better position than outsiders to follow-up in the months (and sometimes years) following the analysis to help ensure that it is incorporated into policy design and implementation.

Policy Analysis and Outreach Are not One-Shot Events

Plant breeding requires maintenance breeding to preserve seed quality over time. Similarly, research and outreach on specific policy issues require ongoing efforts to make sure that they remain relevant and are heard by key policy makers. As noted throughout this volume, West Africa’s food system is changing dramatically, as is the global context within which it operates. Analyses of policy issues, such as the advisability of a particular type of input subsidy, need to be revisited periodically to see if they are still germane in the present context. Even if they are, people in key policy positions frequently change jobs, so that outreach to their successors about critical policy issues, even ones that were well discussed with their predecessors, needs to be an ongoing effort. The need for an ongoing program of policy analysis and outreach is another reason why local capacity in these areas is critical. Outsiders are ill equipped to ensure such a long-term program.

Expecting an Apolitical Approach to Policy is Unrealistic

All around the world, and particularly in countries where political leaders need to woo voters, policies are shaped in part by political considerations. In shaping agricultural policies, it is unrealistic to expect West African political leaders to behave any differently from their colleagues in other countries, particularly since the majority of voters in most West African countries live in rural areas. Yet outside observers often bemoan that short-term political considerations influence agricultural policy decisions in the region, arguing that economic efficiency should be the overriding design criterion. A more realistic approach may be to try to design policies so that short-term programs, motivated in part by political considerations, help address long-term structural constraints to growth. For example, in recent years many West African leaders have tried to signal their support for the agricultural sector through expansion of input subsidies. Recently, subsidized sales of tractors have become a feature of agricultural policies in several West African countries. Currently, such programs serve mainly as a subsidy to medium- and large-scale farmers, and sometimes result in smaller farmers going deeply into debt because that they cannot profitably use the equipment after having contracted to buy it. Can such programs instead be designed to channel the machines to young people who are trained through associated vocational programs in the use and management of such equipment, in order to create custom-hire services for small-scale farmers while at the same time creating jobs for previously unemployed youth? There are, of course, limits on the degree to which programs can be redesigned this way, but given the strong interest in the region in promoting pro-agriculture programs, the scope for improvement in such programs and policies is large.

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