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THE MSU FOOD SECURITY PROJECT IN MALI: 14 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN MALI- MSU-USAID



By



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INTRODUCTION: During the last 14 years, the Department of Agricultural Economics at Michigan State University (MSU) conducted various research, training and outreach activities to improve Mali's food security and thereby contribute to this country's sustainable economic growth based on market economy. These activities were designed and carried out in collaboration with the Mali Economic Research Institute (IER), the Market Information System (SIM/OPAM), and the Sahel Institute (INSAH/CILSS). They were undertaken as part of the MSU Food Security Project funded by USAID/Mali and USAID/Washington.

The MSU Food Security Project constitutes a piece of long standing (more than 20 years) relationships between Mali and MSU involving faculty members and students in the Colleges of

Agriculture and Natural Resources, Arts and Letters, and Social Science. In the last ten years, more than 20 Malians have received graduate level education at MSU and they now hold positions in Mali and in West Africa. In addition, an equal number of non-Malian students undertook their thesis research in Mali.

PROJECT APPROACH: The overall goal of the Food Security (FS) Project in Mali is to increase food security as part of a broad-based, market-oriented sustainable economic growth strategy. The operational objective is to strengthen the capacity of Mali and USAID/Mali to analyze food security issues through applied research, on-the-job training of researchers and analysts, graduate level training of selected Malians, and



extension/dissemination of research findings for policy decision making.

The FS Project has demonstrated that paying attention to the links between applied research, analytical capacity building, and the creation of a dialogue on agricultural policies based on empirical data and information makes it possible to contribute simultaneously to the increase of the demand and supply of credible and relevant information necessary for policy decision making. Without such effort, the private sector involvement and the monitoring of policy reforms are difficult to achieve. The project experience also shows that empirical valid information can be a powerful tool in the policy debates and can be used in the design and implementation of improved food policies, effective programs, institutional reforms, and investment plans aimed at improving food security.

THE LAND GRANT APPROACH AT MSU:

The land grant approach has heavily influenced MSU missions. As a “land grant” institution, MSU was given land and funding by the U.S. government with the mission to:

- (1) provide access to quality higher education to any citizen regardless of socioeconomic status,
- (2) teach knowledge and skills required for professional careers and which are beneficial to society, and
- (3) contribute to strengthening the democratic system through educational programs, research and extension activities that are relevant to people’s needs. This pragmatic and versatile approach

recognizes the synergies resulting from integrating research, extension and teaching.

PROJECT IMPACT: A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE: While recognizing that it is difficult to isolate the impacts of a series of activities designed to change people’s attitudes, promote new ideas, and improve analytical methods, the FS Project impact in Mali can be highlighted as follows:

- The project contribution in changing the policy debate in Mali from a food self-sufficiency perspective to a food security framework.
- Research results obtained by Josué Dioné in 1986 showed the negative effect of the per capita tax on food security and the need to increase household capital in rural areas. The dissemination of these results led to the inclusion of this tax as a constraint in the 1987 five-year development plan and in the 1992 government program, and its subsequent removal by the National Assembly.
- Involvement in the design of the Market Information System (SIM) and in strengthening its analytical capacity. In addition to improving its daily operation, this technical backstopping helped the SIM to respond quickly to the government request to monitor cereal prices and supply following the 1991 events (the communist government was overthrown) and the 1994 currency devaluation. In both cases, the information generated by SIM contributed to stabilizing a very volatile market situation, and facilitating private market operations.

Examples of SIM's support to the private sector:

- In 1996, PRISAS evaluated the impact of a reduction of rice import tariffs in collaboration with SIM/OPAM. This impact assessment study helped the Mali government reduce the tariff rate to its current level, which resulted in a reduction of consumer prices for rice without a significant reduction of the domestic production.
- In addition to its usefulness to the PRMC in the design of a credit program for processing coarse grains, the research conducted by Duncan Boughton on the maize subsector was used as a model (1) for the design of the SubSector Economic Program (ECOFIL) following discussions with representatives from farmer organizations, suppliers, decision makers and researchers, and (2) by the food technology laboratory. Furthermore, this approach led to the improvement of the relationship and integration of research activities between social scientists (economists) and technical scientists.
- At the regional level, Malian researchers and analysts benefitted from exchanges within the network of West African scientists as well as from collaborative and comparative research activities undertaken in the network during the last eight years, including research on the effect of devaluation impact on food security, income, investment, and subsector productivity and competitiveness. Subsectors being studied include livestock, horticulture, cereal, and export crops. The FS Project was able to achieve its objectives thanks to:
 - The willingness of Malian researchers and policy makers to invest their time and scarce

resources in this approach and in producing and using the research results.

- The interest and support of USAID which, recognizing the importance of empirical data and information as well as quality analytical capacity in designing and monitoring food policies, funded the project for 14 years. The USAID financial support made it possible for the project to develop a collaborative and sustained program that enabled in-depth studies of the Mali agricultural sector and the ability to predict policy and economic changes, thereby creating a proactive rather than reactive decision making environment. The USAID investment contributed to the design and implementation of food policies that led to a better performance of the overall Mali economy.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES:

- Further research on the complex issues (related to financing and marketing) Mali faces to develop further its agricultural subsectors and thereby ensure a sustainable economic growth.
- Collaborate in the design of research and teaching programs for higher education institutions in Mali (two-year agricultural technology and agribusiness programs).

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