

Governing Cotton Sectors in West and Central Africa

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The past year has marked the final phase of fieldwork under the multi-year Cotton Sector Reform Project that I have been coordinating since 2008, as part of the Africa Power and Politics Program with funding from the UK DFID and Irish Aid (www.institutions-africa.org). The country-based research teams collected the last round of quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of cotton farmers in 35 villages across the four countries in which we have been working since 2009: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Mali, also among the most important cotton producers in sub-Saharan Africa. The researchers are affiliated with premier research institutes in their respective countries, such as LARES Consultancy Bureau in Benin, the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, the Institute of Agricultural Research for Development (IRAD) in Cameroon and the Institute of Rural Economics (IER) in Mali. Dr Jonathan Kaminski helped me to coordinate and supervise the teams.

The last data collected at village level completes our database containing crucial information on the management of the cotton sector, as seen from below, from the farmers who grow and sell seed cotton, their local representatives in cooperatives unions, and other stakeholders in the village. Such perspectives complement the information previously obtained during interviews with representatives from the government, the cotton companies, the donors, and other actor key stakeholders in the cotton value chain. Fieldwork at this broader, national level helped us to derive a picture of the debate surrounding policy interventions in the

cotton sector, the arguments for and against the proposed measures of liberalization and privatization, and the initiatives put in place to support or resist such interventions. We now possess a rich evidence basis for assessing cotton sector performance in terms that are meaningful to the specific countries' contexts, and analyzing how different countries deal with mounting challenges affecting their cotton sectors and with the multiple pressures to reform. Ultimately, we aim to derive lessons that can inform policy interventions in key productive sectors, which are both sustainable and beneficial to the poor (in line with the broader APPP objectives).



One recent output from our project, a paper titled "Governing Cotton Sectors: An Analysis of Reform Processes in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Mali," presents some lessons from our first comparative analysis. We identify the different and peculiar reform course followed in each country, and locate the main local political and social realities in each country, which have shaped it. We show that these realities were often underestimated when formulating policy prescriptions, thus leading to poor implementation and/or actors' negative reactions, which jeopardized cotton sector performance. When the logic of reform

processes incorporates local realities, as in Burkina Faso until 2006, Cameroon until 2009 and possibly lately in Mali, there is instead better chance for more sustainable and poverty-reducing outcomes.

I presented the paper at two venues this past summer: at the fourth European Conference on African Studies (ECAS4) in Uppsala on June 18th, and at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in Paris on July 28th. Both presentations were well attended and attracted considerable interest. I presented further results at the African Studies Association Meeting, in Washington DC (Nov. 17-20), as part of a panel that I organized on "The Political Economy of African Agriculture."

An analysis of the reforms process in Burkina Faso is now published as APPP Working Paper No. 17, with the title "Endogenous economic reforms and local realities: Cotton policy-making in Burkina Faso" (co-authored with Jonathan Kaminski); while my paper on "Cotton Sector Reform in Mali: Explaining the Puzzle" is forthcoming as APPP WP No. 20. These and other outputs from the project are available from the research publication section of our project site: http://www.institutions-africa.org/publications/research_stream/cotton-sector-reforms.

Renata Serra is lecturer in the Center for African Studies. This research project is part of the Africa Power and Politics Programme (www.institutions-africa.org), with funding from the UK Department for International Development and the Advisory Board of Irish Aid.