

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD SECURITY: POLICY TRADE-OFFS IN SENEGAL

RENATA SERRA

The government of Senegal has committed to a national strategy of accelerated agricultural sector development with the aim to enhance food security and reduce malnutrition among the populations. This latest pronouncement of ambitious policy goals raises at least two overarching questions. When is it that governments are more likely to act on their policy goals of agricultural development? What are the key factors – interest groups, political and social dynamics, external influences – that determine how resources get allocated between different agricultural sub-sectors?

While these questions are pertinent anywhere in Africa and beyond, they are even more crucial, and the stakes much higher, in the case of countries in the African Sahel – due to the low levels of economic development, the high incidence of poverty and child malnutrition, and the multiple demographic, security and environmental stressors. The development of food production systems that are socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable could have in this region an enormous impact on the well being of the populations. It does require, however, a viable policy framework and a strong public policy focus to coordinate multiple actors and objectives.

My new research project focuses on the unique governance and institutional challenges facing agricultural development and food security in countries in the African Sahel, starting with Senegal, where I carried out a first set of interviews and meetings with key stakeholders this past summer. The government policy focus has been lately directed on achieving rice self-sufficiency by scaling up production in the irrigated zones along the Senegal River valley. However, not only has the objective of rice self-sufficiency been elusive so far – leading to the periodic postponement of the target date – because

of shortages in infrastructural investment efforts coupled with challenging technical and environmental obstacles. The strategy of rice self-sufficiency is actually also costly in economic, social and nutritional terms, since it leads to a reallocation of resources and efforts away from other sub-sectors that could potentially have a greater impact on rural incomes and dietary intakes. These include traditional cereals (sorghum and millet) and livestock sectors. My research thus attempts to explain the political economy factors underlying the current rice policies in Senegal, as well as the mixed commitment manifested towards other important value chains. In particular, I examine the reasons for the inconsistent policies in the dairy sector, which favor the importation of milk to satisfy national demand; thus raising the question of which combination of policy and interest factors could support the development of a viable domestic milk production and processing industry.

Future plans include expanding this research to include other countries. Fittingly, the Feed the Future Livestock Systems Innovation Lab (LSIL) at the University of Florida (funded by USAID) is planning to work in two Sahelian countries, Niger and Burkina Faso, so there will be several synergies to be exploited. When I visited Niger in October with other colleagues from the Lab, we noticed a number of policy gaps in the livestock value chains, which merit to be investigated further.

The work in Senegal this past summer was funded by the Center for African Studies through the Research Tutorial Abroad program, which provides funding to Faculty members who are willing to take two to three undergraduate students to an African country, and involve them in some research activity. My two students, Emily Rowland and Charlotte Talham, were highly committed and enthusiastic



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Renata Serra is senior lecturer in the Center of African Studies, faculty member of the Sahel Research Group, advisor for the Master in Development Practice program and Faculty in the USAID-funded Feed the Future Livestock Systems Innovation Lab.