

Chester World Development Forum



Minutes of the Forum Meeting held via Zoom on Tuesday 9 March 2021

1. **Welcome:** TG welcomed everyone to the meeting

Present: Terry Green, Gill Miller, Georgina Wilson, Ann McCarthy, Linda and Stuart Shuttleworth, Bernard Payne, Lindsay Cussons, Brian and Katy Rowe, Diane Williams, John Tacon, Tony Walsh, Peter and Vicki Jenner, Heather Swainston, Heather Lannin, Christel Langdon-Griffiths, Angela McQuiban, and Martin Evans

Before the formal part of the meeting a few moments of reflection were held for our former chair, dear friend and deeply committed campaigner, Peter Byrne, who sadly passed away on 12th February. May he rest in peace.

*Prior to the Forum's "Business-by-Zoom" Agenda we welcomed
Martin Evans, Honorary Research Fellow,
Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, Coventry University:
"Development interventions and social realities in paddy rice farming,
South Senegal"*

Outline of Martin's talk

- **The context – looking at the global food markets in relation to the case study in South Senegal**
- **Examining interventions to increase paddy rice production**
- **Conclusions of the study (but no answers)**

Global Food Markets:

The global food market is influenced by a variety of "drivers" which can include harvest failures in some regions, high oil prices, land used to produce bio-fuels and animal feed rather than staples and export bans/panic buying in some countries. These "drivers" created rapid price rises for many global staples in late 2007 and going into 2008. West Africa saw some of the first protests / riots against rising food prices but such unrest only became mainstream 'news' when it broke out, soon afterwards, in South / Southeast Asia. Countries like Senegal really suffered because they imported a lot of rice.

This price spike prompted a significant rethink among the donor community about the importance of agriculture – for decades a somewhat neglected area in development programming

Among wealthier, food-importing countries (Gulf states, China, India and some western countries including the UK) it also prompted what became known as the 'global land grab' – LSLAs (large-scale land acquisitions on long-term leases) in poorer countries, particularly in Africa (another story for another time...)

However, interventions and lessons learned only went so far; food prices stabilised / fell in some cases but in more recent years have crept up again, particularly in the past year (due to supply-side / distribution issues and problems in the global trading system) as a result of the pandemic.

Case Study – Casamance area of South Senegal



Lower Casamance is a low-lying, complex landscape dominated by the Casamance River delta, tributaries and backwaters. The area has a long history of paddy rice cultivation. Senegambia is believed to have been a prehistoric secondary centre for domestication and early spread of African rice.

Rice cultivation here is rain fed here i.e. no irrigation. The rainy season is from June to September and twice the annual rainfall of Chester falls in these few months. It is an estuarine landscape and managing water flows and preventing salinisation of the paddies is critical. Careful hydrological management is imperative to keep salinity below a certain level.

Pressures of the Slave Trade (initiated by the Portuguese) in the 16th–18th centuries created forms of settlement and social organisation conducive to rice-growing. In fact slaves captured from Lower Casamance (and similar areas along the Upper Guinea Coast) were prized for their rice-growing skills, which were applied effectively in southeast coastal regions of what is today the US. The slaves had the skills to manage the landscape in the southern States of US and traces of these plantations are still there today.

However genetic traces of Senegambian populations are under-represented (relative to slave ship manifests that show early, high numbers) among their African-American descendants: believed to be partly because mortality rates (from malaria and other risks) were high on American rice plantations; and later captives included more children, whose survival rates on the Atlantic crossing were low (Micheletti *et al.* 2020)

Interventions to increase paddy rice production:

Senegal has long ceased to be self-sufficient in rice – probably since around the early 20th century – and from the 1930s has had to import large quantities, today accounting for about two-thirds of national consumption, mainly from Southeast Asia

The Second World War saw hardship and food rationing in Senegal when the British blockaded Dakar – then capital of French West Africa and under the Vichy regime 1940–42 – highlighting vulnerabilities from food import dependency

Post-independence development projects sought to increase domestic food security, particularly through industrial-scale development of paddy rice cultivation in the lower Senegal River Valley (along the country's northern border with Mauritania)

Such national initiatives saw a revival after the 2008 price spike:

La grande offensive agricole pour la nourriture et l'abondance (GOANA):

- launched by then-President Abdoulaye Wade in May 2008
- aimed to make Senegal self-sufficient in food by 2015; targets included doubling domestic rice production (none of this was anywhere near achieved)
- subsidised seeds and fertiliser were distributed

Le programme de relance et d'accélération de la cadence de l'agriculture sénégalaise (PRACAS):

- President Macky Sall aimed, under this programme, to make Senegal self-sufficient in rice by 2017 (again, not achieved)
- Senegal River Valley still the main paddy rice-growing area but other parts of country (i.e. Casamance) also important



A major problem - the number of agencies involved – causes chaos

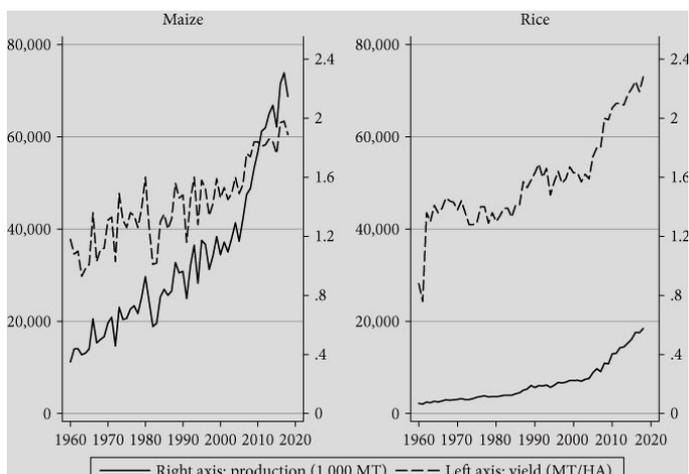
To achieve an increase in rice production various approaches are deployed to tackle (or not) problems of varying degrees of difficulty:

- **The supposedly easy end:** classic technological interventions
- **The largely insurmountable end:** rainfall variability and climate change, and between these:
- **The hard social realities in the middle 1:** land tenure and mechanization
- **The hard social realities in the middle 2:** out-migration

The supposedly easy end – the classic technological interventions largely comprise the distribution of improved ‘high-yielding varieties’ (HYVs) of rice – mainly NERICA (New Rice for Africa) varieties, the distribution of fertilisers and improving the hydrological infrastructure (‘anti-salt dykes’ with water levels controlled by sluices).

But seeds and fertilisers are hampered by problematic supply chains and erratic distribution in a very time-critical setting (growing season determined by the rains – which are very variable). Also HYVs do not give their maximum yield under local conditions; some seed rice is not used as such but consumed as food

There is often poor understanding and application of fertilisers and the dykes suffer from technical problems / lack of maintenance



Graph showing some increase in yields but only modest under local conditions

Some yield increases are claimed / recorded for such interventions but, relative to the development spending involved, they are modest and limited by other factors (more of these later...)



Seed rice distribution by Catholic Relief Services, Simbandi Balante, Middle Casamance – often complete chaos

The largely insurmountable end – rainfall variability and climate change

Casamance, like all of the Sahel and its margins, has always seen high rainfall variability, shaping the onset, duration and nature of every growing season differently. It’s very difficult to do hydrology agriculture under these conditions

Such problems were exacerbated by the Sahelian drought from 1968 onwards; rainfall picked up in the 21st century but is still highly erratic; salinisation remains a threat to many lowlands.



The anti-salt dyke has had a measure of success

Evidence of mounting rainfall instability and potential for drought / desertification in Sahelian West Africa in the context of climate change..... but this is (obviously) a problem that can be addressed globally: Senegal's contribution to GHG emissions is just 0.07% of the global total (USAID 2011)

The hard social realities in the middle 1

Land holdings in rice paddies are fragmented between households, which typically have several (sometimes many) plots in different places in a valley to capture different hydrologies: a way of hedging against harvest failure in the context of highly variable rainfall. In a wet year, a low-lying plot may be flooded too deeply to plant; but in a dry year it may be a good bet while higher plots are too dry. This system does not however lend itself to mechanisation, which requires largish plots to be possible and (evidently) works best with big fields

There are historically deep-seated tensions around land tenure and suspicions of local / national government motives in land reform in Lower Casamance. Violent 'rice wars' over paddies between certain villages in the 1970s required military intervention land expropriation from locals for northern Senegalese and foreign business interests was a spark (among others) that initiated the separatist rebellion of the *Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance* (1982–present)

State actors mutter about 'difficult populations' and 'culture' when they want to reform tenure to improve rice productivity... but in reality populations are fairly protecting their interests

The hard social realities in the middle 2

However, Lower Casamance has seen significant seasonal and increasingly permanent out-migration for decades: it started in the 1930s but took off in the 1950s, assisted by the completion of the Transgambian Highway linking Ziguinchor to Dakar (and other northern Senegalese cities) in 1957

The unpalatable truth for most older people (and development practitioners) is that the limiting factor in rice cultivation is often not rainfall, climate change, seeds, fertiliser, etc. ... but the wholesale absence of the younger working population for much (sometimes all) of the year (Evans 2017). There have many intervention programmes but without labour then cannot increase production significantly. Intervention has been successful where there is a sufficient labour force.

De-agrarianisation is a "long-term process of: (1) occupational adjustment, (2) income-earning reorientation, (3) social identification, and (4) spatial relocation of rural dwellers away from strictly peasant modes of livelihood" (Bryceson 1997, p.1) People want to leave the area and have done for a long time so it is not just because of climate change.



Abandoned rice paddies, Djinaki, Lower Casamance

Conclusions - but no answers

- There have been some modest successes but targets for rice production look unachievable.
- Predictable errors of a 'technocratic approach': reducing development to a **technical** problem amenable to simple solutions (seeds, fertiliser, dykes) ignores thornier **political** land tenure issues (which officials sidestep) and the **social** realities of de-agrarianisation (which older local people deny)
- Rainfall **is** a problem... but it defines most lowland tropical agricultural systems and has always been erratic here

What is really lacking is sufficient (national) political will, ability and accountability to rural populations to support changes to farming systems in ways that are both effective and equitable for smallholder rice farmers

Q and A:

TG: How important is rice production to Senegal? Rice mostly grown for domestic use.

GW: Is there any large scale government rice farming? Yes - some is marketed

BP: Is large scale land grabbing still happening? More in North Senegal to grow biofuel crops but it's not that big a deal.

CL-G: Asked about gender issues – of the young people migrating to the cities is it men or women? It is both but predominantly women. They go to work as house girls in cities.

TW: What drives the general economy? Groundnuts, tourism, oil and mining (gold in SE)

LS: Is there any co-op ownership of plots? Some attempts but pretty small scale. Tenure systems are granted by the village.

GM: Commented on the technocratic failure and how long before they realise their mistakes. A lot of money has been thrown at projects which don't necessarily work and this has been an on-going problem for government agencies and some elements international aid for a long time.

Terry thanked Martin for his very informative talk, which had given us many telling insights into the background and current circumstances of, for many of us, an unfamiliar part of Africa.

CWDF Business Meeting

2. Minutes and matters arising:

- **Forum-by-Zoom 12-1-21 including note of talk by Ciara Hogan** (previously circulated with Diary update 7-2-21) – no matters arising

3. Finance update:

JT thanked all members and organisations who have paid their subs. Many people have paid online. As of 4th March we had £626.42 in the bank. At committee, as we have such a healthy balance, a donation of £60 to DEC was suggested – this was the amount that we would have paid for the hire of the Unity Centre. All members attending the meeting this evening agreed to the suggestion.

4. Communications - recent developments:

- CWDF website and social media – CWDF now has an up and running Facebook and Twitter page thanks to our new committee member, Georgina. It is important that we build up the Facebook page so members are asked to “like” the page and invite friends to do the same. The Twitter page also needs followers. Georgina is now regularly posting events on the pages so we need to keep sharing these. The website is ticking along and “backup” has been completed.
- CWDF publicity leaflet – VJ shared the final leaflet. The leaflet just has to go to print now but we are awaiting on an event at which to use it.

5. Future events:

- BP gave a brief run through of the latest diary update. He drew our attention to:
 - Chester City of Sanctuary event on 23rd March with Shantele Sutherland, Director of CHAWREC
 - Christian Aid event on 24th March with Trevor Dennis
 - The idea of holding additional Zoom sessions between the bi-monthly Forum dates. Members were asked for their views on this suggestion. The first “extra” meeting is to be held on Monday 12th April with Jim Holmes, professional photographer. He will talk about the Mekong River and how climate change and hydro dam construction is affecting the livelihoods of the people who rely on it.
 - Tuesday 13th July – our normal meeting and the possibility of this being via Zoom from the Unity Centre to include more people.
- Any additions/ updates from “members around the screens”?
 - BR: Chester Friends of Palestine – webinar from ICAHD (Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions) 17th March at 5pm. Israeli teenagers who are conscientious objectors appealing to other teenagers around the world. Contact ICAHD to join the meeting
 - CLG: Christian Aid Week 10th – 16th May. 8th May at 7pm - Quizian – fun-filled online quiz. 18th May – Debut performance of “Song of the Prophets”, a Requiem for the climate. Wall of Hope – in Chester Cathedral this autumn. Christel will email BP with details
- Should CWDF work towards a return to face-to-face meetings? Any comments? Zoom gives us more flexibility. Please email BP

6. Date of full Forum: Tuesday 11th May via Zoom