



Foundation for world  
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# AGRICULTURAL POTENTIAL OF WEST AFRICA (ECOWAS)

## Summary

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**THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY** is to contribute to a constructive debate with all the players, by providing the elements of information and analysis enabling light to be shed on this question: does agriculture in West Africa have sufficient potential to feed its population and under what conditions? Can the region guarantee food security for a population which is set to double in the next 25 years without resorting to large-scale imports?

# *Introduction*

The study is based on the conclusions drawn from the changes to West African agriculture of the last 25 years. It combines a quantitative analysis with the analysis of the trends and directions of the various diverse types of agriculture. The study identifies and discusses four scenarios which are all equally possible for West African agriculture over the next 25 years.

The study is available on the website [www.fondation-farm.org](http://www.fondation-farm.org). For more information, please contact [cecilia.bellora@fondation-farm.org](mailto:cecilia.bellora@fondation-farm.org)



## ① In the last 25 years, increases in production in response to growing demand have been made by relying on an extension of cultivated areas

Over the period 1980-2005, the population of West Africa doubled. Despite an unfavourable context, the region's farmers responded to this demand and at the same time maintained only a low dependence in regard to exports, of around 10 to 15% of the calories consumed. The region is self-sufficient in tubers, fruits, vegetables and dry cereals.

Growth in production is mainly based on an increase in the cultivated areas and very little on an increase in yields.

## ② Four scenarios for 2030: The agriculture of West Africa can respond to the growth in demand, under certain conditions

The first scenario (A) examines a continuation of the underlying trend. It is based on the context remaining dominated by international and regional instability. This leads to all the available space being used, deforestation and a major ecological crisis. It relies on an extension of the cultivated surfaces with no encouragement given to a modernisation of the production units and moderate intensification. However, the agricultural growth of the last 25 years which relied on using natural resources is no longer possible.

The second scenario (B) "agricultural growth by the large-scale transformation of agriculture" combines a favourable international, regional and environmental context. It results in a doubling of yields in 25 years which means multiplying the output volumes by 3. Taking into account the propensity of urban dwellers to increase the consumption of rice, meeting needs requires a control of water over nearly 5 million hectares. Meat production enables demand to be met. Milk production improves as well as the rate at which demand is met, without however meeting all needs. Cereal surpluses and also that of tubers and sub-products of agro-industrial crops →→

→→ such as cotton and peanut cakes etc, mean that setting up a more competitive animal feed industry can be envisaged, especially to boost the poultry and pork sectors but also for reorganising types of cattle and sheep fattening which is more in line with the development of food preferences.

This scenario turns its back on recent trends. It accords with the planned direction of Governments and organisations of the region. It is in line with the ambitions of farmers organisations. It seeks to offer the prospect of development to the majority of producers. It is realistic in the sense that the productivity gains per hectare needed for realising this scenario are obtainable for most crops. Results of this level have already been obtained, using known techniques by groups of farmers (rice at 'Office du Niger', maize in the 'Boucle du Mouhoun', diversification at Kano in Nigeria, etc). It is feasible using current knowledge. However, it is indispensable to prepare for the future by reinvesting seriously in research.

Scenario C combines A and B. The modernising trend only involves a minority of producers. This is also in part the scenario which is being sketched out behind the debate about the capacity of smallholders to respond to the demand. Many decision-makers are today tempted to have a dual vision: supporting traditional agriculture for social reasons and food security for rural households on the one hand and assisting innovative farms in pursuing types of agricultural businesses on the other. However, this vision only offers the prospects of modernisation and intensification to some small producers.

The fourth scenario (D) "Regional crisis in a favourable international context" is the opposite of scenario C: the regional context is unfavourable whereas the other factors are favourable. This results in strong growth of produce for export led by world demand and by the stagnation of food production. This is a catastrophic scenario at the level of food dependence for the region. It leads to an encouragement of export production. This scenario is not unlikely. It would reflect a certain inability by the region to seize the opportunity of an improvement in the international economic and commercial environment.

### ③ The need for pro-active public policies

Regional agriculture can respond to regional demand and reposition itself on international markets. But to do so, it needs ambitious regional and national public policies. Producers need an economically healthy regional environment, with better regulated markets. They need a sufficiently secure environment to be able to invest and will only be able to do so if they have suitable financial services available and ways of covering risks etc. The development of the region's agriculture requires a real regional integration strategy, a customs' union with a commercial policy which allows true regulation of the interior markets. For them to be ambitious and raise the required resources, these policies must rely on a common vision of the development of the region's agriculture.

Clarifying this vision implies logically setting the size of production units to those which can ensure their economic viability and decently reward producers, by taking into account the variability of the production systems and local situations.

Finally, the study reinforces the fact that the competitiveness of food products only partly relies on agricultural competitiveness. The overall efficiency of the sectors and the ability of the small-scale and industrial sectors to supply locally processed products is also widely scrutinised, if one is seeking to conquer regional markets, all the more so when they are quickly becoming urbanised. Public policies must also invest in the production environment.