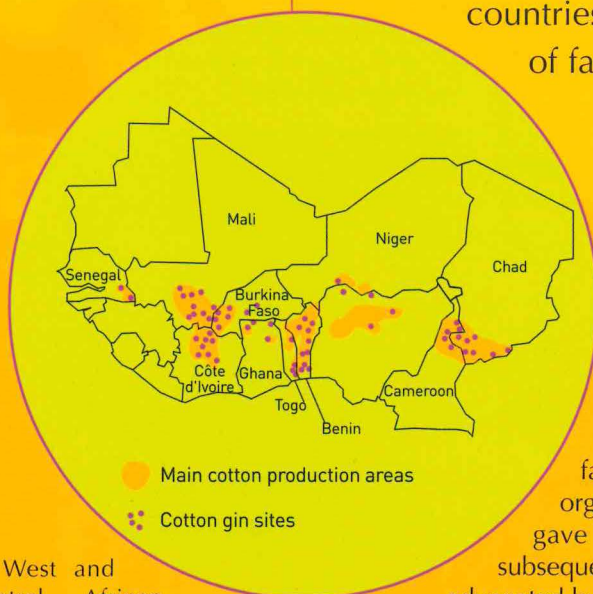




# Key role of farmers' organizations

Farmers' participation in national agricultural policymaking is a key challenge for the reorganization of cotton subsectors in many African countries. Cotton producers have been handicapped by the drop in world prices and many national cotton companies are currently being privatized. CIRAD is thus working with institutions in several African countries and is actively promoting the professionalization of farmers' organization leaders.



## Advent of farmers' organizations

In West and Central African countries of the "franc area", cotton development was based on the same model until the 1990s, i.e. a semipublic cotton company managing the industry, with village farmers' organizations linked to the company. The heads of these organizations thus benefited from literacy and training initiatives, which gave rise to trained literate farmer leaders. The cotton sector was subsequently affected by structural adjustment policies and privatization, often advocated by the World Bank. Cotton farmers then began forming organizations to safeguard their interests.

In West and Central African countries, cotton production is currently above a million tonnes of fibre, i.e. 14% of the total world trade volume in 2004, whereas it was only 4% in 1980! Cotton thus accounts for up to 40% of the export earnings of these countries. Ten million people are living on income from this competitive crop—one of the few African success stories...

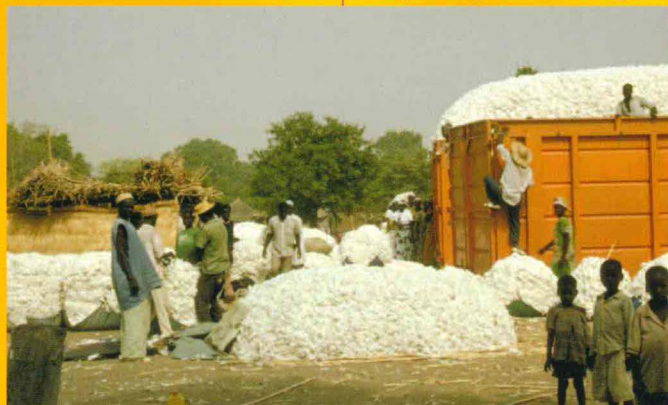
## The Malian situation

In Mali, the drop in world cotton prices combined with the deficit of CMDT, the Malian textile development company, sent shock waves through the industry and signalled the end of the system of remunerative prices and guarantees for producers. In 2004, the government bolstered the industry with the help of donors. In 2005, the seed cotton buying price dropped by 20% relative to prices the previous year, which had a serious impact on farming families and on the Malian economy.

Cotton producers' cash income is now plummeting—175 000 families are affected, or more than 2.5 million people in a region where almost 80% of rural inhabitants are living under the poverty line. The agricultural sector is the mainstay of the Malian economy, so this crisis

will have an unprecedented impact, i.e. a 2-4 point drop in the GDP and a reduction in farm household consumption, with a concomitant reduction in other trade and service activities.

In this harsh setting, it is vital to create a farmer-managed support mechanism to freeze production prices and boost competitiveness. The longer term challenge is also to enhance farmers' status in the new privatized industry and in coordination bodies, e.g. in the joint-trade organization currently being developed.



Loading harvested cotton.  
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## Farmers' initiatives...

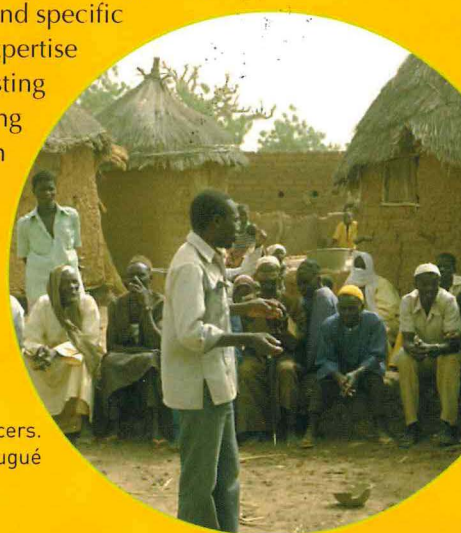
In Burkina Faso, the cooperative union has common shares in the three cotton companies located in the cotton-growing areas (SOFITEX, FASOCOTON, SOCOMA), so farmers have direct access to information and are involved in decision making.

In Mali, farmers have formed unions. The first movement occurred in 1992, with a strike affecting deliveries of cotton to CMDT, which had a seed cotton purchasing monopoly. Farmers also went on strike in 2000 and refused to sow the cotton crop, resulting in a spectacular 50% drop in production. The unions are now partially associated with the industry management and handle certain economic activities.

## The voice of African farmers in international bodies

In September 2003, four African countries protested the subsidization of cotton producers in several countries (especially USA and EU states) which has distorted world prices. Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad put forward a proposal during the 5<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference at Cancún calling for the subsidies to be eliminated. This African initiative drew worldwide attention to the cotton issue and more generally to the conditions of international integration of poor countries into liberalized markets. For the first time, international trade negotiations were tripped up by a request from a developing country, and this demand was legitimized by most other countries. However, no precise response to the African cotton issue was provided at the 6<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference at Hong Kong, in December 2005, despite the progress made at Geneva in November 2004 with the creation of the WTO Cotton Sub-Committee.

Beyond these events, the key breakthrough is the progressive participation of African cotton producers in national and international discussions. The African Cotton Producers' Association (APROCA) was thus founded. These producers are now quickly gaining experience with respect to world cotton market operations and specific features of cotton subsectors. CIRAD—through research, expertise and training activities—is involved with its partners in assisting these farmers' organizations in developing their own strong arguments to put forward within coordination and negotiation bodies.



Technical discussions among cotton producers.  
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## Partners

**IER**, Institut d'économie rurale, Mali

**ROPFA**, Réseau des organisations paysannes et de producteurs agricoles d'Afrique de l'Ouest, Burkina Faso



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## For further information

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