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RURAL LAND TENURE SECURITY AND FOOD SUPPLY IN SOUTHERN BENIN

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ABSTRACT

As part of the national strategy to remedy food insecurity and promote modern agriculture, Benin undertook a series of donor-assisted projects to strengthen the rights of rural landholders, using the instrument of the rural landholding plan (plan foncier rural or PFR). Selected villages have surveyed and mapped their agricultural land parcels, defined and registered the customary rights of landholders and set up a system to draft, witness and register documents of land transfer, tenancy and use. By creating these documentary proofs of rights, it is expected that landholders will gain protection from conflicting claims and feel secure in their long-term possession of the land. This will enable them to change certain customary practices that have limited investment in land improvement, hindered intensive production and restrained the transfer of rights in tenancy or cooperative agreements to allow extensive and modern farm methods. In conjunction with other programs to expand cultivation, diversify crop production, improve yields, and upgrade storage, transport and handling facilities, the PFR is expected to help increase the volume and variety of locally-produced food coming to market. At the end of 2012, almost 400 villages have completed a PFR and a record of their early results and impacts is being compiled. This article looks at PFR results from the rural commune of Klouekanme, where early findings show some positive trends.

Introduction

In the West African nation of Benin, more than 47 percent of the population of 8.6 million falls below the poverty level of \$1.25 per day, and 40 percent of the children under the age of five are deficient in height and weight. These indicators of food insecurity have motivated the Government of Benin and its regional and communal leadership to search for ways to increase agricultural productivity, expand cultivation and bring more diverse food supplies to markets. They have identified several factors that seem to constrain agriculture output and productivity, including the limited availability of crop land for farm producers in many areas, traditional methods of cultivation that deplete fertility and lead to soil erosion and insecure land tenure that causes many rural landholders to withhold land from production or limit its use (Benin PSRSA 2010).

In response to these problems, the national, regional and local administrations, with international assistance, have undertaken a number of programs and projects to expand food production to previously unused or fallow lands. This increases perennial planting, allows farm producers to consolidate small fields and encourages the use of fertilizers, irrigation and other modern techniques (PADMOC 2011, Benin PSRSA 2010). In addition, government authorities have sought to strengthen landholding rights and rural land administration, based on the theory that tenure security will enable and encourage the other initiatives of farming expansion and improvement (Edja and LeMeur 2004).

As the instrument of tenure security, the Government of Benin introduced the rural landholding plan (plan foncier rural or PFR). This method provides for the survey and mapping of agricultural fields, the defining and recording of customary rights of possession and the creation and archiving of written documents of land transactions on a village-by-village basis. The PFR has been developed and applied experimentally over a period of 20 years in Benin, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire (Ouedraogo 2005). More recently, Benin has expanded its coverage to almost 400 villages in projects assisted by the Millennium Challenge Corporation and several European donors.

The early results of the PFR projects are now being collected and analyzed. The researchers hope to find that the landholders, with newly secured land rights, are now increasing their investments in land and farm operations, entering more cooperative and tenancy agreements and bringing into cultivation fallow and previously unused areas. They expect these actions to reinforce other efforts of agricultural support and technology improvements with the final goals of increased rural household incomes, increased and diversified food products in the markets and more stable food prices (MCA-Benin 2009).

In order to review the early results of the PFR and explore their link to food security, this article looks at the commune of Klouekanme in Couffo Department. Klouekanme is an important supply source of fresh fruits and vegetables, tubers, grains, and legumes for the markets of southern Benin, and it has been an eager participant in the PFR projects and the initiatives to improve fruit, vegetable, tuber, and rice production (Klouekanme PCD 2011, Klouekanme PCC 2006). Short-term evidence from Klouekanme shows some positive indicators of expanding cultivation, diversification of crops, investment by producers, and improving methods of cultivation and production. The commune experience also illustrates use of the PFR to complement and reinforce other activities of agricultural reform and investment. While there is, as yet, no robust data that shows the PFR as a direct cause of food production gains, the commune provides a growing body of data that is being closely watched.

Opposite:
The Fulani people, a traditionally nomadic tribe, are gradually transitioning to settlements in Benin.

Agriculture and Landholding in Klouekanme

The commune of Klouekanme is located in the region of Couffo, in south-central Benin, 128 kilometers away from the commercial capital of Cotonou and within 50 kilometers of three urban market centers: Lokossa, Abomey and Bohicon. Its relatively fertile soils, adequate rainfall and the possibility of two growing seasons have allowed the cultivation of a variety of vegetables, fruits and root crops. Its full agricultural potential has, however, yet to be realized. It is estimated that there are 29,500 hectares of land suitable for cultivation in Klouekanme, but active cultivation has occupied about 70 percent of this land in recent years as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Hectares under Cultivation in Klouekanme
Source: INSAE (2010)

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Corn	4,174	5,205	6,350	5,950	5,850	5,900	7,725	7,813	8,600
Improved Corn	290	350	295	215	210	185	310	407	1,910
Tomato	1,240	1,556	1,480	1,572	1,650	1,691	1,457	1,189	1,091
Peanuts	1,365	1,190	2,025	2,270	2,200	1,855	1,160	1,664	1,590
Manioc	794	680	1,150	1,480	1,475	1,475	1,105	972	1,020
Beans	3,860	3,906	4,450	3,650	3,650	5,786	2,475	6,597	6,400
Peppers	190	225	105	163	193	165	140	215	226
Sweet potato	30	55	35	31	33	19	25	29	34
Gumbo	175	152	115	116	160	--	112	212	122
Cotton	3,119	3,895	2,692	2,780	1,964	619	--	--	--
TOTAL	15,237	17,219	18,702	18,227	17,385	17,697	14,649	19,313	21,125

Crop yield has been hindered by several factors: high population density and fragmented landholdings with only 1.3 hectares of arable land per farmer available; low level of farm technology; poor infrastructure, especially roads to markets; illiteracy and limited training for farmers; and scarce credit and few finance institutions (GRAiB 2008). In addition, poor management of water resources has blocked farmers from realizing a second crop in the dry season. Insecure land tenure has aggravated these problems by limiting the ability of farmers to engage in cooperative investments to improve and intensify their cultivation and by using tenancy and other contractual agreements to allow more efficient producers to access additional land (Tossounon 2012, Klouekanme PDC 2006).

Landholding in Klouekanme continues to reflect the influence of customary rules and traditional practice. People recognize agricultural fields as parts of traditional family or tribal lands with rights to possess and control the use and allocation of the fields among family members to be inherited in mostly male lineage. Outsiders with the skills to produce and willingness to live peaceably within the community are given subordinate rights to occupy and use certain fields, taking part in the systems of field rotation and social/family obligations. In recent years, because of the influences of population growth, the money economy and social mobility, most traditional family holdings in Klouekanme have been subdivided into household plots. Parcels are now bought and sold, leased or used under share-crop arrangements, and landholders more frequently engage in land dealings by written and recorded legal instruments or administrative acts (GRAiB 2008).

Food insecurity in Klouekanme, Couffo and Southern Benin

Klouekanme has a population of more than 110,000 (2010 estimate) and an agricultural labor force of 26,000 (2002 census). Its region of Couffo has a population of 524,000 and is densely settled. On average, each farmer in Klouekanme works only 1.32 hectares (GRAiB 2008). Each household, consisting of more than six persons on average, controls two or three parcels of 0.77 hectares each. Generally, these smallholdings provide food for the household and a limited cash crop for market.

Based on the international standard of \$1.25 per day or less, 47 percent of Benin's total population is in the poverty category (World Food Program 2009). For its own calculations of poverty in departments and communes, Benin measures a \$1 equivalent per person per day of expenditures. Using this standard, Benin finds that, nationally, 40.8 percent of its households live in poverty with 68.9 percent of households in Couffo and 60.4 percent in Klouekanme (EMICoV 2010). In the nearby urban centers of Abomey, Bohicon and Lokossa, for which Klouekanme supplies food products, the below \$1 a day poverty level ranges between 31 and 54 percent of households. Measuring consumption of food by the international standards of the Global Analysis of Vulnerability (AGVSAN), Benin reports that 12.2 percent of its total population suffers food insecurity and another 13.2 percent are at risk of insecurity (FAO 2011). In Couffo, 27 percent of the population is insecure and another 14 percent is at risk. Benin's own measurements show somewhat higher numbers than those reported at the international level (Table 2).

Table 2: Percent of Households Suffering Food Insecurity by Level of Insecurity
Source: INSAE (2011)

Region/Commune	Insecure (1A)	Risk (ARIA)	Seasonal Insecure (SA)	Income under \$1 a Day
Cuoffo Region (urban)	15.7%	19.9%	31.0%	--
Cuoffo Region (rural)	39.7%	17.0%	43.3%	71.1%
Klouekanme commune	24.2%	24.2%	51.6%	60.4%
Lokossa commune (urban)	14.0%	35.5%	50.5%	48.0%
Abomey commune (urban)	25.6%	21.8%	52.6%	31.0%
Bohicon commune (urban)	34.6%	37.8%	27.6%	54.6%
Benin urban	32.2%	20.9%	46.9%	--
Benin rural	34.6%	22.0%	43.4%	40.8%

By measure of the growth of children, Benin as a whole has 40 percent of its children under five years old in the deficient growth weight and height category, while in Couffo 42.6 percent of children suffer deficiency (FAO 2011, World Food Program 2009). Couffo, however, has a lower percentage of children in the severe deficiency category: 3.5 percent compared to 5 percent of children in all of Benin.

The Rural Landholding Plan as a Part of the Agricultural Production Strategy

The purpose of the PFR is to resolve the problem of landholding insecurity that is the result of Benin's dual system of unwritten customary rights running parallel with modern, written and recorded land property rights.

As custom, people have conducted their land dealings by ceremonial acts and unwritten agreements and have defined land relations as family and social—not economic or legal—transactions. Lacking documents and parcel maps, families have had to protect their land rights by ensuring tangible and visible evidence of their control. They hold land fallow and vacant when there are too few family members to cultivate and harvest. They prohibit their tenants from planting trees, using fertilizer and making improvements. They assert the principle that land cannot be sold and that family male lineage must prevail over any other right or transaction. They divide the land at inheritance and leave family members and neighbors to argue over boundaries. In these conditions, much land is withheld from production, efficient farm producers cannot expand or make arrangements to consolidate fields, and banks and micro-lenders cannot give mortgage credit. Yet, despite these strategies for protecting customary control, rural landholders often have been unable to defend their rights against speculators or confiscation by the state (Hilhorst 2011).

Rural Landholding Plan/*plan foncier rural*. The rural landholding plan or PFR is an accurate survey map of the agricultural fields, a landholders' list with the names of the proprietors and an archive of transaction documents (land sale contracts and agreements of tenancy and subordinate use). The Government of Benin introduced the PFR in a series of “pilot” villages beginning in 1993. After completing 41 villages by 2003, the government used the experience to inform the drafting and approval of law no. 2007-03 of October 16, 2007, *On Rural Landholding*. This law authorizes the creation of PFR in all villages. In preparing the PFR, the rights and claims of the landholders are made public, allowing the villagers to verify or contest them and then settle any conflicting claims. Once the PFR is complete and certified, the mayor of the (multi-village) commune can issue to each listed proprietor a rural landholding certificate (CFR), which becomes the proof document in adjudication, mediation, administration, and subsequent transactions.

Following the authorization provided by the law, Benin moved forward with its international partners to cover more villages. At the end of 2012, there were 386 villages in 45 communes in all regions of Benin with completed PFRs. These villages consist of about 11 percent of the country's total of 3,400 villages, and their maps delineate 85,000 land parcels encompassing 565,000 hectares that represent approximately 10 percent of all land suitable for cultivation.

In Klouekanme, 17 of the total 59 villages have completed PFRs. More than 7,000 landholders are listed as customary proprietors, and the mayor issued CFRs to more than 600 landholders. The 17 PFRs cover 11,000 hectares of the total 29,000 hectares suitable for cultivation in the commune.

Table 3: Landholding Rights Reported by Klouekanme Village Residents
Source: GRAiB (2008)

Village	Right of proprietorship		Subordinate right of occupancy/use			
	Inherit	Purchase	Lease	Revocable right of use	Share-crop	Gift
Adbago	63%	10%	6.7%	13.3%	6.7%	--
Aglali	73%	26%	2.0%	2.2%	2.0%	--
Akime	16%	16%	13.3%	43.3%	6.7%	3.3%
Aveganme	46%	30%	6.7%	16.6%	--	--
Djihami	60%	20%	6.6%	3.3%	10.0%	--
Edahoue-Ahouego	30%	10%	60.0%	--	--	--
Glohohoue	40%	7%	43.5%	6.6%	--	--
Kpevidji	20%	17%	20.0%	36.6%	3.3%	3.3%
Sawame-Hossou	50%	3%	10.0%	30.0%	3.3%	3.3%
Tchokpohoue	33%	26%	26.0%	3.3%	--	9.9%
Klouekanme commune	27%	45%	--	23%	--	5%
Cuoffo region	42%	36%	2%	14%	2%	1%

Note: The numbers exceed 100 percent either because people in one household have multiple parcels with different origins or some parcels have both a proprietary right and subordinate rights.

Linking land tenure and agricultural production. In its communal development plan, Klouekanme made clear its goals and strategy, including the PFR projects as part of a multi-activity strategy to improve agriculture (Klouekanme PCD 2011 and Klouekanme PCD 2006). The plan identified the strong potential for expanded production of tomatoes, other vegetables, yams, root crops, fruits, and rice (Klouekanme PCD 2006). With government support and some international assistance, the commune administration undertook projects to train farmers and improve farming methods; invest in storage, processing and market facilities; and bring low, riverside land into rice production. In its 2011 plan, Klouekanme continues these programs along with initiatives focused on farm credit and improving rural roads (Klouekanme PCD 2011, Benin PSRSA 2010). Complementing these activities, the PFR is expected to overcome four obstacles to efficient use of land and expanded production.

Overcoming Obstacles for Efficient Land Use

Removing physical barriers. The accurate parcel surveys and maps should allow the removal of physical barriers—rocks, fences, trees—that landholders install to maintain the boundary lines of fields and avoid neighbor disputes. This should result in more cooperative combinations of fields for mechanized cultivation, irrigation and harvest (Koumassou 2010).

Activating unused fields. The written and recorded proofs of customary proprietorship should allow unused fields to become occupied and cultivated. It is no longer necessary for persons with inherited land rights, who are not resident in their villages or who lack the skills to farm, to leave their fields unused in order to show tangible proof of their control. Often in the past, they have left the lands unused because of fear that their tenants would be misperceived by local witnesses as possessors of the land. Thus, the diagnostic reports, prepared for the Klouekanme PFR, have identified several substantial parcels of 25 to 50 hectares that have been held unused (GRAiB 2008). The written and mapped proof of

propriatorship and subordinate rights now provided for the proprietors should remove their worry and enable them to lease the land to active farmers or producer groups.

Removing customary restrictions. The recorded rights in the PFR should also enable land proprietors to remove from their tenants the customary prohibitions on planting trees or perennials, spreading fertilizer and making other long-term improvements, actions which also could be misperceived as evidence of proprietary control.

Improving access to credit. The PFR and CFR should enable landholders to seek credit for investment and farm improvement by pledging the land as collateral for a loan. Law 2007-03 specifically states this rule.

Evidence of results and impacts

Robust statistical evidence is not yet assembled to measure the expected impacts for Klouekanme or its region of Couffo. However, statistics are now being gathered and analyzed by the World Bank to measure possible impacts and there is some anecdotal evidence of changes in landholder behavior as shown in the box below.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF PFR: EARLY RESULTS FROM THE WORLD BANK STUDY

In early 2013, the World Bank completed an evaluation to assess the impact of Benin's PFR program on tenure security, land market activity, agricultural investment, intra-household decision-making, and income diversification.

The impact evaluation also looked at gender differences and whether the PFR expanded or reduced women's access to and control over land relative to men.

The impact evaluation included a survey of more than 3,500 households in 291 villages and compared households that did and did not participate in the PFR program. Preliminary results from the survey found an:

1. Initial spike in perceived land insecurity;
2. Increase in perennial and tree planting;
3. Initial increase in trust in institutions;
4. More engagement in village land management;
5. Drop in paid wage employment (perhaps due to a return to farm-based livelihoods); and
6. Women increased their relative farm input usage.

While the results are still preliminary, the findings suggest that there is an initial spike in tenure insecurity among tenants because they fear that the PFR process will result in landowners having a stronger ability to push them off of land, which diminishes over time as trust increases. The increase in perennial and tree planting, as well as the increase in the use of farm inputs by women, indicate that the landowners are more secure in their land rights and more willing to allow tenants to make investments in their land. There also appears to be increased trust in the modern state apparatus with transparency in boundary setting and land titling. Women also face less conflict and appear to have a greater say within the household as a result of the PFR process.

Source: Goldstein, M. K. Hounbedji, F. Kondylis, M. O'Sullivan, and H. Selod. 2013. Formalizing rural land rights in West Africa: Evidence from a randomized impact evaluation in Benin. Presentation at the CSAE Conference 2013: Economic Development in Africa, St. Catherine's College, Oxford. March 17-19.

Expansion of active use of fields. There is a record of expanding production of vegetables and tubers in Klouekanme, in particular the re-cultivation of lands for these food crops that before 2002 were used for cotton production. The active use of the fields, suitable for cultivation, has expanded from an average annual total of 17-18,000 hectares in 2003-2005 to over 21,000 hectares by 2009. Increasing yields have also been reported for several main crops, including tomatoes, manioc and corn as show in Table 4.

Table 4: Crop Yields (tons) in Klouekanme (2010) and Projected (2015)
Source: Klouename PDC (2011)

Crop	2006	2010	Est. 2015
Corn	10,493	18,901	21,700
Manioc	19,140	21,714	31,000
Cowpeas	--	1,396	1,605
Tomato	11,236	18,355	22,000

The studies do not yet detail the factors that cause the yield gains, but they appear to include increased use of fertilizer and improved seeds, provided with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Herding and Fishing (MAEP) and the programs of farmer training and assistance to cooperative organization by the communal administration (Klouekanme PCD 2011).

Increase in written contracts and tenants. There is some evidence of a willingness by land proprietors to allow more tenants on fallow lands. The MCA-Benin Access to Land Project organized mayoral programs to identify these fallow lands and assist their proprietors to find tenants and conclude agreements. The records of these programs showed positive results in a few communes, although Klouekanme was not studied (BeCG 2011). A 2010 sociological study of the landholding strategies of households in six Klouekanme villages has shown increasing use of written contracts of land sale and leases for tenancy and use. At the same time the study found that most villagers have not been entering these documents into the communal registries in order to avoid the fees (Kousmassou 2012). Recognizing this problem, the mayor and communal council of Klouekanme started in 2011 to set fees for witnessing and registering documents and for obtaining the CFR at the modest level of \$4 to \$8 (Klouekanme Mayoral Order of February 2011).

Lifting of restrictions on land use. There has been positive evidence of the lifting of prohibitions on tenants' tree planting and land improvements. The 2006 study of the pilot PFR villages described the removal of restrictions on tenants' land use in several villages along with an increase in written tenancy agreements and a decrease in conflicts over land boundary lines (GTZ/ProCGRN 2006). In particular, the report noted that women have planted mango trees on the fields they hold subordinate to their husbands' or brothers' fields. Other tenants have planted orange trees and oil palms, and small-holders are making selective use of improved seed varieties and fertilizers alongside their cultivation of traditional varieties (GRAIN 2008). The 2006 study included three of the PFR villages in Klouekanme, although the results were not given specific to them.

Lack of evidence for mortgage credit. There is so far no evidence that rural landholders in Klouekanme or elsewhere in Benin are making applications for mortgage credit. Klouekanme recently reported that 9,787 of its citizens have received micro-credit loans during the period 2006 to 2012. These very small loans, averaging \$63, are not specifically categorized by agricultural or other purpose (FNMBenin 2012).

Challenges to Sustainability

There are two limitations of the PFR projects that are likely to hinder its “sustainability” and impacts over time. First, the cost of maintenance of the administrative system of the PFR, including updating changes in the maps, landholder lists and archives of tenancy and land use agreements, must be borne by the communal administrations. They are authorized to cover these costs by small fees for issuance of CFRs and other documents of proof, but the system is not expected to be self-financing in the initial phases (Decree no. 2010-479, Elbow and Zogo 2012). Second, maintenance of the system and expansion to new villages will depend on the willingness of landholders and users to employ the PFR tools: contract and lease forms, witness by the village committees, communal registry and archives. If landholders and users fail to carry out and record their transactions in order to avoid fees or conceal their transactions from official oversight, then the database of land information will become unreliable and its value as legal proof of rights will diminish. This problem has been recognized in the 2011 sociological study of Klouekanme villages (Koumassou 2012) and in commentary on the PFR program in total (Simmoneau and Lavigne-Delville 2011).

Conclusions

Although the results and impacts are primarily anecdotal, there does appear to be emerging evidence that the PFR is able to complement and reinforce the activities of agricultural promotion and reform. During 2012 and 2013, with the assistance of the World Bank, Benin is engaged in an evaluation of the impacts of the PFR program based on a detailed census of households in a group of 110 PFR villages with 82 corresponding control villages. This study expects to discover and clarify the evidence that landholders and farm producers in the PFR villages are altering their strategies of land use, undertaking investment and entering more agreements of cooperation and tenancy to achieve higher output and improved, long-term productivity of the land (Selod and O’Sullivan 2012). On the basis of these expectations, Benin has made the commitment to continue to expand PFR activities and has sought to engage additional donor assistance.

For further research, Klouekanme will be one of the major locations for analysis and impact evaluation. The Government of Benin and European donors are helping Klouekanme and other communes in Couffo and Mono departments to maintain the operations of the PFR, issue certificates and documents of proof and expand the PFR villages (Netherlands Embassy 2012). Under the new project funding, Klouekanme expects to prepare PFRs in several more villages and improve the operation of its databank and issuance of CFRs. If it is successful, it should offer the best “model” of applying the PFR in Benin and allow detailed study of the linkage of land tenure security to the outcomes of increasing crop yields and expanding cultivation. **KIN**

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