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The stakes of transnational civil society action

NGO advocacy interventions and the farmers of
Mali's cotton zone

Clare Coughlan Koita

Declaration

This is to certify that that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

C. Koita

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Dedication

For Leila and Jeneba

In memory of

Sitan

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Abstract

This thesis examines how transnational advocacy networks operate across local, national, regional and international arenas. It takes a close look at the nature of peasant resistance and civil society in Mali, and explores how these interact with campaign and advocacy activities of Northern-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The central argument of this thesis is that these encounters have strengthened an elite, while marginalising alternative perspectives. This has happened through the collision of actors' diverse interests, through competition between distinct framings of debate, and through differences in modes of political participation which reflect the power dynamics of the political arenas in which actors are rooted. The thesis is informed by the results of qualitative fieldwork research, which was carried out, mainly in Mali, between 2006 and 2008. By identifying the nature of connections and disconnections between actors at multiple levels, the thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of transnational civil society action.

Map of Southern Mali



Figure 1: Map of Southern Mali with legend. Source: mali-guides.com 2006.

Field Sites in Southern Mali



Key:

- | | | | |
|----------------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| K – Kodabougou | W – Wolodo | F – Fana | D – Dien |
| Mp – M'Pessoba | Mi – Miena | M – Moribila | Ki – Kimparana |

Figure 2: This map shows the locations of the main field sites in Southern Mali that are considered in this thesis. Source: mali-guides.com 2006.

Acronyms

AFD	<i>Agence Française de Développement</i>
AFDI	<i>Agriculteurs Français et Développement International</i>
AOPP	<i>Association des Organisations Professionnelles Paysannes</i>
AMADIP	<i>Association Malienne pour le Développement Intégré et Participatif</i>
APCAM	<i>Assemblée Permanente des Chambres d'Agriculture du Mali</i>
AProCA	<i>Association des Producteurs de Coton Africains</i>
ATT	<i>Amadou Toumani Touré</i>
AV	<i>Association Villageoise</i>
CAD-Mali	<i>Coalition des Alternatives Africaines Dette et Développement</i>
CFA	<i>Communauté Financière Africaine (currency)</i>
CFDT	<i>Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles</i>
CMDT	<i>Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles</i>
CNOP	<i>Coordination National des Organisations Paysannes</i>
EJF	<i>Environmental Justice Foundation</i>
ENDA	<i>Environnement et Développement du Tiers Monde</i>
GCAP	<i>Global Call to Action Against Poverty</i>
GSCVM	<i>Groupement des Syndicats des Cotonniers et Vivriers du Mali</i>
HIPC	<i>Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (initiative)</i>
HUICOMA	<i>Huileries Cotonnière du Mali</i>
IDA	<i>International Development Association (World Bank)</i>
IMF	<i>International Monetary Fund</i>
LPDSC	<i>Lettre de Politique de Développement du Secteur Coton</i>
MOBIOM	<i>Mouvement Biologique Malien</i>
MPH	<i>Make Poverty History</i>
MRSC	<i>Mission de Restructuration du Secteur Coton</i>
OHVN	<i>Office de la Haute Vallée du Niger</i>
PASAOP	<i>Programme d'Appui aux Services Agricoles et aux Organisations Paysanne (World Bank)</i>
PASE	<i>Programme d'Amélioration des Systèmes d'Exploitation en zone cotonnière (AFD)</i>
ROPPA	<i>Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest</i>
SAC	<i>Structural Adjustment Credit</i>
SADI	<i>Solidarité Africaine pour la Démocratie et l'Indépendance</i>
SCPC	<i>Sociétés Coopératives des Producteurs du Coton</i>
SPCK	<i>Syndicat des Paysans du Cercle de Kita</i>
SYCOV	<i>Syndicat des Cotonniers et Vivriers</i>
SYPAMO	<i>Syndicat des Producteurs Agricoles du Mali Ouest</i>
SYVAC	<i>Syndicat pour la Valorisation des Cultures Cotonnières et Vivrières</i>
UNPCB	<i>Union Nationale des Producteurs de Coton du Burkina</i>
UN-SCPC	<i>Union Nationale – Sociétés Coopératives des Producteurs du Coton</i>
WACIP	<i>West Africa Cotton Improvement Program</i>
WTO	<i>World Trade Organization</i>

Chapter one

Introduction

In the space of a few years, the international community has seen two very different images of Malian political participation: from Malian farmers participating in the 2003 and 2005 meetings of the World Trade Organization to Malian civilians nearly lynching the interim President following the coup d'état of March 2012. The high profile of Malian farmers calling for an end to rich country cotton subsidies – part of a global, civil society campaign to Make Trade Fair – appeared to be another democratic success story for a country that had been lauded as one of the most stable democracies in Africa.¹ In the words of the then Malian President, Amadou Toumani Touré, 'between Cancun and Hong Kong, cotton has become the symbol of the African fight for fair and equitable trade' (Touré 2005, p. 5). But while Malian farmer leaders were speaking out at the World Trade Organization (WTO), a political crisis was slowly brewing at home. In March 2012, President Touré was ousted in a coup d'état just weeks before presidential elections in which he was not even standing. The international community – and indeed many in Mali's political class – were stunned by this turn of events. But a recent opinion poll revealed that sixty-four percent of interviewees in the capital, Bamako, were satisfied that the regime of President Touré (ATT) had ended before the organisations of elections (Guindo 2012, pp. 11–12). The 2012 coup d'état inadvertently facilitated the partition of the North of Mali, opening the door to regional – indeed, global – instability. The coup leaders may not have given their actions much forethought, but their deeds nonetheless illustrate the dangers of perpetually brushing domestic political crises under the proverbial carpet.

The Make Trade Fair campaign is part of a trend among non-governmental organisations (NGOs) towards 'global campaigning' strategies, which connect actors

¹ See, for example, Le Vine (2004, p. 262).

from multiple political arenas in transnational advocacy networks and global public relations campaigns. This fresh approach, of course, feeds into, and stems from, the growing global social justice movement, as evidenced by the World Social Forum, the anti-globalisation protests targeted at the WTO, G8, IMF and World Bank, and the mobilisation of a large, international movement against war in Iraq. These phenomena have prompted some analysts to speak of new forms of transnational activism (Tarrow 2005; Keck and Sikkink 1998) and even, tentatively, of an emergent ‘global civil society’ (Keck and Sikkink 1998, p. 32; Kaldor 2003). This research takes as a case study the work of one of the world’s leading development NGOs, Oxfam (its British and American affiliates, in particular). Evolving from its shift towards ‘global campaigning’, Oxfam has developed an agenda of promoting Southern campaigning and advocacy. This additional move may be seen as linked to a belief that in many countries of the global South, the capacities of civil societies to campaign and advocate need to be ‘built’. At a time when ‘Advocacy is increasingly fundamental to the work of NGOs, particularly in the form of “advocacy coalitions” or “transnational advocacy networks”’ (Yanacopulos and Baillie Smith 2007, p. 310), this thesis questions how transnational advocacy networks operate across very different political arenas, and to what extent they contribute to democratic participation in governance at multiple levels. This is an enquiry into the nature of ‘global civil society’, and of its relation to civil society in Mali.

The idea for this research project came to me while I was working in Oxfam in Scotland’s campaigns team. The voices of poor and marginalised people abounded in brief citations and sound-bites, but I became aware of a lingering doubt in my mind as to how the project in which we all were so earnestly engaged was actually perceived by those with whom we thought ourselves in solidarity. I chose Mali as the setting for my enquiry not only because of its links to the global Make Trade Fair campaign, but also because of its reputation as one of the least Westernised, yet most democratised, countries in Africa. Like many other African countries, Mali underwent a successful transition to democracy in the early 1990s. A peasant farmer movement, which emerged in this period, asserted itself throughout the 1990s and 2000s in a series of ‘strikes’, refusing to sow cotton or deliver harvests. Since 2002, Mali has its own social forum tradition, connected with, but independent of, the

World Social Forum (begun in 2001). If ‘the best predictor of activism is past activism’ (Tarrow 2005, p. 47), Mali provides an ideal case in which to test the possibility of co-ordinated political activism across very different social, political, economic and cultural spaces. Similarly, ‘cotton’ is an apt lens through which to explore relationships between Malians and transnational advocacy networks, not only because the commodity has featured so prominently in international campaigns, notably the Make Trade Fair campaign focused on the Doha round of world trade negotiations, but also because of the significance of the sector within Mali. Cotton comprised forty percent of the country’s export earnings in 2005,² and the livelihoods of approximately one-third of Mali’s population are bound up with cotton.³

The argument of the thesis and contributions to debate

The central argument of this thesis is that despite intentions and indeed appearances to the contrary, the population of Mali’s cotton zone has been to some extent further marginalised rather than empowered through the interventions of transnational civil society. This has happened through a dynamic interaction of different interests, framings of debate, and modes of political participation among actors in local, national, regional and transnational arenas. The interests, framings of debate and modes of political participation of some actors coincided – sometimes intentionally; sometimes unintentionally – and dominated over those of others.

Actors’ interests variously included jobs, *per diems*, income, livelihood security, debt repayment, food security, nutrition, social status, agricultural inputs, health, power/connections, job/campaign success, and organisational funding. Debate was framed by different actors in terms of export-oriented cotton production or in terms of family farming; in terms of global governance or of national sovereignty. Modes of political participation included petitioning, lobbying,

² UNCTAD (2005) ‘22 Nov 05 – International commodity policy challenges: cotton.’ Source: <http://archive.unctad.org/Templates/Page.asp?intItemID=3606&lang=1> consulted on 01/05/07.

³ UNCTAD (2006, p. 2) ‘An Investment Guide to Mali: Opportunities and conditions, October 2006.’ Source: http://unctad.org/en/docs/iteia20062_en.pdf consulted on 01/05/07.

negotiation, clientalism, expectation of consultation, deference to authority, representation, elections, social forums, media campaigns, and popular mobilisation.

This thesis links academic debate on transnational advocacy networks to debate on African civil society, thus contributing to a more thorough understanding of ‘global civil society’, one which does not exclude or marginalise Africa. The thesis points to where to look for different types of civil society in Africa: unions may be officially recognised but have little autonomy from government; national NGOs may be more autonomous from political interests but are dependent on donor funding; social forums may have little direct influence but, like other channels of expression that are indirect such as the arts, they may perform functions expected of civil society.

The thesis advances academic understanding of how smallholders in Mali’s cotton zone perceive their relationships to the State and capital, exposing some gaps in the literature on peasant resistance (for example, Scott 1990; Isaacman 1993). Other authors (Bingen 1998; Roy 2010a; Dougnon et al. 2010) have identified one or other of three types of consciousness among farmers in Mali. I show that all are present and that this heterogeneity goes some way towards accounting for differential participation in national and transnational civil society campaigns.

Above all, the thesis contributes to academic understanding of transnational civil society networks through an empirical examination of the roles of power and values in this interaction, and by considering some of the (unintended) impacts of transnational advocacy interventions on the local and national political arenas in Mali. In this way, the thesis contributes to academic debate around the ‘deconstruction of development’ by arguing that a significant part of the explanation for these unintended effects lies in the dominance of international NGOs, which structures networks relations and inadvertently facilitates dominating power relations in the wider context.

The structure of the thesis

Chapter two examines the literature and shows that civil society is a problematic concept, especially when applied to non-Western contexts or to an

imagined global arena. It argues that the transnationalisation of civil society activity across multiple political and cultural arenas poses particular challenges because it involves the mediation of power and values in relationships between civil society actors, who are rooted in their own political contexts. In turn, transnational civil society networks impact on the multiple political arenas through which they flow, often with unintended effects.

Chapter three argues that Africa's position as a primary commodity producer at the bottom of the value chain is inherently problematic, in a world trade system is power-based rather than rules-based. This chapter puts in wider context the policy of cotton sector liberalisation considered in chapters five and seven, and the campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies considered in chapter six. It shows that promotion of export-oriented cotton production in Mali has been accompanied by the socio-economic and political differentiation of the peasantry, which offers a partial explanation for farmers' heterogeneous participation in contentious political action.

Chapter four explains the methodology that was used in conducting this research and discusses some challenges encountered.

Chapter five finds that civil society engagement with the programme for liberal reform of Mali's cotton sector took place almost entirely within the national political arena, where the policy-making environment was severely constrained by the World Bank following domestic crises. Pressure from the World Bank led to increased government co-optation of national farmers' representatives, giving the appearance of farmer participation required by the 'good governance' agenda. Staff at the West African office of the international NGO, Oxfam, sought to support Malian farmers' associations, but their capacity to act in the global arena was constrained by organisational priorities set at their headquarters in the UK, and their capacity to be effective in the national arena was limited by their lack of understanding of Malian *realpolitik*. As debate was suppressed within those farmers' organisations deemed legitimate representatives by government actors, social forums organised mainly by educated, urban-based activists – with links to radical left-wing party politics, transnational activist networks and grassroots constituencies – became outlets for counter-hegemonic opinion. Social forums were welcomed by many local to national level farmers as opportunities for free expression, but they were

disconnected from national – and international – policy-making processes. In this case study, an appetite for popular participation in policy-making was not sustained through transnational civil society networks.

Chapter six argues that civil society participation in governance in the global arena can undermine democratic accountability in the national arena, through competitive agenda-setting and framing of debate. Actors in the global campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies responded to opportunities in the international arena rather than grounding their analyses in local realities. The campaign was driven by the British and American wings of the international NGO, Oxfam, together with an elite of West African cotton farmer representatives. Local level participation in the campaign was used more to legitimise intervention in the national and global arenas than to stimulate genuine debate or increase downward accountability. Through the campaign, a new working relationship was forged between cotton farmer leaders and their governments but, in the process, the gap between leaders and grassroots farmers widened and alternative analyses of the problems affecting farmers were further marginalised. Together, the case studies in chapters five and six draw attention to a major challenge for transnational campaign networks: not focusing on global governance overlooks one cause of policy constraint on governance at national level, yet, if not carefully managed, focusing on global governance may undermine efforts to improve national governance.

Chapter seven argues that strengthening civil society participation at local level, and between local and national or supra-national levels, can have exclusionary effects if heterogeneity within the local arena is not taken into account and if the process is framed by policy orientations and political interests emanating from the national and international arenas. The formation of market-oriented co-operatives and a pyramid of unions of co-operatives represents the latest stage in an historical process of disciplining the local arena to conform with the agendas of the State and transnational capital. A rural elite now readily collaborates in this process. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) considered in the chapter are at once less formally representative of farmers and more independent of national level political interests. They are nonetheless influenced by dominant policy orientations emanating from the global North, and they are attracted to work with a form of local civil

society and an agricultural commodity that are familiar to them: specifically, market-oriented co-operatives and cotton. The top-down construction of local civil society and framing of development problems is perpetuated by the funding chain and, despite some attempts at brokerage by national NGO actors, most of the non-governmental interventions considered in the chapter do not constitute alternative models of development.

Chapter eight concludes the thesis by arguing that the dominance of international NGOs was a significant feature of the dynamic interaction of civil society actors across borders, examined in this thesis. The agency of state and civil society actors at local and national levels in Mali, and at regional levels in West Africa, is highly pertinent to understanding how it happened that the interests of an elite rather than the majority of farmers in Mali's cotton zone were promoted by transnational advocacy networks. However, in line with deconstructive critiques of development, a crucial element of the explanation for this phenomenon lies in the dominance of international NGOs within the networks, which facilitated this dominance by other actors in the wider context.

Chapter two

Transnational civil society and African contexts: theoretical challenges

Introduction

The dynamic interaction of civil society actors across borders is the rich subject matter of this thesis. In the late twentieth century, the notion of ‘civil society’ was invoked in diverse contexts: as a democratic counter to the totalitarian state in Eastern Europe; as ‘new social movements’ protesting against neoliberal capitalism in the North and structural adjustment in the South; and conversely, as non-governmental organisations providing services in place of the rolled-back state in reformed economies across the world. This diversity of interpretation has led to questioning of the usefulness of the term (Kumar 1993; Edwards 2004). It parallels the different theories of civil society that have been elaborated – though not reconciled – over the years.

The question of the usefulness of ‘civil society’ as a concept for theorising about, and as a means for bringing about, social and political change is particularly pertinent in non-Western contexts. Contemporary ideas about civil society have a notably Western genealogy (Seligman 1992; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Lewis 2002; Edwards 2004). ‘Civil society’ has taken on highly specific and contested meanings in the Western tradition. Thus, attempts to examine civil society in non-Western contexts through a Western lens risk becoming perilously obtuse. The task is all the more confusing in postcolonial contexts, where Western norms and forms have partially percolated into society, such that semblances of Western-style civil society intermingle with very different logics of civility and social order. The phenomena of transnational development interventions and advocacy networks, increasingly viewed as features of an emergent ‘global civil society’, make the need to get to grips with civil society in non-Western contexts all the more pressing. This

chapter examines the literature on global civil society and on civil society in Africa in order to identify pathways for exploring the processes and the stakes of transnational civil society action.

Literature on global civil society is largely focused on characterising the phenomenon of transnational campaigns and advocacy networks in terms of theories derived from Western political thought. While arguing against critics who suggest that the very concept of global civil society suffers from inherent Western bias (for example, Munck 2006), Anheier (2007) notes that in the literature there has been a ‘failure to take into account other civil society traditions’ (p. 9), and opts to study global civil society as an empirical phenomenon (p. 13). The view taken in this thesis is that empirical research shows such complexity and inconsistencies with the main theoretical traditions that it is necessary to look to other areas of literature to better understand the phenomenon.

Insights from the literature on international development and non-governmental development organisations, particularly from the debate around ‘deconstructive’ approaches to development, help to unpack transnational interactions between civil society actors. The debate around deconstructive approaches to development also helps to explain the wider impacts of transnational civil society action, which may be quite different from the professed aims of advocacy campaigns. In turn, this literature draws heavily from the literature on power, which is useful for analysing, on one hand, power relations between network actors, and on the other hand, the wider fields of power in which actors are situated, and from which they enter (or not) into network relations.

The focus in this thesis, on the wider political contexts in which actors are situated, together with Anheier’s (2007) call to take account of other civil society traditions, necessitates examination of the literature on civil society in Africa, which has been hitherto missing from the literature on global civil society. Insights from critiques of the deconstruction of development and from the broader Social Science debate around civil society, particularly those that emphasise agency in the context of structure, inspire a less deterministic view of civil society in Africa than is prevalent in different strands of the literature. Once again, the literature on power and on participatory development contributes to analysis of relations between state,

society and market actors, through which civil society is constituted over time. Since much of the literature on global civil society and on civil society in Africa reflects influences from Western analyses and contexts, it is useful at this point to provide a very brief sketch of the genealogy of the concept of civil society in Western thought.

The historical antecedents to the concept of civil society in Western political thought are the classical notions of the good society and the active citizenry of the ancients (Edwards 2004, p. 6). These were conceived as central elements of government: ‘In classical thought, civil society and the state were seen as indistinguishable, with both referring to a type of political association governing social conflict through the imposition of rules’ (ibid., p. 6). The concept of civil society came to prominence during the Enlightenment era, when absolute monarchies reigned across most of Europe, and agricultural and industrial revolutions were transforming the very fabric of society. Adam Ferguson and fellow eighteenth century Scottish Enlightenment thinkers posited civil society as a counterbalance to the pursuit of individual economic interest (Seligman 1992, p. 26). Ferguson’s contemporary, Immanuel Kant, living under absolutism in Prussia, was the first to view civil society as a separate sphere from the state (ibid., p. 43).

civil society becomes especially ‘good to think,’ and to signify with, at moments when conventional connections between the political and the social, state and public, are perceived to be unraveling. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, p. 12).

The Comaroffs eloquently compare the emergence of the idea of civil society in the eighteenth century – amid the rise of industrial capitalism and the fall of absolutism epitomised in the date of 1789, with its re-emergence in the twentieth century – amid the rise of neoliberal capitalism and the fall of totalitarian regimes epitomised in the date of 1989.⁴

In the intervening period, the concept of civil society was subject to different reconfigurations (Edwards 2004, pp. 7–9). In the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville lauded the rich associational life he observed in America as the life-blood of

⁴ A similar point is made by Harbeson (1994, p. 2) with reference to political transitions in Africa in the early 1990s: ‘It [the idea of civil society] has reappeared at a point in history when the capabilities of existing nation-states to minimally satisfy the political aspirations of nationalities and ethnic communities has never been more in question.’

democracy. The neo-Tocquevillian view sees civil society as a third sector, a sphere of voluntary, non-profit-seeking activity, beyond the family, and independent of the state and the market. This view is the basis of the ‘good governance’ agenda promoted by international institutions from the International Monetary Fund to the United Nations since the 1990s. A more critical approach evolved through the works of Hegel, who saw civil society as the realm of conflicting, particularist interests; through Marx, who saw civil society as representing the interests of the bourgeoisie under capitalism; to Gramsci, who saw civil society as the site of struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces.

The working definition of ‘civil society’ adopted in this thesis is a realm of social activity distinct from the state, the market, and the family, yet at least partially constructed through interactions between these other spheres. It is a site of both harmony and struggle. In practice, it is a scene where hegemonic/counter-hegemonic struggles play out, but conflicts are not necessarily polemic. This conflictual dimension, emphasised by Gramsci, is important to consider in empirical research. It is not, however, intrinsic to the definition of civil society adopted in this thesis; an entirely harmonious civil society is highly unlikely, but not impossible.

The transnationalisation of civil society activity across very different contexts throws up particular challenges in terms of power and values and in terms of its unanticipated effects. The main argument of this chapter is that transnational interactions between civil society actors are conditioned by actors’ relations to the wider political arenas in which they are situated and through which their interactions flow. This is a process of mutual constitution, however, as civil society is itself shaped over time by the dynamic interaction of historical, social, economic, political and cultural structures and agency. The inequality of power relations is an important aspect of these processes and a significant feature of transnational networks; but this inequality of power relations may be essentialised by overly deterministic analyses, or under-emphasised by non-normative critiques of deconstructive approaches to development.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section outlines theoretical debates around the concept of global civil society and considers their relevance to this thesis. The second section examines research on transnational civil society

interactions more broadly, and identifies strategies for thinking about issues of power, values, legitimacy, accountability and the participation or non-participation of actors in transnational campaign networks. The third section explores approaches to studying civil society in African contexts. The fourth section gives a brief analysis of features of civil society in Mali that are pertinent to this thesis.

Global civil society

The notion of ‘global civil society’ emerged as a way to conceptualise the increasingly transnational dimension of civil society activity since the 1990s. On one hand, there has been a trend since World War II towards ‘universal’ norms of ‘human rights’ and increased calls on international institutions to defend them where states have failed to do so. This trend has continued but, since the 1990s, it has been accompanied by increased opposition, often organised across national borders, to policies and practices of international and transnational governance and commerce. Classic examples include the Jubilee 2000 campaign for the cancellation of ‘third world’ debt by the year 2000; Narmada Bachao Andolan (founded 1989), a social movement in India opposed to a World Bank-funded dam project; the Zapatista movement which emerged in Chiapas, Mexico in 1994;⁵ the ‘Battle in Seattle’ protests against the 1999 meeting of the World Trade Organisation; the World Social Forum, an annual meeting of civil society organisations first held in Brazil in 2001; and Oxfam International’s global Make Trade Fair campaign, launched in 2002.

The increased transnationalisation of civil society action may be seen as a response to the increased transnationalisation of economics and politics. Clark (2001, p. 18) notes that ‘issues cannot be effectively addressed without concerted action by governments throughout the world’ and draws a link between the increased regional integration of governance and the rise of global civil society movements. Debates over the evolving nature of the world political system continue in the literature on Politics and International Relations (see, for example, Hutchings 1999). Marks and Hooghe (2004) have contributed the notion of ‘multi-level governance’ in the

⁵ The Zapatistas timed their uprising against the Mexican state on 1 January 1994 to coincide with the coming into effect of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

context of European integration, to express the simultaneous engagement of state and non-state actors in multiple political arenas. Meanwhile, Chin and Mittelman (1997) emphasise the economic and cultural – not just political – dimensions of globalisation and of resistance to it. A body of literature has grown around the phenomenon of transnational campaign and advocacy networks that challenge power at multiple levels (see, for example, Keck and Sikkink 1998; Evans 2000; Tarrow 2005).

For the purposes of this thesis, the notion of ‘global civil society’ is a useful construct for thinking about transnational interactions between civil society actors because it helps us to grasp the multi-dimensional character of the phenomenon being studied. Indeed, the term ‘transnational’ keeps the focus firmly at the level of the nation-state, whereas the very elusiveness of the ‘global’ encourages consideration of sub-national, regional and supra-national aspects of civil society encounters. However, using the concept of ‘global civil society’ also draws attention to the manifold interpretations of the nature of cross-border civil society interactions. Transnational advocacy networks and social movements have been alternately characterised as ‘cosmopolitan’ or as ‘anti-globalisation’, but neither label accurately reflects their diverse discourses, practices or organisational forms. ‘Cosmopolitan’ values articulated in human rights discourse have a Western genealogy and, while they are sometimes embraced and other times translated and transformed in non-Western contexts (Keck and Sikkink 1998, p. 211), their dominance in the discourse of transnational civil society may also be experienced as a form of cultural imperialism.⁶

Yanacopulos and Baillie Smith (2007) suggest that Oxfam’s Make Trade Fair campaign is ‘useful in highlighting a cosmopolitan ambivalence’: on one hand, it emphasised ‘the capacity of civil society to exert political power beyond the nation-state’, made it impossible to ignore the ‘other’ and emphasised the need for justice; on the other hand, many of its supporters were found to understand little of the campaign objectives and to wear the campaign’s symbolic white band as ‘a fashion statement rather than a political one’, while ‘the level of Southern engagement in the “global” campaign was limited’ (ibid., p. 311). In a separate study of Oxfam’s

⁶ For a fuller discussion of the debate around this point, see Yanacopulos and Baillie Smith (2007).

campaign, Berry and Gabay (2009) observe that supposedly universalist discourses are in fact rather parochial in nature. They argue that the empirical evidence does not support the prevailing liberal-cosmopolitan conception of global civil society, typified in the work of Mary Kaldor (2003), which presents global civil society in neo-Tocquevillian mode, as ‘an inherently positive phenomenon, contrasted with global market forces and the activities of powerful states’ (Berry and Gabay 2009, p. 341).

Although Berry and Gabay (2009) lean towards the rival, neo-Gramscian perspective on global civil society, these authors find that it, too, is overly dogmatic and lacking in empirical accuracy. The neo-Gramscian view regards transnational campaigns and advocacy as part of a counter-hegemonic movement against neoliberal globalisation (Evans 2000), or, more convincingly, as a divided realm that is at once hegemonic and counter-hegemonic (Katz 2006). The neo-Gramscian perspective is a useful frame for drawing attention to divisions *within* global civil society. It can be mapped onto different manifestations of transnational non-governmental activity⁷ so as to differentiate more hegemonic types of activity, such as NGO participation in governance and NGO partnership with business, from more adversarial, activist manifestations of civil society activity, which challenge both state and market forces.

The neo-Gramscian view can also be applied to make sense of North/South structural inequality within global civil society.⁸ In this vein, Collins, Gariyo and Burdon (2001, p. 147) comment, ‘The greatest challenge for Jubilee 2000 as a movement is that it continues to reflect the same North–South imbalances that it criticizes in international economic policy, in terms of access to resources, information and global decision-making.’ Funding chains are particularly pertinent both to the perpetuation of these inequalities and, when they involve donor agencies

⁷ Anheier (2007) identifies four manifestations within global civil society: (i) the New Public Management, through which NGOs participate in governance in partnership with state and inter-state agencies; (ii) Corporatization, in which NGOs partner with or imitate transnational corporations; (iii) Social Capital, in which social solidarity develops through cross-border networks, including faith-based ones; and (iv) the Activist manifestation, in which transnational networks and social movements resist, challenge and act as watchdogs in relation to both state and market forces.

⁸ See, for example, Katz (2006).

– as is increasingly the case in the context of the New Policy Agenda – to the erosion of the independence of NGOs from government donors (Edwards and Hulme 1996).

Unequal participation in global civil society also pertains, however, within the North and the South. As Pallas (2009, p. 6) notes, ‘the resource requirements (in terms of wealth or access) of global networking are such that international civil society associations tend to foster an international elite rather than a global proletariat.’ Thus, alongside divisions between the global North and the global South, there is an even wider gap between the poor and marginalised everywhere and those in global civil society who speak on their behalf or in solidarity with them (Nyamugasira 1998, p. 4). Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin (2007) note that the emergence of international civil society elites through global advocacy networks and campaigns ‘raises serious questions as to *whose alternatives* gain greater visibility in these processes’ (ibid., p. 8, original emphasis).

A challenge to the neo-Gramscian hegemony/counter-hegemony frame arises from the sheer breadth and diversity within global civil society. In deconstructing development, Arturo Escobar (1995a) sought to ‘maintain the focus on domination – as earlier Marxist analyses, for instance, did’ while exploring the discourse of development and the ‘most pervasive effects of development’ (pp. 5–6). Critiques of this approach are discussed below, but first it is pertinent to note that Escobar went on to identify ‘resistance’ to development not as an homogeneous counter-hegemonic movement but as diverse alternatives to development. In Latin America, Escobar (1995b, p. 220) observes the emergence of a ‘discourse of difference,’ ‘which includes cultural difference, alterity, autonomy and the right of each society to self-determination’.⁹ Indeed, in addition to resource inequalities between actors who might take part in transnational networks, there are also cultural differences and language barriers.¹⁰ Graeber (2005, p. 171) notes a trend in which anarchist sympathies and methods of organising have increased among some activists. Some reactions to globalisation – such as defending national sovereignty in the global South and promoting localism in the global North – lean towards communitarianism,

⁹ Similarly, Young’s (1990) ‘politics of difference’ envisages ‘equality among socially and culturally differentiated groups, who mutually respect one another and affirm one another in their differences’ (p. 163).

¹⁰ Note, for instance, the language requirements of participating in global civil society, where English, French and Spanish dominate.

which would seem to be antithetical to any notion of a global society. How, then, are differences to be bridged? Or are they to be bridged at all?

Inspired by the Zapatistas, Olesen (2004, p. 259) posits a new ‘global solidarity’, which can marry the universal and the particular; ‘a form of solidarity that emphasises similarities between physically, socially and culturally distant people, while at the same time respecting and acknowledging local and national differences’. In Tarrow’s (2005) study of contemporary transnational activism, he observes ‘domestically rooted activists’ who mobilise around global frames (p. 205); a realisation of Cohen’s (1992) vision of ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’. Clearly, transnational civil society interactions do not always take these idealised forms,¹¹ and many of the actors concerned may not even aspire towards them, but are they even realisable? Are ‘domestic’ frames always compatible with ‘global’ frames?

Scholte (2007) points out that transnational civil society action does not merely involve a binary tension between the universal and the particular; rather, multiple arenas are implicated in global civil society activity.

every global civil society activity simultaneously has regional, national and local aspects. The global qualities never exist independently of – and are always filtered through – regional, national and local contexts. Conversely, it is also difficult to find civil society operations today that do not have a notable global quality of some kind. Purely local, national or regional civil society, hermetically sealed from global spaces, is no less an impossibility than a discrete global sphere. (Scholte 2007, p. 20)

Add to this complexity Ferguson’s (1990, p. 287) insight, cited in Bending and Rosendo (2006, p. 233), that the status of ‘counter-hegemonic’ always depends on an analysis of local context, then the extent of the challenges involved in transnationalising civil society action begin to become apparent. Transnational interactions between civil society actors are affected by the multiple political arenas through which they flow, and by the diverse ways in which power operates within those many arenas. This, then, prompts questions over the nature of these interactions that are constitutive of global civil society, which take place between

¹¹ Fioramonti (2007, p. 137) notes, ‘In Latin America and Asia, most social movements are highly personalized entities, often shaped around charismatic leaders. Although presenting themselves as loosely organised movements, they are in fact quite centralised in terms of decision-making.’

actors across local, national, regional and global contexts: to what extent and how common ground is found; and to what extent, why, and to what effect divisions, misunderstandings and unequal power relations persist.

Transnational civil society network interactions

In the literature on transnational campaigns and advocacy networks, some authors emphasise processes whereby actors modify their perspectives through the experience of interaction, while others emphasise divergence between actors' perspectives. Keck and Sikkink (1998, p. 213) view transnational advocacy networks as 'dense webs of interactions and interrelations among citizens of different states which both reflect and help sustain shared values, beliefs and projects.' Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos (2004), by contrast, point out that network construction is an on-going and emergent process which involves contestation between actors. Echoing the image of Tarrow's rooted cosmopolitans, Jordan and van Tuijl (2000) observe that actors in transnational advocacy networks 'primarily act upon incentives which emerge in their own space' (p. 2062). In this way, the wider political contexts in which actors are situated can help to explain how actors define their interests and perspectives and arrive at their positions, on the basis of which they engage (or not) in transnational networks.

In parallel, actors' wider social contexts can help to explain differences in their values, which also motivate their behaviour. There is a well-established emphasis within the discipline of Sociology on the role of values in motivating social action and social structure.¹² Joas (2000) examines where values come from in order to try to bridge the gulf in social theory between those who see the role of values in determining social action as all-important and those who see it as insignificant. The approach taken in this thesis is to see values as beliefs about ideals, which arise through a creative combination of socialisation and the rational individual's capacity to reflect, evaluate and make sense of the world (Joas 2000; Hitlin and Piliavin 2004). For the purposes of this thesis, values are regarded as one among many

¹² This emphasis derives in part from what is now regarded as an inaccurate translation into English of Max Weber's work (Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope 1975; Turner 2009).

motivators of participation in transnational advocacy networks, which are not necessarily based on shared values; network actors' values may converge or they may conflict. Actors may have other – for instance, strategic or material – motives for participating in the network, or they may believe that they share values but find that their values diverge as the network evolves. Rather than assuming that values are shared, then, it is interesting to explore what happens when network actors' values differ. Since values are part of complex motives for actors' behaviour (including discursive behaviour), sometimes the role of values is clear and sometimes it is less obvious. The focus in this thesis is not on classification of different types of motives, but on what happens when actors with different sets of motives interact, or potentially could interact within the same sphere of civil society activity.

Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos (2004, p. 851) argue that one way in which contestation between network actors plays out is quite straightforwardly through attempts 'to exclude opposing views from the frame of public discussion'. Universalising discourses are particularly disposed towards hiding differences of perspective, as noted above, and to appearing incontestable. Universalising discourses may seem to be the cement of transnational network construction, but they may become the focus of overt contestation; or they may in practice hide contestation between actors, which may be played out through the juxtaposition of public and hidden transcripts (Chin and Mittelman 1997, with reference to Scott 1990); or else diverse perspectives may be accommodated through the use of common symbols which nonetheless hold different meanings for different actors (Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos (2004, p. 852). There are parallels between this use of common symbols to diffuse tensions and what Mosse (2004, p. 663) describes as the 'mobilizing metaphors' of policy discourse, 'whose vagueness, ambiguity and lack of conceptual precision is required to conceal ideological differences, to allow compromise and the enrolment of different interests, [and] to build coalitions'.

The role of discourse in shaping transnational development interventions and their outcomes has been thoroughly debated in relation to attempts to deconstruct 'the discourse of development', which have put forward the notion that development discourse seems self-evident, irrefutable and is largely internalised by local people, yet the effects of interventions purportedly based on the discourse are not to the

benefit of local populations (Ferguson 1990; Escobar 1995a). If there were continuity between policy, implementation and effects, such that negative impacts flowed directly from the discourse, this would give rise to a questioning of the discourse and its supposedly irrefutable character. Often, however, there is disjuncture between policy, implementation and effects. There are what Ferguson (1990) terms, ‘instrument effects’, or side effects of interventions that are inconsistent with the official aims of policy. In Ferguson’s (1990) case study, a development intervention in Lesotho became a vehicle for the expansion of state power. The phenomenon of ‘instrument effects’ has received much attention in the literature on development, but not in the literature on global civil society.

In attempting to explain how these instrument effects come about, Ferguson (1990) and other deconstructors of development have emphasised the depoliticising effects of development policy discourse, which renders the political, technical (Li 2007, p. 7). Based on a study of an Oxfam development programme in Tanzania in the 1970s, however, Jennings (2001) argues that ‘in a seeming reversal of James Ferguson’s hypothesis, Oxfam became a “politics machine”’ (p. 129). Jennings (2001) attributes Oxfam’s failure to recognise the contradictions inherent in the development intervention – in which ‘villagisation and Ujamaa policy had effectively masked a massive extension in the authority of the central state machinery and a process of authoritarianism that sought to dominate all aspects of rural life’ (p. 109) – to Oxfam’s ‘heavily ideological agenda’ which led the NGO to reduce ‘the technical or development aspects to a secondary place’ (p. 131). Jennings shows that the instrument effects of transnational civil society interventions are not fully accounted for by the deconstructivist thesis of the supposed monolithic character of ‘development discourse’. A discourse of development that emphasises economic rationality and down-plays the political aspects of socio-economic change certainly lends itself to instrumentalisation, yet even when the discourse is more overtly ideological as in the case of ‘Ujamaa’ – or perhaps, ‘trade justice’ – similar instrument effects may be observed, a point made by Bending and Rosendo (2006).

We can also see that if being anti-development became politically useful, then movements might call for change in the name of an “alternative to development.” Perhaps this is already happening. Any intervention by,

for example, northern NGOs to help social movements in the name of “alternatives to development” obviously risks repeating just the type of anti-politics mechanism that Ferguson described under the name “development.” Bending and Rosendo (2006, p. 232)

Jennings’ (2001) analysis does not offer a way to reconcile the findings of his case study with that of Ferguson’s (1990) because he misses two points: (i) instrument effects are facilitated by the NGO sticking rigidly to its own agenda, independently of the ideological character of that agenda; and (ii) instrumentalisation may be *facilitated* by the actions of the NGO and by the character of the discourse (whether depoliticising or universalising), but is *done* by actors in the context in question. This approach to analysing the apparent ‘instrument effects’ of an intervention marks out a middle path between deconstructive approaches (for example, Ferguson 1990; Escobar 1995a), which emphasise the dominance of the NGO or of its discourse, and actor-oriented, non-normative analyses (for example, Mosse and Lewis 2006), which emphasise the independent agency of all relevant actors.

If NGO staff and other actors in transnational networks do have a propensity to stick rigidly to their own agendas, this raises questions of how and why. An obvious way in which actors push forward their own agendas, discourses and interpretations is through the funding chain. Crewe and Harrison (1998) find that power structures supposed ‘partnership’ relationships, not in deliberate, but in systematic, ways. They also point out that almost all donors are also recipients. In seeking to explain the ‘banal cosmopolitanism’ of Oxfam’s Make Trade Fair campaign, Yanacopulos and Baillie Smith (2007, p. 313) note that ‘NGO attempts to articulate alternatives is [sic] strongly circumscribed by being embedded within a neoliberal aid system and by needing to draw support from constituencies in the North whose lives are defined by highly commodified forms of consumption.’ The pressures on NGO actors are clear: at stake are their jobs, their performance reviews, the perpetuation of funding flows. Indeed, Mosse (2004) approaches the phenomenon of ‘instrument effects’ from a different angle, taking issue with the assumption that policy normally drives practice, posing the provocative question, ‘What if, instead of policy producing practice, practices produce policy, in the sense

that actors in development devote their energies to maintaining coherent representations regardless of events?’ (p. 640), concluding that they do this ‘because it is always in their interest to do so.’ (p. 639).

It would be a mistake, however, to overlook the ‘power of discourse’ either in the sense of ‘mobilising metaphors’ that recruit support rather too successfully, lending themselves to processes of co-optation, or in the sense of the role of actors’ attachment to ideology and values in convincing them that their own interpretations are correct, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. There is plenty of scope for lack of awareness of what is really going on, especially where there are considerable distances between actors as there are in global advocacy networks and given opaque or absent processes of negotiation of actors’ perspectives, outlined above, but also where covert operations of power are significant features of the political arena in question.

The focus on the discourse of the NGO, the donor, or the developer neglects, however, the agency of other actors in the political arenas in which interventions, or through which transnational interactions, take place. Bending and Rosendo (2006, p. 231) point out that the mystery of Ferguson’s development ‘machine’ evaporates when one considers the many actors at state level who stand to gain from perpetuating the development intervention. This is not to say that they necessarily do so with subversive intent. Actors pursue their own agendas, through their own strategies, in a field of possibilities in which the development, campaign or advocacy intervention is but one: the policy of the intervention is not central to these actors’ life choices (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Mosse 2004; 2005).

Escobar’s implicit assumption is that developers develop, while local people resist, and arguably that this resistance is the most important part of their lives. Developers remain at the centre of the analysis while other people’s actions are read merely as responses to the fixed centre, rather than as formed and influenced by all sorts of circumstances, many of which will be unconnected to development activity. Conscious resistance may be easy to spot, but how is it possible to distinguish between unconscious resistance and action that is independent of developers? (Crewe and Harrison 1998, p. 18)

This insight draws attention once again to the ways in which actors may participate in the same intervention or discourse for very different reasons. Recipients and other actors may participate in the discourse as a strategic move to get what they really want, not necessarily because they share the same vision of development or of justice as the donor.

One area of the debate around the deconstruction of development that is not addressed here fully is the notion that many recipients internalise the ‘discourse of development’ to their own detriment. This thesis does not go so far as to investigate whether and to what extent civil society actors and local populations may have internalised universalising or activist discourses to the detriment of their real interests because, aside from the methodological challenges involved in such an investigation, it seems superfluous to the task of explaining the phenomena observed. This concept of internalisation as ‘three dimensional power’ (Lukes 2005) is pertinent to the thesis, however, in terms of understanding some of the perspectives of farmers in Mali’s cotton zone on their relationships with the State and the cotton company, which in turn goes some way towards explaining their participation or non-participation in advocacy networks.

In taking on board Crewe and Harrison’s (1998) and Mosse’s (2005) point that actors pursue their own agendas within their fields of possibility, this thesis pays attention to the wider contexts in which actors are situated rather than focuses solely on interactions between international NGO actors and Southern civil society actors or local populations. In relation to his case study, Mosse (2005 p. 229) concludes, ‘the self-reliance model ... ignored the project’s own reality ... [The project] was a powerful external source of patronage interacting with regional and historical processes of change.’ This analysis ties in with insights from the literature on participatory development, which emphasise the significance of ‘immanent development’ in terms of historical and political processes of social change, as opposed to ‘imminent development’ as specific interventions (Hickey and Mohan 2004).¹³ Hence the focus in the latter parts of this chapter is on understanding civil society in Africa and in Mali.

¹³ Similarly, Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin (2007) draw on Hart’s (2001) distinction between ‘little d’ and ‘big D’ d/Development.

In the deconstructivist literature, when instrumentalisation is done by local populations to divert development interventions, it is usually interpreted as resistance. As noted above, Crewe and Harrison's (1998) issue with the resistance frame is that it keeps the 'developers' at the centre of the analysis and neglects the significance of actors' own agendas and strategies. The resistance frame has also been criticised as ideological populism by Mosse and Lewis (2006), citing Oliver de Sardan (2005). Instead, drawing on (Kothari and Minogue 2002, p. 13), they advocate taking what they call a non-normative approach: 'These nonnormative ethnographies of aid and development agencies return to questions of agency beyond "development as concealed power" in order to "throw light on the complexity of practice"' Mosse and Lewis (2006, p. 15). This approach has involved a focus on the function of 'broker', facilitating the encounter between external agents of development and the 'local' populace or intended beneficiaries (Bierschenk et al. 2002; Olivier de Sardan 2005; Mosse and Lewis 2006). This function, which involves political mediation of competing interests and strategic interpretation of otherwise incongruent discourses, has significant impact on the ways in which development interventions proceed and, by extension, on the ways in which transnational network construction proceeds.

Non-normative approaches have their strengths but also their limitations. The resistance frame is problematic, but it does capture an important dimension in transnational civil society encounters that may be missed by the non-normative approach; that of overall imbalances of power. As mentioned above, when local populations divert development interventions, this is often interpreted, in the deconstructivist literature, as resistance. A similar process occurs when state or high level civil society actors in a southern country instrumentalise an international NGO intervention to pursue their own agendas. Inspired by a Foucauldian approach to power, tempered by the actor-oriented turn, the non-normative approach would take most interest in the parallels between these processes, and focus on examining *how* they happen, emphasising multi-directional operations of power. Under the resistance frame, however, both scenarios could be viewed as actors making the most of limited opportunities to pursue their own agendas within overall patterns of unequal power. But the context of first scenario is an overall pattern of unequal

power between local populations and donors, whereas in the latter case, while there is unequal power between national level actors and the international NGO (e.g. via the funding stream), the national level actors are relatively powerful vis-à-vis local populations who may be disadvantaged by their instrumentalising actions. Thus, resistance, as one expression of power, is a relational, not an absolute, concept. As such, it may be confusing to apply it to relations within networks that traverse multiple political arenas. The non-normative approach offers fascinating explanatory detail, yet, to play down power inequalities by over-emphasising the multi-directional workings of power – perhaps in a bid to avoid coming across as ideological or populist – would be to overlook an important dimension of real world interaction. In analysing Foucault’s theory of power, Lukes (2005, p. 97) argues that ‘criteria will be needed ... to distinguish between dominating and non-dominating power and dependency’ and, indeed, that ‘the “Final Foucault” reaches for just such a distinction’.

Non-normative approaches seek to describe and to explain, rather than to evaluate. However, the internal workings of transnational civil society networks have important implications for their accountability and legitimacy, as Edwards (2001) illustrates.

The first set of issues – and by far the most contentious – concern legitimacy and accountability: Who speaks for whom in a global network, and how are differences resolved when participants vary in strength and resources? Who enjoys the benefits and suffers the costs of what the movement achieves, especially at the grassroots level? Whose voice is heard, and which interests are ignored, when differences are filtered out in order to communicate a simple message in a global campaign? In particular, how are grassroots voices mediated by institutions of different kinds – networks and their members, Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs, Southern NGOs and community groups, and so on down the line? (Edwards 2001, p. 6)

The approach taken in this thesis is not to view NGO legitimacy and accountability narrowly, eschewing the wider context, but to put the wider context at the centre of the analysis and to view NGO legitimacy and accountability in relation to it. Atack (1999) identifies four criteria of development NGO legitimacy, two of

which are formal-procedural criteria, representativeness¹⁴ and distinctive values,¹⁵ and two of which are substantive-purposive criteria, effectiveness and empowerment. However, Lister (2003) argues that NGO legitimacy should be approached as a social construct rather than as a technical issue. She argues that ‘Organisational legitimacy is the “reward” for activity which conforms to dominant discourses, and illegitimacy is the sanction.’ (Lister 2003, p. 188). She proposes that the question which should be posed is, ‘*Legitimacy for whom?*’, and that attention should be paid to ‘the relative “weights” of different stakeholders in determining legitimacy’ (ibid., p. 184, original emphasis).

Within transnational networks, particularly those that are built around funding chains, there tends to be too much upward rather than downward accountability. Clark (2001) asserts that ‘true accountability should reside as closely as possible to the citizens of the country in question’ and, upon considering a variety of determinants of NGO legitimacy proposed in the literature, he notes that ‘Only the issue of representation brings accountability anywhere near the poor themselves, and this is the least developed, least focused-on question’ (pp. 26–27). Representation is complicated to instantiate in civil society relations but, Jordan and van Tuijl (2000, p. 2053) argue, ‘it cannot be denied that NGOs are in fact representing interests when they operate with an expertise in a specific political arena and use that knowledge to carry a campaign concern to a new level of decision-making.’ They propose that accountability in transnational advocacy campaigns and networks should be approached in terms of political responsibility to the most politically vulnerable stakeholders (Jordan and van Tuijl 2000).

Viewing legitimacy as a social construct and accountability as political responsibility to the most vulnerable stakeholders provides a framework for verification of claims to legitimacy and accountability in transnational civil society networks, which, Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos (2004) argue, have been quite extensively theorised, but not adequately subjected to empirical investigation. These approaches also inspire a research agenda that focuses on the perspectives and

¹⁴ Edwards (2001, p. 7) argues that because NGOs are not formally representative, they ‘may have the right to a voice, but not necessarily to a vote in global fora.’

¹⁵ Fioramonti (2007, p. 138) asserts that public perception of the legitimacy of global civil society actors is based on ‘widespread belief’ in the justness of their causes.

experiences of southern actors, and of the most politically vulnerable stakeholders, in the construction of transnational development and campaign networks.

In the transnational networks literature the main and often only objects of analysis within the networks are the northern actors, with southern perspectives being marginalised and only being of importance when they affect the legitimacy of northern actors. In this research southern NGOs only appear to be important when they make demands of northern NGOs. As such, northern experiences of participation in transnational networks are privileged over southern ones, which marginalises their agency. (Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos 2004, p. 850)

This is a valuable insight, and, accordingly, the experiences and perspectives of Malian civil society actors and stakeholders in transnational development and campaign networks are placed at the centre of this thesis, where they are considered in relation to their social, political, economic, ecological and cultural contexts.

Civil society in Africa

It is worth considering the context of civil society in Africa as one of the many contextual backgrounds to the transnational civil society interactions examined in this thesis. The view taken in this thesis is that there are commonalities between civil society contexts across Africa, but that is not to say that there is an inherently 'African' form of civil society. Rather, civil society develops in Africa, much as Tarrow (1996) and Fox (1996) argue it does elsewhere, through the dynamic interaction of state, society and market forces; there are, in turn, similarities between these 'ingredients' in the civil society mix across African contexts. However, similarities do not give grounds for cultural determinism, which overlooks the explanatory power of agency.

The end of the Cold War sparked a wave of democratisation across much of the African continent. Between 1990 and 1994 democratic elections were held in thirteen African countries for the first time since independence (Makumbe 1998, p. 310). The fall of the Soviet bloc stemmed the flow of resources to client states in Africa that were already suffering under austerity measures associated with structural adjustment. Popular discontent increased whilst the resources that states had at their

disposal to feed patron–client networks diminished.¹⁶ Witnessing revolutions in Eastern Europe and sensing the international climate of support for democratisation¹⁷ gave further impetus to African civil society groups, many of which had been mobilising clandestinely under conditions of repression.

The use of ‘civil society’ as a rallying cry and as a mobilising strategy in the democratic revolution lends weight to an approach to thinking about civil society in African contexts which David Lewis terms, ‘prescriptive universalism’ (Lewis 2002, p. 575): ‘The idea that civil society in Africa is a “good thing” which needs to be encouraged and “built”.’ However, over the last two decades, the optimism of the early 1990s has been replaced by disappointment as civil society in Africa has not developed in the way expected by prescriptive universalists. J. W. Makumbe identifies common weaknesses among African civil society organisations as (i) lack of autonomy from the state or from foreign donors; (ii) lack of internal democratic culture and embeddedness in patron–client relations; and (iii) lack of information and experience due in part to the jealous guarding of knowledge as power by ruling elites (Makumbe 1998, pp. 311–312). These observations give rise to the approach that Lewis terms, ‘Western exceptionalism’, which suggests that the very concept of civil society is irrelevant in African contexts and that it is yet another inappropriate import (Lewis 2002, p. 576). Makumbe sees the explanation for the weaknesses he identifies in civil society as deriving partly from a history of authoritarian colonial and postcolonial regimes in Africa.

One line of argument associated with the Western exceptionalism approach is that power in Africa has long derived from entities external to the state, and that the external locus of power contributes to a false dichotomy between state and society, since ‘the state’ is but an empty shell (Lewis, 2002, p. 577). The constrained policy-making environment that arises from relationships of aid dependence limits debate, undermining effective democracy and vibrant civil society. The deficit of sovereign power is further replicated in civil society relations, through the predominance of

¹⁶ For a description of this process in Mali, see Fay (1995, p. 22).

¹⁷ In the case of francophone African countries, French President Mitterrand finally turned the tide in favour of democratisation with his address at the Franco-African summit at La Baule in June 1990, following a number of corruption scandals that had unveiled the patrimonial relations through which the French ruling elite had been keeping authoritarian African heads of state in power (Robinson 1996, pp. 588–589).

foreign NGOs. Yet external influence is also a significant channel through which civil society in Africa is being encouraged and ‘built’, as called for by the ‘prescriptive universalism’ approach, notably through the ‘good governance agenda’ imposed by multilateral donors. Thus, it is not only external influence that moulds civil society in Africa, but internal political processes through which power derived from external sources is translated and transformed. There are parallels between this argument and the critique of deconstructive approaches to development outlined in the previous section, which emphasises the agency of African actors in addition to that of foreign donors.

Another approach that gives over-riding significance to the external origins of influence on civil society in Africa asserts that the very concept of civil society was introduced to African contexts through the ‘civilising mission’ of colonialism (Lewis 2002, pp. 580–581). Mamdani (1996) argues that the current debate over civil society replays old, unhelpful dichotomies of citizen and subject (Lewis 2002, p. 581). Thus, the very term, ‘civil society’ is misleading and should be put aside in favour of a broader analysis of democracy and politics in historical context, according to this ‘wrong question’ thesis (*loc. cit.*). As do deconstructivist critiques of development, discussed in the previous section, the ‘wrong question’ thesis attributes too much causal power to discourse, ignoring the agency of actors. It can be adapted, nonetheless, to draw attention to how actors employ the discourse of civil society to legitimise Western organisational forms of civil society, for example, trade unions, over more indigenous forms, for example, age-sets. However, the reality is more complex than the frame of a citizen/subject divide would suggest, not least because of processes of hybridisation, whereby age-sets are bureaucratised¹⁸ and trade unions are infused with clientalism. Furthermore, while discourses and organisational forms derived from the former colonial power continue to be mobilised, certain other discourses are employed in a similarly powerful way to legitimise and delegitimise, for example, that of Islam in West Africa.¹⁹ A broader analysis of democracy and politics in historical context as called for by the ‘wrong

¹⁸ For example, Crewe and Harrison (1998, p. 166) note the stress on bureaucratic organisation in village groups in Luapula, Zambia, which they assert derives ‘from outside influences such as the government and aid organizations, and ... has now been internalized as a key part of village life – for some.’

¹⁹ See, for example, Rosander (1996).

question thesis' is certainly warranted, but civil society is very much a feature of the empirical landscape in Africa – organisations self-identify as 'civil society' – so the concept cannot be set aside.

Turning now to arguments that focus on endogenous influences on civil society in Africa, a pessimistic view is put forward by the Western exceptionalism approach, while an optimistic view is associated with the approach identified by Lewis (2002) as 'adaptive prescription' (p. 578). The pessimistic approach is adopted, for example, by Chabal and Daloz (1999) who regard African societies as inherently too deeply divided to develop civil societies. These authors assert that there is a distinct lack of horizontal solidarity in African societies, which are 'essentially plural, fragmented and, above all, organized along vertical lines' notably those of patron–client networks (1999, p. 20). However, Peter Gibbon (2001, p. 838) identifies age-sets, a clear example of horizontally-organised association, as one of the 'remarkably resilient historical phenomena' that comprise the core of Tanzanian civil society. The 'adaptive prescription' approach suggests that there are indigenous forms of civil society in Africa that tend to be ignored by authors sticking too rigidly to Western notions of civil society. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) point to "uncool" forms of African association': kin-based, ethnic or religious groups, 'tradition', and 'customary' styles of popular critique (p. 22). Similarly, in his quest to identify African civil society, Stephen Orvis (2001) points to liberal democratic values but also to 'moral ethnicity', patron–client networks, self-help and ethnic associations, and traditional authorities. So, whereas Chabal and Daloz (1999) view patron–client networks as antithetical to civil society, Orvis (2001, p. 27) considers their potential as an indigenous civil society institution: 'Strong but imprecise norms demand that patrons provide essential resources to clients when needed, while clients provide loyalty and support to patrons as asked.' Linking people from different strata of society in webs of (albeit unequal) reciprocity, patron–client relationships may be both hierarchical and levelling.

A potential pitfall of the 'adaptive prescription' approach is cultural relativism (Lewis 2002, p. 580). If the term 'civil society' is not to be rendered meaningless, it will be important to critically examine Western concepts of civil society together with non-Western forms and norms in their proper contexts. This

means posing the sort of question posed by J.-F. Bayart (1986), who asks with reference to West African traditions of griotism, ‘What does freedom of speech imply where political expression was previously entrusted to designated orators who could control such a cosmic, dangerous power?’ (p. 123). Western Enlightenment concepts of civil society are predicated on the notion of individual liberty as a prerequisite for voluntary association. In Africa, society is anything but a ‘society of strangers’, the prospect of which prompted Adam Smith and his contemporaries to re-imagine civil society for the age of industrial capitalism in Europe (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, p. 11). It is far from clear that Western societies have ever reached this feared extreme of individualism, but it is easy to see why the prevalence of lineage groups and social networks in Africa is viewed either an alternative form of civil society or as making Western-style civil society superfluous.

The principle of liberty may have even weaker roots in African cultures than does individualism. Political opposition has been widely regarded as divisive and un-African in character, but this view that has been tainted by experience of single party regimes in Africa (Olukoshi 1998, p. 19). The notion of governance by consensus, if it is achieved through dialogue, is akin to classical notions of civil society. Contemporary Western conceptualisations of civil society, however, highlight the need for an independent watchdog to ensure that norms of good governance are adhered to. Thus, while the associative function of civil society may be well catered for in African society, it is the function of independent critique of government that is lacking in Africa.

Although association in Africa takes both vertical and horizontal forms, the combination of strong association and weak independence nonetheless casts doubt on the neo-Tocquevillian view of civil society (for example, Putnam 1993; 1995) which assumes a causal link between horizontal association and democratic governance. Chabal and Daloz (1999) go so far as to argue that due to the strength of societal ties, it is the state which lacks independence from society in Africa, rather than the reverse.

However arbitrary, violent or even criminal, state coercion on the continent has rarely been such as to make totalitarianism a realistic option. We would argue that, if anything, the very reverse has occurred:

it is the state which has been ‘captured’ by society. [...] what needs to be stressed are the linkages between ‘high’ and ‘low’ politics, between the political elites and their clientalistic networks throughout society. (Chabal and Daloz 1999, p. 26)

The question that then arises is whether the lack of independence is an inherent feature of African society and politics. The Western exceptionalism approach would concur that it is. Although it points to some important considerations for empirical study of civil society in African contexts, this approach is overly deterministic.

In his critique of Robert Putnam’s (1993) study of civil society and democracy in Italy, Tarrow (1996) argues that in viewing weak civil society as a feature of political culture and a cause of low civic capacity in southern Italy, Putnam overlooks the role of state agency in the formation and erosion of social capital. Applying this insight to Africa draws attention to the agency of political actors in mobilising cultural norms around ‘consensus’ and ‘unity’ to legitimise the dominance of single parties and the suppression of pluralist forms of democracy. The focus on state agency would seem to be in tension, however, with the rejection, prevalent in the literature, of a clear state/society dichotomy in Africa. In his study of civil society in Mexico, Fox (1996) widens Tarrow’s analysis to take account of interactive ‘processes of mutual influence between state and society’ (Fox 1996, p. 1090). Thus, civil society is viewed as a product of dynamic interaction between state, society – and, it might be added, market – actors in the context of structural forces: ‘in contrast to the predetermination inherent in Putnam’s explanation of social capital accumulation[,] historical legacies are woven deeply into social fabrics, but those imprints are not necessarily fixed by history’ (Fox 1996, p. 1098).

Literature on peasant resistance and participatory development is particularly useful for understanding interactions between actors in the state and in society in authoritarian and repressive contexts. Drawing on the work of Freire (1970) and Scott (1986; 1990), Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) note that ‘relatively powerless groups may simply speak in a way that “echoes” the voices of the powerful, either as a conscious way of appearing to comply or as a result of the internalization of dominant views and values’ (p. 75). Building on these insights, Allen Isaacman

(1993, p. 208) suggests that the tendency for peasants to engage in hidden or localized rather than open and collective forms of resistance is explained by their partial autonomy, in the sense of their access to the means of production and of subsistence, but also by their limited power. Chin and Mittelman (1997) build on Scott's (1990) analysis in order to better understand actors' differing responses to apparently similar situations in the context of resistance to globalisation. Whereas Scott focused on class structures, Chin and Mittelman seek to take full, contextualised account of the culturally-embedded nature of resistance.

Gramsci reminded us that subaltern identities are embedded in complex overlapping social networks in which individuals simultaneously assume positions of domination and subordination (perhaps as a husband or wife, an elder or junior, a manager or office clerk, and a donor or recipient of aid). Analysis of the manner in which particular combinations of identity are expressed in the context of structural constraints can help explain why, given systems of surveillance (in which rewards and punishments inhere), some conform while others engage in infrapolitical activities of different types. (Chin and Mittelman 1997, pp. 32–33)

While the emphasis in most of the literature has been on identifying and explaining either compliance or passive forms of resistance, less attention has been paid to the conditions under which rural populations have participated openly in contentious political action. Fox (1996, p. 1091) argues that alongside passive resistance and compliance, authoritarian contexts can also provoke the intensification of assertive resistance: 'repression cuts both ways, simultaneously facilitating collective action by sharpening the "us" vs. "them" distinction, while increasing the price to be paid for it.' This would seem particularly likely where 'exit' strategies (Hirschman 1970) are not readily open to the actors concerned. Thus, in varying ways, actors' multiple subjectivities combined with structural power relations affect the choices they make over whether and how to engage politically, and, in turn, shape the construction of transnational civil society networks.

Civil society in Mali

Mali was one of the thirteen African countries that made the transition to democracy during the early 1990s. Popular revolt began in 1990, led by civil society groups (including the Association of Students and Pupils of Mali, the Mali Bar Association of lawyers, and the single national trade union) (Nzouankeu 1993). Internal strife deepened until March 1991, when army colonel, Amadou Toumani Touré, overthrew the incumbent president, Moussa Traoré, in a coup d'état. Touré handed over power to a mixed military and civilian committee to oversee the transition to democracy; for this, he was lauded internationally as a 'soldier of democracy'. In 1992, Alpha Oumar Konaré, an academic and promoter of free media, arts and culture,²⁰ was elected president. During his two terms in office, President Konaré sought to develop deliberative democracy²¹ in Mali, based on promotion of dialogue and freedom of speech (Wing 2008).²² His attempts were plagued, however, by the effects of economic crisis, structural adjustment and internal corruption. Amadou Toumani Touré returned to power as a civilian in democratic elections in 2002. His regime, driven by 'consensus politics', was ended abruptly – just weeks before elections at which he was due to step down – by the military coup d'état of March 2012. President Touré's version of consensus-making overlooked the significance of the means through which consensus is achieved and legitimated, and it extended to his management of civil society: 'Independent of political affiliation, ATT [President Touré] successfully silenced civil society with the merest hint of the prospect of a lucrative government post' (Wing 2008, p. 103). Fieldwork research for this thesis was conducted in Mali under Touré's presidency, when the slow rot of Mali's civil society was underway.

Whether through clientalism or liberal-democratic methods, Malian civil society is very effective at collaborating in governance and, to a lesser extent, at

²⁰ Konaré had briefly occupied a government post under Moussa Traoré, as Minister of Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture from which he resigned in 1980. In 1983 he founded a culture and media cooperative, Jamana. Its quarterly cultural review was Mali's first independent journal of the post-colonial era. The co-operative began publishing an independent newspaper, *Les Echos*, in 1989. See www.jamana.org.

²¹ For more on the concept of deliberative democracy, see Cohen (1989).

²² Examples include the *Espace d'Interpellation Democratique* (EID), created in 1994 as an annual event for citizens to publicly question their government representatives with the oversight of a jury (Wing 2008, pp. 125–126).

advocacy (Togola and Gerber 2007).²³ In their evaluation of Malian civil society's role in governance, however, Togola and Gerber (2007) argue that 'The weakest area for civil society has been in the role of a *watchdog* over government' (p. 9, original emphasis). In Mali, the lack of independence of civil society can be accounted for by a combination of factors, including both cultural norms, such as the role of religion in society, and the agency of state actors who have mobilised cultural ideas and symbols, such as 'consensus', for political gain.

In Mali, the principles of collectivism and paternalism – on which kin relations are based – inspire horizontal and vertical forms of solidarity in social and political life. The population of Mali's cotton zone belong mostly to the Mandé group of ethnically and linguistically linked peoples, which stretches across West Africa. Around Sikasso and Koutiala, there are large Minyanka populations: a northern-Senufo language family, which has relatives in northern Côte d'Ivoire, and there are also Fula minorities throughout the cotton zone. Individualist tensions within the patriarchal gerontocratic (*fasiya*) kin system would seem to be represented in the Mandé culture hero – an ambitious person who rises to power outside of the *fasiya*-based authority structure by garnering popular support through patron–client relations (Johnson 1999, p. 17) – and are supposedly diffused through the horizontal associations of age-sets, which unite to form a village-wide *tòn*, and, in particular, of hunter-gatherer societies (*donso-tòn*), which are based internally on the principle of equality. In contrast to other African contexts, where they are conceived as intra-ethnic,²⁴ patron–client relations in Mali often bridge ethnic divides.²⁵ Thus, they do not necessarily lead to 'political tribalism' (contra. Lonsdale 1994). They do, nonetheless, blur the boundaries between state and society, and seriously undermine the independence of civil society. Historical attempts to scale up horizontal

²³ Mali has a large number of non-governmental organisations of local, national and international varieties. The *Conseil de Concertation et d'Appui* (CCA-ONG) co-ordinates national and international NGOs since the droughts of 1983–1984. The CCA-ONG comes together with the national collective of women's groups and with several regional coordinating committees of local NGOs under the more recently established *Fédération des Collectifs d'ONG* (FECONG).

²⁴ Note, for example, Orvis' assertion that 'clientalist ties across ethnic boundaries are rare' (2001, p. 28).

²⁵ Egalitarian Bamana ideology discourages the development of patron–client relationships (including wage employment) among freeborn Bamana, whereas such relationships are regarded as appropriate between Bamana and their pastoralist FulBe neighbours (Toulmin 1992, Appendix, pp. 282–283).

solidarity, on the other hand, have been accompanied by authoritarianism and tyranny.²⁶

It is only since the spread of capitalism, beginning in the late colonial era, that individualism has begun to pose a serious challenge to the principle of the supremacy of the corporate group. Capitalism's uneven penetration of the Malian economy leaves in its wake a mixture of social logics, creating tensions based on incompatible forms of social capital. The introduction of village associations (chapter three) and producer co-operatives (chapter seven) are prime examples of this phenomenon. Whereas these and other Western forms of civil society are theoretically based on the principle of individual liberty, in Mali they, and the state–society relations through which they have been introduced, are infused with patron–client relations. Alexis Roy (2010a) underlines the prevalence of clientelism in his analysis of farmer representation in Mali.

Clientelism and corruption, which more often than not characterise the exercise of power in Africa, are modes of political regulation that transcend the categories and lead to the conclusion that whoever is holding the reins of power – the state via its officials, peasants via their representatives, or even traders and the market – uses pretty much the same mechanisms. (Roy 2010a, pp. 311–312)

Roy's analysis is characteristic of the 'Western exceptionalism' approach (Lewis 2002) to civil society in Africa. It highlights a significant empirical phenomenon in contemporary civil society in Mali, but it misses less obvious phenomena and it obscures more subtle analysis that might explain how and why clientelism has become so pervasive.

Prospects for democratic governance in Mali have suffered from selective interpretations of the principle of government by consensus. According to social norms in Mali, open conflict is deplored, but that does not mean that debate is closed; rather, peaceful negotiation and conflict resolution are prized. Processes of

²⁶ For example, a veritable revolution occurred c.1712 when the *tòn* in Segou rebelled against the elders. It stopped providing agricultural labour and extracted a surplus from the population by force, leading to the rise of the Bamana *Fanga* (empire) of Segou (Djata 1997; Roberts 1987). Two centuries later, the postcolonial socialist regime of Modibo Keita (1960–1968) attempted to base its rural development policy on the same egalitarian institution of the *tòn*. Young men were encouraged to liberate themselves from the authority of the elders through the '*Mali tòn*' (Jonckers 1994, p. 124), as the grassroots base of the single party state.

negotiation between equals and unanimous acceptance of executive decisions are all facilitated by appeal to the Mandé virtue of *sabali* (moderation), which encourages a person to give up his position for the sake of accommodation (Traoré 2004, p. 102). The chief's word is final, however, not because his individual opinion carries more weight but because it is his responsibility to take account of all the opinions that are expressed and he is trusted to represent as best he can the overall interests of the corporate group.

In the Mandé belief system, independent oversight over government is provided by the spiritual realm. Not only has Mali adopted the French republican tradition of *laïcité*, but pre-Islamic Mandé religion is traditionally separated from political affairs (Dieterlen et al. 1992, pp. 67–70).²⁷ The separation of powers is currently being challenged by Islamist movements,²⁸ but the notion that the primordial spirit world is an important source of legitimacy for political authority has deep roots in Malian society.²⁹ Connections between the two realms are facilitated by *nyamakalaw*, notably the *jeliw* (griots, bards), who are entrusted with the duty to speak truth to power, and by *donsow* (hunter-gatherers), whose responsibilities include inter-village diplomacy (Jansen 2008). Because the former groups depend for their livelihoods on cliental relationships to their patrons, *donsoya* is the more influential institution for political legitimacy or sanction.³⁰ Despite a cursory attempt by President Konaré to bring it into the national political domain in Mali (Traoré 2004), Mandé religion has been discredited as backward and un-Islamic, while it has not been effectively replaced in its function of independent oversight over governance.

²⁷ In present day Mandé villages, the chiefly function of ritual 'earth-master' (*dugu-kolo-tigi*) is distinct from that of village political chief (*dugu-tigi*) (Johnson 1999, p. 12; Tag 1994, p. 77). The separation of powers rests on a distinction between nature (the realm of untamed spirits) and culture (the domain of order and authority) (Jansen 2008).

²⁸ Not only by jihadist groups in the North of Mali, but also by some Muslim groups in Bamako, as became evident during the 2009 controversy over the family law code (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8223966.stm>; www.wluml.org/node/7103; www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=85676 consulted on 15/08/11).

²⁹ See Johnson (1999) for more on the Mandé belief system.

³⁰ Note, for example, the use of *donso* symbolism by the leader of the 2012 coup d'état (<http://bamakobruce.wordpress.com/2012/03/24/amadou-sanogo-power-is-his-middle-name/> consulted on 24/03/12). Furthermore, a contemporary genre of Mandé music, called Wassoulou, uses the instruments and styles of the *donso* priest-bard. Wassoulou performers, calling themselves *konow* (birds), claim 'a "bird's eye" view of society, allowing them to comment on social issues in "freer" musical and textual ways than those of the *jeliw*' (Dúran 1995, p. 105).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that transnational civil society action must be considered in relation to the multi-level contexts through which it flows, and, in particular, in relation to the local arenas through which it claims to derive much of its legitimacy. Actors in transnational networks are not rootless global citizens, but have multiple subjectivities shaped by the political, economic, social, cultural and historical contexts in which they are embedded. This is not to suggest that actors are not in some ways transformed through their cross-border interactions, as Keck and Sikkink (1998) suggest they are, but that they come to these interactions with a certain level of ‘baggage’, and that overt or covert forms of contestation between actors often ensue, and sometimes they simply talk at cross-purposes.

Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos (2004) argue that there has been insufficient attention paid in the literature to how power operates and how values are negotiated and contested within transnational development networks – a gap that this thesis helps to fill – but the ‘instrument effects’ of transnational campaigns and advocacy networks have received even less attention. Non-normative approaches to analysing transnational interventions are useful for explaining how these processes take place in practice, but they underestimate the significance of overall patterns of unequal power. These power inequalities are particularly relevant to issues of legitimacy, conceived as a social construct (Lister 2003), and of accountability, conceived as political responsibility to the most vulnerable stakeholders in the campaign or intervention (Jordan and van Tuijl 2000).

The ways in which actors and beneficiaries participate or do not participate in transnational civil society action are conditioned by their multiple subjectivities, which are in turn connected to the particular civil society traditions with which they are linked. Civil society in Africa has developed – and been undermined – through the dynamic interaction of state, society and market forces, both endogenous and exogenous. In contemporary Mali, this interaction has produced a civil society that tends towards collaboration in governance and is weakest in its role as an independent watchdog over the state and capital (Togola and Gerber 2007). This

model is not uniform, however; Fox (1996) reminds us that repression provokes militancy among some actors, while hidden forms of resistance should not be mistaken for acquiescence (Scott 1990) – nor is it predetermined: genuine consensus based on dialogue remains a cultural norm. The challenge mounted in this thesis is to identify and analyse the dynamic interaction between actors in Mali and in transnational civil society.

Chapter three

Malian farmers and cotton in the world economy: history and context

Introduction

Cotton, perhaps more than any other commodity, shows up the imbalances of global economics and politics: rich countries press for liberalisation of African cotton sectors while practising protectionism with regards to their own.

Liberalisation and privatisation of African cotton sectors have been pushed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund through structural adjustment policies and through the initiative for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC); an initiative that was, ironically, the response of these institutions to the transnational anti-debt campaign. Joseph E. Stiglitz (2008) blames the biases of the international financial institutions on a lack of democracy in global governance. Public opposition to liberal reform of Mali's cotton sector is the subject of chapter five; while US and EU cotton subsidies became the target of a transnational campaign, which is examined in chapter six. This chapter sketches the national and international economic, political and historical contexts in which these civil society responses are situated. In so doing, this chapter outlines the structure of the global cotton value chain in which Malian producers participate, and which is the setting for the international NGO advocacy and 'capacity building' interventions examined in chapter seven. As argued in chapter two, understanding these contexts is essential to understanding the perspectives of actors and stakeholders in the transnational civil society networks examined in this thesis.

Raymond C. Miller (2008) cites the US cotton subsidy regime as a prime example of contemporary neo-mercantilism, demonstrating that the global market is not a free market. Questions that arise in the literature in connection to this issue include whether the elimination of subsidies would really increase the revenues of

cotton-producing African countries, given that there are other factors affecting the world cotton market, and whether any revenue increases would trickle down to the producers themselves. Koray Caliskan's (2010) multi-sited ethnography of the global cotton trade demonstrates how actual cotton prices are realised through unequal power relations between market actors, and how farmers in Turkey and Egypt are excluded from this process. Another important question is whether the issue of cotton subsidies can be dealt with effectively through the World Trade Organization (WTO) process. Pascal Lamy, speaking in his capacity as Director-General of the WTO in 2008, commented that 'cotton has become a litmus test of the commitment to make the WTO Doha Round of global trade negotiations a truly development round'.³¹

The absence of a 'level playing field' is one reason to question the wisdom of the policy of liberalising and privatising African cotton sectors, but it is not the only reason. Some of the challenges to successful implementation of liberal reform appear to be integral to the nature of cotton as a commodity, especially in the context of resource-poor farmers. In his study of the impacts of privatisation on cotton sectors in sub-Saharan Africa, Michel Fok (2001) argues that we should take a look back at the history of cotton in Africa to see why the free market does not seem to work well in the case of African cotton sectors. He asserts that government regulation arose as a response to the failure of free trade (Fok 2001, p. 21).

In fact, in the territory that is now Mali, a free market in cotton did function very successfully prior to government regulation. But it was not oriented towards the export of raw cotton; rather, it consisted in local and regional trade of surplus hand-ginned and hand-spun cotton, which fed a vibrant handicraft textile industry (Roberts 1996; Bassett 2001). For much of the colonial era, Malian peasants resisted pressure to expand cotton production, seeming to realise, as did Allen Isaacman et al.'s (1980) informants in Mozambique, that 'cotton is the mother of poverty', because it earned little while holding back production of food crops (Isaacman et al. 1980, p. 594). Colonial government involvement in the West African cotton trade aimed at increasing the volume of cotton produced, but also at re-orienting cotton production

³¹ Speech at the UNCTAD High Level Multi Stakeholder Meeting on Cotton in Geneva on 2 December 2008. www.wto.org/english/news_e/sppl_e/sppl110_e.htm consulted on 11/05/11.

and trade towards the export market. Acknowledging the legacy of the historic shift in the structure of long-distance trade from overland to sea routes, especially for land-locked African countries like Mali, Thomas Lines (2008) advocates an end to the policy of export orientation for the world's least developed countries, together with a re-orientation towards domestic and regional markets and support for domestic food production.³²

R. James Bingen (1998, p. 275) argues that given the intensity of intervention and strict discipline needed to produce it on industrial levels in West Africa, cotton 'fosters the development of a consciousness among peasants roughly comparable to that more commonly found among factory workers'. However, the integration of the peasantry in the cotton economy has not been uniform. In cultivating 'loyalty' strategies among producers (cf. Hirschman 1970), the State and the cotton company have carried over a colonial attitude of paternalism towards farmers, which has evolved into patron–client relations in the case of producers who have challenged the authorities – or repression in the case of the few who have refused to be co-opted. A cotton-farming elite has emerged, which identifies more closely with the interests of the cotton company than with the majority of smallholders, and which has mirrored the corrupt practices of the company (Roy 2010a).

The main argument of this chapter is that the crux of the problem for African cotton in the world economy lies in the export orientation of agricultural production and in the power-based nature of the world trade system. Malian farmers have become entrenched as producers at the bottom of the global cotton value chain through a combination of colonial and post-colonial government intervention, tensions within the lineage-based system of subsistence farming, and the tying of state-led rural development, including support for subsistence crops, to the cotton system. The socio-economic and political differentiation of the peasantry that has accompanied this process are elements of the explanation for the heterogeneity of farmers' perspectives on, and participation in, contentious political action around liberal reform of the Malian cotton sector and rich country cotton subsidies.

³² Similarly, Toulmin and Guèye (2003, p. 59) question export orientation, and recommend adding value through processing and re-orienting trade towards regional markets.

The first section of this chapter details the development of cotton commodity production in Mali. The second section traces the recent history of cotton in Mali, from agronomic success to the emergence of a peasant movement and the decline of the cotton parastatal. The third section outlines the background to liberal reform of cotton sectors in African countries, including Mali, and highlights the main challenges that have emerged since. The final section looks at the controversy over cotton subsidies that became a major focus of the Doha Round of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations.

The development of export-oriented cotton production in Mali

The global cotton value chain developed in tandem with European colonisation, which to some extent is reflected in the structure of trade today. The world market in cotton lint³³ expanded rapidly in the late eighteenth century, following the mechanisation of textile production in Europe (Roberts 1996, pp. 45–51). The vast majority of cotton supplies to Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century came from the southern states of America, where it was grown on slave plantations. In 1860, America accounted for ninety-three percent of France's cotton supply. The American Civil War, from 1861 to 1865, cut off supplies of raw cotton to Europe, where the impact began to be felt in 1862. Cotton imports from America gradually resumed after the War,³⁴ but the experience of disrupted supplies led to the development of a futures market in cotton, and to the establishment of cotton

³³ Cotton is a plant of the *Gossipium* genus. When it reaches maturity, it produces capsules of seeds surrounded by fibres. The capsule is called a 'boll'. *G. hirsutum*, commonly called Upland cotton, is by far the most widely cultivated variety of cotton in the world today. The most highly valued cottons, including Egyptian, Sea Island and Pima cottons, are of the *G. barbadense* variety, which grows well only in optimal climatic conditions. When raw cotton is picked, it contains seeds and bits of debris (dry leaves, etc). It is called, 'seed cotton'. The cotton is then ginned, a process that removes the seeds and debris from the cotton fibre, called lint. The seeds that are removed may be used to sow another crop, to conduct research and development of cotton varieties, to produce fodder for livestock, or to make cottonseed oil for use in the manufacture of various products including vegetable oil, soap and photographic film (source: www.cotton.org/pubs/cottoncounts/fieldtofabric/cottonseed.cfm consulted on 09/03/11). Cotton lint is spun into yarn, which is then woven to make textiles. It also has medical and cosmetic uses in the form of 'cotton wool'. Only ginned cotton lint, not seed cotton, is traded on world markets; this gives ginning a pivotal role in the cotton commodity chain (Larsen 2002, p. 191).

³⁴ Slavery was abolished and small farms largely replaced plantations.

exchanges in Liverpool and New York (May and Lege 1999, p. 91).³⁵ It also prompted European powers to seek to develop their colonies as alternative sources of raw cotton.

On seeing cotton grown throughout the Savannah region, the colonial rulers of French West Africa initially thought that it would be relatively simple to supply the metropolitan textile industry with cotton from these territories (Roberts 1996). In the nineteenth century, the French first elaborated and attempted to implement their cotton development policy (*la politique cotonnière*) in Senegal, without success. The policy was revived in 1897 with the new colony of French Soudan³⁶ (Mali) as its focus, but based on the same (misguided) assumptions that peasants would readily expand production and that the export trade would offer an attractive market for West African cotton.

Historically, cotton was grown in West Africa mainly by peasants as part of subsistence farming, in which lineage was a significant factor in structuring the organisation of labour, control over the means of production, and the distribution of produce.³⁷ Before the development of peasant cash crop agriculture, households produced cotton primarily to make their own clothing and blankets through the reciprocal labour of men and women. Cotton was grown interspersed with food crops.³⁸ Women did the laborious tasks of ginning and spinning cotton by hand, then men wove it into long, narrow bands of cloth that they sewed into a *pagne* (wrap skirt), *boubou* (robe) or blanket (Roberts 1996, pp. 55–56). Hand-woven cotton was

³⁵ Centres of cotton trade grew up in Liverpool, Le Havre, Bremen and Winterthur; locations which are among the hubs of global cotton trade today (Ruh 2005).

³⁶ The territory of contemporary Mali was part of the following French colonial administrative units: French Soudan territory 1890–1902; Senegambia and Niger 1902–1904; Upper Senegal and Niger 1904–1920; French Soudan 1920–1958. Borders varied but not so as to affect the argument presented here. For simplicity, the term, French Soudan, is used to refer to the territory during the entire period of French colonisation.

³⁷ One might be tempted to refer here to the Structural Marxist notion of a lineage mode of production, but that would risk adding greater confusion than clarity, given the fierce debate over the interpretation of the concept (see Resch 1992 for a review of the works of E. Terray, P. Rey and C. Meillassoux on the topic) and its applicability to specific historical contexts (Geschiere 1985), as well as putting undue emphasis on structure over agency (Clarence-Smith 1985). On the other hand, Chaveau and Richards (2008) have incorporated apparently competing models of the lineage mode of production into their analysis of conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. Their work suggests possible avenues for future research on cotton farming in Mali, which would require a level of ethnographic depth that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

³⁸ Millet and sorghum in French Soudan (Mali) (Roberts 1996, p. 55); yams in northern Côte d'Ivoire (Bassett 2001, p. 58).

important in wedding and funeral rites.³⁹ Domestic textile production did not incur much of an opportunity cost as it was a dry season activity, when very little agricultural work was possible (ibid., pp. 197–198). Roberts (1996, p. 197) hypothesises that peasants sold ‘normal surpluses’ of cotton but did not deliberately grow more than they needed to meet their domestic requirements. The sale of small quantities of surplus cotton was one way in which peasants participated in local and regional circuits of trade.⁴⁰

Commercial production and processing of cotton operated within West Africa alongside this subsistence-oriented system. Cotton cloth was exported from the Empire of Wagadu⁴¹ to Christendom as early as the twelfth century (Kea 2004, pp. 768–769). In the nineteenth century, the Maraka in the Middle Niger Valley and the Jula in northern Côte d’Ivoire expanded regional trade in hand-woven cotton textiles through the use of slaves and plantation systems (Roberts 1996, pp. 57–58; Bassett 2001, pp. 30–31). They used slaves to grow cotton; they allocated entire fields to cotton alone; they bought some cotton from peasants; they used slaves to spin, weave and dye cotton; and they sold textiles throughout the region.

Slave plantations were limited to the Maraka and Jula, who specialised in trade, but slavery was widespread in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and operated alongside the family-based system of farming. Customarily, slaves were entitled to some free time and to small plots of land (*jòn-forow*; slave-field), which they could use to supplement their subsistence or to accumulate their own wealth.⁴²

³⁹ Bassett (2001, pp. 57–58) notes that in northern Côte d’Ivoire in the early colonial period, only handcrafted cloth was used for burial shrouds and other ritual purposes. According to Toulmin (1992, p. 238), in the village of Kala, north of Segou, in the contemporary era, wedding costs included *kòdri-songo*, literally, ‘the price of cotton’, to the value of one or two sacks of raw cotton, which is paid by the fiancé’s family to the fiancée’s family. The cotton is spun by the women of the fiancée’s family, then woven by the men of the fiancé’s family into blankets and *pagnes* for the bride. In contemporary Mali, *pagnes* are given as gifts to the bride at her wedding: most consist of manufactured cloth, much of which is imported, but they traditionally include at least one article of hand-woven cotton offered by the fiancé’s family (fieldnotes, Bamako, February 2008).

⁴⁰ For example, in northern Côte d’Ivoire in the mid nineteenth century, Senufo farmers exchanged their surplus cotton with Jula traders for salt and kola nuts (Bassett 2001, p. 29).

⁴¹ Also known as the Empire of Ghana, covering much of western, central and north-western present-day Mali.

⁴² According to Diarra (2010, p. 22), the *Kurukan Fuga* asserted that one is master of the slave but not of the slave’s property. Slaves had the right to work their own fields on two days out of seven (Roberts 1987, p. 187). Domestic slaves in northern Côte d’Ivoire were given food, housing, clothing, and spouses by their masters (Bassett 2001, pp. 96–97). They were entitled to cultivate individual fields and to engage in trade, but had to give up to one-fifth of their income to their masters. Slaves in

At the beginning of the twentieth century, plantation slaves complained that their masters were failing to guarantee their customary rights. In 1905, slaves of the Maraka plantations of Banamba ‘started a massive and spontaneous exodus of slaves that spread throughout the Western Sudan in ever-widening circles over the next ten years.’ (Roberts 1987, p. 184).⁴³ Bassett (2001, pp. 96–97) notes, however, that domestic slaves were not liberated at this time.

The expansion of the institution of slavery and the slave exodus ushered in a number of social and economic changes. There was an erosion of the gendered division of labour. On plantations, slave women were put to work on fields alongside men, sparking intense protest in 1895.⁴⁴ Yet, when slaves left their masters en masse a decade later, men and women worked side-by-side in their own fields to ensure their survival (Roberts 1987, p. 198). A small free-labour market developed. Many of those who had worked as spinners and weavers for their masters used their skills to earn an independent income (Roberts 1987; 1996). Agricultural wage labour emerged as some former plantation owners hired peasant work parties to cultivate their land (Roberts 1987, p. 203). The organisation of production was further altered through the allocation of plots of land to individuals and sub-groups within the household. In many areas, these plots are called *jònforo* (slave field) or *jònkani* (slave’s share), indicating that the practice emerged out of slavery.⁴⁵ This was a gradual change, however; both domestic slavery and lineage-based subsistence farming persisted for most of the colonial period.

From 1897, French colonial authorities and the *Association Cotonnière Coloniale* (ACC), representing French textile industrialists, intervened in the French

the Maraka plantation system were fed by their masters on days when they worked for them, but on other days they had to fend for themselves. They cultivated their own plots to meet their additional subsistence needs, but they were also allowed to accumulate their own wealth from them (Roberts 1987, pp. 123–125).

⁴³ French colonists initially resisted the application of the French law of 1848 on the abolition of slavery, fearing it would cripple the regional economy, but a 1903 reorganisation of the judiciary in French West Africa effectively abolished the legal underpinnings of slavery (Roberts 1987, pp. 174–207).

⁴⁴ In Banamba in 1895, a group of slaves armed with hoes threatened their master in protest at his attempts to force a woman to work in the fields (Roberts 1987, p. 189).

⁴⁵ In the Bamana village of Soro, south-east of Bamako, fields cultivated by individuals or sub-groups within the household are called, *jònforo*, (Becker 1990, p. 317). Among Bamana-Minyanka (northern Senufo) communities in the Koutiala area, plots allocated to the dependants, juniors and women, are called *jonkani* ‘the slave’s share’ (Jonckers 1994, p. 123). In northern Côte d’Ivoire, the terms, *jònforo*, *jònkani* and *jòngarri* designate a private or individual field (Bassett 2001, p. xviii).

Soudan to develop cotton production to a level and a standard that would meet the demands of the textile industry and arouse the interests of French commerce.⁴⁶ The fibres of indigenous varieties of cotton were too short for machines calibrated to the medium staple American strains that constituted the mainstay of the industry's supply; while those New World varieties produced low yields in the Soudanese climate and were attacked by pests. Low prices offered in Le Havre for Soudanese cotton were compounded by the high costs of transporting the bulky commodity from the West African interior. Administrators and the ACC distributed imported seeds, built ginneries, and set up agronomic experimentation stations and farm schools to develop hybrid cotton varieties and to promote intensive farming methods. They also established cotton fairs to tighten control over quality by grading and weighing cotton.

Under pressure from French commercial houses, the colonial authorities largely adhered to free market policies (Roberts 1996). Briefly in the 1920s, officials set minimum buying prices for seed cotton,⁴⁷ but this intervention continued only in the case of the specially-developed Allen variety of cotton, which they sought to promote. By 1928, cotton sales outside of official markets were prohibited, but peasants continued to sell their surpluses to local traders that supplied the domestic handicraft textile industry.

For peasants, the local market consistently offered higher prices than the export market and allowed them to add value by hand ginning, spinning and even weaving some of their cotton before selling it, while itinerant traders saved peasants the time and energy of carrying their harvests to central markets (Roberts 1996). The local market, which expanded further after ex-slaves set up as independent spinners and weavers, was far from saturated. Meanwhile, peasants remained unmotivated to increase their production of cotton: peasant households were generally self-sufficient, social norms prioritised collective subsistence over individual accumulation, and resources were controlled by household heads, so imported manufactured goods, which were expensive, did little to motivate peasants to increase their disposable income (*ibid.*). Furthermore, processing cotton by hand

⁴⁶ This section draws on Roberts (1996).

⁴⁷ 'Seed cotton' is the name given to cotton when it is picked, before it is ginned to remove the seeds.

added value to harvests during the under-productive dry season, but production of cotton competed with that of subsistence food crops for scarce labour during the short rainy season (June, July and August) (Roberts 1996, pp. 208–210).

In 1924, the new governor of the Soudan, Jules Carde, introduced compulsory collective cotton fields that became known as the *champ du commandant* (the commander's field) (Roberts 1996, pp. 172–177).⁴⁸ He employed a discourse of paternalism to justify forcing peasants to expand cotton production,⁴⁹ and envisaged that each village would have a cotton field which would model 'scientific' farming techniques, and on which all villagers would be required to work, with the profits shared equally among them. However, abuses were rife. French-appointed canton chiefs who were involved in organising collective fields were accused of pocketing all of the proceeds (ibid.). The policy of collective fields met with strong resistance in Bamana communities, where it was antithetical to the principle of the autonomy of household heads.⁵⁰ It was soon replaced, first by compulsory household cotton fields, and later by a system in which each household grew cotton on a contiguous plot on a large field area, to facilitate the work of a master-plougher.⁵¹

Alongside rain-fed peasant production, French Soudan witnessed experiments with irrigated cotton during the colonial era. In the 1920s, two European concessionary companies operated irrigated cotton plantations, one in Segou district, the other near Timbuktu, in the North (Roberts 1996; van Beusekom 2002). As the free labour market was small, the companies relied on the administration to conscript labourers for them. This fell as a heavy burden on rural households, especially during the rainy season, and workers were poorly treated. In the 1930s, amid the Great Depression, one of the companies collapsed financially and an alternative method of labour recruitment – 'indigenous colonisation' – was developed. This approach was

⁴⁸ In the Middle Niger Valley, this collective field was called *faama foro*, a reference to the fields of the rulers of the Bamana Empire of Segou, which were worked by their slaves.

⁴⁹ Carde was averse to brutal methods of forced labour prevalent in Côte d'Ivoire and Upper Volta (Roberts 1996, p. 148). Large scale out-migrations affected those colonies (Asiwaju 1976, p. 590).

⁵⁰ Collective cotton fields were more readily imposed on the Senoufo of northern Côte d'Ivoire, among whom agricultural production was organised at the level of village residential quarters, inhabited by members of the same lineage (Bassett 2001, pp. 82, 98).

⁵¹ This new form of compulsory cotton production nonetheless motivated out-migrations from the districts of Bamako and Bougouni in 1937 (Roberts 1996, p. 260).

used for a large scale irrigation project, the Office du Niger, which opened in central Soudan in 1932 (Roberts 1996; van Beusekom 2002).

The Office du Niger was designed to yield cotton for export and rice for consumption in French West Africa (van Beusekom 2002). Yet, even Soudanese peasants who suffered disastrous harvests and increased taxes in the 1930s resisted resettlement on the irrigated lands, preferring to sell their assets and, as a last resort, migrate for seasonal work on plantations in neighbouring colonies.⁵² Many Office du Niger settlers were forcibly recruited and, once there, they were subjected to strict rules and close supervision, and were obliged to pay fees for the irrigation service. In 1944, one thousand settlers in the Niono area threatened to leave the project en masse and return to their villages of origin (van Beusekom 2002, p. 159). In the same year, there was a shift in policy away from cotton and towards rice production at the Office, coinciding with farmers' preferences.

A major shift occurred at the end of World War II when, indebted to Africans who had fought with them, the Free French abolished forced labour (Roberts 1996; van Beusekom 2002). In the context of improvements in working conditions and deeper integration into the colonial economy, Soudanese peasants finally became interested in wage labour and commodity production. In 1947, discontented farmers at Nienebale did not threaten to leave, but instead exerted collective pressure on the Office du Niger to change policies and practices (van Beusekom 2002, pp. 160–161). These settlers cited the new social reforms in protest at the obligation to sell their produce to the Office, usually for less than the local market price. Meanwhile, increasing numbers of young men and descendants of domestic slaves migrated for employment on coffee and cocoa plantations (Bassett 2001, pp. 97–98). Young men left secretly without permission from elders, but were not reprimanded when they returned after six months or a year, having earned enough to buy a bicycle. Some colonial administrators sought to direct this capitalist spirit towards peasant cash crop production.

From 1944, cotton policy was oriented towards rain-fed peasant production in Southern Mali (Roberts 1996; van Beusekom 2002). The *Compagnie Française pour*

⁵² For example, Toulmin (1992, pp. 25–26) recounts that villagers in Kala, not far from the Office lands, in the 1930s sold their livestock and gold, and as a last resort men undertook a month-long walk to the groundnut areas of Senegal to earn cash to pay taxes.

le Développement des Fibres Textiles (CFDT), a joint venture between the French State and private textile interests, began intervening in West Africa in 1952.⁵³ Post-war structural funding for colonial development was used to accelerate cotton research and development, and led to the creation of the CFDT system (Bassett 2001, pp. 90–91; Roberts 1996, p. 280). The CFDT system is a ‘vertically integrated system’, involving all stages from research through production and processing to marketing of cotton lint. In the 1950s, the CFDT penetrated peasant agriculture more deeply than ever before through African extension agents and propaganda-style promotion of ‘scientific’ agricultural techniques, including the use of pesticides, a development which encouraged mono-cropping (Bassett 2001, pp. 92–94).

After Independence in 1960, Mali’s first president, Modibo Keita, injected renewed vigour into the policy of export-oriented cotton production, as part of a socialist model of economic development. Rather than risk losing the CFDT’s investment capital and its technical expertise, independent West African governments granted the CFDT a monopsony on buying peasant cotton, ‘Under the paternalistic guise of protecting the cotton growers from the unscrupulous Jula [traders] and at the same time preserving seed quality in the name of “development”’ (Bassett 2001, p. 176, referring to Côte d’Ivoire). Thus, the circle was closed: farmers who grew cotton were locked into the CFDT system, which provided seeds, fertiliser and other inputs, then bought the harvested seed cotton and ginned it, thereby controlling the circulation of new seed.

CFDT extension agents in the 1960s persuaded West African peasants to grow cotton using methods similar to those employed by colonial administrators, in particular, targeting young men whom they recruited to plant cotton in individual demonstration plots, paying them directly for their harvests with a wad of cash (Bassett 2001, pp. 108–111). The proliferation of fields controlled by individuals or sub-groups within the household is associated with cash cropping and, as mentioned above, the precedent for this was set during the era of domestic slavery.⁵⁴ Some

⁵³ The company was established in 1949 under the name, CTUF, *la Compagnie des Textiles de l’Union Française*, changing its name to CFDT in 1950.

⁵⁴ In Jonckers’ (1994) study of peasant communities near Koutiala, *jònkani* plots were cultivated on two days per week and were devoted to cash crops; their use for the growing of subsistence cereals was not permitted. Similarly, Toulmin (1992, p. 32) notes, ‘During the groundnut boom of the 1950s and 1960s, these subgroups of men [brothers of the same mother in a polygynous marriage] also

peasants started to grow cotton voluntarily when the price rose compared to that of other crops. The CFDT system transformed peasant farming in Southern Mali, through intensive intervention. One elderly interviewee, Bah Kissiman Traoré, recalled his personal experience of this process in a positive light.

I was one of the first to cultivate cotton. ... That was at the time of the CFDT. ... Trainers came to train us, to teach us how to grow this crop. At that time, there were no associations. So it was the Europeans themselves who came to the place where we sold the cotton. ... Our grandparents grew cotton but not in the same way. It was not the same cotton that we have today. There was a difference between the qualities. They made that [*pointing to an article of thick, hand-woven cotton cloth that he is wearing*]. ... In the past, we didn't sow cotton, we threw the seeds on the ground and that was all. ... They taught us how to transplant seedlings... Now we have good yields. ... At that time, when you did work according to the instructions of the trainers sent by the CFDT, they appreciated it. ... I have received medals. Because I am a big producer. The Government often gives me a prize. I am a pilot farmer. Each year, I produce ten tonnes. There were years when I produced thirty tonnes; frequently twenty-five tonnes.⁵⁵

Malian cotton: from agrarian revolution to peasant revolt⁵⁶

Bassett (2001) classifies the period from 1965 to 1984 in West Africa as a 'peasant cotton revolution'. World cotton prices were generally high and yields increased through intensification. The *Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles* (CMDT) was created in 1974, with the Government owning sixty

became involved in farming separate fields of their own with this crop, investing the profits in cattle.' Wider rural development policy under Modibo Keita encouraged young men to liberate themselves from the authority of the elders through the 'Mali ton' (Jonckers 1994, p. 124).

⁵⁵ Interview with B K Traoré, cotton farmer, Wolodo, near Fana, 18/02/08. Original (interpreter): Moi, j'étais un des premiers qui fait la culture du coton. ... C'était la CFDT à l'époque. ... Les formateurs venaient nous former, nous faire comprendre comment se faire cette culture. En ce moment-là, il n'y avait pas d'association. Donc c'est les européens mêmes qui venaient au lieu où on vend le coton. ... Nos grands-parents cultivaient le coton, mais ce n'était pas la même façon. Ce n'est pas le même coton que nous on a aujourd'hui. Il y avait une différence entre les qualités. Donc on faisait ça. [*pointing to an article of thick, hand-woven cotton cloth that he is wearing*]. ... Autrefois, au moment des nos grands-parents, ... on ne semait pas, ... on jetait des graines sur le sol ... à l'époque quand les élèves venaient quand tu faisais un travail convenable à ce que la CFDT envoie les gens comme formateurs, depuis à l'époque quand tu travailles très bien, eux ils apprécient. ... J'ai eu des médailles. Parce que je suis gros producteur. Le gouvernement a l'habitude de me donner un prix. Je suis paysan pilote. Chaque année, je fais dix tonnes. Il y avait des années j'ai fait trente tonnes, souvent vingt cinq tonnes.

⁵⁶ An early version of the analysis presented in this section was presented as part of a conference paper at the 3rd European Conference on African Studies, Leipzig, 4–7 June 2009.

percent, and the CFDT, forty percent of the capital. R. James Bingen (1998, p. 269) argues, ‘Rather than an expression of radical nationalism, this joint Malian–CFDT decision represented a mutually beneficial move.’ It allowed President Moussa Traoré, who replaced Modibo Keita in the coup d’état of 1968, to attract foreign public investment in rural development. In the 1970s and 1980s, the CFDT/CMDT promoted mechanisation of farming. It facilitated credit arrangements with the National Agricultural Development Bank (BNDA) to enable farmers to buy oxen and ploughs. The CMDT also created a department for motorised agriculture to help the largest farmers⁵⁷ to acquire tractors on credit (Girard et al. 2008, p. 3).

Peasants themselves did not see a great deal of the profits from the ‘agronomic miracle’ of West African cotton (Bassett 2001). In addition to the creation of the CMDT, the year 1974 also witnessed a protest, organised by a group of villagers aided by a CMDT extension agent, against corrupt practices on the part of CMDT staff in the grading and weighing of cotton (Bingen 1994). In response, the CMDT’s Area Manager for Fana, Michel Daou, proposed that producers be trained to undertake these tasks and sell their cotton to the CMDT themselves. This was the beginning of the system of *associations villageoises* (AV), whereby producers organised into local groups to perform a range of operational and accounting duties, and to liaise with the CMDT. The CMDT eventually provided functional literacy, numeracy and management training in the Bamanan language, widely spoken in the CMDT areas.

In an interview, Michel Daou recalled that his novel idea was derided by colleagues who felt it threatened their positions in the hierarchy.⁵⁸ Technical Director of the CMDT, French ex-patriot Jacques Moineau, backed his proposal, however, and ordered a pilot project then expansion of the scheme. The first villagers Daou attempted to recruit for the pilot project refused to participate for fear of reprisals, since to suggest that farmers might be able to do the work of the supervisory framework would be to turn the hierarchy upside-down.⁵⁹ Far from provoking an immediate revolution, the AV system may be viewed as a successful co-optation of

⁵⁷ Those growing more than twenty hectares of cotton.

⁵⁸ Interview with Michel Daou, Fana, 18/02/08.

⁵⁹ Interview with Michel Daou, Fana, 18/02/08. Original: C’est comme un chef- tu reprends sa place donc vous voyez comment ça va se passer; ça fait un bouleversement à peu près. Mais, bon, ils n’ont pas voulu.

the farmer uprising since it kept potentially dissident cotton farmers loyal to, and under the control of, the CMDT, while off-loading work previously undertaken at the expense of the CMDT onto unpaid villagers.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, producers benefitted from a guaranteed minimum price for their cotton and, through the AV, they received a collective bonus if a profit was made, increasing village-directed investment in local infrastructure, education and healthcare.

The AV system represented a new, contractual form of organisation, and hence a departure from the lineage-based system of farming. Whereas the *tòn* system redistributes labour between households at the production stage, the AV operates according to the principle of collective liability for net losses incurred by the group once the costs of input credit are deducted from the sale of cotton harvested. This is viewed as engendering ignoble debtor-creditor relations between theoretically equal and autonomous households within the group. Established modes of social relation have nonetheless remained influential in AV structures (Bingen 1998, p. 281), although in somewhat distorted form. In some cases, the village chief assumed the role of president of the AV, helped himself to the association's funds, and monopolised the services of the village *tòn* for his own cotton field (Jonckers 1994, pp. 128–129).

Bingen (1998, pp. 281–282) argues that the AV system has both 'eroded the peasant political ecology of interdependence' and fostered a sense of solidarity among some entrepreneurial cotton producers. From the mid 1970s, there emerged a cadre of literate young men – secretaries and treasurers of their AVs – whose elevated social positions depended on their professional relationships with the CMDT: 'the AVs have been Mali's hothouse for a new generation of rural leaders' (Bingen 1996, p. 25). Thus, the introduction of AVs has contributed to profound and complex changes in rural Malian communities, as Danielle Jonckers (1994) argues.

The logic of the AVs is paradoxical: The development agents work essentially with so-called pilot farmers, who act according to a market logic. They ask them, at the same time, to develop a sense of solidarity at the heart of the AV, despite the fact that these farmers are in a rupture of

⁶⁰ For similar analyses, see Roy (2010a, pp. 301–302) and Bingen (1994).

solidarity with their own kin community. (Jonckers 1994, p. 129, my translation)⁶¹

Selected by the CMDT for pilot projects and brought together for training, members of the AV elite developed both a sense of camaraderie among themselves and a sense of partnership with the CMDT (Bingen 2000, p. 357).⁶² The transfer of responsibilities from the CMDT to the AVs was frequently accompanied, however, by a ‘transfer of abuses’: AV officials engaged in corrupt practices in grading, weighing and financial management, which sparked protests by farmers in the early 1980s (Roy 2010a, p. 302).

More broadly, cotton cash cropping and the CMDT system have increased socio-economic differentiation among farmers in Southern Mali, which, Moseley (2005, p. 49) argues, has been accelerated the CMDT facilitating access to machinery on concessionary terms for entrepreneurial pilot farmers. Poorer farmers pay their richer neighbours for the services of a plough team, often by exchanging their own labour (Bassett 2001, p. 140). Poorer households whose fields are ploughed last, suffer lower yields (Toulmin and Guèye 2003, p. 42). Mechanisation has enabled richer farmers to expand the area of land under cultivation. Moseley (2005) found that in Siwaa, Sikasso, where land is limited, rich farmers used customary usufruct principles of land tenure to persuade their poorer neighbours to let them use their fallow fields when cotton prices rose, thus exacerbating soil degradation. The increase in cultivated area increases the labour needed at weeding and harvesting (Bassett 2001, p. 140). Jonckers (1994, p. 128) observes that the *tòn* has become a paid workforce that hires out its services to rich producers.

Cotton cash cropping has developed hand-in-hand with the proliferation of ‘individual’ fields, as noted above. To some extent, this has contributed to increased socio-economic differentiation, but choices of household set-up and their outcomes vary. Brothers of the same mother (in a polygynous marriage) often unite to form a sub-group within the household and cultivate a plot together. Growing cash crops on

⁶¹ Original: La logique des AV est paradoxale: les promoteurs de développement travaillent essentiellement avec les paysans dits pilotes, qui agissent selon une logique de marché. Ils leurs demandent, en même temps, de développer des sentiments de solidarité au sein de l’AV, alors que ces cultivateurs sont en rupture de solidarité avec leur propre communauté familiale.

⁶² This point was echoed by Michel Daou (interview, Fana, 18/02/08).

this plot gives them a degree of economic independence. In some cases, the individual fields of these sub-units have been the basis of household fission, while in others they have helped to diffuse tensions between elders and cadets, thus maintaining the corporate household.⁶³ While large households may carry a significant number of dependents, they are often less vulnerable to risk and can benefit from economies of scale (Toulmin and Guèye 2003, p. 20), whereas small households tend to struggle if they lack equipment and labour.⁶⁴ A further trend in intra-household relations has been an increase in work done by women and children in fields controlled by men. The CFDT/CMDT system has targeted men,⁶⁵ yet relies on unpaid family labour, particularly in ploughing, weeding and harvesting.

Despite these deep-rooted difficulties, the CMDT system has nevertheless been associated with rural development and improved in food security in Southern Mali. In the first half of the 1980s, the CMDT ran a Maize Intensification Project, which substantially increased yields through subsidised fertiliser for maize (in addition to cotton), improved varieties, promotion of intensive agricultural techniques such as mono-cropping, and guaranteed prices from the state marketing board (Fok et al. 2000). The impacts of cotton farming on soil fertility in West Africa are debated, but overall it seems that where they have been applied adequately, synthetic fertilisers have off-set depletion of nutrients, though soil organic matter has not been adequately replaced through organic manure.⁶⁶

Both maize and cotton cultivation were adversely affected by economic constraints from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, when farmers decreased their use of synthetic fertilisers and extensified production (Fok et al. 2000; Bassett 2001, p. 153). State support for maize decreased far more than for cotton, so farmers diverted

⁶³ Becker (1990) identifies several forms of household organisation in a village in Southern Mali in the late 1980s: extended families in which the household field takes priority over individual fields; federal-style structures in which sub-groups are largely independent but come together to work a small household field; fraternal households or nuclear families in which the distinction between household and individual fields is less clear.

⁶⁴ See chapter six.

⁶⁵ The AV system has tended to exclude women because social norms dictate that men and women associate separately (Jonckers 1994, p. 130). At particular times and places, women have tapped informal markets in agricultural inputs, equipment and labour in order to grow cotton in their gardens or personal fields (see, for example, Bassett 2001, pp. 154–155).

⁶⁶ Compare, for example, Benjaminsen, Aune and Sidibé (2010) with Kidron, Karnieli and Benenson (2010).

some of their cotton fertilisers to their maize crops,⁶⁷ decreasing cotton yields yet further. As repayment for inputs was collected through cotton sales, AVs were left indebted, leading to conflicts within communities.

Like many poor countries faced with spiralling interest rates and plummeting world commodity prices in the 1980s, the Malian Government was unable to repay its external debts, and signed its first World Bank structural adjustment programme (SAP) in 1982. While implementation of austerity measures was under way, the country was hit by drought in 1984. In 1986, the CMDT agreed a ten-year *contrat-plan* with the Government, fixing the price at which the CMDT would buy cotton from Malian farmers at 93 CFA/kg. This ‘producer price’ represented little over a quarter of the world market price of cotton that year (365 CFA/kg) (Docking 2005). The government abandoned its first SAP by 1987, only to agree another in 1988, which led to a dramatic rise in the costs of imported goods, including agricultural inputs, and in the interest rates on the loans farmers had with Mali’s National Agricultural Development Bank (BNDA). By late 1989, cotton farmers were making a loss: ‘With their fixed price at 93 CFA francs per kilogram, while their costs averaged 95 CFA francs per kilogram, producers wanted to know why they couldn’t demand a price increase.’ (Bingen 1994, p. 61).

In the democratic opening of 1989–1991, cotton farmers, forming a committee of AVs and *tòns* in the Koutiala area, called a strike. In the negotiations that followed, the CMDT attempted to persuade the strike leaders to adopt the form of a professional association that would be incorporated into the vertically-organised industry and would ‘adjust their demands to the “big picture” of the international cotton market.’ (Bingen 1998, p. 277). Instead, the producer leaders created a union of cotton and food crop producers, *Syndicat des Cotonniers et Vivriers* (SYCOV), in 1992. Yet, from the start, SYCOV gave itself a dual mandate: to represent producers and to work in a professional partnership with the CMDT (Bingen 1998, p. 272). The union became signatory, on behalf of producers, to the *contrat-plan* between the CMDT and the State.

⁶⁷ A survey in Benin in 1998 found that almost thirty percent of fertiliser bought on credit from the cotton parastatal through AVs was diverted to other crops, mainly maize (Minot et al. 2000, pp. 16–17). Some farmers also sold cotton fertiliser on the black market (Bassett 2001, p. 152).

SYCOV was formed with help from the Chamber of Agriculture and from foreign development agencies, both governmental and non-governmental (Bingen 1994; 1996). The union relied on the CMDT for its telecommunications and transport (Docking 2005, p. 210). It was given office space for its national headquarters at the *Assemblée Permanente des Chambres d'Agriculture du Mali* (APCAM). Meanwhile, in the Kita area of western Mali, a request from cotton producers to establish a union was feared both for revealing 'the corporatist nature of the Chamber' and for the farmers' assumed political sympathies (Bingen (2000, p. 355).⁶⁸ Mali's system of Chambers of Agriculture was founded in the 1980s by a group of highly capitalised farmers, and its close relationship with the State is infused with neo-patrimonial control (Bingen 2004, p. 30). Bonnaisseux (2003, p. 52) argues that the Malian union 'has never received the financial and technical support that could have reinforced its autonomy', noting that it was installed within APCAM, whereas the Burkinabè cotton union, *Union Nationale des Producteurs de Coton du Burkina Faso* (UNPCB), received funding from the European Union to establish and equip its headquarters at Bobo-Dioulasso. The UNPCB was itself promoted by the Government of Burkina Faso and the CFDT at the expense of the more militant *Fédération Nationale des Organisations Paysannes* (FENOP) (Kaminski, Headey and Bernard 2009, p. 6).⁶⁹

The first *contrat-plan* that SYCOV leaders signed with the CMDT and the State in 1994 represented a poor deal for producers. It fixed the basic producer price for cotton for four years at a particularly low 125 F/kg (Berthomé 2002, p. 169). This price remained unchanged even though world prices soared in the mid-1990s, due in part to the after-effects of a fifty percent devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 and in part to a rise in the world market price for cotton lint (Bourdet 2002, p. 51). At the same time, the effects of the devaluation raised the cost of imported inputs on which producers were reliant. A mid-term review of the *contrat-plan* was due in

⁶⁸ They had refused to affiliate to the single national trade union, UNTM, in the 1960s but reluctantly accepted in the 1990s, forming the *Syndicat des Paysans du Cercle de Kita* (SPCK) as a section of SYNAPRO (*Syndicat National de la Production*).

⁶⁹ Producers created FENOP after a riot in Dédougou, in 1991 (Kaminski et al. 2009, p. 5).

1996, but this was not done: producers from across the cotton zone took part in a peaceful protest march in Koutiala (SYCOV 2002, p. 7).⁷⁰

In the 1997/98 cotton campaign, Mali achieved a record harvest of 520,000 tonnes, making it the largest producer in Africa that year. In April 1998, the CMDT celebrated its profits by throwing a party for farmers. But producers in Koutiala, who saw yields diminish in their area, boycotted the festivities. (SYCOV 2002, p. 7).⁷¹ In the same month, SYCOV held its second congress. The CMDT succeeded in orchestrating the election of sympathetic candidates to the leadership at national level and in every regional branch except Koutiala (Berthomé 2002, p. 173; Docking 2005, pp. 216–217).

When it was time to renegotiate the *contrat-plan*, in September 1998, the CMDT delayed then pushed for the same price as the previous year (125 F/kg plus 45 F/kg bonus). The price had still not been agreed when producers were asked in December 1998 to deliver their harvests to the CMDT. SYCOV's regional office in Koutiala called a strike, unsanctioned by its headquarters. The army was called in and the producers' attempts to withhold their produce were violently suppressed (SYCOV 2002, p.20).⁷²

One of the founding members of SYCOV, who since became disillusioned with the union, described his personal experience of the CMDT's methods of persuasion.

During that strike – '98–'99 – the CMDT promised me a motorbike. ... When we raised that strike, the Regional Director sent three agents all the way to my village to see me. ... In the night, eh. ... They had a key to a motorbike so that I might take it, along with a few million [F CFA] and talk the farmers round. ... They had talked round the president of SYCOV here at the regional level.⁷³

⁷⁰ The protesters also call for changes with regards to the provision of inputs and input credit.

⁷¹ They were angry with the CMDT for having ignored their grievances over the poor quality of insecticides and the company's failure to supply the agreed quota of cottonseed meal to feed their livestock, needed to plough their fields.

⁷² One 65-year-old man, Lassine Dembélé died of his injuries. Violence between peasants and soldiers was also described by cotton farmer, Bourama Goita in a fieldwork interview (Koutiala, 21/02/08).

⁷³ Interview with Bourama Goita, cotton farmer, Koutiala, 21/02/08. Original: Pendant cette grève-là – 98-99 – la CMDT m'avait promis une moto. ... Au moment où on a soulevé cette grève-là, le DR [Directeur Regional] m'avait envoyé trois agents jusqu'à dans mon village même pour me voir. ... Dans la nuit, eh. ... Ils avaient une clé de moto pour que moi je puisse prendre ça avec les quelques millions et sensibiliser les paysans. Ils avaient sensibilisé le président du SYCOV ici au niveau régionale.

The strike was finally called off on 23 December 1998, after visits from two delegations, one from the National Assembly and one from the Chamber of Agriculture (APCAM). According to SYCOV's account of the episode, the delegates went to several villages and 'posed questions to know if the movement had not been guided by the leaders for political rather than unionist motives' (SYCOV 2002, p. 21).⁷⁴ In the end, the CMDT paid farmers 185 F/kg (140 F/kg plus 45 F/kg bonus). Producers had at last secured a fairer share of the price of their cotton, but their expectations increased just as world prices began to plummet and the extent of CMDT mismanagement was uncovered.

A technical audit of the CMDT, demanded by the World Bank, was belatedly completed in December 1998. Despite the profits of the boom years, the audit revealed a deficit in the CMDT's finances estimated at tens of billions of francs CFA.

In the four years following the devaluation, the CMDT was so profitable that it became a prime target for rent seekers and costs became heavily padded. When world prices started falling in 1998/99, the CMDT became virtually bankrupt. (Goreux 2003, pp. 9–10)

The information revealed by the audit was not shared with SYCOV and a new union, SYPAMO,⁷⁵ until union leaders were summoned to a meeting with the CMDT and the State on 8 September 1999 (Berthomé 2002, pp. 175–176). The agricultural year was well under way by this time. Producers had sown their crops assuming that the previous year's price of 185 F/kg would be repeated. In the negotiations that ensued, producers were asked to accept a price of 150 F/kg, with no prospect of a bonus since the company would not be able to make a profit given its deficit. Worse still, producers learned that their 18 billion F CFA support fund, designed to protect their incomes in the event of such a price drop, had been entirely swallowed up in the company's financial black hole. With the agreement of a majority of its regional branches, SYCOV signed agreement to this price as part of a

⁷⁴ Original: posent des questions pour savoir si le mouvement n'a pas été guidé par des responsables pour des motifs politiques et non syndicaux.

⁷⁵ SYPAMO represents producers in the recently established cotton zone in South West Mali.

nine-month interim plan due for renegotiation by the start of the next sowing season, in June 2000 (*ibid.*).

Producers' precarious livelihoods bore the brunt of the losses made in the 1999/00 agricultural year. Between December 1999 and June 2000, many producers had to sell equipment and livestock to repay the debts that they had accrued (Roy 2010a). There was widespread anger and talk of strike. But, by May/June 2000, the SYCOV leadership moderated its position and encouraged producers not to strike. Producers from the usually more moderate areas of Bougouni and Sikasso formed a crisis committee and, without any legal right to do so, called on farmers to strike by refusing to sow cotton. A majority of producers joined the boycott.

At the end of June, President Konaré met with the crisis committee and acceded to most of its demands. But the damage had already been done. It was too late to sow the rain-fed crop successfully. An independent audit by Ernst and Young, published on 15 July 2000, exposed mismanagement and a 57 billion F CFA deficit in the CMDT's finances.⁷⁶ Harvest time revealed the extent of the losses from the boycott. The nation's cotton production for 2000/01 was halved compared with that of the previous year. The political impact of the farmers' direct action was considerable. The government had been shocked into learning not to under-estimate the power of the producers acting together. But the strike split the union movement, with the crisis committee splintering away from SYCOV to form a rival union, SYVAC (*Syndicat pour la Valorisation des Cultures Cotonnières et Vivrières*). What is more, the crisis of 2000/01 propelled the question of the privatisation of the CMDT to the fore of the political agenda.

Cotton sector reform in sub-Saharan Africa

Cotton-producing countries throughout sub-Saharan Africa have implemented liberal reform of their cotton sectors to varying degrees since the 1980s. These reforms have been part of wider structural adjustment programmes, made a condition for assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank since that time. Long-term deterioration in the terms of trade for

⁷⁶ Source: 'Mali: Playing the offside rule', *Africa Confidential* 41:18, 15 September 2000.

primary commodity producers, the oil shocks of the 1970s, and recession in developed countries all contributed to the severe economic crisis that faced most African countries by the early 1980s (Parfitt and Riley 1989; Zack-Williams 2000).

Unsuccessful government policies and corruption in African countries exacerbated their balance of payments deficits and public debt. Despite implementing austerity measures and other conditions attached to structural adjustment credits, many African countries fell deeper into debt as interest rates rose and terms of trade continued to decline. Following a transnational civil society campaign for debt cancellation, the IMF and the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) launched the initiative for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) in 1996, with the aim of reducing the external debt burden of the world's poorest countries to a level deemed sustainable by the major creditor institutions.⁷⁷ In order to qualify for this assistance, eligible country governments had to agree and implement fiscal and structural policy reforms that followed the same liberal economic logic promoted by the World Bank and IMF since the 1980s.⁷⁸

Liberal reform of Mali's cotton sector was made a condition for assistance through the HIPC initiative. Having agreed to Structural Adjustment Programmes in 1982 and in 1988, Mali was already in the process of moving from a state-led economy to a market-led economy before HIPC took effect (Bourdet 2002, p. 27). The country entered the HIPC initiative with a 'track record of satisfactory and largely uninterrupted adjustment over a nine-year period beginning in 1988' (IMF and IDA 1998, p. 6). In the agricultural sector, the Office du Niger's marketing monopoly on rice was abolished by 1995, and the cereals market was liberalised by 1997 (Bourdet 2002, p. 29, table 1). Most of Mali's state-owned enterprises were privatised in the early 1990s (Bourdet 2002, p. 34). Remaining ones in telecommunications, banking, power and water sectors were timetabled for privatisation according to the 1998 final decision point document on HIPC (IMF and IDA 1998, Table 5, p. 23).

⁷⁷ Following a review in 1999 debt relief was extended under the Enhanced HIPC initiative, and assistance was made conditional on the writing and implementation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. HIPC's successor, the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative was launched in 2005.

⁷⁸ Many other creditors including members of the 'Paris Club' have applied the same system to bilateral debt owed to them by HIPC-eligible countries.

Privatisation of the national cotton company, CMDT, was clearly on the agenda, but the HIPC document indicates that the modalities of reform of this sensitive sector were negotiable at this stage.

The overall objective of the government is to open the cotton sector to increased private sector participation, according to modalities that will be discussed with the World Bank and IMF. A technical audit of the cotton industry will be completed by September 1998 that will help the government define its position on private sector participation in the industry.” (IMF and IDA 1998, pp. 9–10).

The Executive Directors of the IMF and IDA ‘stressed the need to deepen structural reform, particularly in the area of restructuring and privatizing public enterprises, including the cotton industry’, yet the question of the privatisation of the cotton company was not entirely foreclosed (IMF and IDA 1998, p. 9).

It is hardly surprising that the Malian Government was slow to liberalise its cotton sector compared with other sectors. Cotton is vital to the Malian economy, both in terms of the large section of the population that is involved in the sector – over 3 million people out of a population of 13 million, and in terms of the country’s dependence on the crop for export earnings – cotton accounted for fifty-five percent of Mali’s exports per year on average between 1995 and 1997.⁷⁹ Moreover, the CMDT appeared to be a highly productive and profitable company at the time of writing of the HIPC decision point document. However, the circumstances of the parastatal’s decline ushered in the reform process at the turn of the millennium. Reform of Mali’s cotton sector began later than that of most other African countries. The experiences of other African countries in liberalising their cotton sectors, outlined below, gave grounds for a cautious approach to reform of the CFA zone’s most productive cotton sector. The trajectory of cotton sector reform in Mali is examined in chapter five, in relation to civil society opposition to it.

Prior to the liberal reforms, most African countries had state marketing boards with monopsony purchasing rights on agricultural produce (Zack-Williams 2000, p. 4). Cotton sectors were run by state companies, or by combinations of co-operatives and state marketing boards. All sectoral activities were co-ordinated in a

⁷⁹ Calculated from data in IMF and IDA (1998, Appendix, Table 10).

single system: supplying inputs and extension services, purchasing seed cotton, ginning, and marketing cotton lint (Larsen 2003, p. 16). Cotton was grown predominantly by smallholder farmers (Fok 2001, p. 4).⁸⁰ In most sub-Saharan African countries, the vast majority of cotton lint was – and is – exported, making these sectors dependent on the world market (Fok 2001, p. 4).⁸¹

In the African Franc Zone, state cotton monopolies were part-owned by the *Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles* (CFDT), which promoted cotton production for export during the colonial era and was granted monopolies on the external marketing of lint through its subsidiary, the *Compagnie Parisienne de Coton* (COPACO) in the independence period (Bassett 2008, p. 49; Kaminski et al. 2009, p. 9).⁸² In the mid 1990s, the CFDT was majority-owned by the French state (sixty-four percent). It was considered for privatisation by decree in 1996 under the Juppé government (Docking 2005, p. 214). The company was renamed DAGRIS in 2001 and eventually privatised in 2008, with the Geocoton group becoming the major shareholder. Now a private company, COPACO was among the fourteen largest cotton trading companies in the world in 2009 (Guitchounts 2009, p. 11).

Cotton sector reform began in anglophone African countries (and in lusophone Mozambique) in the mid 1980s, at a time when they were generally performing badly. Cotton sector reform in francophone African countries began in the mid 1990s, when production was increasing, provoking resistance to the reforms and accusations of dogmatic commitment to neo-liberal policies (Fok 2001, p. 6). Cotton sector reform has followed different paths in different countries and produced different outcomes. The challenges for liberalised cotton sectors in Africa principally revolve around input provision, farmer credit and cotton quality.⁸³

⁸⁰ Other models, however, included the Gezira state irrigation scheme in Sudan, large commercial farms in Zimbabwe and South Africa, and the concession system in Mozambique.

⁸¹ Exceptions are Nigeria and South Africa, which do not produce enough cotton to satisfy their textile industries. Ninety-nine percent of Mali's and Burkina Faso's cotton is exported (Bassett 2008, p. 48).

⁸² However, Benin is exceptional because an additional French company entered the sector after independence and both companies left the country during the 1970s (Gergely 2010, p. 2).

⁸³ In addition to the examples discussed here, Caliskan (2010, p. 157) finds that liberalisation of the cotton input market in Egypt has led to decreased use of fertilisers, the privatisation of credit has contributed to an increase in informal money lenders, and farmer incomes have decreased significantly.

The quality and reputation of cotton lint, linked to its national origin, are key factors in determining prices and guaranteeing sales of the product. Quality is linked to the variety of cotton grown and to climatic factors, but also to crop management practices, which are affected by the provision of inputs and extension services, and to the facilities and practices involved in grading, transportation, storage and ginning. During periods of high competition following liberal reforms in Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia, when the numbers of companies operating in their cotton sectors increased, problems arose in maintaining the smooth running of these elements of the commodity chain, lowering the quality of cotton and the levels of production, and so damaging the countries' reputations on the world market.⁸⁴ One of the main problems that arose was the breakdown in relationships that linked the provision of inputs to farmers on credit to the sale of seed cotton to gineries to the recovery of input credit, which would enable the provision of inputs on credit for the next season. Solutions to the crises provoked by liberalisation have included the re-establishment of zonal monopsonies (in Uganda), increased sector-wide public-private co-ordination (in Tanzania and Zimbabwe), and a government-initiated fund to support private companies to provide input credit services (in Zambia).

Alongside Mali, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso are the largest cotton producers in the African Franc Zone. Of these, Benin was the first to reform its cotton sector, but privatisation proceeded gradually, accompanied by minimal liberalisation and considerable political interference (Gergely 2009). The parastatal, SONAPRA (*Société Nationale pour la Promotion Agricole*) continued to control activities across the whole sector⁸⁵ until 2000, when management responsibilities passed to a public-private interprofessional body, the *Association Interprofessionnelle de Coton* (AIC) and a clearing house, *Centrale Sécurisation des Paiements et des Recouvrements* (CSPR) designed to oversee all payments and credit recovery in the chain. The government continued to intervene intermittently in the sector, and SONAPRA continued to operate as a public ginning company until it was privatised in 2008. A crisis developed between 2002 and 2006, when input suppliers, ginners

⁸⁴ For full analyses, see Gibbon (1999), Larsen (2003), Poulton et al. (2004), Tschirley et al. (2006), and Poulton and Hanyani-Mlambo (2008).

⁸⁵ Managing input procurement bids; setting sector-wide prices for inputs, seed cotton, cotton lint and cotton seeds; setting quotas for the quantity of seed cotton each company could buy; and ensuring that producers sold their harvests directly to gineries.

and producers by-passed the CSPR, which, along with the AIC, had not been given the legal and regulatory powers to enforce the rules (Gergely 2009, pp. 22–23). Gergely (2009) suggests that the government allowed – and even encouraged – side-selling, while Goreux (2003, p. 24) notes that ‘political pressures’ occasionally interrupted the smooth functioning of the CSPR. Producers bore the consequences of the crisis in the form of delayed payments. Production declined dramatically for a number of years.

A combination of privatisation, deregulation and war resulted in chaos in Côte d’Ivoire. In 1998, the state cotton company, CIDT (*Compagnie Ivoirienne pour le Développement des Textiles*), was split into three companies, each with a regional monopoly (Goreux 2003, pp. 12–13). Results were mixed, with Ivoire Coton performing better – but LCCI (*La Compagnie Cotonnière de la Côte d’Ivoire*) performing much worse – than the state-owned enterprise, CIDT Nouvelle. From 2000, companies could set their own prices above a pan-territorial minimum price set nationally, but they rarely did (Gergely 2010, p. 28). The reform period coincided with a period of intense political instability, when the reforms became heavily politicised.⁸⁶ All aspects of the commodity chain were disrupted by a civil war from 2002 to 2004,⁸⁷ and national production fell (Gergely 2010, p. 45). The ambitious producers’ association, URECOS-CI (*Union Régionale des Entreprises Coopératives de la zone des Savanes de Côte d’Ivoire*) built its own ginnery in 2002, right next to an existing LCCI one,⁸⁸ but it was partially destroyed in the war, and inputs that the union had imported were diverted to food crops or seized by militias. Between 2001 and 2005, payments to farmers by most companies (except Ivoire Coton) were delayed by months and in some cases years. Desperate farmers sold their crops to

⁸⁶ Following the 1999 coup d’état, the military government proposed to sell eighty percent of the shares in CIDT Nouvelle to producers’ associations for a symbolic franc (Goreux 2003, p. 13; Gergely 2010, p. 7). This sale was prevented by the civilian government elected in 2000, but the proposal inspired the producer group, URECOS-CI, to pursue its ambitions.

⁸⁷ For example, the national cotton research station and quality grading facility were destroyed.

⁸⁸ URECOS-CI, which claimed to represent eighty percent of producers, received support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation to set up a ginning company, SICOSA (Gergely 2010, p. 7). It built its ginnery in Korhogo in 2002 with money from the producer price support fund that it managed and together with two international companies. It gained the liquidity to import inputs through a strategy of forward sales of lint (Goreux 2003, p.13).

companies outside of their zones or to itinerant traders.⁸⁹ While socio-political unrest was a major factor in the poor performance of Côte d'Ivoire's cotton sector after reform, Gergely (2010, pp. 45–46) also points to poor company management⁹⁰ and a lack of institutional framework invested with regulatory powers.

The reform process in Burkina Faso – which became the model for reforms in Mali – was very gradual, beginning with institution-building during the 1990s, and ultimately produced a relatively strong sector (Kaminski, Headey and Bernard 2009, pp. 5–8).⁹¹ Between 1996 and 1999, local level producer associations were reorganised from village groups into market-oriented cotton co-operatives. In turn, the new co-operatives were organised into a pyramid structure of unions, topped with a national union, UNPCB (*Union nationale des producteurs de coton du Burkina*).⁹² The cotton company was partially privatised in 1999 by the entry of producers into its capital. UNPCB used the surplus accumulated in their producer price support fund, from when prices were high, to acquire thirty percent of the State's shares in the Burkinabè cotton company, SOFITEX (Goreux 2003, p. 11). The producers' union also gained majority control over the selection of input bids and two seats on the board of management, and responsibility for quality grading and financial management were gradually transferred to it (Kaminski, Headey and Bernard 2009). Private firms entered the sector between 2002 and 2006, and two new ginning companies were given regional monopsonies.⁹³ The *Association Interprofessionnelle du Coton* (AIC) was established as a public-private regulatory body.

Following the reforms in Burkina Faso, input credit repayment rates increased, but so did debts between members within cotton co-operatives. Despite the apparent success of the reforms, the Burkinabè cotton sector accumulated deficits when world cotton prices fell to very low levels between 2004 and 2006 (Kaminski,

⁸⁹ Illicitly purchased seed cotton was smuggled into Mali and Burkina Faso, including an estimated 70,000 tons in 2004 (Kaminski, Headey and Bernard 2009, p. 13).

⁹⁰ LCCI was declared bankrupt in 2007. By 2008, a number of new companies were operating and producer umbrella groups had fragmented (Gergely 2010, pp. 13–16).

⁹¹ Cotton production tripled over the course of the reform period, making Burkina Faso the largest cotton producer in Africa. However, this increase in production was probably largely due to a government initiative to greatly expand the area under cotton. Many of the new cotton farmers were migrants returning from Côte d'Ivoire because of the conflict there (Kaminski et al. 2009, pp. 8–15).

⁹² See chapter six for analysis of similar reforms in Mali in the 2000s.

⁹³ New entrants included input suppliers, transporters, and ginning and marketing companies. The companies given regional monopsonies were SOCOMA and FASOCOTON.

Headey and Bernard 2009, pp. 33–34). Producer prices remained high relative to world market prices, but these high levels were not sustained by the price support fund at that time. Accusations of corruption were made since it seemed that the support fund had not been adequately replenished during years of higher world prices. In 2006, the mechanism for setting seed cotton prices was revised to reflect world market prices more closely. By 2008, a smoothing fund was operational to balance out discrepancies between the price set before the harvest and the actual world market price at the time of sale. In contrast to similar funds in the past, the new Burkina Faso fund is managed by an independent bank at the West African regional level.

Controversy over cotton subsidies

Government subsidisation of cotton production and exports has become a major issue in international trade negotiations since the beginning of the 2000s. Seven countries directly subsidised production of cotton in 1999/2000, with the largest subsidies provided in the United States, China and the European Union, respectively (Valderrama Becerra 2000). The United States and China also gave direct payments to support exports of cotton. Goreux (2004, p. 6) comments, ‘In 2001/02, subsidies to cotton producers in the United States, China, Greece and Spain reached six billion dollars which was the value of cotton exports worldwide.’ At such high levels, subsidies depress world market prices. Production subsidies encourage farmers to grow more cotton than they otherwise would, thereby increasing the supply of cotton on the market. Export subsidies make up the difference between low world market prices and high producer prices, and so it continues to be profitable to export cotton that would not otherwise be able to compete on the world market.

There has been a general downward trend in cotton prices (adjusted for inflation) from the 1950s to the late 2000s (ITC 2011, figure 1.26). Cotton prices have followed a similar pattern to prices for agricultural commodities in general.⁹⁴ However cotton prices have fluctuated more widely than general agricultural

⁹⁴ This includes a period of exceptionally high prices in the 1970s linked to the oil shocks (Baffes 2011).

commodity prices and, while the latter began to recover in the early to mid 2000s, the price of cotton remained very low until the end of the decade.⁹⁵ In addition to subsidies, factors affecting cotton prices include fluctuations in demand for cotton relative to synthetics;⁹⁶ the internal balance of supply and demand in countries that both produce cotton and manufacture textiles, most notably China;⁹⁷ and technological and biotechnological⁹⁸ developments in agriculture that have increased yields, lowered the costs of production and increased the area under cultivation. Actual prices for cotton from the African Franc Zone are also affected by the exchange rate between the US dollar and the Euro (Bassett 2008, p. 53).⁹⁹

One question that arises in the literature revolves around whether the elimination of US and EU cotton subsidies would make a real difference to cotton-producing African countries, including Mali, and to cotton farmers themselves. Gillson et al. (2004) explain that the answer to this question is complicated by the fact that the world cotton market is not a unitary, integrated market but a partially fragmented one, in which there is less scope for the substitution of one type of cotton with another. The world cotton market operates mainly on the basis of contracts, relationships and reputations, since buyers find these systems the most reliable methods of guaranteeing quality, quantity and delivery times of cotton lint; factors that are considered at least as important as price. Nonetheless, Gillson et al. (2004) conclude that on whichever basis the impact is calculated, the removal of US and EU subsidies would make a substantial difference to the incomes of cotton-producing African countries.

under all the assumptions in all the studies, subsidies by the US and the EU depress the world price of cotton and reduce the income of developing countries, particularly those Least Developed countries most dependent on cotton for their foreign exchange earnings. Reducing these

⁹⁵ After nearly a decade of extremely low prices, and following harvest failures in some countries, cotton production decreased in 2008/09 and 2009/10 (Cotton Inc 2011).⁹⁵ Cotton prices rose dramatically in 2010 and continued to surge in 2011 to levels last seen in 1981 (Meyer 2011). It is expected that farmers will now increase output in response to high prices, and it is not clear whether prices for cotton will remain high.

⁹⁶ See Gillson et al. (2004, p. 88).

⁹⁷ For more information, see ICAC (2002, p. 10) and Goreux (2004).

⁹⁸ The introduction of GM cotton seeds has contributed to increased yields since 1990.

⁹⁹ In international markets, cotton prices are quoted in US dollars, while the CFA franc is pegged to the Euro. Bassett (2010, p. 47) observes that 'Between January 2002 and May 2007, the world price of cotton increased by 12% but due to exchange rates, the price in Fcfa declined by 21%'.

subsidies, whether through national action, trade negotiations, or dispute settlements, would increase the income of poor countries and poor people within them. (Gillson et al. 2004, p. 65)

Well over half of total world cotton subsidies in 1999/2000 were accounted for by US production and export subsidies, supporting only around 25,000 US cotton farmers (Valderrama Becerra 2000). Gillson et al. (2004, pp. 34–36) further note that despite their relatively small total size, EU cotton subsidies have a disproportionately large impact on cotton producers in West and Central Africa because cotton from these countries competes in the same segment of the world market.

Citing studies that indicate that if all cotton subsidies were eliminated, world prices would increase by eleven percent, Thomas J. Bassett (2008, p. 36) asks, ‘Would it [the price increase] trickle down to African cotton growers or end up in the pockets of other actors in the cotton commodity chain?’ His answer is a guarded and qualified ‘yes’: producers would see at least some price increase, but a significant portion of profits would be siphoned off by ginning and trading companies along the way, and the price increase would be short term, since the gap in the market would be filled by cotton-exporting countries that have greater flexibility to respond to fluctuations in demand. Bassett (2008, p. 58) also notes that the costs of agricultural inputs required for growing cotton according to conventional methods are as significant to farmer incomes as the prices they receive for their harvests.

The impact of cotton subsidies on the world market in the context of declining prices became the focus of attention in the early 2000s. The International Cotton Advisory Committee’s Head Economist, Carlos Valderrama Becerra, produced a model that indicated that if US subsidies alone were eliminated, the projected average world cotton price for 2000/01 would be six US cents per pound higher than otherwise expected (Valderrama Becerra 2000). A number of cotton-exporting countries sought to mount international pressure against these subsidies. At the World Trade Organization (WTO),¹⁰⁰ Brazil made a legal case against the United

¹⁰⁰ In establishing the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995, member countries, including the United States, signed up to the Agreement on Agriculture, in which they promised to reduce domestic support, import tariffs and export subsidies by various percentages over a number of years.¹⁰⁰ A distinction was made between domestic support programmes that distort production and trade (‘the amber box’) and those that do not (‘the green box’). There is no limit on green box subsidies, but amber box subsidies must be reduced to an agreed limit (five percent of agricultural production for

States, and four African countries proposed an initiative for the elimination of cotton subsidies. These complaints against developed country subsidies were accompanied by strong support from civil society organisations and became the focus of an international campaign against ‘unfair’ US and EU subsidies.¹⁰¹

In September 2002, Brazil made a complaint against the United States through the WTO’s dispute settlement body regarding US subsidies on Upland cotton.¹⁰² Brazil complained that US domestic support and export subsidies cause serious prejudice to Brazil’s interests in the form of price suppression. After a long investigation and an appeal by the United States against the first ruling, the WTO eventually adopted the findings of its Dispute Settlement Body in favour of Brazil on 21 March 2005.¹⁰³ The WTO ruling was far from the end of the matter, since the WTO has no powers to force the United States to comply. The US Food, Conservation and Energy Act 2008 effectively shifted some government support from cotton to biofuels, but this was not enough to settle the dispute. Brazil eventually threatened the United States with retaliation, recourse to which it was

developed countries; ten percent for developing countries). There is also a ‘blue box’ for subsidies that are designed to reduce distortion of trade and limit production. There is currently no limit on blue box subsidies. The Agriculture Agreement also contained a ‘peace clause’ so that countries could not challenge one another’s subsidies for a period of nine years (until 31 December 2003) while they were in the process of reducing them, unless the subsidies exceeded 1992 levels.

¹⁰¹ The European Union is a net importer of cotton. Greece and Spain are the only EU countries that produce significant volumes of cotton. In 2001, they accounted for six percent of world exports of cotton but sixteen percent of world subsidies to cotton (Gillson et al. 2004, p. 17). These subsidies support a generous target price for cotton. The European Union has the world’s highest level of subsidies per kilogram of cotton produced (Gillson et al. 2004, p. 34). Assistance is guaranteed for a maximum quantity of cotton but penalties in the form of lower subsidies are imposed on excess cotton produced above this level. Since these penalties are designed to limit production, EU cotton subsidies are classified as blue box subsidies. However, penalties were not sufficient to discourage excess production in Greece in the early 2000s (Goreux 2004, p. 19).

¹⁰² ‘Dispute DS267: United States – Subsidies on Upland Cotton’.

www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/cases_e/ds267_e.htm

¹⁰³ The United States had argued that its subsidy regime was protected until 2003 by the peace clause, but the WTO dispute panel found that the peace clause did not apply to a number of US support measures because they exceeded 1992 levels and because the United States wrongly classified decoupled payments in the green box (Benicchio 2005). This raised the level of subsidy support in the amber box above permitted levels. The WTO also ruled that Step 2 payments and export credit guarantee programmes counted as export subsidies. The United States had not reserved the right to use export subsidies under the Agreement on Agriculture, so the WTO ruled that these should be eliminated immediately. The WTO ruled that counter-cyclical payments, marketing loan payments and Step 2 payments caused serious prejudice to Brazil and other cotton exporting countries by preventing a rise in prices (Benicchio 2005, p. 35).

entitled under WTO rules.¹⁰⁴ Only when Brazil announced it would take measures such as increasing import duties on US products did the United States enter into serious negotiations with Brazil. Brazil and the United States reached a preliminary agreement in April 2010 after Brazil threatened, amongst other moves, ‘to stop charging its farmers technology fees for seeds developed by American biotechnology companies’ (Chan/New York Times 2010). In response, the United States agreed to modify its export credit guarantee programmes but, rather than end its domestic support subsidies, it set up a technical assistance fund for Brazilian cotton farmers to the value of US\$147.5 million per year (the value of the retaliation authorized by the WTO) until the next farm bill is passed or a final solution to the dispute is agreed. In February 2011, the US Congress voted against an amendment that would have ended the payments to Brazil.

The Brazil–United States cotton case demonstrates the legitimacy of the complaint against US cotton subsidies but it also shows that in practice the world trade system is still far from rules-based. Without the authority to enforce the rules, the WTO system rests ultimately on countries’ relative bargaining power. When countries are linked by relations of dependence there are also fears of reprisals outwith the rule-governed trade system in the form of the withdrawal of aid.¹⁰⁵ Benin and Chad took part in the dispute as third parties. This meant that the effect of US subsidies on their sectors could be taken into account, but as third parties they were not entitled to any form of compensation or to retaliation against the United States.

In challenging the cotton subsidies of developed countries, Benin and Chad joined Mali and Burkina Faso in pursuing a different strategy from that of Brazil. These four African countries submitted their proposal, Poverty Reduction – A Sectoral Initiative in Favour of Cotton, to the WTO in May 2003. The ‘Cotton Four’ proposed that a mechanism be set up at the WTO Ministerial meeting in Cancun in September 2003, ‘to progressively reduce support to cotton production and export, with a view to fully suppressing all cotton subsidies at a defined deadline.’ (Compaore 2003). They also called for compensation to be paid to farmers of West and Central Africa for the losses incurred from developed country cotton subsidies

¹⁰⁴ On 19 November 2009 Brazil was authorized by the WTO to retaliate against US subsidies on upland cotton. See www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/cases_e/ds267_e.htm

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Jawara and Kwa (2004, p. xxxviii).

pending their removal. The Sectoral Initiative in Favour of Cotton specifically did not request preferential treatment or additional aid, but requested that WTO members recognise the strategic importance of cotton for development and poverty reduction in many of the world's least developed countries.

The Sectoral Initiative was tabled as an agenda item at the WTO Ministerial meeting in Cancùn in September 2003. Initially, it appeared to garner a great deal of support from the conference, and it certainly had very vocal support from demonstrators outside the conference. The Cotton Four made an agreement on cotton their bottom line in the negotiations at Cancùn. Their determination contributed to the breakdown of the talks. The United States was determined not to back down on agriculture and the European Union pushed for the introduction of the 'Singapore issues'¹⁰⁶ into the negotiations. The original agreement was that the Singapore issues would begin to be negotiated after the 2003 Cancùn conference if there was explicit consensus to do so.¹⁰⁷ Developing countries including China, Brazil and India formed the Group of Twenty-One and insisted that negotiations on agriculture be completed before the Singapore issues be introduced. As the talks became deadlocked, the United States and the European Union moved negotiations from the official conference sessions to closed meetings of selected countries. The conference was brought to an abrupt end on 14 September. The Kenyan delegate walked out of a closed meeting because EU negotiators insisted that any deal on agriculture be contingent on agreement to introduce the Singapore issues.¹⁰⁸ At the last minute, the European Union offered to negotiate on only one of the four Singapore issues (trade facilitation). But after consulting with members of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group, Botswana delivered the group's decision that they would not negotiate on any of the Singapore issues until there was a satisfactory offer on agriculture on the table (GAO 2004, p. 33).

A draft ministerial declaration, referred to as the 'Derbez text', mentioned the Sectoral Initiative on Cotton (paragraph 27). But, far from calling for an end to subsidies, it called for change in the countries whose economies are heavily

¹⁰⁶ Investment, competition, government procurement, and trade facilitation.

¹⁰⁷ www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/bey3_e.htm consulted on 28/04/11.

¹⁰⁸ www.cid.harvard.edu/cidtrade/gov/kenyagov.html consulted on 28/04/11; Elliott et al. 2003.

dependent on cotton and for the involvement of the Bretton Woods institutions in the matter.

The Director-General is instructed to consult with the relevant international institutions including the Bretton Woods Institutions, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Trade Center to effectively direct existing programmes and resources toward the diversification of the economies where cotton accounts for the major share of their GDP.¹⁰⁹

This section of the text, which was drawn up by the conference chair, Luis Ernesto Derbez, reflected the US position and it was rejected outright by the Cotton Four. Benin submitted a proposed revision to the text on 7 October 2003.¹¹⁰ Negotiations continued to stall. On the matter of cotton there appeared to be a game ping pong being played between the United States and the European Union on whose cotton subsidies were worse.

The WTO initiated the African Regional Workshop on Cotton, held at Cotonou, Benin, in March 2004. The workshop was attended by representatives of the Cotton Four, twenty-six other African countries, Canada, the European Union, Japan, the United States and China.¹¹¹ At this workshop, a distinction was made between the development aspects and the trade aspects of the Sectoral Initiative on Cotton. The workshop dealt exclusively with the development aspects, while the trade aspects were set aside to be dealt with as part of the general negotiations on agriculture. However the WTO's Summary Conclusions of the workshop note, 'it was frequently underlined that the optimal and comprehensive response lay in coherence between trade and development policies.'¹¹² This reflects a disagreement between WTO member countries that wanted cotton to be negotiated separately (including the Cotton Four) and those that wanted cotton to be reintegrated into the global framework of agriculture negotiations (Amehou 2005, p. 25).

At the Cotonou workshop, the EU and US negotiators presented their proposed responses to the development aspects of the Cotton Initiative. The EU–

¹⁰⁹ www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min03_e/draft_decl_rev2_e.htm consulted on 28/04/11.

¹¹⁰ WT/GC/W/516

¹¹¹ Summary conclusions from the Cotonou workshop: document WT/L/564 of 31 March 2004.

¹¹² Summary conclusions from the Cotonou workshop: document WT/L/564 of 31 March 2004.

Africa Partnership for Cotton Development includes technical support and financial assistance to a large number of African cotton sectors in the form of loans and subsidies, as well as discussion of the ‘trade dimension’ (EU–ACP c.2008). The United States presented its Millennium Challenge Account, and the Cotonou workshop was the genesis of the West Africa Cotton Improvement Program (USAID 2006), which was launched in November 2005 ahead of the next WTO Ministerial, in Hong Kong.

In order to get negotiations on the trade aspects of cotton back on track, several principles were agreed in Geneva as part of the July 2004 Framework Agreement. Cotton was placed firmly back into the Doha round but it was agreed that it would be addressed ‘ambitiously, expeditiously, and specifically, within the agriculture negotiations.’¹¹³ A sub-committee on cotton was set up, charged with overseeing progress on the cotton issue and coherence between the trade and development aspects of cotton. Part of paragraph 27 of the Derbez text, cited above, reappeared almost word for word in the text of the ‘July package’, demonstrating how much ground the Cotton Four had lost to the United States since Cancùn.¹¹⁴

The December 2005 WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong saw limited progress on cotton. The United States agreed to eliminate all export subsidies by 2006, but these had already been ruled illegal by the WTO in the Brazil dispute and they represented only a small percentage of total support to cotton (Oxfam/Green 2005, p. 12). The Cotton Four were faced with the pitfalls – which they had hoped to avoid – of cotton being integrated in the general agriculture negotiations.

In Hong Kong, US negotiators managed to turn a dispute settlement ruling against the USA into a bargaining chip for which developing country negotiators were expected to make concessions in other areas. (Oxfam/Green 2005, p. 12)

The other offers made by the United States were far from what the Cotton Four were looking for. It proposed to allow tariff-free and quota-free access for African cotton to its cotton market, regardless of the fact that the United States is not a target market for West African cotton (Oxfam/Green 2005, p. 8). The United States

¹¹³ WT/L/579 Appendix A.

¹¹⁴ WT/L/579, paragraph 1(b).

also threw into the negotiations its West Africa Cotton Improvement Program (WACIP), which offered a small sum¹¹⁵ as financial assistance to selected countries (the Cotton Four plus Senegal) (ibid., p. 12). The WACIP also promotes liberalisation and privatisation in African cotton sectors, and the introduction of genetically-modified (GM) cotton (USAID 2006).¹¹⁶ The United States succeeded in changing the terms of the debate on cotton from criticism of subsidies to criticism of the competitiveness of African cotton sectors.

International debate on developed country cotton subsidies was accompanied throughout by highly vocal opposition to ‘unfair subsidies’ from civil society organisations. Indeed, without civil society pressure, it is unlikely that the Sectoral Initiative on Cotton would have come about. Chapter six explores in detail the transnational civil society campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies.

Conclusion

The principal lesson to be drawn from the events sketched in this chapter is that the world trade system is not rules-based, but power-based, in that stronger countries are able to effect outcomes in trade negotiations that are contrary to the rules, and that African farmers who participate in the global cotton value chain are in a particularly vulnerable position. US and EU cotton subsidies are extremely costly to African producers. However, they are not the only factors affecting farmers’ incomes. What is more, given the power-based nature of the world trade system, challenging these subsidies has been a relatively risky strategy for cotton-producing African countries. While the United States pays Brazilian farmers nearly \$150 million a year to avert retaliation against its cotton subsidy regime, it has offered only \$5 million to West African cotton sectors, in the form of ‘aid’. Indeed, this rather paltry amount can be seen as another vehicle for the advancement of US economic interests, since it also promotes the introduction of biotechnology controlled by US firms, and by increasing pressure for – and ‘assistance’ with – deeper liberalisation and privatisation of African cotton sectors.

¹¹⁵ US\$7 million, of which only \$5 million is ‘new money’ (Oxfam/Green 2005, p. 12).

¹¹⁶ Since non-food products made from GM cotton are not required to be labelled as such, there is no GM segment of the world cotton fibre market and no price premium linked to GM.

Analysis of liberal reform of African cotton sectors, promoted by the international financial institutions, demonstrates that not all functions previously carried out by single channel marketing systems are readily transferred to the private sector. A major problem identified with the liberalisation and privatisation of cotton sectors is the provision and recovery of input credit following the disestablishment of seed cotton purchasing monopsonies. This aspect is inextricably linked to the paradox of resource-poor farmers being reliant on expensive inputs. Pressure to keep using pesticides and synthetic fertilisers is linked to the imperative to maintain high quality fibre and high yields in order to remain competitive in international markets.

It is only in the long term that the impacts of cotton sector reform on the provision of public goods such as agricultural extension, research and development will be seen. Meanwhile, sectors have fared better where they have been concentrated and when there has been effective co-ordination or co-operation between actors. Sector-wide institutions that bring together all stakeholders and regulatory bodies with real powers have been shown to be a minimum requisite for averting disaster. The experiences of Côte d'Ivoire and Benin warn of the implication of political interests in the management and reform of African cotton sectors: this is a theme all-too-pertinent to Mali, and which runs throughout the rest of this thesis.

In Mali, cotton has brought wealth to rural communities, both in terms of private income and collective goods, such as infrastructure and healthcare centres. It has also brought poverty in the form of debts and a widening socio-economic gap between rich and poor households. The factors that originally discouraged peasants from adopting export-oriented cotton production have remained salient: cotton is labour and capital intensive, and vulnerable to fluctuations in the world market. An elite of cotton producers has gained a political voice since the early 1990s, with the creation of the first cotton union, SYCOV. While the CMDT and its French partners set out to educate SYCOV's leaders about the world market and convince them to work together in pursuit of mutual interests, the union's material dependence on the establishment has ensured their compliance. Cotton leaders have been drawn into webs of patron–client relations, while the vast majority of farmers in Mali remain inadequately represented and continue to suffer from the contradictions of cotton

policies. In his study of African farmers in the cotton commodity chain, Bassett (2008, p. 59) concludes that ‘Cotton producers and their supporters must struggle in both local and global arenas to increase their share of world market price as a step toward improving rural livelihoods in West Africa.’ The subsequent chapters explore this struggle, but also a wider one, in which some African smallholders question whether participating in the global cotton value chain is really the best strategy for enhancing their livelihoods.

Chapter four

Methodology

Research aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to understand how civil society networks operate and what factors affect the impacts they have on livelihoods and on democratic participation in governance in local, national and international arenas. Within this broad aim, a specific objective of this research is to consider campaign networks as viewed from the standpoint of their beneficiary-participants. As mentioned in chapter one, this research aim was motivated in part by personal experience of working in a civil society network, as a campaigner with a Northern-based international NGO. The choice of research topic was motivated by my personal curiosity and my personal values. I wanted to know what grassroots participants and intended beneficiaries thought of the campaign, and I believed their perspectives were important. Christians (2005, p. 142) notes that Max Weber considered it normal and unproblematic that the researcher's initial choice of topic be motivated by value judgments. The personal motivation for this research coincided with the empirical observation that international NGOs are focusing their efforts increasingly on transnational campaign networks and that there is increasing emphasis within this trend on deepening the involvement of Southern actors within these networks. The choice of research objective and of specific research questions was further motivated by a review of the literature on civil society networks, as detailed in chapter two, which points to the need for further research into power, values, interests and perspectives in the interactions between network actors, and between actors and their wider environments.

Research questions

1. What are the perspectives, values and interests of (potential) actors in the transnational civil society networks?
2. How do these perspectives, values and interests relate to the political arenas in which actors are situated and to the multiple political arenas through which network relations flow?
3. How are actors' different perspectives, values and interests mediated through network relations? What role does power play in these processes?
4. How does transnational civil society action impact on the multiple political arenas through which network relations flow, in particular, on the livelihoods of farming families in Mali's cotton zone?

Research strategy

In order to narrow the focus of research, I set out to follow two lines of enquiry, one on opposition to privatisation of the cotton company (*Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles*, CMDT) and the other on the campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies. I had identified these themes as significant political topics during fieldwork research for my Masters dissertation in 2005. I wanted to observe real-time interactions between actors in a natural setting, but found that actors had largely moved on from activity around these two themes by the time I was conducting fieldwork research for this thesis. This meant that the data I could obtain on these two themes were largely limited to actors' retrospective accounts given in interviews and to the contents of documents and other social artefacts. Nonetheless, I conducted participant observation at Malian social forums (*Forum des Peuples*), and observation at the offices of civil society organisations in Bamako. In addition to these two lines of enquiry, I decided to look at the work that two of the main actors in these case studies were subsequently doing in the cotton zone. The distinction between organisations and individual actors was blurred because, in both cases, the individuals had influenced the choice of work they were doing on behalf of their respective organisations. One of the actors was an Oxfam worker who was working with local cotton co-operatives through a Malian farmers'

association; the other was the president of a Malian NGO, based in Bamako, who was acting as a national level broker between a British NGO, Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), and members of local cotton co-operatives.

Early in the research process, I attempted to map out the transnational civil society network of actors involved in campaigning around cotton in Mali. This approach is similar to that used in social network analysis.¹¹⁷ However, I found this approach unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. There was a high degree of overlap between organisations and considerable blurring between individuals and organisations. The fluidity of relationships was such that it was difficult to take a ‘snapshot’ of the social network. The three influence diagrams in appendix two represent an attempt to present snapshots for three different years, 2003, 2005 and 2007. The process of attempting to map actors and their relationships prompted me to question whether there was a delimitable network engaged in civil society activity on cotton in Mali. The network analysis approach could have been applied in the case of a single, highly-organised campaign, such as that of the campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies, but the objectives of this research project were broader: to consider how such a campaign fits into the wider social and political environment; to consider non-participation as well as participation; and to consider the effects of the campaign on its would-be-beneficiaries.

Through the difficulties that I experienced in gathering information in order to map actors and their relationships, I found out that the very definitions of these elements, which comprise civil society networks, were the subject of controversy among the actors themselves. I decided that this controversy, which is part of the ongoing process of network formation (cf. Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos 2004, p. 850), was the most interesting subject of research and the most pertinent to answering the research questions. I opted to carry out qualitative research in order to give prominence to the actors’ own interpretations and analyses of their relationships rather than developing my own interpretations of these relationships at an early stage of the research. This fieldwork methodology was influenced by the actor-oriented approach (Bebbington et al. 2003, p. 7). Observation and participant observation allowed study of interactions between actors, and interviews were used to facilitate

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Knoke and Yang (2008).

enquiry into actors' motivations and beliefs. This seemed to me to be the best way to work towards a degree of value neutrality – or more accurately, of value relevance – in the research process, as advocated by Max Weber (Christians 2005, p. 142).

From the outset, I considered taking an ethnographic approach in order to gain insights into actors' subjective perspectives and to observe their interactions in a natural setting. However, in addition to the obstacle noted above of seeking to research past events, I found that participation in campaign activity was not an everyday or core activity for many of the actors involved, even at the level of farmers' unions. I decided against spending an extended period of time in a rural research site so as to avoid becoming immersed in agronomic concerns. A further obstacle to using ethnographic methods was access. The Oxfam worker mentioned above, who was a key gatekeeper, would not permit me to conduct participant observation on the grounds that the working relationships between the actors involved were already too strained. Instead, a combination of semi-formal and informal interviews were used, together with documentary analysis. Participant observation was used in following the Malian NGO, AMADIP. Interviews were also conducted with staff of AMADIP and EJF. These research methods are discussed in greater detail below.

Research sites

The fieldwork research for this thesis entailed following chains of relationships within networks of actors operating at global, national and local levels. The selection of research sites was inspired by multi-sited research: 'Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations' (Marcus 1995, p. 105). In the research, global, regional, national and local arenas were defined in terms of the focus of activities. Most organisations defined themselves in terms of a single arena, for example, as a national NGO or as a West African regional farmers' network, but they often intervened in multiple arenas. Most individuals operated in more than one arena, for example, a representative in a regional network also held a national level position, participated in meetings of the World Trade Organization, and managed a family farm in his village of origin.

In West Africa, research was conducted in Bamako and in Dakar, Senegal, and with farmers and farmer representatives in Mali's cotton zone. Bamako, the capital of Mali, was selected as the hub of civil society activity on cotton in Mali. Dakar was selected because it was the location of the regional offices of the NGOs Oxfam and ENDA from which much of their campaigns and advocacy work on cotton in West Africa was coordinated. Beyond analysing documents produced in the UK by NGOs, only a very small amount of fieldwork was done in the UK, with campaign actors who had returned there after working in West Africa. The reason for this was in order to maintain the focus on West African actors rather than on the internal workings of Northern-based NGOs.

In Mali, in addition to Bamako, the main sites chosen for fieldwork research were the locales of Koutiala and Fana, in the South East of the country (see figure 1 on page iv). These were chosen through purposive sampling (Blaikie 2000, p. 205) as sites for semi-structured interviews, since they had contrasting reputations as politically 'radical' and 'moderate' arenas.¹¹⁸ Koutiala, where the peasant movement emerged in the early 1990s,¹¹⁹ is a large town with a high level of cotton-based industry as well as an important market. Fana is a small market town, located on an arterial trunk road between Bamako and Segou. Interviews were conducted both in the centre of these small towns and in surrounding hamlets (Kodabougou, Wolodo, Dien, Moribila) so that voices from both centre and periphery might be heard.

Fieldwork

Qualitative, primary data were generated from individuals in semi-natural social settings through semi-structured interviews; in natural social settings through observation, participant observation and informal interviews; and from social artefacts (e.g. petitions, newspaper reports, project evaluation reports) through documentary analysis.

I began the fieldwork stage of research for this thesis with a period of training in the Bamanankan language in Bamako from July to September 2006, at the start of which I took the opportunity to attend the *Forum des Peuples* social forum in Gao as

¹¹⁸ See Docking (2005, pp. 217–219).

¹¹⁹ See chapter three, p. 55.

a participant observer. In October 2006, shortly after I had begun informally interviewing civil society actors in Bamako, I suffered an assault, after which I left the field. I returned for an extended period from the start of June 2007 to the end of February 2008.

I began this main period of fieldwork by attending the *Forum des Peuples* social forum in Sikasso as a participant observer in early June 2007. I then embarked on an attempt to map out the civil society actors involved in campaigning on cotton in Mali by conducting formal and informal interviews, and by attending relevant public events, mostly in Bamako. In July 2007, I took an opportunity that arose to observe the national parliamentary elections in Niono, where I was also able to observe a meeting of a newly-founded rice farmer's union. From there, I joined the Malian NGO, AMADIP, on its research tour of the cotton zone in July and August 2007, observing the NGO at work in villages and hamlets around Koutiala, Sikasso and Bougouni. Following this, Moctar Coulibaly of AMADIP, whom I informally helped with English-French translation, sought agreement from their British counterpart NGO, EJF for me to join their joint tour of the cotton zone later in the year. Before responding to this request, EJF staff asked Moctar Coulibaly to hire a French-English interpreter for their tour. I helped Moctar to look for a suitable Malian candidate but we were unable to find any to satisfy EJF's requirements of a high level of English at a relatively low rate of pay. Eventually, Moctar nominated me; EJF offered me the job; and I accepted it on condition that I could act as a participant observer. I also provided free accommodation at my home in Bamako for the two EJF workers during their stay in Mali. The joint EJF-AMADIP tour of the cotton zone (Fana, Koutiala, San, Sikasso, Bougouni) took place in November 2007. In September, October and December 2007, I conducted formal and informal interviews and observation with civil society actors and farmer representatives in Bamako. In January 2008, I travelled to Dakar, Senegal, in order to interview staff at the regional headquarters of Oxfam and ENDA. In February 2008, in addition to continuing my work in Bamako, I conducted interviews and observation in Fana and nearby hamlets (Dien, Wolodo, Kodabougou) and in Koutiala and nearby Moribila. I concluded the fieldwork in October 2008 with follow-up interviews with two NGO

workers in the UK who had been informants in Mali; a formal interview in London and an informal one in Oxford.

There were advantages and drawbacks to each of the methods of data collection that I used. Clearly, an advantage of conducting participant observation as an interpreter was that it secured my access to the EJF–AMADIP tour of the cotton zone, but a disadvantage was that I was so busy interpreting that I did not have much time to make my own fieldnotes. In the evenings, I was able to make some notes on the evolving relationship between AMADIP and EJF, and their interactions with other organisations. But I was not able to note down much of the rich data provided by EJF’s interviewees. A verbal agreement to share this data was subsequently withdrawn due to concerns over data protection on the part of the EJF staff member’s line manager. Indeed, from an ethical perspective, it was possible to obtain informed consent from these interviewees in some, but not in all, cases. For the most part, I gathered field observations and notes of informal interviews, not linked to individuals by name.

The main method of data collection I used was formal interviewing. This had an advantage in terms of ethics; it was clear to informants how I would use the information they gave me. As mentioned above, it also enabled me to find out about events in the past, and about actors’ subjective perspectives. Interviewees were selected through ‘snowball’ sampling (Blaikie 2000, p. 205), which identified individuals who had worked together in the network. I attempted to use the signatories to two petitions as populations from which to select interviewees, but the data from only one of these petitions were available. In the case of that petition, not all of the names were legible and I was not able to locate all of the individuals whose names were legible. Thus I was obliged to use the snowball method for finding people who had signed either petition, largely through the recommendations of the petition organisers and of research assistants at each locality. This was how I made contact with the interviewees in Wolodo, Kodabougou and Dien. I was also keen to interview some individuals who had not participated in either petition, and I used the snowball method for that, too, in particular through a research assistant who had

acted as a local point of contact for the NGO tours in which I acted as a participant observer. This was how I made contact with the interviewees in Moribila.

A comprehensive list of formal interviews conducted is provided in appendix one. Forty-four interviews were conducted in total. The breakdown by locality was as follows: Bamako (17), Dakar (2), London (1), Fana (8), Dien (4), Wolodo (1), Kodabougou (1), Koutiala (8), Moribila (2). However, the location of interview was not overly significant in many cases, for example, of farmer representatives who travelled frequently between Bamako and their home towns or villages in the cotton zone, and of NGO workers who travelled frequently between Dakar and Bamako.

A limitation of all interviews was that the accuracy of the data depended upon the quality of the informants' memories. To some extent this limitation was mitigated by the research focus on attitudes and opinions rather than facts, and the use of multiple informants and social artefacts to corroborate reported events. However, it was common for farmer interviewees in the cotton zone to be unable to recall which petitions they had signed, because, they said, CMDT agents were always coming to ask them to sign various pieces of paper. This frequent remark was in itself quite telling of the power relationship between the CMDT and farmers.

Another challenge arose from the use of multiple languages. Most of the research was conducted in French, which is a second language for me, as it was for most of the interviewees. A few interviews were conducted in English, with native speakers. In the cotton zone, however, I employed research assistants to act as interpreters as well as gatekeepers and, in some cases, chauffeurs. Informants chose between speaking Bamanankan, Minyanka or French. In practice, most spoke a hybrid of Bamanankan and French. My rudimentary knowledge of Bamanankan was sufficient to notice rare occasions when the interpreter did not interpret my question accurately or missed out information given in reply. I also had the advantage of direct translation of interview transcripts from Bamanankan to English with the help of a native speaker after leaving the field. The main challenge I found in terms of language was the paucity of vocabulary among informants in the cotton zone, or, as I suspected was also the case, a tendency to talk around the subject rather than to speak frankly. Idiomatic use of language was common, which was pleasingly poetic but left unwanted scope for interpretation. At the interview stage, I attempted to

address this through follow-up questions, and, at the analysis stage, I used the whole interview to inform my interpretation of specific phrases.

The way in which I conducted fieldwork was affected by my own personal identity and subjectivities. The reality of being a British woman researching the male-dominated world of African farmer organisations was that it was uncomfortable most of the time. My reaction to culture shock and experiencing an ‘outsider’ identity was to build up social ties with people I had met in Bamako during a previous fieldtrip but who would not be informants for this study. When I returned to the field after the assault in 2006, I relied on my social networks for a sense of security to an even greater extent, and I avoided situations in which I would be alone or isolated. It was not possible to avoid such situations entirely while conducting research, but if it were not for these fears over personal safety, I would have travelled independently in the cotton zone and in pursuit of certain potential interviewees more than I did.¹²⁰ More generally, security was a concern when travelling to certain areas, for example, the village of Moribila between Koutiala and San, even in the company of Malian NGO workers, because of the high incidence of hijacking and armed robbery in the area, a phenomenon that has since escalated to levels of international concern.¹²¹

I found early on that asking informants to sign consent forms was an inappropriate tool for making research ‘ethical’ in the field. The very use of the written word on paper and the power-symbol of a signature reinforced the power relationship between interviewer and interviewee, in a context in which farmers were wary of being duped into signing away their land rights. In Mali, social ties are a better-trusted system of protection than is the legal-judicial system. Thus the social ties that I had built up in Mali were valued highly by my informants as a form of reassurance that I was trustworthy and that if I let them down, they knew who to complain to. Each of my gatekeepers in rural areas would introduce me to interviewees with a long preamble, naming all the individuals, families and organisations through whom they knew me. I presented myself and my research

¹²⁰ Baz Lecocq (2002) argues that fears over personal safety significantly affected research decisions he made during fieldwork in Mali.

¹²¹ Police would only allow us to continue on the road if we paid for two Tuaregs armed with AK-47s to ride in the back of our pick-up (fieldnotes, Koutiala, 12/11/07).

project; showed the informant my dictaphone, explained that I needed it to help me remember exactly what they said and asked their permission to record; and asked whether they wished to be cited by name or anonymously. Once permission was obtained and confidentiality preference stated, I indicated that I would begin recording and asked the interviewee to introduce themselves in their chosen manner.

All interviewees gave full consent at the start of the interview, some emphatic that their names, occupations and locales be stated clearly. However, two professional interviewees requested anonymity part-way through the recording when discussing particularly sensitive matters. Both informants were concerned to avoid souring professional relationships. Mid-way through one of these interviews, when I rather naïvely posed a question as to how a farmer leader whose reputation was tarnished by allegations of corruption had nonetheless been elected president of a national union, the informant became suspicious of me, suggesting that I could not be a research student because I knew too much. Trust was quickly regained, however (my naivety all too obvious), and I realised that the informant was worried about being quoted publicly as saying something that might make him a target of politically-motivated harassment, which might range from threats to arbitrary imprisonment or a beating. I gave assurances of anonymity and later emailed a censored copy of the interview transcript to the informant to reassure that no controversial comments would be linked to the informant's name.

Two interviewees protected themselves from being misquoted – or perhaps from saying too much – by insisting on bringing witnesses into the interview with them. Initially I was concerned that the presence of witnesses would distort the data and ensure that only public rather than hidden transcripts would be revealed. But, from an ethical perspective, it was paramount that the informants felt safe. Once they felt safe, the informants actually spoke quite openly while remaining comfortable with the interview process.

In using the snowballing method for obtaining contacts for interview, I was keenly aware of the need to avoid putting informants at risk (professionally, politically or personally) by giving away any information that might lead to their identification in connection with the expression of certain opinions or my obtention of certain information. I felt very uncomfortable in this situation. Particularly with

regards to the politically-sensitive data, I felt as though I were inadvertently peeking into Pandora's Box and I wanted to close the lid quickly. At the same time, I was curious and I felt I needed to understand more, while my sense of justice motivated me to get to the bottom of the stories and viewpoints participants had shared with me. But I kept reminding myself that I was an academic researcher, not an investigative journalist. I tried to maintain a broader perspective, to explore how these shadowy machinations (which I was unlikely ever to uncover fully) – and moreover the fear and outrage that interviewees expressed (whether justified or not) – affected the workings of civil society in Mali and links with transnational advocacy networks.

Data analysis

The data were analysed by grouping together similar statements from the informants' responses and entering them into a matrix with information about the speaker: their place of residence/work, their occupation, their organisational affiliation, any social positions held, and whether they had taken part in campaigning either on cotton subsidies or on privatisation/liberalisation. In the case of cotton farmers and their representatives, their membership of any farming union or past participation in cotton strikes were noted, and used as indicators of the history, level and nature of their political activity. Similarly, other types of data such as field observations, informal interviews, email communications and written documents were grouped both according to theme and according to context. Informants' reports of events were cross-checked with other informants' testimonials and with newspaper reports and organisations' reports; while the opinions they expressed were compared and contrasted.

Chapter five

Opposition to liberalisation of the cotton sector and privatisation of the CMDT

Introduction

This chapter looks at civil society opposition to the cotton sector reform programme in Mali. It examines the responses of cotton farmers and their organisations to the reforms, and considers their relationships (or lack thereof) to domestic and transnational civil society networks. The chapter looks at the roles of an international non-governmental organisation (NGO), Oxfam, which worked with producer groups on the issue, and of groups from wider civil society in Mali, which led a petition against privatisation of the Malian cotton company, CMDT (*Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles*). The background to the reforms, including the domestic and international policy contexts in which they are situated, was detailed in chapter three.

The interventions by an international NGO and by a national NGO coalition, examined in this chapter, involved attempts to facilitate the participation of Malian farmers in the debate over cotton sector reform. One of the main critiques of participatory development is that it is attempted without an adequate understanding of how power operates in the context in question (Hickey and Mohan 2004). In this case, civil society opposition to the cotton reforms was not connected – or not connected effectively – between local, national and international arenas; this chapter investigates why.

The idea to explore a case in which a transnational advocacy network did *not* emerge is inspired in part by the need, identified in chapter two, to understand the political arenas in which potential network actors are situated, and in part by Crenson's (1971) study, comparing the emergence and non-emergence of air

pollution as a political issue in two American cities.¹²² The differences between Crenson's study and this case are vast, however; the machinations of politics in this case were far from subtle, and opposition to privatisation featured strongly as a political issue. Yet, where there was potential for the mobilisation of a strong, transnational civil society movement against liberal reform of Mali's cotton sector, none emerged. By exploring the wider political context and paying attention to a campaign issue that did not develop into the basis for concerted transnational action, this case study sheds light on aspects of the construction of transnational civil society networks which might otherwise remain obscure.

The main argument of this chapter is that civil society opposition to liberal reform of Mali's cotton sector was not connected – or not connected effectively – between local, national and international arenas because there were diverse interests at stake, there was competition between alternative framings of debate, and there was an inadequate analysis of power by potential network actors. Part of the explanation for this disjuncture lies in the adherence of the international NGO to its own agenda, driven by priorities shaped in the international arena, and by its lack of understanding of the local and national political arenas in Mali.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first looks at the programme for reform of the cotton sector in Mali, and at the somewhat belated attempts by producer leaders to develop a united position on the policy changes. It considers the support offered to the producers by an international NGO, and notes that some farmers began to voice their concerns through a social forum organised by a coalition of national NGOs. The second section looks at how the World Bank responded to slow implementation by the Malian Government of the unpopular reforms, and how the Government in turn secured the co-operation of cotton union leaders for a liberalised price-setting mechanism demanded by the Bank. The third section considers the perspectives of organisers of, signatories to, the petition against privatisation of the CMDT. It compares them with those of the cotton farmers' leaders and considers why they differ. This final section also reflects on issues of

¹²² Carpenter (2007) makes a rare attempt to theorise why some topics are taken up as issues by transnational advocacy networks while others are not. Although Carpenter's insights bear some relevance here, it is not so much issue non-emergence but the disjointedness of a potential network that is the focus of this chapter.

representation and advocacy, and the potential contributions of civil society organisations, both national and international.

Cotton sector reform and producers' responses

In February 2001, the Government of Mali set up a task force, the *Mission de Restructuration du Secteur Coton* (MRSC), reporting directly to the Prime Minister and charged with 'elaborating, coordinating, monitoring and implementing' reform of the cotton sector (Republic of Mali 2004, p. 2). The MRSC organised the *États Généraux du Secteur Coton* in April 2001, in which representatives of the CMDT, the Government, donors and producers were invited to participate. At this meeting, producer organisations, encouraged by the *Association des Organisations Professionnelles Paysannes* (AOPP), voiced their opposition to the privatisation agenda put forward by the Government. In an interview, AOPP External Relations Secretary, Ibrahima Coulibaly outlined the position that his organisation took at the cotton sector meeting.

We fought a lot against privatisation because we think that it is not the solution and, despite the fact that cotton has problems, it is not the act of cutting up the company, selling it to private interests that is going to sort out farmers' problems – at the risk of creating more problems for farmers. [...] So for us it [the solution] wasn't really privatisation but cleaning up the management of the company – reducing the personnel perhaps, I don't know, or the operating costs or other things – but really managing the company well so that it might be profitable without being privatised. That was our position.¹²³

The AOPP acknowledged the problems with the CMDT but argued that its management should be improved rather than the company privatised.

The output of the *États Généraux du Secteur Coton* was integrated into the cotton sector development policy (*Lettre de Politique de Développement du Secteur Coton*, LPDSC), which was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 6 June 2001. But

¹²³ Interview with Ibrahima Coulibaly, AOPP External Relations Secretary and President of CNOP, Bamako, 17/01/08. Original: On s'est beaucoup battu contre la privatisation parce que nous pensons que ce n'est pas la solution et, malgré le fait que le coton connaît les problèmes, ce n'est pas le fait de découper la société, de la vendre à des privés qui va régler les problèmes des paysans au risque de créer encore de problèmes aux paysans.

as the following citation from the policy paper shows, the producers stood little chance of resisting liberal reform of the sector:

The Government stays loyal to its policy of liberalisation of the economy translated by a disengagement of the State from productive, industrial and commercial activities in favour of the private sector and local groups. At the *Etats Généraux du Secteur Coton*, the Government recalled that a sector as large as the cotton sector could not remain outside of this policy. But it has been made clear that every reform of this sensitive sector should be measured, well thought through and consensual. This is why it is envisaged that in a timely manner awareness-raising activities will be carried out among producers on the *incontrovertible* reforms of the sector. (République du Mali 2001, p. 2, emphasis added, my translation)¹²⁴

The central thrust of the cotton sector development policy as laid out in the LPDSC was the withdrawal of the State from the productive, industrial and commercial activities of the CMDT. The CMDT was to refocus its activities on the industrial and commercial aspects of the cotton sector, and to withdraw from public services, agricultural extension services, input and equipment provision, and transportation. This was to entail a corresponding reduction in personnel. The financial capital of the CMDT was to be opened up to producers and workers. Producers were to be involved in providing the services they themselves required. In recognition of the fact that as they stood in 2001, producer organisations did not have the legal status to allow them to become shareholders in the CMDT and were not capable of taking over the functions of service provision, the policy provided for capacity building of managerial skills and organisation among producers.¹²⁵

The action plan that accompanied the policy anticipated the installation of a private company in the zone administered by the *Office de la Haute Vallée du Niger* (OHVN), with shares to be ceded by June 2002.¹²⁶ The cotton oil and other by-

¹²⁴ Original : [L]e Gouvernement reste fidèle à sa politique de libéralisation de l'économie se traduisant par un désengagement de l'Etat des activités productives, industrielles et commerciales au profit du secteur privé et des collectivités locales. Le Gouvernement a rappelé lors des Etats Généraux du Secteur Coton, qu'un secteur aussi important que la filière coton ne pouvait pas rester à l'écart de cette politique. Mais il a été précisé que toute réforme de ce secteur sensible devrait être mesurée, réfléchi et consensuelle. C'est pourquoi il est envisagé de mener dans les meilleurs délais des actions de sensibilisation auprès des producteurs sur les réformes incontournables de la filière.

¹²⁵ This aspect of the reforms is discussed in chapter six.

¹²⁶ According to the first revision of the timetable, which was agreed on 3 October 2001.

products industries were also to be liberalised, and the cotton oil company, HUICOMA, to be privatised by June 2002, with the State retaining a maximum of twelve percent of shares in the company. Liberalisation of the entire cotton sector was to be completed between 2003 and 2005, including opening up to competition, to new operators and the privatisation of the CMDT. The State was ultimately to hold no more than twenty percent of shares in the cotton company (or companies) (République du Mali 2001).

The sales of shares in HUICOMA and in the OHVN zone were not completed by June 2002. The Government under President Konaré had prepared the way for the sales. But Konaré stepped down in June 2002 having served two terms in office, the maximum allowed by the constitution. Amadou Toumani Touré (known as ATT) was elected as an independent candidate and formed a government in which all the major parties were represented. The timing of the general election probably delayed the sales, but then the outbreak of civil war in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002 made successful privatisations impossible. Until then, most of Mali's cotton and cotton oil had been trucked through Côte d'Ivoire to the port of Abidjan for export. Donors assessed that this slippage of the reform timetable was due to 'market risks arising from the sub-regional crisis' and was not the fault of the Malian Government (ADF 2007, paragraph 3.1.3). As such, it did not hinder the payment in December 2003 of the second tranche of the Third Structural Adjustment Credit (SAC III) under the HIPC framework. HUICOMA was eventually privatised in 2005, and the sale of assets in the OHVN zone was subsumed into the programme for the complete privatisation of the CMDT.

While implementation of the cotton sector reform programme progressed slowly, the cotton producer organisations had much-needed time to regroup. At the *États Généraux du Secteur Coton*, the cotton producers' organisations were in disarray following the 2000/01 strike that split the union movement. It was because of this lack of capacity in the unions that the main challenge to the liberalisation policy at this time came from the AOPP. The AOPP evolved out of the *Commission Paysanne*, a network of peasant organisations supported by the French NGO, *Agriculteurs Français et Développement International* (AFDI). It was formally established as an association of peasant organisations in 1995. In 2001, through the

work of its cotton commission, the AOPP was 'able to bridge some of the divides between different union leaders that had become major cleavages during the strike and try to get more of a united producer voice to engage with government and the Bank.'¹²⁷

In April 2001, SYCOV convened an extraordinary congress of its members to replace the incumbent national president of the union, Yaya Traoré, before the end of his term in office. The newly elected president was Ampha Coulibaly, who had been president of the rebellious Koutiala regional branch of SYCOV that called the 1998 strike. By 2002 there were four cotton producers' unions in Mali: SYCOV and SYVAC in southern Mali; SPCK and SYPAMO in the Kita region of western Mali. They started to work together as a semi-formal group, known as the *Groupement*. SYCOV's new president, Ampha Coulibaly, also became president of the *Groupement* until he was replaced in both roles by Bakary Togola of Sikasso in 2003/04.¹²⁸ In 2004, the group of unions was officially recognised as the *Groupement des Syndicats des Cotonniers et Vivriers du Mali* (GSCVM), and it replaced SYCOV as the channel through which the Government negotiated with the producers (ENDA Diapol 2008, p 48).

In order for producers to take on the responsibilities envisaged for them in a liberalised cotton sector, a new form of producer organisation was deemed necessary. Law no. 01-076 on the registration of co-operative societies was passed on 18 July 2001, giving legal status to co-operatives but not to village associations. It would take some time to transform each and every village association into a co-operative, not least because the initiative for change came from the top down. By 2007, the co-operatives would be organised into a pyramid-shaped federation, which will be considered in detail in chapter seven. In the meantime, it was the unions, the *Groupement* and the AOPP's cotton commission that stood between farmers and the reforms.

As one of the stronger national civil society organisations in Mali, the AOPP attracted the support of the international NGO, Oxfam. In October 2002, representatives from the AOPP and Oxfam went together to Washington DC to lobby

¹²⁷ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

¹²⁸ Interview with Ampha Coulibaly, Koutiala, 23/02/08.

the World Bank directly on the cotton privatisation agenda.¹²⁹ This initiative was led by the AOPP representative, Ibrahima Coulibaly, who used his personal contacts at the World Bank. He reported, however, that he felt that this strategy had proved futile: “I myself- We went all the way to Washington. ... We campaigned all the way to Washington. But what? That does no good. ... That doesn’t change the position of the Bank. It changes nothing.”¹³⁰

Oxfam staff working with farmers’ organisations in West Africa were well aware that issues to do with privatisation and liberalisation were at the forefront of people’s concerns. Nevertheless, at international level, Oxfam’s attentions were subsequently diverted to its campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies, which will be considered in detail in the next chapter.

They’re not exactly competing agendas but, you know, at a global level, because of the prominence of the WTO process, and because that was kind of the target in terms of Oxfam’s global campaigning, the organisation was very much focused on the issues that could be directly linked to the WTO process.¹³¹

At national level in Mali, however, Oxfam continued to support the AOPP, which was ‘fighting a little bit of a rear guard action to try and oppose privatisation’ at a time when the policy was already beginning to be implemented.¹³² The international NGO helped to fund a series of activities organised by the AOPP’s cotton commission from early 2003 onwards.¹³³ These activities included advocacy training, travelling to other countries to learn about experiences of privatisation there, and informing grassroots farmers about the reforms through radio.¹³⁴

Keifa Diarra was part of a delegation of Malian producers who travelled to Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Benin, Cameroon and Chad to learn about the processes of privatisation and liberalisation of the cotton sectors in those countries. He

¹²⁹ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07; interview with AOPP External Relations Secretary, Bamako, 17/01/08.

¹³⁰ Interview with Ibrahima Coulibaly, AOPP External Relations Secretary, Bamako, 17/01/08. Original: *Moi, je suis- On est allé jusqu’à Washington. On est allé. On a fait la campagne jusqu’à Washington. Mais qu’est-ce que- ? Ça sert à rien, ça sert à rien. Ça ne change pas la position de la Banque. Ça ne change rien.*

¹³¹ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

¹³² Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

¹³³ See influence diagram for campaign actors in 2003, in appendix two.

¹³⁴ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

discussed his experience of the trip during an interview conducted in 2008, at which time he was SYCOV's regional president in Fana and secretary general at national level.

the countries that went through privatisation before us, not one of those countries copes. We started with Benin, which was the showcase, where we all went on a study tour there to see what happens at the outset ... and in the end we realised that it was worthless. [...] So, after the tour of Cameroon, of Benin, of Chad, of Burkina Faso, of Côte d'Ivoire, we understood that privatisation- not one of their companies could bear it any longer. The only one that could manage it a little well was the one that had Burkina. At the time Burkina had not really opened its door. It had only just opened its capital to producers and it stopped there. So we could understand that over there and over here it's the same, that's why it's ok.¹³⁵

Keifa Diarra's perspective was echoed by the then SYCOV leader, Ampha Coulibaly, who reported having taken part in a study trip to Burkina Faso, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire that was financed by the World Bank and the French development agency, AFD.¹³⁶ Cotton producer leaders in Mali looked to Burkina Faso, where reforms were relatively minimal, as a model of privatisation to be followed. They accepted the opening up of the capital of the cotton company to producers and the taking over of certain functions by producer organisations, but they wanted to retain an otherwise integrated system involving a single cotton company.

Ampha Coulibaly said that on their return from their regional tour, the farmer leaders told the Malian State that they did not want 'savage privatisation' and that the State would just have to wait because the farmers were not well organised yet: co-

¹³⁵ Keifa Diarra, SYCOV Regional President, Fana, 19/02/08. Original: les pays qui nous ont précédé à la privatisation, aucun de ces pays ne s'en sort. On a commencé par le Bénin qui était la vitrine, où on a tous fait le voyage d'étude là-bas pour voir ce qui se passe au départ ... et finalement on a compris que ça ne vaut rien. [...] Donc après le tour du Cameroun, du Bénin, du Tchad, du Burkina Faso, de la Côte d'Ivoire, on a compris que la privatisation au- aucune de ses sociétés ne le supportait plus. Le seul qui le supportait un peu bien c'était l'une qui l'avait le Burkina. Et à l'époque le Burkina ne s'était pas en porte vraiment ouvert. Elle avait tout juste ouvert son capital aux producteurs et ça s'arrêtait là. Donc on pouvait comprendre que chez eux et chez nous c'est la même chose c'est pourquoi ça va.

¹³⁶ Interview, with Ampha Coulibaly, Koutiala, 23/02/08.

operatives would have to be set up in every village and, even at the time of speaking in 2008, this mission had not been completed.¹³⁷

If today [in 2008] you see that the privatisation is still being implemented, that it hasn't yet been completed in Mali, it's us the producers who have blocked it. It's us, it's us who have said 'No, we don't want savage privatisation'. Indeed, it's us that always say, 'We're not organised; we're not organised; we're not organised'. ... But if today in 2008 we tell them we are not organised. If I say to you 'Wait, I'm not organised. You must wait for me until next year.' Next year I say, 'ah, I am still not organised. You must give me more time.' I am obliged to go ahead. There is nothing else to say. That's where we are today.¹³⁸

The cotton producers' organisations were not ready to undertake the new roles envisaged for them in a liberalised cotton sector. This was indeed given as a reason for delays in the implementation of the reforms (World Bank 2006, p. 12). Ampha Coulibaly claimed that this feet-dragging was a deliberate delaying tactic on the part of the cotton unions.¹³⁹

Meanwhile, increasing numbers of farmers got involved in an annual social forum, the *Forum des Peuples*, organised by a coalition of civil society groups, CAD-Mali (*Coalition des Alternatives Africaines Dette et Développement*).¹⁴⁰ In 2004 the forum was held in Kita and a group of ten farmers from Fana went to the forum to express their discontent regarding the privatisation of the CMDT.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Interview with Ampha Coulibaly, Koutiala, 23/02/08. Original: on ne veut pas la privatisation sauvage.

¹³⁸ Interview with Ampha Coulibaly, President of the Regional Union of Cotton Producer Cooperatives of Koutiala and San, Koutiala, 23/02/08. Original: Aujourd'hui si on voit que la privatisation est en cours jusqu'à présent ce n'est pas réalisée au Mali, c'est nous les producteurs qui ont débloqué. C'est nous, c'est nous qui a dit « non, on ne veut pas la privatisation sauvage ». Or c'est nous toujours on dit que « nous on n'est pas organisés ; nous on n'est pas organisés ; nous on n'est pas organisés ». ... Mais si aujourd'hui en 2008, bon, on leur dit on n'est pas organisé. Si je te dit « attends, moi je ne suis pas organisé. Il faut m'attendre l'année prochaine ». L'année prochaine je dit « ah, jusqu'à présent je ne suis pas organisé. Il faut me donner encore un temps » Je suis obligé d'y aller. Je n'ai pas autre mot à dire. On est à ce face là aujourd'hui.

¹³⁹ Serra (2012) argues that delays in implementation have had some positive benefits in terms of gradual shaping of the reforms to the preferences of Malian actors and increasing consensus, acceptance and ownership of the reforms.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Mme A. Barry, President of CAD-Mali, Bamako, 25/02/08. Original: La première édition, il y avait 400 participants dont environ 300 était des paysans ; la deuxième édition où il y avait 650 participants dont 450 était des paysans, la troisième édition où il y avait 750 participants dont 500 était des paysans et à Fana où vous étiez il y avait 1500 participants dont environ 1000 étaient des paysans.

¹⁴¹ Interviews with several farmers, Fana, 17/02/08.

When the railway was privatised, there were difficulties for the population of Kita, cutting their resources and paralysing the village of Kita. These difficulties were explained to us at the Kita forum in 2004. Us, we are in a cotton zone and we don't know if the CMDT, which is our resource, will be sold and we will experience the same difficulties as Kita. ...[W]e said to ourselves that it'd be better to come explain our discontent faced with the problems of the privatisation of the CMDT.¹⁴²

The group had been approached by one of the forum organisers, CAD-Mali Press Officer Modibou G. Coulibaly, who originated from Fana and who had established the local community radio station, *Radio Fanakan*. Modibou Coulibaly (CAD-Mali) reported that, at the Kita forum in 2004, some individual SYCOV leaders spoke in favour of privatisation: 'we called them "the sell-outs"'.¹⁴³ He reported that the main conclusion of the discussion at the 2004 forum was that the CMDT should not be privatised but that farmers should be integrated into the company's management and represented on its governing board so as to avoid a repetition of the mismanagement that had crippled the company and cheated the producers. The Fana delegation's request to host the following year's forum was successful and the main theme would be opposition to the privatisation of the CMDT.

Cotton union leaders comply with implementation

The timetable for cotton sector reform underwent a number of revisions. In 2004, privatisation of the CMDT was due to be completed by 2006. But then President Touré dispensed with protocol and wrote a personal letter to the director of the World Bank to delay privatisation until 2008.

In the summer of 2004, the President of Mali informed the Bank of the Government decision to postpone the privatization of CMDT by two

¹⁴² Interview with Mamadou Konaté, President of the local Chamber of Agriculture in the commune of Gigy, Fana, 17/02/08. Original: Quand le chemin de fer a été privatisé il y a eu des difficultés au niveau de la population de Kita en coupant leurs ressources et paralyser le village de Kita. Ces difficultés nous ont été expliquées lors du forum de Kita en 2004. Nous, nous sommes dans une zone cotonnière et on ne sait pas si la CMDT qui est notre ressource sera vendu et qu'on va rencontrer les mêmes difficultés que le Kita. ...[O]n s'est dit qu'il sera mieux de venir expliquer nos mécontentements face aux problèmes de la privatisation de la CMDT.

¹⁴³ Interview with Modibou Coulibaly, CAD-Mali activist, Bamako, 13/02/08.

years from 2006 to 2008, because of: (a) the delay in selecting an investment bank to advise the Government on the privatization; (b) the need for more time to strengthen producer associations; and (c) the Presidential election scheduled for the Spring of 2007. This important announcement from the President of Mali was taken as a sign of the lack of political commitment on the part of the Government for the privatization of CMDT, and contributed to the delay in processing the operation. (World Bank 2006, p. 12)

The fact that President Touré sought to delay privatisation of the CMDT to avoid jeopardizing his chances of a second term in office did not go unnoticed by at least one civil society activist in Mali.¹⁴⁴ In opting for 2008, he ignored the recommendations of the very government body he had set up to implement the reforms, the MRSC, which ‘had prepared a strong technical case to postpone the privatization until 2010’ (Bergamaschi 2008, p. 239).

As the tone of the above citation from the World Bank document suggests, the President’s move also provoked tension between the Government and Bank staff working with the country.

the donors were kind of vitriolic about how – I mean, not just the obvious ones as well – they took it kind of personally the fact that ATT wrote to Wolfensohn and in a sense went over the head of the donor community and said, ‘We want to delay privatisation’. And there was a lot of very bad feeling about it. It was like they’d been betrayed. ... It was kind of extraordinary.¹⁴⁵

President Touré had won a temporary reprieve for the cotton sector. But he had exhausted any bargaining power he had with the Bank, and this episode would prove to be a turning point in the implementation of the reforms.

Mid-way through the agricultural year 2004/05, while negotiations for a fourth structural adjustment credit (SAC IV) were under way, the World Bank demanded that the Government reduce the promised producer price for that year in line with the plummeting world market price. Farmers had already taken out credit for inputs and sown their crops on the basis of the price fixed at the start of the year. To lower the price at that stage would have had devastating consequences for rural

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Moctar Coulibaly, president of AMADIP and CAD-Mali activist, Bamako, 22/10/07.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

livelihoods, and the Government feared another farmer revolt, so it refused.¹⁴⁶ In defence of the Government's stance, the Minister of Agriculture pointed to a letter from the CMDT's French shareholder, DAGRIS, stating that the company would not support a reduction in the producer price and would cover any deficit (above 8 billion F CFA) that might ensue.

A large deficit did result but DAGRIS reneged on its promise. (World Bank 2006, p. 13). The World Bank subsequently pushed for a new price-setting mechanism that would link the producer price to world market prices, and keep it within a narrow band between 160 and 175 F/kg. When the Malian Government rejected this price range, the SAC IV negotiations broke down.

Because the Government's initial approach would put the burden of the unfinanced gap wholly on the budget, the Regional Operations Committee (ROC) decided in September 2004 to defer authorizing appraisal until the Government provided an acceptable response to the concerns raised in the pre-appraisal Aide-memoire, namely: (i) how the deficit from the 2004/05 season would be covered; and (ii) how the producer price-setting mechanism would be strengthened to avoid setting an unsustainable price in the future. (World Bank 2006, p. 13)

The suspension of the SAC IV authorising appraisal in effect meant a suspension of World Bank aid to Mali worth a potential US\$50 million (Oxfam 2006, p. 20). This experience deepened a split in the Government between the cash-strapped Ministry of Economy and Finance, eager to off-load the burden of the fund-sapping CMDT, and the Ministry of Agriculture, which opposed privatisation of the company (Bergamaschi 2008, p. 238). The Ministry of Agriculture was 'progressively marginalized': 'Donors chose the institution they were willing to negotiate with, and it was the Ministry of Economy and Finance that signed the price scheme in January 2005' (Bergamaschi 2008, p. 238).

The pressure put on Mali by the World Bank to adopt this very specific domestic policy of the price-setting mechanism became the subject of two Oxfam briefing papers, but not until a few years after the event. In 2006, Oxfam released 'Kicking the Habit', criticising World Bank conditionality, which included a case

¹⁴⁶ 'The Government was apprehensive that reducing the price from CFAF 210 to 190 per kilogram after it had been set would result in a farmer revolt of similar or worse proportions than in 2000.' (World Bank 2006, p. 13)

study of cotton privatisation in Mali (Oxfam 2006). This paper was drafted for a meeting of donors in Norway because the theme was of particular interest to the host nation.¹⁴⁷ It was followed by a second briefing paper, 'Pricing Farmers out of Cotton', with a similar focus (Oxfam 2007).

The timing of that [2006] report had a lot less to do with what was going on on the ground in Mali and a lot more to do with that debate happening at international level. I mean it was quite sort of disconnected to be perfectly honest from the national level.¹⁴⁸

In an interview, an Oxfam staff member reported that at the time, Oxfam's organisational priorities were still centred on its campaign on cotton subsidies, and it did not have the necessary staff in place in Washington to track World Bank activity: 'And I think there was quite a number of people, both in Washington and here [Mali], that have always felt that we should have been working much more focusing on the Bank.'¹⁴⁹ Despite the opinions of some individuals there was hardly any civil society counter-pressure on the World Bank. In this constrained policy-making context, attention in Mali remained focused inwardly on negotiations between the Government and the producers.

In December 2004, the AOPP Cotton Commission ran a workshop for cotton farmer leaders to develop a united position on the proposed price-setting mechanism. The three-day workshop was funded by Oxfam and was facilitated by an AOPP technical assistant on secondment from the French development agency, AFD. In an interview, an international NGO worker described the process whereby, despite this support, cotton producer representatives failed to negotiate with the Government in the interests of the producers as a whole.¹⁵⁰ A government representative who had been invited to attend on the final day of the workshop arrived instead at the start of day one. He had already been on a tour of the cotton zone with the Prime Minister and the cotton union representatives to discuss the proposed price-setting

¹⁴⁷ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

mechanism. The union representatives returned from this tour with ‘a slightly ambivalent position’ of reluctant compliance with the policy change.¹⁵¹

It was the government representative and not the unionists who arrived at the workshop with all of the meeting notes from the tour. The farmer leaders complained that they had not had an independent consultation with their constituents on the policy. The government representative offered funding for them to conduct such a consultation, writing out a cheque on the spot. The union leaders became preoccupied with discussing the details of this consultative mission: ‘who was going to which region and how many cars they’d need’. The NGO worker reported feeling uncomfortable with the way in which the farmer leaders took the government money and let themselves be completely distracted from analysis of the price-setting mechanism: ‘I spent most of the meeting arguing with [top cotton union leader] in the breaks about whether or not we were going to pay a *per diem* for the chauffeur which was just like, “Is this really the only interesting thing you have to say to me?”’¹⁵²

The cotton farmer leaders eventually carried out an independent consultation in the cotton zone and came up with a critique of the price-setting mechanism and suggestions of ways in which it could be modified. Yet they did not negotiate any significant changes to the proposed mechanism. ‘In spite of all that, they just signed it. ... There was a lot of muttering. Some of the other regional to national level leaders were uncomfortable with it, I think.’¹⁵³ Neither did the farmer leaders secure any significant benefits in return for cotton producers. Despite prompting from facilitators, they did not make any demands on the Government with respect to the considerable sum owed by the CMDT to the farmers from the loss of their support fund through CMDT mismanagement and embezzlement.

The interviewee reported that the farmer leaders would not engage in discussion about their negotiating strategy: ‘I mean there were all sorts of issues like, why would they discuss it with people like us? As in, you know, ex-patriot NGO workers or ex-patriot technical assistants. You know, fair enough at one level.’¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

¹⁵² Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

¹⁵³ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

Yet the only negotiating strategy that could be deduced, according to the witness, was union leaders seeking to obtain from the Government an office and other resources to formally establish their *Groupement* of cotton unions. The NGO worker questioned to what extent the union leaders' behaviour was due to 'lack of capacity in terms of lack of experience of actually leading those kind of processes and having a negotiating agenda' and to what extent it was to be explained in terms of 'all sorts of other ways in which negotiations happen, which are much more to do with specific sets of interests or even individual interests, or political interests'.

For me it is one of the defining moments of my time here because it just made me realise that I haven't got a clue what is going on! And that, you know, this idea that you kind of capacity build people around advocacy in some sort of mechanical way is just [*breaks off, speechless*].¹⁵⁵

As president of GSCVM, Bakary Togola signed agreement with the Government of Mali to a new price-setting mechanism on behalf of the country's cotton producers. A World Bank credit of US\$25 million was subsequently forthcoming: 'on January 13, 2005, the authorities signed an acceptable Protocol on cotton pricing. On this basis, the ROC granted the authority to appraise and negotiate on February 1, 2005. ... The Credit was finally approved by the Bank Board on March 22, 2005' (World Bank 2006, p. 13).

Throughout the history of the cotton farmer movement in Mali, discussed in chapter three, those leaders who have maintained their positions have tended to be those who have complied with the governing authorities' demands, and may have accepted bribes to do so. Cotton farmers interviewed during fieldwork in southern Mali in 2007–08 expressed extreme frustration with their leader for signing agreement to the new pricing mechanism, which they did not support. Yet, despite the unpopularity of his actions, Bakary Togola was elected president of the *Assemblée Permanente des Chambres d'Agriculture du Mali* (APCAM) for a five-year term and was invested in office by the Minister of Agriculture on 18 July 2005.

In the preceding month, the Government had demonstrated its renewed commitment to the privatisation process with the sale of the majority of shares in

¹⁵⁵ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

HUICOMA to Groupe TOMOTA, the largest privately-owned Malian company. A report by The Oakland Institute (2011, p. 31) argues, ‘This was a highly controversial transaction that resulted in massive lay-offs and special tax incentives being accorded by the Ministry of Finance to the Tomota Group, after a selling process involving restricted bids.’¹⁵⁶ The Tomota Group has subsequently been involved in a contentious project to expand industrial cultivation of oil-producing crops, including jatropha for agrofuel, on one hundred thousand hectares of land at the *Office du Niger* irrigation scheme (The Oakland Institute 2011).

Although union leaders considered privatisation to be generally detrimental to the cotton sector, they were not opposed to all of the measures brought in by the reform programme. Isaline Bergamaschi (2008, p. 237) notes that ‘Maliens within and outside of government did not form a united front. Indeed, the interests at stake on the Malian side were very diverse, even among the anti-privatization group.’ As mentioned above, union leaders welcomed the entry of producers into the financial capital of the company and the increased participation of producers in the running of the sector. Responsibility for the provision of ‘non-strategic’ inputs (for food crops) was transferred from the CMDT to the cotton unions (GSCVM). Bakary Togola, GSCVM President, was implicated in two scandals involving the over-invoicing of imported herbicides for the 2005/06 and 2006/07 agricultural years (*Traoré/Le Républicain*, 22/07/08). Alexis Roy (2010a) describes how the top representatives of the four cotton unions that constitute the GSCVM collaborated in this reaping of rewards from their new roles in the liberalising cotton sector.

They [the unionists] shared the roles, but also the resources, by diverting the tendering procedures and overcharging the producers they were supposed to be representing for the agricultural inputs supplied. Their disagreements of the past temporarily put aside, the union leaders were now more occupied with sharing this manna among themselves than in fighting privatization. (Roy 2010a, p. 307)

In the absence of a transparent and accountable system of producer representation, the transfer of responsibilities to producers merely represented a

¹⁵⁶ The Oakland Institute’s (2011) report cites the following online source: www.reussirbusiness.com/10329-Mali-Cession-de-HUICOMA-au-groupe.html, which was verified and consulted on 13/08/12.

transfer of certain rent-seeking opportunities from the cotton company to a select few cotton farmer representatives.

Broader civil society groups mobilise against privatisation

In July 2005, civil society groups mobilised against privatisation of the CMDT at the *Forum des Peuples* in Fana.¹⁵⁷ The event would feed into the polycentric World Social Forum, one ‘centre’ of which was held in Bamako in January 2006. Forum organisers, CAD-Mali, and one of their coalition members, the *Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes* (CNOP),¹⁵⁸ led a petition expressing opposition to the privatisation of the CMDT and to the introduction of genetically modified (GM) cotton seeds.¹⁵⁹ The petition organisers, who were aware of pressure on the Government from Monsanto and USAID to introduce GM crops in Mali, feared that opening up the cotton sector to private companies would open the door to GM cotton without democratic consultation or an effective regulatory framework. The petition was hand-printed in the Bamanan language onto huge sheets of Malian cotton cloth. In the period leading up to the forum, the organisers took it on a tour of provincial towns (Bougouni, Sikasso, Koutiala, Ségou, Niono and Kita) where they linked up with local farmer representatives. Through community radio stations they broadcast invitations to farmers in outlying villages to come to town to discuss the petition and to sign it if they were in agreement. During the forum, the petition was a springboard for discussion at the *conférence populaire paysanne*. At the end of the event, participants marched through Fana chanting, ‘*Non à la privatisation*’ and ceremoniously presented the petition to the local authorities.¹⁶⁰

The same international NGO worker who had witnessed the signing of the new pricing mechanism attended the Fana forum and was critical of the campaign against privatisation of the CMDT, regarding it as a belated input from ‘civil society groups who really had not been very engaged with the farmers’ organisations back

¹⁵⁷ See influence diagram of campaign actors in 2005, in appendix two.

¹⁵⁸ The CNOP was officially founded in 2004.

¹⁵⁹ For a copy of the CAD-Mali petition, see appendix three.

¹⁶⁰ Fieldnotes, Fana, 09/07/05. Note: This fieldwork research conducted in 2005 contributed to my masters dissertation (Coughlan 2005).

when it mattered in 2000/01'.¹⁶¹ For this informant, the 2005 campaign against privatisation of the CMDT came 'at a point when farmers' organisations have really let go of that because it wasn't going anywhere.' The campaign was viewed not only as behind the times and disconnected from farmers, but as contrary to their interests as they now perceived them.

And I think, for a lot of them, why would they be loyal to the CMDT? ... And whilst they see a lot of negative examples, they also see what happened in Burkina. ... You know, there are people also who see it as an opportunity.¹⁶²

The informant commented that, rather than a position 'worked out in a dynamic with farmers' organisations', the campaign against privatisation of the CMDT seemed to be more part of an 'on-going anti-privatisation stance' by groups that had tried and failed to stop privatisation of electricity and of the railways.

Many of the forum organisers were indeed educated urbanites, brought up on a diet of socialist politics, for whom 'privatisation' was taboo.¹⁶³ Informal interviews with forum organisers in 2005 revealed, however, that their opposition to privatisation was based less on socialist ideology *per se* than on their fear that privatisation would result in a loss of sovereignty, since it was assumed that any private investors would be foreign.¹⁶⁴ The takeover of the cotton oil industry by a Malian company was itself controversial, as mentioned above, but it was also relatively exceptional. Foreign-owned companies have invested in strategically important sectors in Mali. Malian railways, for instance, were bought by Franco-Canadian consortium Transrail in 2003. The company prioritised more profitable freight over passenger transportation. Through lack of investment, the Dakar-Bamako line deteriorated to the extent that it was subsequently closed to passengers between Dakar and Kayes in western Mali.¹⁶⁵ Petition co-ordinator Moctar N.

¹⁶¹ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

¹⁶² Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

¹⁶³ It should be noted that when activists spoke against privatisation they were referring to the sale of the CMDT to private companies, not to the ceding of a portion of shares to producers. During a focus group interview with young forum organisers in Bamako in June 2005, for instance, one of the participants pointed out that something needed to be done about the bad management of the CMDT and that the producers should enter into the capital of the company. (Fieldnotes, Bamako, 12/07/05).

¹⁶⁴ For further elaboration of this point please refer to my masters dissertation (Coughlan 2005, p. 38).

¹⁶⁵ www.seat61.com/Senegal consulted on 12/08/10.

Coulibaly commented that given the strategic importance of cotton in Mali, privatisation would be bad for the economy in general, and for cotton farmers in particular.¹⁶⁶ Civil society activists felt they had some right to express opposition to a policy that would have knock-on effects on the entire population.

It is also worth noting that the petition organisers were of the same social strata as many of the CMDT's employees: farmers' sons who were educated to degree level in Bamako before taking up posts with the company. For this group, the CMDT represented their best chance of employment in the relatively lucrative bureaucracy.

Petition organisers connected with farmers not through the cotton unions at national level but through an umbrella group of farmers' organisations, the CNOP, which facilitated contact with farmer representatives in the provincial towns. Vice President of the CNOP, Souleymane M Keita, shared the fear of losing yet another national asset to foreign ownership.

Mali, at the time of the independences, was one of the first to build small national industries. Over time we noticed that all were sold off, sold at a low price. And then we didn't know what was done with all that money. So, cotton that we had left, with its processing units that are a bit a part of our sovereignty, if we must sell those factories too, it's a part of the country's sovereignty that goes with them. Because cotton has generated a lot of interest in our countryside. It's true that there have been problems around it, but there have nonetheless been big development interventions around cotton, notably in terms of literacy, infrastructure, roads, in terms of the advancement of rural women, *et cetera*. So, in privatising, are all these benefits going to be kept?¹⁶⁷

The petition organisers found an ally in the farmers' umbrella group. One of the main aims of the petition, according to CAD-Mali's Moctar N. Coulibaly, was to

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Moctar Coulibaly, CAD-Mali activist, Bamako, 22/10/07.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with S M Keita, Vice President, CNOP, Bamako, 12/02/08. Original : Le Mali au moment des indépendances, a été l'un des tous premiers à bâtir des petites industries nationales. Au fil du temps on a constaté que tout était bradé, vendu à bas prix. Puis on ne savait pas qu'est-ce qui était fait avec tout cet argent. Bon le coton qui nous a resté, avec ses unités de transformation qui est un peu une partie de notre souveraineté, si on doit aussi vendre ses usines, c'est une partie de la souveraineté du pays qui s'en va avec. Parce que le coton a suscité beaucoup d'intérêt dans notre sous pays là. C'est vrai il y a eu des problèmes autour, mais il y a quand même eu les grandes actions de développement autour de coton, notamment au niveau d'alphabétisation, en matière d'infrastructure, routière, en matière de promotion de la femme rurale, *et cetera*. Donc est-ce que en privatisant, tous ces acquis vont être gardé ?

encourage debate about privatisation in rural areas. He said that the text was drawn up so as to explain the stakes of privatisation rather than simply to assert opposition. He claimed that the State never explained privatisation to the population, but gave a false impression through radio broadcasts that it would improve matters for farmers.¹⁶⁸ An official questionnaire that farmers were required to complete posed only four closed questions on the policy changes (*Traoré/Le Républicain*, 22/07/08).

In terms of the position of the petition organisers in the wider political landscape in Mali, there was significant overlap between association with CAD-Mali and membership of the left-wing opposition party, SADI (*Solidarité Africaine pour la Démocratie et l'Indépendance*). The headquarters of the two organisations were located across the road from one another in Bamako until 2008, when the SADI office moved a few streets away. In Koutiala, a stronghold of the SADI party,¹⁶⁹ the local branch of CAD-Mali occupies the same building as the local Kayira radio station, which is effectively an arm of SADI. One CAD-Mali activist interviewed seemed to have difficulty in distinguishing her membership of one organisation from that of the other.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, in an informal interview, the then national president of CAD-Mali commented on the difficulties she faced in keeping the two organisations separate. She felt SADI regarded CAD-Mali as a fertile recruitment ground and that some SADI members sought to capture CAD-Mali for party political ends.¹⁷¹

In Koutiala, two CAD-Mali activists, interviewed separately, expressed opposition to privatisation of the CMDT not from an ideological perspective but in terms of distrust of the ruling elite.¹⁷² One was a Fulani herder and one a cotton farmer's wife. They claimed that President ATT and his entourage were seeking to purchase the CMDT in order to plunder it for private gain. Upon questioning they confirmed that they had heard suggestion of a link between the country's national debt and the policy of privatisation but, ironically, the supposed debt and development activists did not believe this to be true. The CAD-Mali local branch in

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Moctar Coulibaly, CAD-Mali activist and president of AMADIP, Bamako, 22/10/07.

¹⁶⁹ SADI held the parliamentary seat for Koutiala from 2002-2007 when it lost the election after infighting between candidates. In 2009 Koutiala town elected a SADI mayor, one of ten SADI mayors in the Koutiala region.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Kadija Traoré, CAD-Mali activist, Koutiala, 21/02/08.

¹⁷¹ Fieldnotes, Mme Barry's house, Bamako, 25/02/08.

¹⁷² Interviews with Adama Bocoum and Kadija Traoré, CAD-Mali activists, Koutiala, 21/02/08.

Koutiala was immersed in community development activities and minor conflict resolution. There was little evidence of success in linking global debates to local level, though one member had attended the World Social Forum in Nairobi where she participated in a discussion on safe drinking water.¹⁷³

The petition organisers' opposition to privatisation of the CMDT was indeed contiguous with their opposition to privatisations in other sectors in Mali. Their analysis of the policy was variously coloured by notions of sovereignty, socialism, and opposition politics conceived in terms of distrust of the current power-holders. Educated activists in Bamako articulated the policy's relation to international institutions, but the campaign was focused inwardly on domestic policy debate. The petition was entirely separate, however, from the negotiations that had been going on between the Government and the cotton unions on the policy. Civil society activists claimed some legitimacy to speak against a policy that they felt would harm the nation as a whole. Yet the petition was not necessarily disconnected from farmers. Its organisers actively sought to encourage farmers to debate the cotton sector reforms at local level.

Fieldwork interviews were conducted with farmers and other rural dwellers who had signed the *Forum des Peuples* petition against privatisation of the CMDT. Eight interviews took place in Fana; four in the nearby hamlet of Dien; and one in each of the more remote hamlets of Wolodo and Kodabougou. Eight interviews were conducted in Koutiala. Also interviewed were farmers in the small town of Moribila, north of Koutiala, who had not encountered the petition (two interviews, involving three farmers in total). The interviewees gave their perspectives on the proposed privatisation and on their own participation (or lack thereof) in the policy-making process.

Four out of eight interviewees in Koutiala who had signed the *Forum des Peuples* petition were critical of the Government's role in the proposed privatisation.¹⁷⁴ This view was expressed by cotton farmer Bourama Goita, who was later elected mayor for the SADI party in the commune of Goadji Kao, Koutiala. Bourama Goita had been a founding members of SYCOV and had participated in

¹⁷³ Her trip was financed by *France Libertés – Fondation Danielle-Mitterand*.

¹⁷⁴ Interviews with F. Sumunu, B. Goita, A. Boucoum, and K. Traore, Koutiala, 20–21/02/08.

cotton strikes but was now disillusioned with the union. He argued that the Government should take responsibility for the mismanagement of the CMDT, reform the company, put producers on the governing board, and thereby avoid privatisation.

They say each time that the CMDT is not well managed, so the Government takes money to complete the price of cotton. But it's false. But who is the CMDT? It's the Government! The Government can well enough follow the CMDT in its actions. From that basis, the company could be made to work well. If the people work in a wrong way, crafty guys, manipulation just about everywhere, but that cannot work well.¹⁷⁵

A similar opinion was expressed by Fode Sumunu, a retired CMDT agent, also a SADI supporter, who reported having marched with other workers in protest at the proposed privatisation.¹⁷⁶ He reported that the CMDT was even found to have over-invoiced stationery to the value of two, three or four thousand francs CFA to cover up the gap in its finances.¹⁷⁷ Bourama Goita described how corruption permeates every level of the cotton company, citing the example of CMDT lorry drivers who illegally sell diesel to villagers when they go to collect seed cotton, noting that the villagers see nothing wrong in this and that the supervisors are well aware of the practice.¹⁷⁸

Three interviewees in Koutiala referred to the much-criticised privatisation of HUICOMA and to the closure of its oil-processing plant in Koutiala.¹⁷⁹ They emphasised the area's dependence on cotton and the inter-linked nature of inhabitants' livelihoods.¹⁸⁰ This point was echoed by three interviewees in hamlets

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Bourama Goita, cotton farmer, Koutiala, 21/02/08. Original: Ils disent chaque fois que la CMDT n'est pas bien géré, alors le gouvernement prend de l'argent pour compléter le prix du coton. Mais c'est faux. Mais la CMDT c'est qui ? C'est le gouvernement ! Le gouvernement peut bien suivre la CMDT dans ses actions. À partir de là maintenant, la société pourrait bien être travaillé. Si les gens travaillent de tort, travaillent-, des malins gars, la manipulation un peu partout, mais ça ne peut pas bien marcher.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Fode Sumunu, retired CMDT agent, Koutiala, 20/02/08.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Fode Sumunu, retired CMDT agent, Koutiala, 20/02/08. Original: on a même fait la facturation des bics à deux milles, trois milles, quatre milles pour boucher le trou.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Bourama Goita, cotton farmer, Koutiala, 21/02/08. Original: Même les chauffeurs-là de la CMDT aujourd'hui qui partent dans les campagnes pour ramasser le coton, eux ils tous vendent le gazon. Dans les villages, personne n'est contre ça. Et puis les responsables le savent très bien. Les chauffeurs aussi sentent que les responsables savent.

¹⁷⁹ Interviews with F. Sumunu, B. Goita, and K. Traoré, Koutiala, 20–21/02/08.

¹⁸⁰ A specific example cited by Fode Sumunu was local women who produce and sell soap made from cotton oil (interview, Fana, 20/02/08).

around Fana.¹⁸¹ These were farmers who had signed the *Forum des Peuples* petition but who were not ostensibly engaged in party politics. One was a member of SYCOV, one of SYVAC; both of whom had participated in cotton strikes. Interviewees in and around Fana were generally more accepting, however, of the Government's claim that its hands were tied and it could not avoid privatising the CMDT because it was too large a financial burden.

Some interviewees in Fana referred to a prime ministerial visit to the town, which took place in 2005 after the *Forum des Peuples*. During this public meeting, farmers expressed their opposition to the privatisation policy. One interviewee, Seydou Touré, recalled that he was designated as a spokesperson for the farmers.¹⁸² He told Prime Minister Ousmane Issoufi Maïga that they did not want privatisation because of the negative experiences of cotton farmers in neighbouring countries faced with privatisation of their respective cotton companies. Among their grievances were problems of input supply, costs of transport to market, and the cessation of infrastructure maintenance. The Prime Minister responded by saying that it was the CMDT and not the farmers' fields that would be privatised. The farmers interviewed seemed to regard this statement as a closing of the debate.

The Prime Minister said, 'You farmers, your fields are not being sold. Your farming materials are not being sold. Your hoe is not being sold. It's the CMDT that is being sold.' Well, we don't have any power. We said, 'Sell it.' 'If it', it was said, 'if it pleases you, sow cotton; if not, leave it.' We understood.¹⁸³

It would seem that the Prime Minister had conducted a very successful public relations exercise in Fana. Another interviewee, Seydou Touré, cited his words in explaining local farmers' switch from cotton to maize cultivation.¹⁸⁴ The farmers interviewed seemed satisfied that they had expressed their concerns, been heard by the Prime Minister and responded to, and were now ready to accept the executive

¹⁸¹ Interviews with A. Fomba, Dien; B. Diarra, Kodabougou; and B. K. Traoré, Wolodo; 17–18/02/08.

¹⁸² Interview with Seydou Touré, cotton farmer, Fana, 17/02/08.

¹⁸³ Interview with Mamadou Konate, cotton farmer, Fana, 17/02/08. Original: Premier Ministre ko 'Awma. Awn chikelaw, awn ka furuw man fere. Awn be chike kow man fere. Awn ka daba man fere. CMDT de be fere.' Bon, sé te awn ye. Nous ko, 'B'a fere.' 'N'a', o kora, 'n'a diara awn ye a na kòòri dja; a ma la hem.' An y'a famu.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Seydou Touré, cotton farmer, Fana, 17/02/08.

decision taken, even though it was contrary to their wishes. Yet the exchange also underlined the farmers' subordinate position in relation to the governing authority.

It is instructive here to refer back to the forms of farmer consciousness discussed in chapters two and three. The Prime Minister's framing of the situation drew upon a sense of the partial autonomy of the peasantry, a notion identified by Isaacman (1993) in relation to apparently passive strategies of peasant resistance. This sense of partial autonomy has long been eroded in Mali's cotton zone, however, through policies that have promoted dependence on cotton. This may be why the point, which in other contexts would appear obvious, was made so clearly by the Prime Minister, and why it made such an impression on farmers. It also allowed for a diplomatic resolution of the situation, in which farmers could adopt a 'public transcript' of respect for authority, while acting on a 'hidden transcript' of powerlessness over government policy but control over their own, physical resources. The Fana farmers' sense of partial autonomy may have been reinforced by the presence of alternative livelihood strategies, including maize cultivation, and by talk of an organic cotton project coming to the area.

One interviewee in Fana who had signed the petition in 2005 said he had since changed his mind and was now in favour of privatisation of the CMDT.¹⁸⁵ At the time of interviewing in 2008 he gave over three out of twelve hectares of his middle-sized farm to cotton¹⁸⁶ and, in addition to farming, he worked as a trader. He said that producers and private companies might understand one another and, in that case, privatisation might work well. He distrusted the CMDT and said that it was CMDT agents who went into the bush to tell people that if the CMDT is privatised it won't be good for farmers.

In Dien, a hamlet just outside Fana, cotton farmers were indeed worried by the prospect of having to deal with private traders instead of the CMDT.¹⁸⁷ These farmers had signed the *Forum des Peuples* petition and were members of SYVAC. Their fears of privatisation included: not being able to make a profit, not being able

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Aziz Bagayogo, Fana, 17/02/08.

¹⁸⁶ Figures for two village areas in Southern Mali given in Moseley (2005, p. 44, Table 6) show farm size to average 12.4 ha of which 3.4 ha are cultivated in cotton (27.4%). However in Moseley's study, in farms of comparable size (around 12 ha), a slightly higher proportion of land was given over to cotton (29.4% Djitoumou and 33.1% in Siwaa) than on Bagayogo's farm (25%).

¹⁸⁷ Interviews with A N Fomba and Bakary Fomba, cotton farmers, Dien, 17/02/08.

to negotiate the price of cotton, no longer having the price fixed at the start of the season, and no longer being able to buy inputs on credit. One interviewee expressed concern that there would be redundancies of CMDT workers.¹⁸⁸ It is worth noting that some farmers take seasonal work with the cotton company to supplement their income. Echoing informants in several locations, Amadou Nekita Fomba said simply, ‘In Mali there is nothing but the CMDT now.’¹⁸⁹ Yet interviewees in Dien showed deference to the Government’s decision to privatise in light of its financial difficulties and the mismanagement of the CMDT.

It’s the donors that finance the CMDT. ... The CMDT itself is not well managed. So the State imposes on the CMDT to privatise. We the peasants don’t have our problem with that. Our problem is only to be equipped with inputs and all.¹⁹⁰

Another cotton farmer by the name of Amadou Fomba said, ‘Unless the leader takes that position, we can do nothing to stop the policy of privatisation.’¹⁹¹

Farmers interviewed in the hamlets of Wolodo and Kodabougou were similarly concerned by the prospect of privatisation of the CMDT and had signed the *Forum des Peuples* petition.¹⁹² These were farmers who had not participated in any strikes. In Wolodo, Bah Kissiman Traoré suggested striking was a self-seeking activity and he preferred to pursue good farming techniques. While Bafing Diarra in Kodabougou said that he had always favoured dialogue with the CMDT. Both farmers expressed unwillingness to give up the CMDT as a national asset.

There are a lot of companies that have been privatised – the railways, SOTELMA, EDM, Hotel de l’Amitié, SONATAM. If today the CMDT will be privatised what will become of the peasants? When it was

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Amadou Fomba, cotton farmer, Dien, 17/02/08.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with A N Fomba, cotton farmer, Dien, 17/02/08. Original: Mali kono, CMDT doron sisan.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Bakary Fomba, cotton farmer, Dien, 17/02/08. Original: Ceux sont les bailleurs qui financent la CMDT. ... La CMDT même n’est pas bien géré. Donc l’état impose à la CMDT de privatiser la CMDT. Nous les paysans, donc, nous on n’a pas notre problème à cela. Notre problème c’est seulement d’en doter en intrants et tout.

¹⁹¹ Interview with Amadou Fomba, cotton farmer, Dien, 17/02/08. Original: Fo nakan yemonkon ye o disposition ta nota i madala na biseka faikai moube abali.

¹⁹² Interviews with B K Traoré, Wolodo, and Bafing Diarra, Kodabougou; both 18/02/08.

through that that everyone was satisfied. Because no family here, where we live, can say that they don't benefit from the CMDT.¹⁹³

Bafing Diarra reported that he had heard, during the *Forum des Peuples*, accounts from farmers from neighbouring countries who suffered extremely late payment for their cotton harvests following privatisation. He believed traders would benefit from liberalisation at the expense of farmers. He worried about obtaining input credit and losing the CMDT agricultural extension service, which, he said, accompanies the farmer to the point where he can repay the credit. He also believed, however, that farmers could do nothing to stop the policy of privatisation as it was imposed from above, ultimately by 'Americans'. He said they were told so at a CMDT training meeting in Fana in 2005. He had said his word on privatisation; now he had to accept the decision of the governing authorities.

Bah Kissiman Traoré expressed dissatisfaction with the Government at what he regarded as an unacceptable lack of consultation with farmers on the policy: 'Even the head of the household consults the family before selling the oxen.'¹⁹⁴ For his part, B K Traoré felt he had not had the opportunity to 'say his word' on the proposed policy, and because of this, he found the Government's decision hard to accept.

In Moribila, a small town north east of Koutiala, just off the road towards Kimparana, farmers interviewed had not encountered the *Forum des Peuples* petition, nor had they participated in cotton strikes.¹⁹⁵ Cotton farmer Alphonse Kone worried about privatisation because, he said, they don't know when it will happen and how it will be.¹⁹⁶ He had heard on the radio that the State gets into debt to finance the CMDT as it is bankrupt. He said farmers are powerless to stop the privatisation or any other policy for that matter: even if they protest, they will not be listened to.

¹⁹³ Interview with Bafing Diarra, cotton farmer, Kodabougou nr Kouroukoro, 18/02/08. Original: Huicoma privatisera, radio mali privatisera, EDM, hotel de l'amitie, SONATAM, Train sira ni be privatisera. O toumana haou bedjigui toube finkele mouka ni oye an be ka missi baye ni haou bebi o nonobo ni oye CMDT o fana privatiseli koumabe sena. Yali haou mounou ye malideye ni ahou ye koukono moyye ahou djigui debe moukeleka bler.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with B K Traoré, cotton farmer, Wolodo, 18/02/08. Original: Mais sani akase baga ferelima i ba fo i ka doudeyer.

¹⁹⁵ Interviews with Michel and Joseph Dembele, and with Alphonse Kone, Moribila, 23–24/02/08.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Alphonse Kone, Moribila, 24/02/08.

All but one of the interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with farmer representation, and some were scathing in their criticisms. The most common complaint was that the leaders of the *syndicats* did not consult farmers or feed back information as they should. Some accused the leaders of complicity with the Government, and portrayed them as the corrupt clients of those in power. There was also frustration with the divisions between the different *syndicats*. Siaka Traoré, a farmer in Fana, said that every effort had been made to tear up the union movement so that they would not all speak the same language. He described unionism in Mali as ‘a system of government’.¹⁹⁷ The worst criticism was reserved for the top cotton farmer representative, Bakary Togola, who was accused of falsely claiming to act in the name of all cotton farmers while in reality acting alone in his own interest. Some interviewees commented that representation had become worse since the establishment of a system of unions of cotton farmers’ co-operatives.¹⁹⁸

The farmers interviewed voiced a number of other concerns besides that of privatisation. A universal complaint was the low price farmers received for the sale of their cotton. At least as significant for the interviewees as the low price of cotton was the high price of agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, and the indebtedness that ensued from buying such products on credit. Another area of concern was low yields, which were linked to soil fertility and ‘age’,¹⁹⁹ and to alternate episodes of drought and flood. A number of farmers said they wanted support to develop the use of ‘traditional’ or organic fertiliser, or to switch to growing organic cotton. While others wanted to diversify to food crops such as maize, beans, sesame and peanut. One interviewee said the Government should help farmers to access these new markets.

All but one of the farmers interviewed opposed privatisation of the CMDT; the only interviewee who was in favour of the policy was himself a trader who may stand to gain from the changes. In their study of Malian farmers’ perspectives on privatisation of the CMDT, Dougnon et al. (2010) conclude that a mentality of

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Siaka Traoré, Fana, 17/02/08. Original: Il y a assez de syndicalisme au Mali, les paysans maintenant- mais c’est un système du gouvernement.

¹⁹⁸ For more on this, see chapter six.

¹⁹⁹ This was of particular concern in Koutiala and Moribila, which are located in a long established and increasingly dry cotton-growing area. Ampha Coulibaly, UR-SCPC President, Koutiala, argued that even with unfavourable prices for buying inputs and selling cotton, a farmer could make a decent living if he could maximise his yields. He wanted a thorough analysis of the fertility of soils in the Koutiala area. (Interview, Koutiala, 23/02/08).

dependence in relation to the paternal Malian State may have weakened the potential of the reforms to produce a successful outcome.

This policy was surprisingly controversial. One can argue perhaps that dirigisme had become so deeply-rooted that farmers were unable to see the new policies as an opportunity but saw them instead as a breaking of a moral relationship – ‘leaving farmers as orphans’. (Dougnon et al. 2010, p. 13)

Farmers’ sense of dependence on cotton is certainly one element of their responses to the policy liberal reform. Dougnon et al.’s conclusion does not, however, adequately represent the range of farmers’ responses cited in their own paper or presented in this chapter. Some farmers’ responses exhibited a proletarian-style defence of their livelihoods, seeking a measure of influence over management of the commodity chain. Other farmers expressed a sense of their ‘partial autonomy’ (Isaacman 1993); that they could not oppose national – let alone international – policy, but could resist passively by withdrawing not only their labour but also their land from cotton cultivation. The majority of farmers interviewed during fieldwork research sought to retain the cotton company as a national institution, while at the same time they deplored the misconduct of certain staff and managers. Interviewees in Koutiala were highly critical of the Government’s role in the privatisation, depicting it as evading accountability for the mismanagement and embezzlement that has ruined the company. Farmers interviewed in more peripheral areas tended to be less oppositional. The farmers’ interview responses highlighted the social significance of consultation, on one hand, and of deference to authority, on the other.

Questions remain, however, as to why farmers did not effectively voice their opposition to privatisation of the CMDT or complaints about the lack of consultation through the cotton unions. Ismael Coulibaly of the CNOP, who helped to organise the petition’s tour of the provinces, commented that local level union leaders were keen to support the petition in order to enhance their legitimacy in the eyes of their constituents.

There were a few misunderstandings between the unions, the leaders and their base. Their base was not very, very happy about certain things. They say the leaders don’t negotiate well with the Government. That’s

why when we introduced ourselves they were very happy because they found in us an ally to validate their right. And it's because of that that the petition was signed by hundreds and hundreds of people.²⁰⁰

The petition against privatisation drew attention to the divide between the farming elite and grassroots farmers. As noted above, the position of the cotton farmers' unions on the reforms was ambiguous.

Among the cotton leaders interviewed there was a strong sense that it was not possible to stop the reforms and that time and energy was better spent preparing farmers for the inevitable changes to come.

In reality we don't want privatisation but we ask ourselves if our companies still have the means because – with the price of cotton on the international market – if the State doesn't help them, I wonder whether the cotton companies can still take the matter of cotton in charge. And the World Bank was categorical: it said it will not finance the budget of a state that pays the deficit of cotton.²⁰¹

Producer leaders have been successfully 'educated' to become co-managers of the sector. This is one reason that their perspectives differ from those of grassroots farmers. Since the reforms were considered inevitable, politically savvy producer leaders would be more concerned to position themselves so as to be amongst the winners in the reformed sector.

More broadly, the different reactions to cotton liberalisation and privatisation may reflect a growing divide between family farming and agribusiness. The then president of CAD-Mali, Mme Barry, remarked that there were 'big farmers', 'already launched into agribusiness', who 'take the leadership to make this privatisation a

²⁰⁰ Interview with Ismael Coulibaly, Vice President, CNOP, Bamako, 21/02/08. Original: Il y avait quelques mésententes entre les syndicats, les dirigeants et leur base. Leur base n'était pas très très contente de certaines choses. Ils disent que les dirigeants, ils ne négocient pas bien avec le gouvernement. C'est pour cela que lorsque nous on s'est présentés ils étaient très contents parce qu'ils trouvaient en nous un allié pour faire valeur leur droit et c'est pour cela que la pétition a été signée par des centaines de centaines de personnes.

²⁰¹ Keifa Diarra, General Secretary of SYCOV, Fana, 19/02/08. Original: En réalité nous on ne veut pas la privatisation mais on se demande si nos sociétés ont encore les moyens – parce que avec ce prix du coton sur le marché international – si l'état ne les aide pas, moi je me demande si les sociétés cotonnières aussi peuvent prendre même la question du coton en charge encore. Et la banque mondiale a été catégorique : elle dit qu'elle ne financera pas le budget d'un état qui paye le déficit de coton.

reality'.²⁰² Wealthier farmers have less to fear from privatisation and liberalisation and even stand to gain from some of the changes. They are better able to cope with the volatility of seed cotton prices that is likely to increase when farmers have to deal directly with private companies trading on the world market. As discussed in chapter three, producers who are able to mobilise greater resources are better able to expand cotton production in years when prices are high. One aspect of the reforms in Mali could be particularly advantageous to wealthier cotton farmers: the restructuring of farmer organisation into affinity-based co-operatives.²⁰³

Setting aside the reasons for the gulf between the cotton farmer leaders and their base, the question remains as to how farmers might bring their leaders to account to ensure that their views are represented at national level. As noted above, the *Forum des Peuples* petition fed into the polycentric World Social Forum held in Bamako in 2006. At this event, the international NGO worker cited above complained that there was much anti-privatisation rhetoric that was disconnected from what the farmer leaders were actually doing in negotiations with Government, and yet there was no overt challenging of the leaders, some of whom were there in person.²⁰⁴ Just as during the negotiations on the new price-setting mechanism, the international NGO worker was left wondering whether the producers have their own, mysterious ways of handling the power play or whether they are ultimately powerless.

[T]here were significant proportions of the, you know, genuine producer representatives or producer movement who know that [a top Malian farmer leader] is like, you know, compromised in all sorts of ways. ... [M]aybe they do have a strategy to deal with it. I don't know. But he- I mean, well maybe it's just because the situation is he's just too politically protected and, I mean, that's all there is to it. But, you know, this is kind of where my understanding reaches its limits. I mean he's known to have been involved in all sorts of fraudulent things: [muffled] input distribution. There was a journalist who was brave enough to publish an article on it about a year ago. It's well-known.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Interview with Mme A Barry, Bamako, 25/02/08. Original: Donc on a les grands agriculteurs qui sont là qui sont déjà lancé dans l'agro-business et c'est eux qui prennent le leadership pour que cette privatisation soit une réalité.

²⁰³ This aspect will be considered in detail in chapter six.

²⁰⁴ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²⁰⁵ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

Ismael Coulibaly commented that local level union leaders were highly receptive to the social forum as ‘a space of free expression’.²⁰⁶ A talking shop of non-directed criticism may be one sense given to this phrase; or it may imply a lack of free expression normally.

Ismael Coulibaly reported that he and CNOP colleagues had encouraged farmers to participate in the forum on the basis that it was not a form of direct lobbying but rather an opportunity to speak freely, ‘in their own name’, without the constraints imposed on them by their union leaders.

It’s very important. It’s minimal, but it’s important. Because when you are in organised systems, when the president speaks, it’s over. There are those who are not in agreement with the president. But the social forum was a platform so that they too might express themselves to say, ‘No, we are not in agreement even with our leaders.’²⁰⁷

This explanation echoes the farmers’ comments, cited above, which reflect the social impossibility of challenging authority directly once an executive decision has been taken. Cotton farmers used the petition and the social forum as vehicles to express their opposition to privatisation, which they felt unable to express through their unions.

Nonetheless, Ismael Coulibaly of the CNOP described the cotton unions as the ‘legitimate defenders’ of cotton farmers on the issue of privatisation. He saw the roles of CAD and CNOP as ‘raising awareness’ among unionists so that they might take up the petitioners’ concerns in their dealings with government. He also emphasised that the petition was a matter of stating a position on the policy, not an attempt to impose that position on the Government.

We presented a position but we cannot say do or don’t do. We can form a social movement but the Government can refuse. ... They have the

²⁰⁶ Interview with Ismael Coulibaly, CNOP Vice President, Bamako, 21/01/08. Original: un espace de libre expression.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Ismael Coulibaly, Vice President, CNOP, Bamako, 21/02/08. Original: C’est très important. C’est minime mais c’est important. Parce que quand vous êtes dans les systèmes organisés, quand le président dit, c’est fini. Il y en a qui ne sont pas d’accord avec le président. Mais le forum social était une plateforme pour que eux aussi puissent s’exprimer pour dire que non, on n’est pas d’accord même avec nos dirigeants.

means of repression... The people is obliged to accept because it can do nothing.²⁰⁸

Moctar N. Coulibaly of CAD-Mali described how the petition organisers had repeatedly requested an audience with the Prime Minister to hand over the petition but each time their demand was ignored or refused.²⁰⁹ The pattern of co-optation and repression of opposition is not unique to the case of cotton in Mali. Tiecoura Traoré, the leader of a citizens' collective against rail privatisation (Cocidirail), who resisted co-optation by the authorities, has been the target of repeated attacks and imprisonment in response to his campaigning efforts.²¹⁰

In this authoritarian, indeed repressive context, national civil society organisations saw a vital role for themselves in defending the interests of rural people who were not being adequately represented through the cotton producers' organisations. In 2008, CAD-Mali launched its own advocacy training course for rural communities.²¹¹ National NGOs may be well-placed to understand domestic politicking. However there remains a gulf between the experiences and perspectives of national NGO workers and the rural people they hope to 'empower'. The 2006 *Forum des Peuples*, held in Gao, was devoted to evaluating the previous forums. A major theme that emerged from the workshop I attended was the continuing lack of mutual comprehension between 'peasants' and 'intellectuals'.²¹²

While interviewing cotton farmers in Miena, near his hometown of M'Pessoba, Moctar N. Coulibaly (CAD-Mali and AMADIP) expressed extreme frustration at their fearful and fatalistic attitudes. The farmers, who were visibly

²⁰⁸ Interview with Ismael Coulibaly, Vice President, CNOP, Bamako, 21/02/08. Original: On a montré une position mais on ne peut pas dire faites ou ne pas faire. On peut faire un mouvement social mais le gouvernement il peut refuser. ... Ils ont les moyens de répression... Le peuple est obligé d'accepter parce qu'il ne peut rien.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Moctar Coulibaly, CAD-Mali activist and AMADIP president, Bamako, 22/10/07.

²¹⁰ In his post as leader of the railway workers' union, Tiecoura Traoré resisted co-optation by the authorities and campaigned against privatisation of Malian railways, another measure prescribed by the World Bank under HIPC. He was illegally dismissed without compensation. Since the railways have been in the hands of private operators, Traoré has campaigned with a civil society collective, Codicirail, to highlight the new companies' mismanagement and the devastating effects on the communities around the railway line. On 5 June 2008, on the eve of one such protest march in Bamako, police stopped Traore while he was filming scenes around the railway line. According to a Cocidirail press release (Bamako, 9 June 2008), Traoré was arrested, beaten and imprisoned; he sustained injuries to his shoulder and lips. The march, for which due notice had been given, was declared "not authorised" at the last minute.

²¹¹ Interview with Mme A Barry, President, CAD-Mali, Bamako, 25/02/08.

²¹² Fieldnotes, Gao, 15/07/06.

nervous about discussing the matter with us, said that they were scared to speak out and say that they were not being represented by their union leaders.

One said, ‘You speak at the appropriate level. When you’re at the bottom, you speak to others at the bottom; you don’t speak to those at the top.’ I asked, ‘Why? What will happen if you do?’ He said, ‘You will be eliminated’, and he made a slit throat gesture.²¹³

As will be shown in chapter seven, these farmers’ fears of repression within their representative structures were exacerbated by events that took place in 2007. The difference in perspectives between the farmers and the national NGO worker demonstrates the gulf between these actors in terms of what they feel are the stakes of opposition.

Conclusion

Effective opposition to the cotton sector reform programme would have required a two-pronged approach, targeting the Government of Mali and the international financial institutions (and by extension donor governments) simultaneously. Internationally-connected debt activists in Bamako appeared well-placed to target both, but they struggled to reconcile domestic and international framings of the issue, which – though logically compatible – tended to compete with one another in public debate. Meanwhile, Oxfam’s priorities at international level were directed to its campaign on subsidies, examined in the next chapter, and the NGO’s analysis of domestic Malian politics was found to be lacking.

While the World Bank openly withheld funds from the Malian Government in a bid to push forward liberal reform of the nation’s cotton sector, the Government’s strategy to ensure the compliance of farmer leaders was more obscure. Since democratisation in the early 1990s, Mali has struggled to allow political space for the expression of alternative perspectives through civil society action. As mentioned in chapter three, even during Konaré’s presidency, when an effort was made to encourage public debate, the 1998 cotton strike in Koutiala was initially

²¹³ Fieldnotes, Miena, 17/11/07.

suspected of being a vehicle for the political opposition and was brutally put down. Under President Amadou Toumani Touré's aid-dependent 'consensus' politics, with its room for manoeuvre being severely restricted by the international financial institutions, there was even more reason for the power-holders to be fearful of revolt and to crack down on non-conformists. By attempting to work through formal channels without fully understanding the workings of domestic politics, the international NGO was at serious risk of being used merely as a source of development rent in the form of project funding and per diems.

Broader civil society groups mobilised against liberalisation of the cotton sector, focusing in particular on privatisation of the CMDT. They felt justified in doing so because reform of a sector as strategic as cotton would impact on the economy of the nation as a whole. Some individuals within these groups were actively involved in opposition politics. These national civil society groups lacked political clout and their petition was ignored by the Government. Neither the authorities nor the international NGO – nor even some of their own number – regarded them as legitimate spokespersons on an issue of cotton sector policy. The *Forum des Peuples* petition came at a time when implementation of the reforms was well underway, and it was entirely disconnected from the on-going negotiations between the cotton unions and the Government. However, evidence from fieldwork research shows that it received support from many grassroots farmers and local level union leaders.

While some farmers constructed their viewpoints in terms of political opposition to the current power-holders, for many of those interviewed, the significance of the petition lay in the opportunity it offered to voice their discontent with a policy that they hardly hoped to influence given their relatively subordinate positions. The cotton sector reforms offered opportunities to some, wealthier farmers, and certainly to the union leaders. But the majority, who did not stand to benefit, seemed to be unable or unwilling to hold their official representatives to account. National NGOs that were concerned to support the marginalised demonstrated a better grasp than did their international counterpart of the power play that effectively silenced opposition to cotton sector liberalisation and privatisation of

the CMDT. Yet they did not manage to make any significant impact in terms of the empowerment of the poor majority of cotton farmers.

The diversity of actors' interests, framings of debate and modes of political participation goes some way towards explaining why there was limited success in connecting public opposition to liberal reform of Mali's cotton sector across local, national and international arenas. This case shows how difficult it is to make campaigns reflect complex realities: framings of the debate both as donor-imposed policy and as Malian Government failures are logically compatible but, in practice, the promotion of either frame was interpreted as a negation of the other. The events retold in this chapter have reminded us, as do Hickey and Mohan (2004, p. 10), of the importance of viewing development as an historical process of social change. Given that formal civil society at national level in Mali is largely dysfunctional or at any rate operating according to an entirely different set of rules, this impacts on attempts to extend civil society action to international level. This argument will be developed further in the next chapter.

Chapter six

The campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies: the view from Mali

Introduction

This chapter looks at the civil society activity that lay behind the campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies, which focused on negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the early to mid 2000s, and was led by the international NGO, Oxfam, as part of its global Make Trade Fair campaign. The chapter considers the workings of the transnational network behind the campaign and relationships between actors within the network, but goes a step further – in recognition of the need to situate transnational networks in the wider political context – to look at dynamics within Malian and West African civil society through the lens of interaction with the global cotton campaign. The trajectory of the WTO negotiations on cotton subsidies was detailed in chapter three.

This chapter responds to the call by Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos (2004) for more empirical research to examine power and values within transnational development networks. As outlined in chapter two, these authors argue that network construction is an on-going and emergent process, which involves contestation between actors. More specifically, Berry and Gabay (2009) argue that global civil society has been mistakenly theorised as a realm of liberal-cosmopolitan values, whereas a more accurate portrayal would acknowledge parochialism and tensions between civil society actors. A central challenge in the theory and practice of transnational civil action is how to reconcile the multiple scales – local, national, regional, and global – across which networks must operate (see, for example, Stokke and Mohan 2001). Unequal power relations, and diverse values and interests, affect the formation of transnational networks and their relationships to the external environment, which they seek to influence. Consideration of the ways in which these

differences are dealt with in transnational advocacy campaigns is closely related to the notion of accountability, which Jordan and van Tuijl (2000) suggest should be conceptualised in terms of political responsibility to the most vulnerable stakeholders.

The international campaign for the elimination of unfair US and EU cotton subsidies was an ambitious attempt to link political arenas and, supposedly, to carry West African farmers' concerns right to the top of global trade governance. However, the local, national, regional and international political arenas were not as well connected as they might have been in the campaign. Jordan and van Tuijl (2000) offer a typology of transnational advocacy campaigns: this campaign most closely resembles the 'disassociated campaign', which has a low level of political responsibility to the local level. The evidence presented in this chapter tallies with Gray's (2008) study, which draws on his own fieldwork research to show how international rhetoric about subsidies is disconnected from local realities in Burkina Faso. In conclusion to the same volume, however, Gray and Moseley (2008) are wholly uncritical of the Malian cotton unions and Oxfam's Make Trade Fair campaign; indeed they praise them as promising for the future. An external evaluation of the Oxfam campaign was far more critical,²¹⁴ as is the assessment made in this chapter.

The campaign against cotton subsidies involved an alliance between civil society organisations and West African governments. International NGOs and Geneva-based civil society organisations provided African governments with much-needed technical assistance, which increased their capacities for negotiating with the United States and the European Union at the World Trade Organization. The campaign also provided an opportunity for West African governments to work in close collaboration with cotton farmer leaders. Observers of the campaign, Pesche and Nubukpo (2005) comment that 'The denunciation of an external enemy and the identification of a simple target (US subsidies) allow African states to gloss over any analysis of their own responsibilities regarding the difficulties facing their cotton industries.' (p. 47). Yet, they argue, 'to bestow overriding importance on the

²¹⁴ *Promises to Keep: an evaluation of implementation of Oxfam's strategic plan 2001-2006*, February 2006

instrumentalisation games that took place could overshadow recognition of the fact that committed African stakeholders were strengthened in the process that contributed to the failure of the Cancùn conference' (ibid., p. 48). This chapter argues that the process of the campaign against cotton subsidies, including the alliance it entailed between civil society and government, served to strengthen one faction in the West African farmers' movement at the expense of another.

This chapter demonstrates that civil society participation in governance in the global arena can undermine democratic accountability in the national political arena. This happened in the case of the campaign against cotton subsidies because power relations between actors, and the diversity of actors' interests and values, were not sufficiently recognised or dealt with accountably by actors in the transnational advocacy network. Alternative perspectives were marginalised through the framing of debate, which was reinforced by the ways in which particular modes of political participation were used in the campaign.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section looks at the genesis of the campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies. The second section outlines the evolution of the cotton subsidies campaign, focusing in particular on the period from 2001 to 2003. The third section explores divisions in civil society in the period following the Cancùn WTO Ministerial conference of September 2003 up to and including the Hong Kong WTO of December 2005. The fourth section builds on civil society actors' perspectives on the campaign that are cited in the first two sections by including the responses of interviewees from Mali's cotton zone, which are compared alongside the reflections of civil society interviewees.

The genesis of the campaign

Four representatives of African cotton farmers launched an online appeal in November 2001 for the elimination of US and EU cotton subsidies.²¹⁵ The appeal was signed by François Traoré, president of the Burkinabè union of cotton co-operatives, UNPCB; Ampha Coulibaly, then president of Mali's cotton and food

²¹⁵ The appeal appeared on the website of ABC Burkina, a non-governmental organisation run by French missionary Fr Maurice Oudet. See appendix four for a copy of the text. Source: www.abcburkina.net/content/view/418/44/lang.fr/ consulted on 06/05/11.

crop producers' union, SYCOV; and farmer representatives from Benin and Madagascar.

These subsidies [which benefit EU and US farmers] have perverse effects on the economies of poor countries, because they artificially stimulate production and lead to overproduction, and thus the fall in prices on the world market. By subsidising their cotton producers, the USA and EU seriously threaten African cotton, and so the future of millions of producers, and the economies of numerous countries such as Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali.

...We solemnly ask the USA and the EU to abolish subsidies to their cotton producers.²¹⁶

Fieldwork research into where farmer leaders got the idea from for this declaration was inconclusive. Ampha Coulibaly, who signed the internet appeal on behalf of Mali's cotton producers, said that the cotton-producing countries consulted here and there until they heard about US subsidies and their impact. When pressed, he said that he and other cotton farmer leaders got their information from media sources.²¹⁷ However, in an interview, an international NGO worker raised the question of whether their sources of information may have included the French cotton ginning and marketing company, Dagric.²¹⁸

The connection between falling world cotton prices and rich country subsidies was not obvious at the turn of the millennium.²¹⁹ The ICAC model developed by Carlos Valderrama in 1999/2000 was the first to link low world market prices to domestic support subsidies.²²⁰ It circulated at a time when some farmer leaders in West Africa began working more closely with cotton companies and

²¹⁶ *Appel commun des producteurs de coton de l'Afrique*, November 2001. Source: www.abcburkina.net/content/view/418/44/lang.fr/ consulted on 06/05/11. For original text see appendix four.

²¹⁷ Interview with Ampha Coulibaly, President of the regional union of cotton co-operatives of Koutiala and San, Koutiala, 23/02/08. Similarly, in a documentary film, *Un Homme Intègre à l'OMC (A Man of Integrity at the WTO)* (J.P. Lepers, France 2003), the Burkinabè farmer leader, François Traoré is depicted as making the connection between US cotton subsidies and the lot of African farmers while listening to the radio.

²¹⁸ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²¹⁹ Factors affecting prices included the general decline in the terms of trade and China's swings in supply and demand. Indeed, the sharp fall in the world cotton price in 1999/2000 coincided with China becoming a net exporter of cotton in that year.

²²⁰ The ICAC model was the basis for both Watkins' (Oxfam 2002a) calculations and the case that Brazil brought against the US at the WTO.

governments,²²¹ and when there was closer networking of cotton companies across Africa.²²² At the time, in the early 2000s, prices paid to West African producers were not directly linked to the world market but were set in negotiations between cotton companies, governments and farmer leaders. The cotton producer leaders' appeal for the elimination of US and EU cotton subsidies reflected the kind of awareness of factors affecting the world cotton market that Dagrif/CFDT had long worked to cultivate in the minds of producer leaders, as noted in chapter three.

The link between world market prices for cotton and farm incomes in West Africa was not a direct one until liberal reform of cotton sectors was implemented in the mid-2000s, as discussed in chapter five. In the early 2000s, farmer leaders knew that liberal reform was being pushed by the World Bank and that if reform proceeded, it would expose them directly to the volatile world market. Thus, the issue of US and EU cotton subsidies was one of many issues of concern to farmer leaders, and one about which there was relatively low awareness at grassroots level. But it was on this matter that four farmer leaders chose to speak out. The issue of US and EU cotton subsidies was also one in which some members of staff at the international non-governmental organisation, Oxfam, saw an opportunity.

In 2001, there was a decisive shift in Oxfam International's organisational priorities towards transnational advocacy and popular campaigning on world trade rules and practices. The Make Trade Fair campaign was the 'flagship'²²³ of Oxfam International's Strategic Plan 2001-2006, 'Towards Global Equity'. The campaign was underpinned by Oxfam's trade report, 'Rigged Rules and Double Standards', published in 2002. Its lead author, Kevin Watkins, adapted the ICAC model, which was being used by Brazil as it prepared to take its case against the United States to the World Trade Organization. Watkins estimated the losses in foreign exchange

²²¹ Traoré led the UNPCB onto the board of management of the cotton company, SOFITEX in 1999, alongside French shareholders, DAGRIS and the national government. In Benin, the main stakeholders in the cotton sector began working together through the *Association Interprofessionnelle de Coton* in 2000. In Mali, producer leaders, the cotton company and the government discussed issues affecting the cotton sector at the *Etats Généraux du Secteur Coton* in April 2001, in the aftermath of the mass boycott that halved the country's production in 2000.

²²² Cotton companies from across Africa met in Cotonou, Benin in June 2001 and agreed to set up the African Cotton Association (established 2002). Source:

<http://africancotton.net/en/resources/itemlist/category/3-resources> consulted on 18/12/11.

²²³ *Promises to Keep: an evaluation of implementation of Oxfam's strategic plan 2001-2006*, February 2006, p 29.

earnings due to US cotton subsidies for selected African countries. The results were published in 2002 in a separate Oxfam briefing paper, ‘Cultivating Poverty: the impact of US cotton subsidies on Africa’. An interviewee who worked for the international NGO commented that staff ‘knew that this Brazil thing [the case at the WTO against the US cotton subsidy regime] was going to blow up into a big issue globally ... so ... it was very sort of judicious timing in terms of doing that piece of analysis [Oxfam/Watkins 2002a].’²²⁴ The international NGO’s organisational priorities were shaped in part by this perceived opportunity at the international level. The Doha round of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations became the primary focus of Make Trade Fair, and the cotton arm of the campaign in particular.

By working together, Oxfam and the African farmer leaders were able to launch a transnational campaign that appeared to boast both international expertise and grassroots legitimacy. As noted above, however, foreign subsidies was only one of many concerns prioritised by West African farmers, and perhaps the least grounded at the grassroots level. An interviewee who worked for Oxfam described how, in the early 2000s, the choice of strategic direction for civil society advocacy on cotton was a source of contention between staff members working in different sections of the NGO, and between the NGO and its partner organisations.

that’s always been a bit of a tension really between people working at a global level, with the WTO as their focus, and people like me and some of my colleagues and some of our partners [for whom] the much more immediate reality is the context of privatisation and liberalisation because that’s what ultimately makes you vulnerable to the global market context.²²⁵

These criticisms of Oxfam’s cotton campaign highlight the organisation’s shortcomings over the period from 2001 to 2006 in realising its ‘one programme’

²²⁴ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²²⁵ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07. Similar comments were made by Oxfam staff in West Africa as part of an internal evaluation of the cotton campaign, cited in *Promises to Keep*, an external evaluation of the implementation of Oxfam’s strategic plan 2001–2006 (2006, p. 46): ‘Initially it was a challenge for country teams to respond to “imposed” campaign priorities. While the situation has improved, further work needs to be done. The campaign again raised the issue of Oxfam’s role in Southern advocacy and the perception that Oxfam was privileging cotton over issues which were perceived as being more important by local and regional actors.’

approach,²²⁶ which is designed to do just what Stokke and Mohan (2001) advocate: to integrate the NGO's activities between local, national, regional and global arenas within a single, coherent and consensual strategy.

This section has outlined the dual origins of the campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies, from an international NGO, Oxfam, and a group of West African farmer leaders. It has pointed to contention over the choice of the campaign subject matter, both within West Africa and within the NGO. The rest of this chapter looks in more detail at the challenging global to local interaction that took place through the cotton campaign, beginning in the next section with the first stage of the campaign, which culminated in a strong civil society presence at the 2003 WTO Ministerial Meeting in Cancùn, Mexico.

Rolling out the campaign: building a transnational movement

International NGOs, Oxfam and ENDA, backed West African producer leaders to lobby their governments, then subsequently worked together with governments to bring their case to the World Trade Organization.²²⁷ The NGOs and the farmer organisations also turned their attention to raising awareness and a critical mass of support at grassroots level, both in the North and in West Africa. NGO workers and farmer leaders attended WTO ministerials to inform and lobby African countries' trade negotiators and those of their adversaries, the United States and the European Union, and to keep their cause in the media spotlight.

Initially, the farmer leaders' internet appeal for the elimination of US and EU cotton subsidies was received negatively by their governments. In an interview, the Malian farmer leader, Ampha Coulibaly, recalled the displeasure of government officials on finding that the farmers' representative had spoken out independently on the matter.

Those subsidies – it was me who was the first to sign. At the time, I was president of the union group. I signed with François, François of Burkina,

²²⁶ 'Promises to Keep: an evaluation of implementation of Oxfam's strategic plan 2001–2006', February 2006, p. 43.

²²⁷ See appendix two for an influence diagram of the main actors in campaigning on cotton in Mali in 2003, discussed in this section.

François Traoré: it was he who signed and, me too, I signed. Four countries; but Mali was one of them. After that the other countries got together. But we were criticised. We had problems. I can say that even here in Mali, I had some small problems. Because I signed something in the name of the producers. Well, did that please the Government? Well, I was criticised. I was called to the Department of Agriculture. They talked of a lot of things. I said it concerns no-one but us, the producers, in our capacity as the top representatives. I have a mandate to sign things like that in the name of producers, so it concerns no-one but us, the producers.²²⁸

Transnational civil society collaboration on the cotton campaign began when international NGOs intervened to ensure that the producer leaders were listened to by their own governments. Together, Oxfam and Senegal-based international NGO, ENDA Diapol, were instrumental in bringing farmer leaders into high level discussions between Agriculture Ministers, regional banking and governance institutions,²²⁹ and cotton companies²³⁰ (Pesche and Nubukpo 2005).²³¹ With the backing of NGOs, and organised through a regional network, ROPPA,²³² producer leaders pressed their national governments to take a strong line on subsidies in international trade negotiations.²³³

West African national governments with large cotton sectors clearly had an interest in challenging foreign cotton subsidies, an interest that they shared with producer leaders and with their commercial partners, notably Dagrif. But the governments had to weigh the potential benefits of challenging the domestic subsidy

²²⁸ Interview with Ampha Coulibaly, President of the regional union of cotton co-operatives of Koutiala and San, Koutiala, 23/02/08. Original: “Les subventions-là, c’est moi qui était le premier à signer. À l’époque c’est moi qui était le président du groupement syndicat. J’ai signé avec François, François du Burkina, François Traore : c’est lui qui a signé et moi aussi j’ai signé. Les quatre pays; mais le Mali fait parti. Après ça les autres pays s’est réuni. Mais on était critiqué. On a eu des problèmes. Je peux dire même au Mali ici j’ai eu des petits problèmes. Parce que moi j’ai signé quelque chose aux noms des producteurs. Bon, est-ce que ça plaît au gouvernement ? Bon, j’ai été critiqué. J’ai été appelé au ministère de l’Agriculture. Ils ont parlé de beaucoup de choses. J’ai dit ça n’engage que nous les producteurs en tant que les premiers responsables. J’ai un mandat de signer des trucs comme ça aux noms de producteurs, donc ça n’engage que nous les producteurs.”

²²⁹ West African Development Bank; ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), WAEMU (West African Economic and Monetary Union).

²³⁰ Cotton companies formed the African Cotton Association in 2002.

²³¹ Pesche and Nubukpo (2005) give a detailed history of the processes of networking and negotiation that took place in West Africa leading to the submission of the Sectoral Initiative in Favour of Cotton to the WTO in April 2003.

²³² *Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l’Afrique de l’Ouest*, founded in Cotonou in July 2000, www.roppa.info

²³³ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

regimes of the United States and the European Union against other concerns they might have brought to the table and, above all, against the risks of reprisals from these two powerful actors in the world trade system. A major point of contention within the anti-subsidies camp, described by Pesche and Nubukpo (2005), was over the choice of course of action, between those who wanted to lodge a complaint with the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body and those who advocated negotiation with the United States and European Union. The latter camp won, resulting in the submission by four countries – Mali, Benin, Burkina Faso and Chad – of the Sectoral Initiative in Favour of Cotton to the WTO in May 2003.

In order to take the issue forward successfully, the African governments needed technical assistance, research and legal expertise. This was provided by a network of civil society organisations, including Oxfam; a Senegal-based international NGO, ENDA Diapol; and Geneva-based institutions, the IDEAS Centre²³⁴ and ICTSD;²³⁵ with some assistance coming from official regional institutions, ECOWAS and WAEMU (Pesche and Nubukpo 2005, pp. 49–50). A strong presence in Geneva was crucial. At the time, only two of the Cotton Four (Benin and Mali) had permanent representations in Geneva, where the WTO is based (Pesche and Nubukpo 2005, p. 50). Oxfam opened its office there in 2002 (Anderson 2007, p. 93),²³⁶ and Burkina Faso and Chad have since set up permanent representations in the city. Oxfam's decision to open its Geneva office reflected a strategic choice to focus on the WTO process, while the NGO refrained from allocating resources to alternative strategies: 'because of other stuff going on, we haven't had very much capacity in Washington to track these [World Bank and IMF] issues.'²³⁷

The popular mobilisation phase of the campaign aimed to raise awareness and a critical mass of support at grassroots level, both in the North and South, in this case specifically in the United States, the European Union and West Africa. The focal points of the campaign were the big international meetings of the WTO in

²³⁴ International trade, Development, Economic governance Advisory Services Centre. IDEAS Centre describes itself as an independent, non-profit organisation. See www.ideascentre.ch

²³⁵ International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development. ICTSD describes itself as an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation. See www.ictsd.org

²³⁶ See also www.ipngos.org/ngoprofiles/oxfam_genev.html consulted on 19/01/12.

²³⁷ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

Cancun in September 2003 and in Hong Kong in December 2005. The principal methods of mobilising popular support for the campaign were through global media coverage of the impacts of subsidies on cotton farming in Africa and a global ‘Big Noise’ petition calling for an end to ‘unfair’ cotton subsidies, defined as subsidies that distort the world cotton market. The complexities of the cotton global value chain and of rural poverty in West Africa were crystallized into a simple campaign message: that US and EU cotton subsidies stimulate over-production of cotton in those countries, which artificially lowers world prices, causing cotton-exporting African countries to lose export revenues, and deepening poverty for African cotton producers.

In addition to decisions about the allocation of resources, discussed above, the choice of a high profile multinational or ‘global’ model of campaign narrowed the focus of civil society action. According to this model, which is inspired by commercial marketing strategies, a simple campaign message delivers a high impact. More subtle analysis of the complex factors affecting the populations of West Africa’s cotton zones was obscured.²³⁸

because the focus for Oxfam, up until recently anyway, has been on the WTO issues, it’s quite hard to gain organisational space to work on other aspects, um, except in as much as they are seen as contributing to that agenda ... because working within a sort of global campaigning framework, there’s always a preoccupation with having kind of simple and clear and sort of identifiable messages and not kind of muddying the story too much.²³⁹

The Oxfam-led global campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies was highly successful at gaining media attention: ‘By 2002–2003, we already had a number of journalists writing about the negative impacts of subsidies.’²⁴⁰ Regular articles published in top American, British and European newspapers helped to

²³⁸ Similar concerns were expressed in *Promises to Keep* (2006, p. 47), which cited the North-South Institute’s evaluation of Oxfam’s cotton campaign in West Africa (2001–2006): “*While we understand that a media campaign requires some sharpness...a “sharp” message... that ignores ground realities has (rightly) been viewed with suspicion. [...] Many external stakeholders feel that Oxfam’s campaign model for cotton oversimplifies a complex issue....Going forward we do not think that there needs to be a trade-off between a sharp campaign message and a nuanced approach to how campaigning and research are conducted...*” (Original emphasis).

²³⁹ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²⁴⁰ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

change the terms of the debate on cotton subsidies in those countries and at the WTO, a transformation that is considered, by evaluators and by an Oxfam staff member who worked on the campaign, to be one of its most significant outcomes.²⁴¹

Viewed from West Africa, however, the media-oriented nature of the campaign produced ‘all sorts of contradictions.’²⁴²

Because of the nature of media-oriented campaigning, we had situations where we had a lot of pressure to produce evidence or, you know, anecdotal, other kinds of evidence that [US and EU] farm subsidies are having a direct impact on [West African] people’s incomes. But I mean, in any sort of rigorous sense, they weren’t really having a direct impact on people’s incomes because the prices were regulated at national level until 2005, when the Bank came in and sort of strong-armed the government into changing the price mechanism.²⁴³

Later in the same interview, the NGO worker commented, ‘in some ways, the negative impacts on the ground could have been a lot more to do with national level issues.’ The narrow focus of the campaign against subsidies was rather dissociated both from Mali’s national political arena and from certain processes of supranational governance to which it was connected.

Oxfam staff in West Africa worked to contribute signatures for the NGO’s worldwide ‘Big Noise’ petition, which united numerous concerns under the simple headline message, ‘Make Trade Fair’. As part of the Big Noise petition, Oxfam supported West African farmer leaders to gather farmers’ signatures to a petition calling on West African trade negotiators to push for the elimination of US and EU subsidies that distort the world market. Oxfam twice worked with West African farmers on the Big Noise petition targeting WTO ministerial meetings, first in Cancun in September 2003, then in Hong Kong in December 2005.

For Oxfam, this ‘popular mobilisation’ work was co-ordinated by Oxfam America staff from the NGO’s West Africa Regional Office in Dakar. In 2003, much of the work was carried out by the Regional Communications Officer. But at the start of 2005, the full-time post of Popular Mobilisation and Media Co-ordinator was

²⁴¹ See for example, *Promises to Keep* (2006, p. 36). Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²⁴² Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²⁴³ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

created, and filled by Dominique Jenkins, an American with an interest in social marketing.²⁴⁴ In addition to mobilising farmers, Oxfam sought to raise general public awareness of trade issues. The NGO worked on the Make Trade Fair campaign with student activists in Dakar, including Mamadou Barry, who was one of the founders of PEACE, the Platform of African Students to Make Trade Fair.²⁴⁵ PEACE formed officially in 2004 and contributed to the Big Noise petition for the Hong Kong WTO meeting.²⁴⁶ Oxfam's Dominique Jenkins also recalled working with a local organisation on a fair trade cotton fashion show to raise awareness of trade justice issues, and on the West African part of a worldwide celebrity photo shoot project in which celebrities endorsed the Make Trade Fair campaign.²⁴⁷

Oxfam worked to raise awareness of trade issues among the general public in West Africa, but these activities were largely confined to Senegal, and Dakar in particular. An Oxfam staff member who worked on the campaign noted a discrepancy in participation in the 2003 campaign between Senegal and other West African countries that had more at stake in the cotton subsidies campaign.

That was in 2003, pre-Cancùn, and the actual numerical strength of the mobilisation then was fairly small. I think in total probably a quarter of a million signatures were gathered in four countries in West Africa, of which by far the most in Senegal, not one of the C4 countries.²⁴⁸

In Mali, activity on the Make Trade Fair campaign was relatively low-key and focused on farmers in the country's cotton zone, with a total of 1,300 signatures collected for the Cancùn petition,²⁴⁹ whereas the totals for Senegal and Burkina Faso were 100,000 and 80,000 respectively.²⁵⁰ By 2005, the political arena of producer organisations in West Africa had changed radically, producing a much larger

²⁴⁴ Interview with Dominique Jenkins, Oxfam America West Africa Region Popular Mobilization and Media Co-ordinator, Dakar, 02/02/08.

²⁴⁵ Plateforme des Etudiants Africains pour un Commerce Equitable. Interview with Mamadou Barry, PEACE activist, Dakar, 04/02/08.

²⁴⁶ Interview with Mamadou Barry, PEACE activist, Dakar, 04/02/08. See also 'PEACE sheds light on trade injustice', source: www.maketradefair.com/en/index.php?file=events_senegal02.htm consulted on 31/01/12.

²⁴⁷ Interview with Dominique Jenkins, Oxfam America West Africa Region Popular Mobilization and Media Co-ordinator, Dakar, 02/02/08.

²⁴⁸ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Lassine Sidibe, Executive Secretary, AOPP, Bamako, 29/08/07.

²⁵⁰ 'White Gold Turns to Dust', Oxfam Briefing Paper 58, March 2004, pp. 6–7.

mobilisation, centred this time in Burkina Faso. This will be considered in detail in the next section.²⁵¹

For the 2003 Big Noise petition, the participation of West African farmers was co-ordinated by the regional network, ROPPA. In Mali, at the time, the national platform of ROPPA was the AOPP, the Association of Professional Peasants' Organisations,²⁵² to which the country's cotton unions are affiliated. AOPP External Relations Secretary, Ibrahima Coulibaly, commented that the organisation was keen to take part in the Cancùn petition.

Well, the petition, it was a project, firstly, global, and which was piloted by ... Oxfam, particularly what we called the Big Noise. It was a campaign which effectively had as its objective to draw the attention of the political authorities, to support above all the African governments so that they might resist at the WTO ministerial conference in Cancùn. So we participated because we were convinced that it was a combat worth pursuing, and which led effectively to the blockage of negotiations at Cancùn.²⁵³

In Mali, the AOPP co-ordinated the 2003 Big Noise petition with guidance and support from Oxfam. The NGO provided a draft text on which to base the petition²⁵⁴ and a 'very very small amount' of funding.²⁵⁵ The petition was conducted in August 2003, ahead of the WTO ministerial meeting in September of that year. Since this fell during a period of intense activity in the agricultural calendar, the AOPP's political office-holders were unavailable as they are, by statute, professional farmers. The collection of signatures was carried out by the organisation's technical support staff instead.²⁵⁶ The petition was taken to all five regions of the cotton zone

²⁵¹ Compare influence diagrams of campaign actors for 2003 and 2005, in appendix two.

²⁵² *Association des Organisations Professionnelles Paysannes*, www.aopp-mali.org. The term, 'professional' is employed in the title to differentiate those for whom farming is their main occupation from 'hobby farmers' or those who use farming to supplement their income from another profession (Interview with Issa Coulibaly, Cotton Advisor, AOPP, Bamako, 27/08/07).

²⁵³ Interview with Ibrahima Coulibaly, External Relations Secretary, AOPP, Bamako, 17/01/08. Original: Bon, la pétition c'était un projet d'abord global, et qui était piloté par ... Oxfam, surtout ce qu'on appelait le grand bruit, the big noise. C'était une campagne effectivement qui avait comme objet de tirer l'attention des autorités politiques, de soutenir surtout les gouvernements africains pour qu'ils puissent résister à la conférence ministérielle de l'OMC à Cancùn. Donc on a participé parce que nous sommes convaincus que c'était un combat qui valait la peine d'être mené, et ce qui conduit effectivement au blocage des négociations à Cancùn.

²⁵⁴ Interview with Souleymane Diarra, AOPP Commissions Co-ordinator, Bamako, 17/01/08.

²⁵⁵ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Souleymane Diarra, AOPP Commissions Co-ordinator, Bamako, 17/01/08.

by five teams, each composed of two members of AOPP staff. The signatures were later compiled in Bamako and presented to the Minister of Trade shortly before the Cancùn WTO meeting.

Speaking about his experience of taking the 2003 petition out to rural areas, the AOPP's Lassine Sidibe commented that the peasants he met felt that international matters are very far away from them; that they are matters to be resolved between states.²⁵⁷ This view was echoed by a number of farmers interviewed during fieldwork. The variety of perspectives voiced by farmers will be compared towards the end of this chapter. At this point, it is worth noting that only one of the twenty farmers interviewed in the cotton zone clearly recalled having participated in a petition for Cancùn that had been brought by the AOPP. Nonetheless, the experience made a lasting impression on Amadou Nekita Fomba, president of the cotton producers' co-operative of Dien, a hamlet outside Fana.

The issue of subsidies: we heard about it, and we spoke a lot about it as well. We prepared a petition in that way, to go to Cancùn. Cancùn. That was with the petition. Our Minister took the same petition with him to Cancùn. The subsidies issue, we put a lot of effort into it. We put a lot of effort into it. I can say, by the way, they themselves gave us a response: it cannot be dropped in a single day, but they heard what we said. On that first day, we were not appreciated by the country, the United States people, but it didn't stop, it didn't stop. So they said they heard the campaign, so it will go little by little. It will not end in one day but it will go little by little. That's what they said to us.²⁵⁸

The interviewee emphasised that through their participation in the campaign, he and fellow farmers made themselves heard by the Americans.

The campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies in West Africa was not initiated by grassroots farmers, since it was leaders working at national and regional

²⁵⁷ Interview with Lassine Sidibe, AOPP Executive Secretary, Bamako, 29/08/07. Original: Les paysans pensent que les questions internationales sont très loin d'eux, que c'est les questions qu'on doit régler entres états.

²⁵⁸ Interview with Amadou Nekita Fomba, cotton farmer, Dien, 17/02/08. Original: Subventions-ko aw ye do me ola ani kuma chaman chaman fo fana na. An bora ye petition fana gla o chogo kelen-na ka ta Cancùn. [Eh?] Cancùn. Awn fana ye petition gla o chogo kelen-na, ka ta Cancùn. Ani petition fana ça... Awn ka ministeri tara ni o fana petition ye a bolo Cancùn. Donc, eh, subventions-ko, awn ye layini chaman ke a kan. Awn ye layini chaman ke a kan. N'be se ka fo o la, u-yere accord di an ma: te na se ka dabra don kelen, mais u yan k'an kuma men. O don folo-yere an man ben pays jamana Etats-Uni mogow-ma, o mais a tè da bla, a tè da bla. Donc o ko'u ye kuma men, donc o bè don-doni bo a la. A tè ban don kelen-na mais o be do bo a la. U ye o de fo awn ye na.

level who were aware of exogenous factors affecting the world cotton market. But the petition created an opportunity to discuss these little-known-about issues with ordinary farmers. An Oxfam staff member who worked on the 2003 Big Noise petition in West Africa commented that this was an important element of the project, in terms of the positive knock-on effect on the perceived legitimacy of the national level farmer organisations involved.

for organisations like AOPP, the more that they can be working at the grassroots and talking to people at the grassroots and communicating with them, the more it kind of legitimises their organisation.²⁵⁹

The relatively small scale of the 2003 petition project would seem to have limited its impact in this regard, given that only one farmer interviewed was able to name the AOPP in connection with the cotton subsidies campaign.

Comments made by staff of both Oxfam and the AOPP reflect a sense that the petition was first and foremost a lobbying tool, to enhance the political clout of national level farmers' organisations vis-à-vis their governments. An Oxfam worker interviewed noted that this was a new experience for both government ministers and farmer leaders.

I think it was quite successful in that (a) it did provide a way for the producer organisations to engage with their ministers and say we have X number of people who are concerned about this issue. And we certainly got feedback from some of the ministers, particularly the then Senegalese Trade Minister ... basically saying, 'This is kind of new to me, going to the trade negotiations with a constituency behind me saying we want you to negotiate on this.' So that was quite a sort of powerful moment. ... I think for the producer groups ... they realised that this could be a very useful tool.²⁶⁰

Similarly, Souleymane Diarra (AOPP) said that the first edition of the petition (in 2003) was very formal in that it was done so that they could really have their shoulders next to their leaders.²⁶¹ Indeed, representatives from the AOPP

²⁵⁹ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²⁶⁰ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²⁶¹ Interview with Souleymane Diarra, AOPP Commissions Co-ordinator, Bamako, 17/01/08.
Original: la première édition a été vraiment formalisé plus que la deuxième édition. ... Formalisé

attended the Cancùn WTO meeting in person, as part of the NGO delegation, which also included ENDA (Senegal), Oxfam International and its many country affiliates.²⁶² Lassine Sidibe (AOPP) remarked that they took part in daily briefings with the official government delegation, and both he and Ibrahima Coulibaly (AOPP) said they believed the blockage of negotiations that ensued at Cancùn was due in large part to this participation of civil society.²⁶³

Rolling out the campaign post-Cancùn: divisions in West Africa

At the international level in Cancùn, the cotton subsidies campaign seemed to be relatively successful. The campaign did not produce the change in US and EU policy that it sought, but it garnered strong support in the media, from the public and, at least initially, within the WTO, where it contributed to an unprecedented blockage of negotiations.²⁶⁴ Back in West Africa, however, the fall-out from Cancùn was controversial. Fieldwork research indicates that two principal objections to the campaign were raised by civil society actors in Mali at this time: (i) that the voice of Oxfam dominated at the international conference, marginalising the voices of African civil society actors; and (ii) that the focus of the campaign was too narrow, obscuring alternative analyses of problems affecting African farmers and, in so doing, by-passing other solutions to those problems. The campaign exposed tensions which led to a split in the farmers' movement in West Africa.²⁶⁵

In an interview, out-spoken Malian activist and former government minister,²⁶⁶ Aminata Dramane Traoré expressed frustration that most of the political space at the Cancùn WTO conference was occupied by large NGOs, and Oxfam Great Britain in particular.²⁶⁷ She singled out Oxfam GB for monopolising the debate

c'est-à-dire que on l'a fait pour vraiment avoir des épaules auprès de nos dirigeants. Donc on a fait la liste des gens et nous avons transmis tous les papiers au Ministre de Commerce.

²⁶² List of NGOs that attended the Fifth WTO Ministerial Conference. Source: www.wto.org/english/forums_e/ngo_e/ngo_e.htm consulted on 02/02/12.

²⁶³ Interview with Lassine Sidibe, AOPP Executive Secretary, Bamako, 29/08/07; interview with Ibrahima Coulibaly, External Relations Secretary, AOPP, Bamako, 17/01/08.

²⁶⁴ For more details on what happened at the WTO meeting in Cancùn in 2003, see chapter three.

²⁶⁵ For an overview of changes discussed in this section, compare influence diagrams of campaign actors for 2003 and 2005, in appendix two.

²⁶⁶ Mali Minister of Culture 1997–2000 (during Konaré's second presidential term).

²⁶⁷ Interview with Aminata Dramane Traore, Bamako, 28/02/08.

on cotton, noting that this was not true of all Oxfam affiliates. It was in response to this experience at Cancùn that the civil society organisation of which she is President, *Le Forum pour un Autre Mali*, organised a series of events called *La Fibre Africaine* (The African Fibre) in 2004. The aim of *La Fibre Africaine* was to mobilise grassroots farmers to participate in the cotton subsidies campaign and, indeed, these events featured quite strongly in some of the recollections of farmers interviewed during fieldwork research. When asked whether her position differed from that of Oxfam GB, Mme Traoré said, ‘OGB [Oxfam Great Britain] does not question the neoliberal model; OGB criticises the malfunctioning of the system without challenging the principle of an unjust globalisation.’²⁶⁸ Mme Traoré also commented that one reason she got involved in campaigning on cotton was to find ways for producers and artisans to work together to manufacture cotton products locally.

Ibrahima Coulibaly of the AOPP said in an interview that he voiced his doubts about the cotton subsidies campaign to Oxfam staff after the Cancùn conference. His concerns were twofold. At the level of the world market, even if US subsidies were eliminated, which looked unlikely to happen, the problem of the low price of cotton would not be resolved because, in the absence of a system to regulate supply and demand, the US market share would be taken over by other large producers such as Brazil, Australia and New Zealand. Furthermore, the campaign against subsidies overlooked problems at the regional and national levels: (i) that it is the State and the cotton company, rather than the producers, which absorb profits made from the world market; and (ii) that the policy of export-oriented commodity production has created a system of dependence on cotton, in which the producers’ real needs—for food security and a positive credit balance—are not met. Lassine Sidibe of the AOPP raised the same concern about other large cotton producing countries supplanting the US if it did cut its subsidies, and he argued for regulation of the world market. He also argued in favour of adding value to Mali’s cotton by

²⁶⁸ Original: OGB ne met pas en question le modèle néolibéral; OGB critique le dysfonctionnement du système sans remettre en question le principe d’une mondialisation injuste.

processing it within the country, noting that it is the fact of exporting a primary commodity that lies at the heart of the problem.²⁶⁹

Like Aminata Dramane Traoré, Ibrahima Coulibaly singled out Oxfam GB among all Oxfam affiliates as the one NGO that did not want to hear this discourse of the limitations of the focus on subsidies, ‘because’ he said, ‘it disrupts their campaign.’²⁷⁰

If US subsidies are eliminated, if the producers earn nothing – in Africa, in Mali, in other countries – from their production, it is pointless. ... It could be a success for the NGOs, but it is not a success for us. ... For us, it’s our lives, it is not a campaign – it is not *just* a campaign; it is our lives that are at stake.²⁷¹

Ibrahima Coulibaly went on to say that he believed that staff at Oxfam GB were more preoccupied by their own jobs than by the real problems of peasants. He described large NGOs as ‘large machines of job creation,’ which continue ‘to sell a negative image of subsidies because that mobilises compassion at global level.’²⁷²

Criticisms of Oxfam’s – notably Oxfam GB’s – ways of working in advocacy campaigns, which were voiced by civil society partners and allies from different regions of the global South at this time, percolated into a revision by Oxfam International of its guidelines for Southern campaigning and advocacy.²⁷³ After months of discussion between Oxfam affiliates, the new guidelines were finally agreed on the 31st January 2004, and they were distributed to staff throughout the NGO over the subsequent months. The guidelines advised such measures as subsuming Oxfam’s own brand to those of its partners and allies when supporting them in their advocacy and campaigns in their own countries, unless there is a

²⁶⁹ Interview with Lassine Sidibe, AOPP Executive Secretary, Bamako, 29/08/07, from fieldnotes.

²⁷⁰ Original: parce que ça dérange leur campagne.

²⁷¹ Interview with Ibrahima Coulibaly, AOPP External Relations Secretary, Bamako, 17/01/08.

Original: si on élimine les subventions aux Etats-Unis, si les paysans ne gagent pas – en Afrique, au Mali, dans d’autres pays – de leur production, ça ne sert à rien. ... Ça peut être une réussite pour les ONG, mais ce n’est pas une réussite pour nous. [...] Pour nous c’est nos vies, ce n’est pas une campagne – ce n’est pas *qu’une* campagne ; c’est nos vies qui sont en jeu.

²⁷² Interview with Ibrahima Coulibaly, AOPP External Relations Secretary, Bamako, 17/01/08.

Original: Oxfam GB ... les gens là sont plus préoccupés par leurs propre jobs que par les vrais problèmes des paysans. ... Ces grosses ONG ... c’est des grosses machines de création d’emploi. ... Le job doit continuer; on doit continuer à vendre une mauvaise image des subventions parce que ça mobilise la compassion au niveau mondial.

²⁷³ Oxfam International Southern Campaigning and Advocacy, 31 January 2004.

justification for not doing so; taking extra care when discussing international policies with national governments; involving partners, allies and staff upstream in the development of campaign strategies and policies for early identification of points of difference and potential conflict between affiliates and with partners; and negotiating positions with partners and allies before lobbying ministers at international conferences.

The overall strategy and OI's [Oxfam International's] role need to be defined together with partners and allies in the national context *at the very beginning of the approach*. This process should identify likely impacts and risks, and thus priorities. OI regional and country teams should avoid the situation of instrumentalisation of either Oxfam by Governments or of Oxfam utilising counterparts.²⁷⁴

Over the same period there emerged a Southern-initiated global alliance for action on poverty, styled as a transnational social movement. According to its website, the idea for the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) was first aired at a meeting of Southern civil society activists, including Kumi Naidoo (then CIVICUS), hosted by Graça Machel in Mozambique, during September 2003, the month in which the Cancùn WTO took place. GCAP was launched officially on 1st January 2005 at the World Social Forum in Brazil, initially as a year-long campaign but the alliance was repeatedly extended and is currently set to run until 2015. GCAP had an effect at the level of branding – with Oxfam's brand being subordinated to that of GCAP, which has more of a 'Southern' identity – but it did little to change Oxfam policy or strategy in the cotton campaign over the period considered in this chapter.

Oxfam's Make Trade Fair campaign was made part of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty. In the UK, GCAP was represented by the Make Poverty History (MPH) coalition. Oxfam's own brand was subordinated to that of MPH but the NGO continued to dominate its partners and allies in terms of the content and strategy of the campaign, keeping a tight grip on a campaign message that was not radical enough for the majority of the MPH coalition. MPH was criticised by voices

²⁷⁴ Oxfam International Southern Campaigning and Advocacy, 31 January 2004, page 4, original emphasis.

inside and outside the coalition for relying too heavily on media celebrities and for being ‘too cosy’ with the British Government.²⁷⁵

In West Africa, Oxfam ploughed on with the cotton subsidies campaign, this time linking it to the Global Call to Action Against Poverty and targeting the 2005 WTO ministerial conference in Hong Kong.²⁷⁶ But Oxfam was faced with a situation in which there was significant disagreement about the campaign among its Southern partners in the West African farmers’ movement and, indeed between different Oxfam affiliates working in the region. The 2004 Oxfam International guidelines for Southern Campaigning and Advocacy advise that if this situation arises in a case of engagement with national ministries on international issues, it calls for ‘a careful and conscious political judgement ... about whether to proceed.’²⁷⁷ In West Africa, in 2004–2005, Oxfam did proceed with the cotton subsidies campaign nonetheless.

In 2004 disagreements over the cotton subsidies campaign raged within the regional producers’ network, ROPPA. Ibrahima Coulibaly described how ROPPA made a stand against the narrowness of the cotton campaign, but Oxfam found an alternative partner to work with.

Oxfam Great Britain has never wanted to understand the problem. ... That’s why at one point we, ROPPA, did not want to follow. And we did not follow. They continued their partnership. They continued to mobilise a lot of money, even now, on the issue of subsidies – while the peasant is at a complete dead end. We must get out of that problem. We must help family farming – which is to diversify; to have perspectives other than cotton. That is the deep divergence between us.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ One reason for this may be that some managers lacked support for the new guidelines and gave only very weak instructions to staff to follow them. The guidelines were distributed to Oxfam GB staff with a covering email from Justin Forsyth, then Campaigns and Policy Director, which states, “while they do provide much more clarity they are open to interpretation and Jasmine [Whitbread; then OI Director] and I want to make clear that we do not want you to take a conservative interpretation of these principles and guidelines.” (Email communication 04/03/04.) Later the same year Justin Forsyth left Oxfam to work as Special Advisor on International Development to Prime Minister Tony Blair, where he became a focus of controversy over the alleged co-option of the Make Poverty History campaign by the Blair government (Katherine Quarmby, “Why Oxfam is failing Africa”, *New Statesman*, 30 May 2005).

²⁷⁶ Note, for example, the use of the GCAP white band symbol by student activists promoting the Big Noise petition in Dakar in December 2005: “PEACE sheds light on trade injustice” www.maketradeair.com/en/index.php?file=events_senegal02.htm consulted on 31/01/12.

²⁷⁷ Oxfam International Southern Campaigning and Advocacy, 31 January 2004.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Ibrahima Coulibaly, AOPP External Relations Secretary and CNOP President, Bamako, 17/01/08. Original: Oxfam Grande Bretagne n’a jamais voulu comprendre le problème. ... C’est pourquoi nous à un certain moment, le ROPPA, n’a pas voulu suivre. Et nous on n’a pas suivi. Ils ont continu leur partenariat, ils ont continuer à mobiliser beaucoup d’argent, même maintenant, sur

At the time of interview, in January 2008, Ibrahima Coulibaly was both External Relations Secretary for the AOPP and President of the CNOP (*Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes*). The CNOP dates back to a 1996 meeting of producer organisations, but it was only in November 2004 that the CNOP was given legal status as Mali's national platform of producers' organisations. In November 2004, the CNOP replaced the AOPP as the national platform of ROPPA in Mali. This was a logical step given that the CNOP is an umbrella organisation, which includes the AOPP as a member, along with ten other producer organisations.²⁷⁹ In January 2009, following internal elections, Ibrahima Coulibaly stepped down from his post at the AOPP and has subsequently focused on his role with the CNOP. This correlates with a general shift in which the CNOP and ROPPA have gradually become the prime champions of family farming over export-oriented commodity production in Mali and West Africa.

A new, cotton-specific association, AProCA (Association of African Cotton Producers)²⁸⁰ was formed in December 2004 by those producer leaders who sought to pursue the cotton campaign. According to an Oxfam worker, 'AProCA... had mobilising around the WTO almost as a sort of *raison d'être*.'²⁸¹ Alexis Anouan, Co-ordinator of Agricultural Policy at ENDA Diapol, described how ENDA and Oxfam had wanted to work on cotton through ROPPA, but found cotton producers frustrated by a lack of commitment in the network to their specific interests.

The cotton producers were members of ROPPA. The problem is that ROPPA was going to set up a cotton commission and this has never existed. And the cotton producers ended up seeing their incomes fall.

la question des subventions – alors que le paysan est dans un impasse total. Il faut sortir de ce problème-là. Il faut aider l'agriculture familiale – qui est diversifiée ; avoir d'autres perspectives que le coton. Donc c'est ça qui est la divergence de fond entre nous.

²⁷⁹ One reason for the tardy recognition of the CNOP may be the overlap between the mandate it sought and that already held by the Chamber of Agriculture: 'The CNOP, like the Permanent Assembly of the Chambers of Agriculture, claims exclusive legitimacy for the representation and the defence of the interests of agricultural family farmers and agricultural producers.'

Source: Presentation et Historique de la CNOP, www.cnop-mali.org/spip.php?article95 consulted on 12/01/12. Original: La CNOP, comme l'Assemblée Permanente des Chambres d'Agriculture, revendique la légitimité exclusive pour la représentation et la défense des intérêts des exploitants familiaux Agricoles et des producteurs Agricoles.

²⁸⁰ Association des Producteurs de Coton Africains. www.aproca.net

²⁸¹ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

They said they were going to set up an association of cotton producers. We, in the framework of our activities, we had wanted to advance through ROPPA on the specific problems of cotton, but there were blockages at the heart of ROPPA. So when the cotton producers said, 'ENDA, Oxfam, come help us to set up an association of cotton producers', we said, 'Hold your general assembly and afterwards we will find the means to support you.'²⁸²

Reaching into Central Africa, AProCA brought together cotton producer organisations from a slightly different set of countries than ROPPA, which defines itself as a West African network.²⁸³ An interviewee from Oxfam said that from the NGO's outsider perspective, it had not anticipated the creation of AProCA but, in retrospect, the original farmers' internet appeal against subsidies was a precursor to it.²⁸⁴ Both initiatives were led by François Traoré, President of the National Union of Cotton Producers of Burkina Faso (UNPCB), and now Chair of AProCA.

Ampha Coulibaly, who signed the original appeal on behalf of Malian producers, cited the creation of AProCA as a positive outcome of the cotton subsidies campaign.²⁸⁵ He was replaced in his role as top Malian cotton leader by Bakary Togola in 2003/04. Around the same time, the group of Malian cotton and food crop unions, the GSCVM²⁸⁶ was officially recognised as the top national representative body for cotton farmers and it became the Malian affiliate of AProCA. In 2005, AProCA became Oxfam's new primary Southern partner in the cotton campaign and that should have meant that the GSCVM would be its main conduit in Mali. However, an Oxfam staff member commented, 'AProCA did try and work through the Groupement [GSVCM], but that was a complete failure: they didn't do

²⁸² Interview with Alexis Anouan, Coordinator of Agricultural Policy, ENDA Diapol (Senegal), Bamako, 12/02/08. Original: Les producteurs du coton étaient membres du ROPPA. Le problème c'est que le ROPPA voulait mettre en place une commission coton est ce n'a jamais existé. Et les producteurs du coton ont fini à voir leur revenu chuter. Ils ont dit qu'ils vont essayer à mettre en place une association de producteurs du coton. Nous dans le cadre de nos activités on avait voulu avancer dans le cas de ROPPA sur les problèmes spécifiques de coton, mais il y a eu des blocages au sein du ROPPA. Donc quand les producteurs du coton ont dit, « ENDA, Oxfam, venez nous aider à mettre en place une association de producteurs du coton », nous on a dit, « Faites votre assemblée générale et après nous on va trouver les moyens de vous accompagner. »

²⁸³ At its inception, the new association involved representatives from twelve countries in West and Central Africa, including Mali, with the addition of Central African Republic in 2006.

²⁸⁴ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Ampha Coulibaly, President of the regional union of cotton co-operatives of Koutiala and San, Koutiala, 23/02/08.

²⁸⁶ Groupement des Syndicats Cotonniers et Vivriers du Mali.

anything.’ Ironically, the task then fell back to Oxfam’s long-standing partner, the AOPP, despite the fact that representatives within the organisation had expressed reservations about the campaign.

In December 2004 and January 2005, when AProCA took over on the cotton campaign, the AOPP was already committed to helping Oxfam America host a delegation of American cotton farmers led by Mary Robinson.²⁸⁷ Dominique Jenkins of Oxfam and Souleymane Diarra of the AOPP were involved in organising this media-oriented event.²⁸⁸ The visit, designed by Oxfam to highlight the campaign against US cotton subsidies, coincided with a moment of crisis in the Malian cotton sector, in which the World Bank withheld a structural adjustment credit to the Malian Treasury until a new market-sensitive mechanism was instituted to set the producer price of cotton. As discussed in the previous chapter, this episode cast doubt on the competence and credibility of the top cotton leader, Bakary Togola, who signed agreement to the new mechanism without the support of farmers and while failing to make any significant demands on the Government in return. It also cast an unfavourable light on Oxfam’s campaigning priorities. An Oxfam staff member commented, in relation to this coincidence of events, ‘I think there was quite a number of people, both in Washington and here [in Mali], that have always felt that we should have been working much more focusing on the [World] Bank.’²⁸⁹

As the year progressed, attention turned to organising a petition targeted at the next WTO conference, set to take place in Hong Kong in December 2005. Dominique Jenkins described how Oxfam and AProCA met in Burkina Faso to plan the Hong Kong petition: ‘we had a target, we developed a general message, what the petition would look like, a budget, other organisations on a national level that we would pair with, and pretty much a strategy to collect the petition, as well as determine where and when it would be delivered.’²⁹⁰ Jenkins said that the 2005 Big Noise petition ‘sort of left Oxfam and was appropriated by many of our partners,’ a

²⁸⁷ Former president of Ireland and now a high-profile international campaigner on poverty and human rights.

²⁸⁸ Interview with Dominique Jenkins, Oxfam America West Africa Region Popular Mobilization and Media Co-ordinator, Dakar, 02/02/08; interview with Souleymane Diarra, AOPP Commissions Co-ordinator, Bamako, 17/01/08.

²⁸⁹ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

²⁹⁰ Interview with Dominique Jenkins, Oxfam America West Africa Region Popular Mobilization and Media Co-ordinator, Dakar, 02/02/08.

process which would have been in keeping with the new ways of working under GCAP and Oxfam's revised Southern campaigning guidelines. Another Oxfam staff member described the organisation of the petition for Hong Kong as 'a more well-oiled machine' than the first attempt, with the farmers having more experience and Oxfam having more resources to support them, but noted that the success of the petition varied by country.

In Mali, where AProCA's national platform failed to perform, the petition was conducted by AOPP, this time by its political office-holders. The AOPP was aided in this task by Dutch NGO, SNV, and Swiss NGO, Helvétas, both of which have long worked with farmers in Mali's cotton zone.²⁹¹ Souleymane Diarra noted the less 'formalised' character of the second edition of the petition,²⁹² which nonetheless contributed over 831,836 Malian signatures to the 2005 Big Noise petition:²⁹³ a vast increase on the 2003 total. Even so, the Malian total was dwarfed once again by that achieved in Burkina Faso, where over 1.6 million people signed up to the Big Noise in 2005, contributing more than half of the total 2.7 million signatures from West Africa. Not all of the Burkinabè signatures were to AProCA's version of the petition, however. The Peasant Confederation of Faso launched its own petition reflecting the policy line of ROPPA, of which it is the national platform in Burkina Faso. AProCA's petition focused on the 'unfair' and 'exorbitant' subsidies paid to US and EU producers, which distort the world cotton market,²⁹⁴ while the Peasant Confederation's petition called on the international community both to make trade fair and to recognise the right to 'food sovereignty'.²⁹⁵ Signatures to both petitions were counted by Oxfam as part of the Big Noise.²⁹⁶

²⁹¹ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07; interview with Ampha Coulibaly, President of the regional union of cotton co-operatives of Koutiala and San, Koutiala, 23/02/08.

²⁹² Interview with Souleymane Diarra, AOPP Commissions Co-ordinator, Bamako, 17/01/08.

²⁹³ Source: www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/countries/mali_campaign.htm consulted on 31/01/12.

²⁹⁴ <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200512090647.html> consulted on 06/02/12.

²⁹⁵ See appendix five for a copy of the text. Source: www.abcburkina.net/fr/nos-dossiers/vu-au-sud-vu-du-sud/142-122-ption-en-faveur-dun-commerce-itable consulted on 06/02/12 and fieldnotes, Fana, 06/07/05. 'Food sovereignty' designates the notion that peoples have the right to control the process whereby they ensure their own food security, an idea which was first developed by the international social movement, Via Campesina.

²⁹⁶ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07. See appendix five for a copy of the Confédération Paysanne de Faso petition.

The Peasant Confederation's version of the petition circulated at Mali's social forum, the *Forum des Peuples*, in Fana in July 2005.²⁹⁷ At a workshop on the cotton case at the WTO during this forum, an Oxfam America speaker gave a presentation on the cotton subsidies campaign, which attracted criticism from workshop participants and provoked quite heated debate. A speaker from French NGO, *Peuples Solidaires* accused Oxfam's cotton subsidies' campaign of playing into the hands of the protagonists of free trade, while the Oxfam speaker argued in favour of defending the stand made by African governments at the WTO in terms of the tactics of civil society working in alliance with government.²⁹⁸ Concerns about the campaign that were aired from the floor were in keeping with themes championed throughout the event, in favour of a reorientation towards domestic markets and local processing of cotton.²⁹⁹

The campaign against cotton subsidies led to a yet closer alliance between civil society and government at the end of 2005, when cotton farmer leaders funded by AProCA attended the Hong Kong WTO conference as part of the official government delegations of their respective countries. AProCA, ROPPA, Enda Diapol, Oxfam International and numerous Oxfam country affiliates were all represented in the NGO delegation at Hong Kong.³⁰⁰ Keifa Diarra, a leader of SYCOV in Mali, was in the official delegation at Hong Kong.³⁰¹ He explained that each State had been invited by the WTO to include one or two farmers in their official delegations, and the State could only bring farmers from national representative structures. It so happened that these national structures were also members of AProCA. Each State registered a couple of farmer leaders on its official delegation, but did not or could not pay their travel expenses. So AProCA sought the funding to cover all the costs. Upon arrival in Hong Kong, the farmers in the official delegations regrouped as AProCA but, unlike those who came in the NGO

²⁹⁷ Personal observation, fieldnotes, Fana, 06/07/05. Note: this fieldwork research informed my masters dissertation (Coughlan 2005).

²⁹⁸ Fieldwork recording of *Atelier VIII: Le dossier coton à l'OMC, Forum des Peuples*, Fana, 07/07/05.

²⁹⁹ For elaboration of these points, see my masters dissertation (Coughlan 2005).

³⁰⁰ NGOs Attendance to the WTO Sixth Ministerial Conference, Hong Kong, China, 13-18 December 2005. Source: www.wto.org/english/forums_e/ngo_e/ngo_e.htm consulted on 12/02/12.

³⁰¹ Interview with Keifa Diarra, SYCOV Fana Regional President and National Secretary-General, Fana, 19/02/08

delegation, they enjoyed unrestricted access to all of the conference proceedings. They dressed in uniforms of cotton cloth made in Burkina Faso and whenever there was a meeting on cotton, all the cotton producers would head towards the conference room to disrupt the meeting.

The Ambassador of the United States wanted to go and cry, with us in one of those rooms. Because we annoyed him so much that he left that place, he went out. So in the end he was compelled to call our Minister, Mr Chogel, who was a spokesperson for the African Ministers, to say that, well, he understands our suffering, and it was in that that he promised to withdraw the subsidies by 2013. It was under pressure. It was under our pressure.³⁰²

Keifa Diarra added that the US trade negotiator went on to promise an aid package that would begin in 2006, referring to the US West Africa Cotton Improvement Program (WACIP). He asserted that the concessions made by the US were a result of the pressure that he and other AProCA representatives had exerted at the Hong Kong WTO.

As mentioned in chapter three, the US aid package (WACIP) included promotion of genetically modified (GM) cotton in the Cotton Four countries (Mali, Benin, Burkina Faso and Chad) plus Senegal.³⁰³ Biotechnology is another issue which divides opinion in the West African farmers' movement. François Traoré of Burkina Faso, the main protagonist of the farmers' campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies, is in favour of the use of biotechnology in cotton production.³⁰⁴ Burkina Faso was the first West African country to trial Bt cotton.³⁰⁵ By 2010, Bt

³⁰² Interview with Keifa Diarra, SYCOV Fana Regional President and National Secretary-General, Fana, 19/02/08. Original: L'Ambassadeur des Etats-Unis ne- voulait aller pleurer avec nous dans une des salles-là. Parce que on l'a tellement fatigué que finalement il a laissé le coin, il est sorti. Donc finalement il était obligé d'appeler notre ministre, M. Chogel, qui était une porte-parole des ministres de l'Afrique, pour dire que, bon, il comprend notre peine, et c'est dans ça qu'il a promis de retirer les subventions d'ici 2013. C'est sous pression. C'est sous notre pression.

³⁰³ Source: USAID 2006: "activities include: Improving the technical, bio-safety and regulatory capacity for biotechnology-Bt Cotton through agriculture environmental studies, educational outreach to farmers on Bt cotton, and policy development training;"

³⁰⁴ "François Traoré: Je ne suis pas contre les OGM", LeFaso.net, 5 April 2005, www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article6357 consulted on 28/02/12. "Ce que je pense de la rencontre sur la partage d'expériences sur la culture du coton génétiquement modifié", 3 January 2012, <http://francoistraore.blogspot.com/2012/01/ce-que-je-pense-de-la-rencontre-sur-le.html> consulted on 28/02/12.

³⁰⁵ 'Burkina Faso commercialises GM cotton', ICTSD, 25 July 2008, <http://ictsd.org/i/environment/14348/> consulted on 28/02/12.

cotton accounted for sixty-five percent of the land planted to cotton in the country.³⁰⁶ There is strong opposition to biotechnology, however, within the regional farmers' network, ROPPA. Opposition is particularly strong in Mali, where a National Coalition for the Safeguard of the Genetic Heritage of Mali was formed. This coalition includes, among others, the CNOP, the AOPP, the *Forum pour un Autre Mali*, the *Forum des Peuples*, and a national co-ordinating body of NGOs (CCA-ONG), all of which have been active in the campaign against GM, including translating information into national languages and organising petitions and protest marches.³⁰⁷ Despite intense civil society opposition, Mali's national assembly passed a law regulating biosafety in November 2008, paving the way for the official introduction of GM crops into the country.³⁰⁸

Perspectives on the campaign: a success for whom?

Of the eighteen farmers interviewed in Mali's cotton zone on the subject of the international campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies, only six reported having participated in the campaign. Two of these, Ampha Coulibaly and Keifa Diarra, cited above, had participated at high levels in the campaign while occupying national level posts in the cotton unions. The other four participated in the campaign by signing one of the petitions against subsidies. One of these, A N Fomba, also cited above, was enthusiastic about his experience of the campaign, but the other three expressed a variety of reservations. Seydou Touré, a cotton farmer from Fana, was critical of the United States' promised timetable for the reduction of subsidies, indicating he felt it was too slow.³⁰⁹ Koutiala cotton farmer, Bourama Goita expressed his doubts that the United States would make any significant reforms to its subsidy regime as a result of the campaign. He insisted that while Malian farmers could express their opinions, they could not hold the US Government to account; 'we

³⁰⁶ 'Biotech Facts and Trends: Burkina Faso', www.isaaa.org consulted on 28/02/12.

³⁰⁷ Interviews with Salif Foulani Sissoko, CNOP, Technical Coordinator; Jean Coulibaly, AOPP President; Aliou Maiga, CCA-ONG Communications Officer; all held Bamako, 04/10/06. See also <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4445824.stm> consulted on 28/02/12.

³⁰⁸ "Biosécurité et les OGM au Mali", *Nouvel Horizon*, 14 November 2008, www.malijet.com/a_la_une_du_mali/8378-bios_curit_et_introduction_des_ogm_au_mali_les_d_put_s_ont_trahi.html consulted on 28/02/12.

³⁰⁹ Interview with Seydou Touré, cotton farmer, Fana, 17/02/08.

only see *our government*', he said.³¹⁰ He argued that Malians had to find their own solutions, such as increasing access to farm equipment and low cost fertilizer. Similarly, Seydou Traoré, also of Koutiala, said, 'The campaign against subsidies is a good thing but it has never achieved its objective, and the Government of Mali does not help the peasants.'³¹¹ Traoré complained that the campaign against subsidies had been compromised by corrupt union leaders.

Of the remaining twelve farmers interviewed who did not participate in the campaign, nine nonetheless reported that they were aware of the issue of US and EU cotton subsidies, while three were entirely unfamiliar with the subject. The responses of all nine informants who were aware of the issue but had not had any contact with the campaign are indicative of the remoteness of the subsidies campaign from the lives of many grassroots farmers. Three of those nine interviewees had vivid recollections of hearing Government Ministers or the President of Mali speaking on the issue of US and EU cotton subsidies, two over the radio and one in person at an event in Bamako.³¹² In addition to the television and the radio, sources of information included the CMDT and the cotton unions, both of which, it was reported, cited foreign subsidies as an explanation to farmers who asked why the price paid to producers was low.³¹³ In this way, the focus of attention on foreign subsidies has obscured other factors that may have contributed to the low producer price, such as inefficiencies and profiteering within the global value chain.

As elaborated in the previous chapter, the farmers interviewed raised a number of concerns besides that of subsidies and indeed besides that of the low price they receive for cotton. Perhaps the most detailed argument for a broader analysis of the problems facing farmers in Mali's cotton zone was made by Ampha Coulibaly, signatory to the original 2001 appeal against US and EU cotton subsidies. Speaking

³¹⁰ Interview with Bourama Goita, cotton farmer, Koutiala, 21/02/08. Original: On ne voit que *notre* gouvernement.

³¹¹ Interview with Seydou Traoré, cotton farmer, Koutiala, 21/02/08. Original: La campagne contre les subventions est une bonne chose mais il n'a jamais atteint son objectif, et le gouvernement du Mali n'aide pas les paysans.

³¹² Interviews with cotton farmers: Bafing Diarra, Kodabougou, 18/02/08; Michel Dembele, Moribila, 23/02/08; and Alphonse Kone, Moribila, 24/02/08.

³¹³ Interviews with Bakary Fomba, cotton farmer, Dien, 17/02/08; and Fode Sumunu, retired CMDT extension agent, Koutiala, 20/02/08. Also, interview with Ampha Coulibaly, Koutiala, 23/02/08.

in 2008, Ampha Coulibaly asserted that the most pressing problem for farmers in the Koutiala area was not that of price but of low yields.

If in one hectare you produce one and a half tonnes [of cotton], you sell it at 160 francs [per kilo], if you do the calculation [earns 240,000 francs]. And he who has 200 francs as the price, he only produces 500 kilograms [of cotton] [earns 100,000 francs]. So you see there is a difference: the price is high but the yield is low. And if the yield is high, the price is low, but that can sort out the problems... that can satisfy the peasant and he gets himself less in debt, he will have fewer problems. So if we manage to get the solution to the yield at the level of the soil, so the peasant will be at ease: he will not have a lot of problems, he will not have a lot of debts.³¹⁴

It is worth noting that Ampha Coulibaly did not link low yields to any problem with pest management, which might have supported an argument in favour of the introduction of Bt cotton. Rather, he attributed low yields to soil ‘fatigue’ and called for a detailed analysis of the soils in the Koutiala area. In this, he saw ‘a big role for the State’³¹⁵ in the co-ordination and execution of this kind of research and development. This brings the argument back around to the subject of privatisation of the CMDT and liberalisation of the cotton sector. Ampha Coulibaly suggested that donors might help to finance agronomic research but insisted that the State must play its role in Mali’s rural development.

Overall, the responses of the farmers interviewed indicated that the campaign against US and EU subsidies had some merit in that it addressed one factor that currently has an adverse effect on their livelihoods, but that it had failed to bring about satisfactory change in regard to this issue, which was only one of a complex array of concerns for farmers. The campaign went some way towards making farmers aware of an international level factor affecting their lives but there was a

³¹⁴ Interview with Ampha Coulibaly, President of the regional union of cotton co-operatives of Koutiala and San, Koutiala, 23/02/08. Original: Si dans un hectare tu produis une tonne et demie, tu le vends à cent soixante francs, si tu fais le calcul. Et celui qui a deux cents francs comme prix dans une hectare, lui il ne produit que cinq cents kilogrammes. Donc vous voyez il y a une différence : le prix est élevé mais le rendement est bas. Et si le rendement est élevé, le prix est bas, mais ça peut régler les problèmes... ça peut satisfaire le paysan et il se rend moins endetté, il aura moins de problèmes. Donc si on arrive à avoir la solution du rendement au niveau du sol, donc le paysan il sera à l’aise, il n’aura pas beaucoup de problèmes, il n’aura pas beaucoup de dettes.

³¹⁵ Original: un grand rôle pour l’Etat.

sense that this had served to divert attention from democratic accountability and pragmatic solutions at national level.

By contrast, responses from international NGO workers interviewed indicated that they felt a principal success of the campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies was an enhancement of democratic accountability, both in the North, where citizens increasingly questioned their own governments' subsidy regimes, and in African countries, where civil society organisations developed their capacities to influence their own governments.³¹⁶ One Oxfam interviewee, cited below, took a very long term perspective on how civil society campaigns can bring about social change, which was in tension with views expressed by farmers and their representatives who sought urgent solutions to the problems they faced.

I personally have never been of the school that believes strongly that this kind of campaigning is going to lead to very, very significant reform of US subsidies. And I've always been slightly wary of simplistic attempts to link change in the subsidies regime to actual issues of poverty in Africa. And um, for me, it's much more something of symbolic value in terms of, you know, I think it genuinely has contributed to a different kind of a debate about trade issues and one that is much more widely and popularly understood, in both the North and the South. So I see those as much more tangible aims really. A lot of my colleagues wouldn't agree with me.³¹⁷

This interviewee suggested that the campaign 'also creates other kinds of organisational dynamics which may be empowering in other ways'. The campaign is thus viewed as contributing to the development of debate in the public sphere and to the development of civil society movements themselves. The pertinent question, however, from the point of view of many farmers and their representatives in Mali was precisely *who* in West African civil society has been empowered through the campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies.

One national level farmer leader, who wished to remain anonymous, was clear whom he thought had been empowered through the campaign.

³¹⁶ Interview with Dominique Jenkins, Oxfam America West Africa Region Popular Mobilization and Media Co-ordinator, Dakar, 02/02/08.

³¹⁷ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

It's François Traoré. He was chosen by the government of Burkina Faso. Everybody knows that. ... And he is supported by Oxfam Great Britain. Oxfam supports these people. It's that that's a shame. ... They have mobilised three billion francs CFA which they are in the process of giving to these people who do not fight for the interests of cotton producers. ... They try to marginalise us in the debate, because they tell us, 'You are not cotton producers.' ... They try to create a division by saying that it's only those who have chosen to call themselves cotton-producer organisations, that it's they alone who have the right to talk about cotton today. It's a division that has been supported by the politicians – for their interests, not for the interests of the peasants. And these people like [Bakary] Togola, like François [Traoré] have been the real artisans of this game.³¹⁸

The emergence of cotton-specific producer organisations, such as AProCA, has been facilitated by the cotton-specific focus of the campaign against cotton subsidies and its links to the WTO process. This has advanced the single-commodity perspective over the broad-based family farming approach; a move which has favoured the interests of the State, capital, and the West African cotton elite.

The Oxfam worker, cited above, acknowledged the validity of concerns over the national cotton farmer leadership in Mali, and noted that a key learning outcome of the campaign for Oxfam has been understanding the need to work simultaneously at local and at national levels, in order to thoroughly enhance democratic accountability rather than boosting national level civil society structures which may be only nominally representative.

But our strategic choice, which is following the strategic choice of the AOPP, is to say in this context, you have to strengthen the grassroots because ultimately that's what's going to demand more accountability at the national level. I mean that may also be a pie in the sky theory. ... But I mean at least also by working at the local level, you can have a stronger grip on the extent to which you're actually having any impact on

³¹⁸ Interview with anonymous national level farmer representative, Bamako, 2008. Original: C'est François Traoré. Il a été choisi par le gouvernement du Burkina Faso. Tout le monde le sait. ... Et il est soutenu par Oxfam Grande-Bretagne. Oxfam soutien ces gens-là. C'est ça qui est dommage. ... Ils ont mobilisé trois milliards de francs CFA qu'ils sont en train de donner à ces gens, qui ne luttent pas pour les intérêts des producteurs du coton. ... On essaie de nous marginaliser dans ce débat, parce que on nous dit, "Vous n'êtes pas les producteurs du coton." ... On essaie de créer la division en disant ces organisations qui ont choisi de se dire organisations producteurs du coton, c'est eux seules qui ont le droit de parler du coton aujourd'hui. C'est une division qui a été entretenue par les politiciens— pour leurs intérêts, pas pour les intérêts des paysans. Et les gens comme Togola, comme François ont été les vrais artisans de ce jeu.

ordinary men and women farmers. And in this context, it's very difficult to have a grip on that if you're working primarily at national level. So I mean I suppose that's one of our lessons out of this whole experience: The need for us to focus more at local level at the same time as working at national level. And that partly being about trying to sort of strengthen that dynamic of accountability: big problem for all civil society organisations, but particularly for farmer organisations, which are, you know, effectively one of the only mass movements in West Africa.³¹⁹

Some of the subsequent changes to Oxfam's work on cotton in Mali will be considered as part of the next chapter.

Conclusion

It might be argued that the campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies went some way towards informing grassroots farmers of supranational factors that affect their lives (even if they did so only indirectly in the early 2000s), and that it empowered them to speak out and even to bring about incremental change. The importance of this sense of having been heard by a powerful nation is evident in the interview response of Dien cotton farmer, A N Fomba, cited above. Without undervaluing the positive outcomes of the campaign experience for some farmers, what stands out from the fieldwork research is not that grassroots farmers were liberated by their newfound knowledge of the workings of the world cotton market, but that opposition to US and EU cotton subsidies became the priority for concerted transnational civil society action through a competitive process of agenda-setting; one in which grassroots farmers featured as objects of concern but barely at all as subjects with their own valid viewpoints.

The politics of agenda-setting within civil society, which accompanied the cotton subsidies campaign, took place across multiple political arenas. The initial appearance of a confluence of interests between an international NGO and a group of African farmer leaders belied growing tensions within the West African farmers' movement at regional and national levels. In their critique of the literature on transnational development networks, Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos (2004, p. 851)

³¹⁹ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

point out that the same authors who have identified that within policy arenas, ‘the key strategy of the competing parties is to attempt to exclude opposing views from the frame of public discussion,’ nonetheless ‘do not seem to have applied this approach to analysing processes within networks, as they overlook the lack of consensus within many transnational development networks.’

The campaign against subsidies facilitated the marginalisation of alternative perspectives through the framing of debate, which was fuelled by the interests of relatively powerful actors inside (and perhaps outside) the network, and through the ways in which the ‘tools’ of the campaign were used. Grassroots farmers were primarily concerned with their immediate needs and the security of their livelihoods; while West African farmer leaders sought to consolidate their positions within their national political contexts and in the global value chain; and international NGO workers were looking for the success of the campaign on its own terms or in terms of a general increase in civil society activity.

In West Africa, petitions were used not to promote debate at local levels or within civil society, but to show support to political leaders and to legitimise the campaign by pointing to grassroots signatories. The international NGO’s insistence on promoting a ‘simple’ media-friendly message discouraged debate and obscured more subtle analysis of the problems facing African farmers. The international NGO’s tight grip on the campaign message slackened slightly in 2005 in the context of a worldwide trend towards plurality within the global justice movement. But, by then, the campaign – and the international NGO’s funding of it – had already served as a catalyst for a profound split in the West African farmers’ movement, consolidating a rift between the government-friendly export-oriented cotton elite and the movement for broad-based family farming. The campaign strategy of close collaboration with West African governments must be viewed in relation to this cleavage, which is a major feature of the wider national and regional contexts.

The campaign against cotton subsidies responded to opportunities in the international arena rather than being grounded in local realities. This led to a low level of accountability to the most vulnerable stakeholders in the campaign, and to the campaign’s lack of independence from dominant ideas of free trade and export-oriented commodity production. The fieldwork evidence shows striking parallels

between the campaign against cotton subsidies and the case of the campaign against Scott Paper described by Jordan and van Tuijl (2000) to elucidate their typology of a ‘disassociated campaign’. In the Scott Paper case, the international campaign did not solve the local community’s real problem, that of structural powerlessness. Rather, by not involving local people in deciding the agenda and strategy for the campaign, it weakened the community’s relative bargaining power.

One of the concerns raised by civil society actors wary of the cotton subsidies campaign was that if it were successful, the market shares of the United States and the European Union would be taken by other large producers such as Brazil and Australia, without any benefits accruing to African countries. In practice, the success of the cotton subsidies campaign at international level was largely limited to changing the terms of the debate about trade. In this, it exposed the hypocrisy of neo-mercantilist practices that are antithetical to the hegemonic discourse of free trade, but it did not challenge the hegemonic discourse itself. Indeed, the campaign sought to empower African producers to have a greater voice in the governance of the cotton global value chain, but in so doing it marginalised calls from some sections of African civil society for policy-makers to ‘think outside the box’ of the cotton global value chain.

Berry and Gabay (2009) consider Oxfam’s trade justice campaigns and argue that ‘Oxfam’s universalist pretensions mask more local or parochial concerns and identities’ (p. 340). This chapter illustrates the extent of the diversity of interests and perspectives within the campaign network and among the stakeholders in the campaign, and shows how some were promoted while others were marginalised through the campaign. Thus, the pertinent question is, ‘*Who* is empowered by transnational civil society action?’ The next chapter will look at the state of farmer representation within Mali in the period following the campaign against subsidies; it will consider the re-orientation of Oxfam’s advocacy work towards the local level there; and it will explore the work of another international NGO which attempted to link farmers in Mali’s cotton zone to transnational campaigns.

Chapter seven

‘Capacity building’ Mali’s cotton farmers: national and international designs on the local arena

Introduction

This chapter looks at two cases in which Northern-based international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) sought to link with local producers in Mali’s cotton zone in order to improve accountability and legitimacy within transnational advocacy networks. Chapters five and six have shown the local level in Mali to be weakly linked to civil society activity in national and transnational arenas. The NGO initiatives examined in this chapter are situated in a slightly altered domestic context in Mali, which has seen the formation of producer co-operatives at local level and a federation of unions of co-operatives that stretches to national level. These reforms are part of a ‘top-down’ policy to promote ‘bottom-up’ development by building the capacities of Mali’s cotton producers to fulfil their roles in a privatised cotton sector.

The first of the NGO initiatives to be considered in this chapter is Oxfam’s Cotton Programme 2007–2012, which focused on supporting the development of local cotton producer co-operatives in Mali, following recognition that poor accountability of national level farmer leaders to local farmers had undermined Oxfam’s recent work in this field, notably on the campaign against subsidies. The second is a partnership between the UK-based Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) and a Malian NGO, AMADIP,³²⁰ to gather evidence from Mali to support international campaigns on pesticides and child labour in cotton, and to link with the local level through a proposed project to promote organic cotton production to Malian farmers. AMADIP featured in chapter five, as part of a civil society coalition which campaigned against privatisation of the national cotton company, CMDT.

³²⁰ *L’Association Malienne pour le Développement Intégré et Participatif* (Malian Association for Integrated and Participative Development), officially founded in 2004.

EJF's proposed organic education project is considered through the lens of the global trend – evident in West African cotton sectors – towards promotion of organic and fair trade supply chains.³²¹

The reform of farmer organisation in Mali's cotton sector, and the participation of NGOs both in supporting the development of producer co-operatives and in organic and fair trade supply chains, may be viewed as part of broader policy trends in development. These initiatives reflect the 'good governance' agenda promoted by the World Bank since 1992,³²² which allots a vital role to civil society organisations as a counterbalance to the market and the state, within a context of economic and political liberalisation (Howell and Pearce 2001, p. 4). They also reflect a move – both by mainstream development thinkers and by those seeking radical alternatives – towards a focus on local civil society, participation and empowerment (Peet and Watts 1996; Mohan and Stokke 2000). Stokke and Mohan (2001) argue that this focus on the local has involved a tendency to promote one version of the local over other, more complex analyses of the local. Furthermore, there has been relative inattention to national, regional, and international structures and processes affecting the local arena (Stokke and Mohan 2001, p. 8).

The NGO interventions at local level, considered in this chapter, were motivated in part by questions of organisational legitimacy and accountability within transnational networks. These are familiar themes in the literature on transnational advocacy networks, but Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos (2004) point out that there is a lack of empirical research to investigate how these issues are managed in practice.

One of the central claims of northern NGOs within transnational advocacy networks is that they link southern grassroots communities to northern policy makers. Although this claim is central to NGOs' claims to legitimacy, its validity is rarely questioned and it is clear that some networks exhibit hierarchical tendencies. (Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos 2004, p. 849)

³²¹ For an overview of actors discussed in this chapter, see the influence diagram of campaign actors in 2007, in appendix two.

³²² The World Bank's the notion of 'good governance' dates back to its 1992 report, *Governance and Development*.

This chapter explores how international NGO attempts to improve links to the local area within transnational civil society networks are affected by local dynamics and national level politics, while at once being shaped by, and feeding into, national and international policy orientations. The analysis presented here contributes to the debate around deconstructive approaches to development by unpacking the dynamic interaction between transnational civil society actors and local populations in the context of wider political processes.

The argument of this chapter is that the local level of smallholder agriculture in Southern Mali is framed by national and international policy environments, and that this process, which is reinforced through the interventions of the international NGOs, exacerbates underlying inequality, exclusion and conflicts in the local arena. The political crisis at the heart of farmer representation in Mali has become an intractable problem, which affects development interventions in the cotton zone. The NGO initiatives considered in this chapter operate within the framework of export-oriented commodity production, which does not offer a sustainable solution for the poorest and most marginalised farming families in Mali. In this context, the NGOs' attempts to enhance their legitimacy and accountability by 'building the capacities' of farmers' groups at the local level in Mali serve the interests of relatively wealthy farmers, the State, capital, and, indeed, their own organisational interests better than they serve the interests of the poorest farmers.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section examines the rationale for, and impacts of, the transformation of village associations to cotton producer co-operatives in Mali's cotton zone. The second section considers the formation of unions of co-operatives from local to national levels, in a contentious political context. The third section looks at Oxfam's Cotton Programme 2007–2012 against the backdrop of changes at local and national levels. The fourth section explores the partnership between EJF and AMADIP, considering EJF's proposed organic education project in terms of legitimating links to the local arena and in the context of ethical cotton supply chains in West Africa.

Co-operatives, entrepreneurialism and exclusion in the local arena

A new law (Loi n° 01-076 / du 18 juillet 2001) was passed in 2001 to enable the formation of producer co-operatives. This law provided the legal framework for co-operatives of cotton producers (SCPCs³²³) to replace village associations (AVs) as the first level of farmer organisation above farm level. The programme of transforming AVs to cotton producer co-operatives (SCPCs) was a top-down initiative, led by the Government and major donors. The World Bank's Programme of Support for Agricultural Services and Producer Organizations (PASAOP) played a significant role in this process from 2001 to 2004. There are approximately 7,177 SCPCs in Mali (Dia and Traoré 2011), spread across 6,345 villages and hamlets in the country's cotton zone.³²⁴

The transformation to co-operative status is a pre-requisite for implementation of the Government of Mali's policy for reform of the cotton sector, and privatisation of the CMDT in particular, as was noted in chapter five. Whereas AVs were semi-formal groups organised by the CMDT with no legal stature, co-operatives are independent legal entities, free to form partnerships with private actors other than the CMDT.³²⁵ Unlike an AV, a cotton producers' co-operative would be able to enter into a business contract with a private ginning company, in the event of privatisation of the CMDT and the entrance of new private actors into Mali's cotton market. Their independent legal status also allows for the formation of partnerships between co-operatives and NGOs. The legal status of co-operatives further entitles them to own shares in a private company. The plan for the privatisation of the CMDT envisages that producer co-operatives collectively would own twenty percent of the shares in the privatised company. In theory, this would give producers a voice in the governance of the company, and it would align the commercial interests of producers more closely with those of the company.

Another aspect of the rationale for transforming AVs to co-operatives is to create the conditions for the resolution of some of the management problems

³²³ *Sociétés Coopératives des Producteurs du Coton*

³²⁴ Source: www.maliagriculture.org/services_tech/cmdt/page-cmdt.html consulted on 02/04/12.

³²⁵ Information on the transformation of village associations to cotton producer co-operatives in Mali comes from a fieldwork interview with Ampha Coulibaly, President of the regional union of cotton co-operatives of Koutiala and San, Koutiala, 23/02/08, and from Lacy (2008).

associated with AVs.³²⁶ In the event of mismanagement of a co-operative, such as embezzlement of funds, there can be a judicial process to resolve the matter if complaints are brought to the attention of the authorities. Both AVs and co-operatives operate on a basis of collective liability. This means their members are collectively liable for any losses incurred once reimbursement of input credit is deducted from the sale of the group's seed cotton harvest at the end of the agricultural year. There is no mechanism for recovering debts owed by individuals directly. The group is left to manage this process internally. Co-operatives differ from AVs, however, in that the former can have recourse to legal action and, because they are voluntary associations based on affinity rather than village-wide associations, co-operatives can exclude farmers whom they consider a bad risk.

The transformation of AVs to co-operatives has the potential to resolve the free rider problems and indebtedness experienced by village associations, which have become chronic following the losses made in the 1999–2000 growing season.³²⁷ It removes a disincentive that might have discouraged more successful and wealthier farmers from expanding cotton production. It also presents them with an opportunity to advance further through pooling resources with their economic peers. Indebted farmers who are considered a liability, on the other hand, could be pushed out of cotton cultivation altogether. Poorer farmers could be excluded from all co-operatives and thereby cut off from the only significant source of input credit and agricultural extension services. The poor could lose out yet further if richer farmers choose to expand cotton production by encroaching on their land and disrupting their fallow systems, as discussed in chapter three.³²⁸ This would increase socio-economic inequality and worsen soil erosion yet further, deepening poverty and marginalisation for the most vulnerable rural producers.

Girard et al.'s (2008) account of the formation of the Co-operative of Motorized Farms of Koutiala (CEMK) gives one example of how the shift towards producer co-operatives in Mali may represent an opportunity for wealthier farmers. A group of large-scale farmers established the co-operative in 2002 following the

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ See chapter four for more details of farmers' losses in 1999–2000.

³²⁸ Moseley (2005) observed that wealthier farmers in Southern Mali expanded their cotton production, in years when prices were high, by leaning on their poorer neighbours to let them use their fallow fields.

closure of the CMDT's service for motorised agriculture (ibid., p. 3). In 2007, the collective comprised ninety-two members across the Koutiala district, each cultivating between twenty-five and 160 hectares of farmland, with a total of 109 tractors between them (ibid., p. 5). Initially the main aim of CEMK was to ensure the continued maintenance and repair of members' tractors, which they had received from the CMDT on preferential terms. CEMK entered into a partnership with a branch of the French NGO, *Agriculteurs Français et Développement International* (AFDI), which helped them to gain access to larger scale credit and to source spare parts and better models of tractors. The co-operative's 2007 strategic plan included the building of a grain store to stock their cereal surpluses to a capacity of five hundred tonnes. In this case, the opportunity afforded by co-operative status to form transnational partnerships with NGOs helped to consolidate the economic power of an already advantaged group of cotton farmers in Mali.

The establishment of cotton producer co-operatives is part of a policy designed to make Mali's cotton sector more business-like, by promoting capitalism at local levels. Dougnon et al. (2010, p. 12) suggest it is doubtful, however, that ingrained practices of village-level farmer organisation would change overnight. When SOFITEX introduced co-operatives in Burkina Faso, the initial plan was to limit their membership to 'pilot' farmers, each growing six hectares of cotton. The co-operatives that emerged in fact regrouped producers of all sizes, as it proved difficult to separate large-scale and small-scale farmers in localities where interactions were strong (Bonnassieux 2003, p. 48). Lacy (2008) studied the formation of cotton producer co-operatives in Dissan, southern Mali, in 2002. He observed that personal ties played a role in the division of the village association into two co-operatives, but he also noted that the result correlated with an economic divide within the community.³²⁹

Membership in the smaller CPC was not directly based on production levels, but on family alliances and relationships. ... [But] ... the bifurcation of Dissan's AV consolidated some of the village's more

³²⁹ This is consistent with the points made in chapters two and three regarding the salience of kin group identity in Southern Mali, and the social pressure to prioritise the well-being of the corporate group, but also resistance to this pressure, which has gathered momentum since the late colonial era through the gradual integration of rural communities into a market economy.

wealthy households apart from the larger community. (Lacy 2008, p. 219)

Lacy also notes that Dissan's smaller co-operative regrouped many of the more highly educated and experienced former AV office-holders, leading to a 'new, localized manifestation of brain drain', which cast more doubt on the survival prospects of the village's larger co-operative (2008, p. 221). The process may be gradual, but the shift to cotton producer co-operatives is one factor in the exclusion of the poorest producers from the cotton value chain.³³⁰

Exclusion from the cotton value chain may not be a negative outcome *per se* for poor farmers. Toulmin and Guèye (2003, pp. 41–42) argue, 'Given the intensive inputs required for cotton, in labour, credit, inputs and management, cotton may well not be the most appropriate for small, poor farmers to adopt.' The real problem is the lack of support for growing other crops and the knock-on effects of exclusion from the supply of cotton inputs. Farmers' food crops are likely to suffer from no longer having soil fertilised by diverted cotton fertiliser.³³¹

The policy of forming village level co-operatives may be regarded as part of a recent trend towards cultivating social capital at the local level, identified by Stokke and Mohan (2001). In theory, co-operatives promote trust and co-operation among members who unite voluntarily on the basis of affinity. In practice in Mali, any farmer who wishes to engage in commercial production of cotton is obliged to adhere to a co-operative. Furthermore, since they engender exclusion of indebted farmers, co-operatives promote social capital among their members while contributing to a breakdown of social capital in the wider community. In this regard, co-operatives are merely the newest stage in a series of top-down cotton-related

³³⁰ Another factor creating disincentives to growing cotton, particularly for marginal farmers, is price volatility linked to the price-setting mechanism introduced in 2005. An IMF Country Report for Mali (2008) states that after three years of the new mechanism, the results have been "disappointing". The CMDT has not responded to incentives to improve efficiency and quality, while producers have borne the risks of price volatility (IMF 2008, p. 7). Serra (2012, p. 8) notes that for the same reasons the price-setting mechanism has not been closely adhered to since 2008/09, prices being set once more through tripartite negotiations.

³³¹ See chapter three. An argument is made in OECD (2008) that donors should pay more attention to the mixed-cropping system in operation in Mali.

interventions to have shaken the social fabric of rural communities since colonial times.³³²

Before the arrival of co-operatives, many village associations had already split up into sub-village associations due to internal conflicts, as noted in chapter three. The introduction of co-operatives based on affinity formalised these splits rather than healed them, and provided incentives for further splits. The possibility of recourse to legal action might in theory offer a less confrontational means to resolve disputes but in practice this method of conflict resolution is extremely unpopular in rural Mali.³³³

One source of conflict in the local arena was the formation of district unions of cotton producer co-operatives because, according to Mamadou Konaté, ‘they put in place the structures that are called unions; so they put in place the co-operatives. So that too brought sagas. Everybody wanted to be on the board.’³³⁴ These district unions constitute the first layer in a pyramid of national cotton farmer representation, while village-level co-operatives form the base. Bamoussa Traoré, a cotton farmer in Fana, commented on what he saw as the detrimental impacts on grassroots farmers of the new structures of farmer organisation, which have reduced the flow of information into the local arena and increased conflicts within it.

There was a time when information passed very well. But now it’s very little, it’s minimal. Information doesn’t get passed very much. They introduced a new change – the new union. Since it was introduced there has been a lot of arguing going on. That’s where the mis-information starts. It’s thanks to the arrival of the unions [of co-operatives]. ... There is no information between farmers and the CMDT because the former trade union has been cut down by the newly arrived union, which is determined to destroy the old one. This is why it is very difficult to get information for everybody.³³⁵

³³² See, for example, Danielle Jonckers’ (1994) analysis of the 1974 introduction of AVs, cited in chapter three.

³³³ For a discussion of mechanisms of rural conflict resolution in West Africa, see Traoré and Lo (1996, § 2.1.4).

³³⁴ Interview with Mamadou Konaté, cotton farmer and president of the Gigya district chamber of agriculture, Fana, 17/02/08. Original: ils ont mis en place des structures qu’on appelle unions. Donc ils ont mis en place des coopératives. Donc ça aussi ça a amené des histoires. Tout le monde voulait être membre du bureau.

³³⁵ Interview with Bamoussa Traoré, cotton farmer, Fana, 17/02/08. Original: Ah, wati-do-la konafoni to beye. N’ga sisan a ka souma, a ka souma sisan. Miye information soumaya, ou nanani yelega bolocouranye consayina ni ahou yere kakan ka koumanai miye union koye. Kamini union koye kouma koni fora ni oko sigira seka, ni o sensibilisation kera manga doma ako djoukorolala ... Bon,

Co-operatives are the latest instalment in a long history of imposition onto the local arena of exogenous models of socio-economic organisation, which have precipitated a breakdown of the social fabric of rural communities in Mali. The co-operatives policy may well give additional impetus to an emergent class of local farmer entrepreneurs. But the consolidation of this class into a new layer of local civil society – district unions of cotton producer co-operatives – may have brought out conflicts within the local arena³³⁶ and has certainly brought the local arena further under the influence of national level politics. This section has given an overview of processes at the local level, in which village associations have been transformed into cotton producer co-operatives. These co-operatives form the base of a pyramid of national cotton farmer representation, which is examined in the next section.

Civil society schisms and crony capitalism in the national arena

By 2007, Mali's cotton producer co-operatives formed the base level of a four-tiered pyramid-shaped federation of unions of co-operatives.³³⁷ Part of the Government's cotton sector reform programme, the building of this new structure of cotton producer representation was facilitated by the Chamber of Agriculture (APCAM), with donor funds from the French Development Agency's PASE initiative.³³⁸ The 7,177 local level co-operatives elect representatives to serve in a total of 288 *unions communales*. In turn, office-holders in these district level unions elect from among their number representatives to serve on forty-one *unions sectorales*; who in turn elect representatives for four *unions regionales*. At the apex of the pyramid, members of the four regional unions elect the office-holders of the

syndicat mounoutoubeye ni oulou chargeledo corikola ni kounafoni koubetenai oulouni CMDT tie bon counafoni te teme oulou ni cofelatie ouye oulou betike kada. Bon sisam au union kera coulou filaye, korolebeye donfana baadana. Couloudo moubeye okoni bifessa ka senekela ka djekoulou faga ka tonto a eyere kele doroye, o gueleya ba debe afaiya oh dekoson information perduledo afaiya, aka souma, ak soumayerede. Fadon konife nte otatchokodo.

³³⁶ This would require further research but latent or overt conflicts are likely given that district unions unite co-operatives, many of which formed through village-level splits beginning either in the AV era or with the introduction of the co-operative system.

³³⁷ See appendix two for an influence diagram of actors in 2007 discussed in this section.

³³⁸ *Programme d'Amélioration des Systèmes d'Exploitation en zone Cotonnière*.

national union, who in turn elect the President of the *Union Nationale – Sociétés Coopératives des Producteurs de Coton* (UN-SCPC). Through this process of democratic filtration, the government-friendly cotton leader and President of the Chamber of Agriculture, Bakary Togola, was elected first president of Mali's UN-SCPC by the twenty or so office-holders in the national union.

There is an important distinction to be made between unions of cotton producer co-operatives and unions of cotton and food crop producers (SYCOV, SYVAC, SPCK, SYPAMO and GSCVM). The distinction is clear in the French language: only the former are termed, *union*; whereas the latter are termed, *syndicat*, analogous to a trade union or a labour union. The French term for the type of organisation represented by the UN-SCPC is *faîtière*, the literal translation of which is a 'rooftop ridge tile'. It is often rendered in English as an 'umbrella organisation', but it is more accurately thought of as the pinnacle of an all-encompassing pyramid structure. All farmers in Mali who produce cotton officially³³⁹ are required to be members of SCPCs, and they are therefore formally represented by the structure of unions of co-operatives. The UN-SCPC displaced the GSCVM (the group of cotton producer trade unions) as the official representative body for cotton producers in Mali.³⁴⁰

The process of creating the national union of cotton producer co-operatives was highly political. In an interview in 2008, the General Secretary of SYCOV, Keifa Diarra, described how the State blocked an attempt by trade unionists, including him, to create an independent federation of unions of co-operatives, amid political tensions in the run-up to the 2007 presidential election. He said that many trade unionists who were marginalised in this process went on to question the legitimacy of UN-SCPC President, Bakary Togola.

So another organisation had to be set up. They did everything to make sure the trade unionists weren't in it. So- and if such an organisation is

³³⁹ Some rural people, mainly women, grow minuscule amounts of cotton to sell in local markets or directly to local weavers, or to use in domestic processing. This informal production and sale of cotton outwith the CMDT system was observed in Koutiala during fieldwork research in November 2007. It may be linked to low level leaks in the CMDT system, but that was not investigated. Informal production and processing of cotton still feeds a modest handicraft textile industry in areas outside of CMDT control, as was observed in the Dogon country in January 2007.

³⁴⁰ Compare influence diagrams for actors in 2005 and in 2007, in appendix two.

created by muscling out another- Some unionists managed to get into it, but everywhere the association went, they put their unionists aside. And in putting this organisation in order, there were those who were left out, people who were marginalised, who expected at one point to get together to form their own *faïtière* [top organisation] : they were confronted with one name, of Bakary [Togola]. So those who were confronted with that name and the unionists who were left out, when you ask them they will say that Bakary does not represent them legitimately. ... Because we tried to create another federation. ... I myself was the president of that federation. It was the national federation of unions of cotton producer co-operatives, FNA-USCPC. We held the congress. We did everything right up to the application for a registration certificate. It was at that level that the Administration said it won't give us the registration certificate, and that we had another, unapproved goal that it did not agree with.³⁴¹

Keifa Diarra went on to elaborate the political nature of this refusal to recognise an independent federation of unions of co-operatives in 2007.

It happened during the period of the electoral campaign, when at the time Bakary had assembled the cotton growers so that they vote for ATT. So all who had a contrary idea at that time were considered as opposition, whilst that wasn't true.³⁴²

It is interesting to note that while he described cotton farmers being co-opted and political opposition being repressed, the surface-level thrust of Diarra's complaint was not that these were illegitimate practices, but that his group was wrongly accused of being in opposition to President ATT. He was dismissive of residual opposition to Togola following this episode, asserting, 'in a country,

³⁴¹ Interview with Keifa Diarra, Fana Regional President and National General Secretary, SYCOV, Fana, 19/02/08. Original: Donc il fallait mettre une autre organisation en place. Ils ont fait tout pour que les syndicalistes ne soient pas là dedans. Donc- et si une telle organisation est créée en musclant à d'autre- Certains syndicalistes ont pu y accéder, mais partout où l'association a passé ils ont mis leurs syndicalistes à côté. Et dans la mise en- l'ordre même de cette organisation il y a avait des laissés pour compte, des gens qui ont été marginalisés, qui attendaient à un moment de se retrouver à un moment pour former leur propre *faïtière* : ils ont été confronté à un nom, de Bakary. Donc ceux qui ont été confronté à ce nom et des syndicalistes qui ont été laissé de côté, quand on les demande, ils vont dire que Bakary ne les représente pas légitimement. ... Parce que on a tenté de créer une autre fédération. Tout ce qui ne va pas partir ... moi-même j'étais le président de cette fédération, [...] C'était la fédération nationale des unions des coopératives producteurs du coton, FNA-USCPC. On a fait le congrès. On a fait tout jusqu'à la demande de récépissé. C'est à ce niveau que l'administration a dit qu'il ne nous donne pas le récépissé, et que on avait d'autre but non approuvé qu'il n'est pas d'accord.

³⁴² Interview with Keifa Diarra, Fana Regional President and National General Secretary, SYCOV, Fana, 19/02/08. Original: C'est fait à la période de la campagne électorale où à l'époque Bakary avait réuni les coton-culteurs pour qu'on vote pour ATT. Donc tout ce qui avait une idée à ce moment contraire était considéré comme opposition, pendant que ce n'était pas réel.

everyone cannot be satisfied'.³⁴³ Keifa Diarra emphasised that he believes Togola legitimately represents cotton farmers because he was President of both SYCOV and GSCVM before the national union was created, and because he is 'the biggest cotton producer in Mali', with over one hundred well-maintained hectares of cotton.³⁴⁴ A photograph of Togola and Diarra shaking hands adorned a wall of the living room at Diarra's home in Fana, where the interview took place.³⁴⁵ Whether conciliatory, resignatory, coded or co-opted, Keifa Diarra's testimony is indicative of the murky character of relationships between actors in civil society and the State in Mali.

Giving a slightly different version of these events, Alexis Roy (2010a) argues that the establishment of a rival federation of co-operative unions was opposed not by the authorities, but by Bakary Togola himself. Roy recounts accusations that two political challengers to Togola were imprisoned on trumped up charges, 'one for having said in an interview that "we need to have done with Bakary Togola"', which was then interpreted by a judge as death threats, and the second for having criticised the judge's decision' (Roy 2010a, p. 309). These accusations were heard repeatedly during fieldwork research and were reported in the press.³⁴⁶ An interviewee who wished to remain anonymous said that it was common knowledge that Togola's position at the head of all the major farming organisations was due to the influence of the Government, which sought a compliant leader at the top of the farmer movement.

It's Bakary Togola ... The Government wanted to have someone easy to manage. It was him. But it was not to sort out the problems of the peasants. And all that, it's political because the Government wants a leader who is easy to manage. ... Everyone knows that he was backed to be the president of the cotton unions, to be the president of the chamber of agriculture, to be the president of the co-operatives. He has never done

³⁴³ Interview with Keifa Diarra, Fana, 19/02/08. Original: Dans un pays, tout le monde ne peut pas être satisfait.

³⁴⁴ According to the CMDT website, farmers in Mali who supply cotton to the company cultivate on average two to three hectares of cotton. Source: www.maliagriculture.org/services_tech/cmdt/page-cmdt.html consulted on 16/04/12.

³⁴⁵ Fieldwork observation, Keifa Diarra's house, Fana, 19/02/08.

³⁴⁶ The challenge to Togola and the subsequent imprisonment of Tahirou Bamba were reported in *Les Echos* newspaper: 'Tahirou Bamba, FNA-USCPC: Nous voulons en finir avec Bakary Togola' 08/05/07 and 'Pour avoir mis en place la FNA-USCPC: Bakary Togola « emprisonne » Tahirou Bamba' 23/05/07.

a single action that could put the Government in difficulty. He cannot do that.³⁴⁷

The interviewee went on to say that, ‘the Government put in prison the peasants who wanted to create another organisation, for Bakary Togola’, naming the challengers as Tahirou Bamba and SYVAC President Mènè Diallo, and describing their imprisonment as ‘arbitrary detention’.³⁴⁸ Both Tahirou Bamba and Keifa Diarra had participated in the mass boycott of cotton production in the year 2000.³⁴⁹ The cotton sector reform process is likely one reason the authorities were particularly keen to have a compliant farmer leader at this time. In 2008, Bakary Togola, together with a handful of top level farmer leaders, finally gave their public support to the privatisation programme.³⁵⁰

It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the truth of specific claims of political imprisonment, but it was clear from formal and informal interviews, and from fieldwork observation, that some cotton farmers and farmer representatives were fearful of repression.³⁵¹ It was also obvious that tensions ran high between some farmer representatives at both national and regional levels,³⁵² as elaborated in chapter five and as these fieldnotes testify:

Waiting for interview with Togola, in his secretary’s office. He was in a meeting with Seydou Coulibaly and Tahirou Bamba. Another APCAM worker (Moussa?) was there and I heard the secretary tell him this. They exchanged wide-eyed glances and murmured comments that pointed to

³⁴⁷ Interview with anonymous national level farmer representative, Bamako, 2008. Original: C’est-Bakary Togola ... Le gouvernement a voulu avoir quelqu’un de facile à gérer. C’était lui. Mais c’était pas pour régler les problèmes des paysans. Et tout ça c’est politique parce que le gouvernement veut un leader facile à gérer. ... Tout le monde sait qu’il a été soutenu pour être président du cotonniers, pour être président de la chambre d’agriculture, pour être président des coopératives. Il n’a jamais fait une action qui peut mettre le gouvernement en difficulté. Il ne peut pas le faire.

³⁴⁸ Interview with anonymous national level farmer representative, Bamako, 2008. Original: Le gouvernement a mis en prison les paysans qui voulaient créer une autre organisation, pour Bakary Togola. ... détention arbitraire.

³⁴⁹ Roy (2010a, p. 305) cites an interview with Tahirou Bamba in which he talks of his leadership role in the 2000 boycott. When asked in a fieldwork interview in Fana on 19/02/08, Keifa Diarra said that he had participated in the 2000 boycott.

³⁵⁰ *Le Républicain*, 22/07/08 ‘Privatisation de la CMDT: Bakary Togola a-t-il trahi les paysans?’

³⁵¹ Some farmers were scared to speak up against Togola; others organised a petition against his holding of multiple positions, a petition which was ignored by the authorities (see chapter four). The farmer representative who requested anonymity in connection with the interview cited above was initially wary of discussing the matter, expressing skepticism about my identity as a research student and consenting to continue the interview only once satisfied that I was not a spy.

³⁵² Fieldnotes, Koutiala, 20–24/02/08.

the heated nature of the situation. A little later, the three came out of the meeting, Bamba looking very intense and smoking a cigarette. The other man (Moussa?) said something along the lines of: ‘Ah, Bamba, tu as été avec ton serpent! Il n’est pas facile, deh. Il ne respecte pas la loi, lui.’ [‘Ah, Bamba, you have been with your snake. He’s not easy, eh. He does not respect the law, him.’] At first this comment seemed to be about Togola, but then he repeated it, making it clear he was talking about Bamba smoking. I wasn’t sure if the confusion was deliberate.³⁵³

The anonymous interviewee, cited above, said that he suspected all the top cotton farmer leaders were implicated in illegitimate behaviour and were double-crossing one another.

I don’t get involved because I think that they have all been doing dodgy dealings together. All of those people [including the two allegedly imprisoned for opposing Togola] were with Togola. ... All those people have been with the Government. They have muzzled the peasants, the cotton producers. They have manipulated people. I don’t want to have anything to do with their affair.³⁵⁴

Another possible take on the controversy surrounding the establishment of the UN-SCPC, then, was that it was a battle of competition among the top farmer leaders for the most lucrative positions in the hierarchy of the peasant movement for the pursuit of their rent-seeking ambitions.

Before the creation of the UN-SCPC, Togola had already been implicated in at least two corruption scandals involving the over-invoicing of agricultural inputs, together with other top cotton leaders in the GSCVM, as mentioned in chapter five.³⁵⁵ This puts in context Keifa Diarra’s comments, cited below, on how Bakary Togola extracts benefits from his proximity to power.

Bakary, his problem is that he is too glued to the powers that be today. Well, everyone has their own idea about it. When you ask Bakary himself, he is close to the authorities so that he is better able to get what he is looking for – powers for the cotton growers. As evidence even, the day before yesterday when we were in a meeting in Bamako, there was a

³⁵³ Fieldnotes, APCAM office, Bamako, 13/02/08.

³⁵⁴ Interview with anonymous national level farmer representative, Bamako, 2008. Original: Je ne me mélange pas parce que je pense qu’ils ont fait des magouilles tous ensemble. Tous ces gens-là étaient avec Togola. ... Tous ces gens ont été avec le gouvernement. Ils ont muselé les paysans, les producteurs du coton. Ils ont manipulé les gens. Moi, je ne veux rien avoir dans leur affaire.

³⁵⁵ Citing Roy (2010a, p. 307) and *Le Républicain*, 22/07/08.

blockage because the cotton growers took on the responsibility for the supply of inputs. The CMDT did not agree. And the CMDT which guarantees us said that it would guarantee us no longer. The State itself had to put its hand in its pocket so as to guarantee the inputs to the order of multi-billions [francs CFA], which was given to Bakary the other day. He came to show us the document. Well, perhaps for him, to be in agreement with power is to better extract benefits from power. Well, the extremists find that when one is close to power, it's that one is bought. So everyone interprets in his own way.³⁵⁶

Similarly, in response to a question about Bakary Togola's involvement in ATT's electoral campaign, Keifa Diarra argued that Togola merely saw in ATT a presidential candidate who had a proven track record of improving the lot of Mali's rural producers.

He [Togola] asked all the cotton-growers to support ATT because ATT had already taken action for the cotton-growers, for the peasants. It's for all the peasants, it's not only for the cotton-growers. Because we just received three hundred tractors, which he gave to producers on very very advantageous terms. And he converted hundreds and hundreds of hectares in the Office du Niger and which he gave to producers on very favourable terms.³⁵⁷

There are very different perspectives on this claim of benefits accruing equitably to producers. Smallholders' complaints of land grabs at the *Office du Niger* were heard during fieldwork research,³⁵⁸ and have become the subject of policy

³⁵⁶ Interview with Keifa Diarra, Fana Regional President and National General Secretary, SYCOV, Fana, 19/02/08. Original: Bakary, son problème est qu'il est trop collé au pouvoir d'aujourd'hui. Bon certains- bon chacun à son idée là dessus. Quand tu demandes Bakary même, lui il est près aux pouvoirs c'est pour mieux obtenir ce qu'il cherche – des pouvoirs pour les coton-culteurs. Pour preuve même, avant hier lorsqu'on était en réunion à Bamako, il y avait un blocage parce que les coton-culteurs s'est chargés de l'approvisionnement en intrants. La CMDT n'était pas d'accord. Et la CMDT qui nous garantie dit qu'il ne nous garantie plus. Il fallait que l'état même mette sa main dans sa poche pour garantir les intrants à multi-milliards, qu'on a donné l'autre jour à Bakary. Il est venu nous montrer le papier. Bon peut-être pour lui être d'accord avec le pouvoir c'est pour mieux tirer profit du pouvoir. Bon, les extrémistes trouvent que quand on est au près du pouvoir c'est qu'on est acheté. Donc chacun interprète de sa manière.

³⁵⁷ Interview with Keifa Diarra, Fana Regional President and National General Secretary, SYCOV, Fana, 19/02/08. Original: Il a demandé à tous les coton-culteurs de soutenir ATT parce que ATT avait déjà posé les actes pour les coton-culteurs, pour les paysans. C'est pour tous les paysans, ce n'est pas pour les coton-culteurs seulement. Parce qu'on vient de recevoir trois cents tracteurs, qu'il a donné à les conditions très très avantageux aux producteurs. Et il avait amenagé des centaines de centaines d'hectares dans l'Office du Niger et qu'il avait donné aux conditions très favorables aux producteurs.

³⁵⁸ Field observation, meeting of SEXAGON rice farmers' union, Niono, 25/07/07.

research (The Oakland Institute 2011) and civil society mobilisation.³⁵⁹ The history of inequitable distribution of new technologies linked to cotton in West Africa was mentioned in chapter three.

Notwithstanding the CMDT's record of giving preference to relatively wealthy farmers in the supply of new technologies, in an unrelated comment in defence of the National Co-ordination of Peasants' Organisations' (CNOP) call for technology appropriate to family farming, Ibrahima Coulibaly criticised a CMDT programme which supplied tractors on credit to farmers who were subsequently unable to maintain them and repay the debt.

If you give a tractor, there is now the tractor, there is the cost of farming, the fuel, the driver, and all that. You put all that weight on a family which has got problems already just to have the minimum. ... ask people how the CMDT's Tractor Programme went. Tractors were given on credit to peasants. All those peasants have been ruined. I know people who have lost their whole herd in the tractor. Is that a good development?³⁶⁰

The take-over of the national union of cotton producer co-operatives has exacerbated the marginalisation of producer representatives, like Ibrahima Coulibaly, who advocate for agricultural policy to be oriented towards broad-based family farming.

Unlike the cotton-centric UN-SCPC, the cotton trade unions were at least nominally committed to defending the interests of cotton *and food crop* producers, in recognition of the reality of farmers' mixed cropping strategies. The creation of the cotton *faitière* has promoted the single-commodity paradigm over the integrated farming approach, and it has involved a thorough cleansing of potential opposition

³⁵⁹ Source: www.fian.org/news/news/nyeleni-mali-a-global-alliance-against-land-grabbing/pdf consulted on 16/04/12.

³⁶⁰ Interview with Ibrahima Coulibaly, President CNOP, Bamako, 17/01/08. Original: Si tu donnes le tracteur, il y a maintenant le tracteur, il y a le coût de l'exploitation, le carburant, le chauffeur, et tout ça. Tu mets tout ce poids sur une famille qui a des problèmes déjà pour avoir le minimum. ... demandez aux gens comment le projet- le programme Tracteur de la CMDT s'est passé. On a donné les tracteurs à crédit aux paysans. Tous ces paysans ont été ruinés. Je connais des gens qui ont perdu tous leurs troupeaux dans le tracteur. Est-ce que c'est ça qui est un bon développement?

from the only section of the farmer's movement which the authorities now recognise as the official spokesbody for farmers who grow cotton.³⁶¹

The manipulation of the farmers' movement in Mali would seem to be less a matter of a monolithic State against society and more a case of a network of people in power, in the bureaucracy, in commerce and now in civil society. When President ATT formed a political party, *Parti pour le Développement Économique et la Solidarité* (PDES) in 2010, in preparation for the 2012 election at which he was due to stand down, the party's twenty-two vice-presidents included Bakary Togola, President of the Chamber of Agriculture; Jeamille Bittar, President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and Mamadou Minkoro Traoré, President of the Chamber of Craft Professions. Alexis Roy's (2010b, pp. 95–96) account of a donor-backed government initiative to develop Mali's rice farming found that Togola was one of the suppliers of rice seeds to the highly dubious development project, and that he made large profits from cultivating vast areas of rice as part of the project.

The impact of the political crisis in farmer representation at national level was felt at local level, as is evident in the perspectives of farmer interviewees. Like Bamoussa Traoré, cited at the end of section one, Seydou Touré, a cotton farmer in Fana and SYVAC representative at regional level, argued that consultation with farmers in the local arena had paradoxically reduced to zero following the advent of the union pyramid, which in theory would incorporate the concerns of all farmers at all levels within a single system of representation. Touré said that in practice the president of the UN-SCPC unilaterally signed agreement to a producer price for cotton which was rejected by so many farmers that production levels for the 2006/07 season were dramatically reduced.

The cotton producers do not have a real voice now compared to before when they had a real voice with the participation of all the representatives and their organisations, the trade unions and the chambers

³⁶¹ AOPP actively campaigned for the family farming perspective to be incorporated into the national agricultural policy which was adopted in 2006 (*Loi d'Orientation Agricole, LOA*). The AOPP was supported in this by Oxfam NOVIB (Netherlands) through a capacity-building project 2004–2007 (Sources: www.novib.nl/id.html?lang=EN/id=8785&pid=MAL-503528-0004650 consulted on 15/07/08; www.aopp-mali.org/spip.php?article220 consulted on 31/07/12). The Oakland Institute (2011, pp. 13–14) observes that while mention of the family farming perspective is included in the LOA policy, the text of contains contradictions which reflect conflicting viewpoints, and practice has little to do with policy.

of agriculture. But as there are a fair number of meetings that take place in the absence of the trade unions and chambers of agriculture, that has cut the voice of the cotton producer at national level. Otherwise, in the past, if a cotton producer said his idea in his field to a village leader, so the information climbed hierarchically from the village to the ZPA [CMDT agricultural production zone], from the ZPA to the sector, from the sector to the region, and from the region right up to national level. But now the producer does not have a voice, because decisions are taken without even informing the producer and they are implemented directly.³⁶²

It should be noted, however, that Seydou Touré was a trade unionist at regional level, and may be somewhat biased against the co-operative union pyramid if he was one of those marginalised in the process of its creation. But he was not alone in his views: already mentioned in chapter five was the Fana farmers' petition, ignored by Government, against Togola's holding of all the top positions in farmer representative structures.

Two farmer interviewees who were not directly involved in any trade union argued that direct links between the grassroots farmers and independent national or international civil society were more effective than official representative structures in terms of serving the interests of farmers.³⁶³ Bah Kissiman Traoré of Wolodo, near Fana, expressed his suspicion of all purported farmer representatives.

Those who have large means, it is they who do the business of government. ... If you see the trade unions, it's the educated people, it's the strongest, the richest. During the meetings, we attend, but what we say there is never taken into account. Only what the educated say is taken into account. Never mind the fact it's we who know the difficulties that are there. ... But we are never consulted. Even if we go to the meeting, we are never listened to. ... For me, it is through this interview that I will

³⁶² Interview with Seydou Touré, SYCOV regional representative, Fana, 17/02/08. Original: Les producteurs de coton n'ont pas actuellement une voix réelle parce qu'auparavant ils avaient une voix réelle avec la participation de tous les responsables de leurs organisations, les syndicats et les chambres d'agriculture. Mais comme il y a pas mal de réunions qui sont fait à l'absence des syndicats et des chambres d'agriculture, donc cela a coupé la voix du producteur du coton au niveau national. Sinon auparavant si un producteur du coton disait son idée dans son champ à un responsable du village, donc l'information montait hiérarchiquement du village à la ZPA, de la ZPA aussi au secteur, du secteur à la région, et de la région jusqu'au niveau national. Mais actuellement le producteur n'a pas de voix, parce qu'on prend des décisions sans informer le producteur même et on l'appuis directement.

³⁶³ The opinion that foreign reserachers or NGOs are more effective that farmer representatives in attending to the concerns of farmers was echoed by CMDT extension agent and NGO worker, Fousseyney Coulibaly (interview Koutiala, 21/02/08).

be heard even higher up. ... The trade unions, the government, they want the fruit of the peasants. So it is always the peasants who are the most exhausted. And they profit without meanwhile the profits coming to the grassroots. There are people who have profited a lot on the backs of peasants. But they are not real peasants. We have seen CMDT workers who have built multi-storey buildings; trade union members have even got cars. But we who produce cotton, we don't even have a bicycle.³⁶⁴

The view that nominal farmer representatives are 'not real peasants' is supported by Roy's (2010a) observation of their career paths.

A study of the career path of several of the leaders of the Village Association, unions and umbrella organisation shows that most of them belonged to groups that were already dominant within the rural context – former civil servants, people elected to local councils, traders, customary authorities, NGO staff, with many of them falling into several of these categories. Furthermore, a number of them were not cotton producers, and sometimes paid for a labourer to cultivate a small area to give them legitimacy. (Roy 2010a, p. 311).

Similarly to B K Traoré, Michel Dembele, a cotton farmer in Moribila, near San, asserted that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were more effective channels of communication for farmers than were their elected representatives.

In our opinion it is the NGOs such as [AMADIP] which are best placed [to pass information to farmers]. Otherwise, the trade unions, when we choose the union leaders, they never come back to us with information. They are always in Bamako. So the information comes belatedly. In our opinion to get good information, it's with the NGOs.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Interview with B K Traoré, cotton farmer, Wolodo nr Fana, 18/02/08. Original: Sica fagan be mogo mounouna oulou de dala kouma beme.. Aoufe niyaye cindicat ibitasor kalanba debara aou doufe kalanbaye famaouye. Pareke nafa tonsikibike sica aou mounoube ni aou yebi tiekalaou yeredeye, ni nogoya do aou debe anogoya soro ni gueleyado aou debe agueleya soro aou tatilame faido bitafo oke bekaye walima oke guelya kasoro moubi aouna o ni ote keleye . Bon ode kama ni yaye oko nisodiara nebeke ka dala kafo aouh nali mifleniye obe sekake sababouye ka ne ka koumakan sey a seyorola. Nekoube niyokona yini a tia cent moukaye maseka soro. Peut etre ni bara moufle, ni ni sikira seka mogo bi seka fo naye kouma fefe soro aou dah na tara olakaler abe sekake djama tiekela nietaye, mais ton nounou , kouma dode mais kouma were ba yai, mounou boufo ni mogo ba lamai koumadode a be sekake a bora tiekela dan mais o ni kouma yere yere ti keleye. Parce que aou kan diatela mogo nounou beka sorobe aou tiekela deka wasila, on mais bara damine nisica tie doye soro ke mais a be sekafo tiekela tala, parce que aou ye mogo doye CMDT mogo doye doye etage dio, syndicat mogoye voituri sa mais cori mibe aou mounou bolo aou be tiokodi? O koro ko bara tike tiekan.

³⁶⁵ Interview with Michel Dembele, cotton farmer Moribila nr San, 23/02/08. Original: Kounafoni mika souroula o foussey nounouka barayokonaye si ca ha kan cindicat, niko syndicat ka aou kounafoni ya ni o syndicat akata mounoumounou kama d'ailleurs niye mani mouke mabayeye eyere yein tida okable aw ka voter mana nouyele kaba ni o tara obe ta sigui bamakoye aou yere yai tida okable,

These comments may have been unduly inspired by the presence of the foreign researcher (in the Dembele case, a researcher introduced by the NGO cited), and may reflect an attempt to elicit further interaction. The comments correlate, nonetheless, with a general sense among the farmers interviewed that they have lost confidence in national structures of farmer representation.

This section has elaborated the nature of the political crisis affecting farmer representation at national level, and has shown some ways in which this has affected farmers at the local level. As noted above, the legal statute of co-operatives gives them scope to form direct partnerships with NGOs. This raises questions of whether those farmers who can afford to be members of co-operatives are set to gain yet further through links to national or international NGOs, and of whether farmers would be any better represented by NGOs than by their national farmer representatives.

Oxfam's Cotton Programme 2007–2012: deepening downward accountability or perpetuating a flawed development paradigm?

In 2007, Oxfam began a five-year cotton programme, which included support for the development of cotton producer co-operatives in Mali (SCPCs). The programme, entitled, 'Empowering Producers to Secure Livelihoods in Cotton Growing Regions in Mali and West Africa' was developed by Oxfam America and Oxfam Great Britain, funded by Comic Relief, and was initially designed as a joint programme with Mali's Association of Professional Peasants' Organisations (AOPP). For Oxfam, the programme formed part of its Economic Justice Campaign in Mali.³⁶⁶ This campaign was co-ordinated for the West Africa region from the NGO's regional headquarters in Dakar. Other strands of the campaign, which preceded the cotton programme, include advocacy on Economic Partnership

kounafoni besoro tiokodi? Fousseny mounou bi djiki kana, Fousseny yina, nalekera sababouye kato aou bora faimou kalama, ni aletou teya kounafoni koube soro tiokodisi. Aouni o mogo soukou ka djekabarake o deka kousa aouma kosebe.

³⁶⁶ Interview with Gilles Marion, Oxfam GB Country Programme Manager for Mali, Bamako, 04/07/07.

Agreements (EPAs) and on labour rights in the gold mining industry. Dia and Traoré (2011) present the rationale for the cotton programme as filling gaps in support for newly-created cotton producer co-operatives (SCPCs), following the cessation of projects, including PASAOP, funded by major donors (including the World Bank and the *Agence Française de Développement*). The initiative may also be seen as a move to ground Oxfam's advocacy work in Mali more firmly at local levels. An Oxfam interviewee who was centrally involved in drawing up the proposal for this programme identified the need for Oxfam to work with Malian cotton farmers at local levels as a key learning outcome of the campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies.³⁶⁷

In an interview in 2007, Cotton Programme Officer, Fousseynou Diabaté outlined the programme's four advocacy themes: for a cotton price support fund; for literacy education, especially for women, in the transformation of AVs to co-operatives; for alternative financing for agriculture; for equitable access to and control of resources for agriculture, especially land and credit.³⁶⁸ A review of the programme published in 2011 indicated that its implementation focused largely on supporting the development of cotton producer co-operatives (SCPCs), particularly in terms of their entrepreneurial capacities and in terms of women's participation in co-operatives (Dia and Traoré 2011). The programme was motivated in part by the low level of understanding of the co-operative law among members of co-operatives (Dia and Traoré 2011, p. 4). Some national level lobbying activities featured in the cotton programme (ibid. p. 121, box 3.8). In total, 526 SCPCs were directly affected by Oxfam's cotton programme between 2007 and 2011, a fraction of the 7,177 SCPCs in Mali (ibid.).

At local level, Oxfam's cotton programme was geared principally towards 'developing entrepreneurial performance' of SCPCs (Dia and Traoré 2011, p. 4). It recognised the need for farmers to diversify but while a shea nut processing unit and an organic manure production unit were set up as part of the programme (ibid., Box 3, p. 10), diversification was largely limited to specific niches within the cotton market, notably organic cotton and better quality cotton (ibid., p. 5). Nonetheless, the

³⁶⁷ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

³⁶⁸ Interview with Fousseynou Diabaté, Oxfam Cotton Programme Officer, Bamako, 04/07/07.

programme succeeded in establishing a new system whereby three hundred co-operatives were able to access credit directly from a private micro-credit company, which constitutes a step towards de-linking access to agricultural credit from the cotton supply chain (ibid., p. 10).

By focusing on SCPCs, Oxfam's cotton programme did little to address the problems of indebted farmers excluded from co-operatives. It did, however, support the economic inclusion of another marginalised group: women. Programme Officer Fousseynou Diabaté explained that the programme gave communities a choice: either men and women could join the same co-operative on an equal footing or, if that solution were deemed socially unacceptable, men and women could set up separate single-sex co-operatives.³⁶⁹ Dia and Traoré (2011) present convincing figures for the success of the gender equity dimension of the cotton programme.

From 2007/08 up to the project's mid-term evaluation in 2009/10, [...] In first-generation co-operatives producing conventional cotton, women's involvement increased from 1 per cent in 2006/07 to 35 per cent in 2010. In the same period, women's representation on the governing bodies of co-ops increased from zero to 24 per cent. (Dia and Traoré 2011, p. 6)

The question of gender equity was a controversial issue, however, in the relationship at national level between Oxfam and its main implementing partner, the AOPP, as is detailed below.³⁷⁰

The account of the development of the pyramid structure of unions of cotton producer co-operatives, presented above, casts a long shadow over the optimistic assertion of Oxfam worker Fousseynou Diabaté in July 2007 that, 'With the co-operatives at the base right up to the National Union of Cotton Co-operatives, we have got a good structure for doing lobbying.'³⁷¹ One of Diabaté's colleagues, who wished to remain anonymous, was less naïve about the potential of the UN-SCPC to engage effectively in lobbying and advocacy activities at national level. This

³⁶⁹ Interview with Fousseynou Diabaté, Oxfam Cotton Programme Officer, Bamako, 04/07/07.

³⁷⁰ An interesting question for further research would be whether Oxfam's intervention conflated the complex social dynamics of gender equality with women's access to export-oriented cash crop agriculture, but it is beyond the scope of this study to interrogate the complexities of gender in rural Mali.

³⁷¹ Interview with Fousseynou Diabaté, Oxfam Cotton Programme Officer, Bamako, 04/07/07. Original: Avec les coopératives à la base jusqu'à l'Union National des Coopératives du Coton, on a une bonne structure pour faire le plaidoyer.

interviewee argued that the creation of the National Union of Cotton Producer Co-operatives had not resolved the problems associated with the cotton trade unions, and particularly their leadership.

There are certainly a lot of people who appear to have at different points in time become quite prominent in those cotton farming unions whose real connection to grassroots farmers are somewhat doubtful to put it, er, mildly, and who clearly have all sorts of other kind of political agendas going on. ... now they have the national union of co-operative societies but there are lots of problems around the leadership of that, and which essentially is: the same people have been recycled into the leadership.³⁷²

This point is echoed in the testimony of Wolodo farmer, B K Traoré, cited above, who complained of those who purport to represent farmers that ‘they are not real peasants’.

When questioned on how Oxfam chose which organisation to partner with for its 2007–2012 Cotton Programme, the informant pointed to the lack of alternative options, discounting the UN-SCPC as a direct partner.

How many other farmer organisations at the national level do you see? I mean, you have the AOPP, you have the CNOP, and then you have the unions. Well, um, you have the *Groupement*, which still has no legal existence as far as I know. And now you have the National Union. So you could say, *are you planning to work with the national union?* Um, well, apart from the fact that it’s being run by Togola, which for me is already a problem. I mean, our strategy at the moment is to work indirectly with the national union, through AProCA primarily. ... Supporting AProCA to support strengthening of the national cotton farmers’ union. I mean strengthening in the sense of helping them developing a bit more of an autonomous and independent vision of what they’re supposed to be doing. But, you know, whether that can actually happen-³⁷³

As indicated at the end of the previous chapter, this lack of confidence in national level farmer organisations was a motivating factor in the re-focusing on intervention at local levels which the cotton programme represents: ‘you have to

³⁷² Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

³⁷³ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

strengthen the grassroots because ultimately that's what's going to demand more accountability at the national level'.³⁷⁴

Oxfam's cotton programme encountered further, unanticipated problems when its chosen partner organisation, the AOPP, began to manifest crises similar to those experienced in the cotton producer organisations: divisive campaigns for elected office and accusations of corruption. This placed enormous pressure on staff at the international NGO ahead of a visit by the cotton programme's funding body, Comic Relief.

Talked, too, about worsening difficulties working with the AOPP. In a meeting ... the previous day, AOPP reps basically admitted that they are in crisis. It looks as though the president will be removed before the end of his term in office, even though he doesn't have long to go. A few others are likely to be pushed out with him. It looks like issues of financial mismanagement. Some funders have pulled out – said they are no longer happy to fund AOPP.³⁷⁵

The Oxfam staff member said he/she would not cover up these problems during the inspection, not least because he/she had heard an Oxfam team had got into trouble for that in the past, with a project in Tanzania funded by Comic Relief: 'There were a lot of warning signs but the Oxfam staff acted as if all were hunky-dory, then it all fell apart'.³⁷⁶

Oxfam also found the AOPP to be paying only lip-service to a main advocacy theme of the cotton programme, that of gender equality.

Also said that [speaker] and Oxfam colleagues are fed up asking AOPP folks where their women reps are. There are never any women present at their meetings. There is a women's officer, but she is now being politically challenged. [Speaker] says some people in AOPP claim [speaker] and the women's officer are conspiring together, yet [speaker] has hardly ever seen or spoken to the woman. [Speaker] said the AOPP men have to either embrace women's representation or have it imposed on them.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁴ Interview with anonymous Oxfam (GB/America) worker, Bamako, 17/09/07.

³⁷⁵ Fieldnotes, informal interview with INGO informant, Bamako, 21/10/07.

³⁷⁶ Fieldnotes, informal interview with INGO informant, Bamako, 21/10/07.

³⁷⁷ Fieldnotes, informal interview with INGO informant, Bamako, 21/10/07.

This raises serious questions as to how the AOPP can promote gender equality in the local arena when many of its staff in the capital do not themselves accept it. Moreover, it raises the delicate question of how Oxfam as an international NGO can support any endogenous moves towards women's emancipation in the local arena when it finds itself imposing its own vision of gender equality on its national level partner organisation. In terms of deepening demand for accountability, the cotton programme's work at local level may advance gender equality but this is a long process. In the meantime, the NGO imposing it under pressure of its funder's expectations would seem to be a high risk strategy. Constructive debate on gender equality is suppressed, from one angle, by the INGO's sensitivity to the international funder's expectations and, from another direction, it is obscured, along with many issues of real concern to farmers, by fierce competition over elected positions in the Malian civil society organisation, and access to all the development rent that comes with them.

Given the problems at national level, even within the AOPP in 2007, it is not surprising that limited advance was made by Oxfam's Cotton Programme in terms of its national level lobbying activities. Dia and Traoré's (2011) report mentions that the programme successfully supported farmers to lobby at national level for a generous fertilizer subsidy, and that plans for future work include national level lobbying to scale up the programme's alternative financing initiative, which links co-operatives directly with a private micro-credit agency. However, little was achieved in terms of national level lobbying for a cotton price support fund, which had been presented by Oxfam Programme Officer, Fousseynou Diabaté, interviewed in 2007, as a priority objective of the programme.

The Oxfam Cotton Programme is one example of the new framework of co-operatives attracting international NGO support into the local arena. However, the Oxfam intervention operated through a national level partner, the AOPP, which itself succumbed to the same sort of crisis of legitimacy affecting the cotton farmer movement. Furthermore, by retaining a focus on cotton, the programme did not address the exclusion of indebted farmers from the support channelled through cotton producer co-operatives.

EJF and organic cotton: justice for Malian farmers or justifying a role for Northern NGOs?

In 2007, UK-based international NGO, Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), enlisted the support of Malian NGO, AMADIP, to contribute towards three initiatives. Two of these initiatives were global campaigns, one on child labour in cotton farming, and the other on the use of pesticides in cotton production, both targeted at consumers and decision-makers, principally in Europe. The third initiative was a bid for funding for an education project promoting the idea of switching to organic cotton among farmers in Mali. The initial planning stages for this potential partnership, which to date has not been established, were observed during fieldwork. EJF sought research data, interview testimony, photographs, and film footage from Mali to support these initiatives.

AMADIP initially encountered EJF through UK-based international NGO, Friends of the Earth.³⁷⁸ AMADIP's president, Moctar N. Coulibaly, had submitted a funding proposal to Friends of the Earth for a small project in his home village of M'Pessoba, in Mali's cotton zone. The village women's group had asked him, as president of AMADIP and son of the village, for equipment and other support to develop their production and marketing of shea butter and derivative soap products. The proposal was rejected, but Friends of the Earth commissioned AMADIP to report on the effects of climate change in Mali. It was in connection with this work that Moctar Coulibaly met staff from EJF at a conference in London in May 2007.

According to EJF Campaigner, Duncan Copeland, the NGO's cotton campaign 'developed somewhat in reverse to [the NGO's] other campaigns.'³⁷⁹

It has started at the international level, with lobbying, etc. This has been due to funding. ... EJF is now looking for partners with whom to work at local level, to do more 'concrete'-type work, especially in West Africa and in India.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸ Fieldnotes, AMADIP research tour on child labour in cotton farming, Southern Mali, 27/07/07.

³⁷⁹ Email communication, 02/01/08.

³⁸⁰ Fieldnotes, EJF-AMADIP meeting, Bamako, 24/11/07.

Just as the activities of the Malian NGO were determined by the availability of funding, the agenda of EJF's campaign was set by its funders. The main funder of EJF's cotton campaign was the Open Society Institute.

In an interview, Duncan Copeland described how EJF views its role in advocacy work in relation to its local partners.

Very often we act as an international voice for our partners on the ground so we'll lobby at the European level or even the UN level on issues that our partners are feeding us information for and might be unable to represent them themselves. [Why might they not be able to represent themselves?] A lot of the time it just comes down to basic resources. [To fly there?] To fly there, and again we will as much as possible- we'll facilitate the participation of member organisations in whatever is- they feel is key... But in terms of on-going campaigns it's much easier for us to do it from the UK if it means going over to Brussels every two months than for someone from Bamako to be doing it or wherever. So in that way we're just acting as a voice.³⁸¹

In EJF's ways of working, the global level is viewed as the realm of Northern-based international NGO expertise in contrast to the local level, which is the source of legitimacy for its campaigns. EJF's proposed organic education project in Mali is motivated in part by the NGO's sense that it needs to draw a link, albeit retrospectively, between its international cotton campaign and the local level in West Africa.

Conventional cotton production uses very high levels of pesticides,³⁸² and pesticides used on cotton have been associated with environmental damage and negative impacts on human health (Eddleston et al. 2002; EJF 2008). Evidence of some of the problems with the use of cotton pesticides in Mali was found during the EJF-AMADIP tour of the cotton zone in November 2007, as shown by the following excerpts from fieldnotes.

Found pesticide bottles under a tree – Endosulfan – one that EJF campaigns against. Very interesting interview with the man who sprays the pesticides. I was shocked (and a bit tearful) when he said he knew of

³⁸¹ Interview with Duncan Copeland, EJF, London, 01/10/08.

³⁸² Pesticides include insecticides, herbicides and fungicides. Cotton accounted for 18.9 percent of worldwide insecticide sales in 2000 and pesticide use per hectare is greater for cotton than for grains and oilseeds (Townsend 2010, p. 3).

five cases of adults in his village and ten cases of children who had fallen ill from pesticides. He said children weed in the cotton fields at the same time as the spraying is done. He said he noticed that children got ill after the wind changes direction, blowing the spray towards them.³⁸³

While having a late lunch in our hosts' compound, I spotted an old pesticide bottle that had a carry string attached. The father of the house told us it was for his child to take water to school.³⁸⁴

These observations draw attention to the incompatibility of pesticide use with family farming, especially in resource-poor contexts.

In the year after the EJF–AMADIP tour of the cotton zone, the material on pesticides was the most used by the NGO out of all the material it gathered in Mali. In early 2008, EJF Campaigner, Duncan Copeland, reported that the NGO was part of the EU parliamentary process working to ban certain pesticides.³⁸⁵ In an interview, cited below, Duncan Copeland described what he regarded as the positive impacts of this work on cotton-farming families in Mali.

When we went down to Mali, pesticides was definitely part of the remit. But the fact that it was so blatantly Endosulfan and it was being produced in Europe and everything else has really given us quite strong material to use in the argument of getting the pesticide ban. So that in the immediate is the main focus. ... [What would Endosulfan ban mean for the farmers in Mali you interviewed?] Well, it would be the end of the use of Endosulfan which of the pesticides we saw – other than monocrotophos, which is being phased out anyway in Mali that last season, the season we were there – is by far and away the most dangerous pesticide that's being used there right now. So that'd be a huge step forward in terms of health impacts and that sort of a thing both for adults and for kids.³⁸⁶

A global ban on Endosulfan was indeed achieved in 2011, through an amendment to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.³⁸⁷ The distribution and use of the pesticide was banned in Mali by the Sahelian Pesticide Committee prior to this, in 2007–2008 (the agricultural season after the EJF–

³⁸³ Fieldnotes, Kassorola, between Moribila and Kimparana, 13/11/07.

³⁸⁴ Fieldnotes, Miena, near M'Pessoba, 17/11/07.

³⁸⁵ Email communication, Duncan Copeland, Campaigner, EJF, 02/01/08.

³⁸⁶ Interview with Duncan Copeland, Campaigner, EJF, London, 01/10/08.

³⁸⁷ Source: www.ejfoundation.org/page242.html consulted on 10/07/12.

AMADIP tour), though it was not clear that this ban was implemented in a timely fashion at national level.³⁸⁸

One obstacle to effective implementation of the ban on Endosulfan, identified by the Pesticide Action Network (PAN), is the existence of stockpiles of obsolete pesticides in West Africa (PAN and IPEN 2009, p. 14). This gives some context to the following excerpt from an interview with Ampha Coulibaly, president of the regional union of cotton co-operatives of Koutiala and San, in which he discusses the politics of cotton pesticides in Mali.

The cotton producers always want to have insecticides that will kill the insects. But in other parts of Mali, the State, the Ministry of Health, do not agree with that because they say that we can kill the insects here but in Mopti that can have repercussions because it can be carried by the river. So now it is about reconciling these two points of view. We know we have to protect the environment. But the producer, at the time of growing, has but one notion in his head—to kill the insects. But we can't let them do that. That's why the State often sends pesticides that are not as powerful, which are ten or fifteen years old, because the toxicity has greatly decreased, always to protect the ecology, to protect the environment.³⁸⁹

The desire of farmers to eliminate pests was echoed by Koutiala cotton farmer, Bourama Goita.

³⁸⁸ Fieldnotes, M'Pessoba, 16/11/07: A CMDT agent reported that they were in the process of withdrawing certain pesticides, such as Endosulfan, which have been proscribed by the Sahelian Pesticide Committee. According to PAN and IPEN (2009, p. 16), the Sahelian Pesticide Committee recommended that there be no more supply or distribution of Endosulfan after 13 November 2007, and no more use of the pesticide after 31 December 2008, but by October 2008, no regulatory action had been taken at the State level to implement the ban.

³⁸⁹ Interview with Ampha Coulibaly, President of the regional union of cotton co-operatives of Koutiala and San, Koutiala, 23/02/08. Original: Bon doni dokoma do ni be tchikela gnefai doni dokama dodai, hey haou ye ni kelekai, an ko bagadji moubigla a taka cori toumoufaga... bamakoyere, fasiteye nama amakakai, ate toumoufaga ouka produit dogla moubaga toumou faga. Ayiwa, mais sante mogo, kenegna mogo, nibe yemongoyala ibina kode famou, dja mogo yerebe oulou te cori dronfle oulou be adamadey ni faiyenema fana ni nimoube malikono do fanaka kolochili selesbai oma. Oulou fana be barake, oh cori senenawou oukouka cori soro mais oukana dakarike faiwairaila, siguidala. Est ce que iye korofo famou? Ahou tara niye aka yemogoya kono ko oubai haou ka ni yere deh lakana. Ahou ko aka cori hali aka tchikela donko akaga poisoni gla akaga faiyenemaou faga aka faga yala abai houlou de faga wa?houya djabi. Houkou ahou djera na ka sayaye n'ga mopti ahouka poisini nibe saisai aka bafai aka tienike ouloufeye mais oulou ma djeni ouka sayaye. Mopti kaou ko ayakai amassiba kana se ama, oulou bai ouka gardevous ta, sabou do beye oulou desigilodo ka djamana kakeneya kolochi, donc situation bai mogo koumaka soumaya, dan dode sigira aka dan ika danyorola. Ahou tchikela yemogo mounoube ni ko I be ni fo ika tchieke yorola, atifamoudey? Donc dan mou sigira, ahou baibai chariya de kon ani keneya tigui mana moulayini okakai. Ahou taye bi mais chini ahou baye. Ahou bese kafo aouka posini yenemadi, peutetri aka keneya bi moutie ahou centmouga kono ayete ola n'ga centmouga kono abe moutie ahouye oulou bebo o akalama.

If we didn't have these pesticides to treat our cotton, what would we have? Ha! There would be damage. Whether or not they are good for health, in any case to make money from cotton now, it is necessary to buy these pesticides.³⁹⁰

In Fana and nearby Dien, however, three farmer interviewees complained of the high cost of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, and said that they wanted the opportunity to try growing organic cotton.³⁹¹

For AOPP and CNOP representative, Ibrahima Coulibaly, farmers' dependence on harmful pesticides was part of broader problems with the policy of export-oriented commodity production.

The peasants must first produce their food. They must find other products to sell on the local market that can bring them money, and not be dependent on a product the production of which requires pesticides, fertilizers that destroy the soil, that destroy health. And the peasant earns nothing, and the country earns nothing. We find that it is an aberration of a policy.³⁹²

Indeed, three farmers interviewed sought support to diversify their production away from cotton towards food crops, which could be consumed and surpluses sold on local markets.³⁹³

The citations from fieldwork, presented above, give an insight into the complexity of the issue of cotton pesticides in Mali, from the tension between farmers' immediate economic needs and their families' health to the orientation of national agricultural and environmental policies, and the possible supply of obsolete pesticides. Malian producers were involved in the EJF campaign against cotton pesticides in a very minimal and passive way, and it is far from clear that many of them would have chosen to take an active role had they been given the opportunity,

³⁹⁰ Interview with Bourama Goita, cotton farmer, Koutiala, 21/02/08. Original: Si on n'a pas eu ces pesticides pour traiter notre coton, qu'est-ce qu'on va avoir ? Hah ! Il y aura des dégâts. C'est bon ou c'est pas bon pour la santé, en tout cas pour avoir de l'argent dans le coton maintenant il faut acheter ces pesticides.

³⁹¹ Interviews with A N Fomba, Dien; T Fomba, Dien; and S Touré, Fana; all conducted on 17/02/08.

³⁹² Interview with Ibrahima Coulibaly, President CNOP, and AOPP External Relations Secretary, Bamako, 17/01/08.

³⁹³ Interviews with A Bagayogo, Fana, 17/02/08; D Traoré, Fana, 17/02/08; and S Coulibaly, Koutiala, 20/02/08.

though some farmers interviewed sought practical support to reduce their dependence on pesticides and switch to organic cotton. At the time of extracting material from Mali for its campaign, EJF planned to undertake future work, which would involve educating farmers of the benefits of organic farming practices, which will be discussed below. But the EJF campaign did not address the root causes of pesticide use in cotton farming in Mali, where the supply of inputs is still organised at national level, or consider how a ban on Endosulfan might be implemented in practice. EJF Campaigner, Duncan Copeland, defended the limited scope of the campaign in terms of the NGO's comparative advantage vis-à-vis other NGOs: 'It's about finding where you can add the most value as an organisation.'³⁹⁴

The phenomenon of child labour in cotton farming in Mali proved to be even more complex than that of pesticides. Overall, EJF staff who travelled to Mali concluded that what they witnessed in the cotton zone was not so much an issue of exploitation of children but rather one of general poverty.

There's a huge difference between child labour and forced child labour. The main thrust of our campaign work is on forced child labour, which again ties into Uzbekistan and actually in terms of the work we've done in India as well, where it's far more relevant than it is in Mali. Now, we didn't see directly on that trip that we were with, but we know from other organisations and news reports that there is some forced child labour in West Africa as well. There is smuggling of kids across borders to work in cotton and that sort of thing. But in terms of our main focus, Mali actually has been a little bit difficult because from what we've seen, it's not a forced child labour issue, it's an economics one. And no-one in this organisation is ever going to argue that no kid should ever be helping their family out. ... that's been a little bit of the reason why we haven't gone hugely forward with using Mali as a case study for our cotton campaign [on child labour]. ...it's probably more effective to address it within the supply chain than in the courts of Brussels or the UN. So in terms of advocacy, we haven't really touched on Mali at all.³⁹⁵

Photographs and data from the EJF-AMADIP tour of Mali's cotton zone nonetheless appeared in the NGO's campaign report, *The Children Behind Our Cotton*, released in December 2007. The report included a brief mention of some of

³⁹⁴ Interview with Duncan Copeland, EJF Campaigner, London, 01/10/08.

³⁹⁵ Interview with Duncan Copeland, EJF Campaigner, London, 01/10/08.

the economic factors that contribute to the high incidence of children working in cotton production in Mali.

In Mali, where in some areas children represent approximately half of the workforce in conventional cotton production, farmers can't access credit facilities, lack sufficient adult labour and suitable machinery, and make little money from the crop, with prices pushed down due to developed-world subsidies. (EJF 2007, p. 11)

Fieldwork interviews with farmers confirmed that economic pressures were part of the reason that parents gave their children farm work to do,³⁹⁶ but three farmer interviewees specified that children would only be given farm work once they reached a suitable age or physical condition,³⁹⁷ and two of these farmers emphasised that children follow their parents to the fields from an early age and help out voluntarily.³⁹⁸

The latter points were echoed by national farmer representative, Ibrahima Coulibaly, who regarded the participation of children in farm work as a form of apprenticeship in farming skills, a normal contribution to the household, and even a fun task for children working alongside their peers. He found the term, 'child labour' 'too Western' and inappropriate to the context, and was concerned that its use could give a negative image to Malian producers.³⁹⁹ Souleymane M Keita, Vice President of the CNOP, was similarly astounded to hear of NGOs doing research in Mali for a campaign on child labour: he viewed it as a case of development rent-seeking.

you know that in our country, people often do campaigns for the sake of doing campaigns. ... I could get involved to get a bit of money... but that is not good for the very ethics of our countries. ... There are real

³⁹⁶ Interviews with Bourama Goita, Koutiala; Alphonse Kone, Moribila; Bakary Fomba, Dien; and Mamadou Konaté, Fana; all conducted 17/02/08–24/02/08.

³⁹⁷ Interviews with Bakary Fomba, Dien; Mamadou Konaté, Fana; and B K Traoré, Wolodo; all conducted 17/02/08–18/02/08.

³⁹⁸ Interviews with Bakary Fomba, Dien; and B K Traoré, Wolodo; both conducted 17/02/08–18/02/08. Indeed, it was on B K Traoré's farm in Wolodo, during the AMADIP–EJF tour, that EJF interviewed a boy who was harvesting cotton, who said that he was working because he wanted to help his parents (fieldnotes, Wolodo, nr Fana, 22/11/07).

³⁹⁹ Interview with Ibrahima Coulibaly, President CNOP, and AOPP External Relations Secretary, Bamako, 17/01/08.

development problems. Together, we can identify them and apply ourselves to that.⁴⁰⁰

Both Ibrahima Coulibaly and S M Keita were surprised, however, to hear that during the NGO's research tour of the cotton zone in July 2007, AMADIP discovered some less benign forms of child labour, including the practice of sending a child to work for another family for a period of seven to eight months in exchange for a young ox.⁴⁰¹ AMADIP's report of the research trip cites a CMDT agent who explained this practice as 'an alternative solution to the cessation of the system of credit for equipment for cotton producers' (AMADIP 2007, section 3.2.3).⁴⁰² As noted in chapter three, use of the plough was vulgarised in Mali in the 1970s and 1980s through a credit scheme for buying ploughs and oxen, organised by the CMDT with the National Agricultural Development Bank. This type of support ended in the early 2000s as part of liberal reform of the CMDT.

The choice of child labour as a topic for research and campaign activity was very much driven by the UK-based NGO and its funders; it was not one that arose from concerns within Mali. It would be inaccurate, however, to portray AMADIP's involvement in the project as merely an exercise in development rent-seeking. Rather, AMADIP's Moctar Coulibaly took the opportunity to attempt to 'broker'⁴⁰³ the transnational NGO encounter and tailor it to his own analysis of the underlying development problems, informed by research in the cotton zone. During their research tour in July 2007, he and his colleague, Lamine Togola, commented that they found the phenomenon of child labour to be much worse than they had anticipated.⁴⁰⁴ Moctar Coulibaly said that he wanted to investigate why children work, and why they seem to work more now than in his youth, in the 1970s and

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with S M Keita, Vice President, CNOP, Bamako, 12/02/08. Original: vous savez que dans notre pays les gens font souvent les campagnes pour faire les campagnes. ... Je peux me mettre dedans pour avoir un peu d'argent... Mais ce n'est pas bon pour l'éthique même de nos pays. ... Il y a des vrais problèmes de développement. Ensemble on peut les identifier et se mettre à ça.

⁴⁰¹ A boy who had been sent to work in exchange for an ox said he had been made to work hard and was ill-treated during that time. Fieldnotes, Farakala between M'Pessoba and San, 27/07/07; AMADIP 2007.

⁴⁰² Original: une solution alternative à l'arrêt du système de crédits d'équipements aux producteurs de coton.

⁴⁰³ The notion of 'brokers' and 'brokerage' in development was developed by Bierschenk et al. (2002).

⁴⁰⁴ Fieldnotes, AMADIP research tour on child labour in cotton farming, Southern Mali, July 2007.

1980s, when he worked on his own family's cotton and subsistence farm in M'Pessoba, near Koutiala.⁴⁰⁵

In addition to the loss of credit for equipment, two explanatory factors that AMADIP identified for the apparent increased incidence of child farm labour in the cotton zone were the break up of extended family households, which resulted in a shortage of adult labour and equipment for many nucleated families, and an increased incidence of food security crises among poorer households, in response to which children may be sent to work for a neighbour in exchange for grain (AMADIP 2007).

In the process of distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable levels of child farm labour, AMADIP, EJF, and many of their informants distinguished between children who work in the fields after school and in the school holidays from those who are sent to work in the fields during school hours, whether permanently or temporarily. In the small research sample taken by AMADIP in July 2007, fifty-nine percent of the children found working on farms were not enrolled in school.⁴⁰⁶ A primary school teacher in Yanfolila, a small town south west of Bougouni, commented that children between seven and twelve years of age are greatly solicited for farm work, and many are absent from school either side of the school holiday, at the time of sowing (June) and harvesting (late September onwards).⁴⁰⁷

The teacher at Yanfolila commented that parents think they can do what they like with their children; that they have no notion of child rights.⁴⁰⁸ He also noted that there were a number of NGOs in the area working on child welfare now, whereas there were none in the past. Mali's organic movement (MOBIOM⁴⁰⁹), which produces organic fair trade cotton, is operational in the Yanfolila area. MOBIOM's

⁴⁰⁵ Fieldnotes, AMADIP research tour on child labour in cotton farming, Southern Mali, 26/07/07–27/07/07. Moctar Coulibaly commented that when he was young, adults worked to an older age, but now they retire and oversee only. He suggested this may be because the older generation has been weakened by years of hard work without enough to eat, noting that the farm workers he observed appeared to be eating *moni* (millet porridge) as a main meal, which he said was not substantial enough to sustain that level of work. Fieldwork interviewee, Mamadou Konaté, also commented that in the past, old people did farmwork, whereas children did not. He attributed this change to the introduction of the ox-drawn plough, which a child is able to guide; previously this work was done with a *daba* (hand-held hoe), which a child could not manage. Interview, Fana, 17/02/08.

⁴⁰⁶ Figure extrapolated from data in AMADIP (2007).

⁴⁰⁷ Fieldnotes, Yanfolila nr Bougouni, 01/08/07.

⁴⁰⁸ Fieldnotes, Yanfolila nr Bougouni, 01/08/07.

⁴⁰⁹ *Mouvement Biologique Malien*

director, Sidi N'Guero, said that the Bamako office of the Senegal-based international NGO, Enda, had done a lot of awareness raising work with parents on the benefits of sending their children to school rather than sending them to work in the fields: 'At the time it was not even possible to speak of this subject. But now it is no longer taboo. The peasants have understood a bit.'⁴¹⁰

In the Koutiala area, where conventional cotton is grown, the CMDT regional director said that the CMDT had been educating peasants about child labour.⁴¹¹ When two local farmers were questioned about this later the same day, they said that the CMDT had indeed educated them about child labour – the CMDT agent had told them that children get too much debris mixed in with the cotton they pick and should be taught to be more careful.⁴¹² The pertinence of seed cotton quality to the world market was discussed in chapter three.

Child labour presents a specific problem in the MOBIOM zone because it is incompatible with international organic and fair trade standards, as was explained by Emmanuel Tobo, co-ordinator of *Agri Multi Service*, which supports organic fair trade cotton farming in the Yanfolila area.

The organisations of fair trade cotton come on mission to check. If they see children in the cotton fields, that is not ok. ... We cannot hide the children and let them return afterwards. It is necessary to do something, hence the programme of awareness-raising.⁴¹³

Blowfield (2004, p. 19) observes that the expansion of ethical sourcing in the tea, coffee and cocoa industries means that smallholders are increasingly required to abide by 'codes that were originally developed for large workplaces and that include criteria on overtime, freedom of association and child labour which may not be suited to application to small family-operated farms'. Similarly, Bassett (2010)

⁴¹⁰ Fieldnotes, Bougouni, 30/07/07, original: À l'époque ce n'était même pas possible de parler de ce sujet. Mais maintenant ce n'est plus tabou. Les paysans ont compris un peu. These points were echoed by two informants at *Agri Multi Service* in Yanfolila nr Bougouni, which supports organic cotton farming in the area; fieldnotes, 13/07/07.

⁴¹¹ Fieldnotes, Koutiala, 19/11/07.

⁴¹² Fieldnotes, farm outside Koutiala on road to Kimparana, 19/11/07.

⁴¹³ Fieldnotes, Yanfolila, 31/07/07. Original: Les organisations du coton équitable viennent en mission pour vérifier. S'ils voient les enfants dans les champs de coton, ça ne va pas. On ne peut pas cacher les enfants et les laisser retourner après. Il faut faire quelque chose, et alors, la programme de sensibilisation

points out that fair trade is part of an ‘international moral economy’, driven by values held by consumers in the global North.⁴¹⁴

The issue of children working in cotton farming highlights the disjuncture between the world cotton market and the realities of family farming in West Africa. On one hand, transnational civil society co-operation on the subject is coloured by divergent cultural values and practices, while on the other hand, changing patterns of children’s involvement in farm work may be indicators of socio-economic stress. Having found no evidence of systematic exploitation of children in cotton farming in Mali, EJF used the material it gathered as part of a general portrayal of child labour in global cotton production to bolster its international campaign for tighter international regulation of child labour, and for consumers and retailers to buy only cotton that is certified as free of child labour (EJF 2007). Without any connection to the cotton sector or farmers in Mali, it is hard to see how EJF’s intervention might translate into benefits for farming families; indeed, Ibrahima Coulibaly’s concern that the campaign might tarnish the reputation of Malian cotton would seem to be valid. However, EJF’s Duncan Copeland argued that their work helps to create a market for organic and fair trade cotton.⁴¹⁵ EJF’s proposed organic education project will be considered next, in relation to the potential of organic and fair trade cotton initiatives as alternatives for farmers in Mali.

EJF’s proposal to carry out a project to educate Malian farmers on the benefits of organic over conventional cotton production⁴¹⁶ was motivated by the NGO’s agenda and capacities, and showed little understanding of the needs and desires of Malian farmers or of the set up of the cotton value chain in which they are embedded. The proposed project was first mentioned to AMADIP in an email from

⁴¹⁴ “FLO fairtrade standards state that payments should go directly to women cotton growers, ‘not to the husband.’ This criteria tells more about the culture of the promoters than the participants of fairtrade. One Dagara woman from the Dano region of Burkina Faso who participates in the Helvétas program informed us that when she received her cotton money, she gave it to her husband because “if you keep it yourself you will die.” When asked to elaborate, she explained that “cotton money is hot; it has to be cooled.” It is hot due to the *nyama* or powerful life force that inhabits both living and inanimate things. ... To neutralize or cool the *nyama*, a woman gives her money to her husband who takes it to the family shrine (*mane*) and covers it with ashes. At the end of this ritual, the husband can give some or all of the money back to his wife. At the very least, he knows how much money she has earned.” (Bassett 2010, p. 53)

⁴¹⁵ Interview with Duncan Copeland, EJF Campaigner, London, 01/10/08.

⁴¹⁶ EJF made a bid for funding for the project in 2008 (email comm, D Copeland, 02/01/08), but to date the proposed project has not been realised.

one of the NGO's directors in October 2007, before the EJF team travelled to Mali.⁴¹⁷ The director sought AMADIP's collaboration as a partner in the project, the proposal for which assumed that Malian farmers needed to be convinced of the benefits of organic farming methods. The project was to use the NGO's technical expertise in film-making.

Primary project would be the production of a training film on organic cotton cultivation, and a program of 'training trainers' who would be able to travel from community to community showing the film and working with local farmers towards a switch to organic.⁴¹⁸

As mentioned above, the project would represent part of EJF's 'grassroots capacity building efforts', on which it usually bases its campaigns.⁴¹⁹ Effectively, the project would be an exercise in retrospectively acquiring legitimacy for EJF's use of material from Mali in its international campaigns on pesticides and child labour in cotton.

In persisting with its project proposal, EJF overlooked feedback from some farmers it met in Mali who were already convinced of the virtues of organic farming and sought not a training film, but the practical and institutional support required to make the switch.⁴²⁰ Conventional cotton farmers might benefit from instruction on how to make and apply organic manure,⁴²¹ compost, and pesticide (from the Neem tree).⁴²² However, they could not make their cotton production fully organic, through acquisition of organic cotton seeds and organic certification of their produce, or benefit from the price premium associated with organic status, without the support of the cotton company. If it were to be effective in supporting farmers to switch to organic cotton production, EJF would need to work with the actors already operational in the field, notably MOBIOM and the organisations it works with: Swiss NGO Helvétas, the CMDT (which currently gins all of Mali's cotton, including

⁴¹⁷ Fieldnotes, Bamako, 08/10/07.

⁴¹⁸ Email communication, Duncan Copeland, EJF, 02/01/08.

⁴¹⁹ Email communication, Duncan Copeland, EJF, 02/01/08.

⁴²⁰ For example, the EJF team heard from farmers in Ouroun, near Bougouni, that they had sought to grow organic cotton but had been put off by the CMDT and were not given organic cotton seeds, though some were given organic sesame seeds instead, fieldnotes, 21/11/07.

⁴²¹ The CMDT already instructs conventional cotton farmers to use organic manure.

⁴²² Even these inputs depend on having access to a certain level of resources, such as livestock (Bassett 2010, p. 52–53).

organic and fair trade), Geocoton (the French company which part-owns the CMDT), and international cotton trading companies (e.g. Reinhart, which sells all of MOBIOM's cotton) (Bassett 2010).⁴²³ During the EJF tour of Southern Mali in November 2007, the NGO sought to take film footage of organic cotton farming to use in its bid for project funding. The NGO was not transparent with MOBIOM staff about the purpose of filming, arousing their suspicion and non-co-operation.⁴²⁴

If it were to realise its project, EJF would work with cotton producer co-operatives through a Malian partner NGO, such as AMADIP. In this way, EJF would be linked into the local and national level processes of co-operative formation and representation described in the first and second sections of this chapter. In relation to ethical supply chains, Blowfield (2004, p. 21) argues that 'co-operatives as an ideal type are being promoted to companies as a means of monitoring social and environmental performance' and notes that 'the benefit of co-operatives to small producers can be questioned.' Promotion of the co-operative organisational form in organic and fair trade supply chains is another way in which the local arena is disciplined by policy orientations emanating from the international arena.

Bassett (2010) examines organic and fair trade cotton initiatives in Mali and Burkina Faso, and argues that 'the programs' almost exclusive focus on the producer level (e.g. the organization and operation of producer cooperatives, and cotton quality) and its limited attention to the ginning and trading links in the cotton commodity chain reveals fair trade's weak potential for truly "changing trading practices" (Bassett 2010, p. 44). Producers benefit from organic and fair trade price premiums, but these premiums originate solely from the consumer end of the supply chain, while the power dynamics within the supply chain remain unaltered.

West African cotton stands out for its high quality but farmers rarely reap its market benefits. The added value is captured instead by cotton companies and traders. Fairtrade can thus be viewed as just compensation for a very small number of producers for the cotton they

⁴²³ Indeed, Bassett (2010, p. 50) notes that Helvétas and Geocoton embarked on a five-year project to expand organic fairtrade cotton production in Mali and other countries in West Africa.

⁴²⁴ The Director of MOBIOM refused to let EJF film or interview producers. One reason for this was that there was an inspection taking place at the time. The Director complained that EJF had not fully explained the purpose of the filming and interviews. Duncan Copeland told me that he could not tell the Director that the footage was for use in the project funding bid as this might be regarded as competition for MOBIOM. Fieldnotes, Bougouni, 20/11/07–21/11/07.

produce. This does not involve, however, a redistribution of profits from cotton companies and traders to producers. It is the consumer who pays the higher price that makes fairtrade work. The unequal exchange relations that define the conventional commodity chain continue to be reproduced in the fairtrade chain. (Bassett 2010, p. 52)

Although fair trade certification demands a certain degree of transparency within the supply chain, Bassett (2010) found that the price-setting process and the distribution of profits among actors in the supply chain were more obscure to producers in the case of organic and fair trade cotton than in that of conventional cotton in Mali and Burkina Faso. Bassett points to a direct contract for organic cotton between US lingerie company, Victoria's Secret, and the national cotton farmers' union in Burkina Faso (UNPCB, equivalent to Mali's UN-SCPC) as a new arrangement of the supply chain that has the potential to empower farmers, but he also notes that farmers did not find the UNPCB any more transparent or trustworthy than the cotton companies (Bassett 2010, p. 51).⁴²⁵ In light of the problems with national level farmer representation in Mali, discussed above, it is clear to see that the potential for organic and fair trade supply chains to make supposedly 'direct' links with producers through the UN-SCPC would not be regarded as a positive development by many Malian smallholders.

A further limitation of EJF's proposed organic education project is the unsuitability for organic cotton production of some areas where conventional cotton is currently grown, especially around Koutiala and San, where the soil appears to be severely degraded. As touched upon in chapters three and five, the causes of soil degradation in these areas are disputed, and may be due to too many years of unsustainable cotton production or to climate change or to a combination of these and other factors. The areas of Mali where organic cotton has been grown successfully are located farther south and are relatively new to cotton farming. AMADIP staff member, Fousseyné Coulibaly, was particularly concerned that through discussion of the proposed organic project, the expectations of farmers in the Koutiala and San areas, where he worked, were being raised by EJF without any

⁴²⁵ The contract between Victoria's Secret and UNPCB became the subject of controversy in 2011, when a US media company reported that cotton for this contract was being grown using forced child labour (Bloomberg, 15/12/11, www.bloomberg.com/news-media/clarisse-kambire-victorias-secret-child-labor-cotton-picker consulted on 20/07/12).

guarantees that they would be met: ‘They [EJF] shouldn’t come and get them [the farmers] excited and then leave them like that.’⁴²⁶ Furthermore, Bassett (2010, p. 53) notes that even in organic fair trade cotton programmes, which promote the participation of women, it is mainly women from middle-income households who participate because of the resources required to do so. The resource requirements for successful cotton growing and the low potential for profitable cotton farming in Koutiala and San – whether organic or conventional – demonstrate that while the focus of development interventions and agricultural policies rests narrowly on cotton, they do little to help the most marginal farming families in Mali.

Finally, a limitation of the proposed organic project, which was recognised by EJF’s Duncan Copeland in an interview in 2008, is the risk of insufficient market demand for organic cotton.⁴²⁷ While organic fair trade cotton from Mali and Burkina Faso has been more successful in finding buyers than non-organic fair trade cotton, the organic premium is only paid to producers if the cotton is successfully sold at that premium on the world market; if no buyer can be found at the premium price, the cotton will be sold alongside conventional cotton at lower prices (Bassett 2010). This situation justifies the role played by EJF in trying to increase demand for organic and fair trade cotton in Northern markets; however, it also highlights the point that being dependent on export-oriented commodity production means that the livelihoods of West African smallholders are dependent on fluctuating demand in distant economies.

Conclusion

The local arena is framed by policy which is decided in national and international arenas. The local arena of farming communities in southern Mali has been disciplined into conformity with the single-commodity paradigm. At the national level, top cotton farmer representatives have become embroiled in electoral politics, while a donor-backed government policy to construct a pyramid of unions of co-operatives abruptly curtailed any semblance of independent farmer representation.

⁴²⁶ Interview with Fousseyné Coulibaly, AMADIP, Koutiala, 21/02/08. Original: Il ne faut pas venir exciter les producteurs et les laisser comme ça.

⁴²⁷ Email communication, Duncan Copeland, EJF, 02/01/08.

Indeed, at all levels, processes of representative democracy have been manipulated in a competitive quest for access to development rent and a stake in crony capitalism.

Linkages between the international and local arenas may bring some benefits, most likely for those able to sustain membership of cotton producer co-operatives. However, despite some brokerage by Malian civil society actors, international NGOs still tend to promote their own perspectives on the local and how it should be developed (entrepreneurial producers of commodities of which Northerners are consumers). Furthermore, the disarray of civil society at national level in Mali cannot easily be circumvented since transnational links are often channelled through NGOs or other civil society structures at national level, and above all because, regardless of transnational interventions, rural producers still have to deal with the donor-backed national policy frameworks in which they are situated.

This chapter supports Stokke and Mohan's (2001, p. 12) analysis that the trend towards focusing on the local arena, of which Mali's cotton co-operatives are a part, 'allows the major lenders to sidestep the state and its relation to the global economy since the economic basis is not rendered problematic, simply the shortcomings of local society in inserting itself into economic life in a cohesive and co-ordinated manner.' Furthermore, this chapter validates the authors' assertion, inspired by Tarrow's (1996) critique of Putnam's work on civil society, that 'Following from this cultural internalism comes a tendency to ignore the state's role in enabling or destroying social capital.' (Stokke and Mohan 2001, p. 11).

The continued focus of Oxfam (specifically, Oxfam America and Oxfam Great Britain) on cotton reflects the NGO's analysis that problems in the transnational network stem from corruption of national actors, which can be rectified by strengthening processes of downward accountability within the Malian farmers' movement. Oxfam does not define the problem as with the cotton value chain as such, and does not look at the interests behind the corruption. Nor does it give sufficient reflexive consideration to the impacts of its own power and values. Rather, it sees local level entrepreneurialism as a motor for market-oriented development. In this way, Oxfam's view is in line with the World Bank's good governance agenda, and the NGO's intervention in this case added to processes through which national and international policies frame the local arena. Moreover, Oxfam's intervention

supported a top-down reorganisation of village level farmer organisation, which is set to exacerbate socio-economic inequality and exclusion of the most marginal households in the local arena.⁴²⁸

The model of co-operative capitalism attracts transnational support as it is readily comprehended by foreign NGO workers, far more so than are the complex social realities of rural Malians. Furthermore, ‘cotton’ is an attractive subject matter for civil society actors from the global North because it is a commodity that is ubiquitously consumed in the North. EJF’s proposed organic cotton project reflects a tendency among international NGOs to work towards improved versions of the global cotton value chain, principally by engendering changes at local levels. Again, the model of export-oriented commodity production goes unquestioned. Meanwhile, EJF falls short of its own claimed standards of accountability to local populations in its international campaigns.

⁴²⁸ Analysis of the gender equity dimension of the intervention would require further research.

Chapter eight

Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis set out to examine the phenomenon of transnational campaigns and advocacy networks through the relationships between network actors and through the impacts of their interventions on grassroots actors who have most at stake in the interventions. It is a study of how transnational civil society networks are constructed and how African civil society actors interact in this process of network construction.

The thesis illustrates the ways in which actors in transnational civil society networks are rooted in their own political, social, economic and cultural arenas. Their multiple subjectivities in these arenas condition their interests, perspectives, values and modes of political participation. It is in order to link civil society action across different political arenas that actors network with one another. As one northern-based international NGO worker put it, ‘It’s about finding where you can add the most value as an organisation’.⁴²⁹ Networking enables organisations to augment the impacts of their work by scaling up and transnationalising civil society action. However, if networking is to be successful and coherent, a major challenge for actors is to understand where their counterparts are ‘coming from’, as this helps to make sense of differences between them in terms of their perspectives and ways of working.

In the cases examined in this thesis, there was a very low level of understanding of other actors’ relationships to their own political arenas. In particular, the diverse subjectivities of Malian actors, and how these influenced their perspectives and approaches, were misunderstood, overlooked or obscure. Their perspectives were obscure because of (i) a lack of understanding of the Malian

⁴²⁹ Interview with Duncan Copeland, EJF Campaigner, London, 01/10/08.

political arena, and to some extent of Mali's position in the world trade system, on the part of international NGO actors; and (ii) a lack of reflexive awareness on the part of international NGO actors of their own values and relative power within transnational networks, and (iii) more overt processes of domination in which the international NGOs' framings of issues were given priority in the face of alternative framings put forward by Malian actors.

The implications of these imbalances in the transnational network were the instrumentalisation of transnational civil society action to consolidate the power of elites in civil society, the State and the cotton value chain, and a missed opportunity to network with more independent civil society activists. The argument put forward in this thesis takes on board the point, made by Crewe and Harrison (1998) and Mosse (2005), that the policy and actions of international NGOs are not central to the explanation of the actions of other actors; rather, actors act according to their own agendas and strategies. However, through their interventions, international NGOs feature in the field of possibilities open to other actors. International NGOs participate in the dynamic interaction that takes place between the whole range of actors and, in turn, this dynamic interaction impacts on the wider context. In this case study, the participation of the international NGOs – two northern (Oxfam and EJF) and one southern (Enda) – *involved* relative dominance within transnational networks, through which they (inadvertently) *facilitated* dominance by other actors in the wider context. The phenomenon in which transnational civil society action served to empower an elite rather than the majority of farmers in Mali's cotton zone cannot be explained without reference to these processes of dominating power.

Therefore, while the non-normative approach advocated by Mosse and Lewis (2006) enhances the subtlety of explanation of the phenomenon, it misses a crucial point: that the dominance of international NGOs is a major part of the explanation. Through deepening our understanding of the roles of power and values in shaping transnational campaigns and advocacy networks, and in producing some of the lesser-known impacts that they have on the people they claim to empower, this thesis contributes a more accurate analysis of transnational civil society action than is currently found in the literature. In so doing, the thesis contributes to debates around 'global civil society' by showing that the practice of transnational campaigns and

advocacy on cotton in Mali bears more resemblance to the neo-Gramscian model, which emphasises contention and links to political power, than to the neo-Tocquevillian model, which emphasises association and independence from political power. Furthermore, the thesis contributes to academic debate on civil society in Africa by showing that blurring between civil society and the state, rather than a peculiarly African phenomenon, may be more usefully viewed as one form of what Fox (1996) identifies as processes of mutual constitution the state and a civil society that features both clients and independent voices.

Peasants, producers, clients, and activists in Mali

This thesis has shown that farmers in Mali's cotton zone developed a sense of dependence on the State and the cotton company, as well as a sense that this dependence is to some extent reciprocal. Farmers expected the State and the cotton company to provide a means for them to earn an income. The liberal reform process threatened this relationship of unequal reciprocity, hence the notion that privatisation meant 'leaving farmers as orphans' (Dougnon et al. 2010). Some farmers who viewed themselves as subordinate nonetheless expected to be consulted over the liberal reform agenda, in line with cultural norms of good governance. They did not, however, expect to be consulted over factors affecting the world cotton market, such as US and EU subsidies. As a mode of political participation, consultation was distinguished from more adversarial methods such as strike action and lobbying, as it involved a sense of deference to authority and was contrasted with the pursuit of private interests. It was a government actor who, in seeking farmers' acquiescence with the reforms, reminded farmers of their partial autonomy. It was perhaps the combination of the encounter with this discourse and the availability of alternative livelihood strategies (notably, talk of an organic cotton project) that facilitated reluctant acceptance of the reforms by farmers in Fana. The livelihood strategies of farmers in Koutiala and San, by contrast, were rather more uncertain due to their different ecological contexts and less hope of inward investment.

More highly capitalised farmers and those whose social positions were elevated through association with the cotton company felt they had a relatively high

degree of bargaining power vis-à-vis the State and the cotton company, while also being highly motivated to invest in these relationships as a route to further social and economic advancement. For the most part, these actors were highly responsive to efforts by the cotton company and the State to ‘educate’ their perspectives in line with the workings of the world cotton market, and to engender a collaborative relationship between producers and other actors within the cotton value chain. Although different in content, their interests were aligned initially with those of the cotton company in terms of opposing the liberal reform agenda. However, exogenous pressure on the State (from the World Bank) to implement reform put strain on the relationship between the State and the cotton union leaders. To the extent that union leaders resisted, they engaged in passive resistance, which slowed down the liberal reform process but did not divert it. The complicity of cotton union leaders in the reforms was secured – just as it had been in relation to strike action – through an opaque negotiating process with government actors, which appears to have been linked to practices of fraud, bribery and clientalism. When these tactics were not sufficient to ensure control of the farmer movement, state actors pursued strategies of repression against farmers who challenged them, as happened in the violent suppression of the 1998 Koutiala strike and, with the complicity of the top union leader, in the imprisonment of political challengers during the construction of the co-operative union pyramid in 2007.

The degeneration of the peasant movement in Mali inspires analyses typical of pessimistic views associated with the ‘Western exceptionalism’ approach (Lewis 2002) to civil society in Africa, which tend towards over-determinism and fatalism, like that of Alexis Roy (2010a).

Mali appears to be moving into a patrimonial or clientalist state, or even into ‘uncivil society’. Whereas a dominant position was dependent on the state or on trading, and often on the combination of the two, a third option – that of participation, given the label of ‘civil society’ – is now open to actors. The dominant class would seem to be made up of three pillars (with some confusion and overlap among them): the bureaucracy pillar, the trader pillar and the civil society pillar. The elites, both old and new, move according to circumstance and strategy between these different pillars. ... The diversification of vectors of access to the dominant pillars, ... far from ensuring better distribution of wealth, can be seen rather to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability of the power

relations in Mali, which to a great extent ‘digest’ or absorb the processes initiated exogenously (such as privatisation, decentralisation, and civil society). (Roy 2010a, pp. 311–312)

Roy’s (2010a) analysis of farmer representation in Mali reflects an overall pattern of clientalism that featured strongly in the research findings. However, it does not reflect adequately the diversity among farmers or the agency of state and civil society actors in the degeneration of the peasant movement, which feature in both his own account of the peasant movement in Mali and in the account presented in this thesis. While the pattern of clientalism is pertinent to understanding the instrumentalisation of, for example, the transnational campaign against cotton subsidies, it does not fully explain the participation or non-participation of farmers and their representatives in contentious politics within Mali or in transnational civil society networks more broadly.

In Mali, farmers’ responses to authoritarian attempts to co-opt or repress them varied. Farmers interviewed in outlying villages clearly felt intimidated; whereas pockets of militancy were found in Koutiala, a stronghold of the opposition party, SADI. It was also noted, in chapter three, that Kita farmers who sought to form an independent union were discouraged from doing so, due in part to historical party political opposition in the area (Bingen 2000). This is consistent with what Tarrow (2005, p. 47) describes as ‘the familiar finding from social movement research’ that ‘the best predictor of activism is past activism’. The research findings are also consistent, however, with Fox’s (1996) suggestion that different actors react to repression in different ways: some yield to it, while others intensify their resistance. In the cases examined in this thesis, those actors who resisted most overtly and intensely tended to be those who perceived themselves as being engaged not only in a struggle over cotton sector policy and practice, but in a broader and deeper, counter-hegemonic struggle against the incumbent regime and the transnational regimes of governance and commerce to which it was connected. Among these actors, there were links between farmers and urban activists, and some links to transnational alter-globalisation networks. They differed in their perspectives but, overall, focused on two concerns: government accountability for

mismanagement of the cotton company and the marginalisation of broad-based family farming.

The thesis highlights some shortcomings of the literature on peasant resistance. Scott (1990) rejects the notion that peasants internalise subordination, citing the juxtaposition of peasants' public and hidden transcripts as evidence that they routinely resist domination, and claiming that their passive resistance has merely been overlooked by theorists. The research findings support Lukes' (2005) criticism of Scott's approach as 'oddly monolithic', overlooking 'the gamut of the remaining human responses to conditions of powerlessness and dependence, or the range of forms these conditions can take' (pp. 131–132). Isaacman (1993) identifies the 'partial autonomy' of the peasantry as a condition that is key to explaining the phenomenon of passive resistance observed by Scott (1990):

It is this partial autonomy [derived from the labour process not being divorced from the means of production and thus of subsistence] as well as the realization of their limited power which helps explain why peasants were prone to engage in localized or hidden forms of resistance rather than in broader social movements. (Isaacman 1993, p. 208)

The fieldwork findings suggest that forms of farmer resistance or acquiescence are indeed related to the complex balance of farmers' autonomy and powerlessness, but that there is scope in the literature for further research on this balance and how farmers' political activity relates to it.

In Mali under the CMDT system, the prospects for successful cultivation of subsistence crops was linked to the cotton system through the provision of inputs, credit and extension services. Bingen's (1998, p. 275) comment that the cotton system fostered a consciousness among peasants akin to that found among factory workers suggests that a partial 'proletarianisation' of the 'peasantry' may have contributed to the emergence of the farmers' movement in Mali in the 1990s. However, farmers' approaches varied from *asserting* themselves within structures of dependence, to *inserting* themselves into positions of relative dominance within those structures, to assertively or passively *contesting* that very dependence. Indeed, a major tension that emerged in the research centred on competing constructions of the identity of farmers as 'peasants' or as 'producers in global value chains'.

Academic debate around the nature and conditions of peasant resistance does not take adequate account, therefore, of the complex realities of rural populations whose livelihood strategies are deeply and contentiously entwined in wider economic and political processes of globalisation, which pass through and are conditioned by regional, national and local political arenas. It is only through deeper understanding of this complexity, and of farmers' diverse multiple subjectivities in relation to it, that farmers' participation or non-participation in transnational civil society networks can begin to be understood.

Power and values in transnational civil society networks

By contrast to some of the more radical activist stances found in Mali, the main international NGO actors considered in this thesis sought to reform, rather than oppose, transnational systems of governance and commerce, which they saw themselves as capable of – and justified in – influencing. These actors included the staff of northern-based NGOs, Oxfam Great Britain, Oxfam America, and the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), and southern-based NGO, ENDA. They focused primarily on influencing policy-making processes in international arenas, for example, on US and EU subsidy regimes and international regulation of pesticide use and labour standards. In this process, Oxfam, in particular, worked closely with national level farmer organisations in Mali, but without fully understanding the *realpolitik* of relations between the State and civil society in Mali. The local level of farmer organisation in Mali became a secondary focus of attention for Oxfam and EJF, with a view to enhancing accountability and their own organisational legitimacy.

These activities of transnational civil society contributed to the empowerment of an elite of cotton farmers whilst marginalising the interests and perspectives of the majority of farmers in Mali's cotton zone. An examination of how this happened contributes to the debate around deconstructive approaches to development. In support of the focus on dominating power associated with the deconstructive approach, and against the non-normative approach advocated by Mosse and Lewis (2006), the dominance of international NGO actors within the network was one

relatively significant explanatory factor in this phenomenon. To give credit to the non-normative approach, however, it was more complicated than that.

While at the micro level of a development intervention – the level of analysis with which ethnographic studies tend to concern themselves – donors do not dominate in an intentional or straightforward way, when we look at the aggregate picture, it is evident that there is a gulf between donor agencies (NGOs, state agencies, bilateral or multilateral aid agencies) and local populations in terms of who sets the agenda in the first place. Although a partially autonomous peasantry can to some extent opt out of the options presented to them by state and donor agencies, it is nonetheless largely these agencies that structure the sphere of possibilities within which local populations make their livelihood choices. This is evident throughout this thesis, from the micro level example of the M’Pessoba women’s group’s thus-far-fruitless quest to secure funding for its shea butter processing initiative to the pervasive dominance of the cotton cash-crop framing of farmer livelihoods in southern Mali. This is why the dominance/resistance frame is appealing; because it captures the inequality of the relationship between donors or NGOs and local populations.

The dominance/resistance frame certainly does not capture the whole story, but so long as non-normative ethnographic studies of development interventions fail to show how millions of these development interventions add up to the reinforcement of dominant power relations, the workings of the development ‘machine’ will remain mysterious. But, in fact, those studies, together with this thesis, do unravel the apparent mystery: ‘development’ and ‘justice’ are symbols that are instrumentalised in the operation of power, while power operates as it always has done: in ways that are obvious and subtle, intentional and unintentional, and multidirectional but – crucially – not equally so.

It is through a more critical examination of the roles of power and values in the construction of transnational civil society networks, called for by Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos (2004), that the workings of the ‘campaign machine’ and its ‘instrument effects’ (Ferguson 1990) may be revealed. But this critical examination must be informed by the wider contexts in which actors and their relationships are embedded. Transnationalising civil society action is particularly challenging because

it requires analyses of how power operates, perhaps differently, in multiple arenas. The fieldwork findings draw attention to a major challenge that arises in attempting to address this complexity through currently pervasive modes of political participation – such as through the media, petitions, and lobbying – where alternative framings of debate compete with one another, and simpler framings often mobilise support more readily than complex ones.

The research findings confirm Jordan and van Tuijl's (2000) observation that actors in transnational advocacy networks 'primarily act upon incentives which emerge in their own space' (p. 2062). In their choice of campaign priorities and timing, Oxfam staff working at international level responded to opportunities that arose in the international political arena, such as the case brought by Brazil against the United States at the World Trade Organisation and the Norwegian Government's interest in challenging conditionality attached to World Bank and IMF funding at a meeting of donor governments. Staff working within the same organisation but in a different political arena – in West Africa – argued for different campaign priorities and timings in light of incentives that arose in the West African political arena. In Mali, this tendency for actors to operate first and foremost in relation to their own political arena was summed up by one farmer's comment, 'we only see *our* government.'⁴³⁰ It may go some way towards explaining why there was competition between framings of the problem as primarily national level or as primarily international level.

In several ways, international NGO actors demonstrated 'an insufficiently sophisticated understanding of how power operates and is constituted and thus of how empowerment may occur', one of the broad criticisms of participatory development identified by Hickey and Mohan (2004, p. 11). Misunderstandings arose between actors when modes of political participation were not understood in relation to actors' multiple subjectivities, including in terms of their power in relation to their own political arenas. Clearly, Oxfam staff were not sufficiently aware of the clientalist strategies of cotton farmer representatives and government actors. What is more, Oxfam staff did not understand why Malian farmers did not overtly challenge

⁴³⁰ Interview with Bourama Goita, cotton farmer, Koutiala, 21/02/08. Original: On ne voit que *notre* gouvernement.

their union leaders, and mistook a lack of overt resistance for acquiescence.

Conventional and organic cotton producer co-operatives were mistakenly assumed by international NGO actors to be a route to empowerment for grassroots farmers, overlooking the economic, political, social and cultural contexts in which these forms of organisation were situated. International level NGOs involved in the campaign against cotton subsidies also showed themselves to have an insufficiently critical analysis of how power operates in the world trade system.

At the international level, the campaign against subsidies appeared to be counter-hegemonic in that it challenged the mercantilist practices of the dominant world powers. But viewed from the national level in Mali, the campaign was clearly not counter-hegemonic in that (i) it participated in the dominant discourse of free market economics; (ii) it did not fundamentally challenge the structure of global trade, seeking instead empowerment for farmers within the global value chain; and (iii) it played into the hands of the cotton company, the State and elite Malian farmer leaders. Oxfam attempted to avoid being 'ideological' through economic 'rationality', but in reality it participated in the dominant discourse (although not practice) of neoliberal economics, which appears rational, apolitical and incontestable precisely because it is hegemonic or, at least, dominant.

Thinking back to Jennings's (2001) case study of Oxfam's highly ideologically-driven intervention in Tanzania in the 1970s, Oxfam's organisational history and culture may have contributed to its current tendency to strive to avoid overt ideology and politics. This perspective suggests that the deconstructive view of 'development discourse' as monolithically technical is mistaken, since organisations and their discourses vary over time. So, the seemingly less ideological character of Oxfam's current discourse does not in itself explain why the campaign was to a certain extent co-opted. Oxfam attempted to avoid ideological politics by sticking dogmatically to a discourse of economic rationality and development, but its campaign was subverted by real politics both at the national level in Mali and the international level at the WTO. Oxfam acknowledged that the blockage at the WTO revealed the power-based nature of the world trade system and asserted that this revelation was an achievement of the campaign. The majority of farmers and farmer

representatives interviewed in Mali, however, viewed this as obvious anyway, and sought tangible, material change instead.

There was a comparative lack of will, however, among many – though by no means all – farmers and farmer representatives in Mali to challenge head-on the *realpolitik* operating at national level than to criticise the *realpolitik* at global level, probably because they perceived the personal risks to be higher, a perception which was reinforced by the mobilisation of ‘cultural’ norms that discouraged overt questioning of authority. Oxfam Great Britain and Oxfam America drew the line at intervening more directly in domestic politics, viewing the challenging of domestic politicking as the remit of the national farmer representatives. However, in a bid to redress its own instrumentalisation and to re-orient the NGO’s intervention in the Malian cotton sector, Oxfam, mainly through an individual staff member, turned its attentions to the local level – but, again, working through an institutional structure that was co-opted and controlled by the patron–client network bridging the State and civil society.

In the transnational network interactions considered in this thesis, differences between actors in terms of their values and interests were mediated in a number of ways. Common ground was found when Oxfam, ENDA and West African farmer leaders identified a common campaign target; that of US and EU cotton subsidies. These international NGOs supported the farmer leaders to be taken seriously by their own governments; and a transnational civil society network made development of the WTO cotton case possible. However, what emerged strongly from the research was that there were many differences between actors in terms of their values and perspectives which were not amenable to negotiation and to the finding of common ground. These differences were mediated mainly through unequal power relations between actors. This finding presents a critical challenge to Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) thesis that transnational civil society networks ‘both reflect and help sustain shared values, beliefs and projects’ (p. 213).

Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos (2004) identify the use of common symbols with different meanings for different actors as one strategy that is employed to reconcile individuality and commonality within transnational civil society networks: ‘Symbolic matters can be central to the maintenance of networks because they allow

people to behave differently while retaining membership of the network.’ (ibid., p. 852). This usage of symbols to unify a diverse network was seen in the case of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty’s use of a white band as a campaign symbol and in the use of the campaign slogan, ‘Make Trade Fair’ in 2005. However, this analysis of the usage of symbols within networks does not consider the effects on the balance of power between actors *within* the network or the interpretation of the symbol by actors *outside* the network. As was shown in chapter six, ‘Make Trade Fair’ was the symbolic headline under which there passed two petitions in West Africa, each with different content. While this appeared to diffuse conflict within the transnational network, and it certainly increased the numerical strength of the campaign, what is less clear is how the content of the petitions related to the message ultimately conveyed to policy-makers. The risk with such a strategy is that signatures to one petition are counted in support of a quite different policy position. Thus, rather than diffusing power, and reconciling diversity with unity, the use of symbols may in practice serve as a vehicle for the external promotion of one perspective over all others.

Covert contestation between actors over values occurred in the case of the engagement of AOPP representatives in incongruous public and hidden transcripts regarding gender equality. A non-normative approach would resist analysing this scenario in terms of the dominance of the northern NGO over its southern partner, emphasising instead the multi-directional character of power relations that are evident. It seems strange to consider the northern NGO’s stance on gender equality as domination, since this stance is aimed at countering male domination; and strange to think of the behaviour of AOPP staff as resistance, since it seems to be more a case of consolidating male domination. This is because power is multi-directional and relational, but it is still pertinent to ask whether, overall, power is dominating or non-dominating in the context. Here, the context is network relations and the dominance of the northern NGO’s position within those relations is evident in the fact that its own discourse is the public transcript, not the hidden one. It is the NGO’s dominance in this relationship, together with the dominance of the discourse of gender equality in transnational civil society, that helps to explain why differences between network actors in terms of values ‘went underground’. This outcome is not constructive in

terms of the health of working relationships between network actors, nor, indeed, in terms of addressing power inequality in the wider context; in this case, that of male domination over women.

Child labour and child rights were another focus of differences over values seen in the fieldwork. One interviewee pointed to the potential for engagement in contradictory public and hidden transcripts regarding child labour, whereby Malian civil society actors might participate in a development intervention on the issue in order to profit from development rent, without believing that child labour is a genuine problem in the Malian cotton zone. However, the Malian NGO, AMADIP, whose participation in a development intervention on child labour was studied in chapter seven, did not engage in contradictory public and hidden transcripts, but rather made an attempt to broker and translate the intervention by re-interpreting the phenomenon of children working on cotton farms as significant as a symptom of socio-economic stress, while acknowledging cultural values surrounding the topic. This was a constructive way to reconcile different values within the network, and it did influence the perspectives of the northern NGO staff to some extent. However, since EJF was more interested in its own discourse of environmental justice and exploitation than socio-economic stress, and because this was reinforced through the funding chain, the ‘partnership’ did not continue on the basis of AMADIP’s framing of the issue.

Typical of cases in which apparent consensus belies significant differences of perspective is that of the interest in organic cotton farming. EJF’s policy was driven by its own norms of environmental justice, and was very little if at all motivated to consider the independent perspectives of farmers themselves. EJF’s viewpoint appeared to be affirmed by farmers’ interest in organic cotton, but the farmers’ main interest in switching to organic was financial. This supports the critique of deconstructive approaches to development which asserts that recipients pursue their own agendas and strategies; their participation in a development intervention does not necessarily indicate that they share the same vision of development – or indeed of ‘justice’ – as the donor, or that they engage in subversive strategies of resistance against the donor’s vision of development. The farmers’ interest in organic cotton growing was not just about seizing the opportunity presented by the donor; it was

one of many livelihood strategies farmers interviewed were considering, weighing up the expected inputs and outputs of each option. Alternatives to organic cotton farming considered by farmers included cultivating maize, beans or sesame, transforming raw products on-farm to add value, and pursuing off-farm work. EJF's promise of support for organic cotton farming, however, tipped the balance in favour of this option over the others. A local extension/development agent who did contract work for both the CMDT and AMADIP expressed concern at EJF's raising of farmers' expectations without any guarantee of follow-up. This is indicative of the unequal power aspect of the relationship between the international NGO and the local population, in which the NGO is one of the actors that shapes the field of possibilities in which farmers define their agendas and strategies.

One significant way in which unequal power was evident in transnational network relations was in the contestation of values and perspectives through competition between different framings of debate; most notably, between emphasis on US and EU subsidies compared with emphasis on liberal reform or CMDT mismanagement, and between the competing discourses of single commodity agribusiness and family farming. Contestation over these opposing frames extended to processes of legitimisation and de-legitimisation of Malian and West African civil society organisations. Cotton-specific organisations were constructed – by themselves, by the State, by the cotton company – as the only legitimate representatives of farmers in Mali's cotton zone. This social construction of the legitimacy of cotton-specific organisations and de-legitimisation of broad-based peasant organisations was accepted and internalised by international NGO actors considered in the research, and even by some actors within Malian civil society who were associated with the broad-based farming camp.

Contestation between actors over values and perspectives was perhaps most pervasively played out through the allocation of resources, including through the funding chain. Examples include the choice of Geneva (World Trade Organization) rather than Washington (World Bank) for the location of an Oxfam advocacy office in 2002; Oxfam's funding of AProCA, which allowed continuation of the campaign against subsidies despite the concerns of other actors in the West African farmers' movement; and funding offered by the pro-democracy Open Society Institute as the

origin of EJF's concern over child labour in cotton, with a particular focus on undemocratic Uzbekistan.

More overt conflict arose, however, when some Malian civil society actors took a stand against what they regarded as domination within the transnational network, for example, when Aminata Dramane Traoré of *Le Forum Pour Un Autre Mali* organised a rival forum on the subject of cotton as a challenge to the dominance of Oxfam in the campaign against US and EU cotton subsidies; when the regional farmers' network, ROPPA expressed serious concerns about the subsidies campaign; and when Ibrahima Coulibaly of the AOPP and CNOP stopped working with Oxfam actors on the subsidies campaign. But the transnational network and the campaign survived the breakdown of relations with ROPPA because AProCA formed and served, on the basis of a narrower interest group and with funding from Oxfam, to replace it as the main West African partner organisation in the network. Similarly, even after Ibrahima Coulibaly's withdrawal, the AOPP continued working with Oxfam on the campaign. Another AOPP staff member described the organisation's work with Oxfam on the subsidies campaign as a strategic alliance up to a point. It is unclear how strategic this alliance is for the AOPP in the long term.

The continuation of the campaign for the elimination of US and EU cotton subsidies despite overt conflict within the network is an indication both of the existence of the narrow support base for the campaign within West Africa and of the dominance of the international NGO in the network. Overt conflict did in time lead to some revisions and learning by the NGO, which demonstrates one way in which NGOs can be reflexively aware of their own power and 'give up' some power within networks for the better functioning and accountability of the network. However, among the most striking examples of NGO dominance in transnational networks seen in the case study was the manipulation that occurred when petitions were used, and organic cotton projects proposed, in order to give an appearance of grassroots participation and downward accountability for the enhancement of the socially-constructed legitimacy of national and international NGOs.

Ongoing theoretical and empirical weaknesses

The findings of this thesis call for a research project that looks thoroughly at transnational networks, at the interactions between actors, at the multiple political arenas in which actors and stakeholders are situated. The scale of such a research project would require a team of researchers, including members that have background in the different political arenas and access inside the network. As mentioned in the introduction, access was a problem for me. This was the case both in Mali, where access was restricted in politically sensitive contexts and to some extent by security risks, and at NGO headquarters, where staff reported that they were constrained by their supervisors with regards to sharing information that was regarded as sensitive in terms of the NGOs' reputations and their on-going work.

This approach could be applied to investigate more radical transnational civil society networks, in order to contribute further to the debate around deconstructive approaches to development. One argument made here is that actors taking a more radical political line will not necessarily avoid instrumentalisation by *realpolitik*. In practice, being 'more politically radical' often means following a more radical political ideology, which Jennings' (2001) case study and indeed, world history, has shown can facilitate, rather than prevent, abuses of power. However, it would be interesting to see whether the links being forged between advocates of the family farming perspective in Mali and the transnational network calling for 'food sovereignty', involving the transnational social movement, Via Campesina, are any more robust than the 'trade justice' and 'environmental justice' networks in terms of insulating themselves from contradictory 'instrument effects'.

Theories of 'peasant resistance' could be expanded through studying the participation or non-participation of farmers in contentious politics in the context of globalisation (beyond fair trade schemes), in which the complex reality of farmers' livelihoods may not be adequately represented by the definitions of 'peasant' that are currently prevalent in the literature, and where the very definition of farmers' livelihoods is the subject of contention. It would be particularly interesting see whether, in this context, there are changes in terms of attitudes among rural African populations towards gender relations.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this thesis is that we need to tread a middle path between deconstructive critiques of development and non-normative approaches, and to apply this analysis to transnational civil society action. One danger with simple deconstructive approaches is to assume that by being more overtly political – as NGOs are when they engage in campaigns and advocacy – civil society actors can master the field of power and finally satisfy the deconstructivists’ own ‘will to improve’ (Li 2007) or, indeed, ‘will to bring about justice’. While being more overtly political may help, it is not enough. Non-normative approaches locate causal power with the actors and structures of the wider context, including that of international NGO actors. Crewe and Harrison (1998) and Mosse (2005) resist making normative judgments about the interventions of international NGO actors: they seek to avoid over-estimating the level of intentionality (and therefore of culpability) involved in their actions that have power effects; and they seek to avoid over-estimating the level of control (and therefore of responsibility) that they have. Following these non-normative approaches provides a more balanced and accurate analysis of how it happened that transnational civil society action ended up empowering a West African farming elite at the expense of the majority of farmers in Mali’s cotton zone. But, while adopting a ‘blaming approach’ is not constructive, the analysis presented here shows clearly that power, including the relative dominance of international NGOs, is a significant feature of interaction between actors in the on-going processes of constructing transnational civil society networks, and that the actions of network actors, including international NGO ones, can facilitate unequal and unjust operations of power in the wider context.

The bottom line is that all actors involved in transnational civil society action have a political responsibility to the people who have most at stake in the intervention (Jordan and van Tuijl 2000) – a responsibility to be critically aware of how power operates in the multiple political arenas in connection with which they work, and a responsibility to be reflexively aware of their own power and values –

because, as one farmer representative put it, ‘For us, ... it is not a campaign – not *just* a campaign; it is our lives that are at stake.’⁴³¹

⁴³¹ Interview with Ibrahima Coulibaly, President of the CNOP, Bamako, 17/01/08. Original: Pour nous, ... ce n’est pas une campagne – ce n’est pas *qu*’une campagne ; c’est nos vies qui sont en jeu.

Appendix one

List of formal interviews conducted during fieldwork

1. Salif Foulani Sissoko, CNOP Technical Coordinator, 04/10/06, Bamako.
2. Jean Coulibaly, AOPP President, 04/10/06, Bamako.
3. Aliou Maiga, CCA-ONG Communications Officer, 04/10/06, Bamako.
4. Gilles Marion, Oxfam GB Country Programme Manager for Mali, 04/07/07, Bamako.
5. Fousseynou Diabaté, Oxfam GB & America joint Cotton Programme Officer, 04/07/07, Bamako.
6. Issa Coulibaly, AOPP Cotton Advisor, 27/08/07, Bamako.
7. Lassine Sidibe, AOPP Executive Secretary, 29/08/07, Bamako.
8. Anonymous, Oxfam (GB/America) worker, 17/09/07, Bamako.
9. Moctar Coulibaly, AMADIP president; CAD-Mali activist, 22/10/07, Bamako.
10. Ibrahima Coulibaly, AOPP External Relations Secretary; CNOP President, 17/01/08, Bamako.
11. Souleymane Diarra, AOPP Commissions Coordinator, 17/01/08, Bamako.
12. Ismael Coulibaly, CNOP Vice President, 21/01/08, Bamako.
13. Dominique Jenkins, Oxfam America Popular Mobilisation Coordinator, 02/02/08, Dakar.
14. Mamadou Barry, PEACE Coordinator, 04/02/08, Dakar.
15. Alexis Anouan, Enda Prospectives Dialogues Agriculture Policy Coordinator, 12/02/08, Bamako.
16. Souleymane M Keita, CNOP Vice President, 12/02/08, Bamako.
17. Modibou G Coulibaly, CAD-Mali Press Officer, 13/02/08, Bamako.
18. Siaka Traore, cotton farmer, 17/02/08, Fana.
19. Mamadou Konate, cotton farmer and President of Chamber of Agriculture in the commune of Gigya, 17/02/08, Fana.
20. Seydou Toure, cotton farmer and Regional SYVAC representative, 17/02/08, Fana.
21. Drissa Traore, cotton farmer, SCPC Secretary, and Secretary of communal Chamber of Agriculture, 17/02/08, Fana.
22. Bamoussa Traore, cotton farmer, 17/02/08, Fana.
23. Aziz Bagayogo, cotton farmer and trader, 17/02/08, Fana.
24. Amadou Nekita Fomba, cotton farmer, President of Dien SCPC and local SYVAC representative, 17/02/08, Dien nr Fana.
25. Amadou Fomba, cotton farmer, 17/02/08, Dien nr Fana.
26. Bakary Fomba, cotton farmer and SCPC Accountant, 17/02/08, Dien nr Fana.
27. Tarafan Fomba, cotton farmer, 17/02/08, Dien nr Fana.
28. Bah Kissiman Traore, cotton farmer, 18/02/08, Wolodo nr Fana.
29. Michel Daou, retired CMDT agent, 18/02/08, Fana.
30. Bafing Diarra, cotton farmer and local SYCOV President, 18/02/08, Kodabougou nr Kouroukoro nr Fana.

31. Keifa Diarra, SYCOV Secretary-General (national level), 19/02/08, Fana.
32. Fode Sumunu, retired CMDT agent, 20/02/08, Koutiala.
33. Sidiki Coulibaly, cotton farmer and local councillor, 20/02/08, Koutiala.
34. Seydou Traore, cotton farmer and former SYCOV member, 21/02/08, Koutiala.
35. Bourama Goita, cotton farmer and former SYCOV member, 21/02/08, Koutiala.
36. Fousseyney Coulibaly, AMADIP staff member and CMDT extension agent, 21/02/08, Koutiala.
37. Adama Bocoum, CAD-MALI activist and Fulani herder, 21/02/08, Koutiala. Also present was Yusuf Coulibaly, CAD-MALI activist.
38. Kadija Traore, CAD-MALI activist and home-maker in a cotton-farming household, 21/02/08, Koutiala.
39. Ampha Coulibaly, President of Regional Union of Cooperatives of Koutiala and San. Also present were: Bakary Dembele, Vice-President and Mamdou Sangare, Co-ordinator of the Regional Union of SCPCs, 23/02/08, Koutiala.
40. Michel Dembele and Joseph Dembele, cotton farmers, 23/02/08, Moribila nr Koutiala.
41. Alphonse Kone, SCPC Vice-President, 24/02/08, Moribila nr Koutiala.
42. Aminata Touré Barry (known as “Mme Barry”), President of CAD-Mali, 25/02/08, Bamako.
43. Aminata Dramane Traoré, civil society activist, President of *Le Forum pour un Autre Mali*, and former government minister, 28/02/08, Bamako.
44. Duncan Copeland, Campaigner, EJF, 01/10/08, London.
 - Anonymous, national level farmer representative, 2008, Bamako. (Anonymised part-interview.)

Appendix two

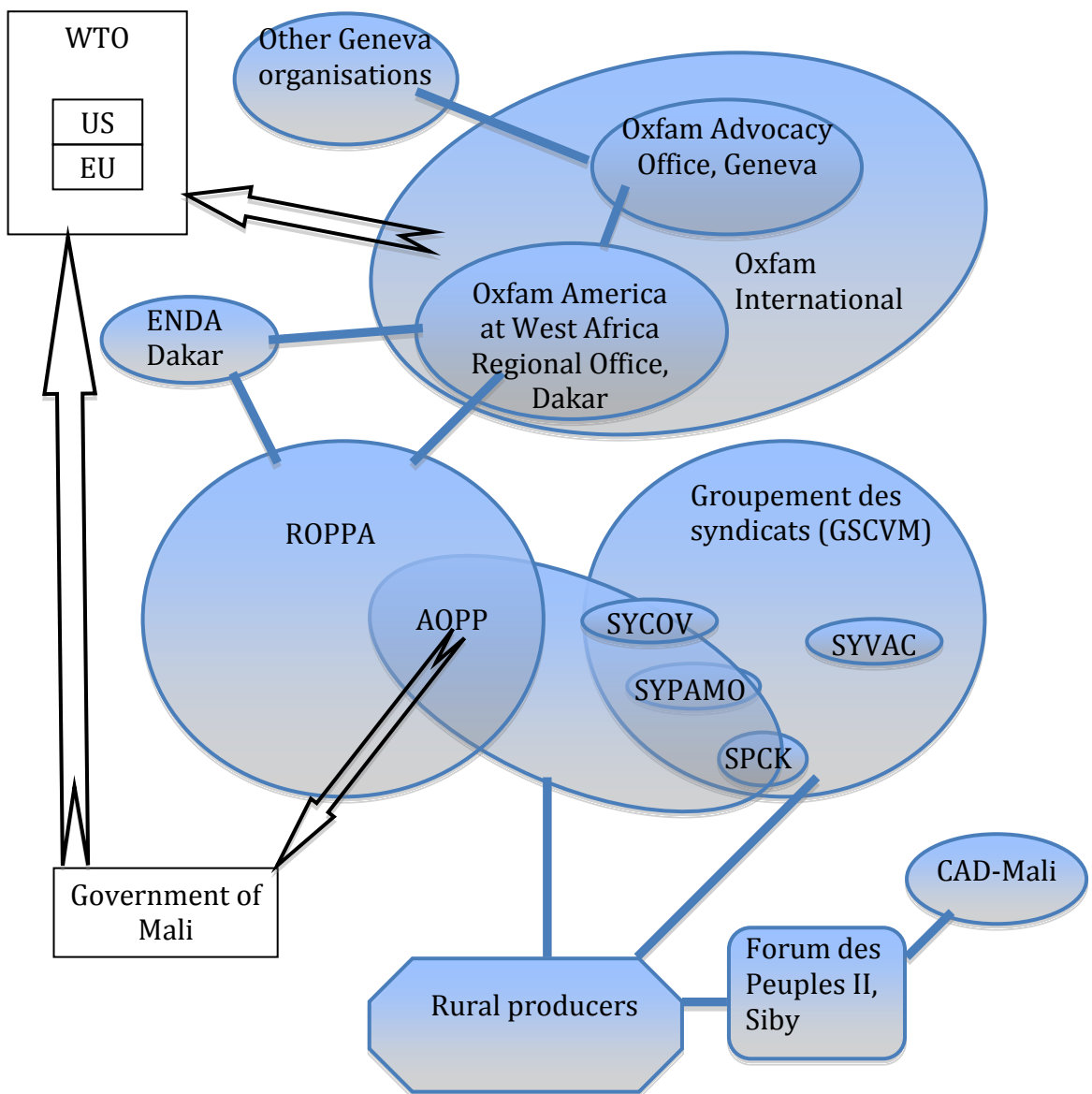
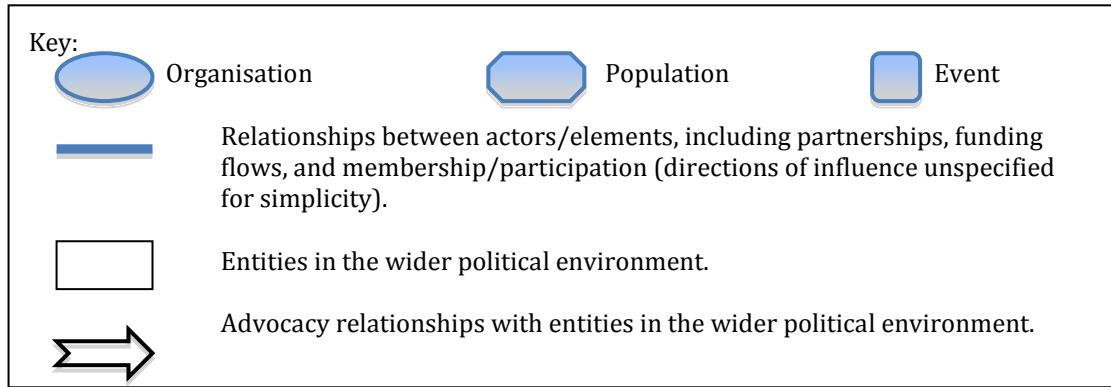


Figure 3: Influence diagram of Mali cotton campaign actors in 2003.

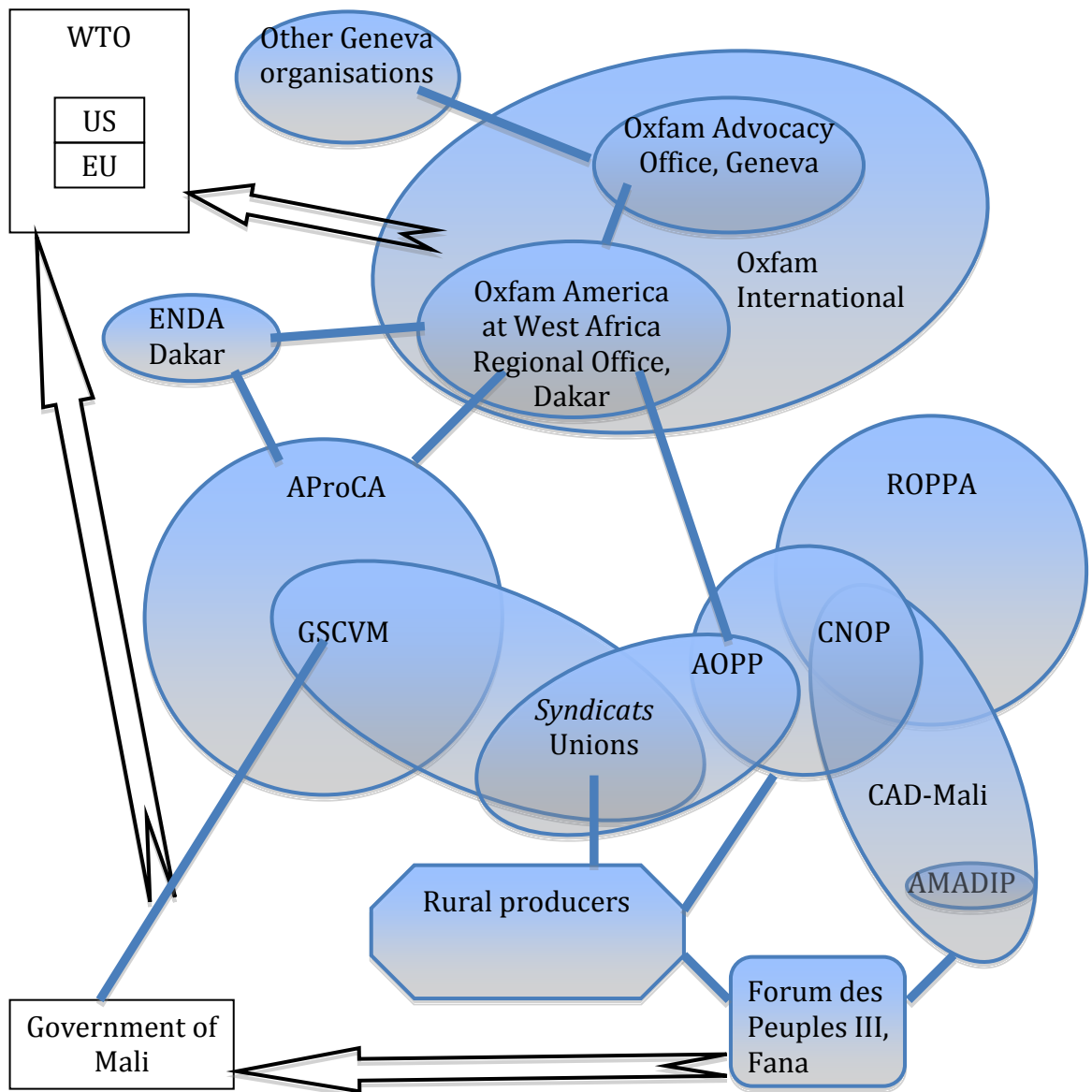


Figure 4: Influence diagram of Mali cotton campaign actors in 2005.
 N.B. It is difficult to achieve clarity as there was a high degree of overlap between organisations.

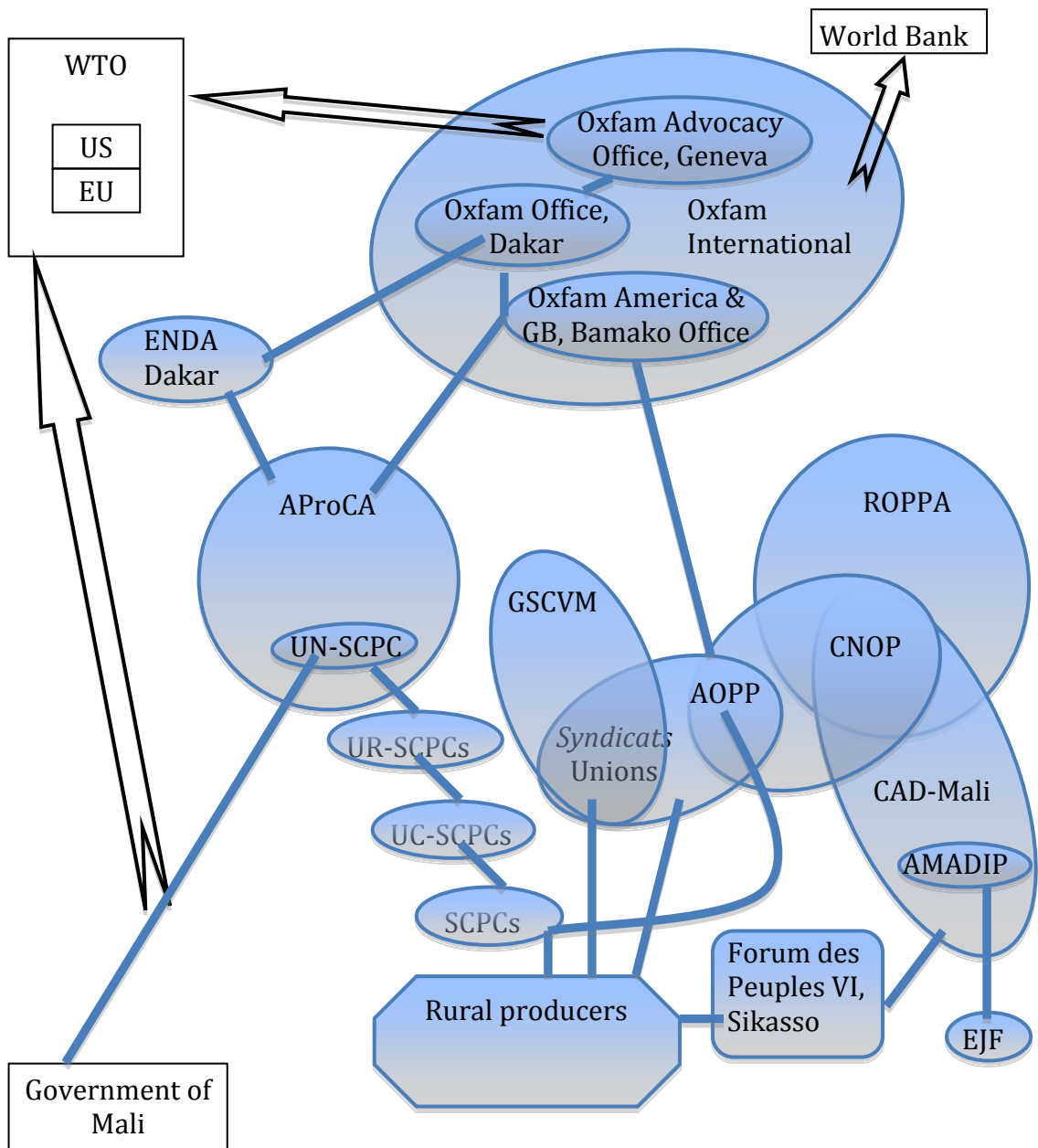


Figure 5: Influence diagram of Mali cotton campaign actors in 2007.

Appendix three

PETITION

Le coton ou la vie !

Le gouvernement de la République du Mali a programmé la privatisation de la Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles (CMDT) pour 2008. Cette privatisation imposée par le Fonds Monétaire International (FMI) et la Banque Mondiale, aura des conséquences très graves sur l'économie du pays en général et sur le monde paysan malien en particulier qui compte 3 millions de cotonculteurs. Au nombre des conséquences de la privatisation, nous pouvons citer entre autres :

- la disparition du prix garanti au producteur. Le prix du coton sera désormais fixé par les entreprises multinationales en fonction du marché international ;
- la baisse progressive des prix entraînant du coup une réduction de la production de coton dans les différentes zones cotonnières du pays, tout comme dans les pays comme le Bénin, le Ghana et la RCI qui ont connu la privatisation avant le Mali ;
- l'augmentation du chômage avec la diminution des emplois agricoles et non agricoles. Il s'agit par exemple des transporteurs, des manœuvres, de la vente de piles, etc.;
- la non prise en compte des services sociaux de base (éducation, santé, eau potable, habitat, etc.) par les entreprises multinationales ;
- la diminution, sinon la disparition, du tissu industriel du mali car les entreprises multinationales peuvent décider d'aller égrener leur coton dans un autre pays tel que la République de Côte d'Ivoire pour réduire les coûts;
- la perte de la souveraineté du Mali sur la gestion d'une entreprise stratégique comme la CMDT, qui a des effets d'entraînement sur d'autres entreprises.
- l'introduction des Organismes Génétiquement Modifiés (OGM) dans l'agriculture car les paysans n'auront plus la maîtrise des semences. La privatisation de la CMDT donnera le champ libre aux entreprises multinationales, aidées notamment par l'USAID (gouvernement américain), qui veulent imposer les OGM dans l'agriculture malienne. Ceci aura pour conséquence la destruction du patrimoine génétique malien, le contrôle de l'agriculture par ces multinationales et l'appauvrissement du monde paysan.

Pour toutes ces raisons, nous, mouvements sociaux maliens (associations de jeunes, de femmes, organisations paysannes, syndicats, confessions religieuses, coordinations d'ONG etc.) refusons la privatisation de la CMDT et l'introduction des OGM dans l'agriculture malienne.

NON A LA PRIVATISATION DE LA CMDT !
NON A L'INTRODUCTION DES OGM !

N°	NOM	PRENOM	PROFESSION/ ORGANISATION	LOCALITE	SIGNATURE

Appendix four

Appel commun des producteurs de coton de l'Afrique de l'Ouest

Au moment où il est question de lutter contre la pauvreté, les producteurs de coton de l'Afrique de l'Ouest ont tout de suite compris que ce n'est qu'au prix de leurs efforts qu'ils peuvent venir à bout de cette pauvreté. Ils se sont mis à la tâche, et au moment où ils obtiennent un nouveau record de production, voilà que subitement les cours du coton s'effondrent.

Nous en arrivons à nous interroger sur la volonté réelle des pays riches à faire reculer la pauvreté dans les pays pauvres. Les subventions dont bénéficient les agriculteurs de l'Union Européenne (U.E.) et des Etats-Unis (U.S.A.) leur permettent de mieux résister à ces chutes de prix.

Mais ce n'est pas tout. Ces subventions ont des effets pervers sur les économies des pays pauvres, car elles stimulent artificiellement la production et entraîne une surproduction, et donc la chute des cours sur le marché mondial. En subventionnant leurs producteurs de coton les U.S.A. et l'U.E. menacent gravement le coton africain, et donc l'avenir de millions de producteurs, et les économies de nombreux pays comme celles du Bénin, du Burkina Faso et du Mali.

Aussi, nous demandons solennellement aux U.S.A. et à l'U.E. de supprimer leurs subventions aux producteurs de coton.

Nous demandons à tous ceux qui veulent construire un monde plus juste et fraternel de se joindre à nous pour faire pression sur les Etats-Unis et l'Union Européenne pour qu'ils suppriment ces subventions.

Fait à Bobo-Dioulasso le 21 novembre 2001

Signatures :

Le Président de l'UNPCB (du Burkina) Monsieur François Traoré

Le Président de la FUFRO (Bénin) Monsieur Issa Ibrahima

Le Président du SYCOV (Mali) Monsieur Ampha Coulibaly

La Maison des Paysans de la région du Sud-Ouest de Madagascar, et son représentant Monsieur Risoja Filiha

Source: www.abcburkina.net/content/view/418/44/lang,fr/ consulted on 06/05/11.

Appendix five

abc Burkina n° 122

Pour un commerce équitable
 et pour la reconnaissance du
droit de souveraineté alimentaire
 par la communauté internationale.

Avec la Confédération Paysanne du Faso, Oxfam International, Recife-ONG et bien d'autres organisations de la Société Civile nous soutenons une pétition en faveur d'un commerce équitable. Ces signatures vont permettre aux négociateurs africains à l'OMC mais aussi devant l'Union Européenne (dans le cadre des Accords de Partenariats Economiques) d'être plus forts et mieux entendus !

Notre coton se vend mal, car il subit la concurrence de producteurs fortement subventionnés.

Nos produits agricoles subissent de plein fouet la concurrence de produits importés à des prix cassés car subventionnés ou de mauvaise qualité. Nous refusons de devenir la poubelle du monde.

Aussi, nous demandons des règles internationales justes en faveur d'un commerce équitable.

Nous pensons que « le droit de maintenir, de protéger et de développer notre propre capacité de production alimentaire, en respectant la diversité de nos produits et de nos cultures, et sans nuire à la sécurité alimentaire des autres pays » devrait être reconnu par la communauté internationale. C'est ce droit que nous appelons, pour chaque pays ou union de pays, le droit de souveraineté alimentaire.

C'est pourquoi nous vous invitons à signer une **pétition en faveur d'un commerce équitable et pour la reconnaissance du droit de souveraineté alimentaire par la communauté internationale en remplissant le formulaire suivant**

Nom et Prénom

Pays

Adresse email

(Un email de confirmation vous parviendra d'ici peu)

N-B : Les signatures de cette pétition rejoindront celles d'Oxfam International. Merci de ne pas la signer à nouveau, si vous êtes déjà comptabilisés par Oxfam International.

Retour au dossier [Vu au Sud - Vu du Sud](#)

[Accueil](#) - [Le Burkina de A à Z](#) - [Politiques agricoles et Pays du Sud](#) - [Actualités](#)

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