



International conference on the future of work and employment in the agricultural and agrifood sector in West Africa

January 14 and 15, 2025 - Hôtel Ndiambour, Dakar

SYNTHESIS



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Introduction

Africa's working population will increase by around 800 million between 2020 and 2050. In most African countries, the process of urbanization has not been spurred by significant industrialization of the economies. As a result, over 60% of the workforce remains engaged in activities related to the agricultural sector, and the majority of the population will remain rural for the foreseeable future. The ability of the agricultural and agri-food sector to provide productive and decent jobs with attractive working conditions is critical to the continent's social and political stability.

Most research and development players agree on this challenge, but their current proposals raise questions. Indeed, most public policies and civil society projects aiming at employing young people in rural areas often boil down to facilitating the emergence of “agripreneurs”, i.e. focusing on improving workers' employability and their ability to create their own jobs. The evolution of the agricultural sector, in response to the challenges of sustainability and food system sovereignty implies making choices about the agricultural models and organization of supply chains to be promoted. But they are rarely linked to the issue of work and employment in this sector. Promoting decent work and employment for people working in agriculture is a key challenge for the African continent.

Against this backdrop, ISRA-BAME, CIRAD and INRAE organized an international conference **to identify ways of creating decent and attractive jobs in agricultural production systems and value chains in West Africa.**

The conference brought together around 60 participants in Dakar and up to 120 online.

The main specific aims of the conference were to:

- Comparing and contrasting research methods and findings on work and employment in agriculture and agri-food;
- To consolidate the constitution of a network of researchers working on issues of work and employment in the agricultural sector across the African continent;
- Brainstorming over these initial results with civil society players and public policy-makers, and developing a more permanent mechanism for dialogue with these players.

More specifically, the conference aimed to delve into the concept of “decent work/employment”, which is recognized and mobilized on the international scene. Decent work is defined as productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity (ILO, 2019). However, its delineations are sometimes blurred and other notions are also invoked (working conditions, arduousness, attractiveness, quality employment...). Thus, three main themes structured the discussions at the conference, namely:

1. What does “decent” mean when it comes to work and employment in agriculture? How is research factoring in the notion of “decent work”?
2. Which types of production systems and supply chains provide which types of jobs? Which agricultural and agri-food models are most likely to create decent jobs?
3. What do public policy makers need from research in order to better consider work and employment in their policies and actions?

Two main concepts were discussed at the conference: work and employment. The following cropped up as the main definitions (which are not exhaustive, of course not).

- Work and employment are objects of research for a variety of subjects or disciplines (economics, sociology, management, zootechnics and agronomy, ergonomics, law, etc.), and are subject to numerous interpretations.
- **Work** is defined as the interactions between workers and tasks that are associated with production systems and the socio-structural characteristics of production units.
- **Employment** is work that generates incomes. It refers to the status of workers (family, salaried or self-employed, entrepreneur) and to a job considered as a portfolio of tasks and skills. A job can give access to a set of social rights.
- Work and employment are studied at **different scales**: household/farm, company, territory, national and international.

In his opening address to the conference, **Dr. Alpha Ba**, the Secretary of State for Cooperatives and Farmer Management, of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Livestock, stressed that Senegal's demographic growth was an opportunity, provided that public policies were put in place to support this growth. But the government lacks the tangible elements needed to make decisions, particularly in the area of youth training, which he sees as a lever for developing the potential of the agricultural sector as a reservoir of employment (via entrepreneurship in particular). The Secretary of State therefore expressed his keen expectations for the conference.



The meeting sessions' summaries

The first session focused on the **challenges of work and employment in Africa's agricultural sector**, with presentations made by Ahmadou Aly Mbaye, a research professor at UCAD, and Benoît Dedieu, a researcher at Inrae. The former expounded on the structural change and employment prospects in Africa. The latter, Benoît Dedieu, shared on a literature review that was done in 2024 to capitalize on what international research has to say on the subject of agricultural work and employment in Africa, using specific methods of publication relative to census and statistical analysis.

Later three speakers took turns dwelling on decent **work in the agricultural and agri-food sector in Africa**. Ms. Nathalie Hostiou, being the first, took a critical look at the notion of decent work. According to her, not only is it difficult to measure and apply but it also fails to take into account subjective dimensions such as workers' well-being. Hence, Nathalie proposes the integration of these dimensions, and the need to be cognisant of additional concepts. The second speaker, Mohamed Porgo, measured the level of decency of employment in small and medium-sized agri-food enterprises (SMEs) in Burkina Faso and Senegal, using original data collected from workers in these SMEs. Out of the 1,217 people surveyed, he identified four categories of workers: informal temporary workers, skilled and decent workers with limited remuneration, "fairly" decent skilled workers, and unpaid SME group members. However, Mohamed Porgo underlined the need to further this study by taking into account the nature of SMEs in order to promote decent jobs. The third speaker, Ibrahima Diallo, looked at decent work through the notion of working conditions for sub-Saharan seasonal agricultural workers in France. He emphasized the gendered division of agricultural labor, and the physical hardships involved. He also highlighted the racist division of labor among seasonal agricultural workers, and the different perceptions of agricultural work by sub-Saharan migrants.

The first half-day ended with a **round-table discussion on how stakeholders are mobilizing decent work in their actions**. This round table brought together a political player, a representative of an international organization (the ILO), a civil society actor and a trade unionist. The four speakers explained how they mobilize the concept of decent work in their actions. According to the first two, Mr. El Hadj Ibrahima Diallo (Ministry of Labor) and Ms. Elisenda Estruch (ILO), attention should be paid to the socio-economic environment and basic amenity services, which play a major role in the notion of well-being. Mr. Yoro Thioye/CNCR of Senegal and Mr. Ibrahima Mané/UNSAS - Senegal, for their part, insisted on building on proven experiences, processes and organizations.



During **the session on "Which jobs for which types of agricultural production systems and value chains" (addressed on Tuesday's afternoon, January 14, 2025)**, intensification of production, mechanization and agroecological approaches were presented as the future of agriculture in Africa, and as potentially favorable to the creation of decent jobs. But when is it going to play out?

The four presentations pored over the correlation between the characteristics of agricultural production systems and certain dimensions of work. The studies were carried out in different agricultural sectors (cotton, plantain, rice and cocoa) and in different West African countries (Ghana, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire).

For production system characteristics, a particular emphasis was placed on farm size, degree of intensification and mechanization, and commitment to a quality production system (certification and organic farming).

The dimensions of work included work organization in the sense of “who does what and when”, with an emphasis on the distribution of work between different types of workers (family, salaried, temporary, seasonal, men, women) and work times. The actual working conditions experienced by workers (farm managers and salaried employees, men and women) were also analyzed in some of these studies (Soullier et al., Compaoré and Diakhate).

The salient points to note are:

- The gendered distribution of work and the type of employment evolve based on the size and level of intensification of the farms. Work carried out by temporary employees may increase as rice production intensifies on larger farms (Hostiou et al). These temporary employees often perform more physically-demanding tasks (herbicide/pesticide application). Women are increasingly involved in post-harvest work (e.g. in rice production in Ghana). The dynamics of intensification in creating daily employment and tasks that are risky for health therefore raise the question “more employment, but which kind of employment?”
- The links between mechanization and work organization are not yet well established, probably due to the temporality of research projects and data processing. The observation was made that mechanization needs to be contextualized, with very different situations between sectors and forms of access to mechanization. It was also pointed out that a systemic analysis at farm level was needed, taking into account the different types of workers and agricultural activities, in order to take on board the effects of mechanization, whereas many studies focus on time saved at plot level.
- Hypotheses about an improvement in working conditions in production systems committed to a quality approach are only very partially verified. In the case of certified cocoa farms (Soullier et al), incomes increase, essentially due to an increase in working time (for harvest and post-harvest operations, i.e. picking/collection, opening, transportation) as a result of higher yields. But there has been no subjective improvement in working conditions as perceived by workers (farmers and employees), particularly in terms of the drudgery of tasks.



This was followed by a round-table discussion on the extent to which new forms of agriculture and supply chain organization are generating decent jobs.

Numerous issues were raised by the speakers as part of the round table, some among others are as follows:

- The precariousness of jobs in the agricultural sector (high proportion of informal work, very low pay/wage)
- The lack of recognition of agricultural occupations and the lack of legal status for family farms before the question of decent work was raised.

- information asymmetry between what is put in place at State level and the beneficiaries
- Inadequate training
- Gender inequality (under-representation of women)

If agriculture and the organization of its sectors are to provide greater support for the creation of decent jobs, we need to:

- To recognize the profession of farmer, with a status that is recognized, respected and protected in the same way as other employment sectors.
- Integrate decent work issues into training programs, or through the activities of agricultural community cooperatives, this is just an example.
- Agricultural training courses must be adapted and co-constructed. Trades must also be better adapted to the needs of value chains/industries.
- Actions must also be geared towards all players, including those involved in processing.
- We also need to steer young people towards jobs that don't yet exist, in particular by enabling them to innovate, and by developing training programs tailored to future needs (especially those of value chains).



The final session on **“How to think about the future of work in the agricultural and agri-food sector?”** (held on Wednesday’s morning, January 15) deep dived into more prospective thinking on the future of decent work and employment in the agricultural sector. The first presentation introduced the issues involved in using the future to think about the present and imagine the future of work (Sall and Ba), while the second presented a foresight experiment on the future of Senegalese agriculture, comparing the impact of two very different models: agroecology and industrial agriculture (Piroux). The morning's final two presentations (by Girard and Camara) threw lights on current projects on employment and work. The main points were as follows :

- While several changes are likely to affect the world of work (automation, artificial intelligence, robotics, uncertainties related to climate change, demography, zoonoses, etc.), reflections on the future of work and employment in agriculture are still limited in Africa. There are few tools and models for understanding the impact of agricultural models on work and employment. It is not so much a question of “thinking” about the future of work and employment, but rather of “exploring” futures in order to identify, in the present, the levers to act upon for a desirable future. It's also a way of identifying new professions in agriculture. A multitude of tools are available to help protagonists get out of the present and plunge into the future.
- Two prospective approaches, which are not antagonistic, to apprehending the future of work and employment: the co-development of scenarios with stakeholders to explore desirable, undesirable or utopian futures on a territorial scale; the elaboration of quantitative scenarios so as to model tools at a country level.
- The participatory and emancipatory nature of foresight exercises is paramount. Futures cannot be planned without the contribution of local stakeholders (local authorities, farmers' organizations, etc.) and governments (namely ministries of agriculture and employment). It should not be a sheerly “experts’ business”.

- The future of employment and work will depend on the agricultural models at work. There is a serious lack of data on the capacity of agricultural models to provide sufficient decent jobs in the agricultural sector and value chains, although it is sometimes possible to make forecasts based on carefully worked hypotheses (as in the case of the AgroEco 2050 forecast in Senegal). The type of agricultural model to be supported is a moot point. Agro-ecology would seem to create more decent jobs than agro-industry, provided it is able to pay a decent wage. But the bottom line is, it is always a question of striking a compromise between production, employment and natural resources. Besides, rather than opposing models, we need to understand the coexistence of agricultural and food models.

That final session was followed by a round-table discussion on what public policy-makers expect from research into the future of work in the agricultural and agri-food sectors. Numerous issues were pointed out by the speakers during the round table, including:

- Research must help policy-makers identify long-term development trajectories. These trajectories are not linear, but sinuous. They cannot be based entirely on a form of technosolutism, which is all too often put forward. Agroecological models seem to offer more promising avenues for work and employment.
- To envisage the future of employment and work in the agricultural sector, we need to think of the countryside as a whole: it is not only agriculture, but also services and small-scale industries that contribute to making territories lively and therefore more attractive to young people.
- Working on training packages, professions and their attractiveness is a role for research and training centers as well. We need to be able to understand the needs, desires and aspirations of young people who could enter agriculture, for us to build career paths with them.
- The level of income in agriculture is a crucial element to consider for employment. Research can play a role in better understanding the impact of international trade and import rules and regulations, which often contribute to keeping local agricultural prices low. It can also support processes to promote local products or produces to consumers.



Conclusion

Astou Diao Camara, Director of ISRA BAME, concluded the conference by emphasizing that:

- Employment and work in the agri-food sector in Africa are both political and scientific issues. Research and policy-makers must pursue their efforts in a joint and concerted manner: research can feed policy-makers, who in turn will make enlightened decisions.
- This first international conference invites us to renew this experience of bringing together contributors from research, public policy sphere and civil society, in order to continue our efforts to promote decent, and attractive jobs.
- The French Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Livestock has requested a briefing note on the policy implications, and initial positions to support young people.
- Finally, the South-South partnership looks very promising in terms of alliances among institutions.



The gaps

While many issues, challenges, themes and proposals were addressed during this conference, nevertheless we can observe that little attention was paid to:

- Job-creating innovations on the ground (technical, including digital, social and organizational), which we need to be able to “track down”, analyze and where appropriate, promote; which innovations are driven by young people, women, communities?
- The role of consultancy and training in building support systems for farmers to help them improve their working conditions and thereby employing others.
- The role of the private sector (especially at the downstream level) in generating decent jobs, alongside with the constraints and realities of employers in the value chains.
- The role of local authorities (social recognition of trades, infrastructure, support for private initiatives, access conditions for young people, training, etc.). A territorial approach to work is yet to be formalized.
- Digital technology and the digitization of agriculture, which could be a way of making agricultural trades more attractive; but what are the real impacts of digital technology on work and employment in African agriculture?
- Gender and the social division of labor between men and women, which in the end was little addressed head-on.
- Workers' health, a component of decent work, which has undoubtedly been undermined for the attractiveness of professions (wear and tear of workers who carry out the vast majority of work manually; health impacts of pesticide use).



The outlook

Decent work and employment in conjunction with work organization, working conditions and, more broadly, agricultural models

Decent work is an interesting grid, provided it is tackled, as proposed, from both objective and subjective angles, i.e. in relation to workers' perceptions of their work (definition, dignity, intensity, arduousness, health, etc.). We also need to integrate a more anthropological understanding of the social relations of production and domination (particularly within the family) that influence these perceptions.

The three dimensions of “decent work”, “work organization/working conditions” and “farming models” are closely connected: forms of work organization define job and task profiles; work can be questioned for the different profiles by being inclusive (gender; family, permanent and temporary employees, not forgetting service providers). Moreover, forms of work organization depend on the structural characteristics of farms.

Going beyond the agricultural sector (and crop production) and focusing on the territorial scale

Many of the presentations and discussions focused on crop production, but it is also necessary to consider value chains such as livestock farming and fishing.

As a whole, reflecting about the future of work and employment in the agricultural sector is also tantamount to looking at/integrating other sectors of activity in rural and urban areas, migration and the market (remuneration of work).

The territorial dimension would also be an interesting entry point for proposing levers for the creation of decent work and employment. Indeed, on a territorial scale, there are different types of farms and supply chains, which have an influence on agricultural work models and the players involved in guaranteeing decent work.



Strengthening studies/research

Future research should integrate several countries for the purposes of comparison and generalizability of results, while retaining country-specific contexts. Multidisciplinary research should also be encouraged, combining quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches.

Working on theoretical and methodological frameworks for addressing the attractiveness of jobs in agriculture. There are different ways of approaching attractiveness, for example: the conditions of access to jobs (training, income, land, etc.), the conditions under which jobs are

carried out (work organization, health, physical burden, etc.), the image portrayed by the job (by those at work, those in training, etc.).

Work on the integration trajectories of young people, farms/models and territories over the long term, to understand how institutional change influences activity in rural areas, and which institutional levers to act on in the future.

Identify job-creating innovations carried out by actors in the agricultural sector and make them visible through research to public actors. This would give a greater voice to farmers and other stakeholders in the agricultural sector, particularly young people.

Carry out prospective studies with public policy and civil society counterparts.

Strengthening collaboration between research and stakeholders (public policy, civil society)

Collaboration between researchers on the issue of work is lukewarm at present, and needs to be extended to other partners (public policy makers, civil society).

The ambition is to build a network that is sufficiently robust and close-knit to structure a significant research agenda, with significant results, and sufficiently flexible to be able to feed, with the theme, other existing networks or those under construction (notably around agroecology, family farming, digital, climate change, the notion of a single health, etc.). For example, it was proposed to create a network of researchers working on the issue of work and employment in Africa, which could be backed by the International Association for Agricultural Work ([IAWA](#)).

This conference could be the forerunner of pan-African research led by African institutions, potentially reshuffling the deck on the priorities to be addressed, and inviting European research institutions to radically modify their partnership posture.

The wish was also expressed that this type of conference be organized on a regular basis (every 3-4 years).



Acknowledgements

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Canada



Appendix.

The agenda of the international conference on the future of work and employment in the agricultural and agrifood sector in West Africa held on January 14 and 15, 2025 at Hotel Ndiambour – Dakar (Senegal).

Tuesday, January 14, 2025 - morning	
9.00 – 9.20	Official opening Alpha BA, Secretary of State for Cooperatives and Extension Services, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Equipment Dr Moustapha Guèye, DG ISRA (to be confirmed) Ibra Touré, Regional Director CIRAD (INRAE representative)
9.20 – 9.30	Objectives and program of the conference <i>Ibrahima Diallo (ISRA BAME), Nathalie Hostiou (INRAE), Pierre Girard (CIRAD)</i>
Labour and employment issues in the agricultural sector in Africa	
9.30 – 9.45	Structural change and employment perspectives in sub-Saharan Africa <i>Mbaye Ahmadou Aly (Professor at Cheikh Anta DIOP University)</i>
9.45 – 10.15	What do we know about work and employment in agriculture in Africa? A literature review <i>Benoit Dedieu, Géraldine. Enderli, Lionel Villard (INRAE), Mohamed Taher Sraïri (IAV Hassan II) et al.</i>
Decent work in the agricultural and agrifood sector: from standards to action	
10.15 – 11.15	Revisiting the concept of decent work in agriculture <i>Nathalie Hostiou (INRAE)</i>
	Employment and working conditions in the agri-food sector in Burkina Faso and Senegal. A case study based on the BioStar project <i>Mohamed Porgo (UTS), Mamadou Bobo Barry (BAME-ISRA), Pierre Girard (CIRAD)</i>
	Decent work in French agriculture. The case of migrant workers <i>Ibrahima Diallo (BAME-ISRA)</i>
11.15 – 11.30	Coffee break
11.30 – 1.00	Round table: How do stakeholders mobilise the concept of decent work in their actions? Facilitation by Abdoulaye Barry (journalist, Radio Télévision Sénégalaise)
	El Hadj Ibrahima Diallo, Director of Occupational Health and Safety, Ministry of Labor, Employment and Relations with Institutions
	Elisenda Estruch, International Labour Organization
	Yero Thioye, member of the Conseil National de Concertation des Ruraux (National Rural Dialogue Council)
	Ibrahima Mané, Head of the Administration Department of the UNSAS Executive Board
1.00 – 2.00	Lunch

Tuesday, January 14, 2025 - afternoon

Which jobs for which types of agricultural production systems and value chains?

2.00 – 3.45	What is the impact of certification on work organisation and working conditions in the cocoa sector in Ghana? <i>Guillaume Soullier (CIRAD, ISSER), Ralph Armah (ISSER), Pierre Girard (CIRAD, ISSER), Emmanuel Drovou (ISSER), Shadrack Nyarko (ISSER), Francis Codjoe (ISSER)</i>
	How is work organised in relation to mechanisation in family farming? Insights from Mecawat project <i>Nazaire Biaou (Parakou University) et Teatske Bakker (CIRAD)</i>
	Discussion
	To what extent is agroecology improving working conditions and organization on rice-growing areas in Senegal and Burkina Faso? <i>Eveline Compaoré (INERA), Pape Bilal Diakhate (ISRA-BAME)</i>
	Work organization in rice farming systems: what matters in the Volta Region (Ghana)? <i>Nathalie Hostiou (INRAE), Pierre Girard (Cirad), Benoit Dedieu (INRAE), Guillaume Soullier (Cirad)</i>
	Discussion
3.45-4.00	Coffee break
4.00-5.30	Round table: To what extent do the forms of agriculture and organization of supply chains supported/promoted by the stakeholders generate decent jobs? Moderation : Inoussa Maïga (journalist, Agribusiness TV)
	Dramé Boubacar, Technical advisor Ministry of Agriculture of Senegal
	Najirou Sall, General Secretary of West African farmers' organizations (ROPPA)
	Mamadou Bobo Barry, researcher at ISRA-BAME
	Yandé Sarr, Manager of the Sokone Cashew Processing Unit (UTAS)
	Souleymane Sarr, Chairman of the Network of Agricultural and Rural Training Stakeholders in Senegal d(FARSEN)

	Wednesday, January 15
9.00 – 9.30	Summary of Day 1
	How to think the future of work in the agri-food sector?
9.30 – 10.00	Introductory presentation on the use of the future to think about the present and imagine the future of work <i>Marième Ba and Aicha Sall (ISRA BAME)</i>
10.00 – 10.30	Prospective Senegal Agroeco 2050 <i>Marc Piraux (CIRAD)</i>
	JobAgri: producing new data on employment in agriculture to inform policy-making <i>Pierre Girard (CIRAD)</i>

10.30 – 11.15	The Future of Work programme (ISSER – ISRA BAME) <i>Astou Diao Camara (ISRA BAME)</i>
11.15 – 11.30	Coffee break
11.30 – 1.00	Round table: What are the stakeholders in public policy and research looking for when it comes to understanding the future of work in the agricultural and agri-food sector? Moderation : Igor Strauss (journalist, Radio France Internationale)
	Alioune Sall, Executive Director of the African Futures Institute
	Kossivi Agbo, Coordinator of the Programme Régional d'Appui aux Organisations Professionnelles et Paysannes agricoles (PRAOP3) at the ECOWAS Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food
	Benoit Fauchoux, World Bank Africa
	Amy Bodian, ISRA/CERAAS
1.00 – 1.30	Closing <i>Astou Diao Camara (ISRA BAME)</i> <i>Ibrahima Diallo (ISRA BAME), Nathalie Hostiou (INRAE), Pierre Girard (Cirad)</i>
1.30 – 2.30	Lunch
2.30 - 5.00	Meetings with researchers

Media coverage






Televisions channel

-  [RTS \(8 p.m. news of January 14, 2025\)](#)
-  [APS Digitale \(8 p.m. news of January 14, 2025\)](#)

Press / Agency

Article : [Un officiel souligne la part de données fiables dans l'élaboration des politiques publiques - APS](#)

Contenu institutionnel

-  [Summary video of the workshop produced by CIRAD](#)
-  [Report article on the ISRA BAME website](#)
-  [Article on the first round table published on the ISRA BAME website](#)

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