

Policy Brief

Organic Versus Conventional Farmer Crisis Responses

Implications under Covid and Russia-Ukraine War

The case of Mali

January 2021

The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Organic and Conventional Farmers and Mitigation Strategies in Africa assessment was initiated by Biovision Africa Trust in eleven countries in Africa, including Mali.

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the food security and economic activities of millions of people all around the world (FAO 2020). Mali was not exempted from this health crisis, it actual destabilized the situation further as the country was recovering from insecurity and terrorist attacks since 2012. Mali reported its first confirmed case of COVID 10 on 25th March 2020. It is reported that this is the period when two nationalities returned from France. From January to March of the same year, over 48% of the participants had heard about the pandemic for the first time. This was expected as the government was already responding to the threat even before the cases where confirmed. He government outlined and reinforced a number of restriction measures including curfew, and the closure of all educational institutions.

The Mali government, even before the first case was recorded, constitute a Defense Council which introduced a range of preventive measures effective March 17th, 2020, to curb the risk and respond to the threat of further spread of the coronavirus and mitigate the impact on public health. On March 26th, 2020, once the two cases were recorded, the president declared a state of health emergency and the main preventive measures included: a 5am to 9pm curfew throughout the country, closure of air and land borders with exceptions of cargo good. schools and educational institutions were closed, churches and places of worship, bars and restaurants too. In addition to strict restrictions on travels were put in place, public and social gathering was reduced to a maximum of 50 peoples, with social distancing. individual and collective hygiene measures were reinforced inclusive of prohibition of handshaking and embracing. The disruption from both government policies aiming to slow the spread of the virus as well as the individual fears of contracting the virus exacerbated the prevailing food insecurity and disrupted the livelihood of the people of Mali.



The Biovision Africa Trust (BvAT) is the lead executing agency for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) -support to the Ecological Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I). It hosts the Continental Steering Committee Secretariat for the initiative which supported this policy brief. The EOA-I is a continental initiative that holds promise for increasing the productivity of Africa's smallholder farms, with consequent positive impacts on food security. The initiative emerged after the African Union Commission (AUC) supported work held in Kenya in 2011. This resulted in the development of the concept note, proposal and later formation of a Central Steering Committee (CSC) on organic agriculture. African Union to access markets, certification and sustainable development in Africa. Although organic production has the potential in Africa, the key question repeatedly raised by the stakeholders is its ability to withstand storm, particularly, the advent of COVID19 and its disruption of the food system. The BvAT institution initiated a study to establish the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on agriculture and food systems in Africa: with the aim of assessing how farmers practicing organic agriculture & conventional agriculture have been affected by the pandemic, and how they are responding to it (Adaptation).



The impact of COVID 19 in Mali

In Mali 48% of the households heard about COVID 19 pandemic in the first quarter of 2020 (January to March). The period coincided with the time the first case of COVID 19 was reported within the region on March. An additional 40% indicated hearing about the pandemic in the first quarter (January-March) of the second year 2021. This indicates that the knowledgeability among the local population increased with the government announcement of the 1st case. There is a need for the government to increase sensitization before even the 1st case and continue with the mobilization as part of preparing the population psychologically. The study observed that all (100%) the households interviewed depended on agriculture as their main source of livelihoods. Of these, 64% of them had their livelihood impacted by the pandemic between the period January 2020-August 2021 due to disruption of supply chain. 52% of the participants felt April to June 2021, the second year of the pandemic as the months they experienced many difficulties as a result of the pandemic.

This coincided with the set of months that majority of the households reported to have greatly been impacted by the pandemic. Precisely 90-180days from the time the first case was reported. This was associated with the various measures the government had put in place in March to mitigate economic impacts of COVID 19. The most affected value chain in terms of production (52%) Livestock e.g., cattle, sheep, goat and poultry and marketing (56%) were cash crops such as sugar cane and cotton. Any disturbance such as lack of farm input and services or limited access to market in this value chain therefore negatively affected the livelihoods of the households. In Mali 56% of the respondent farming community had their farming activities affected by the government restrictions to mitigate the spread of the virus. Cattle (beef) among livestock was the most highly utilized sector as a source of income as 56% of the households sold cattle to generate income in the months of January 2020 to August 2021. This was followed by small ruminants (sheep and goats), dairy and poultry all at 52%. Among crops, maize (84%) was highly utilized as a source of income.

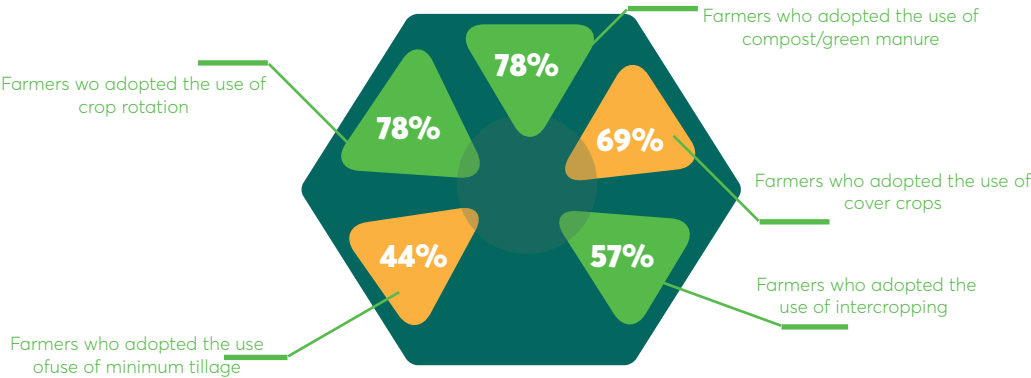
The study evaluated the impact of COVID19 on the sources of livelihoods among women and men. 90% women, compared to 85% men, reported that their sources of livelihoods (Agriculture, Business, services) were affected by the pandemic. This led to 40% reduction in incomes, of which 93% compared to 86% men, reported reduction in overall incomes during the pandemic period. The study observed that 71% of the conventional farmers and 62% of organic farmers were affected by government restrictions and public health measures negatively affecting their sources of income. These indicates that organic producing households had built their resilience over time and were better equipped to handle the disturbances at farm level caused by COVID 19 pandemic. This is associated with the capacity strengthening provided to organic farmers by organic promoting organizations like the Organic Movement of Mali (MOBIOM).

Based on our FGDs, participants indicated that majority of the population living in border regions suffered severe food shortage due to disruption in trade and closed borders.

The government COVID 19 containment measures heavily affected farming activities in general and any shocks that interfered with the delivery of extension services, access to farm inputs and post-harvest handling affected all the farming community and their livelihood. In terms of access to farm inputs, conventional farmers who over relied on exotic farm inputs particularly government subsidized fertilizers were heavily affected by the subsequent lockdown and movement restrictions compared to organic farmers who rely on recycling resources in the agroecological systems. The farming community too experienced postharvest losses and had limited access to extension services. 52% of the respondent reported loss of income as the main felt effect of COVID 19. This together with the 2020 August 2020 coup worsened the food insecurity issues in the country.

The Mitigation measures

The two most adopted organic agriculture production systems used by the farmers in Mali were crop rotation (78%) and use of compost/green manure (78%). Other practices embraced were the use of cover crops (69%), intercropping (57%) and minimum tillage (44%). This showed that the Malian farmers are quite knowledgeable with practices internationally recognized as climate-smart agricultural technologies. The adoption of these agroecological practices built the resilience of the organic farmers as they are based on ecological principles that positively affects the environment through improving the soil structure, aeration and water-holding capacity which subsequently strengthens its adaptation strategies, and this shield the households against external shocks such as COVID 19 pandemic and climate change. In relation to lack of face-to-face extension service that severely affected livestock related extension services, the study observed that most farmers (40%) relied on social media (whatsapp and facebook) while others (24%) found information on mobile phone e-extension services as coping strategies to the difficulties in accessing the face-to-face extension services affected by the pandemic.



Impacts of the Ukraine and Global Crises on Poverty and Food Security

Mali is a vast, land-locked country in the heart of the Sahel region. With social indicators among the lowest in the world, the country ranks 184 out of 189 on UNDP's 2019 Human Development Index . The Mali economy continues to be weakened by the war through significant disruptions in trade and food and fuel price shocks, all of which are contributing to high inflation and subsequent tightening in country financing conditions. Impacts of the price shocks on households depend also on the importance of commodities in their consumption baskets. Cereals and edible oils make up 20 percent of the total value of household consumption in Mali and about one-third of total food expenditures. The shares of cereals and edible oils are even higher for rural households (27 percent) and poor households (31 percent). Mali's fertilizer adoption rate is low, but it still varies significantly by crop, with 75 percent of maize area cultivated with fertilizer versus 34 percent for sorghum and millet (Figure 5). Variation also arises in the amount of fertilizer used on different crops . The surge in world fertilizer prices may therefore have a major effect on fertilizer use and agricultural productivity for much of Mali in 2022 and may cause some farmers to reduce their use of this input, leading to lower agricultural production and higher food prices

Wheat and wheat products are minor food products in Mali, accounting for only 7 percent of cereal consumption (17 kgs/year) versus 35 percent for rice and 58 percent for coarse grains (including maize and sorghum). The sharp rise in world wheat prices and more moderate increases in world rice prices have so far not had a major effect on the domestic price of rice. A small portion of Mali's edible oil supply is imported, mainly as palm oil, and given high substitutability across types of vegetable oil, domestic prices of vegetable oil are likely to rise along with the import price. Almost all (96 percent) oil products (crude oil and processed petroleum) used in Mali are imported, so changes in international prices have a direct effect on prices in Mali unless offset by changes in government subsidies.

Policy interventions to building social protection systems for the future can include a combination of guaranteed minimum income support designed to protect individuals and households from adverse shocks and enhanced coverage of and protection for vulnerable groups

¹<https://www.wfp.org/countries/mali>

²<https://ebrary.ifpri.org/utils/getfile/collection/p15738coll2/id/135949/filename/136163.pdf>

Policy recommendations

Recognizing the growing environmental threat posed by conventional agriculture, the holistic approach of promoting 'ecological agriculture, which is defined as "a new integrated agriculture system which integrates agricultural production, rural economic development, environmental improvement and protection, resources fostering and using together effectively. Recognizing the growing environmental threat posed by conventional

Promotion of climate smart agricultural technologies: The high utilization of these technologies, shows that if encouraged and adopted, farmers will effectively reduce the fragility of the cropping system in the country. There is need to develop supporting policies and frameworks for sustainable agriculture. This is a strategy that will effectively guarantee future shocks inclusive of climate change.

Mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the war while enabling sustainable and inclusive growth. This will require: Improving resilience to climate change, and social risks to safeguard investments in human capital and household livelihoods and promoting the services economy and boosting the productivity and competitiveness of agriculture and related value chains.

ECOLOGICAL ORGANIC AGRICULTURE INITIATIVE

P.O. Box 30772-00100 Nairobi, Kenya Duduville Kasarani Opp Thika road

EMAIL: Info@eoai-africa.org

WEBSITE: www.eoai-africa.org

OFFICE TEL: +254 20 8632000||+254 721 766628