

RICE PRODUCER–PROCESSOR NETWORKS IN CÔTE D’IVOIRE*

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ABSTRACT. Pressured by structural adjustment loan conditions, Côte d’Ivoire reduced state support for rice production and processing during the 1990s. In this article we examine how various actors in the rice commodity chain adapted to the macroeconomic reforms. Following a brief history of the rice sector, we present the results of fieldwork based on interviews conducted in 2002 of farmers, millers, traders, and workers in the state extension service and nongovernmental organizations. We found that, in the absence of state supports for farmers, private millers became the focal point of regional producer–processor rice networks. The four networks identified became the sole source of domestic commercial rice when the state removed subsidies for fertilizer and modern seeds, privatized extension, and liberalized prices and imports. To increase their role in the national rice supply, the rice networks may need support through microlending and a focus on niche markets. *Keywords:* commodity production, Côte d’Ivoire, farming systems, rice, structural adjustment.

In April 2008 the world rice price reached a record high of more than U.S.\$1,000 per ton, more than double its January price. The price spike precipitated food riots in countries that were especially dependent on imported rice, including those in Africa south of the Sahara. Imported rice satisfies 39 percent of the region’s rice consumption needs (ARC 2008, 5). Africa is home to 13 percent of the world’s population, but its rice imports account for 32 percent of all world rice imports (Seck 2007, 1). High-priced rice imports particularly affected West African countries, where consumption grew 6.6 percent annually from 2001 to 2005 (ARC 2008, 10). Three of the world’s top ten rice importers are Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, and Senegal (p. 22). Their dependence on imported rice leaves these countries vulnerable to disruptions in the global rice supply, such as floods in Southeast Asian production areas, and to longer-term shifts away from rice production by rural workers who migrate to cities in India and China.

West Africa’s inability to buffer itself from price shocks in food staples stems from policy decisions to restructure the region’s economies that favored food imports while removing subsidies to support food producers. In the 1980s the world’s major lending institutions, led by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), began to require structural adjustment policies that reduced state supports for agriculture as conditions for loans. These policies affected land use and

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