



## CASE STUDY

# A Future for Food Policy

### Educating the Next Generation of Food Policy Analysts and Agro-Entrepreneurs



Photo by Mamadou Traoré

*MSU team members (Amadou Diallo, Brent Ross, Scott Loveridge, and Niama Nango Dembélé) traveled to Katibougou to work with IPR/IFRA colleagues on the design of a new agricultural economics and food policy curriculum (July 21, 2009).*

**CHALLENGE** For agriculture to flourish in Mali, the country needs well-designed agricultural policies, new technologies that are profitable for farmers and agribusinesses, and agro-entrepreneurs who have the business skills to prosper in Mali's dynamic market economy. Yet the number of Malians with university-level training in food policy analysis, agricultural economics, and agribusiness is small, and many of them, trained in the 1970s, are nearing retirement. The *Institut Polytechnique Rural de Formation et de Recherche Appliquée* (IPR/IFRA) in Katibougou, has faced strong pressure from students and other stakeholders, including the government, to open a full-fledged program in agricultural economics. Previous efforts to start such a program began in 2005 but have since been stalled.

**INITIATIVE** USAID/Mali, through its Project to Mobilize Food Security Initiatives in Mali – Phase II (PROMISAM II) with Michigan State University (MSU), is working to create a new generation of agricultural economics professionals to fill this critical gap. PROMISAM II is partnering with Mali's only university-level faculty in the agricultural sciences at IPR/IFRA to create both an undergraduate and a masters degree program in agricultural economics. The program builds on prior MSU-IPR/IFRA collaboration to strengthen the school's two-year program in agricultural technology and support from USAID/Mali to provide the school with the resources they need.

Starting in late 2008, faculty from IPR/IFRA and MSU's Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics have worked together to assess the supply of and demand for agricultural economists in Mali, identify the skill sets most in demand, and design a curriculum to respond to those needs. The IPR/IFRA and MSU faculty revised the program so that it is more focused on key skills, orients it more towards the needs of the private sector, and delivers the material at roughly 2/3 the cost of the original design.

**RESULTS** Katibougou will welcome its first class of undergraduates in the agricultural economics major in October 2009. The undergraduate program will be offered at Katibougou, but the masters program, to be launched in 2010, will be taught both in Katibougou and in Bamako, so that professionals working in the capital can take courses in the evenings and weekends. The IPR/IFRA partnership will also involve faculty and student exchanges, and two IPR/IFRA faculty members will undertake further graduate studies at MSU. With this Katibougou initiative, Mali will have a much stronger analytic and business capacity to take advantage of its enormous potentials for agricultural development.