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Title: Land Borrowing and Agricultural Productivity in Burkina Faso

The nature of farming and land tenure—and therefore land markets—in West African Sahelian countries, such as Burkina Faso, is distinct from that of most other Eastern and Southern African countries. De facto land tenure law can be described as a relatively new, national statutory system overlaid on top of a regional patchwork of long-established customary systems. In most rural areas of Burkina Faso, the traditional customs prevail: land is considered to be communally owned by the village. Unsurprisingly, land sales are virtually unheard of and even land rental is rare. The customary systems nonetheless permit the exchange of usufruct rights. Ethnographic and quantitative studies alike suggest that land borrowing is widespread throughout the country. Yet, most ethnographic studies tend to focus on select communities or ethnic groups and the majority of recent quantitative studies cover just the cotton zone, which is arguably unique.

This study examines the salient features of land borrowing throughout the country and documents their prevalence using a nationally-representative household panel dataset. Combining covariate matching techniques with stochastic frontier analysis, we then identify differences—in management practices, access to resources, input use, and farming ability—between borrowing and non-borrowing households, recognizing that borrowing is a choice. We find that the prevalence of borrowing varies regionally in a way that is consistent with historical events. We find that borrowers are distinct from non-borrowers in that they farm their plots more intensively and they are more market-oriented. Yet, the total area that borrowers manage is similar to that of non-borrowers, suggesting that customary systems permit and even incentivize productivity-enhancing investments, while still deterring the consolidation of land. We use these finding to compare the functioning of borrowing vis-à-vis (counterfactual) rental markets in terms of productivity and equity, and to predict its relative resilience in the face of exogenously increasing population pressure. Preliminary findings suggest that population pressure is already hindering the exchange of land through borrowing. These findings are particularly relevant as the Burkinabè government formulates its next policies in terms of land tenure.